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**Parental Perceptions and Experiences of Physical and Emotional Violence between Siblings: A Mixed-Methods, Comparative Case Study**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

by

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	xvi
List of Figures .....	xix
Abstract .....	xx
Chapter One: Statement of Problem .....	1
Introduction.....	1
Sibling Violence.....	4
Correlations and consequences of physical and emotional sibling violence .....	6
Missing contextual factors in sibling violence research and literature .....	9
Parental perspective .....	9
Intergenerational transmission of sibling violence .....	10
Family structures.....	11
Inconsistencies in labeling and defining violence between siblings.....	11
Sibling violence and larger systemic issues.....	13
Sibling violence and its connection to bullying and peer violence.....	13
Sibling violence, bullying, and parental perspectives.....	14
Physical and emotional sibling violence, but not sexual sibling violence .....	15
Sexual sibling violence among siblings and policy .....	15
Social Work and Sibling Violence.....	17
Child welfare, mental health, and sibling violence.....	17

Interventions and sibling violence .....	19
Dissertation Overview .....	20
Summary .....	23
Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	25
Introduction.....	25
Sibling Violence as a Problematic Phenomenon .....	26
Prevalence of physical and emotional violence between siblings .....	26
Physical and emotional violence between siblings.....	28
Consequences of physical and emotional violence between siblings.....	30
Defining Violent Behavior between Siblings .....	32
Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry: Higher Than Prevalence Suggests? .....	39
Parents in the Sibling Violence Literature .....	42
Parents witnessing violent behaviors between their children .....	44
Theory and Sibling Violence .....	53
Social learning theory and sibling violence .....	53
Family systems theory and sibling violence .....	62
Sibling Violence in the Context of Differing Family Structures .....	65
Sibling violence and the ambiguity of family structure.....	69
Family Structure, Social Learning Theory, and Family Systems Theory.....	70
Assessing Sibling Violence with the Conflict Tactics Scale .....	72
The Research Question and Mixed Methods Case Study Research .....	75
Case study .....	78
Mixed methods research .....	79

Theory and mixed methods research .....	80
Quantitative data .....	80
Qualitative data .....	81
Quantitative and qualitative data .....	81
Summary .....	82
Chapter Three: Methodology .....	83
The Case Study .....	83
The case study as a process and product.....	83
The purpose of case studies .....	84
Association with theory .....	85
Cases .....	86
Hypotheses .....	87
Hypothesis One.....	87
Hypothesis Two .....	88
Hypothesis Three .....	89
Hypothesis Four .....	90
Hypothesis Five .....	90
Hypothesis Six .....	91
Hypothesis Seven.....	92
Sample.....	93
Purposeful sampling.....	94
Sample Recruitment.....	95
Identifiers .....	96



Demographics .....	96
Comparison of household income and education to Virginia population..	97
Income.....	97
Level of education completed.....	98
Participant demographics when in childhood .....	99
Data Collection .....	101
Three phases of data collection.....	102
Case Study Materials/Instrumentation .....	103
Demographics .....	103
Age.....	103
Gender.....	104
Family structure .....	105
Income.....	105
Education .....	106
Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale .....	106
Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale .....	107
Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument ....	108
Open-ended qualitative interviews .....	109
Case Scenario Decision-Making Process.....	110
Participants and Psychometrics.....	111
Participants and responses from data collection .....	111
BFP1 .....	111
BFP2 .....	112

LFP1 .....	112
LFP2.....	112
NFP1 .....	113
NFP2 .....	113
SFP1 .....	113
Data Analysis .....	113
Analytic strategies.....	114
Quantitative analysis.....	115
Qualitative analysis.....	116
Triangulation.....	116
Analyzing the hypotheses .....	118
Hypothesis One.....	118
Hypothesis Two .....	119
Hypothesis Three .....	119
Hypothesis Four .....	119
Hypothesis Five .....	120
Hypothesis Six .....	120
Hypothesis Seven.....	120
Decision-Making Model.....	121
Rigor .....	121
Case study database .....	121
Chain of evidence .....	122
Reflexive journal.....	122

Human Subjects Protection.....	123
Details of confidentiality and privacy protections .....	123
Participant costs and incentives .....	124
Limitations .....	124
Sample of case study.....	125
Psychometric limitations.....	126
Retrospective data.....	127
Timing of data collection .....	128
Strengths .....	129
Parental perspective .....	129
Inclusion of different family structures.....	130
Multiple forms of data collection.....	130
Inclusion of both sibling violence and sibling rivalry .....	131
Conclusion .....	131
Chapter Four: Results .....	133
Introduction.....	133
Case Study Hypotheses.....	134
Hypothesis One.....	134
Normalization of violent behavior with a sibling .....	136
Experiences viewed as normal.....	137
Experiences viewed as not normal.....	140
Conclusion .....	142
Hypothesis Two .....	142

Consensus in responding to certain behaviors: Emotional/psychological	144
Consensus in responding to certain behaviors: Physical .....	145
Participant experiences compared to behaviors witnessed in children ....	147
Similarities in behaviors experienced and witnessed by family structure	148
Conclusion .....	149
Hypothesis Three .....	150
Sibling violence .....	151
Sibling rivalry .....	152
Both sibling violence and sibling rivalry .....	152
Neither sibling violence nor sibling rivalry .....	153
Sibling violence/Both sibling violence and sibling rivalry.....	154
Both sibling violence and sibling rivalry/Sibling rivalry.....	155
Conclusion .....	156
Hypothesis Four .....	156
Classifying behaviors as “sibling rivalry” or “both sibling rivalry and sibling violence” .....	156
Comparing the number of behaviors experienced as a child to classification of “sibling rivalry,” “both sibling rivalry and sibling violence,” or “sibling violence” .....	158
Conclusion .....	159
Hypothesis Five .....	160
Violent behaviors witnessed by the parent from the single-parent family compared to the other parents .....	160

The story of the single-parent family .....	163
Family life of the (pre)single-parent family.....	164
Emotional-psychological violence between siblings in the single- parent family .....	164
Reasoning for sibling violence in the single-parent family .....	165
Similarities in experiences of sibling violence between the nuclear family and single-parent family .....	165
Conclusion .....	167
Hypothesis Six .....	167
Responses to family structure influencing problems in children.....	168
Similarities and differences in behaviors experienced in childhood and appraisal of those behaviors between LFP1 and NFP2 .....	169
Behaviors witnessed and not witnessed by participants from same-sex family compared to other family structures .....	172
Behaviors witnessed by both participants of the same-sex family compared to other families.....	173
Behaviors not witnessed by both participants of the same-sex family compared to other families.....	174
Behaviors witnessed differently by participants of the same-sex family compared to other families.....	175
Conclusion .....	178
Hypothesis Seven.....	178
Similarities across participants .....	180

Differences across participants .....	182
Participants' responses to statements regarding "sibling violence" and "sibling rivalry" .....	183
Qualifying statements regarding the terms "sibling violence" and "sibling rivalry" .....	184
Initial reactions to "sibling violence" .....	184
Physical component to "sibling violence" .....	185
Emotional/psychological component to "sibling violence" .....	186
Initial reactions to "sibling rivalry" .....	187
Physical component to "sibling rivalry" .....	189
Emotional/psychological component to "sibling rivalry" .....	189
Conclusion .....	191
Summative conclusions related to the hypotheses .....	191
Parental Decision-Making Model of Sibling Violence .....	192
Parental experiences with sibling in childhood .....	194
Children factors .....	196
Age difference between siblings .....	196
Age .....	198
Older children .....	198
Younger children .....	199
Gender .....	200
Context of interaction .....	202
Methods used .....	202

Intent to harm .....	205
Intensity, severity, duration, and frequency .....	206
Rules within the family .....	208
Rules within the family of origin .....	209
Rules within the current family structure.....	210
Conclusion .....	214
Chapter Five: Discussion .....	217
Hypotheses .....	217
Hypothesis One.....	217
Hypothesis Two .....	219
Hypothesis Three .....	220
Hypothesis Four .....	223
Hypothesis Five .....	224
Hypothesis Six .....	224
Hypothesis Seven.....	226
Parental Decision-Making Model of Problematic Sibling Interaction .....	227
Parental experiences with sibling in childhood .....	227
Children factors.....	228
Age difference between siblings.....	228
Chronological age of siblings .....	229
Gender of siblings .....	229
Context of interaction .....	230
Methods Used .....	230

Intent to Harm .....	231
Intensity, severity, duration, and frequency .....	232
Family rules .....	233
Parental appraisal of observed behaviors between siblings .....	234
Connection to Social Work and Social Justice .....	235
Social work direct practice.....	235
Social work advocacy through education of parents .....	237
Social work education.....	238
Policy implications for social work .....	238
Directions for future research .....	240
Research emanating from the hypotheses.....	240
Psychometrics .....	242
Constructs of parental decision-making model.....	243
Inclusion of more family structures .....	243
Inclusion of individuals of various ethnicities .....	244
Intent to harm .....	244
Theory.....	245
Power .....	245
Conclusion .....	246
References.....	247
Appendix A: Informed Consent.....	271
Appendix B: List of Referrals for Clients.....	276
Appendix C: Demographic Sheet .....	278



Appendix D: Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale .....	282
Appendix E: Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale .....	287
Appendix F: Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument .....	291
Appendix G: Open-ended Qualitative Interview Questions .....	294
Appendix H: Case Scenario Decision-Making Process .....	296
Vita.....	299

## List of Tables

Table 2.1: Labels Used to Refer to Physical or Emotional Violence between Siblings .....	34
Table 3.1: Hypotheses of the Comparative Case Study.....	87
Table 3.2: Participant Identifiers.....	96
Table 3.3: Demographics .....	96
Table 3.4: Percentages Estimates for Household Income for Virginia Respondents to the 2011 BRFSS and Corresponding Participant's Household Income from Case Study.....	98
Table 3.5: Percentages Estimates for Level of Education Completed for Virginia Respondents to the 2011 BRFSS and Corresponding Participant's Education from Case Study.....	99
Table 3.6: Participant Family Demographic Information in Childhood.....	100
Table 3.7: Example of Data Analysis Matrix .....	115
Table 3.8: Data Addressing the Hypotheses .....	118
Table 4.1: Total Number of Behaviors Experienced by Participant in Childhood.....	135
Table 4.2: Total Number of Behaviors Experienced by Participant in Childhood by Family Structure .....	135
Table 4.3: Participants' Reactions to Behaviors Experienced in Childhood as Normative or Not Normative .....	136
Table 4.4: Comparison of Participants' Behaviors Experienced as Child to those Witnessed between Children .....	143
Table 4.5: Comparison of Emotional/Psychological Behaviors Experienced as Child to those Emotional/Psychological Behaviors Witnessed between Children .....	144
Table 4.6: Comparison of Physical Behaviors Experienced as Child to those Physical Behaviors Witnessed between Children.....	145

Table 4.7: Substantial Differences in Participants' Behaviors Experienced as Child Compared to those Witnessed between Children .....	147
Table 4.8: Total Number of Behaviors Experienced by Participant and Witnessed by Participant .....	148
Table 4.9: Total Participant Response by Category for the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument .....	150
Table 4.10: Participant Response to "Sibling Violence" for the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument .....	151
Table 4.11: Participant Response to "Sibling Rivalry" for the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument .....	152
Table 4.12: Participant Response to "Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry" for the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument .....	153
Table 4.13: Participant Response to "Neither Sibling Violence nor Sibling Rivalry" for the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument .....	154
Table 4.14: Participant Response to "Sibling Violence" and "Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry" for the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument.....	154
Table 4.15: Participant Response to "Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry" and "Sibling Rivalry" for the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument.....	155
Table 4.16: Number of Times Participants Reported a Behavior as "Sibling Rivalry" or "Both Sibling Rivalry and Sibling Violence" .....	157
Table 4.17: Participant Classification of a Behavior as "Sibling Rivalry" or "Both Sibling Rivalry and Sibling Violence" or "Sibling Violence" Compared to the Number of Behaviors Each Participant Experienced as a Child .....	158
Table 4.18: Total Number of Behaviors Witnessed by Participant .....	160
Table 4.19: Behaviors Witnessed by Participants in Their Children by SFP1 .....	161
Table 4.20: Notable Responses from SFP1 on the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale of Witnessed Behaviors between Children.....	162
Table 4.21: Comparison of Behaviors Witnessed by Both Participants of the Same-Sex Family Compared to Other Families .....	173

Table 4.22: Comparison of Behaviors Not Witnessed by Both Participants of the Same-Sex Family Compared to Other Families .....	174
Table 4.23: Comparison of Behaviors Witnessed Differently by Participants of the Same-Sex Family Compared to Other Families .....	175
Table 4.24: Total Responses to the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale .....	179
Table 4.25: Responses to the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale Where Participants either “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed” .....	180
Table 4.26: Responses to the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale Where Most Participants either “Disagreed” or “Strongly Disagreed” .....	181
Table 4.27: Differences in Participant Responses to the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale .....	182
Table 4.28: Responses to the Statements Regarding Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry on the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale .....	183
Table 4.29: Participants’ Initial Reactions to the Term “Sibling Violence” .....	184
Table 4.30: Participants’ Initial Reactions to the Term “Sibling Rivalry” .....	187
Table 4.31: Participants’ Experiences of Problematic Behavior in Childhood .....	194
Table 4.32: Participants’ Reactions to Age Difference in Case Scenarios .....	196
Table 4.33: Participants’ Reactions to Intent to Harm in Case Scenarios .....	205
Table 4.34: Participants’ Rules within Their Families of Origin.....	209
Table 5.1: Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence or Sibling Rivalry Being Physical or Emotional/Psychological in Nature .....	222

## List of Figures

Figure 4.1: Parental Decision-Making Model of Problematic Sibling Interaction.....193

## Abstract

### **PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE BETWEEN SIBLINGS: A MIXED-METHODS, COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY**

Nathan Hugh Perkins,

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2014

Chair: Mary Katherine O'Connor, PhD  
Professor  
School of Social Work

Sibling violence is a common occurrence for many children yet this form of family violence has received minimal attention in research compared to other forms of child maltreatment. With parents as an integral component in the lives of many children, parental perceptions and experiences of violence between siblings are important to understand. Furthermore, with the increased variation in family structures within society, inclusion of multiple types of families in research is necessary to encompass a broad understanding of sibling violence. This case study included seven parents from four different family structures to examine their perceptions and

experiences of physical and emotional violence between siblings. Three phases of data collection including both quantitative and qualitative data gathered information about participants' experiences with siblings in childhood, witnessed behaviors between children, behaviors associated with sibling violence and sibling rivalry, and labels used to refer to violence between siblings. Participants were also presented with several case scenarios depicting various sibling interactions in which they processed the degree to which they found the behaviors violent or non-violent. Findings indicate that family structure is less important than past and present environmental and contextual factors in understanding participant differentiation between problematic and non-problematic behaviors between siblings. Data from all three phases helped in the construction of a parental decision-making model of sibling interaction that included consideration of past experiences, children factors, the context of interaction, and family rules when classifying behaviors. Implications of the findings for social work direct practice, policy aimed at addressing violence between siblings, advocacy through parental education, social work education, and future directions for research in the area of sibling violence are presented.

*Sibling violence may be so common in families that we fail to recognize it as violence.*  
—Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz

*Our children are going to have a whole host of problems, but I really hope  
that they never think violence is okay. That's my goal.*  
—Parent from Case Study



## Chapter One: Statement of Problem

### Introduction

*He sat there listening to his client discuss the physical and emotional violence she experienced as a child. His client divulged the tremendous violence she had encountered with her siblings and he was amazed to hear this. One incident she mentioned centered on a violent altercation she had with her older sister. They had been discussing how her sister's live-in boyfriend had been treating her poorly and her sister denied that she had been treated badly. With substantial stress in her voice, his client mentioned that verbal attacks between them ensued which eventually escalated into physical violence. She discussed in great detail how her sister had hit her with a broom and caused lacerations to her forehead. In retaliation, his client disclosed how she punched her sister in the face repeatedly to make sure she was hurt. According to her, this was not an isolated event and that violence between her and her siblings was commonplace. She continued to discuss how violence was a common aspect of her relationships with all of her siblings, even her brother. His client discussed being so enraged that she would stop at nothing to make sure her siblings got what was coming to them for the things they did to her. The violence was so bad between her and her siblings that it affected their current relationships to the point that she and her older sister rarely communicated. She felt alone.*

*She was undoubtedly affected by her experiences, and the violence she encountered was affecting her current relationships. She discussed how she felt her relationships with her siblings*

*prevented her from having friends, certainly no friends she would consider close. She always wondered if her interactions with potential friends would lead to violence or rejection. His client was constantly on guard for fear of being rejected or victimized both emotionally and physically by people with whom she had contact.*

*While in school, siblings were never mentioned in his classes on violence in families. He distinctly remembered learning about intimate partner violence, child abuse and neglect, elder abuse, but never violence between siblings. As he continued listening to the various types of physical and emotional violence she both initiated and received with her siblings, he wondered how common violence was between siblings. Surely this was not something many children experience with a sibling. How could the violence his client had experienced be normal? He thought surely her experience was an anomaly.*

*His client then mentioned something that struck him as very odd—her parents did not do anything to address the violence between her and her siblings. She discussed that her parents often ignored the violent situations and even dismissed them as normal occurrences for siblings. With tears in her eyes, his client talked about how her parents would ignore her existence as punishment for the violence she initiated with siblings. For days, her parents would not talk to her, not set a place for her at dinner, and basically temporarily scratch her name off as a member of the family. Unfortunately, her siblings learned to interact with her in the same way and often used ignoring as a weapon against her when she did something they did not like, even if what she did was not violent in nature.*

*How could her parents not have addressed what was going on in her home? Is this a common reaction for parents to have when confronted with violence between their children? How could they not have seen that their other children were going to learn what they initiated*

*which just bred more emotional violence? He wondered if this happened in all types of families. Do parents from all types of families view this type of violence similarly? The session ended and the client left, but the questions about sibling violence and how parents view it remained.*

Time and time again I heard clients discuss their violent experiences with their siblings. Whether those experiences happened when they were children or whether I was working with a child who was actively violent with a sibling, hearing the stories of my clients heightened my curiosity about violence between siblings. Were the instances I was hearing about commonplace or were my clients experiencing something that was atypical because they were themselves atypical for needing treatment? The literature I found addressing violence between siblings suggested that this form of family violence was not only common, but occurred for many children and had numerous negative outcomes.

As I continued my search for answers to understand sibling violence as a phenomenon, the questions continued. I delved deeper into the literature and questions about the differential usage of labels and definitions (and lack thereof), the differences between violence between siblings and sibling rivalry and the behaviors associated with each, whether this occurs in all types of families and is intergenerational, and how parents felt about sibling violence all emerged. These areas became focal points for me as they had been left out of the sibling violence research and literature. It became clear to me that in order to learn how to intervene as a social worker to help children and families who experience this form of family violence, I first needed to know more about violence between siblings. It is my intention with the research that follows to provide further insight into an often unrecognized form of violence many experience. My goal is to contribute to providing mechanisms for intervention and prevention of sibling violence.

## **Sibling Violence**

In their seminal book, *Behind Closed Doors, Violence in the American Family* (1980), Murray Straus, Richard Gelles, and Susan Steinmetz presented results from a national sample of American families in 1976 that focused on violent behavior. This was the first time that information related to sibling violence was collected and presented as a result of a large-scale national data collection on family violence (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). The participants for the surveys were parents, both women and men. While this study was conducted 25 years ago, it serves as an influential guide that brought violence between siblings into the discussion of family violence.

The study by Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) helped present violence between siblings as a problematic phenomenon noting that four out of every five (80%) children between the ages of three and seventeen experience violent behavior with a sibling in any given year. The study conducted by the authors presents a bleak picture of sibling violence permeating many families with more than one child. What the study did not discuss were the perceptions of those experiences by the parents who were providing the information. Parents were only asked about behaviors in the study and, therefore, the meaning associated with the violent behaviors between their children was not obtained. While this is helpful in understanding what violent behaviors parents witness in the home, it does not help in understanding how parents think about those behaviors. Information regarding how parents think about what they witness is important for defining it as either problematic or normal.

Since the study of Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980), the research in the area of violence between siblings has increased minimally. Today, physical abuse between siblings has been noted as a consideration for family and public health (Sprang, 2011) and even for criminal

justice systems (Krienert & Walsh, 2011). Rapoza, Cook, Zaveri, and Malley-Morrison (2010) have noted sibling abuse is recognized by individuals from many cultures (Native American, Latino/Hispanic, African American, European American, Asian Pacific American, and South Asian American) in the United States. Research on sibling violence in Canada has demonstrated it as a problem for families (Ellis & DeKeseredy, 1994) and the need for continued examination in Canada has been discussed (DeKeseredy & Ellis, 1997). Despite the recognition of sibling violence as a problem in various cultural contexts, the amount of research on this phenomenon is scant.

As siblings are considered a subset of the familial system (Minuchin, 1974; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981), sibling violence can be conceptualized under the umbrella of family violence. While violent behavior between siblings can be considered a form of violence within the family, this phenomenon often receives less attention than other forms of family violence (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; 2006). When compared to the amount of literature and research that exists regarding child abuse and neglect as well as other forms of familial violence across the life span, sibling violence has been minimally considered. Parent-to-child violence and violence directed towards a female partner often take center stage in the family violence literature. Gelles (1994) describes this differential stance stating:

There has been less historical and current interest in sibling violence...compared with concern about violence toward children and women in families. In part, this is because social concern for victims of family violence is tied to the perceived powerlessness and helplessness of the victims. Thus there is greater social concern for violence toward infants and young children than violence towards adolescents... (p.263)

If children are perpetrating violence towards their siblings as research demonstrates, would this not be justification for investigations aimed at including this form of violence in the research and knowledge of family violence? Most researchers of violence in the family system would undoubtedly say, “Yes,” yet it remains very under-investigated and deserves continued attention.

### **Correlations and consequences of physical and emotional sibling violence.**

Research has demonstrated that children at any age can experience violence from a sibling (see Finkelhor, Turner, & Ormrod, 2005, 2006; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, 2006 ) and suffer negative consequences because of it in adulthood (Wiehe, 1997). Some research has considered factors that may contribute to the occurrence of violence between siblings (see Haj-Yahia, & Dawud-Noursi, 1998; Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards, 2005; Green, 1984; Steinmetz, 1977b, 1978; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980 ). Other research has focused on the consequences of sibling violence (see Bank, Patterson, & Reid, 1996; Duncan, 1999; Graham-Bermann, Cutler, Litzenberger, & Schwartz, 1994; Milosh, 1992; Stormshak, Bellanti, & Bierman, 1996; Wiehe, 1997). It should be noted, however, that the literature focusing on both causes and consequences of violence between siblings is small. Also, much of the research that has focused on these areas lacks rigor and contains problematic definitional issues. Some of the literature in the area of sibling violence mentions variables that may be associated with the phenomenon with the ideas being conceptual in nature and not tested. This confounds the notion of what can be definitively considered as causes and consequences of sibling violence due to the lack of connection to theory. Without testing the hypotheses and connections proposed by many of the researchers in the area of sibling violence, ideas may have merit; but there is no specific, scientific evidence to support or substantiate their claims.

Factors contributing to sibling violence are varied. Caspi (2012) noted that considering associations with sibling violence may be more logical as many of the factors associated with sibling violence may be difficult to list as causes. This is due to the inability to determine which variable precipitated the other. For example, family stress and parental discord (Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards, 2005) have been found to be associated with sibling violence, yet the authors did not directly explain directional associations. Therefore, it is possible that family stress could be a result of sibling violence or that stress in the family system could result in violence between siblings. Without directional explication, factors deemed to cause sibling violence are difficult to determine.

Some factors that have been associated with violence between siblings include gender and sibling dyad combination (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Goodwin & Roscoe, 1990; Hetherington, 1988; Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards, 2005; Mangold & Koski, 1990; Roscoe, Goodwin, & Kennedy, 1987; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Straus & Gelles, 1990), age (Noland, Liller, McDermott, Coulter, & Seraphine, 2004; Roscoe, Goodwin, & Kennedy, 1987; Steinmetz, 1977; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980), and income (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006). It should be noted, however, that Hoffman, Kiecolt, and Edwards (2005) and Wiehe (1997) found evidence that income may not predict sibling violence. The interpretation of this by the authors is that sibling violence can happen in any home regardless of income.

Although the evidence is minimal, several studies have addressed the connection between sibling violence and family structure. MacKinnon (1989) found siblings from divorced families to be more violent than those siblings from biological, two-parent families. Finkelhor, Ormrod, and Turner (2007) found sibling violence to occur more in blended and single-parent families, whereas others have noted more violence between siblings living in biological, two-parent

homes (Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards, 2005). Deater-Deckard, Dunn, and Lussier (2002) found sibling negativity (as defined by conflict and aggression) to be higher in single-parent families. The understanding of family structure and sibling violence is inconclusive given current research. This highlights the needs to incorporate more research that strives to understand the intersection of violence between siblings and various family forms.

One aspect of sibling violence that pertains to all family structures is the absence of policy. The phenomenon of sibling violence has yet to be considered a social problem. Reasons for this may include disagreement about whether violence between siblings constitutes a problem in families. Conflict and violence between siblings may be dismissed due to parents labeling the behavior sibling rivalry and normative in nature. Until now research investigating how and why parents label certain behaviors as problematic or normal has not been completed. Using excuses that minimize sibling violence is inappropriate, and “a differentiation must be made between ‘sibling rivalry’ and ‘sibling abuse’” (Wiehe, 1997, p. 4). Once this distinction has been made, policy may be considered to address those behaviors deemed abusive.

The research that has been conducted in the area of sibling violence has identified important consequences of sibling violence. Psychological problems (Dunn, 1999), dating violence (Noland, Liller, McDermott, Coulter, & Seraphine, 2004; Reese-Weber, 2008; Simonelli, Mullis, Elliot, & Pierce, 2002), and depression, eating disorders, and interpersonal relationship problems (Wiehe, 1997) have all been linked to sibling violence. In his qualitative study of adults with an average age of 37, Wiehe (1997) notes that respondents attribute many of their problematic functioning to their violent experiences with siblings in childhood. Again, Caspi (2012) highlights the problems with directionality between sibling violence and other



factors. While more research is certainly needed to better understand consequences of sibling violence, the repercussions of this form of family violence are evident.

**Missing contextual factors in sibling violence research and literature.** The research that does exist in the area of sibling violence is limited in its efforts to address contextual variables that deserve consideration. An examination of the variables related to the context of this phenomenon is necessary. In the case of sibling violence, several variables such as family structure, socioeconomic status, and environmental factors, such as perceptions of parents regarding violence between their children, have been minimally considered in their connection to this phenomenon. Parental voice, intergenerational transmission of sibling violence, and family structures are variables deserving attention for the role they play in sibling violence, but have been insufficiently included in the research.

**Parental Perspective.** Caffaro (2011) stated that “the inability to include direct perspectives of all family members or siblings not directly involved in the abuse limits our understanding of the family dynamics involved in sibling violence” (p. 267). Most of the literature regarding violence between siblings has not included the parental perspective. While some studies have asked parents to note violent behaviors they have witnessed between their children (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006, 2009; Finkelhor, Turner, & Ormrod, 2006; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, 2006), studies have not included their perceptions of the violence they witness. With parents as the caretakers of children with a certain responsibility for their behaviors, parental experiences and voice regarding violence between their children is important to ascertain.

An understanding of how parents perceive and experience violence between their children will allow for researchers to begin discussion of how to intervene when sibling violence

exists as well as how to prevent it from happening. Kiselica and Morrill-Richards (2007) noted that children are at a substantial risk of engaging in sibling violence if their parents are unable to help them resolve disputes. Research has shown, however, that some parents dismiss, ignore, and minimize the occurrence of sibling violence (Wiehe, 1997). Despite the idea that “one of the most promising approaches to prevention involves assisting families with parenting responsibilities” (Kiselica & Morrill-Richards, 2007, p.158), efforts at intervening may be misguided until it is known how parents decide what is problematic behavior between their children.

***Intergenerational Transmission of Sibling Violence.*** Markowitz (2001) highlighted that there is minimal evidence that learned attitudes help explain violence in the intergenerational context. The author also noted that parents are likely to be influential in their children’s learned attitudes and the behaviors in which they engage. Therefore, parents are potentially influential in how sibling violence is transmitted intergenerationally even if children never witness their parents in a violent or conflictual context. An understanding of how parents may contribute to intergenerational transmission of sibling violence can help in the exploration of ways in which violence is transmitted and prevented.

In conjunction with the lack of parental perceptions of sibling violence in the literature is the lack of consideration for potential intergenerational transmission of this type of violence in family systems. While siblings are typically considered as being members of the same generational cohort, behaviors and beliefs about emotional and physical violence between siblings can potentially cross generations. Family systems theory (Bowen, 1966) and social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) may potentially speak to how sibling violence can be transmitted across generations as “abuse and the tolerance of abuse tend to be taught in families

from generation to generation” (McGoldrick, Broken Nose, & Potenza, 1999, p. 471). The intersection of these theories and how they collectively speak to sibling violence has not been examined in the literature. However, studies incorporating theoretical frameworks to be used in interventions for sibling abuse are needed (Caffaro, 2011).

**Family Structures.** Another contextual factor missing from the sibling violence literature is that of family structures. Today, many different types of families with children exist. When considering sibling violence, however, most of the research has focused on two-parent, biological families containing a mother and a father. Single-parent and blended families have been minimally considered (see Green, 1984; Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards, 2005 for examples), whereas same-sex families with children have not been considered in the sibling violence literature.

In their article on sibling maltreatment, Kiselica and Morrill-Richards (2007) discuss the need to have all family members, including parents, in the counseling process to address violence between siblings. Despite the notion that family types such as biological two-parent, blended, single-parent, and same-sex headed are all considered legitimate for raising families (see Carter & McGoldrick, 1999), it is possible that families of various structures experience sibling violence differently. Parents from these assorted family structures may also perceive and experience violence between their children differently; however, a comparison of these differences has not yet been examined.

**Inconsistencies in labeling and defining violence between siblings.** Along with missing contextual factors associated with sibling violence is the problematic way in which violence between siblings has been labeled and defined in the literature. A plethora of labels to refer to violence between siblings have been used in the literature including sibling abuse (e.g.

Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 2005; Kiselica & Morrill-Richards, 2007; Wiehe, 1991, 1997, 1998), sibling assault (e.g. Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994; Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005), sibling conflict (e.g. Furman & Buhrmester, 1985a, 1985b; Garcia, Shaw, Winslow, & Yaggi, 2000; Perozynski & Kramer, 1999; Reese-Weber & Kahn, 2005), sibling violence (e.g. Noland, Liller, McDermott, Coulter, & Seraphine, 2004; Omer, Schorr-Sapir, & Weinblatt, 2008; Steinmetz, 1981; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, 2006). The lack of consistency in how labels are used has created confusion regarding what violent behaviors are associated with particular labels. For example, Caspi's (2012) conceptualized the terms "sibling abuse," "sibling conflict," "sibling violence," and "sibling assault" as distinct concepts while Noland, Liller, McDermott, Coulter, and Seraphine (2004) viewed the terms as synonymous. This example is not an isolated case demonstrating the lack of cohesion surrounding how violence between siblings is conceptualized in the research literature.

Authors and researchers of violence between siblings have used labels differently to refer to different behaviors (Krienert & Walsh, 2011). This can lead to confusion in how violence in the sibling subsystem is understood and contextualized. In their study of sibling violence in the criminal justice system, Krienert and Walsh (2011) noted inconsistencies in how violence between siblings has been defined. The authors noted that in studies of violence between siblings "rarely do they include a legal definition of assault," but also "the muddled conglomeration of varying definitions leaves little opportunity for generalizations across studies" (p.332). Also, many studies have failed to include a definition for what constitutes violent behavior leaving the reader to assume what is meant. The combination of many labels used and the wide array of definitions, or lack thereof, is problematic due to ambiguity.

One way to begin to address this predicament is to begin to research how those affected by sibling violence understand it. As parents are responsible for their children, parents can provide insight as to what behaviors they believe to be problematic between children.

Knowledge about these behaviors and how parents make the decision as to what they find to be concerning can help begin the process of consistency in label usage and definition of terms.

A more comprehensive understanding of how parents view sibling violence and the behaviors associated with can help social work practitioners to educate parents when they are confronted with addressing sibling violence in the family system.

**Sibling violence and larger systemic issues.** While, sibling violence is a phenomenon entrapped in the context of the family, the repercussions of sibling violence can have systemic implications for relationships outside of the family. Associated with the occurrence of violence between siblings is dating violence (Noland, Liller, McDermott, Coulter, & Seraphine, 2004; Reese-Weber, 2008; Simonelli, Mullis, Elliot, & Pierce, 2002), peer violence (Duncan, 1999; Dunn & McGuire, 1992; Finkelhor, Turner, & Ormrod, 2006; MacKinnon-Lewis, Starnes, Volling, & Johnson, 1997), and violence towards others in general (Mangold & Koski, 1990). Sibling violence has even been found to be a predictor of violence in hypothetical situations (Gully, Dengerink, Pepping, & Bergstrom, 1981). The potential implications sibling violence has for other relationships highlight the need to intervene when this form of violence exists.

**Sibling violence and its connection to bullying and peer violence.** Sibling violence is a phenomenon that has received minimal attention compared to other forms of family violence (Straus, Gelles, Steinmetz, 1980; 2006), yet bullying is a phenomenon that has recently emerged as a highly investigated topic. The connection between sibling violence and peer violence, victimization, bullying, and relational aggression has been noted by several researchers (Duncan,

1999; Dunn & McGuire, 1992; Finkelhor, Turner, & Ormrod, 2006; MacKinnon-Lewis, Starnes, Volling, & Johnson, 1997; Menesini, Camodeca, & Nocentini, 2010; Ostrov, Crick, & Strauffacher, 2006; Rothman, Johnson, Azrael, Hall, & Weinberg, 2010). These studies have demonstrated a link between sibling violence and violence between peers; however, the discussion about the link has been minimal. Ostrov, Crick, and Stauffacher (2006) have noted:

One of the most serious consequences of sibling aggression is that children often carry these behaviors into new social contexts, particularly the peer group at school...children learn particular behaviors and relational styles within family relationships and then generalize what they have learned to friends and peers. (p. 243)

The sibling relationship may be where children are learning to be physically and emotionally violent with peers. Despite sibling violence as a likely mechanism for eventual bullying and peer violence, the research regarding peer violence and bullying has only minimally considered violence between siblings when trying to understand the manifestation of violence between peers. One way to better understand this connection may be to examine the contextual factors associated with both sibling violence and bullying/peer victimization. A manner in which to accomplish this may be to try and better understand the perspectives of all individuals confronted with the phenomenon of sibling violence, especially those that have been excluded. One voice deserving more attention is that of parents.

*Sibling violence, bullying, and parental perspectives.* In a recent study entitled “The Missing Voice: Parents’ Perspectives of Bullying,” authors Sawyer, Mishna, Pepler, and Wiener (2011) sought to include parents’ perceptions of bullying. The authors noted that missing from the bullying literature has been how parents perceive bullying. Themes emerging from the authors’ qualitative study included how parents define bullying; react to their children who have

been bullied; their awareness of their children witnessing bullying, describe the effects of bullying for their children, view gender and bullying, strategize to address bullying, and experience difficulties related to their children discussing and disclosing being bullied. The authors discussed that including parental perspectives is important in order to consider interventions aimed at addressing bullying because parents need to have the tools necessary to help their children when confronted with bullying.

Sibling violence is an area that has only minimally considered parental perspectives in research. Knowing how parents define, understand, perceive, and experience sibling violence is necessary given the importance of parents for children. With parents being the caretakers of children, their perspectives on sibling violence can determine how it is addressed and are imperative when considering mechanisms for all types of intervention.

**Physical and emotional sibling violence, but not sexual sibling violence.** It is important here to point out that several researchers have noted the likelihood of co-occurrence of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse between siblings (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998; Wiehe, 1997). Research in the area of sibling violence, however, tends to focus on physical and emotional violence with sexual abuse between siblings and sibling incest being separate research areas. This has been evidenced in such ways as authors stating that “sibling abuse occurs in two main forms: the act of physical violence between siblings and the act of incest” (Stock, 1993, p.19). Justification for why these two areas are generally studied independently has not been overtly discussed. Reasoning for this could be based on the distinction between physical and emotional sibling violence and sibling sexual abuse and incest that exists in policy.

***Sexual violence among siblings and policy.*** It is possible that the distinction exists because sibling incest is a criminal behavior per policy standards, whereas emotional and

physical violence between siblings is not considered criminal behavior (Wiehe, 1991).

According to Myers (1998) childhood sexual abuse is prohibited by law in each state of the U.S.

Although each state uses their own definitions and labels for the sexual behaviors that are identified as criminal (Johnson, 2008), sexual violence against a child is prohibited throughout the United States.

The same cannot be said for physical and emotional violence between siblings despite the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA; 1974). The federal definition of child abuse and neglect created in CAPTA is “any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm” (CAPTA, 1974). Within this definition lies the problem for considering physical and emotional sibling violence. The definition provided in CAPTA makes parents (or caretakers) the responsible party when a child experiences abuse or neglect. Research has shown parents to minimize, ignore, and devalue the occurrence of violence between their children (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998; Wiehe, 1991; 1997), yet the reasons parents do this have minimally been considered and to date have not been empirically examined.

For the purposes of the ensuing research, sibling incest and sexual abuse have not been included for two reasons. First, given the nature of sexual contact between siblings already defined as criminal there appears to be less ambiguity about the severity of this type of behavior. Second, unlike sibling sexual violence where specific acts and behaviors are already defined as problematic (criminal), behaviors associated with physical and emotional violence between siblings are more ambiguous and are yet to be defined. Therefore, while both physical and emotional sibling violence and sibling sexual abuse and incest are undeniably problematic, only



physical and emotional sibling violence will be considered in this research process in an effort to move towards the level of clarity currently present in the area of sibling sexual abuse.

### **Social Work and Sibling Violence**

Two of the numerous goals for the social work profession are to combat social injustices and provide interventions to marginalized populations. In the preamble of the National Association of Social Work's Code of Ethics (NASW, 2008), along with helping to empower oppressed and vulnerable individuals, a:

Defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual wellbeing in a social context and the wellbeing of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living. ( p.1)

Given the influence social workers have in working with individuals, families, and systems, research in the area of sibling violence is warranted to help social workers address this form of family violence. Social workers can be advocates for addressing violence between siblings, especially as children are a vulnerable population and think they do not have a voice for changing their incidents of violence with siblings (Wiehe, 1991; 1997; 2002). For children, who are considered a vulnerable population, oppression at the hands of a sibling can be considered a social injustice deserving attention.

**Child welfare, mental health, and sibling violence.** Within social work professional practice, two areas with a substantial focus on children as a vulnerable population are child welfare and children's mental health. Although not commonly mentioned as a subset of either child welfare or children's mental health, the implications of sibling violence for both areas are apparent. In their book on child maltreatment Miller-Perrin and Perrin (2007) discussed sibling abuse as form of child maltreatment that is not typically considered. Also, Green (1984) in the

title of his article on abusive behaviors by siblings labels sibling abuse as “child abuse by siblings.” It has been stated that “child abuse is today the principle focus of child welfare agencies, to the exclusion of nearly all other issues” (Lindsey, 2004, p.177). As the area of child welfare includes the discussion of child abuse and neglect, one can envision how abusive behaviors by siblings could be considered within child abuse and neglect. Violence against a child, regardless the individual perpetrator, is still violence against a child; however, sibling violence and abusive behaviors by siblings has been overlooked in the area of child abuse and neglect.

Similar to the area of child abuse and neglect, children’s mental health has, for the most part, disregarded the phenomenon of sibling violence. Aside from task-centered models that have been presented in single-case design research (Caspi, 2008; Reid & Donovan, 1990) and an intervention model that has been suggested, although not tested (Wiehe, 1997), research in the area children’s mental health in social work regarding interventions in cases of sibling abuse is miniscule. Wiehe (1997) has noted that adult survivors of sibling abuse can experience poor self-esteem, problems with relationships, continued self-blame, sexual dysfunction, eating disorders, substance abuse, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Mental health outcomes in children who are experiencing or have experienced sibling violence, however, have been overlooked in the research with most of the research being retrospective with college students. Mental health outcomes for children experiencing sibling violence need to be assessed to understand how to intervene and what areas of functioning need to be addressed.

While the ensuing research does not directly include mental health outcomes for children exposed to sibling violence, it does take steps towards learning how to incorporate an understanding of parents’ attitudes into the intervention process. Parental understanding of

sibling violence may be associated with child mental health outcomes of the phenomenon of sibling violence, which should be examined in future research. Before this connection can be studied, however, a thorough understanding of parental perceptions and experiences of sibling violence is needed first.

**Interventions and sibling violence.** To understand how to intervene for both addressing sibling violence after it occurs or for preventing its occurrence, a thorough understanding of parental perceptions of what constitutes problematic sibling interaction is needed, as parents are the caretakers of children, responsible for their safety, growth and development. Stress within family systems is an inevitable part of the family developmental process; however, parental stress may be elevated by sibling negativity and conflict (Patterson, 1986). Parental perspectives on how they experience violence between their children will provide insight into the decision-making process parents encounter when faced with violence between their children. An understanding of parents' experiences with violence when they were children may lend support to their perspectives and opinions about sibling violence as a problematic phenomenon, and thus whether they are interested in and amenable to interventions related to sibling violence.

To address sibling violence, several interventions have been proposed. Reid and Donovan (1990) and Caspi (2008; 2012) have proposed task-centered treatment models social workers can incorporate when working with families experiencing sibling violence. Despite the potential for positive outcomes when using the treatment model, the inclusion of small samples (one case in Reid & Donovan (1990) and three cases in Caspi (2008)) provides weak empirical evidence to support the usage of these treatment models. Non-violent resistance has also been proposed as an intervention to address violence against a sibling (Omer, Schorr-Sapir, & Weinblatt, 2008), yet this form of conflict resolution has not been empirically tested. One

empirical study including training and assessment of sibling conflict resolution skills (Thomas & Roberts, 2009) showed inconsequential evidence to support using their model and the authors noted the need for further research given the results.

The need for interventions aimed at addressing sibling violence is clear, yet of the sibling violence intervention research and literature, none includes a discussion for how parents perceive or understand sibling violence. Given this hole in the literature combined with problems in defining violence behaviors between siblings, appropriate targeting of intervention efforts may be misplaced. It has been found that some parents dismiss, ignore, blame the victim, and even engage in abuse with a child that is directing violence toward a sibling (Wiehe, 1997; 2002). Interventions with parents cannot be fully realized until a better grasp of their perspectives and experiences are obtained. To intervene with parents requires a foundational knowledge of how parents view sibling violence and what factors contribute to their thought processes.

### **Dissertation Overview**

Regarding sibling conflict and violence, “increasing understanding of parental beliefs may provide insight about the factors that lead parents to select certain strategies over others” (Perozynski & Kramer, 1999, p.489). Research to elicit responses from parents from various family structures may help to understand parental perspectives and experiences of sibling violence so that some clarity can emerge about problem definitions and ways to intervene. The following research attempts to answer the research question of “How do parents of various family structures experience and perceive physical and emotional violence between their children and their own siblings?” Using social learning theory and family systems theory as guides, a comparative case study methodology (Yin, 2009) will be used to answer the research question.

Within this dissertation, the literature review presented in Chapter 2 provides background information to support the research project. Sibling violence as a problematic phenomenon is presented by considering the prevalence, causes, consequences, connections to sibling rivalry, and ways in which violence between siblings has been defined and labeled. The way in which parents have been included in the literature on sibling violence is presented along with studies demonstrating what parents have witnessed in terms of violence between their children. The manner in which social learning theory and family systems theory have been used in the literature to help understand violence between siblings is included. This is to demonstrate that collectively these theories can better address sibling violence leading to an understanding of intergenerational transmission of this form of violence. The way in which various family structures have been addressed and not addressed in the sibling violence literature is discussed. The end of the chapter focuses on the use of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979) in research related to sibling violence. The focus is on how behaviors associated violence have not included parental voice to determine what they believe constitutes harmful, problematic behavior between siblings.

In Chapter 3, the methodology section of this research process, centers on the use of the case study methodology to answer the proposed research question. The case study provides a useful way of addressing the research question, as sibling violence is a contemporary phenomenon, unalterable by the author, and provides inclusion of multiple forms of data to help understand the case (Yin, 2009). Case studies also have relevance for social work research as they can help with assessment and interventions (Gilgun, 1994) and improving practitioner education (Greenwood & Lowenthal, 2005). Parents from biological two-parent, blended, same-sex, and single-parent families will be the units of analysis for the comparisons made within the

case study. Including multiple forms of data for triangulation will assist in constructing a rigorous model for the decision-making process parents engage in to determine what is problematic behavior between their children and what is not.

With parents as the unit of analysis for the comparative case study, data collection included obtaining quantitative and qualitative data from parents of four different family structures. Based on the hypotheses related to the research question, participants were asked to provide data at three data collections points. Participants filled out several quantitative scales to measure their experiences of sibling violence with their siblings in childhood and between their children. Parents were also asked to complete an instrument to assess behaviors they associate with sibling violence and sibling rivalry, as well as an instrument that assessed their attitudes on labels associated with physical and emotional violence between siblings.

In the second phase of data collection, participants were asked to engage in an interview with their partner, if applicable. These qualitative data centered on understanding the participants' thoughts on sibling violence, sibling rivalry, violence between their children, and past experiences. The data obtained were triangulated with the quantitative data for a better understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions.

In the final phase, participants were provided four case scenarios depicting a hypothesized interaction between two siblings. Participants were asked to engage in a dialogue with their partner (single-parent was asked to process aloud) to determine if the scenario represents sibling violence or sibling rivalry. Data collected from the third phase of data collection was used to help elucidate the decision-making process parents undertake when considering what constitutes problematic sibling interaction and what does not. These data were also triangulated with data from the previous two data collection phases to allow for model

construction--the goal of which is a better understanding of the decision-making process about what is or is not sibling abuse from the perspectives of parents in the case study.

Results of the data analysis are presented in Chapter 4. Comparisons between parents from different family structures are highlighted in matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to allow for presenting similarities and differences between parental responses from the different family structures. Analysis related to the hypotheses was undertaken by tying the responses back to the intersection of social learning theory and family systems theory to determine whether the responses provided support analytic generalization (Yin, 1994, 2009). Subsequently, the analysis was connected to intergenerational transmission of sibling violence as has been proposed by the intersection of social learning theory and family systems theory.

Finally, Chapter 5 contains the discussion and implications of the findings from the research. Within this chapter the results of the research project are connected to the current literature on sibling violence. Particular focus is placed on the connection between social learning theory, family systems theory, and parents for various family structures with implications for social work education, practice and policy development. Given the results of the research, applicability of the findings to the current state of the research and directions for moving forward is suggested. Ideas for future testing of the model for parental decision-making is also presented.

## **Summary**

This project is designed to increase the understanding of sibling violence and how parents from different family structures perceive and experience its existence. If violent behaviors occur between siblings, an understanding of how parents view this behavior is important. Due to the considerable lack of inclusion surrounding parental voice and family structure, examination of

sibling violence with particular attention to these contexts is warranted. The phenomenon of sibling violence cannot be better understood without consideration for all contextual variables that may or may not influence its occurrence. This research project is needed in order to better understand how these variables relate to violent behaviors between siblings, as well as to provide a parental decision-making model as to what may constitute problematic behavior and what does not. Intervention approaches need to include consideration for parental voice in addressing sibling violence. Research that contains this perspective is needed. This research project does just that. It has been noted that “effective intervention and prevention programs cannot be developed until more reliable studies have been made” (Stock, 1993). An increased awareness of how parents perceive and experience sibling violence will provide an understanding of the next steps necessary to achieve the social work ideals of intervention and prevention.

In the next section, a review of the literature in the area of sibling violence is presented. The prevalence and variables associated with sibling violence are presented along with ways in which violent behavior between siblings has been labeled and defined. Variables missing from the sibling violence literature and research are highlighted with justification for inclusion in this research project.



## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Introduction

Forms of family violence such as child abuse, domestic violence, and even elder abuse have garnered considerable attention in the literature whereas research related to sibling violence is minimal. While some research has asked parents to list violent behaviors of their children towards a sibling (see for example Brutz & Ingoldsby, 1984; Eriksen & Jensen, 2006, 2009; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, 2006)<sup>1</sup>, research addressing how parents perceive and experience it is non-existent in the literature. There is also a lack of research related to how parents perceive their own sibling relationships from childhood and how those perceptions impact their view of their own children's violent behavior. With the minimal attention sibling violence receives in research as well as at a societal level, knowledge about parents' experiences with violent behaviors of a child towards a sibling as well as their thoughts about intra-sibling violence are important. This information will aid in considering the scope of the occurrence of sibling violence as well as creating and initiating interventions to address it.

Despite numerous research studies regarding the prevalence of sibling violence (see Straus, Gelles, Steinmetz, 1980, 2006), society, families, and even the academic community appear to be largely unaware of this form of familial violence despite the maladaptive short- and long-term consequences (Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards, 2005; Wiehe, 1997). The general public, and more specifically families, view this type of behavior with a normative lens. Some

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the research with a focus on violent behaviors between siblings, with parents as respondents, has focused on parental accounts of witnessed behaviors. Parents have not been asked about their perceptions of these behaviors and Wiehe (1997) has noted that oftentimes parents do not witness all the violence that occurs between siblings.

parents seriously underestimate the occurrence and severity of sibling violence with parents occasionally dismissing sibling abuse as normal sibling rivalry (Gelles, 1997; Wiehe, 1990). Ignoring sibling violence or denying its existence has been called a form of child victimization (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994; Wiehe, 1997) and even child neglect (Green, 1984).

To better understand the context of physical and emotional sibling violence it is necessary to consider previous research examining this phenomenon. Research with a focus on violent behavior between siblings has included the prevalence, causes, predictors, and consequences. Consideration of these areas helps in providing the necessary background information supporting the idea that that closer examination of this form of violence is warranted. The following section highlights this violence as problematic for many children and individuals as well as identifies the need for the parental voice in helping to further understand the occurrence of sibling violence.

### **Sibling Violence as a Problematic Phenomenon**

**Prevalence of physical and emotional violence between siblings.** The sibling relationship can serve as an initial means of interacting with one's social world before extra-familial interaction. Unfortunately, sibling relationships can involve negative and adverse interactions leading to violence and abuse. Several researchers have labeled sibling violence as the most common form of family violence (Steinmetz, 1977; Straus & Gelles, 1990; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980), with individuals in the sibling dyad likely to be victimized the most (Gelles & Cornell, 1985; Gelles & Straus, 1988; Steinmetz, 1978; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Some view sibling conflict to be rather typical, stating it occurs daily in approximately 50% of young children (Dunn & Kendrick, 1982) and that more than half of all children will

experience violence from a sibling in the course of any given year (Goodwin & Roscoe, 1990; Roscoe, Goodwin, & Kennedy, 1987; Straus & Gelles, 1990; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980).

Roscoe, Goodwin, & Kennedy (1987) surveyed middle school students and found 88% of males and 94% of females had been the victims of sibling violence while 85% of males and 96% of females admitted to being the initiators of sibling violence in the year prior to the study.

Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz (1980) conducted a study asking the parents in 733 families to provide information on sibling violence, and 82% of the parents reported some form of physical violence with 21 acts per year being the average. Steinmetz (1977) found that 78% of sibling pairs 8 years or younger, 68% of siblings 9-14, and 63% of those siblings 15 or older engaged in violence as a means of resolving conflictual situations. An estimated 60% of American families with more than one child living in the household reported the occurrence of sibling violence (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Greenleaf (1990) concluded in his retrospective study on sibling violence in college students, that all subjects had reported violence in their sibling relationships. Given the high prevalence of sibling violence, one could argue that this form of violence has the greatest capacity to harm those in sibling relationships (Wiehe, 1997).

Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (2006) note that prevalence rates of sibling violence may be underestimated with parents often not aware of all the violence that occurs between children. When considering parental versus adolescent reports of sibling violence and abuse, adolescent self-reports show a higher frequency of violence and abuse than investigations where parents are asked to respond about the issue with sibling dyads in their families (Steinmetz, 1977; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Underreporting by parents may be problematic in understanding sibling abuse. Steinmetz (1977) noted four limitations in using parental reporting of sibling abuse: parents tended to generalize conflicts; difficulty exists in deciding the seriousness of the

conflict between siblings; parents may be inaccurate in their accounts of conflict; and parents are not present when all episodes of sibling violence occur. Similar findings were noted by Wiehe (1997) in a qualitative study, which found that parents often ignored, minimized, participated in, and disbelieved abuse between siblings. In their study on parental reporting of sibling violence and abuse, Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980), noted four possible reasons parental underestimation may occur: parents were likely unaware of all physical altercations between siblings; sibling fights may be discounted with less severe violence being forgotten; the amount of violence in single-parent households may be greater due to increased stress; and only violence associated with one child was noted by the parents. Consequently, the potential underestimation of sibling violence in families reflects the societal view that this type of violence is not a significant problem or that it constitutes a normal aspect of child development.

**Physical and emotional violence between siblings.** Numerous researchers striving for a more thorough understanding of sibling physical and emotional violence have attempted to uncover the causes of this form of family violence. Stress has been found to be a risk factor for the development of sibling violence in families. Hoffman, Kiecolt, and Edwards (2005) found the amount of family stress to be positively correlated with sibling abuse. The authors studied parental discord, parental violence, and maladaptive stepfamilies and found all to be predictors of sibling violence in the familial system. Perception of marital discord can be stressful for a child (Brody, Stoneman, & McCoy, 1994; Cummings, Zahn-Waxler, & Radke-Yarrow, 1981; Emery, 1982), and social learning theory proposes that children could potentially incorporate resolution mechanisms learned by witnessing marital discord into their interactions with siblings.

Characteristics of the parent-child relationship and its relation to violence between children has also been considered with sibling abuse being associated with parental favoritism of

one child over another, emotional detachment, and child abuse (Hoffman & Edwards, 2004). Parental favoritism is consistent with the concept of competition of resources since the less a child feels attention from a parental figure the more she/he is going to compete in order to obtain it. Consistent with social learning theory, siblings who witness child abuse or experience it first-hand could be more predisposed to engaging in violence with a sibling to get attention.

Some research has contributed to understanding those aspects that put siblings at a higher risk for encountering abuse in the sibling relationship. Hoffman, Kiecolt, and Edwards (2005) found that males were more likely to be tolerant of violence with another sibling than were females. They also found that the highest rate of violence occurred in males with brothers than any other possible sibling pair. Females with sisters experienced the least amount of violent behavior. Similar studies found evidence to support that brothers engage in the highest amount of violence, followed by mixed pairs, and then sisters (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Goodwin & Roscoe, 1990; Hetherington, 1988; Mangold & Koski, 1990; Roscoe, Goodwin, & Kennedy, 1987; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Straus & Gelles, 1990). This is in contrast to studies that have found older brother/younger sister dyads to experience more sibling violence (Aguilar, O'Brien, August, Aoun, & Hektner, 2001; Graham-Bermann, Culter, Litzenberger, & Schwartz, 1994) and that females are likely to experience sibling violence from a brother or sister (Button & Gealt, 2010). Findings are inconclusive as to which sibling dyad combination experiences the most sibling violence or the most severe sibling violence. Evidence, however, supports that violence between siblings happens in all dyads (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 2005; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980).

Regarding age, Steinmetz (1977) suggested that violence declines with age noting the highest rate of violence in children 8 years old and younger. Others noted that violence between

siblings may peak around the age of 10 to 14 years (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). This is consistent with high levels of violence found in a study of sibling violence in middle school students where the subjects had a mean age of 12.5 (Roscoe, Goodwin, & Kennedy, 1987). While the incidence of sibling violence is still considerable regardless of age, it has been hypothesized that as siblings develop they spend less time together and become better at communication, therefore they do not have to rely on physical violence to resolve conflict (Noland, Liller, McDermott, Coulter, & Seraphine, 2004). Age differences between siblings have also been shown to be a risk factor. Noland et al. (2004) found age difference to be negatively correlated with sibling violence. This supports the idea of competition for resources in the family (Hoffman & Edwards, 2004; Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards, 2005). Resources are different for children at various times throughout theirs and their family's developmental process. Therefore it is possible the closer children are in age, the higher the chance for competition for resources potentially leading to sibling violence.

There is a significant lack of literature regarding socioeconomic status and sibling violence with most studies not collecting data on socioeconomic status or family income. Wiehe (1997) stated that sibling violence can occur in all socioeconomic cohorts. Hoffman, Kiecolt, and Edwards (2005) found no significance in family income predicting sibling violence. Others noted that families with lower incomes experience more sibling violence (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006). More research is needed regarding predictive factors related to violence between siblings; however, research has demonstrated substantial consequences as a result of experiencing sibling violence.

**Consequences of physical and emotional violence between siblings.** The consequences of sibling abuse can be devastating for children who experience it. Duncan (1999) found that

middle school children who had experienced sibling violence were lonelier and presented with more psychological problems. Poor peer relations and behavioral problems (Stormshak, Bellanti, & Bierman, 1996), aggression and delinquency in males (Bank, Patterson, & Reid, 1996; Milosh, 1992), psychological adjustment in females (Graham-Bermann, Cutler, Litzenberger, & Schwartz, 1994), continued self-blame, depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, interpersonal relationship problems, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Wiehe, 1997) have been found to be consequences of sibling abuse.

Children experiencing sibling violence are at increased risk of having maladaptive functioning and behaviors as adults. Gully, Dengerink, Pepping, & Bergstrom (1981) found that sibling violence was a better predictor of violence in adulthood than was parental violence. The experience of sibling violence may be more significant in predicting violent behavior later in life with the family essentially acting as the environment in which siblings practice violence. Sibling violence experienced as a child has a significant impact on the initiation of dating violence in adulthood (Noland et al., 2004), with this form of violence also being associated with being a victim of dating violence later in life (Simonelli, Mullis, Elliot, & Pierce, 2002). Male victims of sibling violence report increased aggression and hostility as adults (Milosh, 1992). In general, adult victims report lower self-esteem, depression, and continued victimization (Wiehe, 1990, 1997). Adults can exhibit antisocial tendencies due to sibling violence (Bank, Patterson, & Reid, 1996) leading sibling violence to have larger-scale societal impacts. The consequences of sibling violence are serious both in children and for the adults who have experienced it, yet its existence as a negative phenomenon is not recognized.

Given the prevalence, causes, predictors, and consequences of violent behavior between siblings, it is apparent that this type of violence deserves consideration and considerable focus.

While more research is needed in the area, one prominent factor may contribute to a lack of focus in the area of sibling violence. Defining violent behavior between siblings in the literature has included a plethora of various behaviors. To complicate the issue further, a variety of labels have been used with or without definitions to refer to violent behavior between siblings. The following section provides an overview of how others who have examined violence between siblings have labeled its occurrence and defined it or more often not defined it at all.

### **Defining violent behavior between siblings**

Currently, no global definition of sibling violence exists as there are many ways in which this type of violent behavior has been both defined and labeled. These confusing ways lead to potential problems in the conceptualization and measurement of this phenomenon. Raffaelli (1997) highlighted the confusion surrounding labels used in research related to conflict and fighting between siblings. In a footnote included in an article discussing her research study on adolescents' conflicts with friends and siblings, Raffaelli stated that "theorists typically differentiate between 'conflict,' characterized by opposition and disagreement, and 'fighting,' characterized by anger and aggression" (p. 541). The author goes on to mention that Hay (1984) found the distinction between what is considered "conflict" and "fighting" (as cited in Raffaelli, 1997, p.541) is rarely made in empirical research. The author then stated that within her article she is going to follow what has been done in prior research by using the words "conflict," "fight," and "quarrel" interchangeably, doing so without providing a definition for any of the words. This leads the reader to wonder what is meant by the words she is using as well as what constitutes violent behavior because she uses "violence" while failing to provide a definition for this label. Given the apparent lack of definitions in the research, it could be concluded that



definitions are not only warranted but needed in order to make distinctions between what might be a problem and what is not.

In a book entitled, *Sibling abuse trauma: Assessment and intervention strategies for children, families, and adults*, Caffaro and Conn-Caffaro (1998) provided definitions for both physically and emotionally violent behavior between siblings. The authors labeled violent behavior that was physical in nature as “sibling assault” and stated that it “occurs when one member of a sibling dyad nonaccidentally cause physical harm, injury, or death to a brother or sister” (p.12). “Psychological maltreatment” was the label given to emotionally abusive behaviors between siblings which included “emotional abuse that includes neglect of a sibling, as well as exposing a sibling to violence by peers or other siblings; comments aimed at ridiculing, insulting, threatening, terrorizing, and belittling a sibling; rejecting, degrading, and exploiting a sibling; and destroying a sibling’s personal property” (p.13). Unfortunately, even with their definitions the authors use many labels interchangeably with others throughout their book, which makes the consistency of behaviors associated with certain labels difficult to identify.

In a review of more than 100 journal articles, books, chapters, and dissertations published between 1977 and 2008 to examine how violent behavior was defined and labeled in the research literature, the author found numerous labels used to discuss emotional and physical violence between siblings (see Table 2.1). Labels referring to violence between siblings are oftentimes used interchangeably (Caspi, 2012). However, approximately a third of the literature reviewed included a definition of what authors were referring to when they discussed violence between siblings. For the remaining literature, the definition of violent behavior was left to the reader’s interpretation.

**Table 2.1: Labels Used to Refer to Physical or Emotional Violence between Siblings**

Label	Articles Using Label
<b><i>Sibling Abuse</i></b>	Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 2005; Graham-Bermann & Cutler, 1994; Green, 1984; Haj-Yahia & Dawud-Noursi, 1998; Hoffman & Edwards, 2004; Kiselica & Morrill-Richards, 2007; Kominkiewicz, 2004; McLaurin, 2005; Rosenthal & Doherty, 1984; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, 2006; Wiehe, 1991, 1997, 1998
<b><i>Sibling Aggression</i></b>	Bank & Kahn, 1997; Berndt & Bulleit, 1985; Duncan, 1999; Dunn & Kendrick, 1982; Dunn & Munn, 1986; Felson, 1983; Felson & Russo, 1988; Hardy, 2001; MacKinnon-Lewis, Starnes, Volling, & Johnson, 1997; Martin & Ross, 1995, 2005; Roscoe, Goodwin, & Kennedy, 1987; Simonelli, Mullis, & Rohde, 2005; Steinmetz, 1977a; Stocker & McHale, 1992; Stormshak, Bellanti, & Bierman, 1996; Teti & Ablard, 1989; Updegraff, Thayer, Whiteman, Denning, & McHale, 2005
<b><i>Sibling Agonistic Behavior*</i></b>	Brody, Stoneman, & Burke, 1987; Goodwin & Roscoe, 1990; Roscoe, Goodwin, & Kennedy, 1987
<b><i>Sibling Antagonism</i></b>	Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985b
<b><i>Sibling Assault</i></b>	Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998, 2005; Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994; Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 2006
<b><i>Sibling Conflict</i></b>	Bank & Kahn, 1997; Brody, 1998; Brody & Murry, 2001; Brody, & Stoneman, 1987; Brody, Stoneman, & McCoy, 1994; Brody, Stoneman, McCoy, & Forehand, 1992; Brody, Stoneman, Smith, & Gibson, 1999; Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Dunn & Munn, 1986; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985a, 1985b; Garcia, Shaw, Winslow, & Yaggi, 2000; Graham-Bermann, 1990, 1994; Graham-Bermann & Cutler, 1994; Kendrick & Dunn, 1983; Kramer, Perozynski, & Chung, 1999; Linares, 2006; Martin, & Ross, 1995; Newman, 1996; Perozynski & Kramer, 1999; Raffaelli, 1992, 1997; Reese-Weber & Kahn, 2005; Ross, Siddiqui, Ram, & Ward, 2004; Siddiqui & Ross, 1999; Steinmetz, 1977a, 1977b; Stoneman & Brody, 1993; Volling, 1997; Volling & Belsky, 1992
<b><i>Sibling Fighting</i></b>	Arnstein, 1979; Bank & Kahn, 1997; Bennett, 1990
<b><i>Sibling Hostility</i></b>	Boer, Westenberg, McHale, Updegraff, & Stocker, 1997; Dunn, Slomkowski, Beardsall, & Rende, 1994; McGuire, McHale, & Updegraff, 1996; McHale, Crouter, McGuire, & Updegraff, 1995; Teti & Ablard, 1989
<b><i>Sibling Maltreatment</i></b>	Kiselica & Morrill-Richards, 2007
<b><i>Sibling Negativity</i></b>	MacKinnon, 1989
<b><i>Sibling Psychological Abuse</i></b>	Whipple & Finton, 1995
<b><i>Sibling Psychological Maltreatment</i></b>	Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998; Whipple & Finton, 1995

<b><i>Sibling Quarreling</i></b>	Furman & Buhrmester, 1985b
<b><i>Sibling Relational Aggression</i></b>	Ostrov, Crick, & Stauffacher, 2006; Updegraff, Thayer, Whiteman, Denning, & McHale, 2005; Yu, Gamble, 2008
<b><i>Sibling Rivalry</i></b>	Bank & Kahn, 1997; Boer, Westenberg, McHale, Updegraff, & Stocker, 1997; Leung & Robson, 1991
<b><i>Sibling Violence</i></b>	Barnett, Miller-Perrin, & Perrin, 1997; Brutz & Ingoldsby, 1984; Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Finkelhor, Turner, & Ormrod, 2006; Gelles, 2007; Gelles & Cornell, 1990; Gelles & Straus, 1988; Goodwin & Roscoe, 1990; Graham-Bermann & Cutler, 1994; Graham-Bermann, Cutler, Litzenberger, & Schwartz, 1994; Gully, Dengerink, Pepping, & Bergstrom, 1981; Hoffman & Edwards, 2004; Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards, 2005; Ketterly & Emery, 2006; Kratcoski, 1984; Mangold & Koski, 1990; Noland, Liller, McDermott, Coulter, & Seraphine, 2004; Omer, Schorr-Sapir, & Weinblatt, 2008; Pagelow, 1984; Purkayastha, 2000; Reid & Donovan, 1990; Robinson, Wright, & Watson, 1994; Roscoe, Goodwin, & Kennedy, 1987; Simonelli, Mullis, Elliott, & Pierce, 2002; Steinmetz, 1981; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, 2006
*According to <a href="http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/agonistic">http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/agonistic</a> , the definition of “agonistic” is <i>of, relating to, or being aggressive or defensive social interaction (as fighting, fleeing, or submitting) between individuals usually of the same species</i> . Of the three studies using this label, only two (Brody, Stoneman, & Burke, 1987; Roscoe, Goodwin, & Kennedy, 1987) provided definitions for how they were using the term. Brody, Stoneman, and Burke (1987) operationalized agonistic behavior between siblings as “hits, attacks, pushes, fights, threatens, quarrels, teases, insults, sarcasm, name calling, yelling, whining, protesting, frowns, cries, or uses negative facial expressions” (p.563) whereas Roscoe, Goodwin, and Kennedy (1987) used agonistic behavior to refer to verbal conflict between siblings.	

Table 2.1 highlights the abundance of labels used in the sibling violence literature. Some authors use the same label yet define the behaviors associated with those labels differently (see footnote in Table 2.1 for example) leading to confusion and a lack of uniformity in how labels are used. Given the wide range of labels used to refer to violence between siblings, determining definitions for what is meant by each term is imperative. However, many of the authors do not provide definitions. This leads to authors using the same labels and potentially having different meanings for the same terms. For the area of sibling violence, this means a lack of clarity in how terms are used and potentially ambiguous definitions associated with each label leading to under or over defining what constitutes this social problem.

Consistency among labels used to describe conflictual behavior between siblings and definitions was absent in a study by Steinmetz (1977b) as were the definitions used to describe the labels that were used. Verbal and physical aggression were placed under the umbrella term of sibling conflict. Abuse and violence were also used throughout the article without any clear delineation between any of the labels used. The assumption here seemed to be that the labels used were synonymous, which was not necessarily accurate (see Caspi, 2012). Noland, Liller, McDermott, Coulter, & Seraphine (2004) used “violence” to help define violent behaviors between siblings and indicate behaviors to help explain it. The authors noted that “sibling abuse, sibling conflict, sibling violence, and sibling assault are considered to be synonymous terms” (p.15), which is completely contradictory to Caspi’s (2012) typology of the terms “sibling conflict,” “sibling violence,” and “sibling abuse” (p.2). Similarly, in a study by Martin and Ross (1985), aggressive behavior between siblings was not defined, nor was conflict between siblings. The authors mentioned the term physical aggression leading one to assume this term included some form of physical contact, yet neither aggressive behaviors nor severity of those behaviors was discussed.

Kratcoski (1984) did not specifically provide a definition for sibling violence, but stated “family violence is defined as the actual or threatened use of force by one member of the family toward another member” (p.446). In contrast, two studies (Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards, 2005; Simonelli, Mullis, Elliott, & Pierce, 2002) defined violent behavior between siblings with the use of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979). Both studies mentioned the contents of the CTS contains; however, the CTS includes a variety of violent behaviors that may be considered on a continuum of severity. Without definitions of abuse (Simonelli, Mullis, Elliott, and Pierce

(2002) use the term “abuse” in their study), the reader may construe all factors on the instrument as abusive, which may be inappropriate.

Updegraff, Thayer, Whiteman, Denning, and McHale (2005) used the term “sibling relational aggression,” defined as “behaviors that are intended to harm others’ social relationship” (p.374). The actual behaviors, however, were not defined leaving the reader to question if physical, emotional, psychological mechanisms for resolving conflict were included. Without a definition for “aggression”, the authors provided no indication that harmful behaviors were included in the constructed measurement for sibling relational aggression.

Howells and Rosenbaum (2008) used an entirely different conceptualization of the term “sibling violence.” The authors used “sibling violence”<sup>2</sup> to refer to witnessing a sibling being abused by a parent. The way in which the authors used the term “sibling violence” highlights the need for consistency in the way in which certain labels are used in the literature. With many authors omitting definitions for the labels they use to describe certain behaviors or constructs, the need to push towards uniformity is warranted. This would promote the ability to associate specific definitions with specific labels so that consistent information is being conveyed. Without the inclusion of the definitions authors are using to measure violence between siblings, conclusions can only be inferred making collective understanding of violent behaviors associated with particular labels difficult, if not impossible.

Potential challenges can occur when operationalizing the definitions associated with labels used to refer to violence between siblings. Mackey, Fromuth, and Kelly (2010) noted that sibling rivalry and sibling conflict may have different meanings depending on age. This highlights a contextual factor that should be considered when deciding upon terms and

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<sup>2</sup> This is similar to another study which used the term “sibling abuse” to refer to parent-to-child abuse witnessed by a respondent (Stewart, Senger, Kallen, & Scheurer, 1987).

definitions. In his recent book on sibling aggression, Caspi (2012) included the terms “sibling violence” and “sibling abuse”; however, the terms were only delineated by the direction of the aggressive behavior initiated by the perpetrator. Caspi asserted that violence was bidirectional; whereas abuse was unidirectional with one sibling striving to be in power over the other. While he did discuss behaviors associated with both sibling violence and sibling abuse in order to provide an operational definition of those labels, Caspi also used sibling aggression as an umbrella term “that refers to behaviors that range from nonviolent to abuse behavior” (p.2) which includes: sibling competition, sibling conflict, sibling violence, and sibling abuse. Caspi’s use of sibling aggression, which is inclusive of four constructs, is different from how others have used the term (see Bank & Kahn, 1997; Berndt & Bulleit, 1985; Duncan, 1999; Dunn & Kendrick, 1982; Dunn & Munn, 1986; Felson, 1983; Felson & Russo, 1988; Hardy, 2001; MacKinnon-Lewis, Starnes, Volling, & Johnson, 1997; Martin & Ross, 1995, 2005; Roscoe, Goodwin, & Kennedy, 1987; Simonelli, Mullis, & Rohde, 2005; Steinmetz, 1977a; Stocker & McHale, 1992; Stormshak, Bellanti, & Bierman, 1996; Teti & Ablard, 1989; Updegraff, Thayer, Whiteman, Denning, & McHale, 2005), which confounds the process of deciphering which labels to use with which behaviors.

Phillips, Phillips, Grupp, and Trigg (2009), challenged the current discourse on sibling violence. They suggested that defining and categorizing “sibling violence” was a problematic, yet a necessary endeavor. The authors stated that defining what constitutes violence or abuse between siblings requires limiting what can be considered problematic. This implies that those behaviors which do not meet criteria of the definition could potentially be viewed as less worrisome. However, the authors also stated:

Defining sibling violence and abuse is critical to demystifying and challenging these violent practices. Because the term sibling violence is marginalized, use of the term, descriptions, and examples seem vitally important to identify so that violent practices occurring between siblings can be named and stopped. (p. E5)

Phillips, Phillips, Grupp, and Trigg (2009) highlighted a conundrum that exists in this area. To define sibling violence is to potentially limit what constitutes violence. Conversely, not defining what constitutes sibling violence is to allow for ambiguity between violence and rivalry. When trying to address this phenomenon, ambiguity could therefore impact policy and practice including intervention development and policy-making.

It is evident that the treatment of violent behaviors between siblings in the literature is problematic. It is possible there are differences between what is considered rivalry and what is considered violent, yet this has not been extensively considered in research. It is possible that blurred lines between constructs may present an unclear picture of sibling violence and sibling rivalry in society. These misconceptions may allow for societal discourse around sibling violence and sibling rivalry that is incongruent with what is actually meant by the terms.

### **Sibling violence and sibling rivalry: Higher than Prevalence Suggests?**

Gelles and Cornell (1985) suggested several reasons why society, researchers, and social agencies overlook negative sibling interactions. They suggested that when siblings hit each other it is perceived as common behavior; that parents view serious conflict between siblings as essential developmental practice; and that because researchers in social sciences have found parents view this behavior as unimportant, there is no need for further research. To confound the issue further, sibling violence may be discounted due to its common occurrence

(Gelles, 1997) and many believe sibling aggression is the same as sibling rivalry (Gelles, 1997; Wiehe, 1990).

Sibling rivalry is a concept many view as synonymous or associated with sibling violence (Noland, Liller, McDermott, Coulter, & Seraphine, 2004), yet it appears to be fundamentally different. Sibling rivalry refers to jealousy between siblings and the competition for family resources (Felson, 1983; Gelles & Cornell, 1990; Hart, 2001). Neubauer (1983) stated that sibling rivalry is a result of “the competition among siblings for the exclusive or preferred care from the person they share” (p.326).<sup>3</sup> Faber and Mazlish (1988) defined sibling rivalry as threats to a sibling’s well-being in terms of potential resources with parents being included as a resource. Additional children in the familial system present a challenge for resources leading to competition for those resources and the additional children being viewed as a threat by children already present. Rivalry between siblings is consistent with the traditional idea that it is important for siblings to be competitive because it allows children to practice for competitive situations in adulthood. The assumption is that practicing in the “safe” sibling context will build skills needed longitudinally. Even if this is accurate, “sibling rivalry is normal; sibling abuse is not” (Wiehe, 1997, p.125).

Regardless of whether the relationship is distant or close, sibling rivalry may imply a connectedness in order for competitiveness to emerge. Kettrey & Emery (2006) stated that the level of intimacy between siblings may legitimize using physical violence, however harmful it may be. Closeness of siblings may allow for lowered inhibitions when children and adolescents feel threatened by another sibling. A negative response to any perceived threat could determine

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that parental favoritism has been considered a factor of sibling rivalry (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Felson, 1983; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). However, research has demonstrated that parental favoritism may not be the only thing to consider when discussing sibling rivalry and that protection of territory and dominance may also need to be considered (see Prochaska & Prochaska, 1985).



the extent of sibling violence in the sibling dyad. It is important to note here that many siblings do not respond in an adverse, maladaptive way; however, when responses become violent and abusive, it becomes a problematic situation for the siblings (Wiehe, 1997).

Sibling rivalry was coined in the early 1920's by Alfred Adler (Sutton-Smith & Rosenberg, 1970). There are numerous self-help books (Caspi, 2012) that attempt to help parents address the occurrence of sibling rivalry (see for example Brazleton & Sparrow, 2005; Faber & Mazlish, 1987; Goldenthal, 2000; Hart, 2001). The research related to understanding sibling rivalry, however, is miniscule and lacks academic, empirical standards (see for example Calladine 1983; Leung & Robson, 1991; Moser, Jones, Zaorski, Mirsalimi, & Luchner, 2005). In a study where children participated as researchers, sibling rivalry was examined to look at what children viewed as causing fights between them and a sibling (Prochaska & Prochaska, 1985). A group of eight fourth-grade students constructed the assessment that was administered to 149 fourth- and fifth-graders and found children ranked being in a bad mood as the number one reason for fighting with a sibling followed by getting even with a sibling, protecting their room or toys, proving they were number one, and being bored. Getting parents' attention was ranked as the last reason they listed for fighting. This is different from how many researchers define sibling rivalry (see Leung & Robson, 1991) as being a result of children's jealousy of a sibling and their quest for parental resources. While a definition of "fighting" was not given in the study, the authors found that sibling fights increased when parents imitated their children's fights as well as when they ignored them.

The notion that sibling rivalry exists as an attempt to gain parental attention, has been included in an assessment examining conflict and violence between siblings (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985b). Contradictory to what children stated as reasons for fighting with siblings in

the study by Prochaska and Prochaska (1985), this assessment measured sibling rivalry in terms of parent partiality based on open-ended interviews with children related to sibling relationships. The definition of sibling rivalry in this study was based on questions that did not directly ask about sibling rivalry, only relationships in general. Also, the assessment was constructed without parental insight about their perceptions of the qualities of sibling relationships.

It has been noted that the use of the term “sibling rivalry” is confusing and potentially problematic. Caspi (2012) stated that “the term ‘rivalry’ is particularly present in the self-help literature but is not a helpful construct as it does not distinguish between mild and extreme aggression, and may confuse conflict over shared living space with competition for parental investment” (p.2). The interpretation of the behaviors associated with the term may be misconstrued when used, potentially leading to an inaccurate exchange of knowledge. This potential inaccuracy could lead to over-estimation or under-estimation of behaviors associated with the sibling rivalry label.

This research, or lack thereof, indicates a need to incorporate parental voice into the process of determining what constitutes violent behavior between children and what behaviors are associated with sibling rivalry. With parents having the role of caretakers for children in their households, as well as the time associated with parent-child interaction, insight from parents regarding what they view as problematic and what they see as normative is important for understanding the complete discourse around sibling violence.

### **Parents in the sibling violence literature**

The research in the area of violent behavior between siblings has focused less on the inclusion of the parental voice in understanding this phenomenon and more on the responses of children or individuals reflecting back on their childhood. Parents have occasionally responded

to questions related to behaviors that their children have experienced (for example see Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; 2006), yet responses about the occurrence of aggressive and violent behaviors between siblings has generally been conducted with individuals and sometimes sibling dyads. The voice of the parent is important to include in order to better understand sibling violence and its meaning for parents as they are caretakers and disciplinarians for children. Understanding the decision-making process parents use to determine which behaviors between their children are problematic is also important. This will allow for a better understanding of the distinctions between what is considered a problem and what is “normal.”

Examining the role of parents’ past experiences in determining whether certain violent behaviors are understood to be problematic could also be helpful in understanding sibling violence. As Wiehe (1997) and Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro (1998) discussed, the parental role in addressing or not addressing sibling violence plays a pivotal role in how children experience violence from a sibling. The beliefs of parents related to sibling conflict and violence have received minimal attention in the empirical literature (Perozynski & Kramer, 1999). With parental beliefs of particular behaviors being a better predictor of behavior than global beliefs (Sigel, 1992), understanding how parents view behaviors related to sibling violence as either problematic or not is important to understand better the dynamics of sibling violence within the family.

It is important reiterate that the research in the area of sibling violence including parents as respondents has specifically asked parents to list behaviors they have witnessed between their children. Research has not explicitly included parental perceptions and thoughts about the behaviors they have witnessed between children. Regarding parental type, most of the research including parents as participants has involved two-parent heterosexual families or mothers from

two-parent heterosexual families. With the exception of Green's (1984) article, which included cases of sibling abuse in single-parents families, studies have focused on two-parent families. Also, to date no research has been found that includes same-sex parents and their perceptions and experiences of sibling violence within the home. As there are numerous types of family structures within the U.S., knowledge of how parents from all types of family structures view and experience sibling violence is important in order to further the knowledge regarding this phenomenon, as well as to begin discussion of intervention implementation.

**Parents witnessing violent behaviors between their children.** Some researchers have mentioned that “one of the most difficult tasks that parents face is deciding how to respond to conflicts between their children” (Perozynski & Kramer, 1999, p.489). Mothers and fathers have differing beliefs about how to address conflict between siblings (McGillicuddy-deLisi, 1992; Perozynski & Kramer, 1999; Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Melby, 1990), yet little is known about how parents address violence between their children. Parents' experiences of sibling violence in their childhood and the meaning they place on those experiences may influence how they address violent behavior between their children. Little is known though about how parents view their experiences with siblings while growing up and how those experiences influence how they perceive violence between their children.

Research in the area of violent behavior has tended to include children or an individual's perspective about their sibling relationships growing up. A minimal amount of research in the area of sibling conflict and sibling violence has included parents as participants in the research process. Existing research has focused on the behaviors parents have witnessed and exhibited with relation to their children being violent. The majority of studies have included mother-father headed households with most other types of family structures ignored. The following discussion

focuses on research involving parents that has included standardized scales and measurements to assess how they respond to conflict between siblings and what parents observe.

Martin and Ross (2005) conducted a study to consider the sex differences of children and parents' responses to sibling aggression. The study attempted to assess factors contributing to parents intervening in conflicts between their children. Violent and aggressive parental reactions to hostility and aggression in their children can potentially lead to a bidirectional influence regarding the maintenance of aggression in their children (Patterson, 1982). Knowledge of these factors is important. In the study, parents of 40 two-parent biological families were observed addressing aggressive behaviors between their children with a focus on prohibitive responses parents displayed related to sibling aggression. All forms of prohibition towards sibling aggression were considered collectively as the authors noted all forms of intervening communicate that children should not be acting aggressively with a sibling. Results of the study indicated that the gender of the child did not significantly impact parental response when a child displayed severe physical aggression. Parents were more likely to prohibit boys' mild physical aggression when children were younger and prohibit girls' mild aggression when they were older. Also, parents were more likely to prohibit aggression directed towards a boy when children were younger, whereas aggression directed towards a girl was prohibited when children were older.

Parents in this particular study responded similarly to boys and girls who exhibited severe physical aggression, which the authors considered as kicking, hitting, or property damage. This indicated parents in this study believed it was not acceptable for their children to engage in severe physical aggression. The researchers did not ask reasons why parents believed it was unacceptable for their children to engage in severe physical aggression. Also, behaviors parents

believe to be inappropriate versus those deemed normative were not assessed. This would have increased the knowledge related to why parents make the decisions they do to intervene.

In another study including parents as respondents to questions of victimization in children, Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, and Hamby (2005) looked at a nationally representative sample of children aged 2 to 17 years. Parents responded to questions on sibling victimization from the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (Hamby & Finkelhor, 2004). Similar to those studies already mentioned, the questionnaire was a measure of actual behaviors that were experienced (for children respondents aged 10-17) or that were witnessed (parents as respondents for children aged 2-9). Parents responded to the behaviors they witnessed; however, their perceptions of sibling victimization were not assessed nor were their points-of-view considered.

Felson and Russo (1988) conducted a study looking at parental punishment of sibling aggression to understand how parents respond to sibling aggression. Parents were only asked about the frequency of aggression between their children and were asked to report whom they felt initiated the aggression. Because the authors found that the responses from children and mothers were more highly correlated and that data from fathers provided very few statistical relationships, responses from fathers were considered not “valid” and therefore were removed from the analysis. Resultant inferences were made only with mothers’ data. Therefore, information on how both parents respond to sibling aggression was not provided. Parents were not asked about the process by which they addressed the aggression they witnessed between their children. This answered the question of what parents did, but not why they did what they did.

In a study that included 88 two-parents (mother-father) and two children (second born child had a mean age of approximately 4 years), Kramer, Perozynski, and Chung (1999) examined parental responses to conflict witnessed between their children. Parents were asked to

respond to sibling verbal and physical conflicts as they normally would and were observed. The authors found parents used passive nonintervention, redirection, power assertion, commands to stop fighting, collaborative problem solving, active nonintervention, and exploration of emotions to address conflicts between their children. The authors did not examine why parents used the strategies they did to address what they considered to be problematic behavior between their children. Coincidentally, what constituted verbal and physical conflict was also not discussed, further blurring what behaviors elicit parental concern.

Similarly, Ross, Siddiqui, Ram, and Ward (2004) conducted a study including parents and children from 40 two-parent (mother-father) families to look at children's perspectives of sibling conflict as well as how it manifested in their relationships with siblings. Parents reported on children's conflict daily for three weeks and rated each conflict from the children's perspective. The authors did not provide information on how the parents were to rate conflict from their child's point-of-view. No other information or data was collected from the parents. This exclusion of a description regarding the research process leads to questioning the methodology used as well as the inclusion of parents in the research process. More in-depth and helpful information is essential to increase understanding of the process involved in the research and the justification for parental involvement.

In two studies, one that considered sibling hostility (McHale, Crouter, McGuire, & Updegraff, 1995) and one that looked at sibling aggression (Stocker & McHale, 1992), the authors attempted to obtain more information from parents than other studies including parents. Inadequate explanation of the research processes in both articles, however, leads to confusion surrounding what data parents provided. McHale, Crouter, McGuire, and Updegraff (1995) conducted a study that included mothers and fathers from 110 non-divorced, biological two-

parent families to examine parental differential treatment of children and its impact on sibling relationships. Parents were asked to complete an assessment of parental differential treatment of their children, a parental evaluation of sibling relationships inventory, and were also asked to rate the frequency of five adverse behaviors each child directed towards their sibling. The five adverse behaviors were obtained from a scale that was developed in another study (Gamble & McHale, 1989) yet were not explicitly discussed in the article. The authors failed to expand on what behaviors were included or what the sibling relationship quality was that the parents reported. Parental perceptions of the behaviors they witnessed were not assessed, again leading one to wonder how the parents felt about what they witnessed between their children.

Stocker and McHale (1992) focused on sibling aggression by interviewing 103 two-parent (mother and father), non-divorced families. During an initial home visit, mothers and fathers were interviewed about the family relationships. Parents were also asked to report on their interactions with first-born children during calls that were made to the house during data collection. The authors did not describe what they asked the parents and what the mothers and fathers reported. Parental input was used as a source of validation for the data collected by the children when reporting on parent-child interaction. A lack of discussion of parental input leaves the reader wondering what information was obtained from the parents during the interviews and what, if anything, the parents noted about the hostility between their children. This lack of transparency in the research process justifies the necessity of further exploring parental perceptions and experiences of violence and aggression between their children.

Updegraff, Thayer, Whiteman, Denning, and McHale (2005) conducted a study to examine sibling relational aggression. Relational aggression was defined as “behaviors that are intended to harm others’ social relationship” (p.374). The authors were interested in examining



adolescent sibling relational aggression and its interaction with parent-child relationship quality. Two-parent, heterosexual, non-divorced couples from 185 families were included in the study. Parents reported on siblings' home and daily activities and completed a measure of strategies for addressing sibling conflict including coaching and intervening.<sup>4</sup> The authors found that maternal intervention was associated with increased relational aggression for daughters and that paternal intervention was associated with increased relational aggression for daughters and same-sex sibling dyads. The authors also asked parents how they would respond to hypothetical sibling conflicts between their children. When presenting findings the authors did not include reasons why parents chose certain ways of intervening. The authors could have increased the depth of the study by incorporating questions addressing the justification for methods parents used to address aggression witnessed between children.

One study did not include parents, but considered the possibility of individuals, as parents in the future, accepting physical and emotional sibling aggression in their children. Hardy, Beers, Burgess, and Taylor (2010) asked 506 undergraduate students to respond to four different scenarios depicting sibling aggression. The four scenarios included two siblings who were 9 and 12 years old. Respondents were asked to answer questions concerning a situation in which a younger sibling takes a remote control from an older sibling, the older sibling grabs back the controller and maintains distance from the younger sibling with their feet. The younger sibling tries to grab the remote control again and then is hit in the face with the controller by the older sibling. The younger sibling experiences a cut to the face that requires stitches. The only thing different in each scenario is the variation in gender of the siblings with the sibling dyads consisting of: brother-brother, sister-sister, brother-sister, and sister-brother. The authors then

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<sup>4</sup> Noninvolvement was not included as a method for addressing sibling conflict. Noninvolvement, however, was included in the original measure which was originally constructed by McHale, Updegraff, Tucker, and Crouter (2000) to look at parental roles in the relationships of adolescent siblings.

had participants rate the acceptability of each scenario and the actions that occurred within it along with having the respondents complete a modified version of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979).

Results indicated that male participants were more accepting of violence than females as were those participants who were youngest siblings. A vast majority of participants reported being both victims and perpetrators of physical and emotional sibling violence. The authors found that those individuals who had experienced sibling aggression in childhood as well as those who identified as being perpetrators were more likely to rate the sibling aggression in the scenarios as acceptable. In their discussion, the authors note that, “[verbal and physical sibling aggression]’s experience during childhood may lead individuals to be accepting of such behaviors in their own and other children.” (Hardy, Beers, Burgess, & Taylor, 2010, p.70).

The efforts of the authors to better understand how individuals perceive sibling aggression as acceptable or not based on personal experiences is noteworthy. However, the authors do not discuss the decision-making process related to why or how the respondents made the decision they did. To ask the respondents about the factors that influenced their decisions would have been beneficial in striving for a greater understanding of the perceptions of the respondents as they relate to sibling aggression. Also, the authors only changed the gender composition of the sibling dyads within the four scenarios where changing the types of violence (ex. pushing, weapons, or name-calling), ages (ex. 4 and 5, 14 and 16, or 6 and 14), reaction/consequence of experiencing violent action from a sibling (ex. bruise, crying, or becoming unconscious) and others may have elicited different results. Furthermore, a varied combination of all of these factors may have produced a varied response to the decision-making

process which would provide more insight into how these factors collectively interact to produce certain decision-making responses.

The role of the parent in addressing sibling violence is important to consider and can be influential in how sibling violence manifests in families (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998; Wiehe, 1997). According to Wiehe (1997), the reactions of parents to the phenomenon of sibling violence is varied. In a qualitative study including participants who had reported being victims of sibling abuse, Wiehe uncovered numerous reactions by parents to sibling violence. He found parental responses to include ignoring and/or minimizing the abuse, blaming the victim for the abuse, inappropriately responding to the abuse, joining in on the abuse with the sibling perpetrator, disbelieving the abuse was occurring, and exhibiting indifference about the abuse. These behaviors were discussed as negative consequences for the respondents, which contributed to continued abuse as well as the difficulty in recovery for survivors of sibling violence. It should be noted that identified parental responses in the study were reported by the survivors of sibling abuse and not by parents themselves. A parental perspective could have furthered the understanding in how parents respond to instances of sibling violence within the family.

Similarly, Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro (1998) heard responses from parents when conducting interviews about sibling abuse with parents that echoed the denial of problematic behavior occurring between children. In one interview, the authors noted a set of parents who witnessed the violent behavior between siblings, yet minimized its importance and denied it as being problematic due to their personal experiences of violence between themselves and their own siblings. These reactions by parents to violent behavior between siblings can potentially exacerbate intense situations and provide a foundation for minimization of this behavior as problematic for families. The study highlights a parental response to sibling violence and

provides an example of how parents can minimize sibling violence. Consideration of family structure, however, was not discussed.

Parental voice and input into the process of uncovering those behaviors that constitute sibling violence has gone unexamined. Also, parents' perceptions of the degree to which violence between their children is problematic has received little attention. Parents are not the only individuals who should have input into identifying behaviors associated with sibling violence, as the voice of the child is equally important; however, parents hold power in deciding what happens to children and what is viewed as problematic behavior for their children. With parents serving as a guide for child development and holding responsibility for the development of their children, understanding how parents view violence is important in order to ascertain how to help families experiencing sibling violence. In order to address the area of sibling violence, which occurs for many children each year (see Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980), perceptions and experiences of parents are necessary in order to consider how to intervene.

In addition to asking parents about behaviors related to sibling violence, it is necessary to assess how parents view sibling rivalry because violent behaviors are often dismissed as normative sibling functioning (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998; Wiehe, 1997). Kettrey and Emery (2006) found in a sample of college students a significant difference in the use of "rivalry" and "violence" when respondents were asked to self-label their experiences with siblings. While this study noted a difference in how individuals labeled behavior from their childhood, the study did not discuss how those decisions were made, nor was the voice of the parent included.

It is worth considering how a parent's experience of sibling violence influences their functioning as a parent. Unfortunately, no such research exists that helps to understand this process. Understanding how parents view and perceive sibling violence is essential when

considering intergenerational transmission of this type of violence. Parents serve as the stepping stones across generations, so it makes sense to consider how they view violent behavior between their children. Various sources of information about abuse in families can provide information on aggression in the home including siblings (Haj-Yahia & Dawud-Noursi, 1998). Information provided by parents can therefore help in understanding how sibling violence is perceived in families and how it might be carried out through generations.

### **Theory and Sibling Violence**

One way in which to better understand how sibling violence has been considered in the research literature is to consider how theory has helped address the issue. Whether implied or stated explicitly, research in the area of sibling violence has incorporated the use of theories to better understand this form of violence within families. The use of theory, however, within the literature lacks rigorous empirical examination and oftentimes provides minimal support for the arguments that are made by the authors/researchers. A lack of quality empirical research combined with incomplete and inconsistent definitions of the terms and labels used in the articles impedes the process of furthering the knowledge in the area of sibling violence—specifically when considering theoretical development. To enhance the knowledge of violent behavior between siblings, theories need to be examined both in terms of how they help understand a phenomenon and the holes theories leave which warrant further consideration. Two theories incorporated into some of the literature on sibling violence are social learning theory and family systems theory.

**Social learning theory and sibling violence.** The most useful theoretical perspective utilized in several research studies in the area of sibling violence is social learning theory. Social learning theory can help in understanding how violence between siblings is not only learned, but

also carried down from generation to generation. Albert Bandura, a developer and proponent of social learning theory, explored how this theory can be used to help understand aggression in children and adolescents (see Bandura, 1973). Bridging behaviorism and cognitive theories, social learning theory focuses on learning through modeling behavior of individuals and the environment with whom one interacts (Bandura, 1977). Bandura asserts that both the environment and one's personal contemplative response to observations influence how behavior is learned and replicated. With consideration of the outcomes of witnessed actions, individuals learn that some behaviors are desired to achieve particular goals/outcomes, whereas other behaviors will not achieve an outcome consistent with the goals of a particular action. Using this theory to understand sibling violence, one could propose that a sibling uses violence as a means to achieve a desired outcome. Violent behavior then is learned from outside sources rather than it being an innate function of the child. The following discussion of articles and research studies highlight how social learning theory has been used as mechanism for understanding the occurrence of sibling violence in families.

In an early study, Steinmetz (1977) conducted an exploratory study that examined the use of violence as a mechanism for resolving family conflict with social learning theory as the foundation. The author noted, "literature would suggest that the methods husbands and wives use to resolve marital conflict might be similar to the methods they use in disciplining their children and in turn might be the method that their children tend to use to resolve sibling conflict" (p. 21). Using college students as participants, Steinmetz found marital verbal aggression to be significantly correlated with sibling-to-sibling verbal aggression and similar results were found between marital physical aggression and sibling-to-sibling physical aggression. Findings of the study indicated that children were likely to utilize similar behaviors they witness their parents

exhibiting regarding conflict resolution. Steinmetz's study, while novel in its attempt to consider associations between various types of family violence, presents some shortcomings. The correlations Steinmetz (1977) conducted described the relationship between sibling-to-sibling verbal/physical aggression and husband/wife verbal/physical aggression, yet connections between multiple types of family aggression were not included in the analysis. With the husband/wife being the referent category, correlations between parent-to-child verbal/physical aggression and sibling-to-sibling verbal/physical aggression were not tested. With a child witnessing violence from parent-to-child in the home being related to sibling violence (Haj-Yahia & Dawud-Noursi, 1998), these correlations could have established further support for the author's inclusion of social learning theory as a means of understanding violence in the home.

In a study that highlighted the discussion on sibling violence within families in the United States, Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) conducted analysis on 733 of the 2,143 families that had two or more children residing in the home to examine aspects of violent behavior between siblings. The authors reported that violence between siblings occurred more often than husband-to-wife or parent-to-child violence. Of the reports on children given by parents, the authors found that 82% of children engaged in a violent act towards a sibling in the year prior to the collection of data (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, p. 80).

While the authors did not explicitly incorporate social learning theory into their discussion of sibling violence, they did state that violence in the family was something that was learned (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). The discussion of sibling violence and its connections to other types of violence by the authors was scant. The authors found a connection between the experience of parent-to-child abuse and sibling abuse because children who are more frequently hit by parents are more likely to attack a brother or sister. A connection to social

learning theory is apparent yet the authors failed to elaborate on how theory helps understand the connection between sibling abuse and child abuse. Noting an association does not provide sufficient information for explaining the occurrence of a particular phenomenon in theoretical terms. Further explanation is not only warranted, but necessary for understanding how theory helps in understanding sibling violence.

Gully, Dengerink, Pepping, and Bergstrom (1981) conducted a study that used a social learning theory lens to examine violent behavior between siblings. The authors analyzed data from 216 undergraduate students and asked the students to respond to questions related to violent behaviors they had encountered in their homes during the past 12 months. The types of family violence respondents were questioned on consisted of parent-to-parent, parent-to-sibling, sibling-to-sibling, parent-to-respondent, sibling-to-respondent, respondent-to-sibling, and respondent-to-parent. Respondents were also asked to read three different scenarios and respond to their likelihood of engaging in violent behavior towards a spouse/partner, towards a child, and towards a police officer. Results of the study indicated that two factors (those behaviors associated with a sibling and those behaviors associated with a parent) were found. The factor “sibling” was significantly correlated with self-reported violence as well as all three forms of self-predicted violence. The authors mentioned that the sibling hybrid variable predicted expectations of being violent more so than the parent variable. They suggested that sibling violence may be more important than violence involving parents when predicting the likelihood of future violence. The authors neglected to explain more in depth how social learning theory was used or how the theory guided the questions they were asking. Also, the authors proposed a link from sibling violence to future violence and violence outside familial settings, yet neglected



to consider the ways in which children learn to be violent and those factors that may contribute to that process.

In a research study that examined multiple forms of violence within the familial unit, Kratcoski (1984) obtained data from 295 adolescents. The authors concluded that if a parent was violent with a spouse, there was a good probability that a parent would also be violent towards a child. This could then lead to sibling violence based on children witnessing violence and then using it as a mechanism to resolve conflict. The authors also found the majority of adolescents who were violent towards a sibling were also violent towards a parent. This study, however, did not consider all forms of violence simultaneously, which would have been more thorough. The author also failed to address the predicament of which forms of family violence precipitated others. This problem is exacerbated by the inclusion and discussion of child-to-parent violence. In order to adequately test the role of social learning theory, discussion of which forms of family violence precipitated others is needed.

Consistent with social learning theory, evidence from several studies has indicated that sibling abuse has an intergenerational transmission of violence component. With violence being a learned behavior, some have demonstrated that children in caretaking roles can sometimes exhibit violence towards a sibling (Abrahams & Hoey, 1994; Green; 1984; Rosenthal, 1984). Green (1984) presented five case examples of violent behavior from one sibling directed towards another sibling. This included children who had all been abused by one or both parents. Interestingly, several of the mothers had experienced intimate partner violence as well as abuse from their parents as a child. It was hypothesized that children who were abused by a parent may be more likely to engage in violence towards a sibling due being exposed to violent parents who served as models for learned behavior. The article, however, contained only five cases and was

presented as descriptive in nature with the author's hypothesis not tested. While the article highlights how social learning theory may help to understand abuse in the sibling context, it was essentially a case review of five different accounts of sibling abuse and not generalizable. Mechanisms for testing the author's hypothesis are warranted.

Social learning theory was used as the theoretical foundation to a study by Felson and Russo (1988) examining the intersection of sibling aggression and parental punishment. The authors hypothesized violence may become a learned behavior of the child being punished. Subsequently, the punished child could then use aggression towards a sibling in subsequent conflictual interactions since violence was learned as a means for resolving conflict. Results of the study indicated that parental punishment of older children and male children led to more violent behavior of the unpunished child towards the older child. Here, the authors asserted that parental punishment was a viable means of learning to use aggressive behavior to resolve conflict. The directionality of the violence within the family system is not completely articulated in the article. Felson and Russo (1988) wanted to determine how parental punishment of initial sibling aggression influenced aggression between siblings after a child was punished for being aggressive. The study failed to consider what precipitated sibling aggression prior to parental involvement. Specifically related to social learning theory, the authors did not address what factors could have contributed to the first instance of sibling aggression making the results of this study incomplete when considering how social learning theory addresses violence between siblings.

Martin and Ross (1995) conducted a study to examine aggression within sibling conflict that referred to the tenets of social learning theory without explicitly stating that social learning theory was serving as a guide. The authors were interested in learning how the relationship

between parents and their reactions to sibling conflict influenced sibling aggression. Forty Caucasian families, consisting of a mother, a father and two young children, were observed six times at both periods of data collection to assess for aggression in children and parental response intra-sibling aggression. In three of the time periods all family members were present during observation and during the other three time periods all members of the family except the father were present. Specifically related to social learning theory, results indicated that parents who responded to aggression in their children in a physical manner had more aggressive second-born children. The study failed to make the connection regarding how and where children learned to be aggressive. The authors minimally addressed what could be contributing to the initiation of aggression in sibling conflict except to say that it may have been a result of inconsistent parental disciplining. Inclusion of ways to assess and consider what factors or models serve as the foundation for the implementation of aggressive behaviors in siblings relationships is appropriate and needed in order to better understand how aggression is learned and then modeled in other relationships.

In one of the few studies that explicitly used social learning theory as the guiding theoretical foundation, and one of a very select few to include a sample that was not predominantly Caucasian, Haj-Yahia and Noursi (1998) examined the various conflict tactics (reasoning, verbal aggression, and physical aggression) used by Arab siblings in Israel. Included in the study were 832 Arab adolescents between the ages of 16 and 18 who were asked about violence they experienced in their families. Respondents answered questions regarding their experiences as a witness, perpetrator, or victim of violence. Results of Haj-Yahia and Noursi's (1998) study found that when respondents witnessed fathers and mothers using certain reasoning tactics to resolve conflict, they were more likely to use the same reasoning tactics to resolve

conflict with their siblings. With regard to verbal abuse of siblings, respondents who witnessed fathers verbally and physically abusing their mothers, fathers and mothers verbally abusing a sibling, and who experienced verbal and physical abuse from their father and/or their mother were more likely to verbally abuse a sibling. Similarly, more verbal and physical abuse from a sibling was linked to an increase in verbal abuse towards a sibling. With regard to the physical abuse directed towards a sibling, the authors found the use of physical abuse by the respondent towards a sibling was positively correlated with father-to-mother physical abuse, mother-to-father physical abuse, parent-to-sibling verbal and physical abuse, father-to-respondent physical and verbal abuse, mother-to-respondent verbal and physical abuse, and sibling-to-respondent verbal and physical abuse. The authors highlighted the fact that social learning theory was a helpful framework to use when considering the occurrence of sibling violence in families.

Hoffman and Edwards (2004) proposed an integrated model of sibling violence and abuse which incorporated social learning theory, feminist theory, and conflict theory. In this conceptual article, the authors proposed that sibling violence is a learned behavior with children imitating and modeling parent-to-parent physical and verbal violence as well as parent-to-child physical and verbal violence. Violence may then be modeled by the child when interacting with a sibling in order to resolve conflict. This supports the idea that hostility of the parent is the most significant risk factor to predict aggression in children (Rutter & Quinton, 1984). Violent behavior when imitated and used by a child with a sibling may demonstrate how social learning theory can speak to understanding sibling violence.

Using questions from the CTS (Straus, 1979) and the integrated model of sibling violence (Hoffman & Edwards, 2004) as a guide, Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards (2005) obtained responses from college students to determine which conflict resolution skills had been used with

their closest aged siblings during their senior year in high school. Sixty-nine percent of the participants had engaged in violent behavior with a sibling. The authors found that spousal abuse between parents, frequent parent-to-parent arguments, parent-to-child yelling and physical abuse as well as parental tolerance of sibling violence led to an increase in violent behavior between siblings. These outcomes were seen as supporting social learning theory as a viable theory to help understand sibling violence in families. The way in which the social learning theory was explained by the authors as it related to family structure is, however, problematic. The authors lumped biological two-parent and blended families together in the analysis, yet noted differences in how these two families were different in parent-to-child interactions. While the authors did make a compelling case, further explanation and examination of ways in which violence may have been learned in different family structures is warranted.

In a study examining adolescent sibling aggression and linkages to sibling and parent/adolescent relationship quality, Updegraff, Thayer, Whiteman, Denning, and McHale (2005) used social learning theory as a guide. Results indicated a connection between sibling relational aggression and parent/adolescent and sibling relationships. The authors did not discuss or assess how aggression between siblings could have been learned. With a discussion of the learning of aggressive or violent behaviors being a requirement in social learning theory, the theoretical connections were amiss in this study. Given the data that was collected on aggression, which resembled sibling rivalry and parental favoritism (see Prochaska & Prochaska, 1985), and the mediocre connection to social learning theory the results of the study should be interpreted with caution.

The research in the area of sibling violence using social learning theory has been minimally effective in helping to understand the occurrence and emergence of sibling violence in

families. Social learning theory suggests that behavior in children is learned from those individuals with which children have close relationships. Regardless of type of violence between family members, children learn to resolve conflicts in ways they have observed in their family. The research in the area of sibling violence has not considered parental perceptions and experiences of violent behaviors between their children and the meaning they place on such dynamics within the family. With parents and children often constituting what is considered a familial unit, discussion of family systems and sibling violence is important.

**Family systems theory and sibling violence.** With family subsystems being connected (Minuchin, 1974) various relationships and interactions within the family system can influence other subsystems. While parents are individual members within a family system, it is important to conceptualize the family as a whole to understand sibling violence better as a phenomenon within families. Bowen's family systems theory (Bowen, 1966) provides ways to potentially understand the behavior between siblings in the family context. The family systems theory of Bowen strives to understand and make sense of anxiety and interpersonal processes in the family system to help explain why some families experience dysfunction.

Bowen's (1966) concept of intergenerational transmission that families encounter can be valuable in understanding sibling violence within the family system. A key concept of Bowen's family systems theory relates to the transmission of family emotional processes that occur through generations due to an individual's lack of differentiation from their family. When family members across generations remain relatively undifferentiated emotionally from what occurred in their nuclear family, the behaviors and thoughts are carried down to the next generation leading to the same types of struggles and experiences for future generations. Parents who experienced considerable anxiety in their relationships with siblings and remain undifferentiated

from their nuclear family may have children who experience the same interactions with their siblings. This transmission process may potentially lead to sibling violence occurring over generations. While no research was found that asked participants specifically about intergenerational transmission of sibling violence, it is possible that violence between siblings gets carried down from generation to generation. This could account for its being viewed as normative and a typical part of the family experience for some parents. Since family systems theory implies that what happens in one part of the family will influence other parts of the family, understanding the effect sibling violence possibly has on others part of the family is important. The following studies highlight violent behavior between siblings as an influential mechanism that affects other areas of family functioning.

Gully, Dengerink, Pepping, and Bergstrom (1981) found associations between those participants who had experienced sibling-to-participant, self-to-sibling, and self-to-parent violence. The authors also found these types of violence to be correlated with hypothetical violence<sup>5</sup> directed towards a potential spouse. Also, the experience of participant-to-sibling violence was correlated with hypothetical participant-to-child violence. This indicates that violence in the family system has implications for violence in other areas of the family system and potentially across generations. Further explanation is necessary for understanding the connections between types of family violence and the potential for intergenerational transmission of violence especially as parents are the “carriers” for violence across generations.

Simonelli, Mullis, Elliott, and Pierce (2002) conducted a study of undergraduate college students to look at the association of sibling abuse and dating violence. Findings indicated that

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<sup>5</sup> In the study by Gully, Dengerink, Pepping, and Bergstrom (1981) participants were asked to respond to how they would handle three stressful, hypothetical situations. The hypothetical situations included being verbally abused by a partner, by a child, and being a police officer being verbally accosted and spit at by another individual. Possibilities for handling conflict in the hypothetical situations included the use of violence directed towards individuals.

almost 90% of the 120 participating students experienced at least one verbally aggressive behavior from both a sibling and a parent and 70% had experienced at least one physically aggressive act by both a sibling and a parent. More than 75% of participants also reported perpetrating dating violence. This is consistent with the notion that experience of violent behavior can manifest in other familial relationships and relationships outside the family.

In a similar study, Noland, Liller, McDermott, Coulter, and Seraphine (2004) examined the connection between adolescent sibling violence as a predictor for dating violence in college using a sample of 371 community college students. The results indicated that the gender of respondent, age, gender of sibling, age difference, parent-to-child violence, and parent-to-parent violence predicted sibling violence. Parent-to-child violence and age difference had the greatest contribution to predicting sibling violence. Using correlations to examine associations between whether a respondent was a victim or perpetrator of sibling violence and other familial types of violence (mother-to-father, father-to-mother, mother-to-child, and father-to-child), the authors found all types of family violence to be both positively and significantly correlated with sibling violence experienced by the respondent as either a victim or perpetrator. Also, the occurrence of sibling violence was found to be a predictor for dating violence.

Noland et al. (2004) presented a study worthy of consideration when trying to understand the impact sibling violence can potentially have on other forms of familial violence. While the findings of Noland et al.'s study are helpful, further support and explanation is warranted to help present a clearer picture of what may be going on related to sibling violence. Regarding family systems theory, the authors neglected to explain how these types of violence may be related to each other and the connections each type has with the other. Associations may help in understanding how sibling violence is potentially learned as a form of managing conflict from



other types of violence within the family system. This suggests a potentially useful intersection of family systems theory with social learning theory to understand violence better in the sibling context.

A family systems approach that focuses on the emotional connections within families and how those connections influence individuals throughout their lives (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Titelman, 1998) is pertinent when considering sibling violence within families. Both family systems theory and social learning theory address how violent behavior may be transmitted intergenerationally. Family systems theory along with social learning theory can speak specifically to how violent behavior can be learned and carried out through generations in different family structures. A valuable aspect to consider then is the environmental context of the family structure. With families being the context in which sibling-to-sibling violence is carried out, it is also important to consider how family structure influences the occurrence of this type of family violence.

### **Sibling Violence in the Context of Differing Family Structures**

Various family structures serve as contextual structures in which family members operate and interact with one another. With the ever-changing landscape of what constitutes a family, it is important to consider how various family types function and experience sibling violence. Research in the area of violence between siblings has predominantly focused on biological, mother-father headed, “intact” families. While studies have considered blended families (Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards, 2005; Turner, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2007), the overwhelming majority of studies focusing on sibling violence have not included parents as participants, nor have studies considered parents from different family structures. The following studies discuss

how family structure and the parental experience of violence between their children within various family structures has been included in research.

In one of the only articles that labels violence and abuse by a sibling as child abuse, Green (1984) looked at the case histories of five children who engaged in serious violence towards a sibling. Green uncovered several commonalities between all cases. All children were living in single-parent, mother-headed households. Some mothers were divorced and living alone and a few mothers had live-in boyfriends who sometimes were away for periods of time. Also, children who had abused siblings had been abused themselves, were caretakers for younger siblings due to family crisis, had experienced the loss of a father or paternal figure, and experienced intense sibling rivalry due to maternal fondness of the child who was the target of sibling abuse. In all cases, violence existed as a dynamic in the family prior to the onset of violence directed towards a child leading one to conclude that behaviors may have been learned by older children and then implemented with targeted children. Several of the mothers had experienced violence from a husband and some had been abused by a parent when they were a child. Along with speaking to the notion of social learning theory being a viable framework to examine when discussing sibling abuse, the article provides justification for the need to consider the perspectives of single-parents. This article highlights the need to consider how single-parents view and experience sibling violence within their homes. Single-parents are often doing the work of what is normally done by two parents. Learning about their thoughts on sibling violence and how it affects their lives may help when developing ways to intervene in order to promote healthy, positive functioning of family members in this family structure.

In a study that included 48 sibling dyad pairs from divorced families and 48 sibling dyad pairs from biological families, MacKinnon (1989) looked at the interactions between siblings

and examined whether there was a difference between siblings from these family structures regarding sibling violence. The author concluded that older male siblings from divorced families are more likely to engage in highly abusive behavior than those siblings from intact families. When discussing why it may be that children from divorced families engage in more negative behavior, the author suggested that children may learn from and model the conflictual relationships they witness between their parents prior to divorce. Siblings may then act towards a sibling similarly to what they have witnessed, increasing the potential for conflictual, negative interactions. The author also proposed that parental relationships may actually influence sibling relationships more than marital status. These results call attention to the need to include various family structures and well as the dynamics between parents in the research of sibling violence.

In a study that included participants from both biological two-parent families and blended families, Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards (2005) asked respondents about their families of origin during childhood. With only 10% of the respondents being a member of a stepfamily, participants responded to questions about frequency of parental arguments and parent-to-parent abuse. Respondents were also asked what parents did to intervene when sibling conflict arose. Regarding the family structures of biological and stepparent families, results of the authors' study indicated that parents from stepfamilies yelled at respondents less often, and were less likely to intervene in conflicts between siblings than were parents from biological families. It was also found that respondents from stepfamilies had fewer arguments and engaged in less sibling violence with siblings than those respondents in biological families contrasting what Turner, Finkelhor, and Ormrod (2007) found in their study. Interestingly, the findings from the study by Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards (2005) were reported with no possible explanations being including in the summary and discussion section. It is unclear whether the dynamics of

stepfamilies, and the family members within them, or different boundary issues in stepfamilies may have contributed to less violence. The authors should have considered these and other factors as sibling violence in various family structures has been minimally considered. These factors are important to consider in order to provide better understanding of how family dynamics from various family types may influence violent behavior between siblings.

Fundamental to the article by Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards (2005), is the notion of family structure of the participants at the time the violence towards a sibling occurred. Despite only nuclear and stepfamilies being included, family structure significantly predicted sibling violence in four of the five models proposed in the study. In one model stepfamilies were more likely to predict sibling violence, and in the other three biological-two parent families were more likely to predict the occurrence of violence between siblings. The authors assumed the violent behavior was learned by the parents. It was not clear from which parent's violence was learned for participants of blended families. It is also possible that participants could have learned violence from biological parents outside of the home as well as those within the home. Additionally, the authors did not address where individuals from single-parent families learned to be violent with a sibling. All of these areas were not addressed and warrant consideration.

Turner, Finkelhor, and Ormrod (2007) conducted a study to investigate how variations in family structure related to victimization in children. By considering patterns in family structures and predictors of victimization, the authors set out to explore the differences between two-parent (biological, mother-father) families, single-parent families, and stepfamilies. The authors hypothesized that children from single-parent families and stepfamilies would have higher rates of victimization when compared to youth from families with two biological parents. They also hypothesized that children from stepfamilies would have more victimizations perpetrated by

family members than single-parent or biological families. Additionally, the authors hypothesized that parent-child conflict and family problems in stepfamilies would best explain higher childhood victimization. Sibling victimization was paired with peer victimization and considered as one group, which has been done in prior research (see Finkelhor, Turner, & Ormrod, 2006). This is problematic, as it does not distinguish between the two types of victimizations and assumes sibling and peer victimization to be similar. This is despite the fact the same authors found substantial differences between sibling and peer victimization with regard to frequency, chronicity, and severity (Finkelhor, Turner, & Ormrod, 2006). The experience of any sibling/peer victimization was significantly more likely to occur in stepfamilies than biological or single-parent families. The percentage of children who disclosed being victimized by a sibling was greater in stepfamilies than the other two family structures as well. With regard to other contextual familial factors, types of victimization and socio-demographic variables differences were found between the various family structures. These differences led the authors to conclude that victimization cannot be considered solely in the context of the family structure. Contextual factors of different family structures must be considered to better understand the differences.

**Sibling violence and the ambiguity of family structure.** Other studies have alluded to family structure yet have demonstrated a lack of clarity when discussing family type within research articles. Steinmetz (1977) discussed a differentiation based on “family type”; however, her typology was not based on family structure but on how the family collectively resolved conflict. Aside from indicating that participants responded to questions related to both their mother and father, no other indication of family type was mentioned in her article.

Updegraff, Thayer, Whiteman, Denning, and McHale (2005) included 185 families in their study on sibling violence. In order to be included in the study, families had to include only

nondivorced couples. The research included no information on why other family types were not considered. In a similar fashion, 80% of the respondents included in a study by Simonelli, Mullis, Elliott, and Pierce (2002) had lived with both biological parents or with adoptive parents for most of their childhood. The reader is left to assume from this study that the experiences of children from all family types are similar since disparities based on family structure are not discussed in the article.

The lack of inclusion of various family types in the previous studies highlights the gap in the literature related to family structure and its intersection with sibling violence. The importance of examining the impact family structure may have on sibling violence is evident. Sibling violence literature has minimally considered the potential impact of family structure and has coincidentally focused similar attention on parents. While most of the following research studies and literature related to violent behavior between siblings has included parents, its attention has been placed on learning from parents the violent behaviors they have witnessed between their children. This research however has not included parental perceptions of violence between siblings with parents reporting on behaviors and not the meaning those behaviors have for them.

### **Family Structure, Social Learning Theory, and Family Systems Theory**

Along with parental voice, consideration for all types of family structures has been overlooked in the research on sibling violence. Various family structures are likely to have differing dynamics, which can be better understood when incorporating a family systems theoretical lens. Family systems theory allows us to examine how family relationships and subsystems affect other aspects of the familial process. Understanding how parents from various family structures experience and manage sibling violence can help improve the understanding of manifestations of the consequences of violence between siblings in other parts of the family

system. A combination of family systems theory and social learning theory can then facilitate a better comprehension of the intergenerational processes associated with sibling violence. Social learning theory provides a guide for considering how violence is potentially learned in the family. Family systems theory helps explain how family dynamics can result in those learned violent behaviors against siblings being transmitted over numerous generations.

One mechanism for attempting to understand sibling violence in the context of families has been the use of the CTS. The work of Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) laid the foundation for considering sibling violence in the context of families and how violence between siblings may be learned. In relation to sibling violence, their analysis of various family structures is minimal, yet their inclusion of all types of violence within the family (parent-to-child, partner-to-partner, sibling-to-sibling) provides a platform to consider how violence between siblings may be learned. The work of Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) needs to be extended to consider how social learning theory, family systems theory, and family structure intersect. Examination of the behaviors from the instrument used in their research provides a way in which to help bridge this gap and better understand how parents perceive and experience sibling violence.

The following section discusses the use one of the most widely used instruments to assess violent behaviors that siblings engage in, the CTS and its revised version the revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). Given the minimal amount of quality empirical research that has been conducted in the area of sibling violence, examining how different versions of the CTS have been used in this area is important. Used in the collection of data for the National Family Violence Survey (Straus, Gelles, Steinmetz, 1980, 2006), the original CTS captured those tactics used by family members to address conflict with other family members.

## **Assessing Sibling Violence with the Conflict Tactics Scale**

Use of the initial CTS focused on parental figures deciding conflictual behaviors between siblings and even labeled sibling conflict as child-to-child conflict (Straus, Gelles, Steinmetz, 1980, 2006). Included in the CTS are tactics that relate to physical, emotional, reasoning, and sexual components. From the original CTS several other versions of the scale have been constructed to assess particular relationships within the family system. The CTS2 (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) includes scale items for the factors of negotiation, psychological aggression, physical assault, sexual coercion, and injury. Within the article discussing the CTS2, the authors discuss the use of the CTS2 to assess sibling relationships with minor modifications. One modified version of the CTS2, the CTS2-SP (Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1995) specifically addresses physical and emotional violence between siblings and excludes the sexual coercion scale. To date, only two published studies (Mackey, Fromuth, & Kelly, 2010; Reese-Weber, 2008) have used the CTS2-SP to examine violence in the sibling dyad.

Some research has examined violent behaviors between siblings by incorporating the CTS, and modified versions, into the data collection. Most of the research using some version of the CTS has included samples of college-aged and undergraduate students (Graham-Bermann & Cutler 1994; Graham-Bermann, Cutler, Litzenberger, & Scwartz, 1994; Gully, Dengerink, Pepping, & Bergstrom, 1981; Hardy, Beers, Burgess, & Taylor, 2010, Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards, 2005; Howells & Rosenbaum, 2008; Kettery & Emery, 2006; Mackey, Fromuth, & Kelly, 2010; Mangold & Koski, 1990; Noland et al., 2004; Reese-Weber, 2008; Simonelli, Mullis, & Rohde, 2005; Simonelli, Mullis, Elliott, & Pierce, 2002). Others studies have included samples of high school students (Goodwin & Roscoe, 1990; Haj-Yahiai & Dawud-Noursi, 1998;



Kratcoski, 1984), middle school students (Roscoe, Goodwin, & Kennedy, 1987), and elementary school students (MacKinnon-Lewis, Starnes, Volling, & Johnson, 1997). Interestingly, only four studies have included parents as respondents in the data collection process using the CTS when examining sibling violence (Brutz & Ingoldsby, 1984; Eriksen & Jensen, 2006, 2009; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Of those four studies, three (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006, 2009; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980) are based on the same data set used in the National Family Violence Survey of 1976.

This leaves the study by Brutz and Ingoldsby (1984) to be the only study focusing on sibling violence by assessing its occurrence to include parents as participants outside of the National Family Violence Survey of 1976. Results of the study found 100% of fathers and 98% of mothers from married couples reported sibling-to-sibling violence. Parents noted witnessing a substantial amount of sibling violence, yet no information on parental perceptions of this violence was obtained by the authors. Similar to the other three studies that used the CTS, this study had parents report only those violent behaviors between their children they witnessed or knew about. Interpretation of what those behaviors meant to parents or whether parents believed these behaviors to be problematic was not assessed. Parents were not asked about whether this was viewed as problematic or normative behavior and what factors would have contributed to their decision.

Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) conducted a study that included a nationally representative sample of families with respondents for those families being the parents of those households. After the publication of the original study, Eriksen and Jensen (2006, 2009) used the same data set twice to examine factors within the family context that contribute to the occurrence of sibling violence. In these studies, parents were responsible for answering the questions

regarding the behaviors they witnessed in the family. Using the CTS, the researchers were primarily concerned with understanding what types of violent behavior occurred in the house and between which family members. The authors only included responses from parents on particular behaviors they experienced or witnessed in their families when they were growing up and their experiences in their families as a parental figure. Parents were not asked about their feelings, thoughts, or perceptions related to what they experienced or witnessed or whether they viewed these behaviors as problematic. This information could have strengthened the notion that violence between children is learned based on the occurrence of other types of family violence. Also, had parents been asked about their perceptions, knowledge about whether parents dismiss the severity of violence between siblings would also be better understood. This study highlights the idea that parental perceptions and thoughts related to sibling violence are important and needed, especially as parents play a part in determining how sibling violence is perceived at a societal level.

The CTS, and its modified versions, appear to be beneficial for understanding what behaviors family members witness or experience to resolve conflict within the family unit; particularly when respondents are asked to describe behaviors that have occurred recently or within the past year. As the CTS asks participants about particular time frames—not exceeding one year—this can potentially make collection of retrospective data difficult. Also, the CTS does not include several behaviors (teasing, tickling, manipulating, and making a sibling feel guilty) other researchers have found to be associated with the label of sibling abuse (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998; Wiehe, 1997). Inclusion of all potentially violent and abusive behaviors is necessary when obtaining parental perceptions of violent behaviors between siblings. This will

allow for a more comprehensive idea about what factors are considered problematic and what factors are not.

To date, parental perceptions of the physical and emotional conflict tactics used between siblings in the CTS has been excluded from the research. Given the various responses some parents have regarding sibling violence (Wiehe, 1997), examination of how parents view various violent behaviors is necessary for increased understanding of sibling violence. Due to the use of the CTS in many research studies examining sibling violence, examining parental perceptions of the behaviors included in the CTS and other research (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998; Wiehe, 1997) is needed.

### **The Research Question and Mixed Methods Case Study Research**

The evidence demonstrating sibling violence as a problematic phenomenon for many children and adults is apparent. Even with problems in the definition of the phenomenon, the prevalence, the causes, the predictors, and the consequences of sibling violence suggest a serious social problem and provide justification for why this area deserves continued exploration. Inconsistencies in defining and labeling the problem remain so that what behaviors are considered violent between siblings and what behaviors are considered normal sibling interaction are unclear. This lack of clarity results in difficulty when considering ways of targeting interventions.

Research aimed at understand how parents decide what is problematic violent behavior between siblings has not been conducted. This may include identifying what factors parents include in their decision-making process as to what constitutes sibling violence and what factors they include in determining what constitutes normative sibling rivalry. Examination of parental perceptions of violent behavior between their children is warranted due to the juxtaposition

between parental reactions to sibling abuse (see Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998; Wiehe, 1997) and their apparent desire for children to interact in harmonious ways. Research on how parents experience and perceive violent behavior between their children is an area that is lacking in the literature. Knowledge about parental perceptions of this phenomenon is imperative in order to address its occurrence. It is necessary to know what parents think of sibling violence in order to begin to understand how to educate parents in an appropriate way; intervene when this form of violence does occur; and find mechanisms for creating preventative measures of this form of violence.

Further confounding efforts in this area are the ways in which social learning theory has been used in the literature as a background for studying sibling violence. Social learning theory assists in understanding how violence and/or lack of action related to violence are continued intergenerationally; but the intergenerational aspect of the phenomenon remains untested. Information regarding how parents perceive violence between their children and those behaviors they deem problematic can help in understanding what is learned to be problematic and what is learned to be normative. Regardless of whether violence aside from sibling violence exists in the home, understanding how parents view this phenomenon is important.

Along with social learning theory, family systems theory has also been minimally considered in the literature and research on sibling violence. Family systems theory provides a way of considering the dynamics of family functioning and how those dynamics are influenced by aspects of family relationships. In conjunction with social learning theory, family systems theory provides a way for examining the intergenerational component of sibling violence in various family structures. Unfortunately, examination of intergenerational transmission of sibling violence guided by family systems theory is not present in sibling violence research. As all

families can be considered systems, the incorporation of family systems theory when discussing sibling violence in families is pertinent.

Parents from various family structures may have differing views on the violent behaviors between their children. Research examining parents from various structures is minimal with most including parents from biological, and to a lesser extent, blended families. Knowledge about how parents from different family structures experience and perceive violence can shed light on sibling violence in the context of various family types. Potential differences are necessary to understand in order to conceive how best to intervene to suit the needs of different families.

Coinciding with the minimal focus on different family structures is the narrow way in which parents have been included in the sibling violence research. Research in the area of violence between siblings has not incorporated the meaning parents place on violence between their children. Only parental accounts of witnessed behaviors—oftentimes with the use of the CTS—have been explored without an understanding of how parents view the violence they experienced. All in all, the voice of parents has been minimized in the discussion on sibling violence and deserves attention.

With various family structures potentially having unique dynamics and contextual factors influencing their functioning, examination of parents from different family structures is essential for increasing the knowledge in that area of sibling violence. Based on the current literature and research focusing on violent behaviors between siblings, attention should be placed on parental voice from various family structures. This places focus on two intersecting areas that have been minimally considered. A better understanding of how parents perceive violence between their children will help in providing education to parents and help in the interventions that are

implemented for families of various structures. Results from this approach will help provide insight on how theory enhances knowledge in the area of sibling violence.

The research question for this project is:

How do parents of various family structures experience and perceive physical and emotional violence between their children and their own siblings?

Justification for the question being asked in this research project should be apparent.

Given the research on violence between siblings that does exist, it is difficult to deny this form of family violence as a serious social and familial problem. With parents being the caretakers and individuals responsible for their children, knowledge of their perceptions of sibling violence is necessary in finding ways to intervene. Parents exist in a variety of family structures which can contain children who, given the prevalence rates in the literature (for example see Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; 2006), are likely to experience violence from a sibling. Within all family structures, children are likely to be influenced by family members in some capacity making social learning theory and family systems theory important to include when doing research on sibling violence. Since no research examining parental perceptions of sibling violence has been found and sibling violence research with a focus on family structure is scant, one could argue the best possible manner of examining this research question is by using case study design.

**Case study.** The case study design provides the best possible manner for examining the research question proposed. Yin (2009) describes the case study as being an appropriate design to use when trying to uncover the answers to questions that address the “how” and the “why” of a contemporary phenomenon where the behaviors cannot be manipulated. In this study, the examination of parental perceptions and experiences of sibling violence in their children using case study is appropriate. This is true, given the inability to manipulate the occurrence of violent

behavior between siblings and the likelihood that parents are not currently living with their siblings.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of this research study is to better understand *how* parents view violent behavior between their children as well as how they view their experiences of violent behaviors with their siblings during their own childhoods. The case study methodology can help uncover constructs related to sibling violence and directional associations of those constructs.

Along with uncovering the how and why of a particular phenomenon, within the case study design, theory serves as a guide in the research process. Yin (2009) mentions that based on the theory used to guide the case study that “generalization is analytic generalization, in which a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study” (p38). In the case of this research, social learning theory and family systems theory serve as the foundation for considering parental perceptions and experiences of sibling violence. A way in which to address what is needed to include in the case study is to incorporate multiple forms of supporting evidence to tie back to social learning theory and family systems theory. Using a mixed methods research design can provide the framework for including both quantitative and qualitative data to address the theories included in the research.

**Mixed methods research.** The case study methodology also allows for the incorporation of mixed methods. Bryman (2004) noted that case studies frequently include the use of both quantitative and qualitative research. To answer the research question proposed in this study, collecting quantitative and qualitative data is necessary. Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007) note that “[Mixed methods research’s] central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone” (p. 5). When referring to this in the second edition of their book on mixed

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<sup>6</sup> Yin (2009) discusses case study methodology as appropriate for studying phenomena that cannot be manipulated or for events that have already occurred. In this research study, sibling violence cannot be introduced as a variable manipulated by the author and therefore the author has no control over the manipulation of sibling violence.

methods research, Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) mention that they took this part of their definition of mixed methods research from Stake's (1995) definition of the case study and the research that can be done within a case study. Quantitative and qualitative approaches can elicit parental experiential information regarding experienced and observed sibling violence. These two forms of data together should help in the development of a theoretical framework for obtaining a clearer picture of how parents from different family structures perceive and experience sibling violence.

**Theory and mixed methods research.** Prior to discussing the quantitative and qualitative components of mixed methods research, discussion of the focus on theory in mixed methods research is important. Coinciding nicely with case study design, mixed methods research also places emphasis on the importance of theory in design of the research process (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) also note that social science theories can help guides the research conceptualization and shapes the questions that are asked. Here, social learning theory and family systems theory provide the theoretical basis for the study and help to inform the questions that are being asked and included in the methodology section. Therefore, theory serves as a guide for quantitative qualitative components of the mixed methods research.

**Quantitative data.** Collecting quantitative data is the first step in this proposed mixed methods research. Given that the CTS uses a scale that is not conducive to collecting retrospective data for more than a year since the time conflict has occurred, a new measure resulting in quantitative data is needed and will be constructed. Behaviors from the CTS, along with what others have found to occur between siblings (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998; Wiehe, 1997), will be included in the new scale to determine violent behaviors that parents encountered



with siblings as well as what they have witnessed between their children. The behaviors parents disclose will help uncover the context of their experiences. Using the content from the measurement assessing experiences of sibling violence will also allow parents to question and assess the behaviors listed within it in a subsequent measure. This study approach will be able to explore whether parents find certain behaviors to be violent or more closely associated with what they consider sibling rivalry. Parents can also answer questions in a quantitative fashion related to labels (see Table 2.1) and the degree to which they associate meaning of those labels as problematic.

**Qualitative data.** Qualitative data should be obtained to help in understanding the perceptions of parents regarding sibling violence and the decision-making process for what constitutes problematic sibling interactions. To obtain the meaning parents place on violent behaviors between siblings and their perceptions, it is imperative to include a qualitative component. Informed by theory, the use of qualitative interviews will allow parents to express what sibling violence means to them. It will also provide a context that allows for consideration of intergenerational transmission of behaviors and the thought processes associated with this transmission. Incorporation of case scenarios will allow the parents to engage in a process where they dialogue to determine what factors they deem important to consider when labeling something as problematic or normative for siblings. This observational data will allow for a better understanding of the decision-making process parents undertake, which is essential to understanding how sibling violence may be perpetuated across generations.

**Quantitative and qualitative data.** Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) discuss the importance of researchers explicitly stating the reasons for engaging in mixed methods research designs. One reason quantitative and qualitative methods are included in this research is due to

the way in which both can be included in triangulation of data in mixed methods research (Bryman, 2006; Green, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). In this research process quantitative data will be collected first. This can then be subsequently corroborated with qualitative data. Aside from the results that the data from each methodology can independently provide, when both qualitative and quantitative data are included more information can be obtained potentially allowing for a more well-rounded picture of the phenomenon being studied. The quantitative and qualitative data participants give should collectively help in not only providing more information about parental perceptions and experiences of sibling violence, but also assist in understanding how social learning theory and family systems theory speak to this form of family violence.

### **Summary**

Through use of this mixed method comparative case study, it is expected knowledge will be gained to aid in understanding how social learning theory and family systems theory can collectively be used to help better comprehend this phenomenon. As an intergenerational component of sibling violence is missing from the research literature, this case study helps provide that information. Also missing from the literature on sibling violence are parental perceptions of this form of violence and how their experiences help inform their viewpoint. Parents have not been asked about what behaviors they view as problematic and which behaviors they view as normal. This information is vital in order to conceive interventions aimed at educating and addressing sibling violence in all family structures as inclusion of family structure has minimally been included in the research on sibling violence. From this case study, a framework for the parental decision-making process regarding sibling violence will contribute to the knowledge development in the area of violence between siblings.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### The Case Study

To address the question of how parents from different family types perceive and experience violence between siblings, a mixed-methods comparative case study was conducted. This study used a functionalist paradigmatic perspective, which focuses on rationally explaining social affairs in an objective manner (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Parents were asked to participate in a comparative case study to assess their perceptions and experiences of sibling violence. Given that sibling violence is a contemporary phenomenon that cannot be manipulated (Yin, 2009), the case study methodology is pertinent to the research question in this study. Before detailed discussion of the methodology used in this study, information on case study methodology is warranted to provide support for its usage.

**The case study as a process and product.** The case study methodology is one that can be viewed as a process as well as an end product. Mitchell (1983) characterized case study methodology as a “detailed examination of an event (or series of related events) which the analyst believes exhibits (or exhibit) the operation of some identified general theoretical principle” (p. 192). Through this definition, the process of studying parental perceptions and experiences of physical and emotional sibling violence using case study methodology can be considered an in-depth examination consisting of a variety of steps. David (2007) discusses the steps of case study methodology as: identifying the research question; identifying hypotheses or objectives; defining the unit of analysis and clarifying the data collection process with discussion

of quantitative and/or qualitative data; analyzing the data; linking the analyzed data back to the hypotheses; and discussing and interpreting the data in the context of the literature that exists related to a particular phenomenon. All of these steps should be done in accordance with the theoretical perspective guiding the case study (Yin, 2009). The research question of this research project has been presented and the steps involving identifying hypotheses and clarifying participants and data collection of the research are presented later in this chapter.

The case study can also be viewed as the collective product generated as a result of the case study methodological process. The case study report (findings), conceptualized here as Chapter Four, is meant to provide a connection between the evidence that was obtained and the researcher's perspective of the data. Using graphs, visuals, ratios (based on frequencies), and portraits (Bachor, 2002) allows for presentation of the data so the audience can understand not only the data, but the analysis of the data. While he asserted that the case report requires the researcher to write a considerable amount to present the findings and interpretations, Yin (2009) also noted that comparative and theory-building structures are applicable and beneficial for the case report. For this research project the findings will include comparative structures highlighting the differences and similarities between the participants' responses, as well as a decision-making model based on data. The case report will connect the results to the literature review and to alternative theories and/or explanations that may speak to the data produced and results obtained (Yin, 2009).

**The purpose of case studies.** The case study methodology has been in existence since the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, according to Platt (1992), the notion of the case study is linked to the "case history" or "case work" of social workers. Platt notes that early case studies emerged from the University of Chicago's School of Sociology and the work done related to

understanding the life histories of individuals experiencing various types of interesting phenomena. The case study method provides a pertinent lens through which to examine how parents perceive and have experienced sibling violence.

Case study methodology seeks to address “how” an event has occurred or the processes behind how an event has taken place (Yin, 2009). The examination of how parents from different family structures view sibling violence, along with assessing their experiences of this form of family violence, lends itself well to this methodology. Through a comparative case study the differences and similarities between parents from different family structures can be assessed, examined, and subsequently analyzed. This process can help to provide a richer understanding of not only parents’ experiences and perceptions of sibling violence, but will also aid in the consideration of whether or not family structure is potentially important in future research related to violence between siblings.

**Association with theory.** A fundamental aspect of case study methodology is the use of theory as a guide (Yin, 2009). Case study research should be led by the theories used to describe and understand the case. Theory provides the framework for conducting the case study and also serves as the guide for analyzing the findings. In this case study, social learning theory and family systems theory are the frameworks that have been selected to guide the investigation into how sibling violence can be transmitted intergenerationally. Social learning theory and family systems theory were selected early in the project. This is consistent with the notion that theories should be introduced before data collection (Lee, Mishna, & Brennenstuhl, 2010) in order to connect the case studying findings to other cases and previous research and to take advantage of predictive patterns of these theories (Gilgun, 1992, 1994; Yin, 1994, 2009). Here “analytic generalization” (Yin, 2009, p.38) of the findings of this research study back to social learning

theory and family systems theory is expected, as opposed to statistical generalization. This facilitates a linkage between the case study findings and the theories guiding the process as well as to prior research results. The following discussion on what defines the “case” in this case study is central to subsequent discussion and explanation of the project’s findings in connection to theory.

**Cases.** For the purposes of this research project, Yin’s (2009) case study design served as the framework for the methodology. Including multiple perspectives was necessary to achieve a better understanding of how parents perceive sibling violence and to better grasp the influence of various systemic structures on the behaviors and viewpoints of participants (Gilgun, 1994). The assumption was that it was possible that parents differ on their experiences and perceptions of violence between siblings and was also possible that inclusion of multiple perspectives regarding sibling violence could bring about greater understanding of this form of violence in families. Consistent with the case study methodology as proposed by Yin (2009), parental perceptions and experiences from four family types were the “cases” of the study. Family type were parents from a nuclear family, a blended family, a same-sex two parent family, and a single parent family. Nuclear family was defined as a mother, a father, and at least two dependent children. A blended family was defined as consisting of a mother and a father with a least one of the dependent children still living in the home and a biological parent living outside of the home. The same-sex, two parent family was defined as two parents in a same-sex relationship with two dependent children. The parent in the single parent family had two dependent children and was not currently married.

The focus of this project is the parental experience and perception of violent behavior between their children, as well as their own perceptions of their personal experiences of violent

behavior with a sibling in childhood. Parents were the unit of analysis for how parents from various family structures perceive and experience violence between siblings.

**Hypotheses.** In Yin's (2009) discussion of the case study protocol, he discusses using hypotheses in the research to address the overarching research question of the case study. The following hypotheses were constructed based on the literature (see Table 3.1) to analyze the research question with the participants.

**Table 3.1: Hypotheses of the Comparative Case Study**

1. Parents will normalize any sibling violence they experienced in their relationship with a sibling when they were a child.
2. Parents who have a child who exhibits violence towards a sibling will have experiences of violence with their own sibling.
3. Parents will label more behaviors from the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument as violent in nature as opposed to labeling the behaviors as sibling rivalry.
4. Parents who experienced sibling violence as a child will be more likely to label violent behaviors as rivalry.
5. The parent from single-parent home will experience more problems with sibling violence than from families with two parents.
6. Regardless of parent sexual orientation, parents will experience and perceive sibling violence in a similar fashion.
7. Parents will respond similarly to the labels that have been used to refer to violence between siblings.

**Hypothesis One.** Parental normalization of violence between siblings may be due to the perceptions of sibling rivalry; however, this has not as yet been examined in the research literature. Caffaro and Conn-Caffaro (1998) mention that parents may deny the existence of siblings assaulting one another. In a scenario presented in their book on sibling abuse, they discussed how the parents in one family seen in therapy normalized the behavior. The father even goes so far as to say, "that's how it was with me and my younger brother, we fought all the time. Boys are just rougher than girls," (p.79) which highlights not only the normalization of the

siblings assaulting one another, but also a normalization of intergenerational transmission. Also, Wiehe (1997) mentions that parents often minimize or ignore disclosed sibling abuse, which could be connected to how conflictual interactions may be normalized and then discounted. Data analysis allowed for closer inspection of how participants respond to any violence they experienced as a child and their views on the degree to which this behavior was normalized by the participant.

Here the theoretical perspective behind this hypothesis centers on the notion that individuals may normalize violent encounters with siblings. Potentially based on normalization of violence by some, participants may have engaged in behaviors with siblings that were “normalized” in their families while growing up. It was assumed that interactions with family members along with parental dismissal of concern for behaviors may lead to learning violent behaviors between siblings to be normal sibling interaction.

**Hypothesis Two.** Coinciding with the intergenerational component mentioned in the previous hypothesis, parents with a child who has experienced sibling violence may be likely to have experienced violence with a sibling while growing up. Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980; 2006) noted that children who use violent tactics with their siblings are likely to have learned the behavior from parents in some fashion, whether that be corporal punishment or interparental violence. Given the widespread occurrence of sibling assault as a form of childhood victimization (Finkelhor, Turner, & Ormrod, 2006), it is likely that not all sibling violence is a result of witnessing violence in the home. To date, no study has considered the connection between parents’ experiences of sibling violence and their children’s experiences of sibling violence. Exploration of this hypothesis allowed for connections to be made related to the possibility of an intergenerational component of sibling violence.



Similar to the first hypothesis, this hypothesis strived to understand the possible intergenerational component from social learning theory and family systems theory. It was assumed that parents who experienced violent behaviors with a sibling in childhood may have children who have also experienced sibling violence as behaviors may have been normalized. Parents may have “learned” and have attitudes that violence between siblings is normal based on their experiences as well as their parents’ experiences of violence with siblings.

***Hypothesis Three.*** This hypothesis was meant to better understand how parents label violent behaviors between siblings. The CTS2-SP (Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1995) includes physical and emotional behaviors associated with resolving conflict. Caffaro and Conn-Caffaro (1998) and Wiehe (1997) have also uncovered other tactics used in situations of sibling abuse such as making a sibling feel guilty, manipulating, teasing, and tickling; however, no research exists which has considered parental attitudes of the behaviors related to violence between their children. It is important to have a better understanding of those behaviors parents define as problematic versus those behaviors parents define as normative in sibling development. This may assist in better understanding how parents from different family structures perceive and define violence between their children.

It was assumed that parents may be more likely to label behaviors as violent as opposed to rivalry. Also, contrary to societal views regarding violence between siblings as potentially normal in child development (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, 2006), parents may consider behaviors deemed violent between siblings to be more synonymous with “sibling violence” as opposed to “sibling rivalry.” Here the thought centered on how parents envision what is problematic and normative in family functioning. the idea was that attitudes about violent behaviors may be learned from participants’ parents and then continued in parenting of children.

**Hypothesis Four.** The fourth hypothesis was an extension of the previous hypothesis with regard to labeling behaviors. It was assumed that it may be that parents who did experience violence in their sibling relationships as a child view violent conflict tactics as normative in the sibling dyad especially from a developmental standpoint. The thinking was that if this were the case, then those parents who have learned violent behavior to be “normative” sibling rivalry are likely to label it as sibling rivalry. Those parents who did not experience any violence between themselves and a sibling were likely to view violent behaviors as problematic since they themselves did not experience them.

Social learning theory posits that parents who learn violence to be normal in some capacity will normalize violence in other contexts. The assumption was that parents’ perceptions of sibling rivalry should be related to their experiences of violence with a sibling when they were growing up. If the behaviors they experienced and have witnessed between their children have been learned to be “normal” then parents should label violence as “sibling rivalry” and not “sibling violence.”

**Hypothesis Five.** The focus of the fifth hypothesis was on the single-parent family. In their nationally representative survey of family violence, Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) only included two-parent families. These authors hypothesized the occurrence of sibling violence in single-parent families may be higher. Their reasoning included greater potential for conflict and violence between parents during marriage dissolution, less time by the mother to intervene in sibling conflicts due to work (both household and employment outside the home), and lack of fathers in the house to control children. In his discussion of five cases of sibling abuse, Green (1984) mentioned that the older siblings who were the perpetrators of violence lived in single-parent homes. His study emphasized that various extraneous variables, such as inter-parental

violence and mother's experience of child abuse, had occurred highlighting the need to consider how the single-parent family experiences sibling violence. Given the lack of research in the area of sibling violence specifically related to family structure beyond two-parent headed households, including the examination of this hypothesis was important.

Grounded in family systems theory, the thought behind this hypothesis centered on the possibility that the dynamics in single-parent families are substantially different from those in families with two parents. The idea was to see if it were possible that single-parent families encounter more stressful factors related to familial functioning, which may present the opportunity for more sibling violence. If so, participant's parental attitudes related to violence between siblings could potentially further exacerbate the attitudes related to sibling violence where "acceptance" of violence is a learned component.

***Hypothesis Six.*** There has been an increased visibility of families with same-sex parents in the United States, especially in the literature regarding comparison of heterosexual parenting and same-sex parenting<sup>7</sup> with regard to children's outcomes (see for example Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Marks, 2012; Patterson, 1992, 2000; Regnerus, 2012). Still, there has been an exclusion of same-sex parents in the research and literature related to sibling violence. Given the fact that some research has demonstrated no pervasive differences between heterosexual and same-sex parents in how they rear their children (Patterson, 1992, 2000), inclusion of the voice of same-sex parents was pertinent to this case study. If parenting practices are relatively similar between

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted here that gender of parents as a construct is not the focus of this particular research project. Martin and Ross (2005) found both mothers and fathers to prohibit aggression towards girls, yet were more tolerant of physical aggression in boys. Given the paucity of research related to parental perceptions of violence between their children along with the notion that both mothers and father are rarely likely to ignore aggression in children (Mills & Rubin, 1990), there is currently no evidence to suggest responses to sibling violence should be different. Should differences arise throughout the research process they will be discussed and presented in the chapter discussing the results of the case study.

heterosexual and same-sex parents, one can imagine that parents, regardless of sexual orientation, would perceive sibling violence in a similar fashion.

Theoretically, if same-sex parents and heterosexual parents are relatively similar in parenting and child outcomes, then parents should experience and perceive sibling violence in a similar fashion regardless of family dynamics. Here, regardless of sexual orientation, parents may learn from their parents about how to perceive violence between siblings. Also, participants' experiences of violence with a sibling may influence their perceptions of sibling violence regardless of sexual orientation. Social learning theory suggests that parents will have been influenced by those with whom they interacted as children. In this research project questions about participant parents were included as mechanisms of modeled behavior and/or attitudes. The thought here was that when participants were children they were similarly influenced by parents, regardless of sexual orientation, and therefore should similarly respond to sibling violence.

***Hypothesis Seven.*** The labels used to refer to violence between siblings are varied and numerous. Along with the labels used to refer to this form of family violence variability continues in the ways in which these labels have and have not been defined. This lack of definition and uniformity in how labels are utilized presents conceptual challenges for those trying to understand the language related to violence between siblings. Also, the use of various labels interchangeably further exacerbates the difficulty in conceptualization and operationalization of what constitutes problematic behavior between siblings. Since it has not been researched and no research indicates that theoretically differences should emerge, it was hypothesized that parents, regardless of sexual orientation or family structure, should similarly perceive labels as problematic or harmful.

The justification for this hypothesis was similar to many of the other hypotheses already mentioned. It was assumed that participants were likely to have been influenced by their parents and families regarding sibling violence and in what behaviors they believe to be appropriate or inappropriate between siblings. The thinking was that family structure should therefore not be an influential factor for parents when responding to the labels that have been used in the literature to refer to sibling violence. Participants might be able to differentiate between the labels used to refer to violence between siblings; however, they were assumed to respond in a similar fashion should they have the same influences from childhood (parental beliefs on sibling violence and experiences of sibling violence). Given the wide array of labels used to describe sibling violence and the way in which a variety of labels have been considered synonymous (see Raffaelli, 1992), participants were assumed to respond to labels in the same manner.

All hypotheses presented were focused on the potential differences and similarities between parents from various family structures. They focused on providing a richer understanding of how parents from different family structures perceive and experience sibling violence based on what they have encountered. Theory was fundamental when conceptualizing these hypotheses as sibling violence can be examined as a learned behavior (or the thoughts about sibling violence as being learned) and a phenomenon that is transmitted intergenerationally in various family structures. The seven hypotheses included in this case study were the basis of testable questions that were examined in this project. The ways in which data collection and analysis addressed the hypotheses will be discussed later.

### **Sample**

To examine the research question of this case study, parents were included as respondents in the data collection phase of the research. In order to discuss the sample utilized in this

research project it is necessary to discuss the aspect of the “case” when considering case study methodology. Yin (2009) talks extensively about the importance of determining what constitutes a case and defining the unit of analysis as being determined by the questions guiding the case study research process. The units of analysis in this research were parents included in the study. Included in the study were two parents from a nuclear family, two parents from a blended family, a parent who was single, and two parents from a same-sex couple.

**Purposive sampling.** Participants of the study were included and sampled in a particular, purposeful manner in order to ensure parents from all four different family structures were included in the research. Purpose sampling is used when the “researchers intentionally select (or recruit) participants who have experienced the central phenomenon or the key concept being explored in the study” (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011, p.173). More depth is obtained for a research study with purposive sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007) making this sampling process beneficial for this case study. The characteristic of “family structure” referring to the structure of the family in which the parents currently lives was the primary basis for participant selection. In order to obtain participants for this research study purposive sampling was used to ensure characteristics and criteria being considered were attended to. One set of parents from each type of family structure were included in the study. Regardless the gender of the parent, these family structures constitute the vast majority of family structures within the United States.

Aside from the differentiation in family type, parents included in the case study were selected according to additional criteria. In order to assess parental experiences of sibling violence, parents had to have had a sibling in the home in which they grew up. Parents were asked to respond to questions about their closest aged sibling if the parent had more than one sibling. Selected parents also had at least two dependent children in order to assess their

children's experiences of sibling violence. For the purposes of this case study, "dependent children" was defined as having two children from the age of 5 to 21. Parents could have had children above the legal adult age who were still living with them or who still depended on them while in college. Considering children to be from the age of 5 to 21 is similar to criteria considered in other research on sibling violence (see Krienert & Walsh, 2011) and therefore was used in this case study as a guideline for age requirement of children of the participants. No participants in this study, however, had any children above the age of fifteen.

Participants were also recruited based on income and education using dimensional sampling (Arnold, 1970). With random sampling and generalizability not being appropriate in this case study design, participants were included whose income and education closely matched that of the average for couples in various family structures in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The following section presents information regarding these criteria as they relate to the participants from this study as well as characteristics of the sample.

### **Sample Recruitment**

Participants were recruited through word of mouth using gatekeepers. Individuals with whom the author has working and personal relationships were told of the research study and given flyers regarding the research. These individuals were asked to provide potential research participants with information related to the study as well as the author's contact information should they want to be involved in the study. Gatekeepers also were given permission-to-contact forms so the researcher could contact participants interested in being in the study should they wish to provide contact information. No permission-to-contact forms were obtained from gatekeepers by the researcher as all participants contacted the researcher about participating in the research study.

**Identifiers.** As shown in Table 3.2, each of the seven participants was given an identifier that was used when referencing results associated with that participant. Table 3.2 also shows a distribution of participants according to family type.

**Table 3.2: Participant Identifiers**

Identifier	Parent and Family
BFP1	Blended Family Mother
BFP2	Blended Family Father
LFP1	Same-Sex Family (Lesbian) Mother 1
LFP2	Same-Sex Family (Lesbian) Mother 2
NFP1	Nuclear Family Mother
NFP2	Nuclear Family Father
SFP1	Single-Parent Family Mother

**Demographics.** The demographic information for the participants including family type is presented in Table 3.3. The mean age of all participants is 42.57 with a range of 38-51. With only 13 years separating the youngest participant from the oldest, the ages of the participants are relatively homogenous. Of the seven participants, five were female with the male participants being members of the blended and nuclear families. The blended family contained six children while the other family structures each had two children. Across the different family types, age of children varied somewhat. Children from the nuclear and single-parent families were very similar in age; however, the sibling composition was different. The range in ages for the children in the blended family was the greatest with children from the same-sex family having similar ages of two of the children in the blended family.

**Table 3.3: Demographics**

Identifier	Age	Sex	Family Structure	Number of Children	Ages (sex) of Children	Household Income	Participant Education
BFP1	38	Female	Blended	6	13(F), 10(F), 9(F), 8(F), 6(F), 3(M)	\$100,000+	Bachelors
BFP2	42	Male	Blended				Masters
LFP1	38	Female	Same-sex	2	10(F), 5(M)	\$75,000-	Bachelors



LFP2	45	Female	Same-sex			100,000	Masters
NFP1	42	Female	Nuclear	2	14(F), 11(M)	\$50,000-75,000*	Masters
NFP2	51	Male	Nuclear				Masters
SFP1	42	Female	Single-parent	2	15(F), 12(F)	\$25,000-50,000	Associates

\* NFP2 was recently unemployed. Using NFP2's previous income, the household income for the nuclear family would be in the \$100,000+ category.

Household income was relatively similar for the blended, same-sex, and nuclear families with the single-parent household income being the lowest of the four family types. Education of participants was similar with all participants having post-high school education and six of the participants having undergraduate degrees or higher.

**Comparison of household income and education to Virginia population.** A purposive sampling process was undertaken to include participants in the study that were relatively similar to other parents from the same family structures with at least two children in the house in the Commonwealth of Virginia based on household income and education. To do this, data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2011 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) was analyzed to determine estimates for household income and highest level of education completed for parents from blended, nuclear, same-sex, and single-parent families.

**Income.** Estimates for income percentages for Virginia respondents to the 2011 BRFSS are included in Table 3.4. Based on the BRFSS estimates, the category representing the highest percentage of household income for nuclear (42.22%), blended (42.22%), and same-sex (58.91%) families was \$75,000+. From the household incomes reported in this case study, both the blended and same-sex families would fall into this category. The nuclear family would have fit into this category also, however, two months prior to the time data was collected the father from the nuclear family became unemployed. The household income of the single-parent family from this case study fit within the second largest category (\$25,000-\$50,000, 25.81%) of single-

parent family household incomes in Virginia based on the BRFSS. Participants in this study reported similar income levels to those respondents of the BRFSS.

**Table 3.4: Percentages Estimates for Household Income for Virginia Respondents to the 2011 BRFSS and Corresponding Participant’s Household Income from Case Study**

<i>Income</i>	<i>Nuclear/ Blended Family</i>	<i>Nuclear Family Study*</i>	<i>Blended Family Study</i>	<i>Same-sex Family</i>	<i>Same-sex Family Study</i>	<i>Single Parent Family</i>	<i>Single Parent Study</i>
\$0-25,000	12.52			28.34		33.92	
\$25,000- 50,000	17.92			11.28		25.81	X
\$50,000- 75,000	15.69	X		0		12.91	
\$75,000+	42.22		X	58.91	X	11.53	
Don’t know/Not sure	4.51			0		9.11	
Refused	7.12			1.48		6.71	

\* *NFP2 was recently unemployed. Using NFP2’s previous income, the household income for the nuclear family would be in the \$100,000+ category.*

*Level of education completed.* As indicated in Table 3.5, all participants in this case study had post-high school education (*Associate Degree (1), Bachelors Degree (2), Masters Degree (4)*). Table 3.7 includes the percentage estimates for highest level of education completed of parents in nuclear, blended, same-sex, and single-parent families based on the 2011 BRFSS. For those individuals in nuclear and blended families, over one in three parents (36.14%) of Virginia respondents to the BRFSS had four years of college or more. All parents from both the nuclear and blended families included in this case study had an undergraduate or graduate degree. While estimates from the BRFSS indicate that almost two out of three (61.37%) parents from same-sex families have completed one to three years of college or technical school, one-third of these parents have completed college or more. Both parents from the same-sex family included in this research fit this category with one having an undergraduate degree and the other having a

graduate degree. The participant from the single-parent family in the case study had an Associate Degree which is the highest level of education one in every four (24.53%) respondents of the 2011 BRFSS from Virginia reported. Participants included in this study reported similar levels of education to those respondents of the BRFSS.

**Table 3.5: Percentages Estimates for Level of Education Completed for Virginia Respondents to the 2011 BRFSS and Corresponding Participant's Education from Case Study**

<i>Highest Level of Education Completed</i>	<i>Nuclear/ Blended Family</i>	<i>Nuclear Family Study</i>	<i>Blended Family Study</i>	<i>Same-sex Family</i>	<i>Same-sex Family Study</i>	<i>Single Parent Family</i>	<i>Single Parent Study</i>
Never attended school or kindergarten only	.271			0		.17	
Grades 1-8 (Elementary)	3.13			0		7.96	
Grades 9-11 (Some high school)	7.53			4.65		13.62	
Grade 12 or GED (High school graduate)	26.11			0		27.26	
College 1 to 3 years (Some college or technical school)	26.58			61.37		24.53	X
College 4 years or more (College graduate and/or post- graduate schooling )	36.14	X	X	33.99	X	26.36	
Refused	.23			0		.11	

**Participant demographics when in childhood.** Participants were also asked to provide demographic information regarding their family context while growing up. Table 3.6 provides

information on the number of siblings for each participant; the sibling(s) gender, whether the sibling was older or younger than the participant; family structure; household income; and participants' parents' education.

**Table 3.6: Participant Family Demographic Information in Childhood**

<i>Identifier</i>	<i>Number of Siblings</i>	<i>Gender of Sibling(s) and family position</i>	<i>Family Structure in Childhood</i>	<i>Household Income</i>	<i>Parent's Education</i>
BFP1	One	Sister (younger)	Nuclear	\$75,000-100,000	Mother: Masters Father: Masters
BFP2	One	Brother (older)	Nuclear	\$25,000-50,000	Mother: Masters Father: Masters
LFP1	One	Brother (older)	Nuclear	\$75,000-100,000	Mother: Some college Father: Some college
LFP2	One	Brother (older)	Nuclear	\$75,000-100,000	Mother: Masters Father: Bachelors
NFP1	One	Sister (younger)	Nuclear	\$50,000-75,000	Father: Some graduate school Mother: Bachelors
NFP2	Two	Brother (younger), Brother (younger)	Nuclear*	\$25,000-50,000	Mother: Some college Father: Bachelors
SFP1	Two	Sister (older), Brother (older)	Nuclear	\$75,000-100,000	Father: Masters Mother: Some college

*\*NFP2 lived with both biological parents until the age of 13 when his parents divorced. From the ages of 13-15, participant lived in a single-parent mother-headed household. Participant's mother remarried when he was 17 where he lived in a blended family until he left for college.*

NFP2 and SFP1 were the only participants to have more than one sibling. There was a wide variation in the gender of sibling(s) as well as whether participants' siblings were older or younger in age. All participants reported that the family structure they grew up in was a nuclear family; however, NFP2 noted having experienced several family structures in his time living at

home in childhood. Participants also reported a variety of family incomes, but all participants reported that their parents had at least some college, if not more.

### **Data Collection**

Along with uncovering the “how” and the “why” of a contemporary phenomenon, the case study methodology requires consideration of multiple variables and multiple sources of evidence, which can include both qualitative and quantitative data (Yin, 1997). In order to better understand a contemporary phenomenon, such as sibling violence, where the boundaries between the context and the phenomenon are not clear and multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1992, 2009), the case study provides a methodology that is appropriate in this research process. Since sibling violence is a fairly under-examined phenomenon, especially in terms of incorporation of parents’ perspectives, inclusion of multiple forms of data helped provide richer data to address the research question.

Consistent with mixed methods research (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011), various forms of data were collected which were both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Yin (2009) discussed that multiple sources of evidence are needed when conducting a case study noting that multiple forms of evidence help in triangulation and also allow the researcher “to address a broader range of historical and behavioral issues” when conducting case studies (p.115). For this case study several sources of evidence including scales and measurements, interviews, and direct observation were included in the data collection process. Both quantitative and qualitative data were included in an even-handedly way to address the hypotheses based on the purpose of the research. These data provided a rich context from which the data analysis occurred. The following includes a brief discussion of procedures in all three phases of the data collection process.

**Three phases of data collection.** In the first phase of data collection participants were asked to complete various scales and measurements. In this phase, each participant completed the quantitative measures independent of their partners. Participants completed a demographics sheet, an Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale, an Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence Between Siblings measurement, and the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry measurement (please see Appendices C-F). The first phase of data collection took participants approximately 1.5 hours to complete.

The second phase of data collection included an open-ended interview. These interviews were conducted with both individuals of the parental unit interviewed together for the nuclear family, the blended family, and the family with same-sex parents. The parent from the single-parent family was interviewed alone. The open-ended interview (Appendix G) was intended to focus on the parents' perceptions of sibling violence, sibling rivalry, and connections between their experiences and those of their children. The second phase of the data collection took participants approximately 1.5 hours to complete.

In the third and final phase of data collection participants were presented with four different case scenarios (Appendix H). Participants were asked to discuss with their significant other (if applicable) whether or not the scenario represents sibling violence. Participants were asked to discuss the decision-making process involved in their position with their partner. The researcher observed and took note of the decision-making process of the parents so that information regarding both the decisions and their process became part of this phase. The final phase of data collection took participants approximately 1 to 1.5 hours to complete.

## Case Study Materials/Instrumentation

**Demographics.** Demographic information was collected to help provide a better understanding of the contextual background of the participants. Demographic information participants provided was meant to help better understand the two family contexts (past and present) in which the participants are associated. With the intergenerational component of this research process being important in examining transmission of sibling violence across generations, it was necessary to obtain information on both family systems. This demographic information assisted in contextualizing the environments of both family systems and was used in data analysis to explore similarities and differences.

The demographic sheet (see Appendix C) included information on the participants and their family members. Participants were asked to provide information including their age and gender, the ages and gender of family members, current family structure, current income, and highest level of education achieved. Participants were also asked to provide information related to their family when they were growing up. This family-of-origin information includes number of siblings, closest aged sibling's gender and the age difference between the participant and their sibling, family structure, household income, and the highest level of parental education.

**Age.** Age as a variable in studies considering violence between siblings has received a fair amount of attention. Age has been considered in sibling violence research predominantly in two ways. Examining the ages at which violence between siblings is the most prevalent has been one way age has been studied (see Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Finkelhor, Turner, & Ormrod, 2006; Goodwin & Roscoe, 1990; Steinmetz, 1977a; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). While there is evidence to support that violence between siblings tends to decrease with age (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980), research also shows that it does not necessarily cease

upon reaching a certain age (Finkelhor, Turner, & Ormrod, 2006). Another way in which age has been included in studies is by considering the age differential between siblings (Noland et al., 2004); however, inconsistent results have been found (Dunn & McGuire, 1992). Some research has found that siblings who are closer in age tend to experience more sibling violence and aggression (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Felson, 1983; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Noland et al., 2004). Other research has found no differences in the experiences of hostility between siblings based on age difference (McGuire, McHale, & Updegraff, 1996), and it has been suggested that abuse may be more common in siblings with greater age separation (Caspi, 2012). Age was an important demographic variable to include in order to provide context for the explanation of the findings when comparing the parents from the four family types.

**Gender.** Gender, specifically related to sibling dyad composition, has been included in numerous studies examining sibling violence (see Button & Gealt, 2010; Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 2005; Goodwin & Roscoe, 1990; Graham-Berman, Cutler, Litzenberger, & Schwartz, 1994; Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards, 2005; Martin & Ross, 2005; Roscoe & Goodwin, 1987). Many studies have included gender as a variable of interest in order to focus on which sibling dyads experience the most frequent and severe violence. Similar to that of age, research incorporating mixed and same-sex sibling dyads has shown mixed results in terms of which dyads experience more violence and which experience more severity. Some research has found brother-brother dyads experience the most violence (Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards, 2005), with males more likely to commit more severe acts of violence and using physical force as a conflict resolution tactic (Goodwin & Roscoe, 1990; Roscoe & Goodwin, 1987). Other research has demonstrated no gender differences when siblings are mildly physically aggressive towards a younger sister (Martin & Ross, 2005), while other research has found males to have a



significantly higher level of violence directed towards a brother than females (Mangold & Koski, 1990). Graham-Bermann (1994) found siblings in same-sex dyads to have more conflict than those in opposite-sex dyads, whereas other research has found older brother and younger sister to experience the most sibling violence (Button & Gealt, 2010; Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 2005; Graham-Berman, Cutler, Litzenberger, & Schwartz, 1994). The inconclusiveness of these collective studies highlights the need to continue to include gender as a factor of consideration when examining sibling violence. While not explicitly asked by parents in the sibling violence literature, Martin and Ross (2005) found parents to be more accepting of male children's use of mild physical aggression than females. Inclusion of gender was important here to ascertain if parents believe violence between certain sibling dyads is more problematic than others as well as to uncover how parents of a certain gender respond to violence between their children.

**Family Structure.** As a fundamental part of this study, family structure was included in the demographic section. Participants were asked to note their current family structure as well as the family structure in which they grew up as a child. As noted in the review of the literature on family structure and sibling violence, the vast majority of studies have not considered family structure. What has been presented has often been included as almost an afterthought with explicit discussion and analysis being minimal (see Hoffman, Kiecolt, and Edwards, 2005). In the present study, family structure served as the focal point for comparative case analysis to consider similarities and differences in how parents from various family structures view and experience sibling violence. Collecting information on both the participant's current and childhood family allowed for comparisons across cases.

**Income.** In the literature related to violence between siblings, income and socioeconomic status have been minimally considered. Garcia, Shaw, Winslow, and Yaggi (2000) found

socioeconomic status to be correlated with maternal ratings of sibling aggression. Most of the research that has collected income from participants, however, has not focused on analyzing how income may play into the occurrence of sibling violence. Income essentially serves as a contextual variable researchers collect yet do not include in the examination or discussion related to sibling violence. In this study, income was considered in the selection criteria in order to begin discussion of how the financial situations of families may impact the occurrence of violent behaviors between siblings.

**Education.** Similar to that of income and socioeconomic status, assessing parental education has been invisible in the sibling violence literature. Several research studies focusing on violence between siblings have included participants who have been enrolled in undergraduate courses (see for example Reese-Weber & Kahn, 2005; Steward, Senger, Kallen, & Scheurer, 1987); however, education itself has not been examined. Education is important to consider since it may play into parental beliefs regarding the degree to which they find violence between siblings to be problematic. To begin to address education as a variable deserving attention, this case study provided the opportunity for examination of how education may or may not play into how parents view sibling violence.

**Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale.** To assess parental experiences of violence with a sibling in childhood and violence witnessed between their children, participants were asked to complete the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale (see Appendix D). Behaviors included in the scale come from the Conflict Tactics Scale-Sibling Version (CTS2-SP; Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1995), as well as behaviors found to be associated with violence between siblings (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998; Wiehe, 1997). The Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale was used to examine possible intergenerational transmission of violence

in the sibling dyad. Using a 5-point Likert scale starting from “never” to “very frequently” participants considered the frequency in which they experienced 25 behaviors with their siblings in childhood and behaviors they may have witnessed between their children.

In this case study, the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale was created due to the retrospective nature of the data collection. The Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale was used because the CTS2-SP is not conducive to the collection of retrospective data further than a year from time data is collected. Due to the copyright status of the CTS2-SP, modifications of the instrument are prohibited and therefore inclusion of this instrument in this case study was not practical. In addition, the behaviors used in the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale were also included in the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument (Appendix F) used in this case study to assess whether participants view behaviors as “sibling violence” or “sibling rivalry.” These two instruments were constructed to create intentional triangulation so that comparisons and differences of participants’ responses could be more easily interpreted and presented in data analysis.

**Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale.** Included in Chapter 2 was a discussion of the use of numerous labels to refer to violence between siblings. One thing that has not been considered is how parents perceive labels that are utilized in the literature. Do parents find certain labels to be problematic? Do they find others to be associated with more potential for harm? Answers to these questions are important as they may be connected to how parents perceive and subsequently associate certain behaviors with particular labels. With the conundrum of the various labels used in the sibling violence literature (Raffaelli, 1997), assessing how parents respond to certain labels helped further the knowledge of how parents perceive and experience sibling violence and what for them represents problematic behaviors.

Participants were asked to complete an assessment of labels related to violence between siblings (Appendix E). Included in the instrument were all of the labels discussed in Table 2.1 of Chapter 2, except for the labels “agonistic behavior” and “sibling relational aggression.” These words are minimally used in the literature and may not be recognized or understood by parents; therefore, were not included in the instrument.

Using a 5-point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree,” this instrument containing 34 statements helped uncover how parents view certain labels used to describe violent behavior between siblings. Also it assessed their views as to whether behaviors associated with the label were perceived as hurtful or harmful. For each label included, there was a statement related to whether parents believed whatever they associated with that label to be common or normal. The second statement with the same label asked parents whether they agreed or disagreed that the consequences associated with that label were harmful or hurtful.

**Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument.** The original Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979) was constructed to measure intra-family violence and conflict to determine the mechanisms family members use to resolve problematic situations. The original CTS included assessment of reasoning, verbal aggression, and violence. Straus (1979) mentioned in the article presenting the original CTS that the three areas were chosen for theoretical reasons; however, the article does not mention how the actual tactics were chosen. The CTS includes “a list of actions which a family member might take in a conflict with another member” (p.78), yet parental perceptions about these behaviors, as they relate to siblings, have not been included in the literature. Also, how parents view these behaviors as problematic or not has also not been discussed in the literature.

To address this, a scale was constructed (Appendix F) to examine parental perceptions of the behaviors listed on the CTS-SP and those deemed abusive in certain sibling contexts (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998; Wiehe, 1997). All conflict tactics included in the CTS2-SP were included in the scale which asked parents to respond to whether they believe behaviors are associated more with sibling violence, sibling rivalry, both sibling violence and sibling rivalry, or neither sibling violence nor sibling rivalry. Of the 25 total questions, behaviors from questions 1, 3-5, 7-8, 9, 11-16, and 18-25 are directly from the CTS. Questions 2, 6, 10, and 17 are included as these are behaviors others have found to be related to sibling abuse (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998; Wiehe, 1997).

**Open-ended qualitative interviews.** In addition to the quantitative measures and following Yin's guidance, open-ended, qualitative interviews were conducted during the second phase of data collection. The qualitative interviews were conducted with both members of the couple present except for in the case of the single parent. The questions included in the interview (Appendix G) allowed for participants to provide their thoughts on sibling violence and sibling rivalry and the physical, emotional, and verbal components within each one of those areas. Questions related to understanding what factors the participants believe to be important for determining when interactions between siblings are problematic were included. Note that the final question included prompts related to past familial experiences of the parents in their family growing up. The interviews provided a better understanding of the connections across generations related to the occurrence of sibling violence. Interviews supported examining how social learning theory contributes to understanding the phenomenon of sibling violence across generations. Specifically, the final question related to past experiences of the parents was posed to explore connections related to how participants view problematic behaviors between their

children. With aggressive behaviors possibly being learned in families (Bandura, 1973), responses to this question provided information on how learned behavior may be transmitted across generations (with dismissal of violence being considered a behavior). Interviews were digitally recorded and field notes were taken while the interview was occurring to collect any non-verbal communication of the participants.

**Case Scenario Decision-Making Process.** In this case study, scenarios were used, further expanding on what Hardy, Beers, Burgess, and Taylor (2010) did in their study. The four case scenarios included in this study (Appendix H) had various aspects changed in each of the four scenarios to better understand the decision-making process parents engage in when confronted with potentially problematic situations between siblings. Gender of the siblings in the sibling dyad, ages of the siblings, age difference between siblings, type of violence perpetrated, and the reaction or consequence of violent action from a sibling represent the five variables that were altered within each scenario. These factors were included as variables because of their prominence in the research related to sibling violence. It was hypothesized that these variables may be factors parents consider when labeling something as problematic or not. Therefore, these factors were thought to be related to how parents perceive something as sibling violence or something other than violent behavior between siblings.

In this last phase of the data collection, each scenario was presented one-at-a-time to the participants in dyads. Participants, with their respective significant other, if applicable, were asked whether or not they believe what was presented in the scenario was indicative of sibling violence and how they came to that conclusion. Participants were asked to collectively decide on a response to whether or not they thought the scenario presented was an incident of sibling violence. This allowed the researcher to observe how the decisions were made by the parents and

factors influencing parental attitudes on violent behaviors between siblings. This was important to understand if both prevention of and intervention in sibling violence is the ultimate goal of this project. Field notes were completed as the participants discussed their decisions and the discussion was digitally recorded. Field notes were extended within 24 hours after the completion of the case scenario process.

### **Participants and psychometrics.**

Given the novel nature of the this research project in examining experiences and attitudes about behaviors as they relate to sibling rivalry and/or sibling violence, as well as the terminology used in the literature to refer to conflictual sibling interactions, this project required the development of new instruments. At this point in their development, the psychometrics of the instruments used in this case study are unknown. One way to address this potential challenge is to demonstrate that the data collected from participants is accurate and credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and triangulated with other forms of data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) for each participant. The following discussion presents how the project data is connected and coherent for each participant in order to address potential concerns due to the lack of psychometrics testing for validity and reliability.

**Participants and responses from data collection.** The responses that participants provided could be connected to the various topics that were presented in the data collection based on their experiences and perceptions. Based on all information provided, responses also appeared coherent in that they followed an identifiable, logical path.

**BFP1.** During the interviews, BFP1 discussed being more attuned to what transpired between the children in the family. This participant reported that she witnessed more behaviors (18 behaviors) between children in the family on the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale

although it was similar to the number of behaviors witnessed by BFP2 (15 behaviors). During the interviews, BFP1 stated she had not experienced much violence with her sister in childhood, yet reported experiencing 15 of the 25 behaviors from the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale.

**BFP2.** This participant reported having experienced the second highest number of behaviors (17 behaviors) from the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale in childhood. BFP2 shared many of the responsibilities of parenting evenly with his wife which supports the similarities in the behaviors that each parent from this family witnessed. BFP2 saw the relationship he had with his brother in childhood as influencing his perceptions of sibling violence, which was noted throughout the qualitative data he provided.

**LFP1.** LFP1 experienced the most violent behaviors of any participant in childhood (20 of 25) from the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale. Although she experienced many behaviors, this participant noted having a strong relationship with her brother which has continued into adulthood. LFP1 and her partner, LFP2, reported experiencing a substantially different amount of behaviors in childhood (LFP1, 20 behaviors; LFP2, 8 behaviors). However, they were similar in the number of behaviors they had witnessed between their children (LFP1, 18 behaviors; LFP2, 14 behaviors). Their perceptions of violence between siblings is different and was articulated throughout the qualitative interviews. This discrepancy can be connected to their responses from the quantitative portion of the data collection based on the sibling relationships each discussed having in childhood.

**LFP2.** From the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale, LFP2 reported the least amount of violence between her and her brother in childhood (8 behaviors). LFP2 reported not having a close relationship with her brother, which is similar to how the two interact today, yet different than the relationship her partner reported having with her brother. Throughout the qualitative



interviews, LFP2 was adamant about her disdain for violence of any form in the sibling relationship which is consistent with how she viewed sibling interaction between her children and in general.

**NFP1.** NFP1 reported experiencing discord with her sister in childhood but nothing that was very physical in nature. She reported having experienced 12 of the 25 behaviors on the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale with her sister in childhood. This participant reported witnessing more behaviors between her children than her husband did (NFP1, 18 behaviors; NFP2, 10 behaviors). The number of behaviors and the behaviors she mentioned having had experienced in childhood is consistent with NFP1's views on the acceptability of violent behaviors in the sibling relationship which was mentioned in the qualitative interviews.

**NFP2.** This participant reported having experienced the third highest number of behaviors experienced with a sibling in childhood (16 behaviors), which is consistent with the stories of violence that he provided in the qualitative interviews. NFP2 also reported having witnessed the least amount of behaviors between his children (10 behaviors). This is consistent with NFP2's perceptions of violence and rivalry as discussed in the qualitative interviews.

**SFP1.** Of the behaviors on the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale, SFP1 reported having experienced 12 of the 25 behaviors. SFP1 reported having an amicable relationship with both her sister and brother in childhood. She noted that her siblings experienced more fighting than she did when they were children. SFP1 reported witnessing her children engage in 16 of the 25 behaviors on the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale. This participant's responses were consistent with the number of behaviors she mentioned witnessing between her children in the qualitative interviews.

## **Data Analysis**

**Analytic strategies.** Quantitative and qualitative data obtained in the data collection phase of the research process were analyzed independently and then collectively. The intersection of quantitative and qualitative data allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of how parents experience and perceive violence between siblings in families. This research approach including both types of research allowed for “a depth of understanding and corroboration” (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, Turner, 2007, p.123) of the data provided by the participants. Both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed based on Creswell and Plano-Clark’s (2011) convergent parallel research design. This framework begins with collecting both quantitative and qualitative data and analyzing both types of data independently of each other after data collection is completed. Quantitative and qualitative data are then compared and related, leading to eventual interpretation of the collective data.

The data analysis plan for the case study was based on addressing each of the hypotheses. Yin (2009) discusses there being four different analytic strategies when conducting the data analysis in a case study. For the purposes of this study, Yin’s strategies of focusing on the use of theoretical propositions, using both quantitative and qualitative data, and examining rival explanations was included. The technique used to address this analysis is what Yin calls “pattern matching” which can help to strength the internal validity of the case study should patterns match (p. 136). As previously mentioned, the process of statistical generalization was not the goal of case study research; however, analytic generalization was (Yin, 2009). Here, “a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study” (Yin, 2009, p.38). The data was analyzed with social learning theory and family systems theory in mind in order to make comparisons and highlight differences across cases based on the hypotheses of the research project.

The data were interrogated to better understand the research question of how parents of different family structures experience and perceive physical and emotional sibling violence. This was facilitated by addressing the project's seven hypotheses. Questions asked of the data included responding to each hypothesis, how each hypothesis was or was not supported by theories included in the research (Yin, 2009), and subsequently how the results spoke to addressing the research questions of this project. The following presents a detailed overview of this analytic process.

**Quantitative analysis.** Due to the small number of participants included in the case study as well as the focus on analytical generalization, frequencies and descriptive data were the focus of the quantitative analysis. Demographic data were presented using descriptive measures. Frequencies were conducted for the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale, the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence Between Siblings Scale, and the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument. With the focus being on the parents from four different family structures, data were presented by making tables and matrices to display the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Table 3.7 provides an example of how information were analyzed in matrix form to consider patterns and to present the analysis of the case study. Tables presenting frequencies and descriptive were also be presented. Information from quantitative data were presented in this fashion so that comparisons and contrasting information were easily accessible and understood.

**Table 3.7: Example of Data Analysis Matrix**

	Age	Gender	Childhood Family Structure	Income	Education
Nuclear family					
Blended family					

Same-sex two-parent family					
Single parent family					

**Qualitative analysis.** After qualitative data collection from all participants was completed, interviews and responses to the case scenarios were transcribed. Transcriptions were then analyzed in Atlas.ti using content analysis (see Miles & Huberman, 1994). Patton (2002) noted that “content analysis is used to refer to any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (p. 453). He also suggested that the case study is appropriate for content analysis. The analysis was deductive in process and the data were analyzed based on the theories that guided the research project and the hypotheses emanating from those theories. Upon completion of the first qualitative interview a codebook was started and revised throughout the analysis of qualitative data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Since the research was guided by social learning theory and family systems theory, analysis used the variables in these theories as guides when analysis was done to query how the data spoke to these theories. This is consistent with guidance regarding data analysis in case studies (Yin, 2009). Qualitative data were coded for themes (Patton, 2002). Similarities and differences between the different cases were investigated after analysis of the data was complete and codes had been checked between cases (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Cross-case displays (Hays & Singh, 2012), much like the matrices used for the quantitative portion, were used to present findings of the qualitative data.

**Triangulation.** Approaching an understanding of parents’ perceptions and experiences of sibling violence through multiple forms of data collection allowed for ideas, patterns, and results

to be triangulated. Yin (2009) states that triangulation of multiple forms of evidence is a strength of the case study design. In this research study, data triangulation (Denzin, 1978) was used by examining the results of quantitative scales and measurements, the open-ended interview, and the observation collectively. The justification for including all forms of data centered on the fact that all data addressed parents' experiences and perceptions in some fashion. Collectively the data provided a greater potential for understanding the phenomenon and were used to support arguments presented by the data as well as refuting hypotheses by including evidence to the contrary of a hypothesis (see Yin, 2009). Triangulation allowed for more confidence in the findings just as differences were instructive.

Examining patterns across cases was performed in conjunction with the use of triangulation in this case study. The focus of the analysis was on the patterns found in the data between cases. According to Thomas (2011), patterns are the way of generalizing to the theory by finding connections related to ideas that are found in the data. Patterns that were found, along with differences between parents from the four family structures, served as the basis for this aspect of data analysis. The similarities and differences between cases were examined during the testing of the hypotheses of the case study. By addressing the hypotheses, patterns between cases were presented. This highlights how social learning theory and/or family systems theory may further address the area of sibling violence.

In summary, the quantitative and qualitative data that are provided by the participants were examined using triangulation and attention to patterns presented in the data. Per the data collection process, quantitative data were collected first and then subsequently the interviews and case scenarios followed. Both qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed independently

first. Then analysis of how the data collectively helped to better understand parents' experiences and perceptions was conducted. Incorporation of a case study database assisted in this process.

*Analyzing the hypotheses.* This section discusses how each of the forms of data collection helped address and respond to each of the hypotheses included in Table 3.3. Analysis and interpretation of findings used supporting evidence from any of the forms of data collection when needed. Table 3.8 provides the foundation for how addressing each hypothesis was approached. Ways in which each form of data addressed particular hypotheses are explained below.

**Table 3.8: Data Addressing the Hypotheses**

<i>Instrumentation/Form of Data Collection</i>	<i>Hypotheses</i>
The Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale	1, 2, 4, 5, 6
Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence Between Siblings Scale	7
Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument	3, 4
Open-ended Qualitative Interviews	1, 5, 6, 7

*Hypothesis One: Parents will normalize any sibling violence they experienced in their relationship with a sibling when they were a child.* To address this hypothesis information from the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale and the open-ended qualitative interviews were incorporated into the analysis. For parents from each family structure, responses from the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale were compared to information provided in the qualitative interviews. Once triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative data was completed for family structure then comparison across the units of analysis were made.

*Hypothesis Two: Parents who have a child who exhibits violence towards a sibling will have experiences of violence with their own sibling.* Similar to the analytic process for Hypothesis One, the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale and open-ended qualitative interviews were included to address this hypothesis. For each parent, responses to the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale were examined to determine any behaviors parents experienced with a sibling in childhood that were similar to what they witnessed between their children. Cross-case comparisons occurred upon completion of the first part of the within-family structure analysis.

*Hypothesis Three: Parents will label more behaviors from the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument as violent in nature as opposed to labeling behaviors sibling rivalry.* The Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument served as the foundation form of data analyzed to address this hypothesis. Responses from participants were assessed to determine behaviors associated with sibling violence, sibling rivalry, both sibling violence and sibling rivalry, and neither sibling violence nor sibling rivalry. Responses were then compared and contrasted across family structure.

*Hypothesis Four: Parents who experienced sibling violence as a child will be more likely to label violent behaviors as rivalry.* First, the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale was analyzed for each participant to determine if any form of physical or emotional violence with a sibling occurred in their childhood. Then, for those parents who experienced any form of sibling violence, responses to The Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument were examined to consider how they responded to those behaviors experienced with a sibling as well as the entire set of variables. Comparisons across participants from different family types followed.

*Hypothesis Five: The parent from single-parent home will experience more problems with sibling violence than from families with two parents.* Similar to Hypothesis One and Hypothesis Two, the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale and open-ended qualitative interviews addressed this hypothesis. Here the focus was on how parents responded to witnessing violence in their children. Responses from the participants' experiences of sibling violence as a child were used as supporting evidence, if applicable. Comparisons across family structure were presented and any supporting evidence from the open-ended qualitative interviews was included. Qualitative data was included to triangulate quantitative data.

*Hypothesis Six: Regardless of parent sexual orientation, parents will experience and perceive sibling violence in a similar fashion.* Using data from the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale and the open-ended qualitative interviews responses from participants from different family structures were compared and contrasted. Participants' experiences of sibling violence both in childhood and in witnessing violence between their children were considered. Responses from the open-ended qualitative interviews were included in the analysis to consider differences and similarities in responses towards sibling violence across parents from the various family types. This information was used to help substantiate the evidence through triangulation.

*Hypothesis Seven: Parents will respond similarly to the labels that have been used to refer to violence between siblings.* The Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale was analyzed to address this hypothesis. Responses from all participants, based on family structure, were compared and contrasted. Data from the open-ended qualitative interviews that help address this hypothesis was included.

For all hypotheses the testing of evidence of the selected theories occurred throughout the analysis and examination. To be consistent with the case study analytic process proposed by Yin



(2009), it was important to incorporate how the data do or do not address the theories that have been used as a guide. This helped in the analytic generalization of the case study findings back to theory.

***Decision-Making Model.*** A model addressing how parents may decide what constitutes problematic behavior between siblings was constructed based on the analysis of the data through the hypotheses and specifically based on the decision-making exercises. Using data from the open-ended qualitative interviews and the Case Scenario Decision-Making Process, a model was created that helps address how parents may decide what constitutes problematic behaviors between children. This model will be a starting point for future research that strives to better understand parental decision-making around identifying and potentially addressing sibling violence.

## **Rigor**

Throughout the research process, various activities were undertaken to ensure the proposed research project was rigorous. Yin (2009) mentions three principles of data collection in case study research: using multiple sources of evidence, creating a case study database, and maintaining a chain of evidence that, when completed, helps strengthen the construct validity and reliability of the process. Multiple sources of evidence were used in the case study research process. The following sections address how a database was constructed to house the quantitative and qualitative data and how a chain of evidence (Lee, Mishna, & Brennenstuhl, 2010; Yin, 2009) was created as a mechanism for auditing.

**Case study database.** During the data analysis process, Yin (2009) proposes creating a case study database to increase the reliability by organizing the information and documenting what data have been collected from participants. According to Bernard and Ryan (2010),

database management consists of records and fields, with records being the unit being analyzed (in this study scales, measurements, interviews, and observations) and the fields being the characteristics within those fields you want to examine (aspects within the scales, measurements, interviews, and observations). Quantitative data was stored and analyzed in SPSS; whereas, qualitative data was kept in Atlas.ti. Atlas.ti assisted in the data analysis process of the qualitative data so that themes could be identified from the interviews and responses to the case scenarios.

**Chain of evidence.** Lee, Mishna, and Brennenstuhl (2010) discussed the need to be transparent and explicit in how the chain of evidence links interpretations of the data back to the raw data. Similarly, Yin (2009) highlighted that maintaining a chain of evidence allows the researcher to increase the reliability of the case study by linking the case study questions with the findings through several steps. The research question and hypotheses of this research project were connected to the findings through the case study database, so that verification of connections can be audited. Although an outside auditor was not included in this research design, it was important to adhere to steps to make auditing possible, thus assuring research rigor.

**Reflexive journal.** Coinciding with the idea of connecting ideas from the findings back to the questions and hypotheses in the research project, a reflexive journal was included to monitor and report the author's analytic procedures and processes (Patton, 2002). Similar to Rodwell's (1998) idea of the reflexive journal as "the diary of the inquirer's journey through the project" (p.105), the ideas and connections regarding the data provided by participants and the author's interpretation of what is uncovered in this case study were recorded. Patterns addressing the research hypotheses were noted within the journal as they became evident. Along with noting themes and patterns that emerge from the research, journaling was completed to ensure that the

author remained as objective as possible in the research process. This information was periodically reviewed by the author and recorded throughout the data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation phases of the research process.

### **Human Subjects Protection**

The case study research project received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Virginia Commonwealth University. In order to assure all protective measures have been conducted through informing participants about the research study, interviews were conducted after informed consent (see Appendix A) was obtained from the participants. An explanation of the procedures included in the study along with participant involvement was thoroughly described. This included explicit information regarding the three phase process of data collection and how the participants were asked to be involved in the research process. The potential risks and discomforts of participating in the study was made clear and a list of referrals for counseling services (see Appendix B) was provided if the discussion and processing of violence between siblings conjure unintended memories or thoughts for participants. No participants mentioned any problematic feelings or thoughts as a result of engaging in the study. The participants were told of the potential benefits that may come from this study. These included learning more about violence between siblings and how parents perceive and experience this type of family violence. The possibility of the research impacting the implementation of programs, policies, and interventions was also be discussed.

**Details of confidentiality and privacy protections.** Discussion of confidentiality was included in the consent form so participants knew how the information they provide will be guarded. While anonymity was not possible given the data collection procedures utilized in this case study, every attempt at confidentiality and privacy was maintained. Gatekeepers had no

knowledge from the researcher about who participated in the research project. Participants were asked where they wanted to complete the data collection in order to address any concerns of privacy. Given the nature of the recruitment and the multiple data collection points, phone numbers and/or email were used to communicate with the participants. This information was kept on a password protected document of which only the researcher and the principal investigator had access. Participants were told that all identifying information will be erased and destroyed upon completion of three phases of data collection and analysis or if they chose to discontinue participation at any time. Every effort was made to maintain confidentiality including the use of different names for participants constructed by the researcher when discussing the results of the data analysis. Participants were also told that their participation was voluntary and that they could choose to stop their involvement in the research process at any time for any reason.

**Participant costs and incentives.** Participants were told of the costs of participating in the research process was the time they spent providing data. As part of participating in the study, participants received \$20 for participating in Phase 1, \$20 for participating in Phase 2, and \$20 for participating in Phase 3 of the data collection. The participants were paid an extra \$20 upon completion of all of the phases of data collection. Each participant included in the study who completed all three phases received a total of \$80. Given the amount of time that each phase took to complete along with the necessity in having data at all three phases from parents in each family type, the incentive was appropriate and not coercive. Participants were asked to sign a form acknowledging that they received payment for their participation at each data collection point.

### **Limitations**

There are several aspects of this research process that warrant discussion to better understand the limitations in the findings related to this research project.

**Sample of case study.** The sample included in the study is a limitation of the research process for several reasons. This sample was chosen partially due to feasibility and the practicality of this case study research process. All attempts were made to obtain participants by family structure that fit perfectly into all demographic categories based on the BRFSS; however, this did not occur. With respect to the percentage estimates for income, the nuclear family and single-parent family in the case study did not have household incomes consistent with the largest category for their family structure based on the BRFSS. The nuclear family had a parent who was recently unemployed and would have been in the category with the largest percentage of respondents of the BRFSS in Virginia if still employed or if the data had been collected from these participants two months earlier. Based on data analyzed from the BRFSS, the largest discrepancy occurred in the education of the same-sex participants, with the participants from the case study having more education than 61% of the same-sex respondents to the BRFSS.

The sample also consisted of only one set of parents from a same-sex family. The participants included in this case study identified as lesbians. It is probable that responses from a same-sex family with male parents would be different, given the differences in lesbian and gay parenting (American Psychological Association, 2005) and in experiences in general. Future studies should include the voice of gay male parents to fully include parents from both types of same-sex families. Coincidentally, although not included in this study, gender differences in how parents decide what constitutes problematic behavior and the differentiation between sibling violence and sibling rivalry may also be important to examine in future research.

While the voice of parents has been only minimally considered in the research on sibling violence and, thus the reason for this project, the voice of individuals of various ethnicities in sibling violence research is also miniscule (Rapoza, Cook, Zaveri, & Malley-Morrison, 2010). All participants included in this case study were Caucasian. Including perspectives of parents from various ethnic groups is essential to better understand how all parents perceive and experience sibling violence based on both their personal experiences and what they witness in their children. With individuals of different ethnicities appraising sibling abuse in different and similar ways (Rapoza, Cook, Zaveri, & Malley-Morrison, 2010), it is possible that parents may also have varying perspectives of sibling violence, which is important to understand, especially when considering psychoeducation and intervention strategies to address this type of violence.

One of the challenges of the case study methodology may be the sample due to the inclusion of small numbers of participants and how small samples can be perceived in research. It should be noted however, that this case study was conducted for knowledge building in an area where there is scant research, which is parental perceptions and experiences of sibling violence. This case study was buttressed by using specific strategies to identify an appropriate sample to address the hypotheses proposed. While the results of the sample are not generalizable, generalizability is not the purpose of this process. Enhanced generalizations of the material to theory was supported by the inclusion of multiple family structures. The purpose of this research study was to better understand how parents perceive and experience violence between siblings which the sample helped to do.

**Psychometric limitations.** The measurements used in the quantitative portion of this case study (Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale, Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence

and Sibling Rivalry Instrument and Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale) have not been previously assessed for validity and reliability. The Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale was developed based on the CTS (Straus, 1979) and included many of the behaviors from this scale. The CTS, however, did not include all of the behaviors necessary for this case study given the research that has demonstrated additional violent behaviors experienced in sibling relationships (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998; Wiehe, 1997). Both the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale and the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument included the same behaviors.

The creation of the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale was necessary to understand what behaviors participants had experienced in childhood and witnessed between their children. Utilizing the same behaviors from this scale, the creation of the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument was essential in understanding which behaviors participants classified as sibling violence, sibling rivalry, both sibling violence and sibling rivalry, or neither sibling violence nor sibling rivalry. The Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale, however, was constructed to learn more about participants' thoughts related to the wide variety of labels that have been used to refer to violent behavior between siblings in research and in the literature. It is likely that participants could have been confused or overwhelmed by the number of questions including various labels.

**Retrospective data.** Participants in this research study were asked to recall events from their past along with behaviors they had witnessed between their children. Retrospective data can be problematic as recalling memories from the past may be prone to error (Drake & Jonson-Reid, 2008). It is possible that participants did not recall all events they experienced in childhood and that they have witnessed between their children. With this case study including a focus on sibling

violence across generations, including retrospective data was essential. Furthermore, while retrospective data may potentially be flawed in some instances, obtaining longitudinal data across generations was neither feasible nor practical for this research project. Unlike the CTS, which asks participants about the severity and frequency of conflict tactics they have experienced or witnessed over the last year, participants were only asked about behaviors ever happening to minimize inaccurate responses of past behaviors experienced and witnessed. Asking participants to respond to the severity and frequency of behaviors in the quantitative portion of this project was not part of this project due to the period of time participants were asked to consider, which may have further confounded the accuracy of the recalled violent behaviors.

**Timing of data collection.** This case study included three data collection points for participants. The first data collection point consisted of participants' responding to three scales as well as demographic questions. The second data collection point consisted of a qualitative interview. The final data collection point included participants' responding to four case scenarios about sibling interactions. Ideally, all data collected from participants would have occurred in a similar manner with regard to time, but this did not occur. The participants from the blended family completed the data collection over several weeks, while the participant from the single-parent family completed all data collection over two consecutive days. The nuclear and same-sex families completed all of their data collection on the same day. All participants completed the first and second data collection points on the same day. For the participants from the blended family there was time to consider the notion of violent behaviors between siblings before engaging in the third data collection point. Interestingly, the parent from the single-parent family mentioned having thought about the scales she filled out and questions from the qualitative



interview from the first day of data collection when she returned to complete the third data collection point. The time between data collection could have allowed for some participants to reflect more on the topic of violence between siblings while others did not have the same opportunity despite not knowing the content of the third data collection point.

### **Strengths**

While there are limitations of this case study, there are also strengths of this research project which considered parental perceptions and experiences of sibling violence. The following sections highlight aspects of this case study research project as a developmental strategy to move forward to more generalized research with this case study research being highly rigorous and strong first step.

**Parental perspective.** The voice of parents regarding sibling violence is scant in the research surrounding this phenomenon. Much like the research conducted by Sawyer, Mishna, Pepler and Wiener (2011), which helped the missing voice of parents be heard regarding bullying, this project provided a platform for parents' voices to be heard regarding violence between siblings. Most of the research in the area of sibling violence has not included parents' perspectives from a qualitative standpoint (i.e. Kramer & Baron, 1995; Recchia, Wainryb, & Howe, 2013; Tucker & Kazura, 2013) thereby potentially not including all necessary components when trying to understand this type of family violence. With parents being integral parts of the developmental process for children, it is important to understand how parents perceive and experience sibling violence in order to better understand how to address it for children.

The voice of parents is also important when considering the distinctions between sibling violence and sibling rivalry, which is something this case study strived to do. Unlike research

that has considered only severely violent behaviors in establishing a model of severity of sibling violence (Khan & Cooke, 2013), this case study included a plethora of behaviors deemed to be violent in the literature. Participants were then asked to classify behaviors as sibling violence, sibling rivalry, both sibling violence and sibling rivalry, or neither sibling violence nor sibling rivalry. This was important to uncover which behaviors were deemed as more problematic and which behaviors were viewed as potentially more normative in the sibling relationship.

**Inclusion of different family structures.** Unlike any research project to date focused on the topic of sibling violence, this case study included a variety of parental perspectives from different family structures. Parents from a blended family, nuclear family, same-sex family, and single-parent family were included in this research project to better understand the influence of family structure when considering sibling violence. With the structure of families emerging to include multiple variations, knowledge of sibling violence in the context of a variety of family structures was timely.

**Multiple forms of data collection.** One of the advantages of conducting a case study is the multiple forms of data that are typically collected in the research process (Yin, 2009). This case study research project was no different in that many types of data were provided by the participants. Both quantitative and qualitative data helped to provide a better understanding of how parents from different family structures experience and perceive sibling violence. Quantitative and qualitative data were triangulated to provide layers of evidence to support the results of the data. The various types of data collected provided a wide array of ways to consider sibling violence from the viewpoint of the participants. The quantitative scales were constructed based on the previous research in the area of sibling violence, whereas the qualitative data collection allowed grounding in the participants' experience, thus allowing participants to

provide meaning to their responses on the scales, as well as other questions regarding multiple aspects of sibling violence and sibling rivalry.

**Inclusion of both sibling violence and sibling rivalry.** Compared to the amount of research and literature on child abuse and neglect, the amount of research and literature addressing sibling violence and sibling rivalry is minimal. Inclusion of both of these concepts in the same research study from the viewpoint of parents is practically non-existent (see Tucker & Kazura, 2013). Not only did this case study include sibling violence and sibling rivalry, but behaviors of each from the perspective of the parent were also examined. The findings from this research essentially allows for the consideration of what behaviors parents associated with sibling violence and those that are associated with sibling rivalry. This case study brings behaviors parents consider to the forefront of the discussion around problematic interaction between siblings and whether those behaviors are physical or emotional/psychological in nature. The creation of the parental decision-making model for problematic sibling interaction may help in furthering the discussion of sibling violence and sibling rivalry, which hopefully leads to interventions and psychoeducation to address these issues with parents of all family structures.

## **Conclusion**

The preceding discussion highlighted the mixed methods comparative case study research project to better understand how parents perceive and experience physical and emotional sibling violence. Hypotheses were been established to address the research question with consideration of social learning theory and family systems theory as the theoretical guiding positions. Incorporation of both quantitative and qualitative data along with triangulation of the data allowed for a more in-depth examination of how parents from different family structures experience and perceive physical and emotional sibling violence. The variety of ways in which

data was collected adhered to the goal in case study research of incorporating multiple forms of data (Yin, 2009). A plan to analyze the data to address the hypotheses was enacted as a mechanism of addressing the proposed research question. Data provided by participants helped to not only address how parents experience and perceive sibling violence but also aided in the construction of a testable parental decision-making model that demonstrates how parents decide what behaviors between siblings may be considered problematic.

## Chapter Four: Results

### Introduction

To examine the research question “How do parents of various family structures experience and perceive physical and emotional violence between their children and their own siblings?” various forms of data were analyzed. The results below address the seven hypotheses of this case study, as well as a decision-making model, based on the data analysis. Hypothesis One was analyzed using participant responses from the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale and the qualitative interviews to determine if participants normalized any sibling violence they experienced in childhood. The Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale was used to examine Hypothesis Two, which posited that parents who have a child who has exhibited violence towards a sibling will have had experiences of violence with their own sibling in childhood. Hypothesis Three focused on data from the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument to consider whether participants label more behaviors from the instrument as sibling violence or sibling rivalry. Responses from the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale were analyzed in conjunction with the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument for Hypothesis Four in order to consider whether participants who experienced sibling violence as a child would be more likely to label violent behaviors as sibling rivalry. Focusing on whether or not the participant from the single-parent family experienced more problems with sibling violence than other families, the examination of Hypothesis Five used data from the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale and the qualitative interview. The Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale along with data from the qualitative

interviews were analyzed to examine similarities and differences of parents of different sexual orientations for Hypothesis Six. For Hypothesis Seven, data from the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale was examined along with data from the qualitative interview to study whether or not participants responded similarly to the labels that have been used to refer to violence between siblings.

The decision-making model was also created as part of the data analysis process. At the third data collection point, participants were presented with scenarios describing various behaviors between siblings and then asked to describe what factors influenced whether or not they viewed a scenario as being indicative of sibling violence. Using participants' responses to these scenarios and the qualitative interviews, a model was constructed to depict those factors that appear to influence the decision-making process for participants in deciding whether certain situations between siblings are problematic or not.

### **Case Study Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis One: Parents will normalize any sibling violence they experienced in their relationship with a sibling when they were a child.** To address this hypothesis, participants completed the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale to identify their experience with 25 different behaviors with a sibling in childhood. All of the behaviors included in the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale have been discussed in the literature as being violent behaviors. The Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale was constructed to ascertain the frequency the parent experienced various behaviors using the following scale: never, rarely, sometimes, frequently, and very frequently. For the purposes of this analysis, responses were grouped into “ever having experienced or witnessed a behavior” or “never having experienced or witnessed a behavior” to allow for easier comparisons across cases, due to the small sample size and low

variability on the response scale. Table 4.1 shows the number of behaviors each participant reported having experienced with a sibling in childhood.

**Table 4.1: Total Number of Behaviors Experienced by Participant in Childhood**

	Participant Identifier						
	LFP2	NFP1	SFP1	BFP1	NFP2	BFP2	LFP1
Number of Behaviors Experienced as a Child	8	12	12	15	16	17	20

Ranging from eight to twenty behaviors, participants reported experiencing a wide number of behaviors with a sibling. NFP1 and SFP1 experienced the same number of behaviors. BFP1, BFP2, and NFP2 experienced similar numbers of behaviors. Of the participants, six of the seven experienced almost half (12 of 25) or more of the behaviors from the scale. The least number of behaviors were reported by LFP2, who experienced approximately one-third (8 of 25; 32%) of the behaviors with her sibling.

When comparing based on family structure (Table 4.2), LFP1 and LFP2 had the greatest discrepancy in number of behaviors experienced with a difference of twelve behaviors separating these participants. BFP1 and BFP2 reported having experienced similar number of behaviors

**Table 4.2: Total Number of Behaviors Experienced by Participant in Childhood by Family Structure**

	Participant Identifier						
	BFP1	BFP2	LFP1	LFP2	NFP1	NFP2	SFP1
Number of Behaviors Experienced as a Child	15	17	20	8	12	16	12

in childhood, with BFP2 reporting having experienced 2 more behaviors than his wife. NFP1 reported having experienced four less behaviors with her sister than NFP2 discussed having experienced with his brothers in childhood. Despite not having a partner to compare responses

to, SFP1 reported experiencing the second lowest number of behaviors (same amount of behaviors as NFP1) with her siblings in childhood.

The number of behaviors each participant noted having experienced is consistent with their stories on their experiences of violence with their siblings. For example, LFP2, BFP1, and BFP2 noted that they were not close with their siblings growing up and rarely had opportunities in which violence between them could occur. BFP1 noted, “My sister and I were five years apart and we were never very close. She had her things and I had mine. We just really didn’t mix that much” (P1-LFP1-225). NFP2 and LFP1, however, mentioned that behaviors more violent in nature occurred frequently in their interactions with their siblings. BFP1, BFP2, NFP1, and SFP1 all either mentioned or alluded to the notion that the behaviors they experienced in childhood with a sibling were what they considered typical.

*Normalization of violent behavior with a sibling.* To understand better whether participants normalized any violent behaviors with a sibling, data from the qualitative interviews were analyzed. Participants had a wide variety of experiences with their siblings in childhood regarding violent behaviors. The degree to which participants normalized the behaviors they experienced varied (Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3: Participants’ Reactions to Behaviors Experienced in Childhood as Normative or Not Normative**

BFP1	Normalized behaviors between her and her sister
BFP2	Did not normalize several of the experiences he had with his brother
LFP1	Normalized behaviors between her and her brother
LFP2	Did not normalize behaviors between her and her brother
NFP1	Normalized behaviors between her and her sister
NFP2	Normalized behaviors between him and his brother
SFP1	Normalized behaviors between her and her sister and brother

Participants normalized some behaviors while others were perceived as problematic. In some cases, particular behaviors were noted as normal but problematic by partners in the same family.



The following is an in-depth look at participants' approaches to normalizing violent behaviors between siblings.

*Experiences viewed as normal.* Violent behaviors were mentioned as being common in childhood by NFP2 and LFP1, yet their attribution of violence to the behaviors was different. For NFP2, violent behaviors occurred occasionally in the interactions he had with his brothers. NFP2 normalized the behaviors he experienced with his brothers based on his perception that he and his brothers lacked any intent to harm:

And sometimes it happens, but there's usually, again for me, the distinction is when one is in the mind and the heart of the perpetrator, when it becomes less a "I'm just being kid" to "I now have an intent to hurt" and I think that's...and that may be a distinction that doesn't exist, you know I'm 51 so I don't really know if I ever really thought about, I don't remember ever thinking that about my brothers...even when I was beating them up. It was not a conscious thought that I want to hurt them it was really just a...it was uncontrolled I'm full of anger on my part and they were there so they got it. But it was never like [brother] is a bad...there was never any of that. It was all heat of the moment just working out...parents were getting divorced...(P3-NFP2-073)

Despite violent behaviors not being acceptable in his mother's eyes, NFP2 stated "that didn't stop me from doing it" (P3-NFP2-287). NFP2 also noted that he views the behaviors he has witnessed between his children as more normal in nature because they have never escalated to the level of violence he experienced with his brothers. While NFP2 mentioned that he viewed his interactions with his brothers as normal rivalry—despite the violence that occurred between he and his siblings—his comparison to what he has witnessed in his children and personal

experiences may indicate that NFP2 views normal sibling experiences and violent behaviors between siblings differently.

Unlike NFP2, NFP1 stated she did not engage in violent behaviors despite there being conflict in their relationship prior to the time when her younger sister was in middle school. She stated:

My sister and I there was never a physical, I mean there maybe was very, very rarely a physical component. [When] someone's totally furious would slam the door or shove somebody but that would happen once or twice in the history... (P3-NFP1-99)

NFP1 mentioned that violence between her and her sister was not allowed in her home growing up and unlike her husband, did not normalize any behaviors she experienced with her sister growing up.

When thinking back on those sibling interactions that influenced her perception of normative behavior, SFP1 had a difficult time remembering behaviors that occurred other than being teased and picked on by her brother. This often led to fighting between her sister and her brother, as her sister stood up for SFP1. This triangulation in the sibling dyad was extremely infrequent with most of the fighting occurring between her siblings and not involving her directly. Rules of the family dictated sibling interaction, which influenced her understanding of non-normative sibling interaction:

We weren't allowed to be physical with each other, but I don't even remember the urge to want to do that or the fighting. Like I said, I know listening to stories my brother and sister fought like cats and dogs apparently according to my mom, her sisters, and my dad; but I don't even remember that. (P7-SFP1-149)

SFP1 gave no indication that her experiences in childhood with her siblings were non-normative. Despite her stories of the interactions between her brother and sister in childhood, SFP1 never noted that anything she felt was out of the ordinary in terms of her interactions with her siblings.

BFP1 mentioned having had a distant relationship with her sister while growing up, which she attributed to her age. When asked about how her past influenced her perceptions of violence between siblings, she stated distance between her and her sister prevented them from being close. BFP1 said that her and her sister had different friends and activities they were involved with which contributed to the distance they experienced. While BFP1 stated she did not experience much violence or negative interactions with her sister in childhood, she reported having experienced 15 of the 25 behaviors from the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale. In the qualitative interviews, BFP1 never mentioned any of her experiences to be non-normative. This may be an indication she normalized the behaviors she experienced with her sister in childhood.

LFP1 mentioned her relationship with her brother to be very close. LFP1 believed her experiences with her brother, even some of the more violent behaviors they experienced, were normal and were mechanisms that she believed allowed for bonding in childhood. Several incidents indicative of her understanding of normative sibling interaction involved:

chasing my brother down the hallway with a can of [hair removal cream] to try to get the hair off of his legs... there was laughter also and we knew that it was a game of chase essentially and so there also was a fun element to it so other things that would fall outside of that, and I might do this today. I would walk up behind him and on the back of his

head and give him a little pop. Not hard, but just pop on his forehead or whatever... (P5-LFP1-059: P5-LFP1-075)

LFP1 also noted having wrestled with her brother in childhood but described the behavior as playful without the intent to harm. She mentioned behaviors sometimes escalated out of control where lines could be blurred on what was normative:

There was always that point where either myself or him that you turn that off and you back off because it can get escalated. I remember plenty of times it started out as a tickling match or a wrestling, something fun, and before I knew it man I was going for him with... I can remember I had a fist raised him and with all my might was going to swing and punch him right in the stomach and he was smart enough to move or hold my head longer than my arm's length away so I couldn't get to him... (P5-LFP1-165)

Despite all of the incidents of violence LFP1 and her brother experienced in childhood, she stated:

So overall I would not classify any part of my relationship with my brother as violent. Even though if you said to me, "Is slapping violent?" Or whatever I probably checked "I agree" [referring to quantitative measures] but it's interesting because I would not say that any of it was necessarily violent. Sure did I kick him in the balls? Yes. Did it hurt? Yes.

Did he punch me in the nose? Probably. (P5-LFP1-325)

While LFP1 felt many of the behaviors she experienced with her brother were normal, her partner, LFP2, did not.

*Experiences viewed as not normal.* Unlike LFP1, LFP2 stated that violence was not normal in her relationship with her sibling, "Well, you know when I analyze it like this it's interesting because I don't remember... there was no violence that I would call, even on the verge

between my brother and I. There was sibling rivalry” (P5-LFP2-297). When responding to her partner’s story of chasing her brother with hair removal cream, she said, “see... yeah that to you is not violent, that's totally violent to me. Like that is demeaning and manipulating and awful” (P5-LFP2-069). Similarly, in response to her partner “smacking” her brother on the head LFP2 noted:

See we’ve had this discussion already because his daughter does that, [LFP1’s brother’s] daughter, your brother, his daughter does it to him, smacks him on the forehead... and I’m... it's appalling to me. It's just awful. And I've talked to them about it because I don't want them doing it in front of my children because I don't think it's okay.” (P5-LFP2-085: P5-LFP2-089)

LFP2’s experiences with her brother were more emotionally and verbally violent in nature and did not really include a physical component, whereas this was not the case for her partner who experienced physical violence with her brother. For LFP2, the distance she experienced with her brother was something she felt was not normal and even jokingly mentioned that had more instances of “violence” occurred between them that they might be closer emotionally now.

The distance between LFP2 and her brother was similar to that of the relationship BFP2 had with his brother in that each participant experienced emotional disconnect with their sibling in childhood, which continues to today. BFP2 noted that he and his brother were not very close growing up since his brother was rather introverted. He mentioned their relationship was influenced by unspoken rules about what was acceptable and what was not acceptable. BFP2 mentioned one incident that stood out to him that deviated from his normal sibling interaction:

I mean the two or three times my brother you know went a little far come to my mind at this point... yeah the time he pulled me from the [top of the bunk bed]...down from 6 feet

in the air or gosh there was one time when he had a fan pointed at his shoes all night because they were wet and wanted them dry by morning and someone had told me that fans catch fire if left on all night so I shut it off and I think he got a little physical with me the next day. (P1-BFP2-297)

BFP2 reported that he had very few interactions with his brother that he viewed as out of the ordinary, which was similar to the experiences of his wife; however, those instances that he viewed as not normal were vivid for him.

**Conclusion.** Hypothesis One was not supported with data being inconclusive in that five of the seven participants normalized violent behaviors they experienced with their siblings. Regardless of the family structure, participants differed on their perceptions of what was considered normative and what was not in discussing both their childhoods and relationships between siblings in general. **Past experiences, environment, and family context in conjunction with rules of the family (whether explicitly stated or alluded to) seemed to influence how participants did or did not normalize violent behavior with a sibling in childhood. Subsequently, past experiences also seemed to influence how participants viewed normative behaviors between their children.**

**Hypothesis Two: Parents who have a child who exhibits violence towards a sibling will have experiences of violence with their own sibling.** Participants were asked to identify those behaviors in the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale they had experienced with a sibling when they were a child, as well as those behaviors they observed between their children. Table 4.4 presents a comparison of those behaviors that participants experienced as a child and those they witnessed between their children. There was a wide variation between what they experienced in childhood and behaviors they witnessed between their children.

**Table 4.4: Comparison of Participants' Behaviors Experienced as Child to those Witnessed between Children**

Behavior	Participant Identifier						
	BFP1	BFP2	LFP1	LFP2	NFP1	NFP2	SFP1
2. Teasing	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
8. Yelling at a sibling	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
21. Doing something to spite a sibling	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
6. Tickling	●	●	●	●	●	◐	●
9. Grabbing	●	●	●	●	●	◐	●
23. Name calling	●	●	●	●	●	○	●
10. Manipulating	●	◐	●	●	●	◐	●
19. Insulting	●	●	●	◐	●	◐	●
18. Shoving	●	●	●	◐	◐	●	◐
25. Pushing	●	●	●	◐	◐	●	◐
17. Making a sibling feel guilty	●	○	●	●	●	○	●
7. Threatening	◐	●	◐	◐	●	●	◐
15. Kicking	◐	●	●	◐	◐	●	◐
3. Throwing something at a sibling	●	◐	●	○	◐	◐	●
13. Destroying a sibling's property	●	●	●	○	●	○	◐
14. Punching	◐	●	●	◐	○	●	◐
1. Slapping	◐	●	●	○	◐	◐	◐
12. Twisting a sibling's arm	◐	◐	◐	○	◐	●	○
16. Swearing at a sibling	○	◐	◐	○	●	○	○
22. Beating up a sibling	○	○	●	○	○	◐	○
4. Slamming a sibling against a wall	○	○	◐	○	○	◐	○

24. Pulling hair	●	○	○	○	○	○	●
20. Choking	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
5. Burning	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
11. Using weapons such as a knife, bat, or gun	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

- = Participant experienced behavior as a child and witnessed behavior between their children
- ◐ = Participant experienced behavior as a child but did not witness behavior between their children
- ◑ = Participant did not experience behavior as a child but did witness behavior between their children
- = Participant neither experienced behavior as a child nor witnessed behavior between their children

*Consensus in responding to certain behaviors: Emotional/psychological.* There were several behaviors all participants and their children had experienced and other behaviors that neither participants experienced nor did they report they witnessed between their children (Table 4.5).

**Table 4.5: Comparison of Emotional/Psychological Behaviors Experienced as Child to those Emotional/Psychological Behaviors Witnessed between Children**

Behavior	Participant Identifier						
	BFP1	BFP2	LFP1	LFP2	NFP1	NFP2	SFP1
2. Teasing	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
8. Yelling at a sibling	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
21. Doing something to spite a sibling	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
23. Name calling	●	●	●	●	●	○	●
10. Manipulating	●	◐	●	●	●	◐	●
19. Insulting	●	●	●	◐	●	◐	●
17. Making a sibling feel guilty	●	○	●	●	●	○	●
7. Threatening	◐	●	◐	◐	●	●	◐
13. Destroying a sibling's property	●	●	●	○	●	○	◐
16. Swearing at a	○	◐	◐	○	●	○	○



sibling							
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- = Participant experienced behavior as a child and witnessed behavior between their children
- ◐ = Participant experienced behavior as a child but did not witness behavior between their children
- ◑ = Participant did not experience behavior as a child but did witness behavior between their children
- = Participant neither experienced behavior as a child nor witnessed behavior between their children

*Teasing, yelling at a sibling and doing something to spite a sibling* were behaviors all participants experienced directly in childhood and had witnessed in their children. All participants reported having experienced *manipulating* in childhood with a sibling, with BFP2 and NFP2 not having witnessed this behavior between their children. Also, with the exception of LFP2 and NFP2, who reported never experiencing *insulting* with a sibling, all other respondents reported experiencing *insulting* with a sibling in childhood with everyone witnessing it in their children. NFP2 was the only participant to have never experienced or witnessed *name calling*, with every other participant having had experienced this behaviors with a sibling and witnessed this behavior between their children. All of these behaviors are associated with having an emotional-psychological nature to them.

**Consensus in responding to certain behaviors: Physical.** Table 4.6 presents all of the behaviors from the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale that are physical in nature.

**Table 4.6: Comparison of Physical Behaviors Experienced as Child to those Physical Behaviors Witnessed between Children**

Behavior	Participant Identifier						
	BFP1	BFP2	LFP1	LFP2	NFP1	NFP2	SFP1
6. Tickling	●	●	●	●	●	◐	●
9. Grabbing	●	●	●	●	●	◐	●
18. Shoving	●	●	●	◐	◐	●	◐
25. Pushing	●	●	●	◐	◐	●	◐
15. Kicking	◐	●	●	◐	◐	●	◐

3. Throwing something at a sibling	●	◐	●	○	◐	◐	●
14. Punching	◐	●	●	◐	○	●	◐
1. Slapping	◐	●	●	○	◐	◐	◐
12. Twisting a sibling's arm	◐	◐	◐	○	◐	●	○
22. Beating up a sibling	○	○	●	○	○	◐	○
4. Slamming a sibling against a wall	○	○	◐	○	○	◐	○
24. Pulling hair	◐	○	○	○	○	○	◐
20. Choking	◐	○	○	○	○	○	○
5. Burning	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
11. Using weapons such as a knife, bat, or gun	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

- = Participant experienced behavior as a child and witnessed behavior between their children
- ◐ = Participant experienced behavior as a child but did not witness behavior between their children
- ◑ = Participant did not experience behavior as a child but did witness behavior between their children
- = Participant neither experienced behavior as a child nor witnessed behavior between their children

There were several behaviors that participants reported having never experienced with a sibling nor witnessing between their children. These behaviors appear to be the most severe types of physically violent behaviors one can experience with a sibling. No participant either experienced or witnessed their children engaging in *burning* or *using a weapon such as a knife, bat, or gun*. *Choking* was another behavior participants reporting having never witnessed between their children with only BFP1 experiencing *choking* with her sister in childhood. No parent responded they had ever witnessed one of their children *slamming a sibling against a wall* or *pulling hair*, yet LFP1 and NFP2 had experienced *slamming a sibling against a wall* in childhood, and BFP1 and SFP1 had experiencing *pulling hair* with a sibling when young. All of these behaviors have a

physical component to them and based on the Table 4.6 appear to be on a continuum from least severe to most severe based on what participants reported experiencing in childhood and witnessing between their children.

***Participant experiences compared to behaviors witnessed in children.*** Participants reported experiencing and witnessing many of the behaviors included in the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale, but the degree to which experienced behaviors and witnessed behaviors coincided varied. For most of the behaviors, the difference between participant experience and what had been witnessed between children was minimal. There were, however, five behaviors for which participants responded to having experienced substantially<sup>8</sup> less than what they had witnessed between their children. Overall, participants reported experiencing less *threatening, kicking, punching, shoving, and pushing* compared to the extent to which they had witnessed their children engage in those same behaviors (Table 4.7). Behaviors listed in Table 4.7 are ordered beginning with those behaviors where the greatest discrepancy exists between experienced and witnessed behaviors for all participants.

**Table 4.7: Substantial Differences in Participants’ Behaviors Experienced as Child Compared to those Witnessed between Children**

Behavior	Participant Identifier						
	BFP1	BFP2	LFP1	LFP2	NFP1	NFP2	SFP1
7. Threatening	○	●	○	○	●	●	○
15. Kicking	○	●	●	○	○	●	○
14. Punching	○	●	●	○	○	●	○
18. Shoving	●	●	●	○	○	●	○
25. Pushing	●	●	●	○	○	●	○

● = Participant experienced behavior as a child and witnessed behavior between their children

<sup>8</sup> For each behavior the total number of participants who had experienced a behavior in childhood and the total number of participants who had witnessed a behavior between their children were calculated. These numbers were then compared for each behavior to determine if in any behavior there was a difference of at least three participants who experienced a behavior compared to the number of participants who witnessed a behavior between children.

- = Participant experienced behavior as a child but did not witness behavior between their children
- ◐ = Participant did not experience behavior as a child but did witness behavior between their children
- = Participant neither experienced behavior as a child nor witnessed behavior between their children

All participants reported witnessing all five of the behaviors in their children with the exception of NFP1 who reported not witnessing any *punching* between her daughter and son. Four of the seven participants reported witnessing *threatening*, *punching*, and *kicking* between their children yet did not experience these behaviors with their own sibling in childhood. Three parents noted they witnessed *shoving* and *pushing* in their children, but did not experience these behaviors in childhood. Of these five behaviors, all are physical in nature compared to *threatening* which is more emotional-psychological in nature.

***Similarities in behaviors experienced and witnessed by family structure.*** Comparisons of experienced and witnessed behaviors based on family structure were conducted to examine differences between participants. These comparisons were completed as it could be hypothesized that parents within the same family might be likely to witness the same behaviors in their children. Table 4.8 presents the total number of behaviors participants reported experiencing as a child and the number of behaviors participants reported witnessing in their children by family structure.

**Table 4.8: Total Number of Behaviors Experienced by Participant and Witnessed by Participant**

	Participant Identifier						
	BFP1	BFP2	LFP1	LFP2	NFP1	NFP2	SFP1
Number of Behaviors Experienced as a Child	15	17	20	8	12	16	12
Number of Witnessed Behaviors of Children	18	15	18	14	18	10	16

Participant responses to the behaviors experienced and witnessed were in some ways similar when compared across family structure, but not necessarily within family structure. When comparing the total number of behaviors experienced and witnessed by participant no patterns in the data emerged. When considering the responses by participant within the context of family structure, however, an interesting pattern can be seen. With the exception of the single-parent family, which had only one parent to consider, the other family structures contained one parent who experienced more behaviors with a sibling than they witnessed and one parent who witnessed more behaviors than they personally experienced with a sibling in childhood. BFP2, LFP1, and NFP2 all reported that they experienced more behaviors with a sibling in childhood than what they had witnessed between their children. All of these participants had brothers growing up with NFP2 having had two brothers. BFP1, LFP2, NFP1, and SFP1 reported witnessing more behaviors in their children than what they had experienced with a sibling in childhood. All of these participants are women, and BFP1, NFP1, and SFP1 had a sister growing up whereas LFP2 had a brother growing up.

**Conclusion.** The data show that both participants and their children have experienced violent behaviors indicating the hypothesis was supported. The average number of behaviors experienced by participants in childhood ( $M=14.29$ ) was similar to the average number of behaviors participants reported witnessing in their children ( $M=15.57$ ). **The types of behaviors experienced by participants and their children appear to vary with no specific patterns emerging based on type, however both participants and their children tend to engage in violent behaviors.** Participants reported these behaviors to occur across generations indicating there may be an intergenerational component to violence experienced in sibling dyads.

**Hypothesis Three: Parents will label more behaviors from the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument as violent in nature as opposed to labeling the behaviors as sibling rivalry.** Responses from participants on the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument were totaled for each behavior under each category (“Sibling Violence,” “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry,” “Sibling Rivalry,” and “Neither Sibling Violence nor Sibling Rivalry”). Table 4.9 represents the total response by category on the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument.

**Table 4.9: Total Participant Response by Category for the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument**

	Sibling Violence	Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry	Sibling Rivalry	Neither Sibling Violence nor Sibling Rivalry
4. Slamming a sibling against a wall	6	1		
11. Using weapons such as a knife, bat, or gun	6	1		
22. Beating up a sibling	6	1		
3. Throwing something at a sibling	5	2		
20. Choking	5	2		
5. Burning	5	1		1
1. Slapping	4	3		
24. Pulling hair	4	3		
12. Twisting a sibling's arm	3	4		
14. Punching	3	4		
15. Kicking	3	4		
25. Pushing	1	6		
7. Threatening	1	5	1	
6. Tickling	1	2	2	2
9. Grabbing		7		
13. Destroying a sibling's property		7		
16. Swearing at a sibling		7		
18. Shoving		7		
8. Yelling at a sibling		6	1	
19. Insulting		6	1	

10. Manipulating		5	2	
17. Making a sibling feel guilty		4	3	
21. Doing something to spite a sibling		4	3	
23. Name calling		4	3	
2. Teasing		3	4	

When looking specifically at the categories, participants determined more behaviors were indicative solely of “Sibling Violence” (14 of 25 behaviors) than they did “Sibling Rivalry” (9 of 25 behaviors). However, most behaviors were identified as “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry” with all 25 behaviors being placed in this category by at least one participant. For each behavior, most participants placed behaviors in either the “Sibling Violence” or “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry” categories with only two items identified as neither by three participants.

**Sibling violence.** Participants were not unanimous in placing any of the behaviors solely into the category of “Sibling Violence” (Table 4.10). There were, however, several instances where the majority thought particular behaviors fit into this category. Six of the seven participants stated that *slamming a sibling against a wall, using weapons such as a knife, bat, or gun, and beating up a sibling* were sibling violent behaviors. *Throwing something at a sibling and choking a sibling* were behaviors deemed to be violent by five participants.

**Table 4.10: Participant Response to “Sibling Violence” for the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument**

	Sibling Violence
4. Slamming a sibling against a wall	6
11. Using weapons such as a knife, bat, or gun	6
22. Beating up a sibling	6
3. Throwing something at a sibling	5
20. Choking	5

5. Burning	5
1. Slapping	4
24. Pulling hair	4
12. Twisting a sibling's arm	3
14. Punching	3
15. Kicking	3
25. Pushing	1
7. Threatening	1
6. Tickling	1

**Sibling rivalry.** Only nine behaviors were found to be indicative solely of sibling rivalry by at least one participant (Table 4.11). The greatest number of participants placing any behavior in this category was four for the behavior of *teasing* with the remaining three participants placing this behavior in the category of “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry.” While some individuals indicated certain behaviors fit into this category, no particular behavior received a majority (five out of seven) of participant votes.

**Table 4.11: Participant Response to “Sibling Rivalry” for the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument**

	Sibling Rivalry
2. Teasing	4
17. Making a sibling feel guilty	3
21. Doing something to spite a sibling	3
23. Name calling	3
6. Tickling	2
10. Manipulating	2
7. Threatening	1
8. Yelling at a sibling	1
19. Insulting	1

**Both sibling violence and sibling rivalry.** All participants believed four behaviors (*grabbing, destroying a sibling's property, swearing at a sibling, and shoving*) fit into the category of “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry” (Table 4.12). Six participants responded that they thought *yelling at a sibling, insulting, and pushing* and fit into the category of “Both



Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry.” *Threatening* and *manipulating* was placed into this category by five of the seven participants. In addition, each of the other 21 behaviors was identified as belonging to this category by at least one participant.

**Table 4.12: Participant Response to “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry” for the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument**

	<b>Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry</b>
9. Grabbing	7
13. Destroying a sibling’s property	7
16. Swearing at a sibling	7
18. Shoving	7
8. Yelling at a sibling	6
19. Insulting	6
25. Pushing	6
7. Threatening	5
10. Manipulating	5
12. Twisting a sibling’s arm	4
14. Punching	4
15. Kicking	4
17. Making a sibling feel guilty	4
21. Doing something to spite a sibling	4
23. Name calling	4
1. Slapping	3
2. Teasing	3
24. Pulling hair	3
3. Throwing something at a sibling	2
6. Tickling	2
20. Choking	2
4. Slamming a sibling against a wall	1
5. Burning	1
11. Using weapons such as a knife, bat, or gun	1
22. Beating up a sibling	1

*Neither sibling violence nor sibling rivalry.* Only two behaviors were considered by any participant as “Neither Sibling Violence nor Sibling Rivalry,” (Table 4.13). Two participants

placed *tickling* in this category with one participant believing that *burning* was neither sibling violence nor sibling rivalry. No other category contained fewer behaviors than this category.

**Table 4.13: Participant Response to “Neither Sibling Violence nor Sibling Rivalry” for the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument**

	Neither Sibling Violence nor Sibling Rivalry
6. Tickling	2
5. Burning	1

**Sibling violence/Both sibling violence and sibling rivalry.** All of the behaviors from the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument that were placed in the “Sibling Violence” category were also placed in the “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry” categories by at least one participant (Table 4.14). Six of the seven participants placed *slamming a sibling against a wall; using weapons such as a knife, bat, or gun; and beating up a sibling* in the “Sibling Violence” category. *Throwing something at a sibling, choking, and burning*, were reported as being “Sibling Violence” by five participants. Four participants placed *slapping and pulling hair* in the “Sibling Violence” category with three parents placing these behaviors in the “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry” category. Similarly, three participants placed *twisting a sibling’s arm, punching, and kicking*, into the “Sibling Violence” category with four participants stating each of these was both sibling violence and rivalry.

**Table 4.14: Participant Response to “Sibling Violence” and “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry” for the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument**

	Sibling Violence	Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry
4. Slamming a sibling against a wall	6	1
11. Using weapons such as a knife, bat, or gun	6	1
22. Beating up a sibling	6	1
3. Throwing something at a sibling	5	2

20. Choking	5	2
5. Burning	5	1
1. Slapping	4	3
24. Pulling hair	4	3
12. Twisting a sibling's arm	3	4
14. Punching	3	4
15. Kicking	3	4
25. Pushing	1	6
7. Threatening	1	5
6. Tickling	1	2

**Both sibling violence and sibling rivalry/Sibling rivalry.** All behaviors where at least one participant placed a behavior in the “Sibling Rivalry” category had at least two participants place the same behavior in the “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry” category (Table 4.15). Of the behaviors placed in both categories, six of seven participants placed *yelling at a sibling* and *insulting* as “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry” with one participant placing these behaviors in the “Sibling Rivalry” category. Five of the seven participants placed *manipulating* and *threatening* as behaviors related to both sibling violence and sibling rivalry, with only two individuals placing *manipulating* and one participant placing *threatening* in the “Sibling Rivalry” category. The rest of the behaviors that were placed in both the “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry” and “Sibling Rivalry” categories were fairly evenly divided. *Making a sibling feel guilty, doing something to spite a sibling, and name calling* were all listed as “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry” by four participants with three of the participants stating these behaviors were solely sibling rivalry. Four participants believed *teasing* to be associated with sibling rivalry with three stating it was both violent and part of sibling rivalry.

**Table 4.15: Participant Response to “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry” and “Sibling Rivalry” for the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument**

	Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry	Sibling Rivalry
8. Yelling at a sibling	6	1
19. Insulting	6	1
10. Manipulating	5	2
7. Threatening	5	1

17. Making a sibling feel guilty	4	3
21. Doing something to spite a sibling	4	3
23. Name calling	4	3
2. Teasing	3	4
6. Tickling	2	2

**Conclusion.** The hypothesis was not supported with inconclusive data in that participants labeled more behaviors as solely “Sibling Violence” than they did solely “Sibling Rivalry” yet all of the behaviors were listed by at least one participant as being “Both Sibling Rivalry and Sibling Violence.” If the category of “Both Sibling Rivalry and Sibling Violence” were considered as a “neutral” category, one could argue that more behaviors were labeled as violent as opposed to being associated with sibling rivalry; however, this would oversimplify the lack of clarity surrounding the perceptions of the behaviors by the participants. Labeling behaviors as either “Sibling Violence” or “Sibling Rivalry” appears to be a process that is not clear cut, but includes gray areas.

**Hypothesis Four: Parents who experienced sibling violence as a child will be more likely to label behaviors as rivalry.** To address this hypothesis, responses to the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument were examined in conjunction with the number of violent behaviors experienced with a sibling in childhood from the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale. The classification of behaviors as either “Sibling Rivalry,” “Sibling Violence,” or “Both Sibling Rivalry and Sibling Violence” was then compared to the number of behaviors experienced in childhood.

**Classifying behaviors as “sibling rivalry” or “both sibling rivalry and sibling violence.”** Responses to how many behaviors each participant labeled as either “sibling rivalry” or “both sibling rivalry and sibling violence” are included in Table 4.16. With the exception of

SFP1 who had fairly equal numbers of behaviors in both categories, respondents overwhelming labeled more behaviors from the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument as being “both sibling rivalry and sibling violence” than they did as being associated only with “sibling rivalry.” NFP1 and NFP2 reported no behaviors being solely “sibling rivalry” with BFP2 reporting only one behavior in that category.

**Table 4.16: Number of Times Participants Reported a Behavior as “Sibling Rivalry” or “Both Sibling Rivalry and Sibling Violence”**

Response	Participant Identifier						
	BFP1	BFP2	LFP1	LFP2	NFP1	NFP2	SFP1
<b><i>Sibling Rivalry</i></b>	5 (20%)	1 (4%)	3 (12%)	4 (16%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (28%)
<b><i>Both Sibling Rivalry and Sibling Violence</i></b>	14 (56%)	17 (68%)	18 (72%)	11 (44%)	14 (56%)	17 (68%)	8 (32%)

*Numbers in parentheses represent the percentage of the 25 behaviors that participants classified as either “Sibling rivalry” or “Both sibling rivalry and sibling violence.”*

Percentages provided in Table 4.16 help demonstrate the portion of behaviors each participant classified as either “Sibling Violence” or “Both Sibling Rivalry or Sibling Violence” out of the 25 possible behaviors included in the instrument. SFP1 and BFP1 had the highest percentages of behaviors classified solely as “Sibling Rivalry.” SFP1 labeled over 25% of the behaviors as “Sibling Rivalry” whereas BFP1 gave 20% behaviors the same classification. When considering behaviors associated with both sibling rivalry and sibling violence, five of the seven (BFP1, BFP2, LFP1, NFP1, and NFP2) classified at least half of the behaviors as being “Both Sibling Rivalry and Sibling Violence.” The two participants who did not classify at least half of the behaviors this way (LFP2 and SFP1) still labeled 44% and 32%, respectively, of the behaviors as being “Both Sibling Rivalry and Sibling Violence.” All participants associated more behaviors with “both sibling rivalry and sibling violence” than they did solely with “sibling rivalry.”

*Comparing the number of behaviors experienced as a child to classification of “sibling rivalry,” “both sibling rivalry and sibling violence,” or “sibling violence.”* The hypothesis was constructed with the idea that participants who had experienced sibling violence would be more likely to minimize behaviors since they had experienced violence in childhood with a sibling. Put another way, experience with violent behaviors as a sibling in childhood child would “desensitize” participants to how problematic behaviors are leading to their classification of behaviors as more consistent with the notion of sibling rivalry rather than sibling violence. Table 4.17 includes the number of behaviors participants experienced as a child, as well as the number of behaviors each participant classified as indicative of “Sibling Rivalry,” “Sibling Violence,” and “Both Sibling Rivalry and Sibling Violence.”

**Table 4.17: Participant Classification of a Behavior as “Sibling Rivalry” or “Both Sibling Rivalry and Sibling Violence” or “Sibling Violence” Compared to the Number of Behaviors Each Participant Experienced as a Child**

Response	Participant Identifier						
	BFP1	BFP2	LFP1	LFP2	NFP1	NFP2	SFP1
<i>Sibling Rivalry</i>	5 (20%)	1 (4%)	3 (12%)	4 (16%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (28%)
<i>Both Sibling Rivalry and Sibling Violence</i>	14 (56%)	17 (68%)	18 (72%)	11 (44%)	14 (56%)	17 (68%)	8 (32%)
<i>Sibling Violence</i>	5 (20%)	7 (28%)	3 (12%)	10 (40%)	11 (44%)	8 (32%)	9 (36%)
<i>Number of Behaviors Experienced as a Child</i>	15	17	20	8	12	16	12

Participants generally classified more behaviors as solely violent than they did as being associated solely with sibling rivalry. Neither NFP1 nor NFP2 labeled any of the behaviors from the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument as indicative of solely rivalry; however, NFP1 classified 11 behaviors (44%) and NFP2 classified 8 behaviors

(32%) as solely “Sibling Violence.” With the exception of BFP1 and LFP1, who classified the same amount of behaviors as both rivalry and violence, all other participants had high percentages of behaviors they classified as “Sibling Violence” compared to “Sibling Rivalry.” Also, SFP1 was the only participant to classify more behaviors as “Sibling Violence” (9 behaviors, 36%) rather than “both sibling rivalry and sibling violence” (8 behaviors, 32%), but the numbers were very close.

The number of behaviors participants experienced with a sibling was then compared to how participants classified behaviors. For BFP1, BFP2, LFP1, and NFP2 the number of behaviors they experienced as a child with a sibling was similar to the number of behaviors that were classified as “both sibling rivalry and sibling violence.” For LFP2 and NFP1, the number of behaviors labeled as “both sibling rivalry and sibling violence” and the number of behaviors experienced were relatively close. SFP1 reported experiencing more behaviors in childhood than what she classified into any of the three categories. The three participants who reported experiencing the most violent behaviors in childhood with a sibling (BFP2, LFP1, and NFP2) were also three of the four participants who reported the least number of behaviors to be to be classified as “sibling rivalry.” Furthermore, these participants classified more behaviors as “both sibling rivalry and sibling violence” than any of the other participants.

**Conclusion.** It was expected that participants who reported experiencing more violent behaviors with a sibling would report more behaviors to be “Sibling Rivalry.” This was hypothesized due to idea that participants with more experience with violent behaviors would classify more behaviors as “normative” or typical in the sibling dyad. In this instance, **the hypothesis was not supported indicating that participants who experienced more violent**

**behaviors in childhood are not necessarily more likely to label behaviors as “Sibling Rivalry.”**

**Hypothesis Five: The parent from the single-parent home will experience more problems with sibling violence than from families with two parents.** To address this hypothesis, data focusing on behaviors participants have witnessed between their children from the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale were analyzed. Comparisons of the number and types of behaviors were conducted to consider similarities and differences based on family structure. Participants from the blended and same-sex families did not explicitly discuss any situations in which violence had occurred between their children, whereas participants from the nuclear and single-parent families did. The stories from the participants from the nuclear and single-parent families are quite similar. Evidence from the qualitative interviews from SFP1 and NFP1 is discussed in depth below to highlight the similarities in the experiences of these two family structures as they relate to violence and conflict between the children in these families.

*Violent behaviors witnessed by the parent from the single-parent family compared to the other parents.* For many of the behaviors listed in the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale, SFP1 responded similarly to other parents in the number of behaviors they witnessed (Table 4.18).

**Table 4.18: Total Number of Behaviors Witnessed by Participant**

	Participant Identifier						
	SFP1	BFP1	BFP2	LFP1	LFP2	NFP1	NFP2
Number of Witnessed Behaviors of Children	16	18	15	18	14	18	10

While there was not a collective experience from all participants on the behaviors they had witnessed between their children, the behaviors witnessed by SFP1 were not unlike what other



participants had witnessed. When considering the responses from the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale, at least two other participants, oftentimes more than two, had witnessed or not witnessed the same behaviors SFP1 had between their children (Table 4.19).

**Table 4.19: Behaviors Witnessed by Participants in Their Children by SFP1**

Behavior	Participant Identifier						
	SFP1	BFP1	BFP2	LFP1	LFP2	NFP1	NFP2
2. Teasing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7. Threatening	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
8. Yelling at a sibling	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
15. Kicking	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
18. Shoving	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
19. Insulting	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
21. Doing something to spite a sibling	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
25. Pushing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
6. Tickling	X	X	X	X	X	X	
9. Grabbing	X	X	X	X	X	X	
23. Name calling	X	X	X	X	X	X	
14. Punching	X	X	X	X	X		X
1. Slapping	X	X	X	X		X	
3. Throwing something at a sibling	X	X	X	X		X	
10. Manipulating	X	X		X	X	X	
17. Making a sibling feel guilty	X	X		X	X	X	
13. Destroying a sibling's property		X	X	X		X	
12. Twisting a sibling's arm		X				X	X
22. Beating up a sibling				X			
16. Swearing at a sibling						X	
4. Slamming a sibling against a wall							
5. Burning							
11. Using weapons such as a							

knife, bat, or gun							
20. Choking							
24. Pulling hair							

The frequency with which several of the behaviors were witnessed by SFP1 is substantially important to note based on the experiences of the family. Table 4.20 contains the responses to SFP1 and the rest of the participants to several behaviors from the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale.

**Table 4.20: Notable Responses from SFP1 on the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale of Witnessed Behaviors between Children**

Behavior Witnessed	Frequency of Witnessing Behavior	Participant Identifier						
		SFP1	BFP1	BFP2	LFP1	LFP2	NFP1	NFP2
<b>Insulting</b>	<i>Frequently</i>	X						
	<i>Sometimes</i>		X	X			X	
	<i>Rarely</i>				X	X		X
	<i>Never</i>							
<b>Name-Calling</b>	<i>Frequently</i>	X						
	<i>Sometimes</i>		X	X		X		
	<i>Rarely</i>				X		X	
	<i>Never</i>							X
<b>Making a sibling feel guilty</b>	<i>Frequently</i>		X					
	<i>Sometimes</i>	X					X	
	<i>Rarely</i>				X	X		
	<i>Never</i>			X				X
<b>Shoving</b>	<i>Frequently</i>							
	<i>Sometimes</i>	X	X					
	<i>Rarely</i>			X	X	X	X	X
	<i>Never</i>							

SFP1 responded similarly to at least one other participant based on witnessing *shoving* and *making a sibling feel guilty*. Regarding the *insulting* and *name-calling*, SFP1 was the only participant to note witnessing these behaviors frequently. With the exception of *shoving*, the

behaviors *making a sibling feel guilty, insulting, and name-calling* are all behaviors having an emotional and/or psychological component. These behaviors are important to note here as they were mentioned by SFP1 as occurring between her children not only in the quantitative data, but also in the qualitative data she provided. To better understand the importance of how SFP1 responded to these behaviors with emotional/psychological underpinnings that were included on the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale of witnessed behaviors between children, it is necessary to consider data from the first qualitative interview that occurred with this participant.

*The story of the single-parent family.* The story SFP1 shared regarding her family, family members' experiences, and the relationship her children supports why she responded to the way she did regarding several of the behaviors she witnessed between her children. At the beginning of the first interview I asked the participant what came to mind when I said "sibling violence." Her response indicated that while she first thought of physical acts, emotional/psychological behaviors came to mind as well:

Well when I was reading through that list of physical acts initially, the choking, the punching, the kicking, pushing, shoving, burning, but reading through that list I noticed that a lot of the ones I marked as being more severe, not more severe but as severe were the emotional-psychological ones because of personal experiences with my two daughters... and I never even...when you say it I think physical but when I was doing this I was like, "holy cow, the emotional part can be just as damaging," because of what has happened with my two girls. (P7-SFP1-017)

Her perceptions of violence seem to have been influenced by what she had witnessed between her daughters. She realized that emotional and psychological behaviors can be just as problematic as physical behaviors.

*Family life of the (pre)single-parent family.* SFP1 went into great detail explaining what she felt precipitated the problematic behaviors between her children. She discussed having had a tumultuous relationship with her now ex-husband before they were divorced. When she was six years old, SFP1's oldest daughter caught her father with another woman and told SFP1 about what she saw. This resulted in a divorce for which this daughter blamed herself. As a result of the daughter telling her mother what she had witnessed and the subsequent divorce, the father refused any interaction with the oldest daughter and only saw the younger daughter during visitation. He would say to the oldest daughter, "I want to see [younger daughter], you and I don't get along" (P7-SFP1-017). As a result of this, the oldest daughter became very depressed and angry and would become violent with her younger sister. The father eventually stopped visitation with both daughters and the oldest daughter became increasingly depressed and despondent. It was during this time that the oldest daughter was hospitalized for suicidal ideation.

*Emotional-psychological violence between siblings in the single-parent family.* As a result of the daughters' father only wanting to see one child and not the other, discord ensued between the siblings. This, coupled with the depression the oldest daughter was experiencing, led to problems between the sisters. SFP1 discussed how much of the violence she witnessed between her children was emotional and/or psychological in nature. There were some cases of physical violence such as shoving; however, some of what she saw between her children was not physical but psychological. The oldest daughter would tell her sister, "I wish I was dead, they love you better" and "I wish I was dead because everybody likes you better, you're perfect" (P7-SFP1-017). These statements, while expressing the sadness of the older daughter, present the notion of guilt that was experienced by the younger daughter. While SFP1 mentioned the

physical component of violence between her daughters (mainly from oldest to youngest) the emotional/psychological aspect of what she witnessed resonated with her in a way that it had not previously when she reflected, “So we all had guilt to go around, but that's the backdrop of the emotional part that I didn't even think about until I was reading this” (P7-SFP1-017).

*Reasoning for sibling violence in the single-parent family.* Much of the violence between the siblings in the single-parent family occurred after the divorce. Attributing the sibling violence that occurred in the family to the structure of the family, however, would seem to be inaccurate. The experiences of the family contributed to violence between the sisters in this family. The pre-divorce conflict between the parents; the affair the father had; the guilt the older daughter felt in finding out about the affair and her disclosure of what she saw; the lack of participation (and rejection) of the father in both of his daughters’ lives; and the substantial depression the oldest daughter experienced appear to be related to the experiences of sibling violence in this family. The psychological and sociological context of the members of the family seems relate to the occurrence of sibling violence, not the family structure. The experiences of sibling violence in this family are not unlike those of the nuclear family from this case study, in that the siblings in the nuclear family were also affected by biopsychosocial factors that influence violent behavior.

*Similarities in experiences of sibling violence between the nuclear family and single-parent family.* Much like the experience of depression of the older daughter in the single-parent family, the daughter from the nuclear family also experienced depression and some anxiety. The depression of the daughter in the nuclear family was not as severe as that of the daughter from the single-parent family with no suicidal ideation or extreme behaviors being discussed. Her depression was discussed as being a result of the biological and social changes she was experiencing. The daughter from this family experienced changes both physically (puberty) and

socially (school, friends, and peers) that impacted her relationship with her brother, sometimes leading to problematic behaviors between them. NFP2 noted:

I think that probably the ugliest stuff we've seen, and there hasn't been for a while now, praise the Lord, but for a good I guess it was when [daughter] was first hitting adolescence and for so long she and [son] had been best buds and she's [son's] idol. And she was getting her period and all the things were happening and she was pulling away from him. That really confused him and hurt him and she didn't want... "I want to spend time with my friends and not with you" and that made him really angry. I don't know if I would say that was rivalry but that anger informed other dynamics throughout the day and he related to her because he would have a chip [on his shoulder] and something else would happen and he'd carry it into that dynamic. (P3-NFP2-179)

The mother of the children, NFP1, stated that, "sometimes we see how the violence or rivalry between the kids is part of a larger thing" (P3-NFP1-477). Here the violence experienced between the children in the nuclear family was not a result of being in a nuclear family, but seems to be influenced by the external and internal factors associated with the daughter in the family, much like that of the single-parent family.

Both daughters in each family experienced depression, and both received treatment for the depression. Each daughter was at one time involved in individual therapy with both families experiencing family therapy. SFP1 noted that the therapy has helped the relationship between her children. Similarly, NFP1 stated:

[The daughter] has just started treatment for depression and anxiety and some talk therapy as well and that's making a big difference in how they're interacting with each other so that's just been a reality in the nuclear family and I think the fighting and the

acting out between them did at some point become sort of baffling, but there were ways in which we sort of identified her as the “patient” needing attention at that point, but we’re seeing as she becomes healthier it’s making [sister-brother] relationship happier which is kinda cool. (P3-NFP1-477)

The similarities between the two families in what they experienced regarding violence between siblings appear to be connected more to the biopsychosocial factors than the structure of the family. Participants from both family structures noted resources such as counseling and medication to be important in helping to change the dynamic in the sibling relationship.

**Conclusion.** SFP1 reported having witnessed her children engage in 16 of the 25 behaviors listed on the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale. Three of the participants (BFP1, LFP1, and NFP1) reported witnessing more behaviors in their children and three of the participants (BFP2, LFP2, and NFP2) reported witnessing fewer behaviors in their children than SFP1. The sibling violence that did occur in the single parent family seemed to be related to the biopsychosocial and environmental context of the family and was not necessarily a result of being in single-parent family. This was similar to instances of violence between children in the nuclear family where biopsychosocial factors influenced problematic behaviors between children. Participants from the blended and same-sex families did not explicitly discuss instances of problematic behavior between their children, yet they did report that violent behaviors occurred through their responses to the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale. **This hypothesis is not supported. The results indicate that the parent from the single-parent home did not experience more sibling violence between her children.**

**Hypothesis Six: Regardless of parent sexual orientation, parents will experience and perceive sibling violence in a similar manner.** Qualitative data and responses from the

Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale were analyzed to determine whether participants from the same-sex family experienced and/or perceived sibling violence in a similar or dissimilar manner from those participants of other family structures. Qualitative data were analyzed to examine any instances where participant's sexual orientation was discussed as influencing perceptions or experiences of sibling violence from the point of view of all participants. Responses from the Experiences with Sibling Violence Scale were analyzed to consider any similarities or differences in how participants responded. Specifically, LFP1 and LFP2 were asked about how they believed their family consisting of two mothers influenced how they viewed violence in the sibling relationship. Their responses were analyzed for any indications supporting sexual orientation as a factor in how sibling violence was viewed. The experiences and perceptions of NFP2 and LFP1 are presented given their in-depth discussions of the violence they experienced in childhood with their siblings in order to compare experiences of a parent who identifies as a lesbian and one who identifies as heterosexual. Finally, the responses of parents from different family structures are presented with special attention placed on whether or not parents from the same-sex family witnessed violence differently than other families.

***Responses to family structure influencing problems in children.*** When asked about whether they believed their family structure influenced how they viewed the interaction between their children, LFP1 and LFP2 were surprised by the question. Their response highlights a viewpoint that emphasizes a lack of distinction between how they view their family when compared to other families:

LFP2: Family structure as in two moms and two kids? That sounds weird.

LFP1: They're confused as hell those kids. [said sarcastically]

LFP2: Aww, they're very proud.



LFP1: They'll be alright. [said jokingly]

LFP2: So we don't consider ourselves that...

LFP1: We're normal.

LFP2: ...amazing. We're amazing, but we don't consider ourselves...see I even had to ask the question. What do you mean because we're two moms? Is that what you're...what is he getting at? Like really that is not the first thing that occurs to me. We are just like everyone so I don't think it does. I imagine at some point it could. We haven't seen it.

LFP1: Yeah. (P5-LFP2-455:P5-LFP1-471)

The participants from the same-sex family believed their family to be no different than other families and that their family structure would not necessarily influence any sibling violence or sibling rivalry that may occur. LFP1 and LFP2 did think their past experiences, with both participants having had a brother in childhood, would help in addressing any problems between their children as their children are a brother-sister dyad with LFP2 stating, "Well it's what we're familiar with [referring to past sibling experience] so I think that's a good thing. Neither of us have a sister so it's what we are sorta used to" (P5-LFP2-479).

*Similarities and differences in behaviors experienced in childhood and appraisal of those behaviors between LFP1 and NFP2<sup>9</sup>.* LFP1 and NFP2 reported having experienced more violence in childhood than all other participants with the exception of BFP2, who reported having experienced one more behavior than NFP2. LFP1, from the same-sex family, and NFP2, from the nuclear family, discussed in depth having experienced violence with their siblings while growing up. Despite the fact both participants experienced violence with their siblings, the

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<sup>9</sup> BFP2 was not included in the discussion of similarities and differences of the behaviors experienced in childhood and appraisal of those behaviors due to a lack of background information provided by BFP2. In the qualitative interview, BFP2 did mention an altercation he had with his brother in childhood, however, descriptive information surrounding that experience and his perceptions of that experience were not provided by the participant.

circumstances and contextual factors influencing the violence were different. NFP2 thought that his parents' divorce influenced the relationships he had with his siblings. He reported that his brothers colluded against him at times stating:

There was also some of that them against me a lot of times... they were always, I won't say they were always coming after me, yeah they were and then I would react...

[brothers] were always trying to get my goat [sic] and always trying to tease me and when they did I lashed out physically (P3-NFP2-123:P3-NFP2-127:P3-NFP2-287)

NFP2 also noted that although there were times when situations between him and his brothers became violent, he never would hit siblings in the face or head. He stated:

Never slapped, ever. To me that seems much more malevolent than a punch... I think there is something primal when you start touching someone's face or head. [The head] occupies a place of privilege I think when we're talking about this kind of stuff. (P3-NFP2-301:P4-NFP2-233)

The family tension contributed to triangulation between the siblings in NFP2's family. The violence NFP2 experienced in childhood with his brothers is something that he uses to compare against the behaviors of his children where he noted, "the level of violence has never gotten to the point where it was with me and my brothers" (P3-NFP2-273). NFP2 also noted that he does not have a close relationship with his brothers anymore, yet his brothers are close with one another.

Similar to NFP2, LFP1 experienced violence with her brother. While things sometimes got out of the hand, most of the time the violence they experienced was not a result of discord, rather it was a result of playing together. LFP1 referred to a time when she was chasing her brother with hair removal cream and stated:

There was laughter also and we knew that it was a game of chase essentially and so there also was a fun element to it so other things that would fall outside of that, and I might do this today, I would walk up behind him and on the back of his head and give him a little pop. Not hard, but just pop on his forehead or whatever... and I'd mean it almost in an affectionate way. (P5-LFP1-075:P5-LFP1-079)

Where NFP2 never considered the face as a part of the body where hitting was acceptable, LFP1 would, and has, which has led to arguments between her and her partner on what is acceptable and what is not.

Growing up LFP1 stated she did not experience much discord in her family. Violence between her and her brother occurred when playing with one another reached a level where competition escalated. This escalation would then sometimes lead to physical violence and sometimes either LFP1 or her brother would recognize that a situation was getting out of control:

There was always that point where either myself or him that you turn that off and you back off because it can get escalated. I remember plenty of times it started out as a tickling match or a wrestling something fun and before I knew it man I was going for him with... I can remember I had a fist raised him and with all my might was going to swing and punch him right in the stomach and he was smart enough to move or hold my head longer than my arm's length away so I couldn't get to him. He backed up and I spun around and fell on the ground. If I had connected with him Lord have mercy but there was always that... and because he was four years older than me I think I think that he often had that better check than I did. "Wow, she's really mad, we are going to back off."

(P5-LFP1-165)

LFP1 and her brother had the necessary skills to monitor their behavior and not allow most situations to escalate out of control. To this day, different from NFP2, LFP1 noted having a strong relationship with her brother that she felt was enhanced by the competitive times they shared when young.

The experiences each participant appeared not to be a result of sexual orientation or family structure as these participant examples each mentioned the environment, context, and relationships with their siblings as influencing the behaviors in which they engaged. For each participant, they perceived and experienced violence between siblings differently due to their past experiences with a sibling growing up, yet they both viewed sibling violence as unacceptable, despite the fact they had different contextual experiences with sibling violence. Nothing was ever discussed by LFP1 indicating sexual orientation or the fact that she is a parent in a same-sex family influenced her perceptions about sibling relationships; past experiences were the influential aspect. While NFP1 and LFP1 have different relationships and closeness with their siblings, it appears that sexual orientation does not help explain their differences and similarities in experiencing sibling violence; whereas, the environment, context, and relationships with their siblings do help explain the behaviors they experienced with siblings.

***Behaviors witnessed and not witnessed by participants from same-sex family compared to other family structures.*** To analyze whether there were any similarities and/or differences in the behaviors witnessed in children by parents from the same-sex family in comparison to those from other family structures, responses from the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale were examined. The following three sections present comparisons across family structure with reference the category being the same-sex family. These sections include: behaviors witnessed by both parents within the same-sex family compared to other families, behaviors not witnessed

by both parents of the same-sex family compared to other families, and behaviors witnessed differently by participants of the same-sex family compared to other families.

*Behaviors witnessed by both participants of the same-sex family compared to other families.* Behaviors that were witnessed by both participants of the same-sex family compared to those behaviors witnessed in other family structures are presented in Table 4.21.

**Table 4.21: Comparison of Behaviors Witnessed by Both Participants of the Same-Sex Family Compared to Other Families**

Behavior	Participant Identifier						
	LFP1	LFP2	NFP1	NFP2	BFP1	BFP2	SFP1
2. Teasing	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
7. Threatening	◐	◐	●	●	◐	●	◐
8. Yelling at a sibling	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
15. Kicking	●	◐	◐	●	◐	●	◐
18. Shoving	●	◐	◐	●	●	●	◐
19. Insulting	●	◐	●	◐	●	●	●
21. Doing something to spite a sibling	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
25. Pushing	●	◐	◐	●	●	●	◐
6. Tickling	●	●	●	◐	●	●	●
9. Grabbing	●	●	●	◐	●	●	●
23. Name calling	●	●	●	○	●	●	●
14. Punching	●	◐	○	●	◐	●	◐
10. Manipulating	●	●	●	◐	●	◐	●
17. Making a sibling feel guilty	●	●	●	○	●	○	●
12. Twisting a sibling's arm	◐	○	◐	●	◐	◐	○
3. Throwing something at a sibling	●	○	◐	◐	●	◐	●
13. Destroying a	●	○	●	○	●	●	◐

sibling's property							
1. Slapping	●	○	◐	◑	◐	●	◐

- = Participant experienced behavior as a child and witnessed behavior between their children
- ◐ = Participant experienced behavior as a child but did not witness behavior between their children
- ◑ = Participant did not experience behavior as a child but did witness behavior between their children
- = Participant neither experienced behavior as a child nor witnessed behavior between their children

LFP1 and LFP2 witnessed fourteen of the same behaviors which is similar to the number of behaviors BFP1 and BFP2 witnessed between their children which was fifteen. *Manipulating* and *making a sibling feel guilty* are the only two behaviors BFP1 and BFP2 did not collectively witness that LFP1 and LFP2 did. NFP1 and NFP2 witnessed nine of the same behaviors. In four of the behaviors (*tickling, grabbing, name calling, and punching*) both LFP1 and LFP2 along with BFP1 and BFP2 collectively witnessed where as NFP1 and NFP2 did not. While there was no other parent in the single-parent family with which to compare results, SFP1 witnessed sixteen of the behaviors included in Table 4.21.

*Behaviors not witnessed by both participants of the same-sex family compared to other families.* Table 4.22 includes responses from the Experiences of Sibling Violence scale of those behaviors not witnessed by both participants of the same-sex family compared to other families.

**Table 4.22: Comparison of Behaviors Not Witnessed by Both Participants of the Same-Sex Family Compared to Other Families**

Behavior	Participant Identifier						
	LFP1	LFP2	NFP1	NFP2	BFP1	BFP2	SFP1
4. Slamming a sibling against a wall	◐	○	○	◑	○	○	○
5. Burning	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
11. Using weapons such as a knife, bat, or gun	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
20. Choking	○	○	○	○	◑	○	○
24. Pulling hair	○	○	○	○	◑	○	◑

16. Swearing at a sibling	●	○	●	○	○	●	○
12. Twisting a sibling's arm	●	○	●	●	●	●	○
22. Beating up a sibling	●	○	○	●	○	○	○

- = Participant experienced behavior as a child and witnessed behavior between their children
- = Participant experienced behavior as a child but did not witness behavior between their children
- = Participant did not experience behavior as a child but did witness behavior between their children
- = Participant neither experienced behavior as a child nor witnessed behavior between their children

LFP1 and LFP2 collectively did not witness seven behaviors with BFP1 and BFP2 also collectively not witnessing seven behaviors. LFP1 and LFP2 witnessed *beating up a sibling* differently whereas BFP1 and BFP2 witnessed *twisting a sibling's arm* differently. NFP1 and NFP2 collectively did not witness six behaviors. Despite there being no other parent in the single-parent family, SFP1 did not witness any of the behaviors included in Table 4.22.

*Behaviors witnessed differently by participants of the same-sex family compared to other families.* Table 4.23 provides a comparison of behaviors witnessed by participants with attention to family structure with those instances of difference within family compared to other families where there was a difference in how each parent responded to witnessed behaviors. Difference in how participants from the same family responded are shaded in the Table 4.23 by family structure.

**Table 4.23: Comparison of Behaviors Witnessed Differently by Participants of the Same-Sex Family Compared to Other Families**

Behavior	Participant Identifier						
	LFP1	LFP2	NFP1	NFP2	BFP1	BFP2	SFP1
1. Slapping	●	○	●	●	●	●	●
3. Throwing something at a sibling	●	○	●	●	●	●	●
13. Destroying a sibling's property	●	○	●	○	●	●	●

22. Beating up a sibling	●	○	○	◐	○	○	○
6. Tickling	●	●	●	◐	●	●	●
9. Grabbing	●	●	●	◐	●	●	●
10. Manipulating	●	●	●	◐	●	◐	●
14. Punching	●	◐	○	●	◐	●	◐
16. Swearing at a sibling	◐	○	●	○	○	◐	○
17. Making a sibling feel guilty	●	●	●	○	●	○	●
23. Name calling	●	●	●	○	●	●	●
12. Twisting a sibling's arm	◐	○	◐	●	◐	◐	○

- = Participant experienced behavior as a child and witnessed behavior between their children
- ◐ = Participant experienced behavior as a child but did not witness behavior between their children
- ◑ = Participant did not experience behavior as a child but did witness behavior between their children
- = Participant neither experienced behavior as a child nor witnessed behavior between their children

Results indicate that, with the exception of the single-parent family, behaviors witnessed by parents in the same family varied in each family structure. LFP1 and LFP2 reported differences in witnessing *slapping, throwing something as a sibling, destroying a sibling's property, and beating up a sibling*. NFP1 and NFP2 witnessed these same behaviors differently with the exception of *beating up a sibling* where neither participant reported having witnessed this behavior. There were three behaviors that participants from the blended family witnessed differently than LFP1 and LFP2. BFP1 witnessed their children engage in *manipulating, twisting a sibling's arm, and making a sibling feel guilty*, whereas BFP2 did not witness those behaviors. For the participants from the nuclear family, the discrepancy in witnessed behaviors was larger at ten behaviors witnessed differently. In every case except for one, where NFP2 witnessed their



children engage in *punching* and NFP1 did not, NFP1 witnessed *slapping, throwing something at a sibling, tickling, grabbing, manipulating, destroying a sibling's property, swearing at a sibling, making a sibling feel guilty, and name calling* in their children whereas NFP2 did not witness these behaviors. Participants from this study tended to witness different behaviors in which their children engaged.

Although SFP1 was not included in the comparisons across family structure due to lack of a partner for comparison of responses, examining responses across the other three family types suggest these participants experienced violent behaviors in their children differently. Collectively within family structure, participants from the same-sex family and blended family may have been more attuned to what transpired between their children. This could have been due to LFP2's disdain for violence of any kind which led to assertive monitoring or the participants from the blended family having six children to monitor leaving room for witnessing different behaviors. There could also have been potential differences in time spent with children, which may impact what behaviors participants from the nuclear family witnessed.

When considering participants individually in what they have witnessed in their children (Table 4.8), the number of behaviors varied. BFP1, LFP1, and NFP1 all reported witnessing 18 behaviors whereas their significant others reported witnessing the lowest amount of behaviors with BFP2 witnessing 15 behaviors, LFP2 witnessing 14 behaviors, and NFP2 witnessing 10 behaviors. SFP1 reported witnessing 16 behaviors which was the median of all participants. These results indicate a lack of differentiation from the same-sex family and other families in the study in witnessing violent behaviors of their children with at least one parent witnessing a higher number of behaviors and one parent witnessing a lower number of behaviors. Interestingly, however, although BFP2, LFP1, and NFP2 reported the highest number of

behaviors experienced in childhood, LFP1 reported witnessing more than BFP2 and NFP2 with the number of behaviors witnessed by LFP1 being the same as the wives of BFP2 and NFP2.

**Conclusion.** Mechanisms for understanding the way in which participants perceived and experienced violence in the sibling relationship based on sexual orientation were not apparent. Past experiences, the context of those past experiences, and the relationships participants had with their siblings seemed to help provide a better understanding the similarities and differences between participants, especially between LFP1 and NFP2 who reported experiencing substantial violence with a sibling in childhood. When comparing behaviors witnessed between parents within the same family structure based on sexual orientation, no substantial differences emerged with all family structures experiencing discrepancies between parents within the family, excepting the single-parent family where comparisons were not possible. This hypothesis was not supported. **Sexual orientation of participants appeared not to be a factor in the similarities and differences between participants.**

**Hypothesis Seven: Parents will respond similarly to the labels that have been used to refer to violence between siblings.** Participant responses to the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale were analyzed to understand the thoughts participants have regarding the various labels that have been used in the research literature to refer to violence between siblings. The scale includes whether or not parents respond to those labels as being normative or problematic/harmful for siblings. Overall, participants in this case study did not respond similarly to many of the labels that have been used to refer to violence between siblings. Table 4.24 includes the collective responses for all participants on the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale.

**Table 4.24: Total Responses to the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale**

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
4. Harm can be experienced when a sibling psychologically maltreats another sibling.	6 (85.71)	1 (14.29)			
15. A sibling can be hurt by another sibling who is hostile towards them.	3 (42.86)	4 (57.14)			
17. Siblings are likely to experience sibling rivalry.	3 (42.86)	4 (57.14)			
23. Conflict in the sibling relationship is normal.	3 (42.86)	3 (42.86)	1 (14.29)		
3. Negativity between siblings can have damaging consequences.	2 (28.57)	5 (71.43)			
14. Psychologically maltreating a sibling is problematic.	2 (28.57)	5 (71.43)			
20. Aggression towards a sibling can be harmful.	2 (28.57)	5 (71.43)			
29. Competition between siblings is common.	2 (28.57)	5 (71.43)			
10. Rivalry between siblings is normal.	2 (28.57)	4 (57.14)		1 (14.29)	
31. The experience of sibling rivalry can include violence.	2 (28.57)	1 (14.29)	2 (28.57)	2 (28.57)	
18. Fighting between siblings is common.	1 (14.29)	6 (85.71)			
28. Antagonism between siblings can be hurtful.	1 (14.29)	6 (85.71)			
34. When a sibling maltreats another sibling it is problematic.	1 (14.29)	5 (71.43)	1 (14.29)		
7. Conflict between siblings can be harmful.	1 (14.29)	5 (71.43)		1 (14.29)	
24. When siblings fight it is a typical part of child development.	1 (14.29)	4 (57.14)	2 (28.57)		
9. It is normal for a sibling to experience antagonism from another sibling.	1 (14.29)	4 (57.14)	1 (14.29)	1 (14.29)	
22. It is common for siblings to experience negativity.	1 (14.29)	4 (57.14)	1 (14.29)	1 (14.29)	
2. Aggression between siblings is normal.	1 (14.29)	3 (42.86)	1 (14.29)	2 (28.57)	
13. Siblings maltreating each other is normative.	1 (14.29)	3 (42.86)		3 (42.86)	
30. Fighting that leads to siblings getting emotionally hurt is common.	1 (14.29)	2 (28.57)	3 (42.86)	1 (14.29)	
32. It is common for a sibling to be aggressive with another sibling.	1 (14.29)	2 (28.57)	2 (28.57)	2 (28.57)	
1. It is common for siblings to experience violence.	1 (14.29)	2 (28.57)	1 (14.29)	3 (42.86)	
25. It is normal for siblings to experience violence.	1 (14.29)			4 (57.14)	2 (28.57)
21. When a sibling abuses another sibling psychologically it is not harmful.	1 (14.29)			1 (14.29)	5 (71.43)
19. Most siblings do not abuse another		4 (57.14)	2 (28.57)	1 (14.29)	

sibling.					
5. Fighting that leads to siblings getting physically hurt is common.		2 (28.57)	2 (28.57)	3 (42.86)	
6. A sibling abusing another sibling is normal behavior.		1 (14.29)	2 (28.57)	2 (28.57)	2 (28.57)
11. It is normal for siblings to experience emotional violence.		1 (14.29)	1 (14.29)	4 (57.14)	1 (14.29)
27. Psychological abuse between siblings is normal.		1 (14.29)		6 (85.71)	
8. Quarreling between siblings is harmful.			5 (71.43)	2 (28.57)	
12. Assault between siblings is common.			3 (42.86)	3 (42.86)	1 (14.29)
16. Assaulting a sibling is typical in most families.			2 (28.57)	3 (42.86)	2 (28.57)
26. Hostility between siblings is unusual.			1 (14.29)	5 (71.43)	1 (14.29)
33. Quarrels between siblings are uncommon.				3 (42.86)	4 (57.14)

\* Number in parenthesis represents the percentage of participants who responded in each category.

Along with examination of the responses from the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale, qualitative data was then analyzed to understand better how participants responded to the terms “sibling violence” and “sibling rivalry” as participants were specifically asked to respond to these terms in the interview at the second data collection point.

*Similarities across participants.* There are several statements within the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale where participants responded similarly. All participants responded in the same way to approximately 26% (9 of 34) of the statements (3, 4, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 28, and 29) by answering either “strongly agree” or “agree” (Table 4.25).

**Table 4.25: Responses to the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale Where Participants either “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed”**

	Strongly Agree	Agree
4. Harm can be experienced when a sibling psychologically maltreats another sibling.	6 (85.71)	1 (14.29)
15. A sibling can be hurt by another sibling who is hostile towards them.	3 (42.86)	4 (57.14)
17. Siblings are likely to experience sibling rivalry.	3 (42.86)	4 (57.14)

3. Negativity between siblings can have damaging consequences.	2 (28.57)	5 (71.43)
14. Psychologically maltreating a sibling is problematic.	2 (28.57)	5 (71.43)
20. Aggression towards a sibling can be harmful.	2 (28.57)	5 (71.43)
29. Competition between siblings is common.	2 (28.57)	5 (71.43)
18. Fighting between siblings is common.	1 (14.29)	6 (85.71)
28. Antagonism between siblings can be hurtful.	1 (14.29)	6 (85.71)
<i>* Number in parenthesis represents the percentage of participants who responded in each category.</i>		

Six of seven participants also agreed or strongly agreed with statements 23 (*Conflict in the sibling relationship is normal.*) and 34 (*When a sibling maltreats another sibling it is problematic.*). For the most part, participants were also similar in how they disagreed or strongly disagreed with several of the statements as well. At least six of seven participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with statements 21, 25-27, and 33 (Table 4.26).

**Table 4.26: Responses to the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale Where Most Participants either “Disagreed” or “Strongly Disagreed”**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
21. When a sibling abuses another sibling psychologically it is not harmful.	5 (71.43)	1 (14.29)
33. Quarrels between siblings are uncommon.	4 (57.14)	3 (42.86)
25. It is normal for siblings to experience violence.	2 (28.57)	4 (57.14)
26. Hostility between siblings is unusual.	1 (14.29)	5 (71.43)
27. Psychological abuse between siblings is normal.		6 (85.71)
<i>* Number in parenthesis represents the percentage of participants who responded in each category.</i>		

While there are similarities in how participants responded to certain statements, no pattern emerged surrounding the labels on which individuals collectively agreed or disagreed.

Labels where there was almost to complete collective agreement (with only one participant responding “neither agree nor disagree” and no participants responding disagree or strongly disagree) included: *psychological maltreatment, hostility, rivalry, negativity, aggression, competition, fighting, antagonism, conflict, and maltreatment*. Collective disagreement (with only one participant responding “neither agree nor disagree” and no participants responding agree or strongly agree) included the terms: *psychological abuse, quarrelling, violence, and hostility*. Participants were likely to collectively agree on terms associated with an emotional/psychological component (e.g. *psychological maltreatment, psychological abuse, and antagonism*).

**Differences across participants.** There was discrepancy in how participants responded to several statements in the scale. Responses to statements 1, 2, 5-7, 9-11, 13, 22, and 30-32 had a wide variation in whether or not participants agreed or disagreed with the content in the statements (Table 4.27).

**Table 4.27: Differences in Participant Responses to the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
10. Rivalry between siblings is normal.	2 (28.57)	4 (57.14)		1 (14.29)	
31. The experience of sibling rivalry can include violence.	2 (28.57)	1 (14.29)	2 (28.57)	2 (28.57)	
7. Conflict between siblings can be harmful.	1 (14.29)	5 (71.43)		1 (14.29)	
9. It is normal for a sibling to experience antagonism from another sibling.	1 (14.29)	4 (57.14)	1 (14.29)	1 (14.29)	
22. It is common for siblings to experience negativity.	1 (14.29)	4 (57.14)	1 (14.29)	1 (14.29)	
2. Aggression between siblings is normal.	1 (14.29)	3 (42.86)	1 (14.29)	2 (28.57)	
13. Siblings maltreating each other is normative.	1 (14.29)	3 (42.86)		3 (42.86)	
30. Fighting that leads to siblings getting emotionally hurt is common.	1 (14.29)	2 (28.57)	3 (42.86)	1 (14.29)	
32. It is common for a sibling to be aggressive with another sibling.	1 (14.29)	2 (28.57)	2 (28.57)	2 (28.57)	
1. It is common for siblings to experience violence.	1 (14.29)	2 (28.57)	1 (14.29)	3 (42.86)	

5. Fighting that leads to siblings getting physically hurt is common.		2 (28.57)	2 (28.57)	3 (42.86)	
6. A sibling abusing another sibling is normal behavior.		1 (14.29)	2 (28.57)	2 (28.57)	2 (28.57)
11. It is normal for siblings to experience emotional violence.		1 (14.29)	1 (14.29)	4 (57.14)	1 (14.29)
<i>* Number in parenthesis represents the percentage of participants who responded in each category.</i>					

In nine of these statements (1, 2, 6, 9, 11, 22, and 30-32), participants responded in four of the possible referent categories. The differentiation in responses to the statements highlights the lack of consensus in how individuals interpret various labels used to refer to violence in the sibling relationship.

*Participants' responses to statements regarding "sibling violence" and "sibling rivalry."* Given the variation in how participants responded to labels, responses to statements specifically addressing sibling violence and sibling rivalry were examined (Table 4.28).

**Table 4.28: Responses to the Statements Regarding Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry on the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Sibling Violence</b>					
1. It is common for siblings to experience violence.	1 (14.29)	2 (28.57)	1 (14.29)	3 (42.86)	
25. It is normal for siblings to experience violence.	1 (14.29)			4 (57.14)	2 (28.57)
11. It is normal for siblings to experience emotional violence.		1 (14.29)	1 (14.29)	4 (57.14)	1 (14.29)
<b>Sibling Rivalry</b>					
17. Siblings are likely to experience sibling rivalry.	3 (42.86)	4 (57.14)			
10. Rivalry between siblings is normal.	2 (28.57)	4 (57.14)		1 (14.29)	
31. The experience of sibling rivalry can include violence.	2 (28.57)	1 (14.29)	2 (28.57)	2 (28.57)	
<i>* Number in parenthesis represents the percentage of participants who responded in each category.</i>					

Regarding statements including "sibling violence," no clear consensus existed in how participants responded. Six of seven participants either disagreed or strongly disagreed that

siblings experiencing violence was normal. With regard to “sibling rivalry,” all seven participants either agreed or strongly agreed that sibling rivalry is likely to occur between siblings with six of the seven participants reporting that sibling rivalry is normal. However, when violence was incorporated into the discussion of sibling rivalry, responses varied considerably as to whether sibling rivalry can include violent behaviors.

***Qualifying statements regarding the terms “sibling violence” and “sibling rivalry”.*** No overall patterns emerged in the analysis of data from the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale that can be specifically attributed to family structure of the participants. Data from the qualitative interviews were then analyzed to consider how participants responded when asked about their thoughts on “sibling violence” and “sibling rivalry.” Data from the qualitative interviews provided insight on how participants responded to the terms with “sibling violence” appearing to serve as a proxy for problematic behaviors between siblings and “sibling rivalry” appearing to serve as a proxy for non-problematic, normative behaviors between siblings. Participants provided varied responses about “sibling violence” and “sibling rivalry” with both similarities and differences within and between family structure.

***Initial reactions to “sibling violence.”*** Upon asking participants what came to mind when they heard the term “sibling violence,” all participants mentioned they thought physical behaviors went along with the term (Table 4.29).

**Table 4.29: Participants’ Initial Reactions to the Term “Sibling Violence”**

BFP1	<i>Extreme behaviors...things that are that are meant to hurt. (P1-BFP1-009)</i>
BFP2	<i>Violence to me sounds pretty huge so I think of punching, beating up, weapons, shoved against the wall, ya...those things, things that leave a mark, you know or bruises, cuts...(P1-BFP2-007)</i>
LFP1	<i>Sibling violence to me means you are causing some serious physical harm to that sibling or, and/or serious mental harm...I think in terms of the physical aspect I think it would be bloodying noses intentionally, black eyes, breaking bones, throwing down the stairs... intentionally having that high level of physical abuse. (P5-LFP1-017)</i>



LFP2	<i>To me it's violence, it's just like any other violence. It would not be okay for me to come up and smack you really hard and it wouldn't be okay for a sibling either... right it would have to cause an injury. It wouldn't have to cause psychological harm it could just be anything that could be considered violent in any other situation. (P5-LFP2-019)</i>
NFP1	<i>For me a whole range of things come to mind and I think of name-calling and threats, hurtful...I mean I think of abuse that is violence that is spoken, but probably the first thing that comes to mind is the other stuff on your list [referring to quantitative measurements], the burning, the hitting...when I hear sibling violence I think of those things first, but then as I unpack it I think about the whole range. (P3-NFP1-005)</i>
NFP2	<i>I guess for me the two things that would distinguish violence for me would be 1) physical injury and 2) which is much harder to measure action which is not an immediate reaction or an immediate manifestation of the perpetrator's state of mind, but is actually engaged in with the intent to cause harm to the other, not just an uncontrolled outburst within, but it goes beyond the within towards the specific focus. (P3-NFP2-007)</i>
SFP1	<i>I think of the actual physical acts of, well when I was reading through that list of physical acts initially, the choking, the punching, the kicking, pushing, shoving, burning, but reading through that list I noticed that a lot of the ones I marked as being more severe [on quantitative scales], not more severe but as severe were the emotional-psychological ones because of personal experiences with my two daughters. (P7-SFP1-005)</i>

To BFP1, BFP2, and NFP2 sibling violence was a concept that included a physical component. For LFP1, LFP2, NFP1, and SFP1 sibling violence included behaviors that were more than just physical; emotional/psychological behaviors were initially mentioned by these participants along with physical behaviors.

*Physical component to "sibling violence."* All participants included physical behaviors in their conceptualization of sibling violence. Behaviors such as punching, hitting, beating up, using weapons, burning, kicking, pushing shoving, and anything potentially causing physical harm to a sibling whether that be bloodying noses, giving black eyes, breaking bones or throwing down the stairs was violence. This was similar to how participants responded to behaviors on the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument. For NFP2, two things distinguished violence:

One, physical injury and two, which is much harder to measure action which is not an immediate reaction or an immediate manifestation of the perpetrator's state of mind, but is actually engaged in with the intent to cause harm to the other, not just an uncontrolled outburst within, but it goes beyond the within towards the specific focus. (P3-NFP2-007)

Similar to NFP2, LFP1 agreed that physical injury was needed with serious physical harm to constitute sibling violence; however, LFP1 also believed serious mental harm could also constitute sibling violence, whereas NFP2 did not. LFP1 and LFP2 did not agree on the boundaries of what constituted sibling violence. Where LFP1 felt physical injury needed to occur, LFP2 did not stating:

See and to me it's violence, it's just like any other violence. It would not be okay for me to come up and smack you really hard and it wouldn't be okay for a sibling either. Much lower on the scale for me. (P5-LFP2-019)

For SFP1, sibling violence made her think of physical acts initially, but when reading through the list of behaviors from the scales she "noticed that a lot of the ones I marked as being more severe, not more severe but as severe were the emotional/psychological ones because of personal experiences with my two daughters" (P7-SFP1-005).

*Emotional/psychological component to "sibling violence."* With the exception of NFP2, who recognized an emotional component to sibling violence but thought sibling violence was physical in nature, all participants thought sibling violence could include emotional/psychological behaviors. BFP1 and BFP2 agreed that sibling violence could be emotional or verbal in nature with BFP1 stating, "I think all violence has an emotional component. The systematic degrading of sibling would be emotional violence I think" (P1-BFP1-019). LFP1, LFP2, NFP1, and SFP1 mentioned numerous behaviors such as putdowns,

manipulation, verbal abuse, name calling, threats, and making a sibling feel guilty to be associated with sibling violence. For all participants, sibling violence that was emotional/psychological in nature was considered to be just as harmful and important to consider as physical sibling violence.

*Initial reactions to “sibling rivalry.”* All participants’ initial perceptions of the term “sibling rivalry” were less physical in nature compared to how they initially perceived sibling violence (Table 4.30).

**Table 4.30: Participants’ Initial Reactions to the Term “Sibling Rivalry”**

BFP1	<i>Competition, competition for both parental time, for parental affection, and for material things for just jockeying for position I guess...not designed to cause injury or pain, more designed to get what you want. (P1-BFP1-033)</i>
BFP2	<i>[Participant agreed with BFP1]...success (P1-BFP2-035)</i>
LFP1	<i>I can remember things we used to do on a car trip or at the dinner table to try to get the other one in a little bit of, not outwardly trouble, but in front of the parents... and I don't know if you would categorize this differently but there was a little bit of competitiveness between he and I. (P5-LFP1-123)</i>
LFP2	<i>The tickling, the teasing, the gentle name calling, the competition. “I have to have that because you do.” or “you can't have that because I can't.” The arguing... to spite the other one... all very normal I think. (P5-LFP2-121)</i>
NFP1	<i>That, for me, would not be physical. That would be trying to measure one's own value, status whatever against that of the siblings so...I think sibling rivalry can manifest in ways that include things we've been talking about...threats and manipulation and stuff, but I think also the rivalry, that's where I get...that's real natural. I think there's always going to be some sibling rivalry and that rivalry often will entail language that's hurtful and manipulations that can damage the relationship or can just be developmentally part of the [process] (P3-NFP1-041)</i>
NFP2	<i>Sibling rivalry to me means normal state of affairs between kids...and it doesn't have to be negative, I mean, it can be “I'm going to try to do...” and “I'm going to try and beat you” and it can be good natured. It's not necessarily negative. It's part of kids self-differentiating. It's an expected and normal part of growing up. And sometimes they don't grow up. (P3-NFP2-045)</i>
SFP1	<i>I think of the rivalry sometimes as being competitive, competitive or true rivalry, I think of when I usually hear sibling rivalry, the bickering, the arguing all of that type of stuff... I considered normal even though it probably shouldn't be, but that's more what I think of, I don't think of the violent component to it as far as the physical aspect but probably the emotional now after reading the list. (P7-SFP1-065)</i>

Similar to how participants responded on the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument, behaviors, actions, and concepts mentioned as being indicative of sibling rivalry included doing something to spite a sibling, jockeying for position, jealousy, hurtful language, threats, teasing, tickling, bickering, and gentle name-calling. Every participant mentioned that sibling rivalry was grounded in competition or related to competition in some way. These qualitative responses were similar to how participants responded to the normalcy of “sibling rivalry” on the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Sibling Scale. Along with LFP2 who felt sibling rivalry was “all very normal I think, defining-wise [sic],” (P5-LFP12-129), NFP2 stated he felt sibling rivalry to be normative and noted:

When I think about sibling rivalry what I think about is differentiation. That’s what comes to mind. How am I going to distinguish myself over and against my brother or sister in the eyes of the world, in the eyes of family. To me that’s what sibling rivalry means. (P3-NFP2-127)

NFP2 thought sibling rivalry could be normal but could also manifest in ways that led to problematic behaviors. For SFP1, the term “sibling rivalry” led her to be contemplative about its meaning and acceptability:

I think of [sibling rivalry] as something that, and once again coming back to these, I think of that as something, something that was until I did this was typical, normal and rivalry I don’t know if is the word I would use cuz [sic] I think of the rivalry sometimes as being competitive, competitive or true rivalry, I think of when I usually hear sibling rivalry, the bickering, the arguing all of that type of stuff... I considered normal even though it probably shouldn't be, but that's more what I think of, I don't think of the violent component to it as far as the physical aspect but probably the emotional now after reading

the list.... looking at some of those that marked as rivalry is not acceptable and growing up in my household it was stuff that was not tolerated. I don't necessarily think that I tolerate it, but I obviously let my kids get away with more than what was acceptable when I was growing up. (P7-SFP1-065:P7-SFP1-073)

*Physical component to “sibling rivalry.”* Participants noted that behaviors or actions related to sibling rivalry were less physical in nature. When asked if sibling rivalry could include a physical component, all participants agreed it could, with all noting a physical component of sibling rivalry to be different than the physical component of violence between siblings. Participants noted that grabbing, pushing, poking, jockeying for position, and wrestling could all be seen in sibling rivalry. BFP1 noted that sibling rivalry was “not designed to cause injury or pain, more designed to get what you want,” (P1-BFP1-049) which exemplifies how others felt about the physical component associated with sibling rivalry.

*Emotional/psychological component to “sibling rivalry.”* Regarding behaviors that were emotional-psychological in nature, all participants either mentioned or agreed with their significant other that behaviors such as manipulation, teasing, name-calling, and making a sibling feel guilty were actions consistent with the notion of sibling rivalry. NFP1 noted that sibling rivalry may get to the point where a perceived lack of fairness between siblings could lead to one sibling being psychologically abusive to another. NFP2 discussed his experience with his two brothers and how each of them tried to achieve dominance over the other and that there could be an emotional component when “struggling for prominence...for worth I guess” (P3-NFP2-147). For LFP1, an example of rivalry with a sibling where emotional behaviors were exhibited happened one time when the participant and her brother were playing soccer and “shooting goals

on one another but there's also all little bit of talking smack out there so something like that I would say is kind of in the rivalry category” (P5-LFP1-133).

For SFP1, the emotional/psychological component was seen as being more of an internal experience. Rather than behaviors that were outwardly emotional or psychological in nature, the internal processes of the sibling were where emotionality existed:

Yes, but I, in my opinion I don't think it's...I think it's an emotional component inwardly on the person, if that makes sense. Emotionally yes they're feeling something which is why maybe they're acting the way they are but I don't think it's saying it or verbalizing it I think it's just something that, um you know jealousy for example... I got along great with my sister and brother growing up, believe it or not but I remember I was extremely jealous of my sister because she was everything, homecoming queen, May Queen, honor roll, student... and I wasn't really any of that so I remember being jealous but I... it was an emotion I felt, but we never really argued or bickered. I looked up to her more even though I was extremely jealous. (P7-SFP1-077)

Verbal and non-verbal behaviors were also mentioned LFP1 and LFP2 as having an emotional/psychological connection to sibling rivalry. LFP2 noted that she and LFP1 had witnessed their children pushing each other's buttons; something both LFP1 and LFP2 remembered experiencing with their brothers in childhood:

LFP1: Yeah and I see with our kids now and we'll probably talk about that. I can remember, like I've said, “These kids can make each other cry in about 15 seconds if they want to,” If they know that sibling well enough right?

LFP2: Mmmm hmmm.

LFP1: And I remember my brother, it could just be staring.

LFP2: Oh mine was the rolling of the eyes I think, that was the worst thing ever....

LFP1: Ahhh, that body language.

LFP2: ...because it made me feel stupid. It worked very well.

LFP1: But it can be something as simple as that. (P5-LFP1-189:P5-LFP1-203)

**Conclusion.** This hypothesis stating that participants will respond similarly to labels that have been used to refer to sibling violence was not supported with there being inconclusive data. Participant responses to the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale varied. For some terms participants responded in a similar fashion and for other terms there was a wide variation in how participants responded. While participants were more likely to respond similarly to terms associated with emotional/psychological behaviors, no overarching patterns emerged regarding the terms included in the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale. However, participant responses to the questions, “When I say sibling violence what comes to mind?” and “When I say sibling rivalry what comes to mind?” elicited similar responses from participants. Participants similarly associated sibling violence with physical behaviors that caused harm whereas sibling rivalry was associated more with competitive behaviors that were less physical in nature.

**Summative Conclusions Related to the Hypotheses.** Analysis of the data to address the hypotheses from the case study provided varying degrees of support for each hypothesis. Hypotheses Two and Six were supported, Hypotheses One, Three, and Seven were partially supported, and Hypotheses Four and Five were not supported. When considering the theories that guided the hypotheses, family systems theory and social learning theory appear to be important to consider when discussing violence in the sibling relationship. For example, intergenerational transmission of violence was evident in that both participants and their children

had experienced violence in the sibling dyad. The context of the participants' past experiences and the relationships they had with family members also appeared to influence perceptions of violence and rivalry between siblings. Furthermore, based on rules and expectations of family members (particularly participants' parent's expectations of the sibling relationship), behaviors and thoughts about behaviors appear to be learned, at least partially, in the family context.

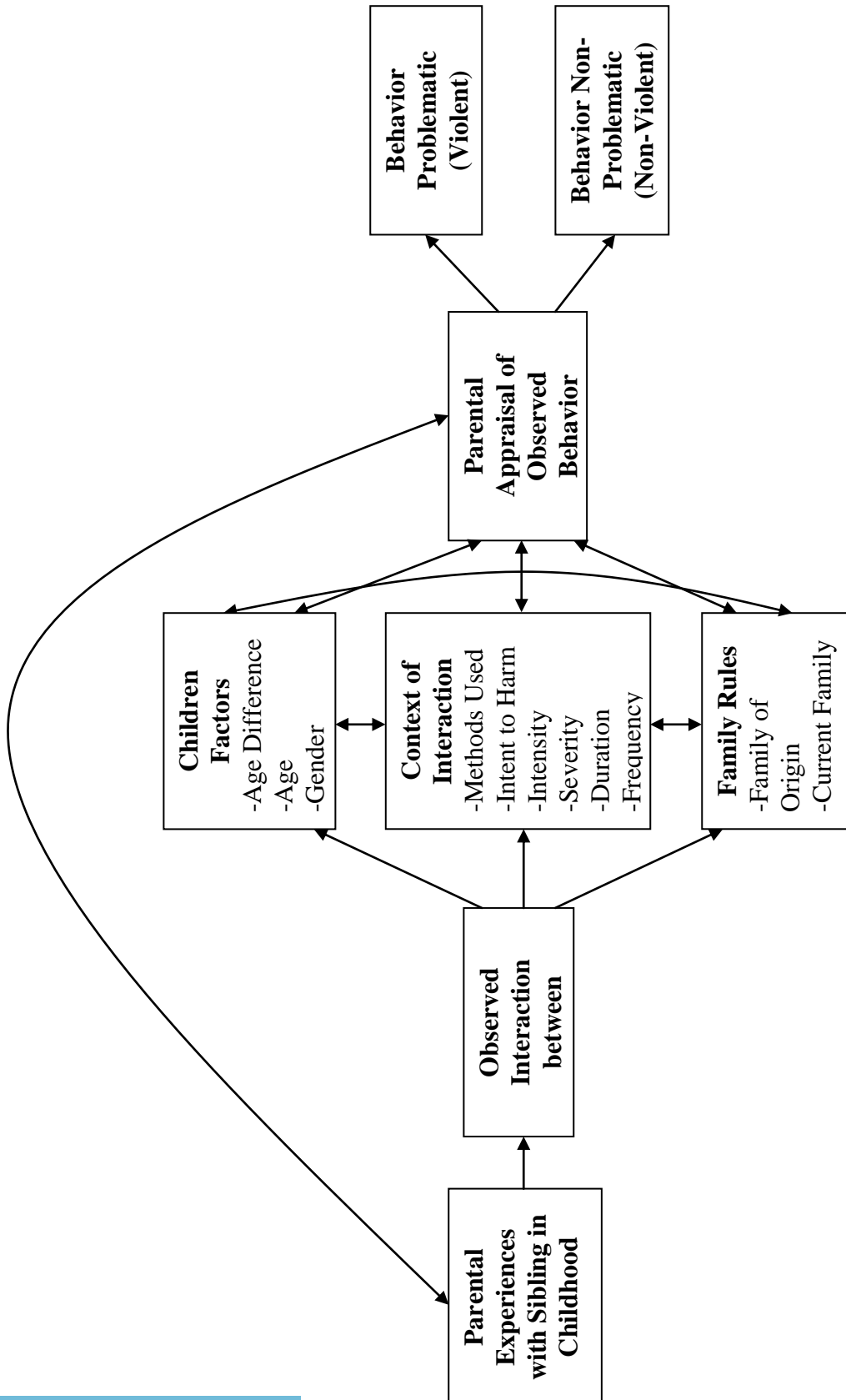
Multiple factors appear to influence how participants viewed violence in the sibling relationship and how they decided whether behaviors were problematic or not. Past experiences, demography of children, context of sibling interaction, and rules within the family all appeared to influence the decision-making process of participants included in this case study. These factors may collectively help when considering how parents decide what constitute problematic behaviors. The following section highlights a proposed decision-making model of problematic sibling interaction grounded in the data provided by participants.

### **Parental Decision-Making Model of Sibling Violence**

The decision-making model highlights those factors that influenced participants' decisions when considering what situations between siblings are considered problematic or not problematic. Figure 4.1 is the decision-making model which emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data from the open-ended interviews, qualitative data from the case scenario decision-making process, and quantitative data.



**Figure 4.1 Parental Decision-Making Model of Problematic Sibling Interaction**



Data were analyzed in the open-ended interviews and case scenario decision-making process, in conjunction with the quantitative data presented in the hypotheses above to examine those factors influencing participant perceptions of behaviors between children. The following sections provide a detailed description and justification for those factors included in the model.

The proposed parental decision-making model from Figure 4.1 suggests parental past experiences in childhood may be directly related to how behaviors are observed between children. Observed interactions between children may be considered by the parent in the context of three factors: children factors, the context of the interaction, and the family rules. The behavior observed between children may then be considered with children factors, the context of the interaction, and the family rules influencing how the behavior is appraised by the parent. These factors may be considered in simultaneously and in conjunction with each other when the parent is deciding what constitutes problematic behavior or non-problematic behavior. The parent then appraises the behavior as either problematic or non-problematic. In the following sections, the parental decision-making model of problematic sibling interaction is explicated

**Parental Experiences with Sibling in Childhood.** In several of the hypotheses presented above, the past experiences of participants were discussed. Participants mentioned having been influenced by their interactions with siblings in childhood. Table 4.31 presents experiences that participants identified which stood out to them when recounting experiences of problematic interaction with a sibling in childhood. These memories influenced their consideration about what is and is not sibling violence.

**Table 4.31: Participants' Experiences of Problematic Behavior in Childhood**

BFP1	Discussed the age difference between her and her sister as being a factor in the distance they experienced in childhood. Participant mentioned having not experienced much interaction with her sister due to their age difference; however, she reported having had experienced 15 of the 25 behaviors with her
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	sister on the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale.
BFP2	Discussed what he considered a problematic interaction with his brother while in childhood. Participant mentioned being grabbed by his brother while he was in the top bunk of their bunk bed and being roughed up for removing the fan from his brother's gym shoes so they could dry. BFP2 has a rule in the house now that forbids any member of the family from grabbing another family member or grabbing something from another family member.
LFP1	Provided multiple accounts of violent behaviors between this participant and her brother were discussed during the qualitative interview. While her partner considers the behaviors LFP1 experienced in childhood as violent, LFP1 considers the behaviors as normative for her relationship with her brother as she stated there was never an intent to harm.
LFP2	Discussed there being substantial distance between her and her brother given their age difference, LFP2 was very vocal about the violent behaviors LFP1 experienced with her brother. LFP2 was emphatic that their children would not experience the violence LFP1 did when she was a child even if it was not malevolent in nature.
NFP1	Stated that she and her sister experienced discord and conflict when they were young, but that problematic interactions between them dissipated when they reached middle school. She mentioned how important her relationship with her sister ended up being to her and wanted to make sure that her children knew the importance of their relationship.
NFP2	The accounts of violence between NFP2 and his brothers appear to be a result of contextual and environmental factors the siblings experienced when they were children. During the interview, NFP2 mentioned his past interactions with his siblings influencing his current interactions with his siblings. Since he often felt as though he was the odd brother out with his two brothers being closer emotionally, he discussed feeling upset when their daughter would say hurtful things to their son.
SFP1	During the qualitative interview, SFP1 reported that she did not experience much of the violence or conflict with her siblings. She did note that she witnessed problematic behaviors between her two oldest siblings. She mentioned that her sister would often get into fights with her brother when he would provoke SFP1. While SFP1 recognized the differences in historical context in which she grew up compared to her daughters, her hope was that the relationship between her daughters would resemble what she currently has with her sister now.

The experiences of the participants and their siblings were mentioned by each participant in the qualitative interviews. The relationship each participant had with their sibling appeared to serve as a frame of reference for participants when considering interactions between their own children. When each participant was asked the question, "How have your experiences from your past influenced how you view problematic behavior between your children?" each participant

initially discussed an experience they had with a sibling. This sibling referent point appeared to be very influential in helping them in understanding what constituted problematic behavior between siblings. With past experiences of the parent in the background almost serving as a framework to guide decision-making, once a behavior has been exhibited by children then parents may consider children factors, context of the interaction, and family rules before appraising the situation.

**Children factors.** Along with or based on participants' experiences with their siblings in childhood, child attributes influence parental appraisal of sibling interaction. . Participants noted age difference between children and chronological age of children influencing what behaviors they considered problematic. The gender of children also influenced their perceptions of problematic behaviors. Consensus regarding how age difference, chronological age, and gender influenced decision-making did not occur between all participants. However, all participants noted these factors influence how they perceived violence between siblings.

**Age difference between siblings.** All participants mentioned the difference in age between siblings as a factor when considering whether behaviors exhibited were problematic or not. In fact, in the case scenarios discussions the majority of the content was focused on the importance of age difference in deciding what was problematic. Table 4.32 presents statements by participants demonstrating their thinking about age difference as a factor.

**Table 4.32: Participants' Reactions to Age Difference in Case Scenarios**

BFP1	[When discussing the sibling interaction in Case Scenario Four] <i>Yes and I think the main difference here is the age. You've got a 13 year old and a 6 year old so she's probably double his size. I mean, it's just being a bully to use anything like that as an advantage over somebody who's so much smaller. (P2-BFP1-234)... When you've got a 13 year old and a 6 year old where one just has greater reasoning power, a greater toolbox to draw from, to win, it's not fair from the get go. (P2-BFP1-318)</i>
BFP2	[When discussing the sibling interaction in Case Scenario Two] <i>I think if a 2</i>

	<i>year old slaps a 12 year old sibling that's a little bit different but this is a child of the age to understand... (P2-BFP2-134)</i>
LFP1	<i>[When discussing the sibling interaction in Case Scenario Four] Yeah. And I'm envisioning, so [son] is almost 6, [daughter] is 10, like I've said, we've had this play out at our house this scenario. It would blow my mind if [daughter] slapped [son] in the face, but I think if she did and reacted I don't know that I would consider that a violent move.(P6-LFP1-319)</i>
LFP2	<i>[When discussing the sibling interaction in Case Scenario Four] The age does have a factor for me a little bit more because they are so far apart. And so the older one to me should have a little more restraint, but the fact that there's a mark to me puts it into the lowest violence category. (P6-LFP2-283)</i>
NFP1	<i>[When discussing the sibling interaction in Case Scenario Four] Yeah, I'm with [NFP2] on that and I think the issues were the same for me. The age difference and the face matters to me too. (P4-NFP1-219)</i>
NFP2	<i>[When discussing the sibling interaction in Case Scenario One] If he would have been 16 and she were 11 I would have felt differently about it. Sixteen and 14, they're roughing it up. (P4-NFP2-067)</i> <i>[When discussing the sibling interaction in Case Scenario Four] If it were a 6 year old girl and a 12 year old boy and the 6 year old slapped the boy then because of the motor control of the 6 year old I could maybe excuse that... he's going to be taller so yeah, I could possibly think that that was not violence if it were a 6 year old and a 12-13 year old boy. (P4-NFP2-247; P4-NFP2-243)</i>
SFP1	<i>[When discussing the sibling interaction in Case Scenario One] Possibly the ages with Keaton [name used in case scenario] being a boy that was 16 and her being at girl that was 14 maybe if it was a wider range of age I wouldn't have considered it that, but I mean I can't guarantee, but let's say it said Keaton was an 8 year old boy and Delaney [name used in case scenario] was 14, I mean the punch would have still been wrong but I probably wouldn't have viewed it as bad as a 16 year old punching a 14 year old. (P8-SFP1-017)</i>

While there were some minor differences in how participants perceived the direction of violence from either a younger to and older sibling or from an older sibling to a younger sibling, all participants considered age difference when determining problematic behaviors.

For BFP1 and SFP1, the age differences between them and their respective sibling in childhood provided justification for the minimal problematic interactions they experienced. For BFP1, the five year age gap prevented them from having many of the same interests and friends which she said probably accounted for their lack of fighting in childhood. SFP1 noted:

My personal experience, I think one of the reasons I did not fight with my brother and sister as much is because of the four year, six and a half year gap as opposed to the two year gap my kids have. (P7-SFP1-249)

For SFP1, the lack of fighting in childhood was partly due to the age difference between her and her siblings; however, the closeness in age of her daughters was something that concerned her because of the possibility for problematic behaviors.

*Age.* Along with age difference of children, the age of children also influenced whether or not participants reported behaviors as violence. The importance of age became apparent when parents were asked to respond in the case scenario decision-making process. Participants had particular thoughts regarding the age of the child who initiated violence with a sibling and it seemed to relate to the age of reason.

*Older children.* As children increase in age participants viewed the experiences of siblings somewhat differently than those scenarios including younger children. Participants expected that the older a child was, the more knowledge she or he should have regarding what behaviors are appropriate and what behaviors are unacceptable. SFP1 noted that “8 year old should know that you can’t pick up a fork and stab somebody with it just because you don’t get your way,” (P8-SFP1-045) and when referring to Case Scenario Two (where the older sibling goes to take a popsicle from his younger brother) “that at 12 years old they still wouldn’t realize that you cannot do this, it’s not acceptable and then in one more year you could potentially go to juvenile detention for doing something exactly like this...” (P8-SFP1-069).

BFP1 and BFP2 noted the expectations for older children to be higher, especially in relation to younger children:

BFP2: Ya, not to mention the fact that Sarah’s 13 and she should have a lot more...

BFP1: Yes.

BFP2:...a lot more available to her in her brain.

BFP2: I would expect more of a 13 year old, she has more at her disposal. She should be able to talk with Max. (P2-BFP2-236)

LFP1 and LFP2 noted that in their house a 16 year old and a 14 year would potentially be more inclined to have problematic interaction with Case Scenario One (about an older brother punching his sister over a popsicle). They thought older children would not be monitored as much as younger children, potentially leading to problematic behaviors. NFP1 and NFP2 reported that age was a factor for them when considering Case Scenario One because they thought it was comical that teenagers would be fighting about a popsicle. With Case Scenario One, which included older children, SFP1 thought that situation “had the potential to become a lot more violent probably because of the ages being older...where they could have done a lot more damage to each other” (P8-SFP1-141).

*Younger children.* Participants thought that the knowledge about what is appropriate and not appropriate should be evident in children at most ages; however, younger children were viewed differently. In reference to the verbal violence from Case Scenario Three, SFP1 stated, “at age 5 and 7 that they both, and regardless of sex, but at 5 and 7 they both should know that it can be harmful to say stuff like that to each other” (P8-SFP1-105).

Several participants mentioned they saw the behaviors differently when very young children were involved. BFP2 noted, “I think if a 2 year old slaps a 12 year old sibling that’s a little bit different but this is a child of the age to understand...”[referring to 8 year old who used fork in Scenario 2] (P2-BFP2-134). When considering Case Scenario Four, SFP1 stated:

At 6 I think Max is still...he should know the concept of sharing, he should know of if it's hers you can't just grab for it, um, but at 6 I still think you're going to see kids do that where you have to try and explain to them, but at 13 when she, obviously should know better and then actually slaps him he's much younger, much smaller...she's completely at fault here even with Max grabbing for it. (P8-SFP1-117)

BFP1 thought that with younger children, more explanation of the behaviors they engage in is warranted in order for them to learn what is not appropriate to engage in with a sibling:

Well, it's not just, I mean, if you hit a younger sibling which...and they do some, you know our 3 year old will hit the 8 or 9 year old because he's 3 and they'll hit him back. You know, what are you teaching him? You're teaching him that it's okay to hit. He's going to be bigger than you, he's going to see...You can't, you older child need to be a better model. Hitting is never okay, but it's a learning tool for someone who is 3. It's a problem issue for someone who is 10. (P1-BFP1-353)

Chronological age of children factored into the decision-making process for the participants involved in this case study. Along with age difference and chronological age, gender was also important, although to a lesser degree, to participants when deciding whether behaviors were problematic or non-problematic.

**Gender.** Participants noted gender influenced their decision-making in what was acceptable (and not acceptable) between children. Participants responded similarly in how they viewed the appropriateness of sibling violence based on gender with more acceptance of violence directed towards a boy and between brothers than violence involving girls.

LFP1 and LFP2 though that they had more concern with a brother hitting a sister. LFP1 stated:



I would have some stupid sort of stereotypical view, and again I'm going to throw this back to my sort of my upbringing, some of the guidance I feel like my dad has given my brother, it would...I would jump on [son] maybe even sooner than [daughter] or maybe talk to him differently. (P5-LFP1-505)

LFP2 agreed that a brother hitting a sister would be viewed differently than two brothers or two sisters engaged in violent behaviors. They also thought that if things escalated out of control between their children, that they would be harder on their son for being violent than they would their daughter, despite recognizing that a women can hurt a man.

For BFP1 and BFP2 gender was not a focus in their family. BFP2 noted, "we don't really have genders...." This was said sarcastically because their family consists of five girls and the youngest, a son. They noted other factors influence their thoughts about violence between siblings based on what they experienced with so many daughters. They did note that expectations for their children, regardless of gender, would be similar.

SFP1 discussed hearing about what her daughter's doctor said about sibling dyads and that relationships where the sibling dyad is same-sex composition (i.e., brother-brother or sister-sister) could be more problematic with violence. SFP1 noted she had not previously considered this when thinking about sibling relationships, but that the process of discussing sibling interaction made her reflect on it. Similar to BFP1 and BFP2, when presented with various scenarios about sibling relationships, factors other than gender seemed to be more important to her when considering violence between siblings.

Regarding gendered stereotypes, NFP1 and NFP2 responded in a similar fashion to LFP1 and LFP2. When discussing gender of children and behaviors potentially leading to violence, NFP2 stated:

I wouldn't expect to see an older boy wrestling with a younger sister. That would strike me as odd. The younger boy wrestling with the older sister strikes me as pretty normal. She's stronger, she's bigger, and he's doing that. There's a natural point of...you know? (P3-NFP2-463)

NFP1 agreed with the gender dynamic her husband mentioned about siblings and mentioned:

If there was a physical component and [daughter] was the younger one I'd probably be more troubled than I am with the physical component with her as the older one...that's obnoxious of me but that's probably [how she would view it]. (P3-NFP1-453)

Gender, when considering sibling violence, was something to be considered for LFP1, LFP2, NFP1, NFP2, and SFP1. BFP1 and BFP2 acknowledged it, but focused more attention on other factors that influenced their decision-making process.

**Context of Interaction.** Along with parental experiences with sibling in childhood and child factors influencing participant decision-making, the context of the interaction between siblings also appeared to be an influential factor. Those contextual factors identified by participants as influencing their decisions included: intent to harm, methods of violence used, intensity, severity, duration, and frequency of behavior used with a sibling. The following elaborates these aspects of the decision-making model.

**Methods used.** All participants mentioned that the various behaviors used by one sibling on another in the case scenarios influenced their decision about whether behaviors could be construed as sibling violence or not. Certain behaviors, however, led participants to ponder whether sibling violence existed; whereas, other behaviors were immediately labeled as problematic and violent. For example, while she felt that verbal violence could do as much

damage as physical violence, when responding to the verbal violence in Case Scenario Three (about an older seven year old sister who call a younger sister a fat, ugly pig), BFP1 stated:

I don't think I would treat this any differently than with the first scenario where the brother punched his sister. Calling someone names is serious but I don't think I would also...if you asked me to describe sibling violence I would probably lean first towards physical violence. (P2-BFP1-176)

BFP1's husband shared similar views yet, stated that there was ambiguity in some situations where "pushing someone away from something you're going for...that kind of sorta contact" is different than "striking, slapping, hitting" (P2-BFP2-021). SFP1 thoughts on the emotional violence from Case Scenario Three were less ambiguous. When comparing the emotional to the physical SFP1 stated:

I think the words can sometimes do more harm than a punch to the...maybe not a fork to the side, but a punch to the arm, the punch is going to hurt for a little while, but this is definitely sibling violence because you don't know what her feelings are towards her sister. Maybe she worships her, idolizes her, wants to be like her and then to have somebody tell you you're a fat, ugly pig, that you love and care about, all of that, that can have lasting effects, so I absolutely think that this is sibling violence. (P8-SFP1-081)

Holding the same position as BFP1, the ambiguity of the boundary of what constituted physical sibling violence for NFP1 was apparent when responding to arm punch from Case Scenario One and she said, "the arm punch...I think any physical harm is a kind of violence, but I don't see that as a...when I think about sibling violence I don't think this scenario" (P4-NFP1-039).

For all participants there was no ambiguity. Hitting a sibling in the face was violent.

Every participant either mentioned or agreed with their partners that hitting a sibling in the face

constituted sibling violence. BFP1 stated that “there’s a certain intimacy about slapping someone on the face that’s not present with a punch to the arm” (P2-BFP1-378). NFP1 and NFP2 were in agreement that in Case Scenario Four (about a thirteen year old sister who slaps her six year old brother on the face), the behavior of a sibling slapping another sibling on the face was problematic for them and constituted a violent act. NFP2 noted:

So I think there is something primal when you start touching someone’s face or head. It’s not just our...it’s cultures all over. Thailand the head is the holiest, it’s all...so yeah. [The head] occupies a place of privilege I think when we’re talking about this kind of stuff.  
(P4-NFP2-233)

LFP1 agreed, stating when she thought “of punching and slapping someone in the face that has a different connotation. I almost think it’s more personal. Hence the expression ‘a slap in the face’...” (P6-LFP1-265). LFP2 agreed with her partner. Similarly SFP1 mentioned that the sibling in the same case scenario “hit him in the face which is really bad” (P8-SFP1-117).

Of all of the case scenarios, Case Scenario Two (about a brother stabbing a sibling with a fork) brought about the most visceral reaction from participants. When asked if the behavior was violent, BFP1 emphatically stated, “of course it’s violence and oh my gosh if any of our children stabbed another child with anything...I don’t know what we would [do]...” (P2-BFP1-094). All participants classified the behavior in the scenario as sibling violence without much discussion. In this scenario, participants reported that no other factor influenced their decision in labeling this sibling violence other than the fact a fork was used as a weapon. NFP1 and NFP2 discussed the violence as including the use of a tool, which served as a weapon. LFP1 classified using a fork differently than other behaviors from the other scenarios and said that “punching could be [makes punching movement that is somewhat soft at the hitting point]. Picking up a fork and

stabbing someone in the side is very different to me” (P6-LFP1-131). Interestingly, at some point most of the participants laughed when discussing the scenario which included the fork as a weapon. For them, the thought of a sibling using a fork as a weapon against a sibling was almost inconceivable. BFP2 said while laughing that “once you step up to a weapon then you step up to a point where a child can do more damage than they understand pretty quickly. That’s what’s frightening about weapon use” (P2-BFP2-096).

**Intent to harm.** When discussing problematic behaviors in the qualitative interviews as well as the Case Scenario Decision-Making Process six of seven participants mentioned “intention to harm” as influencing their decisions. With the exception of SFP1 who neither explicitly nor implicitly mentioned intent to harm or “things that are meant to hurt,” (P1-BFP1-015), the rest of the participants used this factor when deciding whether behaviors were problematic and/or violent in nature. The following table (Table 4.33) provides examples of participant thinking in considering intention of doing harm in sibling relationships.

**Table 4.33: Participants’ Reactions to Intent to Harm in Case Scenarios**

BFP1	<i>Ya, and I think intent has a lot to do with it too. When we perceive that a child is doing this maliciously, you know they’ve decided to harm someone emotionally or physically or their property because they’re angry with them then we’re going to step in. (P1-BFP1-221)</i> <i>My barometer just doesn’t move I think. None of these scenarios is okay. None of these is normal sibling behavior. Once you cross the line into being purposefully hurtful whether with words or being physical that’s when you leave the realm of okay. (P2-BFP1-294)</i>
BFP2	<i>The intent is very similar ya. It’s feeling sort of desperate for a response and reaching for inappropriate ones. That’s not going to get your the popsicle back. (P2-BFP2-220)</i>
LFP1	<i>Sibling violence to me means you are causing some serious physical harm to that sibling or, and/or serious mental harm and so that could be where the person then is... their behavior is affected, their sense of self-esteem is affected and so on and so forth. I think in terms of the physical aspect I think it would be bloodying noses intentionally, black eyes, breaking bones, throwing down the stairs... intentionally having that high level of physical abuse. There is a threshold for me. (P5-LFP1-017)</i>

LFP2	<i>And did he ever get that mad with you? No, because you couldn't have stopped him from punching you and he wasn't doing things out of maliciousness. I think that's huge like the intent... that to me that's the difference between sibling rivalry and sibling violence...intent to hurt... (P5-NFP2-175)</i>
NFP1	<i>I think some violence can be not intended to hurt, like if he had a knife in his hand and he accidentally kinda [makes motion pushing], (P4-NFP1-031) I would think that could be violent even if you didn't intend to harm them there could be some violence in that so...that's not so much the issue for me so much as with this they're having a fight that's territorial. (P4-NFP1-039)</i>
NFP2	<i>I guess for me the two things that would distinguish violence for me would be one, physical injury and two, which is much harder to measure action which is not an immediate reaction or an immediate manifestation of the perpetrator's state of mind, but is actually engaged in with the intent to cause harm to the other, not just an uncontrolled outburst within, but it goes beyond the within towards the specific focus. (P3-NFP2-007) ...that's not a reaction. That requires deliberate thought, however unconscious or quick. It's an action to assert harm against the other. (P4-NFP1:NFP2-075)</i>
SFP1	Participant neither explicitly nor implicitly mentioned intent to harm as a factor when deciding what constituted problematic and/or violent behavior between siblings.

The intent to harm was a factor that all but one (the single parent) participants believed should be considered when making the decision to determine if sibling interaction was problematic. This factor appeared to be important when considering a behavior and the line between sibling rivalry and sibling violence, though little discussion was present about how one can know the intent. In addition to intent to harm, intensity, severity, duration, and frequency of a behavior between siblings may help parents to classify a behavior as problematic (violent) or non-problematic (non-violent).

***Intensity, Severity, Duration, and Frequency.*** While completing the qualitative interviews during the data collection process, participants were asked how they would know when things were problematic between siblings. Participants were asked whether intensity of behavior, severity of behavior, and duration of behavior would influence their thoughts on knowing when interactions between siblings were problematic. Along with these factors,

participants also identified frequency as influencing decision-making. While all participants acknowledged each of these factors as influencing their decision-making processing, the extent to which each participant explicated the factors varied greatly. The methods used to carry out violence and intent to harm were not only mentioned by participants, but participants provided substantial explanation as to why these were important whereas participants provided less supporting evidence related to intensity, severity, duration, and frequency.

LFP1 provides an example of how intensity of behaviors between siblings had to be considered when contemplating the distinction between the behaviors of punching and stabbing with a fork from the case scenarios. For LFP1 punching someone in the arm lightly did not have the same level of intensity as stabbing a sibling with a fork, as was presented in the case scenarios. NFP1 also mentioned intensity when she noted, that “every so often [daughter] would say something like ‘I don’t care about him, I don’t care what happens to him’ and that would be one of the harshest things and that’s like okay that’s intense” (P3-NFP1-201).

Along with intensity was severity of the behavior which was oftentimes used synonymously with intensity. When asked about how LFP1 would know things were getting out of hand with her children, she said, “I think I would acknowledge it, worry about it, think about it before [LFP1] would if it was growing in intensity because of our backgrounds” (P5-LFP2-259). SFP1 also mentioned that severity was an issue for her in deciding what was problematic behavior between her daughters because behaviors sometimes escalated and got out of hand and problematic only when she was not there to monitor the situation.

Duration and frequency of behaviors were also considered when discussing what constituted problematic behaviors. When thinking of duration of behaviors, BFP2 identified an experience he and BFP1 had with their children. He stated:

Sometimes they do try to sort of, sometimes it sort of steps into bullying range when they start to line up allies, when they start to say, “I’m not going to play with you for two days because...” when they start to sort of imply they’re going to bear this grudge and that’s when we just come in...(P1-BFP2-127)

Similarly, LFP2 acknowledged that duration and frequency would influence perceptions of behaviors because “time can either escalate or de-escalate” behaviors. LFP1 agreed. LFP2 also noted that duration of behavior is important as it could be related to malicious intent making behaviors more aligned with violence. Participants noted that frequency of behaviors was as important to consider with LFP2 mentioning that the emotional violence from Case Scenario Three (about an older sister calling her younger sister a fat, ugly pig), was sibling violence because “she said that every day to her” (P6-LFP2-191).

The context of the interaction between siblings was important for participants to consider when deciding whether a behavior was problematic or non-problematic. The methods used when interacting with a sibling and intent to harm were substantial in decision-making with intensity, severity, duration, and frequency being important but to a lesser extent. These factors in conjunction with rules of the family help provide a more complete picture of those aspects parents consider when appraising an observed behavior.

**Rules within the family.** All participants mentioned rules that existed in both their families of origin as well as their current family structures. These rules used when participants were asked about past experiences that influenced their current thoughts on problematic behaviors between siblings. The following details how the various levels of rules surrounding sibling interaction have influenced participant decision-making regarding problematic behaviors between siblings.



**Rules within the family of origin.** For all participants, the rules within the family of origin, focused mainly on physical behaviors. Participants remembered knowing that negative physical behaviors such as hitting, punching, and slapping between themselves and sibling in childhood was not permitted. Whether the rules were implicit or explicit, all participants reported knowing what behaviors were acceptable and what would not be permitted in their interactions with siblings. Table 4.34 presents excerpts from the qualitative interviews showing the rules participants knew around interacting with a sibling while growing up.

**Table 4.34: Participants' Rules within Their Families of Origin**

BFP1	<i>I mean there were always rules in my family about respect for others and for property. I mean my parents would never have allowed me to systematically be mean to my sister in any way...it was understood and expected... but there were no house rules. You will be nice to your sister. You will do this, you will do that. (P1-BFP1-229)</i>
BFP2	<i>I don't remember growing up with a lot of hard and fast rules around how we relate to each other... (P1-BFP2-231) I guess as a younger sibling there were rules about...I mean not even rules, I had some understandings about getting into his stuff, but how not to physically...things I couldn't do physically to my big brother that wasn't really a subject of conversation. (P1-BFP2-247)</i>
LFP1	<i>I remember my dad though on many occasions sitting down and saying, that was a real conversation he had... "there's important stuff in her stomach that she is going to need in her life" and "there's important stuff there [referring to brother's groin] and you may not..." There were some definitive rules around stuff like that and I think there was also from my dad this sorta sense of looking out for a female. (P5-LFP1-415)</i>
LFP2	<i>I think it's totally influenced because I can't imagine my parents would have let any of the things I would categorize into violent, that she would not [referring to partners experiences], they would not have happened more than once at my house. I would not have been okay. I can't imagine. I can picture me getting pinned down by him because of something, like to not to go tell my parents something. (P5-LFP2-389)</i>
NFP1	<i>I'm sure there were. I don't think I remember what they were. My guess is...yeah I remember the time when I locked [sister] in laundry room for a couple of hours. [laughs]...that was one time that I knew I crossed the line, but I think... I'm sure they made it clear that certain things were not to be done. My guess is...I don't know that it ever occurred to us to be physically violent with each other, but that was probably pretty clear that that was not acceptable. I don't remember anything else. (P3-NFP1-277)</i>
NFP2	<i>It wasn't acceptable in our house either, but that didn't stop me from doing it.</i>

	<i>But I do remember one conversation in particular...one long heated conversation between her and me and how I was complaining because [brothers] were always trying to get my goat and always trying to tease me and when they did I lashed out physically. And I remember over and over and over again I was always hearing, “no you can’t hit your brothers. Don’t hit your brothers that’s not allowed.” But I remember at that point her...she probably said it at other times, but I specifically I do remember her at that point going to my brothers and telling them not to tease me. “Don’t tease [NFP2’s name], don’t hit your brothers.” (P3-NFP2-287)</i>
SFP1	<i>We really...the only things, you like, you weren’t allowed to curse. You couldn’t say “shut up” in our house. We weren’t allowed to be physical with each other, but I don’t even remember the urge to want to do that or the fighting. Like I said, I know listening to stories my brother and sister fought like cats and dogs apparently according to my mom, her sisters, and my dad but I don’t even remember that... (P7-SFP1-149)</i>

Participants were clear that there were rules in their families of origin regarding what was acceptable and unacceptable behavior in the sibling dyad. Even when rules were not made explicitly clear, participants stated they knew that physical interaction between siblings that was violent in nature was not permitted. These rules from participants’ families of origin appeared to mirror the overall notion that violence and inappropriate behaviors were not acceptable for the sibling relationships between participants’ children.

***Rules within the current family structure.*** All participants mentioned rules in their current family structures regarding what behaviors are expected and what behaviors are not acceptable. Participants noted having a variety of different rules for their children, but there were specific rules they established to define a boundary for what was and was not acceptable behavior between siblings. Crossing that boundary would to them constitute problematic behavior between siblings.

For the participants from the blended family, specific rules in the family were explicitly discussed and agreed upon by both parents. BFP1 stated that the basic rules in the house included, “Respect, you have to respect each other, you know, each other’s bodies, each other’s

spaces, each other's feelings and with those basic ground rules...try and give them leeway to figure out their own relationships" (P1-BFP1-147). Along with respecting individuals in the family, BFP2 was insistent that grabbing a family member or grabbing something that belonged to another in the house was not acceptable behavior, not just for the children, but also the adults.

BFP2 stated:

[BFP1's] language tends to be more...respect, be kind, maybe more subjective terms where...partially based on having children with a language issue, partially based on my own personality, my rules tend to be, you know, you're not allowed to grab things unless someone's about to get hurt...(P1-BFP2-239)

BFP1 noted that BFP2 "came to our relationship with a strict no grabbing rule. It's never okay to grab. It's never okay for kids to grab from each other" (P2-BFP1-039).

While rules in the blended family were explicitly stated and discussed between parents and children, the rules were less clear for the same-sex family. The expectations were apparent, however, existed for both participants. For example, when the partners were discussing Case Scenario One (about an older brother punching his younger sister in the arm), LFP2 said that the punching exhibited within the scenario "wouldn't be okay at our house" (P6-LFP1-061). LFP2 was adamant that she did not want her children to experience the violence that her partner experienced with her brother as children. The rules were somewhat different for each participant in childhood which influenced how they viewed the rules for their current family:

LFP1:... and I think it's important because you learn how to navigate your world through those experiences of conflict and whatever it is...I'm not saying I want to foster conflict between [daughter] and [son], I think it's very normal. I'm thinking a lot because again I think they've sorta hit that year were those years...

LFP2: But I think [LFP1] lets it, I think you put up with more than I do and I wonder if that's part of the reason.

LFP1: Right.

LFP2: I don't really put up with it.

LFP1: Now having said that I think I have more want for constraint than I did with my brother.

LFP2: With them? Mmmm hmmm.

LFP1: It's different with your kids.

LFP2: Mmmm hmmm.

LFP1: So even though we were rough and tumbly... (P5-LFP1-349)

LFP1 would not allow her children to be as physical as her experience with her own bother.

PPF2 held the same position, even without a similar childhood experience.

For the parents from the nuclear family, the rules included a variety of aspects necessary to consider when thinking about interaction between siblings. For NFP2, one of the foundational rules for him that emerged from his childhood was that his daughter and son were not allowed to hit a sibling's face. When discussing violent behaviors NFP2 stated, "...of course when I think 'slap' I think face. And that was one of the rules [when NFP2 was growing up], and I say it all the time here, that I heard growing up, 'stay away from the head'" (P3-NFP2-309). Similar to her husband, NFP1 noted her past experiences influence what she currently expected in the relationship between her children:

Well I mean, I just was thinking about how my expectations, the kinds of things I expect of [daughter] and [son] may be based on my experience and based on who I am now, we will frequently say to them "you can talk about how you feel, but don't...no meanness.

We don't speak mean words here. So try to figure out how to say what you need and what you're feeling but..." So on one hand I feel like a certain amount of verbal violence I expect as people figure out how to express themselves, how to be in relationships, how to share space, how to deal with the changes in a body, all that stuff, how to channel anger. A certain amount of violence is going to happen, but that's not okay. (P3-NFP1-333)

While current expectations were influenced by past experiences, in this family NFP1 focused more on emotional/psychological rules and NFP2 focused more on those rules involving physical behaviors. However, when discussing these rules and expectations for their children, both participants were in agreement about those behaviors that were unacceptable.

For SFP1, rules focused on both physical behaviors and emotional/psychological behaviors. While she did not explicitly discuss her past as influencing the rules in the house, the expectations and rules she had for her daughters were similar to her stated experience as a child with her siblings, where certain behaviors were not allowed. According to SFP1 the rules are:

No physical. Absolutely no physical and they know that, they don't always listen to it, but they know not to do that, no physical. No cursing. Calling names, the rule in our house is if someone is being mean or ugly and it is something they can control I do not have a problem with you speaking up to them to address it, but if it is something that cannot be controlled you better never tease someone...my youngest is a little bit overweight, my oldest has a lazy eye, for example I better never hear either of the two pick on something like that...but I know the bickering and the arguing does happen sometimes. I let it happens as long as they aren't being ugly, so I can try and find out or listen to what the issue is. (P7-SFP1-137)

Similar to the participants from the other family structures, SFP1 had rules and expectations for the interactions between her children. These regulations appeared to serve the purpose of helping participants decide when behaviors became problematic between siblings in the family.

For the participants of this case study, family rules were important in deciding whether behaviors between siblings were problematic or non-problematic. The family rules (both current and family of origin) serve as one of the platforms participants acknowledged when appraising behaviors observed between children. Along with family rules, the context of interaction between sibling and children factors are aspects participants appear to consider in decision-making. Past experiences of participants served as the background from which decision-making was initiated with observed behaviors being considered based on the past experiences of participants. All of these factors then appear to influence parental appraisal of observed sibling interaction leading to a decision of witnessed behaviors as problematic or non-problematic. And given participants responses, these problematic behaviors may be potentially considered violent with non-problematic behaviors being non-violent.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter presents the results from the case study examining how parents of various family structures experience and perceive physical and emotional violence between their children and their own siblings. Guided by family systems theory and social learning theory, results of the data indicate support that concepts such as intergenerational transmission of violence occurs with both parents and their children experiencing violence in the sibling dyad. Interaction between siblings may be learned based on past experiences which guide thoughts on how siblings are to interact—even if they interact in ways counter to what they have learned or been taught.

Based on the data provided and examination of that data through the seven hypotheses, these theories provide support that family context through interaction, environmental factors, and behaviors learned in the past may supersede family structure in helping to explain differences how parents perceive and experience sibling violence. Analysis of the data also provided insight regarding the differences and similarities in how participants decided what constituted sibling violence and sibling rivalry. Participants viewed sibling violence as having more of a physical component to it, whereas sibling rivalry was noted as being more emotional/psychological in nature.

The quantitative and qualitative data analyzed from the three data collection points provided the platform to then consider how parents may decide what factors influence decision-making regarding problematic and non-problematic behaviors. These factors influencing participants were then incorporated into a model of parental decision-making to determine problematic sibling interaction. Parental experiences with a sibling in childhood, child factors, context of sibling interaction, and rules within the family appear to be influential in distinguishing problematic and/or violent behaviors from those behaviors that are non-problematic and/or non-violent. These factors were considered by participants and often discussed as being connected to each other with more emphasis being placed on certain factors at particular times. For example, when participants were presented with the scenario where a fork was used as a weapon, the method of violence superseded any other factor as influencing decision-making. However, when participants processed the scenario where punching was involved, some participants simultaneously considered how gender of the siblings in the scenario related to the method of violence perpetrated and how these related to the rules families had for violent behaviors between siblings.

The process participants engaged in when making decision was oftentimes circular with factors being processed and re-evaluated for importance when participants were presented with various scenarios, as well as those personal situations they discussed. Factors may be considered by parents, not in checklist form, but more in conjunction with one another at the same time in a constant comparison method. This then leads to the parental process of responding to the question about whether or not a behavior is problematic (violent) or non-problematic (non-violent) with an answer of “It depends.”



## Chapter Five: Discussion

The results of this case study emphasize a complex and integrated system for considering parental perceptions and experiences of physical and emotional violence between siblings. While families consist of different structures, these structures may be less important in understanding what sibling violence and problematic interaction between siblings means for parents than the influence of contextual and biopsychosocial factors on parental thinking. This highlights the potential importance of including more theories along with social learning theory and family systems theory when examining parental perceptions and experiences of physical and emotional sibling violence. The following sections provide a detailed discussion of the hypotheses and parental decision-making model along with the limitations and strengths of this case study, directions for future research, and this case study's connection to social work and social justice.

### Hypotheses

The complexity of this case study is highlighted in the varying degrees to which the hypotheses were supported, not supported, or partially supported. Social learning theory and family systems theory served as the platforms from which hypotheses were conceptualized. Embedded in the discussion of the hypotheses is how these theories do and do not address the understanding of how parents from different family structures experience and perceive sibling violence, which is consistent with case study research (Yin, 2009).

**Hypothesis One: Parents will normalize any sibling violence they experienced in their relationship with a sibling when they were a child.** With inconclusive data, there was not

support for the hypothesis stating that parents will normalize any sibling violence they experienced in their relationship with a sibling in childhood. The number of behaviors participants experienced in childhood was first assessed to consider any patterns by family structure. No patterns existed within the data based on family structure. Five of the seven participants normalized violent behaviors experienced in childhood between siblings, whereas two participants did not. Hardy, Beers, Burgess, and Taylor (2010) found that experiencing higher rates of aggression was associated with more acceptability of aggressive behaviors; however, this was not the case for one of the participants from the case study who did not normalize the behaviors he experienced with a sibling yet reported experiencing the second highest number of violent behaviors in childhood. While some participants normalized their experiences and others did not, several factors appeared to emerge that influenced normalization: past experiences, environment, family context, and family rules.

Participants considered their experiences from their past when considering what was normal behavior between them and their siblings in childhood. Past experiences and the context of those experiences may be important when considering what constitutes “normal behaviors.” Past behaviors and the appraisal of those behaviors may serve as the platform from which to base all conceptualization of sibling interaction. If violence between siblings is viewed as problematic in the family of origin, those ideals may get carried into future family structures. On the other hand, if violence between siblings is dismissed or minimalized when an individual is in childhood, then those behaviors may be disregarded or marginalized when that individual becomes a parent. This may be related to the observation that participants who normalized violent behaviors did not attribute violence to the behaviors they experienced. Therefore, when

behaviors are witnessed between children, parents may not classify them as violent since they themselves may have experienced the same behaviors with a sibling during childhood.

The family environment and the rules around the family may also be related to whether behaviors are viewed as normal. Many families have implicit and explicit rules that guide interaction between members of the family (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974). These rules may serve as a basis for some in helping to identify when behaviors between siblings are normal sibling interaction and when they may constitute problematic behavior. Interestingly, all participants from this study discussed there being rules surrounding sibling interaction with violence not being tolerated when they were young; however, all participants experienced violence with a sibling. While rules may be important to help influence sibling interaction, they do not seem to always prevent all violent behaviors between children from occurring.

**Hypothesis Two: Parents who have a child who exhibits violence towards a sibling will have experiences of violence with their own sibling.** The idea behind this hypothesis was that parents who have experienced sibling violence in childhood will have children who have experienced sibling violence. This hypothesis was supported as participants reported experiencing and witnessing relatively similar numbers of violent behaviors. It is possible that the actual number of violent behaviors between participants' children may be higher given that parents do not always witness all of the violent behaviors that occur between siblings (Wiehe, 1997). The comparable numbers of experienced and witnessed behaviors reported provide support that there may be an intergenerational transmission of sibling violence. While the linkage may not support learned behaviors in the sense that children do not witness their parents engaging in sibling violence, the thoughts and ideas around violence in the sibling relationship may continue through generations (Markowitz, 2001). As it has been posited with other forms of

family violence, cognitive factors, such as the perception that some violence is acceptable, may moderate intergenerational transmission of aggression (Herzberger, 1983) or in this case sibling violence.

When considering the types of behaviors experienced and witnessed an interesting pattern emerged. Although variation occurred in both the experienced and witnessed physical and emotional/psychological behaviors, many parents reported having had experienced the same emotional/psychological behaviors they witnessed in their children. More variation occurred in those physical behaviors, which may mean that emotional/psychological behaviors are more likely to be exhibited between generations.

Differences and similarities in what participants experienced and witnessed occurred, something which no other previous research study has examined, but this was apparently not due to family structure. With the exception of the single-parent, families contained one parent who experienced more behaviors and one parent who witnessed more behaviors between children. By family structure, the parent who reported experiencing more violence in childhood also reported witnessing less violence between their children with the exception of the parents from the same-sex family. The parent from the same-sex family who reported the most violence also reported witnessing the most violence in her children. Here, family structure is not sufficient for understanding the notion that violence occurs across generations. Factors such as those mentioned for Hypothesis One (past experiences, family environment, and family rules) should be considered when assessing how sibling violence appears to transcend generational boundaries.

**Hypothesis Three: Parents will label more behaviors from the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument as violent in nature as opposed to labeling the behaviors as sibling rivalry.** It was hypothesized that participants would label

more behaviors as sibling violence rather than sibling rivalry. This hypothesis, however, was not supported due to inconclusive data. Participants reported more behaviors as solely indicative of sibling violence than they did sibling rivalry, yet all behaviors included from the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument were classified as both sibling violence and sibling rivalry by at least one participant. There were no behaviors that all participants classified as sibling violence or sibling rivalry indicating there was lack of clarity in what constitutes what is normal and what is not. The results did, however, elucidate a potential distinction between physical behaviors and emotional/psychological behaviors as related to sibling violence and sibling rivalry with physical behaviors being associated more with sibling violence and emotional/psychological behaviors associated more with sibling rivalry. The proposed decision-making model may be one way to consider clarity around the lack of distinction between sibling violence and sibling rivalry. Taking into account factors from the model, it may become clearer why participants respond the way they do by considering the factors they report as being important to consider when making decisions about problematic behavior.

The way in which participants responded indicated no clear distinction between behaviors associated with sibling violence and sibling rivalry which is inconsistent with previous research finding a significant difference in classification of level of violence between the labels “sibling violence” and “sibling rivalry” (Ketterly & Emery, 2006). There was an overall tendency for parents to place behaviors in one of two categories. With the exception of *burning*, *tickling*, and *threatening*, which were placed in three or more of the categories, behaviors were either placed in “Sibling Violence” and “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry” or “Sibling Rivalry” and “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry.” However, associations also

emphasize an initial delineation between those behaviors that are more physical in nature and those with more of an emotional/psychological component. Table 5.1 demonstrates those behaviors that participants placed in either the “Sibling Violence” and “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry” category or the “Sibling Rivalry” and “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry” category.

**Table 5.1: Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence or Sibling Rivalry Being Physical or Emotional/Psychological in Nature**

	“Sibling Violence” and “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry”	“Sibling Rivalry” and “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry”
	<i>Physical</i>	<i>Emotional/Psychological</i>
<b>Behaviors from the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument</b>	Slapping Throwing something at a sibling Slamming a sibling against a wall Using weapons such as a knife, bat, or gun Twisting a sibling’s arm Punching Kicking Choking Beating up a sibling Pulling hair Pushing	Teasing Yelling at a sibling Manipulating Making a sibling feel guilty Insulting Doing something to spite a sibling Name calling

It should be noted that both groups of behaviors in Table 5.1 share the element of the category “Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry.” If this category were removed, it would appear that those behaviors more likely to be considered as sibling violence would be physical in nature and those behaviors more in line with sibling rivalry would be more emotional/psychological in nature. Many of these behaviors from the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument came from the CTS which assesses conflict tactics and not necessarily violent behaviors. Furthermore, the CTS does not assess extraneous factors which may contribute to the occurrence of violence. To get a clearer idea of how participants classified behaviors, it seems it was necessary to consider context of behaviors along with extraneous

factors (past experiences, family rules, etc.) when determining whether a behavior should be labeled sibling violence or sibling rivalry.

**Hypothesis Four: Parents who experienced sibling violence as a child will be more likely to label behaviors as rivalry.** This hypothesis was grounded in the notion that parents who experience sibling violence may be more likely to label behavior as rivalry due to desensitization of violent behaviors; however, this was not supported by the data from the case study. Participants classified more behaviors as solely violent than they did as solely sibling rivalry. Contrary to what was hypothesized, participants who experienced more sibling violence in childhood were less likely than others to label behaviors as sibling rivalry. In fact, the three participants who experienced the most violence placed the most behaviors as being both sibling violence and sibling rivalry.

The process of data collection and the research project itself could also have caused participants to question placement of behaviors into categories, as many of them reported not having thought about the topic at hand prior to involvement in the study. It is also possible that participants in general may have believed it was difficult to classify behaviors into one particular category as child factors (e.g., age, age difference, and gender), methods of violence used, intent to harm, and/or severity may be important to consider when reflecting on behaviors. Thus, these factors became a major impetus for the decision-making model along with past experiences with a sibling. Participants could also have reflected on their experiences with siblings and recognized their experiences to be atypical leading them to classifying behaviors between siblings as potentially both violent and rivalry. If this is the case, then similar to how cognitions related to violence in family can potentially occur across generations (Herzberger, 1983), parental

uncertainty about problematic behaviors could be transmitted intergenerationally with children also being uncertain about what is violence and what is rivalry.

**Hypothesis Five: The parent from the single-parent home will experience more problems with sibling violence than from families with two parents.** Given the context of single-parent families as potentially experiencing more stress due to one less parental figure in the household (Kazak & Linney, 1983), it was hypothesized that the participant from the single-parent household would experience more problems with sibling violence than those participants from other family structures. The results of the data analysis did not support this hypothesized difference related to family structure. The single-parent had the median response for the total number of violent behaviors witnessed by each project participant and witnessed the same behaviors as three other participants from the case study.

The assertion that family structure was a mechanism for differences between the single-parent family and the other families was not sound. Along with the lack of distinction between the single-parent family and the others based on number of violent behaviors witnessed in children, the single-parent family shared an experience that was similar to that of the nuclear family. Both families presented information on situations including sibling violence they had experienced due to biopsychosocial changes experienced by the oldest daughter in each family. As it appeared to the case with these families, rather than family structure, mental health factors such as depression (Wiehe, 1997), biological changes such as puberty, and environmental/situational factors influencing family interaction and relationships (Caspi, 2008: 2012; Reid & Donovan, 1990) may be risk factors for engaging in sibling violence.

**Hypothesis Six: Regardless of parent sexual orientation, parents will experience and perceive sibling violence in a similar manner.** To date, the research in sibling violence has not



included the voice of same-sex parents. The lack of research including the voice of same-sex parents as it relates to sibling violence in conjunction with research indicating a lack of substantial of differentiation in the parenting of same-sex parents and heterosexual parents (Patterson, 2006) provided the support for this hypothesis. It was hypothesized that same-sex participants would experience and perceive violence in a similar manner to that of the participants from other family structures. This hypothesis was supported as sexual orientation of participants appeared not to be a factor in the similarities and differences between participants.

When responses to the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale were examined to consider what participants had witnessed between their children based on family structure, little differentiation existed between the same-sex family and the other family structures. In fact, the data showed the witnessing of behaviors between the participants from the same-sex family and the blended family to be very similar. The partners from the same-sex and blended families reported similar numbers of witnessed behaviors and behaviors not witnessed, as well as similar numbers of behaviors that were witnessed differently by the participants of these family structures.

A comparison of two parents, one parent from the same-sex family and one parent from the nuclear family provided further support to the influence of past experiences, environmental factors, context factors, and family rules in affecting how sibling violence is perceived both in general and within the context of participants' children. Both participants experienced considerable violence with a sibling in childhood, yet their appraisals of their situations differed. This highlights the notion that sexual orientation in and of itself is not sufficient for understanding any potential similarities and/or differences in perceptions and experiences of sibling violence.

**Hypothesis Seven: Parents will respond similarly to the labels that have been used to refer to violence between siblings.** With a multitude of labels that have been used to refer to violence in the sibling dyad, it was hypothesized that parents from this case study would respond similarly to labels that have been used to refer to violence between siblings. Data addressing this hypothesis was inclusive and this hypothesis was not supported. Participants responded similarly to some labels and differently to others included in the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale where there was wide variation in how participants responded overall. It could be that participants have not heard of some of these terms. Furthermore, the terms may have elicited different conceptualizations in the meaning for the parents, thus highlighting a confounding issue related to the assessment and scale.

However, with respect to the terms “sibling violence” and “sibling rivalry,” notable similarities existed in how participants perceived these terms from a qualitative standpoint. All participants mentioned there were both physical and emotional behaviors associated with sibling violence and sibling rivalry. The severity of the physical behaviors related to sibling violence and sibling rivalry may be different based on the age, age difference, and gender of who is involved much like in research on perceptions of child sexual abuse (Maynard & Wiederman, 1997). When comparing the physical behaviors associated with sibling violence to those physical behaviors associated with sibling rivalry, all participants noted the physical behaviors of sibling rivalry as less severe.

Interestingly, this is not how participants viewed the differences between sibling violence and sibling rivalry when considering emotional/psychological behaviors. All participants generally mentioned the same behaviors when asked about emotional/psychological behaviors and aspects of sibling violence and sibling rivalry. *Manipulation, teasing, name-calling,*

*putdown*, and *making a sibling feel guilty* were named when discussing both violence and rivalry. No mention of severity of emotional behaviors was discussed by any participant, leaving a lack of clarity around what distinguishes emotional sibling violence from emotional sibling rivalry. This difficulty in uncovering factors associated with emotional sibling violence and emotional sibling rivalry is similar to the area of child abuse and neglect where “it has been especially difficult to reach consensus about the definition of emotional abuse with resulting difficulties in the operationalization of this construct, a critical factor in scientifically sound research” (Trickett, Kim, & Prindle, 2011, p. 876). While participants identified emotional behaviors as problematic and potentially harmful during interviews, they tended to associate emotional/psychological behaviors more with sibling rivalry than sibling violence.

### **Parental Decision-Making Model of Problematic Sibling Interaction**

The parental decision-making model of problematic interaction between siblings is grounded in the analysis of the data from the case study. This model proposes various factors that parents may consider when evaluating behaviors they observe between their children. With reflection on past experiences, parents may consider children factors, context of sibling interaction, and family rules when making sense of behaviors they witness between their children leading to an assessment of behaviors as problematic or non-problematic.

**Parental experiences with sibling in childhood.** All participants included in this case study discussed interactions they had with their siblings in childhood. Regardless of whether participants reported they felt interactions between them and their siblings were violent, past interactions appeared to be where participants started when considering the existence of violence between siblings. It may be that past experiences with a sibling resonate with parents in a way so that parents base their part of their assessment of their children’s interactions on what they

remember experiencing. No matter what type of relationship a participant had with a sibling in childhood, they referenced past interactions to frame the discussion of their current relationship with their siblings, thus providing further evidence supporting the influential nature of sibling interaction in childhood as a mechanism for understanding present contextual factors. Along with parental experiences with a sibling in childhood, children factors, context of sibling interaction, and family rules were included as aspects that seem to be considered simultaneously by a parent.

**Children factors.** Factors related to children were found to influence parental decision-making. Specifically, the age difference between children, the chronological age of children, and the gender of children were aspects parents considered when contemplating problematic behavior. Participants appeared to consider these factors collectively when making decisions about behaviors between siblings.

*Age difference between siblings.* Research has shown that siblings closer in age are likely to have increased frequency of conflict (Aguilar, O'Brien, August, Aoun, & Hektner, 2001), aggression (Herzberger & Hall, 1993), and violence (Noland, Liller, McDermott, Coulter, & Seraphine, 2004). Participants from this case study, however, found it to be more problematic when behaviors between siblings occurred with a greater difference in age than with siblings who were closer in age. It could be that participants believe if there is substantial age difference between two siblings, that the younger siblings may not be able to defend themselves against an older sibling who is assumed to be the perpetrator of violence. The assumption of violence being unidirectional from older to younger sibling may be a contributing factor to the reaction many participants had when the younger brother in one of the case scenarios used a fork against his brother who was four years older. Participant focus on younger and older siblings with increased

age difference highlights that not only was age difference important in decision-making but chronological age was important as well.

***Chronological age of siblings.*** While violence between siblings has been reported to be the most frequent when the oldest child in the sibling dyad is between ten to fourteen years of age (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 2006), parents in this project considered all ages when considering sibling violence. For most behaviors included in the case scenarios, participants thought children were old enough to know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. In each scenario presented in the third phase of data collection, participants contemplated age, even if they eventually said it was not a factor in their decision-making. For example, all participants thought the use of a fork as a weapon was unacceptable regardless the age; however, they did consider the fact that the younger sibling was the perpetrator of violence in the scenario.

Age was considered, and their expectation was that older children should not engage in behaviors they know are inappropriate for their age. With the exception of the scenario including the use of a fork as a weapon, participants became more lenient with expectations for very young siblings. One participant even stated that older children should model appropriate behaviors for younger siblings.

***Gender of siblings.*** For participants, consideration of the gender of siblings was important when determining whether or not behaviors were problematic. Similar to other research, participants in this case study showed disapproval of sibling aggression from brother towards a sister and more tolerance of aggression between males (Martin & Ross, 2005). For many of the participants, they were cognizant of their responses as being gender biased. When discussing their past experiences, the experiences of their children, and the case scenarios from

the decision-making process, participants noted brother-to-sister violence as being unacceptable, and if the brother was younger, at least one participant believed the violence was an opportunity for learning appropriate behaviors. This combination of gender and age emphasizes that participants considered child factors collectively when making decisions about problematic and non-problematic behaviors.

**Context of interaction.** Along with characteristics of children, the context of the behaviors between siblings was important for participants. Participants assessed the methods used to perpetrate violence towards a sibling; whether intent to harm was present; and the intensity, severity, duration, and frequency of behaviors. Similar to the variables from the child factors, these variables were also considered in conjunction with one another, as well as in connection with the variables from child factors and family rules.

**Methods Used.** All participants focused on the ways in which particular behaviors were initiated between siblings when appraising situations between siblings. Interestingly, many of the participants mentioned the face as being a part of the body that was off limits with respect to physical violence. Any physical violence directed towards the face or head was inappropriate and for some was a mechanism to consider intent to harm a sibling. Participants spent more time contemplating the less severe behaviors and whether or not they should be considered problematic.

A gray area may exist when contemplating less severe behaviors leading parents to consider a multitude of factors before determining whether behaviors exhibited by a sibling are violent or sibling rivalry. This may mean the ambiguity (inconclusiveness of whether a behavior is violence or rivalry) of parental response to a certain behavior could be interpreted by children as the behavior being an acceptable interaction. For example, a parent may think a punch to the

face is more problematic than a punch to the arm. Children may be confused by this interpretation as the method of violence is a punch regardless of where the punch lands.

One interesting result of the interview process was the reactions of participants to the case scenario including the use of a fork as a weapon from a younger brother towards an older brother. When participants heard the fork scenario, almost all of them laughed. Most laughed due to their interpretation of the action being absurd and could not comprehend how something like this could happen between siblings. What the participants did not know was that this was an actual behavior the researcher had heard described in another research project and decided to include in one of the case scenarios of this case study.

This was a situation that actually occurred in someone's life. The reaction of the participants to this scenario has implications for decision-making. Every participant labeled this behavior as sibling violence without question and without necessarily considering other factors which may have influenced their decision. Had participants experienced or witnessed this behavior, their response to the scenario may have been different as the reality of having experienced or witnessed a fork used as a weapon would appear less absurd. However, given the reaction of the participants to the use of a fork as a weapon, parents may dismiss or minimize violence that occurs between siblings (Wiehe, 1997). When confronted with this behavior (or other behaviors) between siblings in real life, parents may respond in ways that are inconsistent with the behavior exhibited, potentially even more so if a parent does not personally witness the behavior.

***Intent to Harm.*** All but one participant mentioned a sibling's intent to harm another sibling without being prompted by any research questions. Participants wanted to know what the intentions were of the sibling perpetrating the violence. During the qualitative interviews,

participants appeared to be less concerned with whether or not the behaviors presented were physical or emotional/psychological and more concerned with the intent to harm a sibling. Intent to harm was viewed as being more malicious and serious in nature than consideration of whether the behaviors were physical or emotional/psychological.

Intent to harm has been included in the research surrounding child abuse and neglect with it being asked whether intent to harm should be “required to classify a particular type of behavior as either abusive or neglectful” (Zuravin, 1991, p.121). Hamarman and Bernet (2000) propose parental intent to harm needs to be considered when determining the severity of psychological maltreatment against children. Given project participants’ substantial focus on intent to harm when considering behaviors between siblings (regardless of whether those behaviors were physical or emotional/psychological), it appears the consideration and challenges in measurement of “intent to harm” in the area child abuse and neglect would also pertain to intent to harm as it relates to sibling violence. This, however, assumes that intent to harm can be measured (McCoy & Keen, 2013), making intent to harm in the area of sibling violence an area for future research.

***Intensity, severity, duration, and frequency.*** Past research has included severity and frequency when considering violence between family members (Straus, 1979; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). Participants reported intensity, severity, duration, and frequency of behaviors to be important when considering behaviors between siblings. During the qualitative interviews of the second phase of data collection, participants were probed to consider whether these variables were important. Unlike methods used and intent to harm where most participants brought these into discussion before being asked, these variables were discussed to a lesser extent and not without probing. Without probing, the degree to which these would have



been identified and discussed is unknown. Participants did agree that these elements were important and noted they were considered in conjunction with the methods used and intent to harm when deciding whether or not behaviors between siblings were problematic. These descriptors need to be included in future research examining the behaviors constituting sibling violence and whether the inclusion of these variables moderate parental appraisal in the decision-making process.

**Family rules.** Whether implied or explicitly stated, families have rules regarding the interaction between individual members (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974). This was consistent with how participants discussed rules of their families of origin. Some participants mentioned their families did not have explicit rules regarding appropriate and inappropriate sibling behaviors. Other participants recounted stories about discussions with parents regarding what behaviors were unacceptable when interacting with a sibling. Regardless of whether the rules were explicit or implicit, rules existed in these families and these rules influenced participants' perceptions of problematic and non-problematic behaviors between siblings.

Family of origin rules appeared to influence rules in participants' current families. Although not stated, rules from one generation appeared to be similar to rules regarding sibling interaction for a subsequent generation with definitions of unacceptable behaviors being intergenerational. This did not mean that violent behaviors did not occur for participants. In fact, behaviors occurred despite family rules surrounding inappropriate sibling interaction. It may be that rules regarding violent interaction between siblings may be flexible since some violent behaviors occur in sibling relationships despite rules being set in place to deter violence from happening. Furthermore, in at least one instance, current family rules existed due to the experience of one participant's sibling's lack of adherence to family of origin rules. While there

was replication of rules in current family systems from the family of origin rules, there was also reaction to the rules that influenced parental decision-making.

As was the case with several participants, rules set in place may be disregarded in the context of the sibling dyad when parents are not present. It could be that parents are unable to be with their children all of the time, thereby allowing the potential for violence to occur outside of parental supervision (Perkins & Shadik, 2013). The meaning and influence of the rules to siblings may be different depending on the context and environment in which they find themselves. If parents are not present the likelihood of violence between siblings may increase as there is no one to enforce rules in the context of the interaction. This could then add to the complexity of addressing sibling violence through intervention and prevention with families.

**Parental appraisal of observed behaviors between siblings.** The factors above appear to be those that parents may consider simultaneously when making decisions regarding problematic or non-problematic interaction between siblings. Parental decision-making regarding potentially problematic behavior is important to consider as it sets the tone for how behaviors are going to be viewed within the family, essentially creating the rules that somehow seem to be passed from generation to generation regarding acceptable and unacceptable sibling interaction. One could argue that despite the creation of rules and despite parental appraisal of problematic or non-problematic behaviors, violent behaviors may still exist within the sibling dyad. This could highlight the notion that other factors may be involved when considering the continuation of sibling violence across generations. Rules, whether explicit or implicit, created to address sibling violence within families may not be enough to curb its occurrence.

From the case study, with the exception of the participant from the single-parent family, participants from the blended, nuclear, and same-sex families engaged in discussion with their

significant others around behaviors each found problematic and behaviors that were considered normal sibling interaction. However, observations of these interactions suggest that participants had their own thoughts around behaviors, which were not always initially consistent with the thoughts of their partners. It was through discussion and communication that participants were able to hear their partner's stance on particular behaviors and then reconsider their own positions. Some participants were surprised at the stances of their partners regarding particular behaviors suggesting potentially more communication between parents may be important to solidify parental standing regarding particular rules of the family.

### **Connection to Social Work and Social Justice**

Children are a marginalized group, and violence directed at a child is without question a social justice issue. With parents being responsible for children, an understanding of their experiences and perceptions surrounding sibling violence helps provide insight to addressing this issue that deserves attention and consideration within the profession of social work. Efforts aimed at addressing sibling violence can occur through social work practice that is clinical or educative in nature along with macro practice designed to affect changes in policy that does not specifically address sibling violence. Also, efforts at incorporating discussion of sibling violence into social work education in curricula addressing interpersonal violence and violence directed towards children is warranted.

**Social work direct practice.** Violence perpetrated by a sibling toward another sibling can have long-lasting consequences (Wiehe, 1997). Efforts aimed at intervention have primarily focused on therapy of individuals and families experiencing sibling violence (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998: 2005; Caspi, 2008: 2012; Reid & Donovan, 1990). Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro (1998) suggest family-based therapies which include a variety of approaches to address sibling

abuse trauma with families. The connection of sibling violence to other forms of family violence (e.g. child abuse and neglect) has been minimally considered within social work micro practice despite evidence showing its connection to other forms of violence (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994; Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005; Straus & Gelles, 1990; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 2006). Interventions with a focus on the family rules surrounding violence in the sibling relationship may be important for all family members, not just children. As was with this case study, parents often had not previously considered the rules of the family and how they related to sibling interaction. Rules regarding sibling interaction should be made explicitly clear with all members of the family so that ambiguity surrounding acceptable behaviors does not exist. Processing rules in an open manner with all family members will allow for every person to know the rules regarding problematic sibling behaviors.

Given the cognitive process of decision-making regarding problematic and non-problematic behaviors and the factors considered when making decisions, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) may be pertinent when addressing sibling violence in families, despite the lack of empirical research using CBT as an intervention for sibling violence. CBT would include focusing on the thoughts around behaviors that have occurred between siblings in a family and would allow for processing of those behaviors. CBT may also help capture the construct of “intent to harm” in decision-making due to the importance of considering and processing cognitions. Furthermore, those cognitions and behaviors could also include examination of the rules for families and how these rules intersect with the meaning that has been placed on the behaviors between siblings. Caffaro (2014) suggests including trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy for groups of children and adolescents, however, given the importance of

considering parental involvement in understanding the meaning of sibling violence for a family, all members of the family may benefit from CBT to address violence between siblings.

**Social work advocacy through education of parents.** One way to begin to initiate change regarding sibling violence is to increase opportunities for consciousness-raising in parents. Advocating for change can be initiated in helping parents to consider that sibling violence can be problematic for children. Even within this case study, parents mentioned that sibling violence was not something they had previously considered until confronted with processing it during the data collection process. Parents' telling their stories and reflecting on their meaning of sibling violence helped them to see this form of family violence as potentially problematic with children in their families.

Helping parents to contemplate their own meaning around behaviors associated with sibling violence and sibling rivalry may be helpful. As proposed in Table 5.1, there may be behaviors that parents associate more with sibling violence and others they associate more with sibling rivalry. Like many of the participants in the case study who associated behaviors as being both violent and rivalry, parents may report ambiguity when considering behaviors. This is potentially problematic. It is not enough to simply indicate that parents may link violence and rivalry with particular behaviors. Steps toward parental education need to be taken to help inform parents of the seriousness of this issue for children and adults who have been significantly impacted by the experience of sibling violence (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998; Wiehe, 1997). Along with education is the need to emphasize reflection of sibling violence and what it means to parents so they are able to address it should it occur in their families.

Assisting parents in noticing the implications and consequences sibling violence can have for children as well as for themselves is important in changing the way parents view this

phenomenon. Parental education may also help parents to be more informed of the systemic connections sibling violence can potentially have within the family as well as with other forms of family violence. It has been proposed that sibling violence needs to be considered in curricula addressing child abuse and neglect with parenting intervention groups as violence between children can potentially have negative effects for parents at risk for child abuse and neglect (Shadik, Perkins, & Kovacs, 2013). Here, education of violence between siblings can prepare at-risk parents to not only be aware of the impact of sibling violence, but also, social workers can help teach parents how to address it so that the stress of children fighting does not lead to inappropriate means (child abuse) of regaining parental control over situations.

**Social work education.** Curricula in social work education also needs to consider sibling violence as deserving as much attention as other forms of violence directed towards children. Not only can students become more informed regarding violence between siblings, but students may also hear peer views regarding the personal impact sibling violence has had for them (Perkins & Price, 2010). Hopefully this will then help eventual social workers to not only be cognizant of sibling violence as a problematic phenomenon, but also empathetic to future clients who are experiencing or have had experienced violence with a sibling. As with educating parents, including students may be an initial way to begin advocacy efforts through education leading to consciousness-raising about sibling violence as a problematic occurrence for many children.

**Policy implications for social work.** Along with the need to consider how sibling violence can be address in social work practice, the implications of violence between siblings also deserves policy consideration. It has been said that “research and clinical experience suggest that the child welfare system should expand its definition of ‘protective issues’ to include sibling

abuse cases” (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998, p.1). Despite the fact that CAPTA provides federal guidelines for parent- or caregiver-to-child maltreatment, CAPTA does not specifically address violence perpetrated by a sibling. While state interpretations of CAPTA may implicitly allow for addressing sibling violence through parental responsibility to protect children, explicit guidelines for considering emotional and physical violence between siblings is non-existent. The lack of policy addressing physical and emotional sibling violence is problematic since so many children and adolescents experience this phenomenon (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 2006).

Although wide-spread policy changes regarding violence between siblings is unlikely to occur quickly due to the minimal amount of available research when compared to research focusing on child abuse and neglect, as well as societal attitudes dismissing negative sibling interactions (Gelles & Cornell, 1985). The need for education surrounding violence between siblings becomes instrumental in creating a space for policy changes occur. Until this is recognized as a social problem of importance, efforts aimed at creating policies to addressing this form of violence may be disregarded.

One way in which to begin to addressing the need for policy regarding sibling violence is to highlight the connection of sibling violence to bullying and peer violence (Duncan, 1999; Dunn & McGuire, 1992; Finkelhor, Turner, & Ormrod, 2006; MacKinnon-Lewis, Starnes, Volling, & Johnson, 1997; Menesini, Camodeca, & Nocentini, 2010; Rothman, Johnson, Azrael, Hall, & Weinberg, 2010). Recently, some research has begun using the label “sibling bullying” to refer to emotionally and physically violence behaviors between siblings (Menesini, Camodeca, & Nocentini, 2010; Skinner & Kowalski, 2013). Currently, bullying between peers is an issue the media exposes constantly as reactionary incidents of violence are carried out by children and adolescents due to the experience of being bullied. Bullying in schools is considered

so important that laws and/or policies aimed at addressing bullying exist in every U.S. state (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014). While addressing bullying is undoubtedly important, no laws or policies exist to address sibling violence despite this form of violence being considered a precursor to peer violence (Ostrov, Crick, & Stauffacher, 2006) and the most common form of family violence (Steinmetz, 1977; Straus & Gelles, 1990; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Policies to address sibling violence are needed; however, until more education aimed at elucidating this form of violence on a societal level is done, sibling violence more than likely will not receive the attention it deserves.

**Directions for future research.** This case study presented several areas that need to be considered for future social work research. Research as a result of the examination of the hypotheses could help in future research related to psychometrics as well as uncovering and appropriately measuring more constructs important for understanding the parental decision-making model. The psychometrics of some of the scales need to be tested along with consideration of creating new scales to better understand the distinction between sibling violence and sibling rivalry and constructs of the parental decision-making of sibling interaction model. Inclusion of more family structures and parents/families of various ethnic backgrounds also needs to occur in future research with a focus on intent to harm as an influencing component of decision-making regarding problematic behaviors. Future research also needs to focus on including more theories when examining parental perceptions and experiences of sibling violence as well as issues of power between siblings in parental decision-making.

**Research emanating from the hypotheses.** Not all parents normalized the violence they experienced in childhood. Research, with an emphasis on examining factors influencing how parents decide what is normal, is important to conduct when trying to understand parental



decision-making regarding problematic and non-problematic behaviors. A better understanding of the construct of “normal sibling interaction” and factors associated with this construct may shed light on how parents normalize interactions between their children. Including more parents in future studies aimed at understanding the differences between those behaviors that are “normal” and those behaviors that are “non-normal” is needed to further distinguish sibling violence from sibling rivalry.

Participants who experienced sibling violence had children that experienced sibling violence. While social learning theory and family systems theory provide assistance in understanding how violence may be transmitted from generation to generation, the inclusion of more theories to test this notion may be helpful. Examining the linkages between generations as well as societal/systemic factors influencing the occurrence of violence in the sibling dyad may prove beneficial for understanding how violence occurs over generations. As sibling violence appears to be exhibited across generations, understanding the ways in which violence is either transmitted intergenerationally or occurs independently for each generation is important to understand. Results from future studies including this as a focus may provide insight on how to address sibling violence in families through interventions and parental education by addressing mechanisms responsible for its occurrence.

While the data was inconclusive regarding how participants labeled behaviors, future research examining the differences between sibling violence and sibling rivalry is needed. The way in which participants responded to “sibling violence” and “sibling rivalry” alluded to the notion that “sibling violence” was problematic whereas “sibling rivalry” was a part of normative sibling development and interaction. However, behaviors associated with sibling violence appeared to be more physical in nature and behaviors associated with sibling rivalry were more

emotional/psychological in nature. Despite these groupings participants discussed emotional/psychological behaviors to be potentially just as problematic as physical behaviors. Future research aimed at further distinguishing between sibling violence and sibling rivalry is important to determine what behaviors parents view as problematic and which they view as non-problematic as this has substantial implications for intervention development. Furthermore, understanding the distinction between sibling violence and sibling rivalry, as well as normal sibling interaction, will assist with appropriately measuring problematic and non-problematic behaviors and allow for appropriate operationalization of constructs used in scales and measurements to address the decision-making model.

*Psychometrics.* Using some of the same scales from this case study with the inclusion of others with a larger sample is important. Aside from further testing to establish appropriate psychometric properties, the Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale and the Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument were helpful for considering what participants had experienced and witnessed as well as what behaviors participants associated with sibling violence and sibling rivalry. The inclusion of an altered version of the Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale that focuses solely on parental thoughts regarding the labels sibling violence and sibling rivalry and how the association with these are considered as problematic, harmful, normative, and common may be helpful when trying to better understand the distinctions between violence and rivalry between siblings. Given the focus in this case study on sibling violence and sibling rivalry, a scale focusing on these concepts may have been more beneficial in understanding the differences and/or similarities between these constructs. A potentially more effective use of this scale may have been to take

the label without “sibling” attached (e.g. maltreatment) and ask participants to label behaviors as sibling violence and/or sibling rivalry.

Examination of these measurements with a larger and more diverse population may be important to help provide a greater understanding of how parents from a variety of backgrounds and different demographic characteristics view sibling violence and sibling rivalry. Furthermore, the inclusion of a larger sample will allow for the psychometrics of these scales to be considered as well as factors associated sibling violence and sibling rivalry. This then could lead to the creation of scales used to assess sibling violence for parents for intervention purposes. Also, psychometrics as they apply to measuring the constructs within the parental decision-making model need to be considered.

***Constructs of parental decision-making model.*** In conjunction with further testing of the scales and measurements related to sibling violence and sibling rivalry is the need to examine the parental decision-making model of sibling interactions. The model proposes constructs that need to be considered for how they will be operationalized and measured. While path analysis or structural equation modeling could eventually be used to examine the interrelatedness of components from the model to consider the fit of the proposed model, constructs and variables in the model first need to be operationalized and measured appropriately. Furthermore, continued examination of how parents perceive sibling violence could elicit more factors and variables that deserve consideration for inclusion in the model.

***Inclusion of more family structures.*** While it appears that family structure has less to do with sibling violence than other contextual and environmental factors, further examination of family structure is warranted given the various types of families that exist today. With the exclusion of same-sex families and the minimal inclusion of blended and single-parent families

and with the limited consideration of parental voice, in future research it is necessary to understand how family structure relates to the occurrence and/or deterrence of sibling violence in families. To date this case study is the only research on sibling violence to include the family structures; however, more families of various structures need to be included, such as families with gay male parents and families built through adoption. Both family structures have been excluded from the general discussion (including this project) of sibling violence and deserve voice in the process of helping to better understand this phenomenon.

***Inclusion of individuals of various ethnicities.*** Coupled with the need to include more family structures in the sibling violence research is the need to include more individuals of various ethnicities in this research. To assume that all parents, children, and individuals of different ethnicities appraise and experience sibling violence in the same manner is not consistent with the small amount research that exists (Rapoza, Cook, Zaveri, & Malley-Morrison, 2010), nor is it consistent with the complexities surrounding violence between siblings. Including more parents of various ethnicities in the research will help provide not only a better understanding of the distinctions between sibling violence and sibling rivalry, but also a better starting point from which to create interventions aimed at addressing sibling violence in all families.

***Intent to harm.*** Another area for future research that emerged from this case study is the need to examine intent to harm as it applies to sibling violence. Similar to the consideration of intent to harm in the child abuse and neglect literature (Hamarman & Bernet, 2000; McCoy & Keen, 2013; Zuravin, 1991), participants in this case study emphasized the need to consider intent to harm when making decision regarding problematic sibling interactions that could constitute sibling violence. This variable appeared to be very important for participants when

deciding what constituted sibling violence and what was considered sibling rivalry. Measuring intent to harm could be difficult as it would require a sophisticated conceptualization that could be translated into a measurement tool that would also only be retrospective in nature. However, including intent to harm as a component parents may consider in future research is important given its discussion by participants and its place as a factor of consideration in the decision-making model. Inclusion of intent to harm in the research on sibling violence could help to explain why violence between siblings is an important phenomenon to consider along with child abuse and neglect because violence directed towards a child is problematic regardless the perpetrator.

**Theory.** Social learning theory and family systems theory served as the foundation for this case study research. These theories provided ways to better understand parental perceptions and experiences of sibling violence; however, these theories are insufficient for understanding all aspects of this phenomenon. Inclusion of theories such as ecological theory and attachment theory may further help to understand sibling violence from an environmental context and developmental context. Furthermore, efforts aimed at examining distinguishing characteristics of sibling violence and sibling rivalry may be assisted by including conflict/resource theory when considering resources and/or lack thereof in families.

**Power.** Although not necessarily included in this research study, but implicitly implied by participants' discussion of violence between siblings is the need to consider power in the sibling relationship. Given the interaction of children factors and context of sibling interaction from the parental decision-making model, the construct of power may provide further support for understanding the dynamic between siblings when sibling violence occurs. For example, participants considered age difference, age, gender, methods used, intent to harm, intensity,

severity, duration, frequency, and family rules when deciding whether behaviors were problematic or non-problematic. Embedded within these concepts may be the notion of a power differential that exists between siblings when sibling violence occurs or when non-problematic behaviors escalate and become problematic behaviors. The concept of power may help further elucidate an understanding of how parents view violence when power differentials between siblings are included future research of sibling violence.

### **Conclusion**

Most of the research in the area of sibling violence has not examined the role of family structure or parental voice. Including parental voice by examining parental perceptions and experiences of physical and emotional violence is one way to better understand violence between siblings. This research project is a preliminary attempt at furthering the knowledge in the area of sibling violence. Findings from this case study suggest that family structure is less important than both current and past contextual and environmental factors in understanding problematic and non-problematic behaviors between siblings. Furthermore, parents are likely to consider past experiences, children factors, the context of interaction, and family rules before appraising behaviors as sibling violence or sibling rivalry indicating that classification is an iterative process where many variables are considered simultaneously. Until there is continued research on sibling violence, social work practice focusing on sibling violence, advocacy efforts aimed at educating others about sibling violence with the hope of change, and examination of ways in which policy can address sibling violence, social work cannot say that all efforts have been exhausted to combat this form of family violence for children.

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**Appendix A**  
**Informed Consent**

## RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

**TITLE:** *Parental Perceptions and Experiences of Physical and Emotional Violence Between Siblings: A Mixed-Methods, Comparative Case Study*

**VCU IRB NO.:** HM14919

If any information contained in this consent form is not clear, please ask the study staff to explain any information that you do not fully understand. You may take home an unsigned copy of this consent form to think about or discuss with family or friends before making your decision.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this research study is to find out about parental experiences and perceptions toward violent behaviors between siblings. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a parent with at least two children and had a sibling while growing up as a child.

### **DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT**

If you decide to be in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form after you have had all your questions answered and understand what will happen in the research process. In this study you will be asked to participate in three phases of data collection on the subject of violence between siblings. The first phase consists of filling out demographic information and completing four scales which ask about your experiences and perceptions of violence between siblings. This phase will take approximately 1-1.5 hours. The next phase of data collection includes a joint-interview with you and your spouse/partner (if applicable) which will take approximately 1.5-2 hours to complete. The final phase of data collection includes a joint-interview where you will be asked to respond to four case scenarios and this phase will last approximately 1.5-2 hours. Case notes from the interview will be written down during and after the interviews and the interviews will be digitally recorded with an audio recorder.

### **RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

The subject matter of this research project may cause people to become upset. Several questions will ask about things that have happened in your family that may have been unpleasant. You do not have to talk about any subjects you do not want to talk about, and you may leave the interview at any time. If you become upset, you will be given the names of counselors to contact so you can get help in dealing with these issues.

### **BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS**

You may not get any direct benefit from this study, but the information learned from people in this study may help us design better programs, policies, and interventions for parents and children experiencing violence in the sibling relationship.



## **COSTS**

There are no costs for participating in this study other than the time you will spend completing questionnaires and in the interviews.

## **PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

As part of participating in the study, you will receive \$20 for participating in Phase 1 of the data collection and another \$20 for participating in Phase 2 of the data collection. Upon completion of the Phase 3, you will be paid \$40, which constitutes \$20 for completion of Phase 3 and \$20 for completing all three phases. If you complete all three phases of the research study you will receive a total of \$80.

You may be asked to provide your social security number in order to receive payment for your participation. Your social security number is required by federal law. It will not be included in any information collected about you for this research. Your social security number will be kept confidential and will only be used in order to process payment.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Potentially identifiable information about you will consist of data is being collected only for research purposes. Your data will be identified by ID numbers and locked research area. All personal identifying information will be kept in password protected files and these files will be deleted upon completion of the research project. Access to all data will be limited to study personnel. Given the nature of the recruitment and the multiple data collection points, phone numbers and/or email may be used to communicate with you. This information will be kept on a password protected document of which only the researcher and the principal investigator will have access. Every precaution will be made to maintain confidentiality including the use of different names for you constructed by the researcher when discussing the results of the data analysis.

## **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You do not have to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time without any penalty. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the study.

## QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about your participation in this research, contact:

Nathan H. Perkins, MSW, MS  
PhD Candidate  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
School of Social Work  
1001 West Franklin Street  
P.O. Box 842027  
Richmond, Virginia 23284  
Telephone: 614-214-3905  
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Mary Katherine O'Connor, PhD  
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1001 West Franklin Street  
P.O. Box 842027  
Richmond, Virginia 23284  
Telephone: 804-828-0688  
Email: mkoconno@vcu.edu

The researcher/study staff named above is the best person(s) to call for questions about your participation in this study.

If you have any general questions about your rights as a participant in this or any other research, you may contact:

Office of Research  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 3000  
P.O. Box 980568  
Richmond, VA 23298  
Telephone: (804) 827-2157

Contact this number for general questions, concerns or complaints about research. You may also call this number if you cannot reach the research team or if you wish to talk with someone else. General information about participation in research studies can also be found at <http://www.research.vcu.edu/irb/volunteers.htm>.

## CONSENT

I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of the consent form once I have agreed to participate.

---

Participant name printed

Participant signature

Date

---

Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent  
Discussion / Witness  
(Printed)

---

Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent  
Discussion / Witness

Date

---

Principal Investigator Signature (if different from above)

Date <sup>4</sup>

## Appendix B

### List of Referrals for Participants

## List of Referrals

### **Richmond Behavioral Health Authority**

Mental Health Services for Adults

Shenee McCray, LCSW

Adult Mental Health Director

1-804-819-4110

### **Chesterfield Community Services Board**

Mental Health Support Services

Intake Services

1-804-768-7318

### **Hanover Community Services Board**

Mental Health Support Services

1-804-356-4200

### **Henrico Community Services Board**

Mental Health & Developmental Services

Intake Services

1-804-727-8515

### **Fan Free Clinic**

Client Support & Mental Health Services

1-804-358-6343

**Appendix C**  
**Demographic Sheet**

## Demographic Questions

**The following questions refer to your current family environment. Please answer the following questions thinking about your current family environment.**

### 1. Ages and Gender of family members:

You:

Age: \_\_\_\_\_, Sex \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse/Partner (if applicable):

Age: \_\_\_\_\_, Sex \_\_\_\_\_

Children:

Age: \_\_\_\_\_, Sex \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_, Sex \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_, Sex \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_, Sex \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_, Sex \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Current Family Structure (Circle One):

Two-parent never divorced

Two-parent blended (step-parent)

Same-sex parents

Single parent

### 3. Current Income (circle one): Provide options here

\$0-25,000

\$25,000-50,000

\$50,000-75,000

\$75,000-100,000

\$100,000+

4. Highest Level of Education Achieved (circle one):

- Grade school or less
- Junior high or middle school
- Some high school
- High school graduate/GED
- Technical/Vocational School
- Some college
- Associates degree
- Bachelors degree
- Some graduate school
- Master degree
- Doctoral degree

**The following questions refer to your family environment when growing up. Please answer the following questions thinking back to when you were a child growing up.**

5. Number of Siblings When Growing Up: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Closest Aged Sibling when Growing Up:

Brother or Sister (circle one)

Age difference between you and this sibling: \_\_\_\_\_

Was this sibling older or younger than you: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Family Structure Growing Up (circle one):

- Two-parent never divorced
- Two-parent blended (step-parent)
- Same-sex parents
- Single parent

8. Household Income Growing Up (circle one):

- \$0-25,000
- \$25,000-50,000
- \$50,000-75,000
- \$75,000-100,000
- \$100,000+



9. Highest Level of Parental Education Achieved (circle one):

Parent (circle mother or father):

- Grade school or less
- Junior high or middle school
- Some high school
- High school graduate/GED
- Technical/Vocational School
- Some college
- Associates degree
- Bachelors degree
- Some graduate school
- Master degree
- Doctoral degree

Parent (circle mother or father):

- Grade school or less
- Junior high or middle school
- Some high school
- High school graduate/GED
- Technical/Vocational School
- Some college
- Associates degree
- Bachelors degree
- Some graduate school
- Master degree
- Doctoral degree

## Appendix D

### Experiences of Sibling Violence Scale

The following is a list of behaviors that siblings sometimes experience while growing up in childhood. Please indicate the frequency in which you experienced the following behaviors with a sibling while growing up.

	Never		Sometimes		Very Frequently
1. Slapping	1	2	3	4	5
2. Teasing	1	2	3	4	5
3. Throwing something at a sibling	1	2	3	4	5
4. Slamming a sibling against a wall	1	2	3	4	5
5. Burning	1	2	3	4	5
6. Tickling	1	2	3	4	5
7. Threatening	1	2	3	4	5
8. Yelling at a sibling	1	2	3	4	5
9. Grabbing	1	2	3	4	5
10. Manipulating	1	2	3	4	5
11. Using weapons such as a knife, bat, or gun	1	2	3	4	5
12. Twisting a sibling's arm	1	2	3	4	5

Participant # \_\_\_\_\_

	Never		Sometimes		Very Frequently
13. Destroying a sibling's property	1	2	3	4	5
14. Punching	1	2	3	4	5
15. Kicking	1	2	3	4	5
16. Swearing at a sibling	1	2	3	4	5
17. Making a sibling feel guilty	1	2	3	4	5
18. Shoving	1	2	3	4	5
19. Insulting	1	2	3	4	5
20. Choking	1	2	3	4	5
21. Doing something to spite a sibling	1	2	3	4	5
22. Beating up a sibling	1	2	3	4	5
23. Name calling	1	2	3	4	5
24. Pulling hair	1	2	3	4	5
25. Pushing	1	2	3	4	5

The following is a list of behaviors that siblings sometimes experience while growing up in childhood. Please indicate the frequency in which you witnessed the following behaviors between your children.

	Never		Sometimes		Very Frequently
1. Slapping	1	2	3	4	5
2. Teasing	1	2	3	4	5
3. Throwing something at a sibling	1	2	3	4	5
4. Slamming a sibling against a wall	1	2	3	4	5
5. Burning	1	2	3	4	5
6. Tickling	1	2	3	4	5
7. Threatening	1	2	3	4	5
8. Yelling at a sibling	1	2	3	4	5
9. Grabbing	1	2	3	4	5
10. Manipulating	1	2	3	4	5
11. Using weapons such as a knife, bat, or gun	1	2	3	4	5
12. Twisting a sibling's arm	1	2	3	4	5

Participant # \_\_\_\_\_

	Never		Sometimes		Very Frequently
13. Destroying a sibling's property	1	2	3	4	5
14. Punching	1	2	3	4	5
15. Kicking	1	2	3	4	5
16. Swearing at a sibling	1	2	3	4	5
17. Making a sibling feel guilty	1	2	3	4	5
18. Shoving	1	2	3	4	5
19. Insulting	1	2	3	4	5
20. Choking	1	2	3	4	5
21. Doing something to spite a sibling	1	2	3	4	5
22. Beating up a sibling	1	2	3	4	5
23. Name calling	1	2	3	4	5
24. Pulling hair	1	2	3	4	5
25. Pushing	1	2	3	4	5

## Appendix E

### Attitudes on Labels Related to Violence between Siblings Scale

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Place an "X" in the box that corresponds to how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. It is common for siblings to experience violence.					
2. Aggression between siblings is normal.					
3. Negativity between siblings can have damaging consequences.					
4. Harm can be experienced when a sibling psychologically maltreats another sibling.					
5. Fighting that leads to siblings getting physically hurt is common.					
6. A sibling abusing another sibling is normal behavior.					
7. Conflict between siblings can be harmful.					
8. Quarreling between siblings is harmful.					
9. It is normal for a sibling to experience antagonism from another sibling.					
10. Rivalry between siblings is normal.					
11. It is normal for siblings to experience emotional violence.					



	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12. Assault between siblings is common.					
13. Siblings maltreating each other is normative.					
14. Psychologically maltreating a sibling is problematic.					
15. A sibling can be hurt by another sibling who is hostile towards them.					
16. Assaulting a sibling is typical in most families.					
17. Siblings are likely to experience sibling rivalry.					
18. Fighting between siblings is common.					
19. Most siblings do not abuse another sibling.					
20. Aggression towards a sibling can be harmful.					
21. When a sibling abuses another sibling psychologically it is not harmful.					
22. It is common for siblings to experience negativity.					
23. Conflict in the sibling relationship is normal.					

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
24. When siblings fight it is a typical part of child development.					
25. It is normal for siblings to experience violence.					
26. Hostility between siblings is unusual.					
27. Psychological abuse between siblings is normal.					
28. Antagonism between siblings can be hurtful.					
29. Competition between siblings is common.					
30. Fighting that leads to siblings getting emotionally hurt is common.					
31. The experience of sibling rivalry can include violence.					
32. It is common for a sibling to be aggressive with another sibling.					
33. Quarrels between siblings are uncommon.					
34. When a sibling maltreats another sibling it is problematic.					

## Appendix F

### Behaviors Associated with Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry Instrument

Participant # \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate by placing an "X" in the column for those behaviors you feel are associated more with sibling violence, sibling rivalry, both sibling violence and sibling rivalry, or neither sibling violence nor sibling rivalry.

	Sibling Violence	Sibling Rivalry	Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry	Neither Sibling Violence nor Sibling Rivalry
1. Slapping				
2. Teasing				
3. Throwing something at a sibling				
4. Slamming a sibling against a wall				
5. Burning				
6. Tickling				
7. Threatening				
8. Yelling at a sibling				
9. Grabbing				
10. Manipulating				
11. Using weapons such as a knife, bat, or gun				
12. Twisting a sibling's arm				
13. Destroying a sibling's property				
14. Punching				
15. Kicking				

Participant # \_\_\_\_\_

	Sibling Violence	Sibling Rivalry	Both Sibling Violence and Sibling Rivalry	Neither Sibling Violence nor Sibling Rivalry
16. Swearing at a sibling				
17. Making a sibling feel guilty				
18. Shoving				
19. Insulting				
20. Choking				
21. Doing something to spite a sibling				
22. Beating up a sibling				
23. Name calling				
24. Pulling hair				
25. Pushing				

## Appendix G

### Open-ended Qualitative Interview Questions

## Open-ended Qualitative Interview Questions

When I say sibling violence what comes to mind?

- Physical
- Emotional
- Verbal

When I say sibling rivalry what comes to mind?

- Physical
- Emotional
- Verbal

How would you know when the relationship between your children was not good?

- Intensity
- Severity
- Methods used
- Normal
- Duration

How have your experiences from your past(s) influenced how you view problematic behavior between your children?

- Rules of your parents
- Rules of your family growing up
- Your parents thoughts on violence between you and a sibling
- Did either or both of your parents ever mention experiencing any violence with a sibling?
- Past interactions with siblings influencing you thoughts now (or influence how you regard problematic behaviors between your children)?

How does your current family structure influence how you view problematic behavior between siblings?

- Gender of children
- Age of children
- Age different between children
- Relationships within the family

## Appendix H

### Case Scenario Decision-Making Process



## Case Scenarios

In this phase of the research process, you will be presented with four different scenarios. I will read each scenario to you and then after I read the scenario I will ask you a couple of questions. With your spouse/partner (By yourself) please discuss out loud how you would collectively answer the questions based on each scenario.

### ***Scenario 1***

Keaton, a 16-year old and his sister Delaney, aged 14, are in the kitchen of their house. Keaton goes to the refrigerator to get a popsicle. Upon retrieving the last popsicle from the box, Delaney says to Keaton that the popsicle is hers because he ate more than she did. Disagreeing, Keaton starts to unwrap the popsicle and begins eating it. Upset that her brother is eating the popsicle she believes is hers, Delaney goes to grab for the popsicle. Before she is able to reach the popsicle, Keaton punches her in the arm. Delaney leaves the room crying, holding her arm in pain, and yelling for their mother.

*Question: Is this sibling violence? If yes, why? If no, why not?*

### ***Scenario 2***

Greg a 12-year old and his brother Connor, aged 8, are in the kitchen of their house. Connor goes to the refrigerator to get a popsicle. Upon retrieving the last popsicle from the box, Greg says to Connor that the popsicle is his because Connor ate more than he did. Disagreeing, Connor starts to unwrap the popsicle and begins eating it. Upset that his brother is eating the popsicle he believes is his, Greg goes to grab for the popsicle. Before Greg is able to reach the popsicle, Connor grabs a fork and stabs his brother in the side. Greg leaves the room holding his side in pain, with blood starting to show on his shirt, and yelling for their mother.

*Question: Is this sibling violence? If yes, why? If no, why not?*

### ***Scenario 3***

Miranda, a 7-year old and her sister Tracy, aged 5, are in the kitchen of their house. Miranda goes to the refrigerator to get a popsicle. Upon retrieving the last popsicle from the box, Tracy says to Miranda that the popsicle is hers because Miranda ate more than she did. Disagreeing, Miranda starts to unwrap the popsicle and begins eating it. Upset that her sister is eating the popsicle she believes is hers, Tracy goes to grab for the popsicle. Before Tracy is able to reach the popsicle, Miranda tells Tracy that she does not need the popsicle because she is a fat, ugly pig. Tracy leaves the room in tears crying and yelling for their mother.

*Question: Is this sibling violence? If yes, why? If no, why not?*

#### **Scenario 4**

Sarah, an 13-year old and her brother Max, aged 6, are in the kitchen of their house. Sarah goes to the refrigerator to get a popsicle. Upon retrieving the last popsicle from the box, Max says to Sarah that the popsicle is his because Sarah ate more than he did. Disagreeing, Sarah starts to unwrap the popsicle and begins eating it. Upset that his sister is eating the popsicle he believes is his, Max goes to grab for the popsicle. Before Max is able to reach the popsicle, Sarah slaps Max on the face, leaving a red mark. Max leaves the room in tears crying and yelling for their mother.

*Question: Is this sibling violence? If yes, why? If no, why not?*

## Vita

Nathan Hugh Perkins was born on August 12, 1976 in Xenia, Ohio, and is a citizen of the United States. He graduated from Westerville South High School, Westerville, Ohio in 1994. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and French from Ohio University, Athens, Ohio in 1998. In 2002, Nathan received a Master of Science in Human Development and Family Science from Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio and spent three years of intensive training in Marriage and Family Therapy at Ohio State University. After receiving his Master of Social Work from Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, in 2009 he spent several years as a social worker doing counseling and research for a residential treatment facility in Chesterfield, Virginia.