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## SIBLING CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLES AND MARITAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLES

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### SIBLING CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLES AND MARITAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLES

This study used qualitative methods to examine if there was a connection between conflict resolution styles used with siblings in adolescence and conflict resolution styles utilized in current romantic committed relationships. The Conflict Resolution Behavior Questionnaire (Reese-Weber, & Bartle-Haring, 2003) and Gottman's (1994a, 1994b) couple-conflict types as adapted by Holman and Jarvis (2003) were administered to 144 participants through an online questionnaire. Analysis of the CRBQ using a multiple regression indicated participant's self-rating of compromise, attack, and avoidant conflict resolution styles used with siblings when an adolescent predicted current self-ratings of compromise, attack, and avoidant conflict resolution styles utilized in current romantic relationships.

**KEYWORDS:** Conflict resolution, siblings, marriage, social learning theory, family of origin

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April 15, 2011

SIBLING CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLES AND MARITAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION  
STYLES

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THESIS

Fatimah Shalash

The Graduate School  
University of Kentucky

2011

SIBLING CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLES AND MARITAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION  
STYLES

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THESIS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in the  
College of Family Studies  
at the University of Kentucky

By

Fatimah Shalash

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Nathan Wood, Professor of Family Studies

Lexington, Kentucky

2011

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To my siblings Samerah, Sami, Neimeh, Samieh, Sophia, Mariam, Sara, and Mohammad,  
thank you for giving me so much great material. I am because you are.

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## **Chapter 1**

### Introduction

Sibling relationships are among the longest lasting and most influential relationships in an individual's lifetime, lasting longer than connections with spouses, parents, or children (Bank & Kahn, 1997). While research has typically focused on factors such as age spacing between siblings or birth order, these variables have been found to have an insignificant role in children's emotional and social adjustment (Brody et al., 1985; Buhrmester, 1992).

More recently, researchers have found that sibling relationships provide opportunities for developing conflict resolution skills (Anderson et al., 1994). Conflict resolution skills, defined as the ability to resolve conflicts and consequently manage interpersonal disagreement, formed between siblings can influence how they are later used in relationships outside the family (Reese-Weber, 2000). Research on the consistency of interpersonal conflict styles across relationship types is limited. Sternberg and Dobson (1987) supported the concept that individuals have significant stability for specific conflict resolution styles among dyadic relationships.

Literature on the family of origin found a continuous pattern of conflict resolution styles that began with the interparental dyad, continued through sibling relationships, and into late adolescent romantic relationships (Furman, 2009; Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998). Studies have not compared sibling conflict resolution styles against the conflict resolution style used with spouses or committed partners. The current study addresses this gap by testing the hypothesis that an individual's conflict resolution style used with adolescent siblings will continue to be utilized in their current committed romantic relationships.

## Chapter 2

### Relevant Literature

In their review of literature, Ross, Ross, Stein, and Trabasso (2006) have found that well-known childhood researchers Erikson, Piaget, and Sullivan are in agreement that “children’s early experience of conflict profoundly affect their developing knowledge of social rules, relationships, and interpersonal processes” (p. 1730). This impact can take place through various avenues. Many studies confirm that an individual’s patterns of conflict resolution, both positive and negative, can develop from their family of origin and be generalized to how conflict is managed in other relationships (O’Leary, 1988; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Rubenstein and Feldman, 1993).

Yeh and Lemper (2004) build on the assumption that adolescents use their interactions with siblings to build a working model in order to function in the social world. They suggest that secure attachment to siblings and perceptions of positive sibling relationship can significantly affect their social development and healthy adjustment (Yeh & Lemper, 2004). Sibling dyads can provide a rich opportunity to test prosocial behaviors, develop peer-like relationships, and learn how to manage interpersonal conflict, both constructive and destructive. Moreover, each sibling’s developmental history and prior experiences are not erased by current ones, but continue to build on new relationships as well as the ongoing sibling relationship (Brody, 1994).

Interparental conflict resolution, or the manner in which parents resolve conflict, is another variable impacting conflict in the sibling relationship, by both the severity and manner in which parents argue. Researchers have explained this impact in a variety of ways. Brody et al. (1987) has researched this relationship between parents to find that its qualities

strongly predict siblings' observed positive and negative behavior with one another. In another study, it was found that an increase in conflict between parents was correlated with an increase in sibling conflict at the same time and one year later (Brody et al. 1992).

In an attempt to better understand the link between parent and sibling conflict behavior, Patterson (1982, 1986) applied the coercive family model to these relationships. The coercive family model suggests that when parents fail to stop escalating conflict with their child and continue to engage with them, they can perpetuate negative exchanges. Furthermore, coercive interactions between parent and adolescents may lead to similar negative interactions between adolescents and their sibling (Patterson, 1986). More recent research connected to Patterson (1986) and Brody's (1992) work and found that interparental conflict resolution styles had an indirect influence on sibling conflict resolution styles; such as Reese-Weber and Bartle-Haring's (1998) study of conflict resolution styles in interparental, parent-adolescent, sibling, and romantic partners.

Similarly, Reese-Weber (2000) suggested that if a resolution style is used in one dyadic relationship, then it will most likely be used in other dyadic relationships in the family. The resolution styles consist of compromise, which includes apologizing and working collaboratively; attack, which incorporates hostility and escalation of conflict; and avoidance, where the problem is ignored or someone withdraws or leaves the room (Rubenstein & Feldman, 1993).

A possible explanation for these connections between dyads is that a common family member could be involved in multiple dyadic relationships, thus, the same conflict resolution style is more likely to emerge in each relationship. Reese-Weber (2000) developed a mediation model based on the discovery that how parents resolved conflict did not have a

direct influence on sibling conflict, but made an impact based on how parents treated their adolescents differently. Essentially, the conflict resolution skills used between parents influenced the behavior of the parent towards the adolescent (e.g. mother and adolescent, father-adolescent), which ultimately influenced the sibling relationship and how siblings resolved conflict (Bartle-Haring & Reese-Weber, 1998). Reese-Weber (2000) also applied the mediational model to middle adolescents and discovered that “sibling conflict resolution skills are influenced in similar ways at different developmental stages (p.707)”. This reflects continuity in the model as siblings increase in age.

### **Sibling conflict resolution**

Sibling relationships serve as a unique source of emotional support and have distinct meanings and functions from those with friends, parents, or romantic partners (Buhrmester, 1992; Lamb & Sutton-Smith, 1982; Stocker & Dunn, 1994). Adolescent’s closest siblings ranked even higher than their parents for the attributes of intimacy, companionship, and nurturance (Buhrmester, 1992; Lamb & Sutton-Smith, 1982; Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992; Stocker & Dunn, 1994). The intimate nature of a sibling relationship joined with incompatible goals evidenced in most sibling relationships typically leads to sibling conflict.

There has been relatively little work on how siblings resolve conflict. Rather, the focus has remained on either conflict outcomes or conflict strategies. The known studies on conflict outcomes indicate that early sibling conflicts rarely end in agreeable compromise resolutions and most frequently end with no resolution, followed by one party’s submission, and then compromise (Dehart, 1999; Howe et al, 2000; Siddiqui & Ross, 1999; Vuchinich, 1987).

Compromise is defined as a type of resolution where both parties are partially realized by the end of the conflict, submission characterized by having one clear winner and one loser, and the last form of conflict ending is when conflict issues are unresolved (Siddiqui & Ross, 1999). This pattern of conflict endings continues throughout development (e.g. middle childhood through adolescence), as reflected by children's statements that conflict with their siblings is more likely to be destructive than constructive and end without agreeable solutions (Raffaelli, 1992, Rinaldi & Howe, 1998). There is little existing literature on the correlation between children's conflict resolution styles and consequent conflict endings. This reflects a gap in research on sibling conflict.

As siblings attempt to reconcile their differences, there is often a large distinction between the tactics used. The terms describing these tactics are "constructive" and "destructive." Understanding these types of conflict are essential to studying conflict and conflict resolution in children's development (Ross, Ross, Stein, & Trabasso, 2006). Destructive conflict is defined as "hostile, unresolved, and undermines interpersonal relationships," while constructive conflict "includes reasoning, resolutions of differing goals, and enhanced interpersonal understanding" (Ross, Ross, Stein, & Trabasso, 2006, p. 1730).

These different strategies of conflict are precursors to understanding how siblings arrive at their various resolutions or compromises. Ram and Ross (2008) define deconstructive conflict as using self-centered arguments, threats, and verbal expression, whereas constructive conflict may include making concessions and asking more questions. Graham-Bermann et al. (1994) discovered two resolution styles particular to sibling conflicts. One style was similar to the compromise style (Ram & Ross, 2008) and included positive problem solving and calmly discussing the disagreement. On the other hand, negative

problem solving involved insulting the other and refusing to talk or leaving the room, essentially avoiding the conflict and withdrawing (Graham-Bermann et al., 1994).

Ross, Ross, Stein, & Trabasso (2006) were one of the few researchers to examine how the strategies of expressing opposition or planning a way to resolve differences could relate to conflict outcomes. Opposition was reflected by displaying hostile actions when pursuing conflicts of interest, typically leading to an escalation of argument and lack of resolution. Children could choose to “win” by blaming and dismissing the other child’s argument, at the risk of harming their relationship. On the other hand, conflict negotiations were found to be more productive when the focus remained less on the past and more on how they could change their current situation (Stein et al., 1994).

Ross, Ross, Stein, & Trabasso (2006) maintained that “future-oriented” planning encouraged children to coordinate their interpersonal needs, consequently finding motivation and a means to work towards a mutual compromise. Their findings confirmed that increased opposition led to a decreased likelihood of compromise solutions, and that the failure of resolutions was correlated with little use of future-oriented planning strategies by both younger and older siblings.

Despite the conflict strategies used, there are variations in the outcomes when considering other factors. For example, there appeared to be a notable difference in the tactics used by younger siblings versus the ones used by older, more “powerful,” siblings (Howe & Recchia, 2009). When the younger sibling had a poorer interpretation of the conflict and could not understand the idea of having a different perspective, it generally led to the inability to compromise, if the siblings had a poor relationship (Howe & Recchia, 2009). Thus, the perceived quality of the sibling relationship can be a mediating factor to

how siblings resolve conflict. Related studies also found that providing knowledge of others' perspectives was more influential on younger siblings than older siblings (Ram & Ross, 2008). This is most likely due to the probability that older siblings have already developed the skill of multiple perspectives taking.

Other moderating factors may impact sibling's conflict behavior and resolution styles. Howe and Recchia (2009) looked at conflict between siblings and predicted that global sibling relationship quality and the measure of social understanding would correlate with conflict strategies. Their findings suggested that self-reported positive relationships were the strongest correlate of conflict strategies and were associated with positive conflict processes. Sibling relationship quality was positively associated with constructive conflict tactics such as negotiation and negatively linked to destructive tactics (Howe et al., 2002; Ram & Ross, 2001; Rinaldi & Howe, 1998). These results add to literature findings that a variety of factors influence sibling conflict.

### **Marital conflict resolution**

In the field of family science, discussion of how family of origin experiences affects relationship skills is predominant. But, few studies have actually linked family of origin experiences to factors that encourage the success or failure of marriages (Story et al., 2004). More specifically, while sibling conflict resolution styles have been linked to relationships outside the family, it has only gone as far to link conflict styles to adolescents in romantic relationships. Research has recognized that experiences in early childhood have contributed to later romantic relationship well-being (Black & Schutte, 2006).

It is also well documented that the way couples have communicated about relationship conflicts and disagreements was a significant predictor of marital health

(Clements, Stanley, & Markman, 2004; Markman, 1981; Rogge & Bradbury, 1999).

Accordingly, it is rare that the topic of the argument caused relationship deterioration; rather it was the couple's conflict style that more potently discriminated for relationship longevity (Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002). These collective findings reflect the importance of conflict resolution styles in marriage and with committed romantic partners. But, the origin of these conflict resolution styles are still relatively unknown (Whitten, et al., 2008).

Despite the lack of focused research on the origin of conflict resolution styles, there are various examples of the intergenerational transmission of relational conflict. For instance, individuals who grew up in divorced families carry a higher likelihood of displaying negativity in their own marital communication than individuals who had intact families (Story, Karney, Lawrence, & Bradbury, 2004; Tallman, Gray, Kullberg, & Henderson, 1999). Also, Booth and Edwards (1989) discovered that those who described their parents as having an unhappy marriage had a greater chance of disagreements and instability in their own marriage. More recent findings connected negative exposure to parental conflict with young adults using similar conflict tactics in their own romantic relationships (Reese-Weber & Kahn, 2005).

The family of origin providing a context of developing conflict management styles supplements findings that people gained consistent styles of how they approached or resolved conflict over time (Sternbreg & Soriano, 1984). In fact, it has become apparent that conflict management skills are not suddenly developed with the initiation of marriage, but largely derive from family of origin experiences (Hanzal & Segrin, 2008). Those with a familial background displaying negative interparental conflict may have socially learned and therefore repeated those behaviors; contributing to predisposed characteristics that could lead

to negative outcomes (Jacquet & Surra, 2001). The possibility of parental conflict lowering offspring's relationship quality has been evident in both childhood friendships and young adult romantic relationships (Kirk, 2002). These findings suggest that an individual's early exposure to dysfunctional conflict has a harmful effect prior to marriage, and thus has a chance to continue into marriage.

As research suggests, couple conflict resolution styles are significant to marital health. Gottman believed that couples dealt with arguments in one of two ways. He termed these two different couples "regulated" and "nonregulated." Regulated couples differ from nonregulated couples based on a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative interactions, with regulated couples having closer to five positive interactions for each negative interaction (Gottman, 1994a). Gottman labeled these more functional (regulating) couples as validating, conflict-avoiding, and volatile couples, and warns against labeling one type as better than the other. The aforementioned couples ranged by the degree of how a partner may try to influence the other as well as the timing of that influence, but all have similar 5:1 ratios of positive to negative exchanges (Gottman, 1999).

Validating couples are characterized as having a lot of togetherness and working openly to resolve their differences. They typically utilize an ample amount of positive affect and respectfully consider their partner's opinions. Conflict-avoiding couples have a lesser degree of persuasion between partners than other couple-conflict styles. Instead, they focus on the strengths of their marriage and "agree to disagree" (Gottman, 2009, p. 89).

Essentially, they avoid dealing with conflict head on and rather than come to a solution, their goal is acceptance. On the other hand, volatile couples have a greater frequency of persuasion and influence attempts. Gottman (1994a) describes these partners as passionate and very

emotionally expressive, frequently and openly displaying both positive and negative affect. However, contrary to Gottman's belief that the three regulated styles are equivalent, Busby and Holman (2009) and Holman and Jarvis (2003) consistently found superiority in the validating style.

Despite the pervasiveness of conflict in marriages, nonregulated couples make more use of highly dysfunctional ways to interact than regulated couples (Gottman, 1994a, 1999). Those couples that embody negative interactions such as personal attacks and withholding positive affect are labeled "hostile" couples (Gottman, 1994a). Hostile couples are also more likely to utilize what Gottman (1994a) called the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and withdrawal. Moreover, unlike regulated couples, hostile couples typically lack the mechanism to soothe their own emotional reactivity as well as their partner's overwhelmed affect (flooding and soothing).

Holman and Jarvis (2003) investigated Gottman's couple-conflict types using their own self-report methodology in order to test if their findings matched up with Gottman's observational findings. Their results were congruent with Gottman's in that there was a significant difference between regulated couples and nonregulated couples. Couples classified as hostile tended to have the lowest relationship quality as indicated by scoring lowest on "satisfaction, stability, positive communication, and soothing, and highest on negative communication, criticism, contempt/defensiveness, withdrawal, and flooding" (Holman & Jarvis, 2003, p. 279). Their research solidified the identification of four different couple-conflict types and that hostile conflict communication is the most detrimental to marriages (Holman & Jarvis, 2003).

Despite grounded research on different couple-conflict types, it cannot be assumed that partners in a marriage have the same approach to conflict. If the aforementioned styles (validating, conflict-avoiding, and volatile) are a mismatch between individuals, the lack of understanding can lead to a higher potential for divorce (Gottman, 1999). Another study furthers the idea of mismatched relationship personalities, stating that over time in a marriage conflict resolution styles become more ingrained. Once this occurs, dysfunctional communication patterns are amplified and can lead to relationship dissatisfaction (Schneewind & Gerhard, 2009).

Certain mismatches may be more detrimental to others. For example, when one partner in a relationship exhibits a hostile style of conflict, their relationship is more likely to be unstable than in couples where neither partner has a hostile style (Gottman & Levenson, 2000). Busby and Holman (2009) explore perceived match or mismatch on the Gottman conflict styles and sought to expand Holman and Jarvis's (2003) findings that the three regulated couple conflict styles are not equal when measuring quality and stability of marriages.

Their results indicated that the validating style "had significantly more positive means as compared with volatile and avoidant in seven of the eight comparisons" (Busby & Holman, 2009, p. 541). If at least one partner had a validating style it led to a better relationship, but when the couple "matched" with a validating style, that was significantly better than other matches or mismatches. Also, they found that the volatile-avoidant mismatched style was clearly less functional compared to the other mismatched conflict styles, not including the hostile style. Busby and Holman (2009) recommend further

longitudinal research to determine if mismatched conflict styles may erode relationships over time.

### **Sibling and marital conflict resolution**

The comprehensive review of literature on sibling and marital conflict resolution styles reveal significant similarities. Although the terms of conflict resolution styles differ from study to study, they essentially capture the same concepts and variations of conflict resolution. Most noticeable are the two overarching categories of conflict resolution: constructive versus destructive conflict.

Sibling research defined constructive conflict as reaching differing goals, using reasoning, and utilizing interpersonal understanding (Ross, Ross, Stein, & Trabasso, 2006). Constructive conflict management also has a dual role that coordinates interpersonal needs while bridging relationships with others. This is because when two people resolve a conflict constructively, one or both persons may have to decide on what they are willing to sacrifice in order to strengthen the relationship as a whole. To be able to do this, a person first must be introspective and knowledgeable of their interpersonal needs. This approach to resolving conflict is comparable to Gottman's regulated style of couple conflict types. More specifically, it emulates the validating couple type, which emphasizes positive affect and openness as conflict is resolved.

On the other hand, sibling conflict can be used destructively when children escalate oppositional tactics and reciprocate one another's hurtful actions (Katz, Kramer, & Gottman, 1992; Perlman & Ross, 2005; Phinney, 1986; Vuchinich, 1987). This type of conflict is reminiscent of Gottman's (1999) unregulated couples, who have the least functional and stable marriage when compared to the regulated couple types. Perhaps the most prevalent

finding across research is that hostile communication patterns while resolving conflicts are the most detrimental to any relationship. Ross, Ross, Stein, and Trabasso (2006) found that opposition and using hostile actions while attempting to resolve conflicts risked harming a sibling's relationship. Similarly, Gottman's (1999) hostile couple style of resolution typically incorporated criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and withdrawal.

Fueling the close comparison between sibling and marital conflict are the methods used to measure conflict resolution. One study in particular adopted measures previously used by researchers studying conflict resolution between spouses (Ross, Ross, Stein, & Trabasso, 2006). This crossover acknowledges the likelihood that styles would be similar across relationships. Ram and Ross (2008) also compared adult negotiation techniques to more recent sibling negotiation tactics, discovering that similar processes exist as solutions are being attempted. They noted that there is extensive research on adult negotiation strategies (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986) leading to integrative solutions, but little is known about what creates positive conflict strategies among siblings (Ram & Ross, 2008). The researchers also note the importance of information sharing in adult negotiation, which is similar to the idea found in sibling conflict of how multiple perspective taking and learning about the opponent's goals can facilitate positive conflict resolution. Using previous knowledge about adult negotiation, Ram and Ross (2008) facilitated a study to find the impact of information-sharing on siblings' resolution of conflict, finding that it did have a positive impact on negotiations, specifically for younger siblings.

Research has not studied the connection between conflict resolution styles in the family of origin and conflict resolution styles found within romantic relationships. Reese-Weber and Bartle Haring (1998) sought to supplement this gap by comparing conflict

resolution styles between the family dyads of interparents, mother-adolescent, father-adolescent, siblings, and adolescent romantic couple conflicts. Implementing Reese-Weber's previously mentioned meditational model, the study found that conflict resolution in sibling relationships significantly associated to conflict resolution in adolescent romantic relationships, more so for the attack and avoid styles than for the compromise style. These results suggest that if attack and avoid resolution styles are employed in one dyadic relationship; they are likely to be utilized in other dyadic relationships.

In a recent study Whiten et al. (2008) extended the research past adolescent romantic and provided one of the first direct tests of the hypothesis that marital conflict interaction patterns are learned from the family of origin. Specifically focusing on the interactions of positive engagement and hostility as communication patterns that have the most continuity; results reflected that only family hostility served as a forecast of marital hostility or marital positive engagement (Whiten et al. 2008). This conclusion was remarkably similar to the aforementioned study Reese-Weber and Bartle Haring (1998) conducted, perhaps indicating the possibility that negative or unregulated resolution styles are transmitted more easily. However, Whitten et al. (2008) had a broader focus on family of origin interactions, but lacked specificity on family dyads such as sibling relationships.

Current study hypotheses:

*H1: Self ratings of compromise in sibling relationships will predict self ratings of compromise in current committed relationships.*

*H2: Self ratings of avoidance in sibling relationships will predict self ratings of avoidance in current committed relationships.*

*H3: Self ratings of attacking in sibling relationships will predict self ratings of attacking in current committed relationships.*

*H4: Self rating of either volatile, validating, avoidant or hostile conflict resolution behavior in sibling relationships using Gottman's scales will predict self-rating of volatile, validating, avoidant, or hostile conflict resolution behavior in current committed relationships.*

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### Participants

The sample for this study was a sample of convenience. The survey was distributed online via Facebook and list serves. Requirements for participation in this study included having at least one sibling within five years of age and being in a current romantic relationship for at least one year in duration. The sample was made up of individuals who are currently in a committed relationship (e.g. cohabitating, married) and have at least one sibling within five years of age (see Table 1). 194 participants responded to the questionnaire. Of the 194, there were 144 cases with complete data (119 females and 25 males). The study included a measure to collect the participant's ethnicity, but due to an error, the data was missing from the survey. Participants reported the following level of highest completed education: 1 (high school diploma), 18 (some college), 4 (associate degree), 70 (bachelor's degree), and 51 (advanced degree). The mean age of the participants was 28.9 years. Participants were asked to report resolution styles used with the sibling closest to them in age and in "emotional closeness." The average age of chosen siblings was 14.6, which signified mid-adolescence, and participants had an average of 2.4 siblings. Participants reported current relationship length to be an average of 6.8 years and 5.5 months.

#### Measures

**Demographic form.** Respondents answered questions from three short demographic forms. Immediately after the informed consent form, a general participant demographic form was used to determine items such as age, gender, highest level of education completed, relationship status, and race (see Appendix A). The final question on the general demographic form asked if the participant had a sibling within five years of age. If they did

not, they were informed that they were not eligible for the study. The first part of the sibling questionnaire sections consisted of a short sibling demographic form (see Appendix B). Example questions included: How many siblings do you have? Looking back to middle or late adolescence (years 12-18), describe your closest sibling that was within five years of age? Once they identify a sibling, more descriptive questions will be asked (e.g. how old were you at the time? How old were they?).

This study asked respondents to look back to middle or late adolescents because studies show that conflict resolution skills are more developed at that time. Developmentally, siblings are more apt to be able to take in another perspective other than their own. Essentially, a sibling relationship around that time will more closely represent what conflict resolutions skills they consistently have in other relationships. Respondents also filled out a committed relationship demographic form (See Appendix C) before answering questions for the committed relationship section (e.g. Relationship status, gender of partner, age of partner).

**CRBQ.** To measure sibling conflict resolution styles, Reese-Weber and Bartle-Haring's (2003) Conflict Resolution Behavior Questionnaire (CRBQ) was adapted. This instrument was designed to assess three conflict-resolutions: attack, avoidance, and compromise (Rubenstein & Feldman, 1993). It consisted of a 22-item Likert scale that asked participants to consider how often they engage in certain behaviors and rate items from a range of 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). Rubenstein et al. (1993) found alpha coefficients as .78, .73, and .77 for the attack, avoidance, and compromise scales respectively. Example questions included "Try to work out a compromise" and "get mad and walk away." Three subscale scores were calculated to represent the three types of conflict resolution. The attack subscale

reflected negative conflict resolution behaviors (e.g. “really get mad and start yelling); the compromise subscale reflected positive conflict resolution (e.g. Listen to what the other says and try to understand); and the avoid subscale reflected .....(e.g. Try to avoid talking about it).

Rubenstein and Feldman (1993) further defined compromise as understanding the others’ point of view and/or working together to negotiate the problem. An attack style of resolution included hostility, escalation of conflict, and authoritarian behavior. Last, the avoidance style was characterized by ignoring the problem and/or removing self from the conflict.

Reese-Weber and Bartle-Haring (1998) made slight revisions to the CRBQ to reflect behaviors of both adults and late adolescents and reported alpha coefficients from .81 to .87 for the attack scale, .63 to .79 for the avoidance scale, and .78 to .79 for the compromise scale. The reliability was comparable the previously reported alpha coefficients of Rubenstein and Feldman (1993). Small revisions were made to the questionnaire in the present study to reflect the behavior of both sibling and marital relationships (See Appendices D and E). For example, the wording was revised from “talk with brother or sister” to “talk to spouse.” Also, the instructions were change from “Please indicate in the first column how often you do the following things when you have a conflict with your husband about something” to “Please indicate in the first column how often you did the following things when you had a conflict with your sibling about something” and “Please indicate in the first column how often you did the following things when you have a conflict with your partner about something.”

Reese-Weber (2000) used three subscales to measure avoidance (e.g. clam up and hold your feelings inside, try to be funny and make light of it), attack (e.g. really get mad and start yelling, stay mad for a long time), and compromise (e.g. apologize to the other, try to reason). Previous studies have used this scale to assess parent-adolescent conflict (Rubenstein & Feldman, 1993) and parents' and adolescents' perceptions of the adolescents' conflict-resolution behaviors. This study measured spouse perspectives of their significant other, closest sibling from the family of origin, and their own conflict-resolution behaviors.

**Couple and Sibling Conflict Types.** In an attempt to validate Gottman's (1994b, 1999) couple conflict styles, Holman and Jarvis (2003) created four scenarios based on Gottman's (1994a, 1994b) descriptions of the types (See Appendix F). The scenarios each represented a validating, avoiding, volatile, or hostile relationship. Holman and Jarvis (2003) were able to validate these items as accurately representative of Gottman's regulated and unregulated couple types. Participants were asked to read each scenario and on a scale ranging from never, rarely, sometimes, often, and very often, chose the response that best reflected how it describes their conflict interactions. The instructions were altered to allow participants to answer the same questions for their sibling relationship (See Appendix G).

### **Procedure**

Participants were recruited using a snowballing method by utilizing Facebook and email list serves. Facebook is an avenue where "open events" can be created and user friends invited to access the survey link. Friends were encouraged to invite other friends to the event, thus creating a snowball sample to reach the targeted audience. To create an incentive for taking the survey, one \$15 cash prize/gift card was offered to a random participant as well

as ten \$5 cash prizes/gift card. The questionnaire was posted in December 2010 and the deadline to respond was January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011.

The demographic form, the Conflict Resolution Behavior Questionnaire (CRBQ), and Gottman's couple-conflict type predictor were formatted for electronic use. The respondents first filled out a general demographic form. The last two questions determined if participants were qualified for the study and asked if respondents were currently in a committed relationship and if they had a sibling within five years of age when they were adolescents. Before being directed to the questionnaires, they filled out a short demographic form before both the sibling section and the committed relationship questionnaire. The approximate time it took to take the survey varied between 15-20 minutes. At the completion of the study, data was stored on a secure server and retrieved on a spreadsheet for further analysis.

### **Analysis**

Multiple regression analysis was used because it provided the relationship between many variables as well as the magnitude of the relationships (Lunenburg, F. & Irby, B., 2008). A multiple linear regression was employed to help determine if the self rating of conflict resolution styles used with a sibling could predict the self rating of conflict resolution styles used in current committed relationships.

The first step in a multiple regression was to compute the correlations between the predictor variables and response variable in order to yield a multiple correlation coefficient ( $R$ ).  $R$ , which ranges from 0.00 to 1.00, measured the magnitude of the relationship between the predictor variable and the response variable; and the larger the  $R$  the better the prediction. In this case,  $R$  was squared in order to yield the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), which reflected the amount of variance in the response variable explained by the predictor variables

(Lunenburg, F. & Irby, B., 2008). For example, the  $R^2$  coefficient for the self rating of avoidance with siblings is .287, which is the square of the corresponding  $R$  coefficient .535. Translated, 28.7% of participants (with control variables) who rated their conflict resolution styles as avoidant with their siblings also rated their conflict resolution styles as avoidant with their current committed partners.

Next, the  $F$  value was calculated in order to find the level of significance that could either accept or reject the null hypothesis. In this case, the null hypothesis states that the model (independent variables) of interest does not predict the response variable. Results are significant at the 5 % level and indicate that the null hypothesis should be rejected.

Once it was determined if the models for the hypothesis were significant, further tests were run in order to determine the  $B$  coefficients for the model as well as the significance for the response variable and control variables, everything held constant (participant age, sibling age, number of siblings, and participant gender).

Table 3.1

*Participant Demographics*

Item	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	25	17.3
	Female	119	82.6
Education	High School	1	.007
	Some College	18	12.5
	Associate Degree	4	.03
	Bachelor Degree	70	48.6
	Advanced Degree	51	35.4

*Note.*  $N = 144$ .

## Chapter 4

### Results

*H1: Self ratings of compromise in sibling relationships will predict self ratings of compromise in current committed relationships.*

A multiple linear regression was utilized with the self rating of sibling comprise total score as the predictor variable and the self rating of compromise in their current committed relationship as the response variable. Variables of participant age, number of siblings, age of sibling, and participant gender were included as control variables (see Table 2). The overall model predicted 14.9% of the variance,  $R^2 = .149$ ,  $F(5, 114) = 4.003$ ,  $p = .002$ . Results support hypotheses 1 and show that for every one point increase in the self-rating of sibling comprise total score, there was a corresponding .279 point increase in the rating of compromise in their current committed relationship after controlling for participant age, number of siblings, age of sibling, and participant gender ( $p < .01$ ). It interesting to note that participant's age was also significantly predictive in the opposite direction. In this case for every one year older the participant increased in age, their reported comprise in their current committed relationship score decreased by .079 points ( $p = .008$ ).

*H2: Self ratings of avoidance in sibling relationships will predict self ratings of avoidance in current committed relationships.*

A multiple linear regression was utilized with the self-rating of sibling avoidance total score as the predictor variable and the self rating of avoidance in their current committed relationship as the response variable. Variables of participant age, number of siblings, age of sibling, and participant gender were included as control variables (see Table 3). The overall model predicted 28.7% of the variance,  $R^2 = .287$ ,  $F(5, 114) = 9.166$ ,  $p < .01$ . Results

support the hypotheses and show that for every one point increase in the self-rating of sibling avoidance total score there was a corresponding .468 point increase in the rating of avoidance in their current committed relationship after controlling for participant age, number of siblings, age of sibling, and participant gender ( $p < .01$ ). All other variables being equal, females scored 2.321 points higher than males on their reported avoidance in their committed relationship ( $p = .007$ ).

*H3: Self ratings of attacking in sibling relationships will predict self ratings of attacking in current committed relationships.*

A multiple linear regression was utilized with the self-rating of sibling avoidance total score as the predictor variable and the self rating of avoidance in their current committed relationship as the response variable. Variables of participant age, number of siblings, age of sibling, and participant gender were included as control variables (see Table 4). The overall model predicted 21.3% of the variance,  $R^2 = .213$ ,  $F(5, 114) = 6.180$ ,  $p < .001$ . Results support the hypotheses and show that for every one point increase in the self-rating of sibling avoidance total score there was a corresponding .301 point increase in the rating of avoidance in their current committed relationship after controlling for participant age, number of siblings, age of siblings, and participant gender ( $p < .01$ ). All other variables being equal, females scored 3.068 points higher than males on their reported avoidance in their committed relationship ( $p = .007$ ) and for every one year older the participant increased in age, their reported attacking in their current committed relationship score increased by .094 points ( $p = .022$ ).

*H4: Self rating of either volatile, validating, avoidant or hostile conflict resolution behavior in sibling relationships using Gottman's scales will predict self-rating of volatile, validating, avoidant, or hostile conflict resolution behavior in current committed relationships.*

A multiple linear regression was utilized with the self-rating of each specific sibling conflict style score as the predictor variable and the self rating of the corresponding conflict style score in their current committed relationship as the response variable. Variables of participant age, number of siblings, age of sibling, and participant gender were included as control variables. Several models were not significant: Volatile ( $R^2 = .040$ ,  $F = .954$ ,  $p = .449$ ), avoiding ( $R^2 = .080$ ,  $F = 1.958$ ,  $p = .090$ ) and hostile ( $R^2 = .062$ ,  $F = 1.482$ ,  $p = .201$ ).

Out of Gottman's four conflict resolution styles, the validating style was the only one to have statistical significance. A multiple linear regression was utilized with the Gottman's self-rating of validating sibling conflict resolution style total score as the predictor variable and the self rating of validating in their current committed relationship as the response variable. Variables of participant age, number of siblings, age of sibling when adolescent and participant gender was also included in the model (see Table 5). The overall model predicted 13.6% of the variance,  $R^2 = .136$ ,  $F(5, 110) = 3.450$ ,  $p = .006$ . Results also show that for every one point increase in the self-rating of sibling validating total score, there was a corresponding .331 point increase in the rating of compromise in their current committed relationship after controlling for participant age, number of siblings, age of sibling, and participant gender ( $p < .001$ ). It is interesting to note that participant's age was also significantly predictive in the opposite direction. In this case for every one year older the participant increased in age, their reported compromise in their current committed relationship score decreased by .021 points ( $p = .039$ ).

Table 4.1

*Predictors of Self-reported Compromising Conflict-resolution Behavior with Siblings*

Variable	Self-reported compromising conflict resolution		
	<i>B</i>	Std. Error	95% CI
Constant	15.365**	2.286	[10.838, 19.893]
Sibling compromise	.262**	-.078	[.107, .417]
Participant age	-.079**	.029	[-.137, -.020]
Number of siblings	-.114	.159	[-.430, .202]
Age of sibling	-.063	.100	[-.261, .134]
Participant gender	.863	.820	[-.761, 2.486]
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.149		
<i>F</i>	4.003		

Note. *N* = 144. CI = confidence interval. \*\* *p* < .01.

Table 4.2

*Predictors of Self-reported Avoidant Conflict-resolution Behavior with Siblings*

Variable	Self-reported avoidant conflict resolution		
	<i>B</i>	Std. Error	95% CI
Constant	4.972**	2.348	[-.320, 9.625]
Sibling avoidant	.468**	.088	[-.294, .642]
Participant age	.038	.030	[-.021, .097]
Number of siblings	.187	.162	[-.135, .509]
Age of sibling	-.096	.102	[-.298, .106]
Participant gender	2.321**	.841	[-.655, 3.987]
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.287	3.205	
<i>F</i>	9.166**		

*Note.* *N* = 144. CI = confidence interval. \*\* *p* < .01.

Table 4.3

*Predictors of Self-reported Attack Conflict-resolution Behavior with Siblings*

Variable	Self-reported attack conflict resolution		
	<i>B</i>	Std. Error	95% CI
Constant	.645	3.123	[-5.542, 6.832]
Sibling attack	.301**	.078	[.146, .456]
Participant age	.094*	.041	[.014, .175]
Number of siblings	.229	.215	[-.198, .655]
Age of sibling	-.096	.136	[-.364, .173]
Participant gender	3.068**	1.113	[.863, 5.273]
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.213		
<i>F</i>	.180**		

*Note.* *N* = 144. CI = confidence interval. \**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01.

Table 4.4

*Predictors of Self-reported Validating Conflict-resolution Behavior with Siblings*

Variable	Self-reported validating conflict resolution		
	<i>B</i>	Std. Error	95% CI
Constant	3.515	.748	[2.032, 4.997]
Sibling validating	.330**	.093	[.145, .516]
Participant age	-.021*	.010	[-.042, -.001]
Number of siblings	-.003	.055	[-.112, .106]
Age of sibling	.008	.036	[-.063, .078]
Participant gender	-.062	.297	[-.651, .527]
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.136	1.092	
<i>F</i>	3.450**		

*Note.* *N* = 144. CI = confidence interval. \*\* *p* < .01

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

In the current study, conflict resolution styles utilized with siblings in adolescence were examined to determine if they correlated with conflict resolution styles currently used with committed partners. It was hypothesized that self ratings of compromise, avoidance, and attack conflict resolution styles in sibling relationships would predict self ratings of compromise, avoidance, and attacking conflict resolution styles in current committed relationships. It was further hypothesized that self ratings of Gottman's (1994a, 1999) four conflict resolution styles (as measured by Holman & Jarvis, 2003) used with siblings would also be predictive of self reported conflict resolution styles used in current committed relationships.

Findings reflect that a significant connection exists between self ratings of conflict resolution styles with siblings in adolescence and self ratings of conflict resolution styles with current committed partners. Specifically, the strongest models were found in the self ratings of avoid and attack conflict resolution styles, compromise also being significant. The findings on the crossover of attack and avoid styles from sibling to current committed relationships are most interesting, as it has been discovered that those with family backgrounds displaying more negative interparental conflict are more likely to observe and learn similar behaviors, as evidenced by the social learning theory (Jacquet & Surra, 2001).

An emerging theme in literature deems exposure and/or participation of negative resolution behaviors in the family of origin creating a stronger likelihood of predicting conflict interactions in adolescent romantic relationships and marital conflict patterns during adulthood (Reese-Weber, 2000; Whitton, et al., 2008). This premise furthers the likelihood of

direct and indirect relationships occurring between and within conflict resolution styles in family dyads and into late adolescent romantic relationships (Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998). These conclusions are consistent with literature stating that conflict resolution styles are found to be consistent from one dyadic subsystem to another and across relationships (O’Leary, 1988; Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998, Sternberg & Soriano, 1984).

The use and discussion of the CRBQ in this matter is pertinent, as this measure was used in past research regarding interfamilial conflict resolution styles and its influence on late adolescent romantic conflict resolution styles (Reese-Weber, 2000; Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998; Reese-Weber & Kahn, 2005). Reese-Weber’s (2000) latest study sample of “late adolescents” consisted of undergraduate students that had a mean age of 21.8 years. Having used the same instrument (CRBQ) in the current study, but on a population with a median age of 28.8, it reflects a continuity of resolution style past late adolescence and into adulthood.

The current study’s mean sample age of 28.8 is an important addition to literature for two reasons. First, this is the first known study to bridge the connection past sibling resolution styles and late adolescent romantic relationships and into current committed partners of a later age. Furthermore, the use of the CRBQ is an important element, as it reflects possible longevity of the findings from past research and validates previous studies. Second, the specific focus on self rating of conflict resolution styles and the continuity in findings across sibling and committed partner relationships enhances dated previous research; the last known study to have examined consistencies in conflict resolution styles being in 1987 (Sternberg & Dobson). The aforementioned study’s findings suggested that there was a significant stylistic consistency of conflict resolution across relationships with

four main styles of conflict emerging: active/mitigating, passive/mitigating, active/intensifying, and passive/intensifying. These four styles arguably compare to the attack, avoid, compromise, volatile, and hostile styles examined in the current study. The commonalities between Sternberg and Dobson's (1987) study and the current study reflect continuity in findings.

Results showing consistency of self rating of conflict resolution styles across past sibling relationships and into current committed relationships lends further possibility that resolution styles are formed and primed in the family of origin; also continuing in relationships outside the family. This view is consistent with literature on the family of origin being a significant part of developing conflict resolution skills (Hanzal & Sagrin, 2008). More importantly, the current study's results serves to deepen the literature beyond the general scope of family of origin interactions because of its focus on family member's individual conflict resolution styles with siblings.

Social learning theory and family systems theory offer the strongest reasoning behind the transmission of self rated conflict resolution styles in sibling relationships to conflict resolution styles in current committed relationships. Social learning theory explains how adolescent's observation and participation of conflictual interactions with parents can be translated into their own conflict resolution behaviors (Bandura, 1989). Research on conflict resolution styles commonly cite how this theory may explain how resolution styles can be generalized to relationships outside the family (O'Leary, 1988; Jacquet & Surra, 2001; Reese-Weber & Kahn, 2005).

Additionally, family systems theory works to describe how interactions where tension is being resolved in one family subsystem (e.g. interparental) can impact how other

subsystems attempt to resolve tension (Bertalanffy, 1969). The consistency of conflict resolution styles across relationships in family dyads, as experienced in Reese-Weber's (1998) meditational model, may be explained by considering that a common family member is involved in multiple dyadic relationships (e.g. adolescent-mom, adolescent-sibling). This offers a systemic explanation, considering that if an individual is using a particular style of conflict resolution in one subsystem, they are likely to use that same style in other subsystems (Smith, Hamon, Ingoldsby, & Miller, 2009). Thus, what occurs in one part of the family is likely to affect the family as a whole.

The combined application of social learning theory and family system theory support the current study's hypothesis that current conflict resolution behaviors are grounded in dynamics learned from the interparental conflict resolution styles and consequently, sibling dyad. Furthermore, the current study's results supports past research by Sternberg and Dobson (1987), who examined adolescents' conflict resolution skills with several individuals such as parents, teachers, and romantic partners, and found that individual conflict resolution styles can have strong consistency across relationships; as well as specific resolution styles that appeared across dyadic relationships.

In regard to the measure including four short scenario's of Gottman's (1994a, 1999) couple-conflict styles created by Holman and Jarvis (2003), the only significant correlation found between self rating in the sibling and current committed relationship conflict resolution styles was the validating style. According to previous literature and findings of the current study, it is reasonable to expect the relationship between sibling conflict styles and adult conflict styles as measured by Holman and Jarvis's (2003) to also be significant. That they are incongruent warrants a closer look at the internal validity of the instrument.

The language and number of items used to describe each measure are possible reasons for the inconsistency of results. For instance, Holman and Jarvis's (2003) measure of hostility includes statements such as "there are a lot of insults back and forth, name calling, putdowns and sarcasm... There are clearly more negatives than positives in our relationship (p. 282)." The description of volatile is characterized by "we have volcanic arguments, but they are just a small part of a warm and loving relationship (Holman & Jarvis, 2003, p. 282)." The CRBQ subscale of attack utilizes statements such as "really get mad and start yelling, get madder the more you talk, and say or do something to hurt the others' feelings (See Appendix D)." The measure of attack is most comparable to Holman and Jarvis' (2003) interpretation of what Gottman (1994a, 1999) describes as hostile, but could arguably fit in the category of volatile as well. The different language and room for interpretation across measures could be an explanation for the differing results.

When considering the style and format of questionnaires, the CRBQ is a 22-item measure that consists of short statements to be rated on a scale of 0 (*Never*) to 4 (*Almost Always*). On the other hand, Holman and Jarvis' (2003) measure includes four short scenarios that reflect each conflict style and are rated on a scale of 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Very Often*). While the CRBQ has been previously used and has withstood the test of validity (as noted in the measures section) on both sibling and romantic relationships, the Holman and Jarvis' (2003) conflict styles have only been utilized with couples. Holman and Jarvis' (2003) supported the distinction found between Gottman's four couple conflict styles, but there is no known evidence that rewording of it to be applied to other populations (e.g. "your partner" to "your sibling") would produce the same results. As the current study attempted to use Holman and Jarvis' (2003) scale intended for couples with siblings, the instrument may have lost validity

in the process of rewording of the scenarios to reflect sibling relationships. Future research would benefit in the further analysis of Holman and Jarvis' (2003) instrument.

A final consideration for the inconsistency of results reflected in the fourth hypotheses is that the instruction for rating the four scenarios in Holman and Jarvis' (2003) measure is a double-barreled question. The participant was asked to reflect on which type "most closely describes how you and your sibling dealt with conflict in your relationship" (see Appendix F). The wording essentially forces the participant to rate how both they and their sibling dealt with conflict, rather than rating their own conflict, and their sibling's conflict separately as measured in the CRBQ. The same dilemma was presented in the conflict scenarios asking participants to rate their conflict styles currently with their partners. The issue with asking participants to identify how they *and* their sibling dealt with conflict is that the total score does not take into account mismatch of conflict styles and how that may influence the response. It makes it more difficult to decipher the participant's individual self-rating of conflict resolution style.

### **Implications**

There are several implications for both researchers and professionals working with individuals, couples, and families. The current study results reflect that conflict resolution styles used in sibling relationships in the family of origin can be predictive of resolution styles used in current committed romantic relationships.

**Clinical implications.** Rather than simply looking at the prevalence of conflict, mental health professionals should emphasize and recognize conflict resolution styles when mediating family, marital, or divorce disputes. As the current study reflects how conflict styles can be similar across siblings to current relationships, clinicians would benefit from

gathering information on of how an individual learned their pattern of resolution. Insight on the family of origin and sibling relationships conflict resolution styles can offer the first step towards positive change. For instance, educating clients on the different existing conflict styles and that they can be learned, can provide validation to the client that they are not wrong to have a conflict style that is different than others. This could especially be helpful to clients who employ an avoidant conflict style and possibly clash with others that are more confronting or volatile.

This study also offers specific implications for when working with couples. Research shows that Gottman's (1999) regulated couple styles (validating, avoidant, and volatile), as measured by Holman and Jarvis (2003) in the current study, employ more functional conflict resolution behaviors, which correlates with higher marital satisfaction. On the other hand, unregulated couples more hostile while resolving conflict, or couples that have a mismatch of conflict styles, have a higher potential for divorcing (Gottman, 1999). This knowledge could be directly applied in couple's therapy, as awareness to a situation can be powerful in itself. In a similar fashion towards working with individuals, provoking insight to couples of how they may have attained their conflict resolution styles could lead to a better understanding of their presenting issue. Consequently, this can provide a means to change the way they resolve their conflicts. Moreover, the current study's results imply that the particular conflict style an individual presents within a couple is most likely not unique to the current romantic relationship. Rather, the individual conflict style has a strong possibility of being similar to the same style used in other relationships and contexts.

Furthermore, social learning theory and family systems theory can be used as a powerful intervention by practitioners working with distressed families. With this mindset,

they can detect if the root of destructive conflict is in a particular subsystem and place their attention in that area. By changing the interactions in that subsystem, it could have a spillover effect to the other subsystems in the family (Bertalanffy, 1968). Moreover, interactions between subsystems can contribute to a process that leads to either positive or negative outcomes.

**Parenting implications.** It is also important to be aware of literature findings that hostile conflict resolution styles are more easily transmitted from parents to children (Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998; Whitton et al., 2008). That the current study found the strongest model to be the attack and avoid styles emphasizes the importance of this awareness. Poorly resolved conflicts can be more detrimental to children than the presence of conflict. In fact, children who observe marital conflict are believed to internalize more dysfunctional modes of conflict resolution, rather than growth-promoting modes (Bauer et al., 2006). This can influence children to either become more aggressive or victims in their peer group (Bauer et al. 2006). Moreover, it could be critical to observe how a child interacts in their sibling relationships, as this can be a window to how they model their behaviors with their peers. Parental involvement and mediation in these conflicts could promote more healthy interaction between siblings.

Social learning theory is common in literature pertaining to conflict resolution styles. That a child can learn through observation and participation of behavior should be taught to parents, especially ones who constantly argue or those going through a divorce. Parents often think that their behaviors go unnoticed by their children, or that children aren't cognitively able to grasp situations, but the opposite is true. As evidenced by literature, siblings and children pick up on marital distress and it can translate into their own relationships (Reese-

Weber, 2000). In the critical time of a high divorce rates, children may easily find themselves distressed by interparental conflict. While the current study does not concentrate on interparental conflict styles, literature strongly supports its indirect relationship with sibling conflict styles (Reese-Weber, 2000). Families would benefit from divorce education that emphasizes the spillover effect that can occur from one subsystem's conflict resolution style to another, whether the style is positive or negative.

### **Limitations and future research**

A limitation of the study is that participants were asked to examine retrospective perceptions of their conflict resolution behaviors used with their siblings in adolescence. The more time spent away from the family of origin, the more time that the participant may have had to evolve in their sibling relationships, which could influence how they rated their conflict styles. Participants may have also carried a more favorable bias concerning themselves and how they rated their conflict resolution styles with both their sibling and current partner. Future research could reduce this bias by having the sibling and partner also taking the survey in order to rate the participant's style as well; offering a more comprehensive and accurate picture of true conflict resolution styles.

Another limitation is that other familial context, such as the interparental and parent-child relationships, was not incorporated in the tested model. Thus, results could be influenced by other interactions and contextual factors occurring simultaneously during an individual's growing development. These factors must be kept in mind before interpreting and generalizing results. Future research should include these other subsystems in the test model in order to be able to control for these influences. The inclusion of these subsystems

would further support the theoretical lens of social learning theory and family systems theory used in previous literature, as well as the current study.

Snowballing, a non-probability sampling method, offers another potential limitation. Because the current study used a convenience sample and did not gather information about the participant's ethnicity, it decreases the chance that the results could be generalized to individuals with different demographic characteristics.

Future areas of research to be considered are specific ways to improve conflict resolution skills, what exceptions there are, if any, there are to intergenerational transmission of resolution styles, and the application of different cultural backgrounds and values to conflict resolution styles. The subject of consistent conflict resolution styles would also benefit from longitudinal studies, as it could give a more in depth and credible look at how it styles translate from one relationship to another. Also, the current study found that the average length of relationships that the participated reported is 6.8 years and 5.5 months. This lends curiosity of how conflict styles may change over time in relationships, both short-term and long-term.

## **Chapter 6**

### Conclusion

The present study significantly contributes to the literature. The main findings indicate that self ratings of conflict resolution styles utilized with siblings in adolescence often predict self ratings of conflict resolution styles used with current committed partners. The assessment of the sibling subsystem in connection to current adult relationships is also unique to literature. Last, the present study is the first to link family of origin resolution styles and current adult romantic relationship resolution styles. Future research is needed that duplicates the present study and also incorporates more subsystems in the rating of conflict resolution styles.

*Appendix A*

**Participant Demographic Form**

1. How old are you?
2. Select your gender (Male or Female)
3. Select your highest level of education completed (Elementary school, middle school, high school, college, graduate +)
4. Select your ethnicity (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Other)
5. Are you currently in a committed relationship lasting six months or longer?
  - a. If not, you are not eligible for this study. Thanks for your time!
6. Did you have a sibling within 5 years of age when growing up?
  - a. If not, you are not eligible for the study. Thanks for your time!

*Appendix B*

**Sibling Demographic Form**

1. How many siblings do you have?
2. Looking back to middle or late adolescence (years 12-18), using the following questions describe your emotionally closest sibling that was within five years of age.
  - a. How old were you?
  - b. How old were they?
  - c. Gender of sibling?
  - d. Biological Sibling or Step-Sibling?
  - e. Did you feel like your parents treated you differently? (Yes/No)
  - f. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being very emotionally close, how close were you with this sibling?

*Appendix C*

**Committed Relationship Demographic Form**

1. What best describes your relationship status? (Dating, Cohabiting, Married, Partners)
2. What is the gender of your partner?
3. How old is your partner?
4. How many months or years have you been together?

*Appendix D*

**Sibling Relationship -CRBQ**

This questionnaire lists a number of different things that people might do when they have a conflict with their sibling. Answer the questions about your relationship with the sibling you identified previously. Please indicate in the first column how often you did the following things when you had a conflict with your sibling about something. In the second column, please indicate how often your sibling did the following things.

Never	Often	Not Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
0	1	2	3	4
			How often do <b>you</b> do the following?	How often does your <b>sibling</b> do the following?
1. Try to avoid talking about it	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. Really get mad and start yelling.	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. Try to reason	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. Get sarcastic.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. Try to smooth things over.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. Listen to what the other says and try to understand.	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. Clam up and hold your feelings inside.	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. Try to work out a compromise.	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. Get cool and distant or give the other the cold shoulder.	_____	_____	_____	_____
10. Get mad and walk away.	_____	_____	_____	_____
11. Come right out and say what you are feeling.	_____	_____	_____	_____
12. Get madder the more you talk.	_____	_____	_____	_____
13. Stay mad for a long time.	_____	_____	_____	_____

- |  |       |       |
|--|-------|-------|
| 14. Get mad and throw something at the other.            | _____ | _____ |
| 15. Say or do something to hurt<br>the other's feelings. | _____ | _____ |
| 16. Go to your room to be alone.                         | _____ | _____ |
| 17. Watch T.V., read a book or<br>play video games.      | _____ | _____ |
| 18. Tell yourself the problem is not important.          | _____ | _____ |
| 19. Try to be funny and make light of it.                | _____ | _____ |
| 20. Talk to a friend or sibling about<br>how you feel.   | _____ | _____ |
| 21. Apologize to the other.                              | _____ | _____ |
| 22. Get back at the other in some way.                   | _____ | _____ |

*Appendix E*

**Committed Relationship- CRBQ**

This questionnaire lists a number of different things that people might do when they have a conflict with their spouse/partner. Answer the questions about your relationship with the committed you identified previously. Please indicate in the first column how often you do the following things when you have a conflict with your partner about something. In the second column, please indicate how often your partner does the following things.

	Never	Not Often	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
	0	1	2	3	4
				How often do <b>you</b> do the following?	How often does your <b>partner</b> do the following?
4. Try to avoid talking about it	_____			_____	_____
5. Really get mad and start yelling.	_____			_____	_____
6. Try to reason	_____			_____	_____
4. Get sarcastic.	_____			_____	_____
5. Try to smooth things over.	_____			_____	_____
6. Listen to what the other says and try to understand.	_____			_____	_____
7. Clam up and hold your feelings inside.	_____			_____	_____
8. Try to work out a compromise.	_____			_____	_____
9. Get cool and distant or give the other the cold shoulder.	_____			_____	_____
10. Get mad and walk away.	_____			_____	_____
11. Come right out and say what you are feeling.	_____			_____	_____
12. Get madder the more you talk.	_____			_____	_____

- |  |       |       |
|--|-------|-------|
| 13. Stay mad for a long time.                            | _____ | _____ |
| 14. Get mad and throw something at the other.            | _____ | _____ |
| 15. Say or do something to hurt<br>the other's feelings. | _____ | _____ |
| 16. Go to your room to be alone.                         | _____ | _____ |
| 17. Watch T.V., read a book or<br>play video games.      | _____ | _____ |
| 18. Tell yourself the problem is not important.          | _____ | _____ |
| 19. Try to be funny and make light of it.                | _____ | _____ |
| 20. Talk to a friend or sibling about<br>how you feel.   | _____ | _____ |
| 21. Apologize to the other.                              | _____ | _____ |
| 22. Get back at the other in some way.                   | _____ | _____ |

## Appendix F

### Sibling Conflict Styles

Below are descriptions of how people in four different types of relationships handle conflict. We would like to see which type most closely describes how you and your sibling dealt with conflict in your relationship. For each of the following paragraphs, think back to your sibling relationship and choose between 1 (*Never*) and 5 (*Very Often*) (Labels will be removed).

1=Never 2=Rarely 3= Sometimes 4=Often 5=Very Often

(Volatile)

In our relationship, conflicts may be fought on a grand scale, and that is okay, since our making up is even grander. We have volcanic arguments, but they are just a small part of a warm and loving relationship. Although we argue, we are still able to resolve our differences. In fact, our passion and zest for fighting actually lead to a better relationship, with a lot of making up, laughing, and affection.

(Avoiding)

In our relationship, conflict is minimized. We think it is better to “agree to disagree” rather than end up in discussion that will result in a deadlock. We don’t think much is to be gained from getting openly angry with each other. In fact a lot of talking about disagreements seem to make matters worse. We feel that if you just relax about problems, they will have a way of working themselves out.

(Validating)

In our relationship, when we are having conflict, we let each other know the other’s opinions are valued and their emotions valid, even if we disagree with each other. Even when discussing a hot topic, we display a lot of self-control and are calm. When fighting, we spend a lot of time validating each other as well as trying to persuade our sibling, or trying to find a compromise.

(Hostile)

We argue often and hotly. There are lots of insults back and forth, name calling, putdowns, and sarcasm. We don’t really listen to what the other is saying, or do we look at each other very much. One or the other of us can be quite detached and emotionally uninvolved, even though there may be brief episodes of attack and defensiveness. There are clearly more negatives than positives in our relationship.

## Appendix G

### Committed Relationship Conflict Styles

Below are descriptions of how people in four different types of relationships handle conflict. We would like to see which type most closely describes how you and your sibling dealt with conflict in your relationship. For each of the following paragraphs, think about your current relationship and choose between 1 (*Never*) and 5 (*Very Often*) (Labels will be removed).

1=Never 2=Rarely 3= Sometimes 4=Often 5=Very Often

(Volatile)

In our relationship, conflicts may be fought on a grand scale, and that is okay, since our making up is even grander. We have volcanic arguments, but they are just a small part of a warm and loving relationship. Although we argue, we are still able to resolve our differences. In fact, our passion and zest for fighting actually lead to a better relationship, with a lot of making up, laughing, and affection.

(Avoiding)

In our relationship, conflict is minimized. We think it is better to “agree to disagree” rather than end up in discussion that will result in a deadlock. We don’t think much is to be gained from getting openly angry with each other. In fact a lot of talking about disagreements seem to make matters worse. We feel that if you just relax about problems, they will have a way of working themselves out.

(Validating)

In our relationship, when we are having conflict, we let each other know the other’s opinions are valued and their emotions valid, even if we disagree with each other. Even when discussing a hot topic, we display a lot of self-control and are calm. When fighting, we spend a lot of time validating each other as well as trying to persuade our partner, or trying to find a compromise.

(Hostile)

We argue often and hotly. There are lots of insults back and forth, name calling, putdowns, and sarcasm. We don’t really listen to what the other is saying, or do we look at each other very much. One or the other of us can be quite detached and emotionally uninvolved, even though there may be brief episodes of attack and defensiveness. There are clearly more negatives than positives in our relationship.

Appendix H

IRB Approval



Office of Research Integrity  
IRB, IACUC, RDRC  
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CF Cover Letter, Procedures/Materials

Modification Review                      Approval Ends                      IRB Number  
November 11, 2011                      10-0787-P4S

TO:                      Fatimah Shalash, B.S.  
Family Studies  
3036 Charleston Gardens Blvd  
Lexington, Kentucky 40615  
PI phone #: (859)494-7350

FROM:                      Chairperson/Vice Chairperson  
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

SUBJECT:                      Approval of Modification Request for Protocol 10-0787-P4S

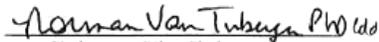
DATE:                      December 15, 2010

On December 14, 2010, the Institutional Review Board approved your request for modifications in your protocol entitled:

*Sibling Conflict Resolution Styles and Marital Conflict Resolution Styles*

If your modification request necessitated a change in your approved informed consent/assent form(s), attached is the new IRB approved consent/assent form(s) to be used when enrolling subjects. [Note, subjects can only be enrolled using informed consent/assent forms which have a valid "IRB Approval" stamp, unless waiver from this requirement was granted by the IRB.

For information describing investigator responsibilities after obtaining IRB approval, download and read the document "PI Guidance to Responsibilities, Qualifications, Records and Documentation of Human Subjects Research" from the Office of Research Integrity's Guidance and Policy Documents web page [<http://www.research.uky.edu/ori/human/guidance/html#PIresp>]. Additional information regarding IRB review, federal regulations, and institutional policies may be found through ORI's web site [<http://www.research.uky.edu/ori>]. If you have questions, need additional information, or would like a paper copy of the above mentioned document, contact the Office of Research Integrity at (859) 257-9428.

  
Chairperson/Vice Chairperson

Appendix I

Approved Cover Letter

FORM C

10-0787
THIS FORM VALID
12-14-10 - 11-11-11

We are asking for your participation that we are conducting at the University of Kentucky. You are being invited to take part in this research if you are currently in a committed relationship for the last six months AND grew up with a sibling that is no more than five years younger or older than you. We are asking you to reflect on your conflict resolutions styles in each of those relationships.

You responses are very important and may help us understand more about the relationship between sibling conflict resolution styles and the conflict resolution styles you may use in your current relationship.

This survey should take about 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

One 15 dollar and ten 5 dollar cash gifts will be awarded to random participants in the study. Upon completion of the survey, you will be instantly notified if you are a winner and will be asked to provide contact information to send you the gifts via postal mail.

Once again, your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary and all of your responses will be kept confidential. . If you wish to do so, you may discontinue the survey at any time. There are no known risks to you by participating in this study.

We appreciate your time and consideration in completing the survey. Should you have any further questions or comments, please feel free to contact me at [Fatimah886@uky.edu](mailto:Fatimah886@uky.edu) or 859-257-7755 or my Faculty Advisor, Nathan Wood at [Nathan.Wood@uky.edu](mailto:Nathan.Wood@uky.edu) or 859-257-7932.

If you have complaints, suggestions, or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the staff in the University of Kentucky Office of Research Integrity at 859-257-9428 or toll-free at 1-866-400-9428.

Many thanks,

Fatimah Shalash  
*Department of Family Studies, University of Kentucky*  
PHONE: 859-257-7755  
E-MAIL: [fatimah886@uky.edu](mailto:fatimah886@uky.edu)

(Button placed here: "Click here to proceed to survey")

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