



Exploring the lived experiences of young adults’ sibling relationships after parental divorce: A retrospective study

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SUMMARY

Exploring the lived experiences of young adults' sibling relationships after parental divorce: A retrospective study

Keywords: parental divorce, sibling relationships, parent-child relationships, family systems theory, qualitative, phenomenology.

For a significant amount of years, divorce has been a popular research topic in social science literature, with the focus within this topic mainly being on the parent-child relationship after parental divorce. Very little research, however, has focused on the sibling relationship after parental divorce. With the sibling relationship being one of the longest lasting relationships in people's lives, it is important to gain a better understanding of how experiences regarding this relationship could change after parental divorce.

The current study therefore aimed to explore and achieve a better understanding of young adults' lived experiences of sibling relationships after parental divorce in childhood. It further aimed to explore whether parental divorce changes the experience of sibling relationships and, if so, how it changes and what aspects contribute to those changes.

A phenomenological research design was used. Purposive sampling was used as the sampling criteria are narrowly described. The final sample for the study included six participants, of which one was male and five female. Data collection took place in the form of a demographic questionnaire and in-depth interviews. Field notes (as part of the bracketing process) were taken throughout the research study; in this way, possible bias within the study was interpreted and countered. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. Important themes that were identified included: *conflict between siblings*, which included increased experiences of conflict and positive experiences in terms of conflict; *the feeling of closeness*, which included support and shared

experiences, open and improved communication, and gratitude for the sibling relationships; and lastly, *inter-relational learning*.

As it was difficult to find any studies pertaining to this topic in a South African context, this study serves as one of the first conducted in South Africa. Therefore, the study stands as a basis for future research studies. It identified the importance of the sibling relationship after parental divorce, as well as the changed experiences that took place after parental divorce. Additionally, when therapeutic programmes are designed regarding parental divorce, these findings could serve as an essential consideration.

PREFACE

According to Rule A 4.4.2.9 of the North-West University, this mini-dissertation adheres to the predetermined rules and regulations for utilising the article model. Furthermore, the entire mini-dissertation adheres to the established guidelines provided by the American Psychological Association (APA: 6th edition), while Section 2 of the mini-dissertation adheres to the author guidelines of the identified journal. In relation to the latter statement, the aim of this mini-dissertation is to submit the article to the *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, an accredited and peer-reviewed journal, with the potential to be published therein. As indicated in the table of contents, the entire mini-dissertation exhibits chronological page numbers – Section 1 starts on page 1 and it continues chronologically to the complete reference list at the end.

Ms Elcke du Plessis is an adept language and technical editor, registered at the South African Translators' Institute (SATI), who assured that the quality of the language and the layout adhere to the expectancies of the North-West University. The researchers (Ms Mandie Moore, Dr Werner de Klerk, and Mrs Lelanie Malan) obtained ethical clearance (reference number NWU-00073-18-S1) from the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the Faculty of Health Sciences Ethics Office for Research, Training and Support of the North-West University. The primary researcher (Ms Mandie Moore) purposively and systematically generated data in fulfilment of the requirements for the master's degree in Counselling Psychology. The entire mini-dissertation was furthermore submitted to *Turn-it-in* to provide the North-West University researchers (Ms Mandie Moore, Dr Werner de Klerk, and Mrs Lelanie Malan) with a report stating the similarities that were detected in the mini-dissertation in relation to international databases, where it was determined that it falls within the norms of acceptable similarities (Index: 8%).

PERMISSION LETTER FROM THE SUPERVISOR

Permission is hereby granted for the submission by the first author, Mandie Moore, of the following article for examination purposes towards the obtainment of a Master's degree in Counselling Psychology:

Exploring the lived experiences of young adults' sibling relationships after parental divorce: A retrospective study

The role of the co-authors was as follow: Dr W. de Klerk acted as supervisor and project head of this research inquiry and assisted in the peer review of this article. Mrs L. Malan acted as critical consultant.



Dr Werner de Klerk

DECLARATION

I, Mandie Moore, declare that this research study with the title: “*Exploring the lived experiences of young adults’ sibling relationships: A retrospective study*” is original work done by myself. The study functions as partial fulfilment of my master’s degree in Counselling Psychology at the North-West University, Potchefstroom. This work has not previously been submitted for examination. The required consent from all the applicable parties was obtained to conduct this study. Throughout this mini-dissertation, the necessary acknowledgment was provided to all reference material.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mandie Moore', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mandie Moore

Student number: 23505508

STRUCTURE OF RESEARCH MINI-DISSERTATION

The present mini-dissertation encompasses three sections. *Section 1* will provide a literature overview in order to inform the reader regarding some background information and concepts that are relevant to the research study (see pages 1-22). *Section 2* (see pages 23-56) will present the article and will consist of the methodology, findings, discussion of the findings, and the conclusion. *Section 3* (see pages 57-64), the final section, will consist of a critical reflection of the researcher on the present research study, as well an indication of the contributions that the research study provides.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This section of the mini-dissertation provides an in-depth overview to ensure an opportunity for the reader to gain a complete understanding of important concepts of the present research study. The topics that will be discussed shortly include: 1) definition of parental divorce; 2) divorce and parental divorce in a South African context; 3) definition of siblings; 4) the role of sibling relationships in childhood; 5) the parent-child relationship versus the sibling relationship in divorce research; 6) definition of middle childhood; 7) definition of young adulthood; 8) sibling relationships in young adulthood; and 9) definition of the family systems theory. This section will additionally include the problem statement and the aim of the research study.

Literature Overview

In the literature overview of this research study, the terms “*parental divorce*”, “*sibling relationships*”, “*parent-child relationships*”, and “*family systems theory*” were investigated using the following databases: Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, JSTOR, and One Search.

Definition of Parental Divorce

Divorce is the act of legally dissolving a marriage through a court or another competent body (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015). According to Hornby (1995), divorce can be explained as ending a marriage through legal means, thus it is when two individuals who have a marital contract decide to end that contract willingly (Du Plooy & Van Rensburg, 2016). Although divorce seems as if it is a fairly straightforward process, the impact thereof can be far greater (Du Plooy & Van Rensburg, 2016). “Parental” refers to designating parents or a parent to something or someone (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015). In the context of this research study, parental

divorce thus refers to a divorce between two adults where the adults have biological children together. From the perspective of the child or children of these adults, they experienced a parental divorce when their parents legally dissolved their marriage. Although divorce can be seen all over the world, for this research study, it is important to understand it in a South African context.

Divorce and Parental Divorce in a South African Context

Divorce has become a pivotal part of many families' lived experiences (see OECD Family Database, 2016; Statistics South Africa, 2015). According to Statistics South Africa* (2015), the divorce rate has risen by 2.3 % from 2014 (24 689 divorces) to 2015 (25 260 divorces), mainly from couples only married once. These statistics also provide information regarding divorce and population groups in South Africa. In 2015, 42.9 % of the documented divorces were from the black African population group, and 26.1 % from the white population group (Statistics South Africa, 2015). The coloured and Indian/Asian population groups were rather invariable during a 13-year period in terms of their divorce statistics (Statistics South Africa, 2015). Furthermore, these statistics indicate that in 2015, 55.6 % of the divorces in South Africa had children involved (see Table 1 and Figure 1 on following page; Statistics South Africa, 2015).

**Please note that these are the most recent official statistics available.*

Table 1

Number of Divorces With and Without Children (Aged Below 18 Years) by Population Group in South Africa

Population group	Total	Divorces with children	Divorces without children	Divorces with children (%)	Divorces without children (%)
Black African	10 841	6 446	4 395	59,5	40,5
Coloured	4 213	2 658	1 555	63,1	36,9
Indian/Asian	1 566	868	698	55,4	44,6
White	6 588	3 112	3 476	47,2	52,8
Mixed	837	403	434	48,1	51,9
Unspecified	1 215	558	657	45,9	54,1
Total	25 260	14 045	11 215	55,6	44,4

(Adapted from Statistics South Africa, 2015)

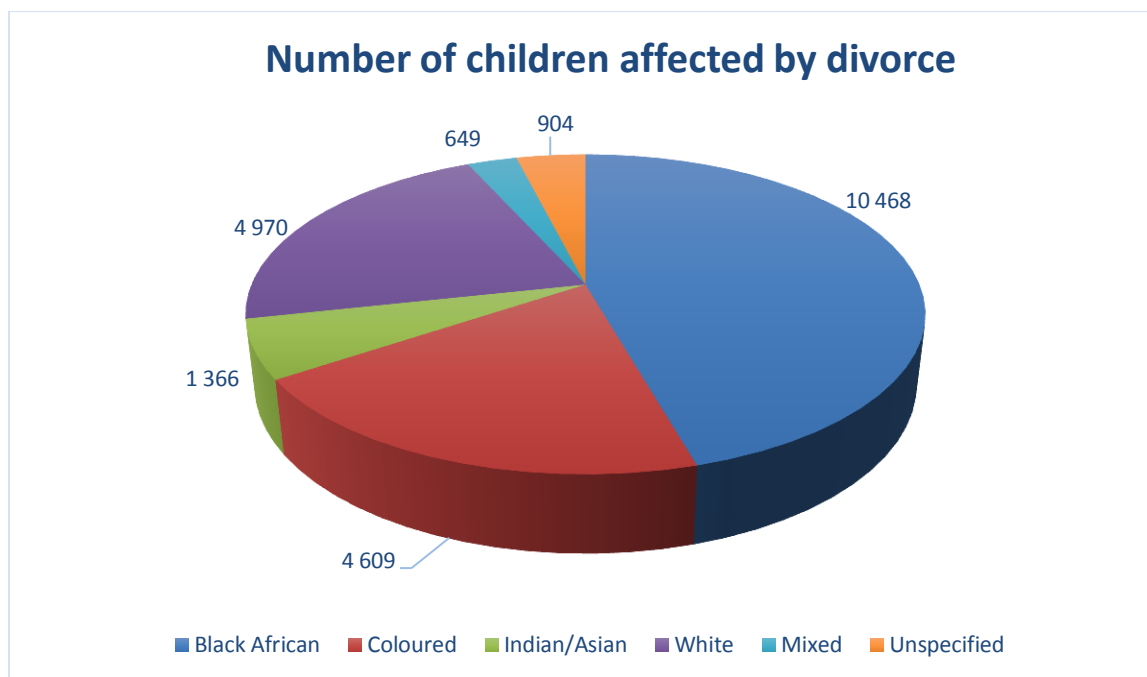


Figure 1. Number of children (aged below 18 years) affected by divorces, 2015 (adapted from Statistics South Africa, 2015).

These findings indicate how divorce is continuously becoming an increasing trend where children become involved more than half of the times a divorce occurs. This has made divorce and the effects on family life after divorce a significant research focus in social science for many years (Aquilino, 1994; Cui, Fincham, & Durtschi, 2011; Greenwood, 2012). Consequently, since the 1990s, a substantial amount of the focus has moved to parental divorce to further our understanding in relation to the parent-child relationship after divorce (Greenwood, 2012). Very little of the research, however, has focused on sibling relationships after parental divorce. One particular study that was conducted in South Africa focused on young adults' perceptions of coping with parental divorce (Du Plooy & Van Rensburg, 2015). In these findings, one of the themes that emerged as important for coping with parental divorce included communication strategies, under which sibling relationships could be included as a part of family relationships (Du Plooy & Van Rensburg, 2015). In the article published by Du Plooy and Van Rensburg, a participant was quoted mentioning how important communicating with their sibling is during and after parental divorce (Du Plooy & Van Rensburg, 2016). Siblings can thus be said to play at least some role during parental divorce as well as after; therefore, this research study aims to gain a better understanding thereof. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of this study, the definition of "siblings" first needs to be understood.

Definition of Siblings

The definition of siblings can be divided into three categories: full siblings, where the children have the same biological parents; step-siblings, where the children are not biologically related to each other but joined in family through a step-parent; and half-siblings, where a child shares one biological parent with the sibling (Baham, Weimer, Braver, & Fabricius, n.d.). For the purpose of this study, the focus will be on full siblings. This will enable the researcher to gather

information on the topic from before the divorce as well as during the divorce process, and how the experiences of participants' sibling relationships might have changed after the divorce.

Before one can focus on sibling relationships in a parental divorce context, the role of the sibling relationship in childhood would first need to be understood.

The Role of Sibling Relationships in Childhood

So, why are sibling relationships important? According to Howe and Recchia (2014), most children around the world have at least one sibling. Despite the fact that siblings are not necessarily in each other's day to day adult lives, they are a constant social attribution throughout each other's lives and could therefore be said to be one of the longest-lasting and most important relationships in existence (Voorpostel, Van der Lippe, Dykstra, & Flap, 2007). Therefore, the sibling relationship plays a key role in how children develop during childhood and beyond (Sanders, 2004). The contributions that siblings make include social skills, adjustment abilities, cognitive and reasoning abilities, and differentiation of the self (Deater-Deckard, Dunn, & Lussier, 2002; Sanders, 2004; McHale, Updegraff, & Whiteman, 2012; Nelson & Strachan, 2017). The sibling relationship can also contribute to negative attributions (Sanders, 2004; Brody, 2004). These contributions will be discussed next.

Social skills. Firstly, according to McHale et al. (2012), siblings' constant contact and comradeship in childhood give them abundant opportunity to form each other's socio-cognitive and emotional development; meaning it gives them the chance to learn from each other's behaviour and interactions to shape their own behaviours and interaction in social contexts. This can later be linked to their emotional understanding and social competence (McHale et al., 2012). According to Dunn (1988, as cited in Brody, 2005), children who receive nurturance and care from older siblings tend to be more focused on and sensitive to other people's needs and

feelings. Thus, siblings act as socialisation representatives (Deater-Deckard et al., 2002), which means that siblings contribute to the acquired skill of socialisation and social understanding (Sanders, 2004).

Secondly, as siblings spend a significant amount of time together, there are bound to be bickering and conflict (Sanders, 2004). Brody (2004) suggests that when there is a balance between this bickering or conflict and nurturance in the sibling relationship, this will contribute to children's ability to understand other people's viewpoints and feelings, and their ability to manage their own anger and conflict situations. Thus, sibling relationships are very important for developing children's abilities to handle conflict situations, as they provide the opportunity for the development of skills such as perspective taking, negotiation, persuasion, and problem solving (McHale et al., 2012). Once again, these abilities are very important both in social contexts and in work and romantic contexts in adulthood.

Thirdly, sibling relationships contribute to social learning processes as siblings often imitate and model each other in social situations (Nelson & Strachan, 2017). This imitation or modelling is based on the social cognitive theory which states that children can learn quite a lot by simply observing the people around them, giving them the opportunity to imitate the behaviour they have seen (Louw & Louw, 2014). For example, if a child becomes aggressive in conflict situations, this could be because they observed it from a sibling (Louw & Louw, 2014).

Adjustment. Sanders (2004) suggests that siblings contribute to one another's emotional adjustment because of the warmth and support in the sibling relationships that contribute to less behaviour problems, less loneliness, and feelings of better self-worth. Furthermore, Brody (2004) states that older siblings often become teachers for younger siblings during middle childhood; this entails older siblings having to adjust their teaching strategies as they learn to simplify

certain tasks for their younger siblings. According to a study done by Pike, Coldwell, and Dunn (2005), the quality of the sibling relationship affected the adjustment abilities of older siblings, but not of younger siblings. They further found that variation in negative and positive sibling interactions and behaviours was necessary for the development of adjustment skills (Pike et al., 2005). Thus, once again, this indicates the importance of the balance between conflict and nurturance in the sibling relationship.

Cognitive and reasoning abilities. According to Sanders (2004), the sibling relationship also contributes to cognitive and reasoning abilities through the cooperative and imaginative play that takes place in childhood; meaning it broadens their capacity to reason logically and problem-solve. Teaching from older siblings towards younger siblings that occur naturally also contributes to children's language and cognitive development (Brody, 2004); thus, the natural occurrence of teaching and playing that takes place between siblings is important for cognitive development in children.

Differentiation of the self. Contrary to siblings imitating and modelling each other's behaviours, the sibling relationship also provides the opportunity for children to differentiate themselves as they compare themselves with their siblings and select different roles in the family to develop individual qualities (McHale et al., 2012).

Contribution to negative attributes. In addition to these positive contributory factors of the sibling relationship, a negative sibling relationship can also add to aggressive and delinquent behaviour (Sanders, 2004). According to Bank, Patterson, and Reid (1996, as cited in Brody, 2004), younger siblings who grow up with older siblings who are more aggressive towards them and who, in general, are more likely to develop conduct or behavioural problems, have more negative experiences with peers and perform poorly in school. It is clear that the quality of the

sibling relationship plays an important role in positive and negative attribute development in childhood.

Taking these aspects of the sibling relationship into consideration, the question arises of how the sibling relationship is experienced after parental divorce. By gaining a better understanding regarding this, the current research study can set the basis for further studies regarding the impact thereof, depending on the findings of the proposed study. As the role of the sibling can now be seen to be quite impactful, we can turn to the research conducted on the sibling relationship after parental divorce compared to the research on the parent-child relationship after divorce.

The Parent-Child Relationship versus the Sibling Relationship in Divorce Research

According to Greenwood (2012) parental divorce is an occurrence that can be detrimental to the parent-child relationship. In the research that has been conducted regarding this prevalent topic (see Aquilino, 1994; Booth & Amato, 1994; Kalmijn, 2013; Shevchenko, 2016), it is most often concluded that the parent-child relationship is negatively affected by divorce. Poortman and Voorpostel (2009) indicate that this could be because of the lack of support from the custodial and non-custodial parent, among other reasons. According to the findings from a study conducted by Kalmijn (2013), there are three different effects that divorce has on the parent-child relationship. First, Kalmijn (2013) concluded that the parent-child relationship with both the mother and father becomes poor because the children cannot see both of their parents at the same time as children with married parents do, increasing the chance that the children support both parents less often. Another interpretation Kalmijn (2013) provides for this poor relationship is that both parents experience psychological problems after divorce, reducing the attention they provide to their children. Second, Kalmijn (2013) states that divorce escalates inequality between

parents. A child could have a good relationship with the one parent and a poor relationship with the other because of loyalty conflicts and compensation effects (Kalmijn, 2013). When the relationship between parents involves conflict after divorce, this causes children to experience conflicts of loyalty, consequently leading them to solve this by disengaging from the one parent and interacting more with the other (Kalmijn, 2013). This compensation could also take place from the parent's side, where they invest more in a child when they see that the relationship between the other parent and child is suffering, to ensure sufficient support for the child (Kalmijn, 2013).

According to Poortman and Voorpostel (2009), the relationship changes between parent and child can lead to interference in relationships between the children themselves (sibling relationships). Noller (2005) proposes that relationships of siblings from divorced families are different than those of siblings from married families because of the role changes in the family system that take place after divorce; but the questions remain: how are they different? What do these differences mean? Does this also include a South African context? The role changes in the family system that Noller (2005) refers to are based on the family systems theory, which will be discussed later in this section (see page 14).

Only a few studies have concentrated on sibling relationships after parental divorce, of which many indicate a lack of research on the topic (see Hallberlin, 2015; Poortman & Voorpostel, 2009; Roth, Harkins, & Eng, 2014). In South Africa, specifically, it was very difficult to find any studies on the topic, which is indicative of a major gap in research and literature. Thus, there is a tremendous need for further research regarding sibling relationships after parental divorce, and this study aims to narrow that gap. For the current study, middle

childhood as a developmental stage is very important; therefore, the definition thereof needs to be comprehended.

Definition of Middle Childhood

Middle childhood can be described as a transition period between early childhood and adolescence, where a child moves to self-sufficiency and begins to develop independence (Knoetze, 2012). Middle childhood is commonly known as the age period from six to twelve years (Louw & Louw, 2014). Even though this period can be described as relatively stable and calm compared to the rapid development in early childhood and adolescence, it is nevertheless a very important phase in children's development as it enables them to gain a better understanding of their world (Louw & Louw, 2014). When development in middle childhood is balanced and adequate, it will serve as a good foundation for further development in different areas of growth (such as social, emotional, cognitive, and self-concept areas of development) during adolescence and beyond (Louw & Louw, 2014). There are many different theories describing the middle childhood phase of development (Knoetze, 2012). For the purpose of this discussion, the theories of Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, and Jean Piaget will be explained to ensure a comprehensive understanding of middle childhood.

Freud was the father of psychoanalysis and developed a series of psychosexual stages through which he suggested children move as determined by maturation (Louw & Louw, 2014). He described five stages where, within each stage, the focus is on a different body part, also called the erogenous zones – ruled by sexual instincts (Louw & Louw, 2014). When either too little or too much gratification of these sexual urges occur, problems could result, causing fixation in this developmental stage; meaning the child cannot move ahead to the next developmental stage (Louw & Louw, 2014). The latency stage of psychosexual development

refers to middle childhood (Cooper, 2005). In the latency stage, children's sexual instincts are said to subside as children assimilate new social skills and values and children's energy moves to school and peers (Louw & Louw, 2014). During these years, which were thought to be peaceful, children basically polish the skills they assimilated in the early childhood phase (Cooper, 2005).

Erikson's theory, on the other hand, was focused more on psychological and social aspects than on psychosexual aspects (Louw & Louw, 2014). Erikson coined eight stages of development and stated that the effective resolution of crises in each stage of development would result in better ego-strength and the skill to resolve one's own problems (Knoetze, 2012). Middle childhood would then fall under Erikson's stage of industry versus inferiority (six years to adolescence). The basic skill that needs to be acquired during this stage is to work with others and learn basic skills (Louw & Louw, 2014).

Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development states that, during childhood, children attempt to make sense of their world, including the physical and social aspects thereof (Louw & Louw, 2014). In their efforts to make sense of their world, children act as investigators as they explore their surroundings; from their explorations, they develop theories that are tested daily (Louw & Louw, 2014). Piaget further states that people move through four stages in cognitive development, where middle childhood would fall in the concrete operational stage (Louw & Louw, 2014). In the concrete operational stage of cognitive development, children start to think more logically in terms of concrete objects, although their ability for abstract thinking is still mostly absent during this stage and only starts to become better during the formal operational stage (Louw & Louw, 2014).

From the above discussion on middle childhood, it is clear that this stage of development is important in becoming and growing into a healthy adult, making middle childhood a

significant and important life phase to take note of. Middle childhood is an important stage to be understood for the purpose of this research study as the focus of the parental divorce will be at this stage of childhood. As young adulthood will be the population group, it will also be very important to understand young adulthood as a stage of development.

Definition of Young Adulthood

In young adulthood, Freud's psychosexual stages of development are no longer applicable, as the last stage of psychosexual development concludes after adolescence (Louw & Louw, 2014). Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial stages does, however, include stages beyond adolescence (Louw & Louw, 2014). According to Erikson (as cited in Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2009), early/young adulthood can be described as the period of life from the age of 20 to 39 years. The psychosocial stage for young adulthood refers to intimacy versus isolation, meaning that young adults seek to commit to a loving intimate relationship (Louw & Louw, 2014). For the purpose of this research study, young adulthood will be considered as the age group of 20 to 29 years. According to Piaget (2000), young adulthood is a time period in which individuals are more able to look at situations from different angles, meaning they have greater complexity in critical thinking as well as in integrating cognitive and emotional information; thus, they are able to reflect on a higher cognitive level regarding events from the past by using their abstract cognitive abilities. Therefore, using young adults as participants for this research study enabled the researcher to gain information from people who have the cognitive ability to reflect back on their sibling relationships (specifically during middle childhood). Keeping the definition of young adulthood in mind, the question arises as to the importance and impact of sibling relationships in young adulthood.

Sibling Relationships in Young Adulthood

According to Stewart, Verbrugge, and Beilfuss (1998), from late adolescence and onwards, the sibling relationship changes in nature as the interaction between siblings become more voluntary instead of ruled by parental desires, living situations and/or other external restrictions. In a study conducted by Scharf, Shulman, and Avigad-Spitz (2005), the results indicated that siblings tended to become less involved in joint activities with each other but partook in more emotional exchanges compared to adolescence. These emotional exchanges included, for example, feeling warmth for their siblings and discussing personal difficulties with each other (Scharf et al., 2005); thus, they become more emotionally involved and supportive towards each other. Furthermore, these studies further indicated that conflicts between siblings also tend to decrease and become less intense in young adulthood (Scharf et al., 2005; Stewart et al., 1998). The decrease in conflict could be said to be due to the decreased amount of time siblings spend together in young adulthood, making it easier for them to attend to each other's emotional needs (Scharf et al., 2005). In young adulthood, siblings are also able to maintain an intelligible and integrative perception of their siblings, thus they are better able to understand the wishes and needs of their siblings (Scharf et al., 2005), providing a warmer and more mature type of relationship. These attributes of the young adults' sibling relationship can be attributed to the cognitive and socio-emotional maturity they achieve in this stage of development (Scharf et al., 2005).

Alternatively, in a study conducted by Stocker, Lanthier, and Furman (1997), the findings indicated that some siblings still experience conflict in their relationships with each other. In the same study, siblings reported experiencing feelings of concern and rivalry over the attention they acquire from their parents, even if they no longer lived at home. According to Stocker et al.

(1997), the decreased sense of conflict reported by some individuals could be due to the strategy of avoidance, as young adults have the opportunity to decide when to spend time with their siblings, giving them the opportunity for distance and disengagement.

Stewart et al. (1998) postulated that sibling relationships are affected by conditions, situations, and/or contexts close to siblings. Taking the above discussion into consideration, it would be interesting to explore the sibling relationship in young adulthood after parental divorce had occurred in childhood. As previously mentioned, the relationship changes between parent and child can lead to interference in relationships between the children themselves (Poortman & Voorpostel, 2009). This refers to the family systems theory which is an important concept to be understood for the current research study.

Definition of the Family Systems Theory

According to the family systems theory, all the individuals and the subsystems in the family are interconnected and mutually dependent; concurrently, when change happens within the system, all the relationships and individuals (subsystems) are impacted by that change (Broderick, 1993). Therefore, persons cannot be understood in separation from each other, and individuals have to be understood as part of their family system as they are interdependent and interconnected (see Figure 2 on the following page for a visual representation of the family system interactions and influence). Within this theory, families are seen as systematised wholes and enduring entities, with members being in constant interactive and patterned relationships with each other. A change that takes place in any component of the family will unavoidably cause change in other components in its relation (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004). The theory further states that individuals can best be conceptualised and understood through evaluating interactions within the family (Corey, 2013). Thus, an individual's problem could be the result or

symptom of the functioning of the family system (Corey, 2013). The family systems theory has various approaches to therapy, including Adlerian family therapy, Multigenerational family therapy, Experiential family therapy, Structural-Strategic family therapy etc. (Corey, 2013). All of these approaches to therapy are based on different approaches to the family systems theory.

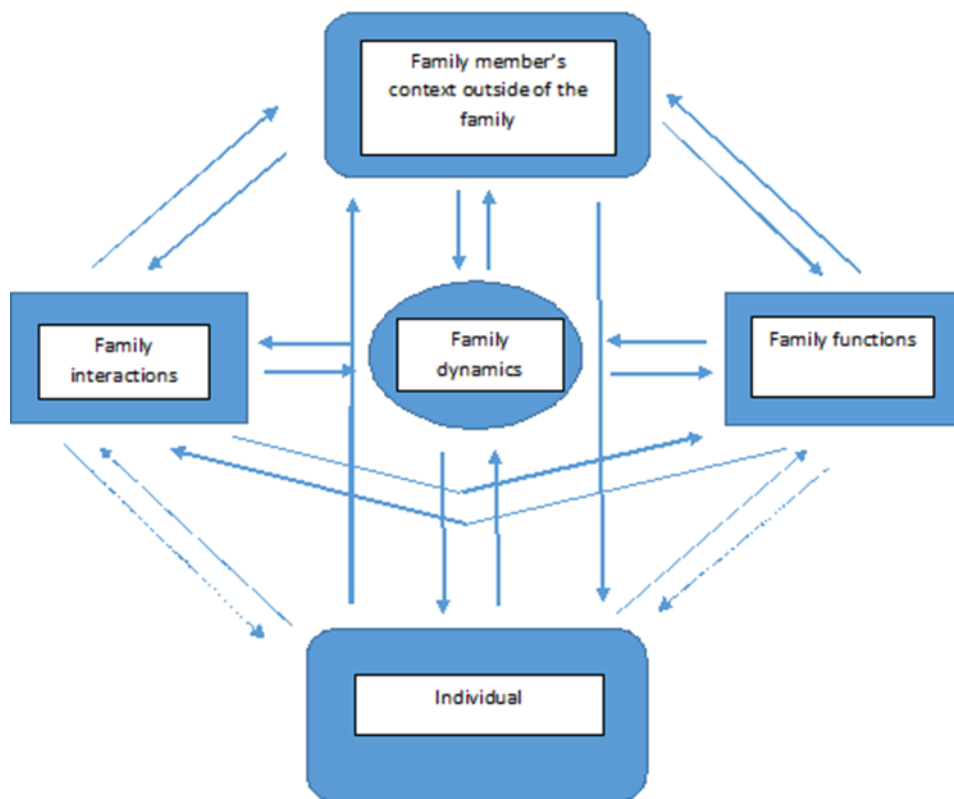


Figure 2. Visual representation of the family system interaction and influence.

Murray Bowen's theory of family systems was one of the first all-inclusive theories of the family systems (Brown, 1999). For the current research study, the focus was mainly on Bowen's theory of the family system. According to this theory (Bowen theory), every member in the family has a certain role they fulfil and rules they respect; these roles are determined by certain relationship agreements (Brown, 1999). Patterns then develop within the family when

family members' behaviours interplay with each other (Brown, 1999). When patterns are maintained, this can either lead to balance or dysfunction in the family, and vice versa (Brown, 1999). Within Bowen theory is an inclusion of eight interlocking concepts: triangles, differentiation of the self, the nuclear family emotional system, the family projection process, the multigenerational transmission process, emotional cut-off, the sibling position, and the societal emotional process (Brown, 1999). The first seven (as the eighth is an attempt to connect his theory to society and is less applicable to this discussion) of these concepts will be discussed briefly for comprehensive understanding.

Triangles. According to Bowen theory, 'triangling' occurs when anxiety is experienced in a dyad and a third vulnerable individual becomes involved in order to detour the anxiety or take sides in the dyad (Brown, 1999). When the family is in harmony, it is difficult to spot the triangling process, but when under stress, this process feeds itself and interconnecting triangles are formed throughout the family system (Brown, 1999).

Differentiation of the self. Differentiation can be explained as the ability of an individual to be autonomous (this includes making his or her own choices) while still accomplishing emotional connectedness to the relationship or family system (Brown, 1999). Contrary to this, lack of differentiation or 'fusion' is when a person will reserve their own choices or opinions in order to maintain harmony or peace in the family system (Brown, 1999).

The nuclear family emotional system. This refers to the patterns in the family that explain where problems or conflict could develop and includes couple conflict, dysfunction in a spouse, impairment in one or more children, and emotional distance (Brown, 1999).

The family projection process. This describes how children can develop symptoms when they become involved in the previous generation's anxiety in relationships; a child reacts

with anxiety to the tension in their parents' relationship and the parents mistakenly interpret the child as a problem child (Brown, 1999).

The multigenerational transmission process. This concept explains how certain patterns and roles in a triangle can be passed on through generations as parents project onto children (Brown, 1999).

Emotional cut-off. This is where a family member reduces or cuts off emotional contact with their family as a way of coping with unresolved issues (Brown, 1999).

The sibling position. The sibling position refers to the roles that children take on based on the position they were born in, and how these positions impact their behaviour and development (Brown, 1999).

From the above discussion on family systems, it is evident that the change that takes place in parental divorce is expected to have an influence on the child subsystem (sibling relationships; Reed, Lucier-Greer, & Parker, 2016). In a study done by Poortman and Voorpostel (2009), they concluded that there was more conflict in the sibling relationship when the divorced parents had higher conflict patterns between them, which is indicative of how the family systems theory operates; the conflict that took place in the parental relationship also changed the conflict in the sibling relationship.

Problem Statement

From the preceding literature overview, it is apparent that the sibling relationship plays a vital role in family contexts in childhood and beyond (Voorpostel et al., 2007). Additionally, it can be concluded that divorce has become a fundamental part of many families' lives (see Statistics South Africa, 2015; OECD Family Database, 2016). This has caused divorce to become a popular research topic in social science literature for many years (Aquilino, 1994; Cui

et al., 2011; Greenwood, 2012). Although divorce has become a hot topic over the years, the focus within this topic has mainly been on the parent-child relationship after parental divorce (see Aquilino, 1994; Booth & Amato, 1994; Kalmijn, 2013; Shevchenko, 2016). Very little research has focused on the sibling relationship after parental divorce. With the sibling relationship being one of the longest-lasting relationships in people's lives, it is important to gain a better understanding of how experiences regarding this relationship could change after parental divorce in childhood. There is an evident gap with regard to this research topic.

Thus, by focusing on the sibling relationship instead of the parent-child relationship, this study will contribute by extending previous findings on the topic and provide new findings pertaining to a South African context, narrowing the gap currently experienced, and broadening the knowledge regarding parental divorce and sibling relationships. Through the approach of a qualitative study, a more in-depth understanding can be gained from the participants (Creswell, 2013), which will help to better understand the sibling relationship after parental divorce. This will also help to understand what contributed to said experience of the relationship. Furthermore, practically, the findings of the research can contribute to knowledge on therapy for children from divorce where siblings are involved, and also pave the way for further studies. The research questions that guided this qualitative study were as follows: *What are the lived experiences of young adults' sibling relationships after parental divorce in childhood? What, if any, are the changes that parental divorce has brought to the sibling relationship?*

Aim of the Study

The study therefore aimed to explore and achieve a better understanding of young adults' lived experiences of sibling relationships after parental divorce in childhood. It further aimed to

explore whether parental divorce changes the experience of sibling relationships and, if so, how it changes and what aspects contribute to these changes.

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SECTION 2: ARTICLE

Guidelines for Authors: *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*

This article will be submitted for possible publication in the *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*. Therefore, there will firstly be a summary of the guidelines given to authors for this specific journal, after which the article will follow.

Instructions for Authors

Manuscripts

Manuscripts have to be typed, be double-spaced and have a one-inch margin on all sides. It must follow the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th ed. Manuscripts have to include a title page that accompanies the author's name(s), mailing address, affiliations, fax, phone, and email information. If there are multiple authors, this information need to be provided for all authors and the corresponding authors has to be indicated.

All manuscripts must be 20 pages in length, where lengthier manuscripts can be considered, but at the discretion of the editor. Do not use footnotes, rather set all as endnotes that are following the text and preceding the references. The abstract of the manuscript should be roughly 100 words on a separate paper. 3-10 keywords should be included below the abstract for indexing purposes.

Tables and Figures

They should not be embedded in the text but should be placed on separate sheets or files. A short descriptive title should appear above each table with a clear legend and any footnotes suitably identified below. All units have to be included. Figures should be entirely labelled, taking into account necessary size reduction. Figure legends should be typed, double-spaced, on a separate sheet.

Referencing

Referencing should follow the 6th edition Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association.

- *In text placement:* The citation in text should consist of the surname(s) of the author(s), year of publication of the work that is cited, and the page number(s) if necessary, enclosed within parenthesis, for instance: The most recent report (Gullett, 2017) on the use of... If the author's name forms a part of the discussion, only the year of publication can be used within parentheses, for instance: Gullett (2017) found that the use of... If both the year of publication and the author's name forms part of the discussion, no parenthesis need to be added, for instance: In 2017, Gullett's report on... If a citation is to appear with parenthetical text, place the year within commas, for instance: (see Table 2 of U.S. Departments of Development, 2003, for more information). If the reference includes a month and a day, still only include the year with the in-text citation.
- *In text page, chapter, etc. number:* Ranges for page numbers are preceded by "pp." and a space, and then linked with an en dash, for instance: "pp. 123-234". E.g., (Gullett, 2017, p. 5) or (Gullett, 2017, Chapter 6).
- *In text with a quotation:*
 - This is the text, and Gullett (2017) says "quoted text" (p. 1), which supports my argument.
 - This is the text, and this is supported by "quoted text" (Gullett, 2017, p. 2).
 - This is a displayed quotation. (Gullett, 2017, p. 2)
- *One author:* Gullett (2017) or (Gullett, 2017). You have to position multiple works by the same author in different years by chronological order, separated by a comma (e.g.

Gullett, 1990, 1995, in press). If the primary authors of two or more works in the reference list have the same surname, include the first author's initials in all in-text citations even if the year of publication differs (J. Petersen, 1990; M. Petersen, 1986).

- *Two authors:* Gullett and Petersen (2016) or (Gullett & Petersen, 2016). If both authors should have the same surname, include the first author's initials in all in-text citations (e.g. M. A. Gordon & Gordon, 2008).
- *Three or five authors:* Cite all authors' names the first time the reference emerges in the text (e.g. Kisangau, Lyaruu, Hosea, & Joseph, 2007). In subsequent citations, include only the name of the first author followed by "et al." and the year of publication, e.g. Gordon et al. (2007) or (Gordon et al., 2007).
- *Six or more authors:* Cite only the surname of the first author followed by "et al." and the year of publication, e.g. Gullett et al. (2016) or (Gullett et al., 2016).
- *Multiple works by the same author or author group with the same publication date:* Add a, b, c, etc. after the year; repeat the year. The arrangement is based on the order of the entries in the reference list, where such references are ordered alphabetically by their title: (Chen, 2011a, 2011b, in press-a; Chen et al., 2016a, 2016b). Non-identical author groups with the same first author in the same year: If the first author's name and the year of publication are identical for two or more references, cite the surname of the first author and as many co-authors as necessary to distinguish the references, followed by a comma and et al. Include just enough names to eliminate ambiguity. For example: Gullett, Chernoff, DeVet, et al. (2001) and Ireys, Gullett, Stein, et al. (2001)
- *Multiple citations within the same parentheses:* When two or more works are cited within the same parentheses, arrange them into the same order in which they appear in the

reference list: (Black, 1980; Gullett & Briggs, 1974; Gullett & Jones, 1974; A. L. Smith, 1978; G. T. Smith, 1978; Smith et al., 1978; Petersen et al., 1978; Baker, 1978) An exception to this rule is that a major citation may be separated from other citations within parentheses using a phrase such as “see also”: (Willis, 1978; see also Brown, 1980; Dawson & Briggs, 1974; Dawson & Jones, 1974; A. L. Smith, 1978; G. T. Smith, 1978; Smith et al., 1978; Tyndall et al., 1978)

- *Organization as author (group author)*: The name of an organization can be spelled out each time it appears in an in-text citation, or spelled out only the first time and abbreviated thereafter. A basic rule is that enough information should appear in the in-text citation to assist in the reference being located easily in the list. An abbreviation is presented when the name of the organization first appears in an in-text citation, e.g. American College of Surgeons (ACS, 2001) or (American College of Surgeons [ACS], 2001). For subsequent in-text citations, ACS (2001) or (ACS, 2001) would be used.
- *No identified author*: Begin the in-text citation with the first few words of the reference list entry (usually the title, e.g. “Editorial,” 2000). If the author is designated as “Anonymous”, cite the work as such in the text (Anonymous, 1998).
- *Multiple dates*: Give the first and last years of publication linked with an en dash: (Author, 1959–1963). For in-text citations to reprinted publications, give the date of the original and of the reprint linked by a solidus/forward slash: (Author, 1970/1988).
- *Unknown date*: With no date, use “n.d.” within parentheses: (Author, n.d.)
- *Classical or religious work*: Works such as the Bible and the Qur’an are cited only in the text. Identify in the first in-text citation the version used, e.g. 1 Cor. 13:1 (King James Version)

- *Personal communication:* Personal communications such as private letters, memos, telephone conversations, personal interviews, messages from online discussion groups and email, etc. If they do not provide recoverable data, personal communications are cited only in the text and not included in the reference list. Include the initials as well as the surname of the communicator and provide as exact a date as possible, for example: T. K. Lutes (personal communication, April 18, 2001). (V.-G. Nguyen, personal communication, September 28, 1998)

Tables and Figures

References in a table are usually most appropriately put in footnotes to the table. If references have to appear within the field of a table, use a separate column or row for them and supply an appropriate heading to make them identifiable.

Do not use references within figures, charts, graphs or illustrations. If such references are needed to support the data or methods, put them in the caption.

Reference List

- *Order:* At the end of a document, list the references to sources that have been cited in the text, including those found in tables and figures, under the heading “References”.
- Surname is to be placed first in alphabetical order of the first author followed by the initials of the author’s given name. Arrange references with the same author(s) by year of publication, beginning with the earliest. If several items have the same first author, both alone and with co-authors, arrange the single-author items before any multi-author items.
- Arrange the multi-author publications alphabetically by the surname of the second author or, if the second author is the same, by the surname of the third author, etc. Items by the same author(s) with the same publication date are arranged alphabetically by title (excluding “A”,

“An” or “The”) unless they are identified as belonging to a series, in which case arrange them in series order. Add a lower-case letter (a, b, c, etc.) after the year: Smith, J. (2016a). Smith, J. (2016b).

- When organizations serve as authors, alphabetize by the first significant word of the name. Full official names should be used in the list (e.g. American Psychological Association, not APA). The name of a parent body precedes that of a subdivision (e.g. University of Michigan, Department of Psychology).
- If no authors are present, move the title to the author position and alphabetize the entry by the first significant word of the title. If a work is actually signed “Anonymous”, begin the reference with and alphabetize by the word Anonymous in the reference list.
- *Form of author name:* Begin with the surname, followed by the initials, e.g. Author, A. A. Separate successive author names from one another by a comma and a space, e.g. Author, A. A., Author, B. B., & Author, C. C. If the reference list includes more than one author with the same surname and first initial, the authors’ full first names may be given in square brackets, e.g. Smith, J. [Jane]. (2012). Smith, J. [John]. (2016). If an author’s first name is hyphenated, retain the hyphen and add a full stop (period) after each initial, e.g. Latour, J.-B. Place any family designation of rank after the initials, e.g. Author, A. A., Jr.
- *Date of publication:* The year of publication is required for all references. The month is also required when citing a journal that has no volume or issue number, or a presentation at a conference; the month and day of the month are required when citing a magazine, a newsletter or a newspaper. For articles accepted for publication but not yet published, use (in press). If no date of publication is available, use (n.d.).

- *Title:* If the original version of a non-English work is used as a source, cite the original version. Give the original title and, in square brackets, the English translation of the title. Capitalize non-English titles according to the conventions of the particular language. If the English translation of a non-English work is used as a source, cite the English translation. Give the English title without square brackets.

Article

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Young Adults' Sibling Relationships after Parental Divorce:

A Retrospective Study

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Abstract

Divorce has become a pivotal part of many families' lived experiences. A substantial amount of research has focused on divorce and the parent-child relationship after divorce; very little research, however, has focused on the sibling relationship after parental divorce. This qualitative study with a phenomenological research design aimed to explore young adults' lived experiences regarding their sibling relationships after parental divorce in childhood. A sample of six participants from Potchefstroom, North West Province, South Africa, participated in this study. Thematic analysis was used and the following main themes were identified: conflict between siblings; feelings of closeness; and inter-relational learning. It was recommended that future research should be done on the sibling relationship after parental divorce in the South African context, and a therapeutic programme be developed in which the sibling relationship plays a vital role in coping with parental divorce.

Keywords: parental divorce, sibling relationships, parent-child relationships, family systems theory, phenomenology.

Introduction

Divorce is a phenomenon that has become a central part of many families' lived experiences (see OECD Family Database, 2016; Statistics South Africa, 2015). Worldwide, this occurrence has been prominent where, in countries such as Denmark, Korea, Portugal, Israel, Japan, and many more, the divorce rate has increased from 1995 to 2014 (OECD Family Database, 2016). According to the American Psychological Association (APA; 2017), the United States of America, for example, is a common place of divorce, where around 40 % to 50 % of marriages end in divorce. Similarly, in South Africa, divorce has also been a prevalent occurrence. According to Statistics South Africa (2015), the divorce rate has risen by 2.3 % from 2014 (24 689 divorces) to 2015 (25 260 divorces), mainly from couples only married once, which indicates that this is a continuously increasing trend. Furthermore, these statistics indicate that in 2015, 55.6 % of the divorces in South Africa involved children (Statistics South Africa, 2015). This has made divorce and the effects on family life after divorce a significant research focus in social science for many years (Aquilino, 1994; Cui, Fincham, & Durtschi, 2011; Greenwood, 2012). Consequently, since the 1990s, a substantial amount of the focus has moved to parental divorce to further our understanding in relation to the parent-child relationship after divorce (Greenwood, 2012).

Problem Statement

According to Greenwood (2012), parental divorce is an occurrence that can be detrimental to the parent-child relationship. In the research that has been conducted regarding this prevalent topic (see Aquilino, 1994; Booth & Amato, 1994; Kalmijn, 2013; Shevchenko, 2016), it is mostly concluded that the parent-child relationship is negatively affected by divorce. Poortman and Voorpostel (2009) indicate that this could be because of the lack of support from

the custodial and non-custodial parent, among other reasons. Poortman and Voorpostel (2009) further state that this can lead to interference in relationships between the children themselves (sibling relationships). Only a few studies have concentrated on sibling relationships after parental divorce, of which many indicate a lack of research on the topic (see Hallberlin, 2015; Poortman & Voorpostel, 2009; Roth, Harkins, & Eng, 2014). In South Africa, specifically, it was very difficult to find any studies on the topic, which is indicative of a major gap in research and literature. Thus, there is a clear need for further research regarding sibling relationships after parental divorce.

Despite the fact that siblings are not necessarily in each other's day to day adult lives, they are a constant social attribution throughout each other's lives and could therefore be said to be one of the longest-lasting and important relationships in existence (Voorpostel, Van der Lippe, Dykstra, & Flap, 2007). In order to understand sibling relationships, the definition thereof has to be understood. The definition of the sibling relationship can be divided into three categories: full siblings, where the children have the same biological parents; step-siblings, where the children are not biologically related to each other but joined in family through a step-parent; and half-siblings, where a child shares one biological parent with the sibling (Baham, Weimer, Braver, & Fabricius, n.d.). For the purpose of this research study, the focus was on full siblings. This enabled the researchers to gather information on the topic from before the divorce as well as during the divorce process, and how the experiences of participants' sibling relationships might have changed after the divorce.

Importance of Sibling Relationship

The sibling relationship plays a key role in how children develop during childhood and beyond (Sanders, 2004). The first contribution the sibling relationship provides is the fact that

siblings act as socialisation representatives (Deater-Deckard, Dunn, & Lussier, 2002), which means that siblings contribute to the acquired skill of socialisation and social understanding (Sanders, 2004). Secondly, as siblings spend a significant amount of time together, there are bound to be bickering and conflict (Sanders, 2004), which could contribute to children's abilities to handle conflict situations. Thirdly, according to Sanders (2004), the sibling relationship also contributes to cognitive and reasoning abilities through the cooperative and imaginative play that takes place in childhood. Fourthly, sibling relationships contribute to social learning processes as siblings often imitate each other in social situations (Nelson & Strachan, 2017). Lastly, Sanders (2004) further suggests that siblings contribute to one another's emotional adjustment because of the warmth and support in the sibling relationships that contribute to less behaviour problems, less loneliness, and feelings of better self-worth. Contrary to these positive contributory factors of the sibling relationship, a negative sibling relationship can also add to aggressive and delinquent behaviour (Sanders, 2004). Taking these aspects of the sibling relationship into consideration, the question arises as to how the sibling relationship is experienced after parental divorce.

Noller (2005) suggests that relationships of siblings from divorced families are different than those of siblings from married families because of the role changes in the family system that take place after divorce; but this does not provide much information for a South African context, or on how these families are different, and what the differences could mean. The role changes in the family system that Noller (2005) refers to are based on the family systems theory.

Family Systems Theory

According to the family systems theory, all the individuals and the subsystems in the family are interconnected and mutually dependent; concurrently, when change happens within

the system, all the relationships and individuals (subsystems) are impacted by that change (Broderick, 1993). Accordingly, the change that takes place in parental divorce is expected to have an influence on the child subsystem (sibling relationships; Reed, Lucier-Greer, & Parker, 2016). In a study done by Poortman and Voorpostel (2009), they concluded that there was more conflict in the sibling relationship when the divorced parents had higher conflict patterns between them, which is indicative of how the family systems theory operates; the conflict that took place in the parental relationship also changed the conflict in the sibling relationship.

Aim of the Study

This study aimed to explore and achieve a better understanding of young adults' lived experiences of sibling relationships after parental divorce. It further aimed to explore whether parental divorce changes the experience of sibling relationships and, if so, how it changes, and what aspects contribute to these changes. This research study was guided by the following research questions: *What are the lived experiences of young adults' sibling relationships after parental divorce in childhood? What, if any, are the changes that parental divorce has brought to the sibling relationship?*

Method of Exploration

Research Method

In the present study, a qualitative research approach was used. According to Nieuwenhuis (2016a), qualitative research is an approach that aims to understand the experiences of individuals. It attempts to make sense of certain phenomena as people give meaning to it (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a). The qualitative approach is suited for this research study because the aim was to explore the participants' lived experiences regarding the phenomenon of their sibling relationships after parental divorce. Lived experience refers to an individual's first-hand account

of a certain phenomenon as they lived it (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a). In this particular research study, it refers to the first-hand account of the participants' experience of their sibling relationships after parental divorce (thus their lived experience over time).

Research Design

For the aim of this study, a phenomenological research design was used.

Phenomenological research focuses on the nature and meanings of certain phenomena and therefore offers an in-depth understanding of the participant's subjective experiences and perceptions (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). This design was deemed as suitable for the research study as the researchers concentrated on how the participants experienced their sibling relationships after parental divorce, where the participants were perceived as the experts on the topic.

Participants and Research Context

Participants had to meet certain criteria in order for the aim of the study to be met. Firstly, the participants had to be between the ages of 20 and 29. Secondly, the participants had to have experienced parental divorce between the ages of 6 and 12 and have at least one full sibling in the household at the time of the divorce who is still currently alive. Thirdly, the divorce proceedings must have concluded within a year after filing for divorce. Fourthly, the siblings had to have lived in the same household for at least a year after the divorce was finalised. Fifthly, the participants could be of any racial, ethnic, or cultural group as the study was not aimed at making comparisons between different groups, but rather at gaining an understanding of all groups' experiences. Furthermore, as mentioned, the participants could be of any ethnic group, but they had to be able to speak and/or understand either Afrikaans or English, as the researcher is fluent in those languages. Lastly, the participants had to be willing to sign the informed consent form and share their subjective experiences regarding the phenomenon.

The sampling for the research study was done using pamphlets to advertise the research. The pamphlets were distributed all over the Tlokwe region. These pamphlets contained a brief description of the study as well as the contact details of the independent person who had to be contacted if they were interested in taking part in the study. The final research sample was six participants who voluntarily took part in the study, of whom five were female and one male. Five of the participants were White, and one was an African female (see table 1).

Table 1

Demographic Information of Participants

Participant number	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Home Language	Age of parental divorce	Gender and age of sibling/siblings at time of parental divorce
P1	20	Male	White	Afrikaans	10	Female (8); Male (5)
P2	21	Female	White	Afrikaans	11	Male (14); Female (6)
P3	20	Female	White	Afrikaans	11	Female (13); Female (9)
P4	21	Female	White	Afrikaans	6	Male (7)
P5	20	Female	White	Afrikaans	12	Female (15); Female (6)
P6	28	Female	African	Tswana	12	Male (14); Female (9)

Data Collection

As mentioned, a phenomenological research design was used which provided the researchers with the opportunity to explore the meaning, individual experiences, and interpretations of the participants (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b) pertaining to their sibling relationships after parental divorce. For the collection of data, different methods were used.

Firstly, demographic questionnaires were used to gain basic demographic information of the participants. This demographic questionnaire included gender, age, ethnicity, age at which parents divorced, ages of siblings currently and at the time of parental divorce, and the gender of

the participant's siblings. *Secondly*, in-depth interviews were conducted. In-depth interviews allowed the primary researcher to explore and understand the concerning phenomenon and also gave the participants the opportunity to share their experiences and make meaning thereof (Greeff, 2011). Two open-ended questions were asked during the in-depth interview: the first was to address each participant's lived experience regarding their sibling relationships after parental divorce, and the second was to address whether the parental divorce produced changes in the sibling relationships and, if so, what they were. As the participants disclosed information after each of these two questions, the primary researcher probed on the information given from the questions in order to gain as much information as possible concerning the participants' lived experiences regarding sibling relationships after parental divorce. *Thirdly*, the primary researcher used field notes (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). Keeping field notes gave the primary researcher time to reflect on the process and uphold bracketing (which is an important part of the phenomenology research design process).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilised for the purpose of this research study (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Clarke and Braun (2013) describe six phases in thematic analysis namely; familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. *Firstly*, for the primary researcher to familiarise herself with the data, as mentioned, she transcribed the data verbatim, reading and re-reading the transcriptions, and writing down initial ideas. *Secondly*, she identified codes from the transcribed data and initial ideas. *Thirdly*, she identified possible themes from the codes. *Fourthly*, she revised the themes in order to ensure that they are relevant to the research. *Fifthly*, the researcher identified subthemes and labelled the themes and subthemes appropriately. Thematic analysis

continued until the research questions were answered, whereafter, *finally*, the findings were written up. According to Nieuwenhuis (2016b), as part of the phenomenological research process, once the themes have been identified, the researcher must develop the following: a textual description of what the participants experienced; a structural description of the participants' experiences regarding how they experienced the phenomenon in terms of conditions, situations and/or context; and "a combination of the textual and structural descriptions to convey an overall essence of the experience" (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b, p. 78).

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness for the current study was ensured by adhering to the model of Lincoln and Guba as described in the research article of Krefting (1991). This model contains four aspects that have to be focused on, namely truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality.

The first aspect, *truth value*, concentrates on whether the researcher has established credibility and confidence in the findings of the research (Krefting, 1991). In order to ensure truth value, the researcher had to be truthful about the data that she collected regarding the lived experiences of young adults' sibling relationships after parental divorce. This was done by presenting accurate interpretations of the findings, the use of precise verbatim transcriptions of the data collected, active engagement with the data (as with thematic analysis) and making use of a co-coder. *Applicability*, the second aspect of Lincoln and Guba's model, refers to the ability of the findings to be generalised and applied to other contexts, groups, and larger populations (Krefting, 1991). In order for this study to be useful in future research, the methodology is described in a detailed fashion. The third aspect, *consistency*, refers to whether the findings would be the same if the research were to be replicated with the same participants or in the same

context (Krefting, 1991). The consistency for this research study was ensured by following the thematic analysis steps as set out by Clarke and Braun (2013) and by keeping to the research questions when conducting the interviews with the participants. The fourth and last aspect, *neutrality*, refers to the absence of bias in the research process; meaning objectivity of the researcher (Krefting, 1991). Neutrality was ensured (by the primary researcher) by putting aside her own perspectives and only focusing on the information provided. Furthermore, she also kept records and field notes in the research process to ensure objectivity as part of her bracketing process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this research study was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC), Faculty of Health Sciences Ethics Office for Research, Training and Support at North-West University (NWU-00073-18-S1), South Africa. After permission was obtained from HREC, the primary researcher distributed pamphlets containing information regarding the research in order to obtain participants. These pamphlets were placed on relevant notice boards at the Dan Tloome Civic Centre as well as the Potchefstroom Library. The primary researcher only placed these pamphlets on the notice boards after formal permission was gained from these civic centres. The pamphlets were placed on the notice boards for one month and provided readers with the necessary information regarding participant inclusion and exclusion criteria, as well as the aim of the research. Furthermore, on the pamphlet, the contact details of an independent person were provided who had to be contacted by the participants in order to obtain and sign a consent form. After the participant had contacted the independent person, a meeting was arranged where the participant had the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the research process. The participant then signed the consent form in the presence of the

independent person before the interview was conducted. A witness also signed the consent forms.

Confidentiality is another aspect that was brought into consideration and entailed informing all participants that the personal identifying information they gave would stay confidential and anonymous. Confidentiality and its limitations were therefore explained thoroughly to all participants with regard to the study. Anonymity was also explained to the participants and was ensured by allocating a number to each participant. The primary researcher made it clear to the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any moment prior data analysis. Additionally, the interviews were conducted in a quiet and private room on the North-West University, Potchefstroom campus, in order for the primary researcher to be able to hear the participant clearly and to create a comfortable environment. The door was closed with permission from the participants in order to keep noise and disturbance to a minimum. A 'do not disturb' sign was placed on the door. Finally, safekeeping of all data and findings is the responsibility of the North-West University (South Africa).

Findings

Through thematic analysis, three main themes with their subthemes were identified (see Table 2). As support for the themes, verbatim quotations were also provided.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes regarding Young Adults' Lived Experiences after Parental Divorce in Their Childhood

Theme 1:	Conflict between siblings
Subthemes:	1.1. Increased experiences of conflict 1.2. Positive experiences in terms of conflict
Theme 2:	The feeling of closeness
Subthemes:	2.1. Support and shared experiences 2.2. Open and improved communication 2.3. Gratitude for the sibling relationship
Theme 3:	Inter-relational learning

Theme 1: Conflict between Siblings

During the process of data collection, it became clear that conflict between siblings played an evident part in individuals' experiences of the sibling relationship after parental divorce. Some participants reported that they initially and occasionally experienced an increase in conflict amongst their siblings after parental divorce, but there was also the unavoidable positive experience regarding conflict between the siblings.

Increased experiences of conflict. The increase of conflict after parental divorce was an evident part of the findings pertaining to the sibling relationship after parental divorce in childhood. One participant stated the following: *"It caused great fights between me and my brother and sister ... There were intense like, fights and actions and other stuff"* (P1). Two other participants additionally added, *"It also sometimes caused a lot of fights"* (P5) and, *"Now my oldest sister and I have never gotten along, we were always at odds, and when my mom and dad got divorced, it just got a bit worse ... Now when I say (that) afterwards it got worse, then (did) like, I can't fight with the mouth, she can ... so then it got violent between us"* (P3).

The findings of the study further indicated that various reasons played a part in the increase of conflict after parental divorce had taken place in childhood. Some of these reasons were reported by the participants as: having different opinions on their parents' views; roles that changed in the dynamics of the siblings; and circumstances that changed as a result of the divorce. One participant mentioned: *"We sometimes differed a bit regarding our parents' views ... It caused great fights between my brother and sister and I because I agree with my dad for instance, and brother and sister with my mom ..."* (P1). Three other participants reported: *"Yeah it caused a lot of conflict because my brother really sided with my dad no matter what"* (P6), and, *"She felt she needed to take on a parent role ..., because she really thought she can rule my life after my parents got divorced. Until I came to a point of up until here and no further and then the being-at-odds times became more"* (P3) and, *"One didn't fight because the other person did something wrong, it was just the whole situation, then it causes that you have a bit of conflict"* (P5). Therefore, it appears that increased conflict between siblings was an apparent new experience after the parental divorce had taken place in childhood. Additionally, these conflicts seem to be the result of various different aspects pertaining to the divorce.

Positive experiences in terms of conflict. In terms of conflict, however, it became apparent that there were also positive experiences in the sibling relationship regarding the conflict after parental divorce in childhood. The parental divorce seemingly assisted the siblings to keep in mind the importance of their sibling relationships, to learn about each other and how to see things from the other sibling's perspective: *"A lot of times it was just like not nice, because you don't want to fight with them and in the end you realise, okay, why are we actually fighting, as a result of the whole situation, but it also taught you a lot about each other and at*

least now we know how to handle each other ... Sometimes after you fought then you tried to think, okay from the other person's perspective, like just try to think about that" (P5).

Another positive experience that became unavoidable was that the conflict became less between some of the participants' sibling relationships after the parental divorce, one participant explained: *"Like when my parents were still together, obviously we fought like any brother and sister can ... but I would say that it definitely improved a lot"* (P2). Another participant, after asked about her experiences with her sibling relationship after parental divorce, reported: *"Our relationship is very strong, and like we never fight"* (P4). Hence, even though in some instances the conflict between siblings increased, those increased instances still gave the siblings the opportunity to learn about and from each other. In other instances, parental divorce produced the positive change of decreasing the conflict in the sibling relationship, both of which instances led to an increased feeling of closeness.

Theme 2: The Feeling of Closeness

During data gathering, it was extremely evident that the participants experienced an increased feeling of closeness to their siblings after parental divorce in childhood. One participant reported: *"We are very close; like they are my two right hands We are very-very close"* (P2). It became particularly apparent that feelings of support, unity, and gratitude were experienced in the sibling relationship after their parental divorce.

Support and shared experiences. To most of the participants, their parental divorce brought about feelings of support and shared experiences in their sibling relationships. One participant explained how she experienced it: *"So he like started to talk to me more about the whole situation, like we were there for each other more than what we relied on our parents ... We are there to support each other, no matter what, and like, like we give each other advice"* (P4).

Two participants reported: *“Like if something happened, we were all behind each other”* (P2), and, *“Like if you, (one) feel unhappy about something or, then we just like, you have to tell someone so we talked to each other about it ... We know we are always there for each other”* (P5). The support that the participants experienced in their sibling relationships took on different forms; for some of the siblings, a sense of protection arose for their siblings, in which they supported each other by standing up for each other. After asking a participant whether the divorce had brought about any changes in the sibling relationship after parental divorce, he explained: *“Uhm, sort of standing up for each other that kind of, it’s almost the same as standing together but it is something a bit different. It’s more a thing of if someone scolds at them then you’re like no, no you... I can, but you are not allowed to”* (P1).

It became clear that the support they felt from each other also gave them a sense of having shared experiences; a feeling in which they knew that they were together in the difficulties, never to be left alone. One participant mentioned: *“We know it is all that we have now (each other) ... Nobody had it worse than the other one”* (P2). Hence, it is clear that most of the participants experienced their sibling relationships after the parental divorce as a safe relationship where they can rely on each other regarding the difficulties of the divorce, and henceforth, regarding anything.

Open and improved communication. The feeling of closeness they experienced from each other contributed additionally to their openness and trust towards each other, improving the communication in their relationships. One participant explained how, after the initial phase of conflict they experienced during the divorce, the communication improved: *“So yeah, it brought a lot of communication between the three of us. We started communicating more, and it was always positive.”* (P6). Another participant explained: *“We learned how to also like... told each*

other how we feel and respected each other and there were a few times (we were) at odds and then for a few days (you) don't feel well or don't communicate about things, but also sort of learned to do that (communicate) in all situations" (P1).

One participant described how they came to a place of sharing more with each other: *"You would share more with each other and you kind of understand each other better"* (P5). For another participant, she explained how her brother started to communicate with her more, and how this contributed to them depending on each other's opinions: *"So he started talking to me more about the whole situation ... like we literally depend on each other's opinions"* (P4). Hence, talking and communicating more with each other was something that changed after the divorce, and also contributed to a feeling of trust and openness.

Gratitude for the sibling relationship. The relationships with their siblings were such a positive experience after the divorce that it made up for the difficulties of the parental divorce. One participant explained: *"It makes up for what we lost in a way ... You still feel okay, there are people with whom you can do things and enjoy yourself even though it is not the same"* (P5). Another participant explained how grateful she is for the outcome of her relationship with her siblings after the divorce, and that she would prefer for the divorce to have taken place: *"It is a very good thing that they got divorced ... Honestly, I don't think we would have been this close if my father was still in the house ... I am very glad it happened ... I would rather have this and not have a father, than have a father and not be so close with my brother and my sister"* (P2). This provides an indication of how deeply she experienced the closeness in her sibling relationships after parental divorce. For another participant, spending time with her brother after the parental divorce had taken place was something special to her and increased her appreciation thereof: *"But since I came here (Potchefstroom) and my brother is there (back home), like I realised it*

more and more like how much time we actually spent together and how much it actually meant ...” (P4). This once again points to the extreme closeness that participants experienced with their siblings after parental divorce.

Theme 3: Inter-Relational Learning

During the data gathering process, the inter-relational learning that took place in and through the sibling relationship became an evident pattern throughout the findings. Inter-relational learning can be explained as learning how to go about in interacting with siblings and other individuals, widening perspectives, and acquiring a better developed skill of empathy.

It became apparent during the data gathering process that the participants felt that they acquired a better understanding of their siblings and, through this, learned how to understand and interact in their sibling relationships and also in general relationships. One participant explained how, after their parental divorce, they had to learn within their sibling relationships how to understand people from a different view: *“Sometimes after you fought then you tried to think, okay, from the other person’s perspective like just try to think about that ... It just teaches you like... to understand people from a different perspective” (P5).* Another participant explained how, from her sibling relationships, she was able to develop the skill of having empathy and noticing when someone is going through a difficult time. She reported: *“Honestly, I could not see if someone is coping. Now if my friend is a bit mean to me then okay, yes, listen we wrote a difficult test, it’s her way of coping ... If the divorce did not take place and I didn’t go through what I went through and my sisters (went through) with me, then I wouldn’t have been able to see that she’s not coping, or anyone else close (to me) regarding it” (P3).* She continued, *“Because the fact that I am loving and care about the people around me comes from that I had*

to be there for my sisters. Otherwise I would have just come and gone like I wanted to and not really care the way that I do at the moment” (P3).

For one participant, the sibling relationship after parental divorce taught him how to work together with his siblings: *“Yes it definitely taught us to work harder and also to kind of work together to like tell each other, you do that, I’ll do all of these, you do all of those, then we can finish sort of quicker and easier” (P1)* and, *“We definitely learned how to (nicely) face conflict ... Uhm and also to the outside like I now know if someone is really angry that I maybe shouldn’t talk immediately, that it might be better ... Other people, I can say you know, if they scream like that and get that angry then I know okay, this is how to manage, this is what to do, this is what will happen if I say this, uhm, in all situations” (P1).*

Hence, the parental divorce and the conflict and closeness it brought to the sibling relationship also taught the participants about interpersonal relationships and how to read other people better, how to view things from different perspectives, how to manage conflict, and how to work together in a team.

Discussion

For this qualitative study, the focus was on exploring participants’ lived experiences regarding their sibling relationships after parental divorce in childhood. Two research questions directed this study: *What are the experiences of young adults’ sibling relationships after parental divorce in childhood? What, if any, are the changes that the parental divorce brought to the sibling relationships?*

Participants had various experiences regarding their sibling relationships after their parental divorce in childhood. These experiences included the themes of conflict, closeness, and social learning. Various studies support these findings. In a study conducted by Bush and

Ehrenberg (2003), it was established that siblings' perceived conflict to be present in their relationships after parental divorce had occurred. In another study by Poortman and Voorpostel (2009), it was concluded that the chances for sibling conflict to occur are increased and more likely when parents are divorced. This study therefore supported these findings, as most of the participants reported that their experiences regarding conflict in their relationships with their siblings were changed; for some it increased in quantity and for others in intensity. Many explanations can be provided for this occurrence. According to Poortman and Voorpostel (2009), this is the result of parental conflict during and after parental divorce.

There are, however, other aspects that can also contribute to an increase in conflict after divorce. Bush and Ehrenberg (2003) found that, in sibling relationships where the relationships were already conflict-ridden before the divorce, the conflict that took place after the divorce was perceived as more damaging. This finding is supported in this study where a participant explained how the divorce intensified an already conflict-ridden sibling relationship; the participant did, however, add that this was because of the parenting role that was taken on by her older sister. According to Bush and Ehrenberg (2003), when a sibling's role becomes too parental and the sibling becomes the dominant parent figure, this too can cause conflict. Once again, this study supported that finding. This is consistent with the family system theory (Broderick, 1993); as the dynamics between the parents change in the household, the sibling subsystem has a consequential result of some siblings taking on a parental role, causing changes in the dynamics of the sibling subsystem, thus changing the relationships between them. In addition, this study also found that circumstantial situations, such as a smaller house, caused an increase in conflict. In line with the findings of Bush and Ehrenberg (2003), some participants felt that there was a decrease or diminishing in sibling conflict after parental divorce had taken

place. Hence, the divorce had a positive influence on the conflict in the sibling relationship for some participants; for this particular study, it was due to the fact that the siblings became each other's only support and, therefore, the conflict decreased.

Bush and Ehrenberg (2003) indicate that siblings perceive their relationships with each other as closer after parental divorce had occurred. This is substantiated in this study where participants explained how they experienced closeness with their siblings after the parental divorce. Numerous studies have confirmed the findings that parental divorce can have a positive effect or bring about a sense of closeness to the sibling relationship (see Bush & Ehrenberg, 2003; Poortman & Voorpostel, 2009; Roth et al., 2014). In the current study, participants explained that they experienced a greater feeling of support from their siblings after the parental divorce. This was something they perceived as a sense of closeness. Furthermore, in the findings of the study done by Bush and Ehrenberg (2003), the feeling of going through a shared experience was something that provided participants with a sense of support from their siblings. In addition to this, Bush and Ehrenberg (2003) discovered that siblings communicated with each other more for support regarding the divorce as they felt that they were the only ones that would understand. This is consistent with the findings of the current study where participants indicated communicating with their siblings more openly and honestly as they felt that they would understand. One particular subtheme that seems to be a relatively new finding is the gratitude participants experienced for their sibling relationships. This gives an indication of the intense closeness and deepened bond they experienced with their siblings. This finding was difficult to substantiate with literature on the topic, and could therefore be a topic to be further researched regarding sibling relationships after parental divorce.

According to Deater-Deckard et al. (2002), the sibling relationship acts as a socialisation

representative. This means that it contributes to social understanding, social learning, and socialisation (Nelson & Strachan, 2017; Sanders, 2004). Additionally, according to Sanders (2004), because of the conflict and bickering that take place in the sibling relationship, it could provide siblings with the skills to manage conflict situations. The current study indicated that conflict increased as a result of the parental divorce that occurred in childhood, but how siblings learned how to understand each other and, consequently, understand outside individuals better. This could indicate that the natural processes of the sibling relationship might be fast-tracked by parental divorce, causing individuals to acquire social skills at a faster pace. Therefore, from the findings of this study, the experience of the sibling relationship after parental divorce in childhood changes in various areas, including conflict, feelings of closeness, and in the inter-relational learning processes.

Possible Contribution to Practice

In practice, one contribution this study can thus make is that it can enable the therapist to establish a support structure using siblings in the family in order to increase coping abilities with the parental divorce. The findings indicated how closeness, inter-relational learning and conflict in the sibling relationship after parental divorce helped the individuals cope with the divorce, and contributed to the human beings they are today, especially in the context of social relationships. It can additionally assist therapist in psycho-educating the parents and family system on the importance of the sibling relationship during the time of parental divorce at a young age. On a scientific or theoretical level, these findings indicated the large impact the sibling relationship has on individuals after parental divorce took place at a crucial time of childhood development. It raises questions on how the sibling relationships, and consequently, the individuals themselves would have been different if the divorce did not occur during this time, or if the divorce occurred

during another period of human development. The positive and negative contribution that the sibling relationship could have during and after the time of divorce, was confirmed with these findings.

Limitations and Recommendations

The limitations of the study comprise the small number of participants that took part in the study, of whom five were female individuals and only one male. Additionally, most of the participants were white (five), and only one participant was African. The sample thus shows limited variation in terms of different groups, making it difficult for generalisations to be made. This was a retrospective study. Retrospective studies involve collecting data about past events. One of the limitations (threats) to retrospective studies is recall bias (Peyper, De Klerk, & Spies, 2015). Another limitation (see Peyper et al., 2015) could also be misinformation due to the time difference between the recall of the experience(s) and the experience(s) itself.

It is recommended that further research be done on the current topic, especially in a South African context, where a greater variety of individuals is included in the research sample. Furthering research regarding sibling relationships after parental divorce in a South African context could provide more depth on the topic, especially in a context as unique as South Africa. Additionally, it is recommended that the development of a therapeutic programme be researched regarding sibling relationships and parental divorce. This therapeutic programme should focus on the aspects discussed in this article and how these aspects can contribute to coping after parental divorce. The sibling relationship plays a key role during parental divorce and more research on the topic is of great importance.

Conclusion

The aim of this research study was to explore the lived experiences of young adults' sibling relationships after parental divorce in childhood. The research found that young adults experienced the following in their sibling relationships: conflict, feelings of closeness, and the sibling relationship as a space for social learning. In addition, it became clear that certain factors were involved in these aspects. The conflict in the sibling relationship increased in some instances, but, surprisingly, decreased in other instances. The increase in conflict experiences took place as a result of loyalties to parents, different roles that were fulfilled by siblings, and circumstantial situations that occurred due to the divorce. The decrease in the conflict that was experienced was due to the support the siblings needed and provided to each other. The closeness that participants experienced involved support and shared experiences, open and improved communication, and gratitude for the sibling relationships as compensation for the losses in parental divorce. Lastly, it became evident that the process of the sibling relationship as an inter-relational learning representative was accelerated due to the divorce.

Therefore, it can be concluded that parental divorce changes the experience of the sibling relationship. These changes include some negative aspects, such as increased conflict, but mostly include positive recollections regarding participants' experiences. The need for more research on this topic is tremendous; therefore, more research should be done, specifically in the South African context.

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SECTION 3: CRITICAL REFLECTION

This section will entail a discussion of the researcher's personal reflection regarding her overall experience of this research study.

Critical Reflection

The personal reflection regarding this qualitative study will include various aspects of the research. It will include a critical personal reflection of the data collection, data analysis, and research findings. According to Finlay (2008), researchers should engage in a reflective process in order to become more mindful of the research as a whole but also in its different parts; therefore, this critical reflection is essential, and an essential part of the 'bracketing' process of the phenomenology research design of this research study. My critical reflection will follow below.

Data Collection

Approaching this journey of conducting research in a semi-independent manner (with the support and guidance of my supervisors) was, without a doubt, a daunting, yet exciting thought. Daunting because of the little experience I had in this area, but exciting because of the findings, experience, insights, and contributions that could come of it. After the final approval from the ethics committee, my nerves reached a high as I knew that the collection of data was becoming more of a reality.

According to Brinkmann (2007), creating a trusting and empathic atmosphere where participants can express themselves freely is the responsibility of the researcher. As I was approaching the in-depth interviews, this was something I kept in mind for the foundation of the process. Luckily, with my training and experience as a now intern counselling psychologist; this was something I was trained to do – which provided me with some sort of relief. Although this

prepared me in a way for the conduction of the interviews, it was also something that created a challenge for me as I had to be aware of not taking the role of the therapist, but rather the researcher. This challenge encouraged me to do some research on in-depth interviewing to ensure that I do it to the best of my ability, although it proved to be challenging at times. I had to constantly remind myself of the role I am in and to ask open ended questions as much as possible.

Before conducting the in-depth interviews, I also had to ensure that the consent forms were signed by all of the participants in the presence of the independent person. Thankfully, this was a smooth process, thanks to the commitment and hard work that the independent person brought to the research process. For me, the most challenging part of the data collection process was waiting to hear whether any interest had been shown from individuals to participate in the study. This was, at times, frustrating and anxiety-provoking as my timeline became shorter and more limited. Luckily, after the first two participants, the research topic spread through word of mouth which brought in a few more interested participants. After all of the informed consent forms were signed, another challenge was finding a time for the interview that would suit both me as the researcher and the participant. It was a particularly busy time of the year, so this sometimes took a week or two to finalise. Nevertheless, the wait and anxiety were worth it as the in-depth interviews were a very enjoyable experience for me.

Throughout this process, I learned to have patience, trust the process, respect each participant's lived experience, and reflect and probe in an appropriate manner. Brinkmann (2007) proposition's that certain therapeutic techniques can be utilised to find ways through a participant's resistances. Once again, the training and experience I received in my master's year as well as in my internships helped prepare me for this. Some of the therapeutic techniques that I

utilised included building rapport with the participants to ensure a feeling of safety and trust, being non-judgmental, and responding in appropriate ways. Additionally, I had to remind myself to stay objective, especially because of my own history of parental divorce. Having psychological services available for debriefing sessions after the in-depth interviews also assisted me in staying calm and helped me to stay focused on the study, because I knew that, if the participants needed psychological support, it would be provided to them. Furthermore, having two open ended questions that were set up before the interviews helped to keep me focused and grounded, and assisted in keeping me on the topic of the study. The experience of gathering data, therefore, took me out of my comfort zone and it was challenging, but also very enriching and exciting in many different ways.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

According to Brinkmann (2007), it is extremely important for the researcher to stay objective and not impose biases onto the study. Therefore, in order for me to ensure my objectivity, I had to make use of bracketing. Bracketing refers to where the researcher casts aside his or her own experiences as far as possible in order to gain a new perspective on the topic being studied (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Therefore, before even conducting the interviews, I had to make notes about the possible biases I might have in order to be aware of the influence this could have on the research. I followed the same approach before starting with data analysis to ensure that I stay objective and unbiased during the process.

After becoming aware of my biases, I was ready to start with the data analysis process. Firstly, I had to make sure that I was familiar with the data by transcribing the interviews verbatim, and reading through it multiple times (as it is indicated by the guidelines of Clarke & Braun, 2013). This was a very time-consuming process and took a lot of my attention as I had to

make sure that I was communicating the data accurately. This initial process really assisted me in familiarising myself with the data and made the coding process much smoother. After I identified codes, it was time to identify the themes. This was also a time-consuming process as I had to review the themes multiple times and wanted to be as accurate as possible with the findings. Luckily, my supervisor assisted me as a co-coder and ensured that my biases did not seep through the findings. He assisted me in staying objective and helped me feel at ease and confident in the themes that were identified.

In addition to writing down my biased thoughts before the conduction of data analysis, I continuously reflected on my own views during the interviewing and data analysis process. I also tried to keep in mind what my expectations were with regard to the findings to ensure that I did not look for what I was expecting. This was difficult at times, but becoming aware of it continuously helped to keep me unbiased. Besides personal reflection and awareness, my supervisor also monitored me closely to ensure objectivity. The data analysis was a very exciting section for me as it started to bring the findings to life; I found it very interesting and thought-provoking as I went through the process. It was truly enjoyable.

Findings

My study aimed to explore the lived experiences of young adults' sibling relationships after parental divorce in childhood. After I had identified the themes of the study, I was very excited to read up and search for literature that either correspond or differ from the findings (see Bush & Ehrenberg, 2003; Hallberlin, 2015; Poortman & Voorpostel, 2009; Roth, Harkins, & Eng, 2014). The research regarding this specific topic was limited, making it difficult to find different literature that either corresponds or differs from the findings. It was, however, heartening and interesting to see how much of the findings correspond with research that had

already been done. Conducting the literature overview, gathering data, and identifying themes were a fruitful experience for me. A specific theme that was particularly interesting and special to me was the theme of closeness in which participants experienced support, open communication, and a deepened sense of closeness with each other. This theme encourages me as an intern psychologist to remember to look for the positives whenever working with clients from parental divorce. It also provided me with a new perspective for whenever I am working with children who are going through a parental divorce and have siblings; because of these findings, my approach towards these children will change significantly.

Parental divorce has always been a very interesting topic to me, largely because I went through parental divorce in childhood myself and learned a lot about it through my own experiences. Preceding studies, however, focused largely on the parent-child relationship after parental divorce (see Aquilino, 1994; Booth & Amato, 1994; Kalmijn, 2013; Shevchenko, 2016), and none of these studies placed the focus on the sibling relationship. For this study, it therefore seemed evident to me that research is lacking regarding the sibling relationship after parental divorce, especially in a South African context where it was difficult to find any studies on the topic.

My empathy and interest in the sibling relationship only grew through the conduction of this research study. It also provided me with a renewed sense of appreciation for my own siblings and their contributions to my life. Even though this research study will only make a minimal contribution to the South African context and knowledge regarding the topic, my hope is that this study will encourage the social science to broaden the research regarding parental divorce, and to cater for the sibling relationship as well, as I believe that it plays a vital role in many aspects of parental divorce.

Personally, I feel that I have grown through this research study as it broadened my perspective regarding parental divorce and the sibling relationship, not only in general, but also in my personal life. Even though the research study challenged me in making sure to not be biased and to push myself in different ways, this is a research study I will always be grateful for and proud of.

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ADDENDUM A: Example of Informed Consent Form



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Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>



INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENTATION FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED PARENTAL DIVORCE AND HAVE AT LEAST ONE SIBLING.

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY: Exploring the lived experiences of young adults' sibling relationships after parental divorce: A retrospective study.

ETHICS REFERENCE NUMBERS: NWU-00073-18-S1

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr Werner de Klerk (Project Head: Registered Research Psychologist)
Mrs Lelanie Malan (Co-Supervisor: Registered Research and Clinical Psychologist)

POST GRADUATE STUDENT: Ms Mandie Moore (Master Student in Counselling Psychology)

ADDRESS:
North-West University
Faculty of Health Sciences
School of Psychosocial Health
Private bag X6001
Potchefstroom
2520

CONTACT NUMBER: 0722373030

You are being invited to take part in a **research study** that forms part of my (Mandie Moore) Masters Research Dissertation in Counselling Psychology. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this study. Please ask the researcher or person explaining the research to you any questions about any part of this study that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research is about and how you might be involved. Also, your participation is **entirely voluntary** and you are free to say no to

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participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point (prior data analysis), even if you do agree to take part now.

This study has been approved by the **Health Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences of the North-West University (NWU-00073-18-S1)** and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Processes and Structures (DoH, 2015) and other international ethical guidelines applicable to this study. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or other relevant people to inspect the research records.

What is this research study all about?

- *This study will be conducted at the North-West University (Student Counselling and Development, Ingryp) in a private room and will involve in-depth interviews with participants regarding their sibling relationships after their parents divorced during their childhood. The researcher (Ms Mandie Moore) is trained in in-depth interviewing, and a registered Counselling Psychology Student with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). These findings will possibly provide enriching data regarding sibling relationships after parental divorce specifically in a South African context.*

Why have you been invited to participate?

- *You have been invited to be part of this research because you are individual who experienced parental divorce between the ages of 6 to 12 years who possesses valuable information with regard to your experience of your sibling relationship after the parental divorce.*
- *You also fit the research because you are currently between the ages of 20 and 29, had at least one full sibling in the household at the time of the parental divorce with whom you lived with in the household for at least a year after the divorce, the parental divorce proceedings were concluded within a year after filing for divorce.*
- *You also fit the criteria because you are from any ethnical group but can speak and/or understand either English or Afrikaans.*
- *Additionally, you are also willing to participate in the study, sign an informed consent form and also comfortable to be interviewed and audio-recorded during your interview.*
- *You will not be able to take part in this research if you do not meet the above mentioned requirements, if you are currently in psychotherapy regarding the parental divorce or if you are a psychology student at the North-West University. If you are a familiar friend or peer of the researcher, you will also be excluded from the study.*

What will be expected of you?

- *You will be expected to participate in an in-depth interview (of approximately 60 minutes) during which you will be asked to share your experiences with regard to your sibling relationships after parental divorce. Please take note that the interview will be scheduled during a time and date that best suits you and the researcher (Ms Mandie Moore). You will be expected to travel to the interview at the North-West University, Potchefstroom.*
- *You will also be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (of approximately 5min) for administration purposes. During this questionnaire, you*

will be assigned a participant number which will ensure the anonymity of your information.

- *It is also expected that you, as well as the independent person (who has provided you with this informed consent form), sign the consent form in one another's' presence.*
- *Once the researcher (Ms Mandie Moore) has received all the informed consent forms from the independent person, she will directly make contact with you in order to schedule a suitable date and time for the interview.*
- *You will be provided with bottled water as refreshment during the interview.*
- *Before the interview starts, you will be informed once again that the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed (this is done in order to prevent any assumptions made by the researcher herself) and upon your permission, the researcher will start the audio-recording.*

Will you gain anything from taking part in this research?

- *There are no direct benefits that can be foreseen in this study. There are however, indirect benefits that can be anticipated, they include:*
 - *The present study will contribute to the psychological knowledge regarding sibling relationships after parental divorce.*
 - *The study will contribute to the knowledge of sibling relationships after parental divorce specifically in a South African context.*
 - *The study will be able to make recommendations for future research.*

Are there risks involved in you taking part in this research and what will be done to prevent them?

- *The risk level of this study is classified as medium due to the possibility of emotional discomfort while sharing your experiences. It is important to note that may a situation arise where you feel emotional discomfort or upset about anything discussed during the interview, the researcher will take the necessary steps to contain the situation within the interview. Debriefing and psychological services will be made available to you (free of charge) after the interview if you feel the need to make use of these services. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and content of the research, the researcher (Ms Mandie Moore) will take extra precaution and care in acting empathically and in a professional manner. Confidentiality will also be of utmost importance.*
- *No foreseen risks of physical harm exist, as the in-depth interviews will be conducted in a secure and private room at the North-West University, Potchefstroom.*

How will we protect your confidentiality and who will see your findings?

- *Anonymity of your findings will be protected through the allocation of participant numbers to all partaking individuals. The data will also be coded during transcription. The former, as well as the latter, will be done in order to ensure that no link can be made between the information received and a specific participant. Identifying data will therefore be changed during the transcription phase of the research to ensure confidentiality during data capturing.*
- *The voice recording of your interview on the audio recording device will be copied onto the researcher and project heads' computer where after it will be deleted from the audio recording device. The computers containing the audio recordings will be password protected and only the researcher and project head*

will therefore have access to the audio recordings. These audio recordings will be transcribed and each audio recording will be identified by only a participant number (as explained above) to ensure that all identifying data is changed.

- *All findings will be reported as anonymous. It is therefore only the researcher (Ms Mandie Moore), the project head (Dr Werner de Klerk), and the co-supervisor (Mrs Ielanie Malan) who will have access to the findings and will be able to look at your findings. All other data and hard copies will be kept in locked cabinets within the project heads' office. Electronic data will consequently be password protected on the researcher and project heads' computer.*
- *All data will be stored within COMPRES (Community Psychosocial Research) at the North-West University for seven years, after which it will be successfully destroyed by the North-West University.*
- *It is important to note that the HREC will also be monitoring the research process in order to ensure that the aspects within this research study adheres to approved protocol thereof.*

What will happen with the findings?

- *This study is a once-off study and the data collected will therefore only be used and analysed in this study within South Africa. After the data has been analysed, the findings will be reported in a written article and summarized within a conclusions paragraph. This article will be submitted to an accredited scientific journal for possible publication.*
- *Please take note that all findings within this study will also be reported in the Masters Dissertation of the researcher (Ms Mandie Moore) which forms part of her obtaining her MA Degree in Counselling Psychology at the North-West University*

How will you know about the findings of this research?

- *We will give you a summary of the findings of this research after the dissertation has been compiled. If you wish to receive such a summary of the findings, one will be sent to you electronically upon your request. A suitable date and time will also be arranged with you to give feedback should you wish to do so. If the submission of a written article for possible publication proves successful, the findings of this study will also be available after publication.*
- *You will be informed of any new relevant findings by email.*

Will you be paid to take part in this study and are there any costs for you?

- *No. You will not be paid to take part in this study but you will however be remunerated for the travel expenses to the interview site. You will receive R50 to cover the cost of travelling to take part in the interview. Additionally, you will be provided with a bottled water as refreshment during the interview. The only costs involved for you will be your travel arrangements to the North-West University, Potchefstroom.*

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

- *You can contact Jandre Van der Merwe (independent person) at 0832541938 if you have any further questions or have any problems.*
- *You can also contact the Health Research Ethics Committee via Mrs Carolien van Zyl at 018 299 1206 or carolien.vanzyl@nwu.ac.za if you have any*

concerns that were not answered about the research or if you have complaints about the research.

- You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own purposes.

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I agree to take part in the research study titled:.....

I declare that:

- I have read this information/it was explained to me by a trusted person in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- The research was clearly explained to me.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person getting the consent from me, as well as the researcher and all my questions have been answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be handled in a negative way if I do so.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in the best interest, or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed to.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

.....
Signature of participant

.....
Signature of witness

Declaration by person obtaining consent

I (*name*) declare that:

- I clearly and in detail explained the information in this document to
.....
- I did/did not use an interpreter.
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I gave him/her time to discuss it with others if he/she wished to do so.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

.....
Signature of person obtaining consent

.....
Signature of witness

Declaration by researcher

I, Mandie Moore declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to
or I had it explained by who I trained for this purpose.
- I did/did not use an interpreter
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them
or I was available should he/she want to ask any further questions.
- The informed consent was obtained by an independent person.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as described above.
- I am satisfied that he/she had time to discuss it with others if he/she wished to do so.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

.....
Signature of researcher

.....
Signature of witness

ADDENDUM B: Goodwill Permission Letter



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School of Psychosocial Health

To whom it may concern.

This letter is to formally request permission to place advertisements (pamphlets) on your notice boards as part of the recruitment process in a research project. This research project (with ethics approval number: NWU-00073-18-S1) forms part of a mini-dissertation which is a requirement for the completion of a Master's degree in Counselling Psychology.

The research project's title is: "Exploring the lived experiences of young adults' sibling relationships after parental divorce: A retrospective study". The study therefore aims to explore and achieve a better understanding of young adults' lived experiences of sibling relationships after parental divorce. It will further aim to explore if parental divorce changes the experience of sibling relationships and if so, how it changes and what aspects contribute to these possible changes.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

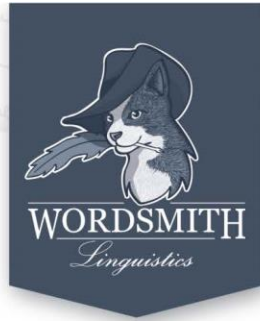
Should you have questions please do not hesitate to contact me (Ms Mandie Moore) at 072 237 3030.

Kind regards,

Ms Mandie Moore
Researcher

Dr Werner de Klerk
Research supervisor

ADDENDUM C: Letter of Proof from Language Editor



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18 November 2018

To whom it may concern

This is to testify that the Master's dissertation titled

**'Exploring the lived experiences of young adults' sibling relationships
after parental divorce: A retrospective study'**

by

Ms Mandie Moore

has been language edited to the best of the language practitioner's knowledge
and ability.

The language practitioner in question is registered at the South African
Translators' Institute (SATI) with membership number 1003382 and thereby
fully qualified and authorised to provide said services.

Should there be any queries, please feel free to contact the language
practitioner at the number provided below.

Kind regards

Elcke du Plessis (I.D. 9212030060083)
0845480579

Registered at the South African Translators' Institute (SATI)

Membership number: 1003382

ADDENDUM D: Translation of Quotes from Afrikaans to English

Theme 1: Conflict between Siblings

1.1 Increased Experiences of Conflict

P1: Dit het groot bakleiery tussen ek en my broer en suster begin. Daar was intense soos fights en actions gewees en ander goed.”

It caused big fights between me and my brother and sister. There were intense like, fights and actions and other stuff”

P3: Nou ek en my oudste sussie het nog nooit oor die weg gekom nie, ons het altyd koppe gestamp en toe my ma en pa geskei het, het dit net soos bietjie erger geword. Nou as ek sê na die tyd het dit erger geraak dan het soos, ek kan nie met die mond baklei nie, sy kan ... so dan het dit gewelddadig geraak tussen ons.

Now my oldest sister and I have never gotten along, we were always at odds, and when my mom and dad got divorced, it just got a bit worse ... Now when I say (that) afterwards it got worse, then (did) like, I can't fight with the mouth, she can ... so then it got violent between us.

P5: Dit het baie bakleiery ook soms veroorsaak.

It also sometimes caused a lot of fights.

P1: Ons het partykeer ook bietjie verskil rakende ons ouers se sienings. Dit het groot bakleiery tussen ek en my broer en suster begin want ek stem saam my pa byvoorbeeld, en broer en suster saam my ma.

We sometimes differed a bit regarding our parents' views. It caused great fights between my brother and sister and I because I agree with my dad for instance, and brother and sister with my mom.

P3: Sy het gevoel sy moet 'n ouer rol inneem. ... want sy het regtig gedink sy kan my lewe regeer na my ma-hulle geskei is. Tot ek op die punt gekom het van nou toe en nie meer nie en toe raak dit erger ons koppe stamp tye.

She felt she needed to take on a parent role. ... because she really thought she can rule my life after my parents got divorced. until I came to a point of up until here and no further and then the being-at-odds times became more.

P5: Mens het nie baklei omdat die ander persoon iets verkeerd gedoen het nie, dit was maar net die hele situasie dan veroorsaak dit dat mens bietjie konflik het.

One didn't fight because the other person did something wrong, it was just the whole situation then it causes that you have a bit of conflict.

1.2 Positive Experiences in terms of Conflict

P5: Baie keer dan was dit net soos nie lekker nie, want mens wil nie met hulle baklei nie en op die ou end besef jy oky hoekom baklei ons eintlik, as gevolg van die hele situasie maar dit het mens maar baie ook geleer van mekaar en darem weet ons hoe om mekaar nou te hanteer. soms nadat jy nou baklei het dan het jy probeer soos dink oky, uit die ander persoon se perspektief soos probeer maar net daaraan dink.

A lot of times it was just like not nice, because you don't want to fight with them and in the end you realise, okay, why are we actually fighting, as a result of the whole situation, but it also taught you a lot about each other and at least now we know how to handle each other.

Sometimes after you fought then you tried to think, okay from the other person's perspective, like just try to think about that.

P2: Soos toe my ouers nog bymekaar was obviously het ons baklei soos enige boetie en sussie maar kan ... maar ek sal sê dit het definitief baie verbeter.

Like when my parents were still together obviously we fought like any brother and sister can ... but I would say that it definitely improved a lot.

P4: Ons verhouding is baie sterk en soos ons baklei nooit nie.

Our relationship is very strong, and like we never fight.

Theme 2: The feeling of Closeness

P2: Ons is baie close, soosin dis soos my twee regter hande daai. Ons is baie baie close.

We are very close, like they are my two right hands. We are very very close.

2.1 Support and Shared Experiences

P4: So hy het soos meer met my begin praat oor die hele situasie, soos ons was meer soos daar vir mekaar gewees as wat ons op ons ouers staatgemaak het. ... Ons is daar om mekaar te ondersteun, maak nie saak wat nie, soos en, soos ons gee mekaar advies.

So he like started to talk to me more about the whole situation, like we were there for each other more than what we relied on our parents ... We are there to support each other, no matter what, and like, like we give each other advice.

P2: Soos as iets gebeur het, was ons almal agter mekaar.

Like if something happened, we were all behind each other.

P5: Soos as jy, mens, ongelukkig voel oor iets of dan het ons maar net soos, jy moet dit vir iemand sê so ons het maar met mekaar daaroor gepraat. ... Ons weet ons is altyd daar vir mekaar.

Like if you, one, feel unhappy about something or, then we just like, you have to tell someone so we talked to each other about it ... We know we are always there for each other.

P1: Uhm, half opstaan vir mekaar wat nogals, dis amper dieslefde as saamstaan maar dit is bietjie iets anders. Dis meer 'n ding van as iemand hul uittrap is jy van nee, nee jy... ek kan, maar nie jy nie.

Uhm, sort of standing up for each other that kind of, it's almost the same as standing together but it is something a bit different. It's more a thing of if someone scolds at them then you're like no, no you... I can, but you are not allowed to.

P2: ... Ons weet dit is al wat ons nou het (mekaar) ... Niemand het dit erger gehad as die ander een nie.

... We know it is all that we have now (each other) ... Nobody had it worse than the other one.

2.2 Open and Improved Communication

P1: [...] Ons het geleer ook hoe om mekaar ook soos, vir mekaar gesê hoe ons voel ook en mekaar respekteer en daar het ook 'n paar keer hard kop gestamp en dan vir 'n paar dae nie lekker voel of kommunikeer oor goed nie, maar ook half geleer het om in alle situasie daai te doen.

... We learned how to also like... told each other how we feel and respected each other and there were a few times (we were) at odds and then for a few days (you) don't feel well or don't communicate about things, but also sort of learned to do that (communicate) in all situations.

P5: ... Mens sal meer met mekaar deel en mens verstaan mekaar nou kind of beter.

... You would share more with each other and you kind of understand each other better.

P4: So hy het meer met my begin praat oor die hele situasie ... soos ons maak letterlik net op mekaar se opinies staat.

So he started talking to me more about the whole situation ... like we literally depend on each other's opinions.

2.3 Gratitude for the Sibling Relationships

P5: ... Dit maak op vir wat ons verloor het in 'n manier ... Mens voel nogsteeds oky daar is mense saam wie jy soos goeters kan doen en jouself geniet al is dit nie dieselfde nie.

... It makes up for what we lost in a way ... You still feel okay, there are people with whom you can do things and enjoy yourself even though it is not the same.

P2: ... Dit is 'n baie goeie ding dat hulle geskei het ... Eerlikwaar dink ek nie ons sou so close gewees het as my pa nog in die huis was nie ... Ek is baie bly dit het gebeur ... Ek sal eerder dit hê en nie 'n pa hê nie, as 'n pa in die huis en nie so close wees met my boetie en my sussie nie.

... It is a very good thing that they got divorced ... Honestly, I don't think we would have been this close if my father was still in the house ... I am very glad it happened ... I would rather have this and not have a father, than have a father and not be so close with my brother and my sister.

P4: ... Maar vandat ek hiernatoe gekom het en my boetie is daar soos het ek dit meer en meer besef soos hoeveel tyd ons actually saam spandeer het en hoeveel dit eintlik beteken het

... But since I came here (Potchefstroom) and my brother is there (back home), like I realised it more and more like how much time we actually spent together and how it actually meant

Theme 3: Inter-relational Learning

P5: ... Soms nadat jy nou baklei het dan het jy probeer soos dink oky, uit die ander persoon se perspektief soos probeer maar net daaraan dink ... Dit leer jou maar net soos... om uit 'n ander perspektief mense te verstaan ...

... Sometimes after you fought then you tried to think, okay, from the other person's perspective like just try to think about that ... It just teaches you like... to understand people from a different perspective.

P3: ... Eerlikwaar ek kon nie sien as iemand cope nie. Nou as my vriendin bietjie muslik met my is dan oky ja, hoor hier ons het 'n moeilike toets geskryf, dis haar manier van cope ... As die egskeiding nie plaasgevind het en ek deur is waardeur ek is nie en my sussies saam met my nie, dan sou ek nie enigsins kon sien dat sy cope nie, of enige iemand anderste wat na aan my is om dit nie.

... Honestly, I could not see if someone is coping. Now if my friend is a bit mean to me then okay, yes, listen we wrote a difficult test, it's her way of coping ... If the divorce did not take place and I didn't go through what I went through and my sisters (went through) with me, then I wouldn't have been able to see that she's not coping, or anyone else close to me around it.

P3: ... Want die feit dat ek liefdevol is en omgee vir die mense om my kom van dat ek daar moes wees vir my sussies. Anderste sou ek net gekom en gegaan het soos wat ek wou en nie regtig so omgee het soos wat ek doen op die oomblik nie.

... Because the fact that I am loving and care about the people around me comes from that I had to be there for my sisters. Otherwise I would have just come and gone like I wanted to and not really care the way that I do at the moment.

P1: Ja dit het ons defintief geleer om harder te werk en ook om half saam te werk om soos vir mekaar te sê oky, jy doen daai, ek doen al hierdie, jy doen al daai dan kan ons half vinniger en makliker klaarkry.

Yes it definitely taught us to work harder and also to kind of work together to like tell each other, you do that, I'll do all of these, you do all of those, then we can finish sort of quicker and easier.

P1: ... Ons het definitief geleer om lekker konflik te face ... Uhm en ook buitentoe soos ek weet nou as iemand regtig kwaad is dat ek dalk nie dadelik moet praat nie, dat dit beter is dalk. ... Ander mense, kan ek sê weet jy as hulle so skree en so kwaad raak dan weet ek oky, hierdie is hoe om te manage, hierdie is wat om te doen, hierdie is wat gaan gebeur as ek dit sê, uhm, in alle situasies maar.

... We definitely learned how to (nicely) face conflict ... Uhm and also to the outside like I now know if someone is really angry that I maybe shouldn't talk immediately, that is might be better. ... Other people, I can say you know, if they scream like that and get that angry then I know okay, this is how to manage, this is what to do, this is what will happen if I say this, uhm, in all situations.