

HALF SIBLINGS: ADULT CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF THE DIALECTICAL
TENSIONS WITH A SHARED BIOLOGICAL PARENT

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the unique relational tensions between adult children and the parent they share with a half sibling. Grounded in relational dialectics theory, transcripts from interviews of 17 half siblings were analyzed using thematic analysis to search for contradicting opposites that identified dialectical tensions between participants and their shared biological parent. Seven dialectical tensions between parent and child emerged and three dialectical tensions between half siblings were identified, along with conflict management strategies for the tensions within blended families. The themes of residence, age, and activities as involvement were influential on the connection between participants and their family members. The dialectical tensions of autonomy-connection, inclusion-seclusion, and revelation-concealment were both expressed between parent and child and between half siblings. Half siblings considered their relationship to be the same as full biological siblings, but a distinction was made if participants had full biological or stepsiblings. Half siblings felt their blended family dynamic was not abnormal, but felt they were socially stigmatized at times for not fitting the traditional definition of family.

DEDICATION

To my adored older sister, Morgan Lee; my beloved little brother, VJ Oliver; and my strong yet silent stepbrother, Blake McDonald – their siblinghood to me has been filled with unconditional love and support and has made me proud of who I am today.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The definition of ‘family’ is changing. The traditional description of ‘family’ assumes the presence of two married parents and their biological children (Holtzman, 2008). Today, families are more likely to have an unconventional family structure such as divorced, step, or blended families (Baxter, 2004a). These family types dismiss the assumption that all children are biologically related, and include the presence of step and half siblings. The evolving and changing definition of ‘family’ mirrors the shifting relationships within these untraditional family types, especially between parents and their children. Research has explored the untraditional family structures of post-divorce and stepfamilies; however, the research has not adequately explored how members of blended families nor how sharing a biological parent with a half sibling can affect the parent-child relationship.

This study applies a relational dialectic perspective to the tensions perceived by adult children in their relationship with the biological parent they share with a half sibling. Relational dialectics theory can be used to help explain, understand, and make meaning of relationships and experiences (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). Investigating the interpersonal relationships between family members requires researchers to investigate how individuals make meaning and understand their relationships within their family structure. As a researcher, my goal is to interpret the lives of participants and determine themes through disclosure of personal everyday experiences. Relational dialectics theory allows me insight into the personal lives of participants and aids in understanding the complex phenomenon of an untraditional and complex family dynamic such as being a half sibling in a blended family.

Although studies show young adults use both traditional and recent socially expansive definitions for defining ‘family’, their discussions of parent-child bonds tend to reinforce the traditional definition of family (Holtzman, 2008). Further, half siblings describe their half sibling relationships to be more like full biological sibling relationships than stepsibling relationships (Anderson, 1999). This shows the desire for children in society to rebrand their family structure to fit the traditional definition of ‘what is family’ (Holtzman, 2008). No matter how half siblings justify their untraditional family, the blended family structure will never be included in the traditional definition. The untraditional and complex nature to blended families affects the relationships within the family, specifically between parents and their children. The complexity of a blended family is greater when one or both parents start a second family that includes half siblings. This concept of ‘starting a second family’ can lead to tension within the parent-child relationship, especially between a child and the biological parent they now share with one or more half siblings (Bumpass, 1984).

This study identifies the dialectical tensions that arise in an adult child’s relationship with his or her biological parent who has a biological child with someone else. This research includes adults who have one or more siblings with whom they share only one biological parent. This unique parent-child relationship does not function without the presence of a half sibling; thus the tensions perceived in the half sibling relationship(s) is discussed as well. In order to determine these tensions, adult children who have one or more half siblings were interviewed. Interviews included open-ended questions pertaining to the participants’ relationship with their shared biological parent and with their half sibling(s). ‘Shared biological parent’ refers to the biological parent of both half siblings. Half siblings are brothers or sisters who have the same biological father, but different mother; or have the same biological mother but different father. To reduce

further confusion, the biological parent that the half siblings share will be referred to as the “shared biological parent.” A child’s relationship with the shared biological parent is unique and can include many contradicting and opposing feelings; however research has not identified the particular tensions in this relationship.

Learning how adult children perceive the relationship with a biological parent who also parents a child from another mother or father is important. There has been little research on half siblings and even less research on parents starting second families and the tensions that are then presented within the family dynamic. Once tensions are identified within this complex family structure, communication coping strategies can be created to help diffuse the tension within blended families. Studies similar to this one have uncovered how children of divorce and remarriage cope with the tensions presented within their family structure; however, relational coping strategies for half siblings in a blended family dynamic are rare.

Although past research has identified using a system’s theory approach such as boundary management to circumvent conflict surrounding ritual events in a blended family (Baxter, Braithwaite & Nicholson, 1999), little is known about how half siblings mediate tension within their family dynamic. Further identifying the dialectical tensions between half siblings and their shared biological parent as well as between half siblings themselves can provide insight into how these relationships function and can be improved. Conflict management strategies can then be employed by blended family members themselves or in clinical counseling settings. Further, exposing these tensions can help others not in a blended family structure understand the complex and conflicting experiences of a half sibling and create awareness of how family structure can affect child development. Studying this unique yet expanding family type contributes to research on post-divorced, remarried, step and blended families. This study shines light on how half

siblings make meaning of their relationships and experiences and how the concept of parents “starting over” or creating second families affect the relational communication within families.

In order to accomplish the goal of identifying the tensions within half sibling-parent relationships, the following chapter examines the relevant literature. The review summarizes important and basic principles of relational dialectics theory and is followed by a summary of the research on the dialectical tensions within post-divorce, step, and blended families. An examination of the literature on parenting and sibling relationships, including half sibling research, follows. The third chapter provides a detailed synopsis of the methods used in conducting this particular research and the fourth chapter provides the results. Finally, chapter five provides a discussion of limitations and improvements for future half sibling research and a conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relational Dialectics Theory

Relational dialectics theory (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) originated from Bakhtin's notion of dialogism (Holquist, 1981). Dialogism, often referred to as the dialogic view, describes how social life is not definable by one inside voice, but is understood through dialogues that bring together our own monologue and other voices (Bakhtin, 1981). This dialogue helps create meaning and makes sense of relationships. Bakhtin explains two voices is the minimum for life and the minimum for existence (1984) where participants form a unity in conversation only through two distinct or opposing perspectives. The perspectives may be vastly different, but they unite to form the conversation. Bakhtin (1981) identified dialogue as both a conversation balancing unity and difference where "contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two tendencies battle" (p. 272). Baxter and Montgomery (1996) saw their own theory within this dialogic view where social life is made up of contradictory discourses. (Baxter, 2004b). Elaborating on Bakhtin's concept of dialogic process, and detailing the communicative aspects of the struggles, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) labeled their developments the theory of relational dialectics.

Baxter noted five concepts from Bakhtin's dialogism that laid the groundwork for the creation of RDT: dialogue as constitutive processes, dialogue as dialectical flux, dialogue as aesthetic moment, dialogue as utterance, and dialogue as critical sensibility (2004b). The key principle and contribution of dialogism is Bakhtin's idea that relating in relationships is a dialogic process where communication struggles to keep the unity of opposed tendencies

(Bakhtin, 1981). Baxter and Montgomery later gave this concept the name contradictions in their theory of relational dialectics (1996). The concept of contradictions in RDT derives from the building blocks of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Relational dialectics refers to the constant struggle to keep unified but opposing forces in a relationship at equilibrium. Equilibrium is difficult to achieve and these unified yet opposing forces cause tension and conflict in relationships. Relational dialectics highlights the conflicts and struggles between people and within relationships. Baxter's additional work reiterated her notion that relational dialectics is a theory of communication, and specifically of family communication (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). Relational dialectics theory (RDT) can be applied to all kinds of personal relationships, ranging from romantic relationships to friendships and to the currently discussed topic of communication in families. RDT allows researchers to apply a dialectical perspective to everyday relationships where relating to one another is an ongoing challenge that must negotiate the interaction of oppositional forces (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). This negotiation of everyday relationships (RDT) includes four concepts: totality, praxis, contradiction, and change.

The first and most central principle to RDT is the concept of contradiction, derived from the key principle in Bakhtin's dialogism (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Contradictions are incompatible yet mutually conditioning aspects producing the dynamic pulse of human relationships (Rawlins, 2000). Contradictions are essential to the study of relational communication because contradictions create change in relationships. Contradictions in RDT can include opposition, tensions, and multivocality (Baxter & Montgomery, 1997).

Opposition is necessary, but is not a sufficient requirement in the contradiction principle of RDT (Baxter & Montgomery, 1997). Opposition explains the struggle created in relationships

where individuals try to keep contradicting opposites at equilibrium. This interplay of contradicting opposites is identified as the tension within contradictions. Tensions are the basis of this study on half siblings and their relationships within their family dynamic, and these dialectical tensions are created in response to opposing contradictions. Baxter and Montgomery (1997) refer to tensions as “the ongoing, ever-changing interaction between unified opposites” (p. 327). Researching the complex communication within family relationships identifies the interplay of tension within contradicting opposites. The last concept to fall under contradictions in RDT is multivocality. Multivocality explains how multiple groups of opposites may create a web of contradictions within relationships. Half siblings may display dialectical tensions that are expressed differently when internalized or externalized. For example, the dialectical tension of expression vs. non-expression is internalized as openness vs. closedness (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

The second principle of RDT is totality. Totality means concepts can be co-existing and interdependent and implies that dialectics should be viewed as a ‘knot or web” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Baxter and Montgomery (1996) explain totality further by “the assumption that phenomena can be understood only in relation to other phenomena”. (p. 14). Totality in RDT allows researchers to look at the world as a process of relations to and apart from others, similar to a holistic view where individual parts work together and independently to form a larger picture. Totality in RDT involves three issues: where contradictions are located, interdependencies among contradictions, and contextualization of contradictory interplay (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The location of contradictions is important in the dialectical tensions perceived by half siblings by taking the focus off of the participant, and locating the tensions that are located in the relationship between the half sibling and their shared biological parent.

Interdependencies among contradictions may explain how contradictions in the parent-child relationship are not isolated from the half sibling's relationship with their half sibling(s). The contextualization of dialectic interplays explains how the contradiction itself is needed only in comparison to the context in which the contradiction occurs. Studying the relationship between a child and the biological parent they share with a half sibling will differ depending on the social, historical, and environmental context of each participant (Baxter & Montgomery, 1997). Half siblings who live with their shared biological parent may perceive different tensions than half siblings who share a nonresidential parent, a context that is important in the exploration of contradictions within a blended family.

The third principle to RDT is praxis. Praxis explains individuals are actors as well as the object of their actions simultaneously (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Praxis is also explained by individuals being both subjects and objects of (their) own communicative actions (Rawlins, 2000). The concept of praxis in RDT explains how individuals are everyday social actors who create the future out of a reconstruction of the past (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Future interactions are developed from past communication decisions. As adults, half siblings may base their current actions in their family relationships upon interactions in the past or experiences they had as a child.

The final principle of RDT is change. Change simply refers to the notion that relationships are constantly in motion or changing over time. Change is created when individuals try to manage contradictions within their relationships. This change is characterized by linear and cyclical patterns seen in the ways to negotiate relationships where equilibrium is not possible (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Adult children may perceive their relationships

with their parents differently from how they viewed these bonds as children (Holtzman, 2008). This may be due to change and the notion that their relationships have changed over time.

Three main dialectical tensions were seen in a majority of Baxter and Montgomery's research and were noted as the most common in their findings, also referred to as the three main families of contradictions. The three main families of contradictions are integration-separation, stability-change, and expression-nonexpression. Integration-separation refers to the 'pull' in relationships where a need for autonomy or separation competes with the need for connection and integration (Baxter, Braithwaite, Bryant & Wagner, 2004). The contradiction of stability-change emerges across studies in RDT where stability and certainty compete with uncertainty, spontaneity and change in a relationship. Baxter, Braithwaite, Bryant, and Wagner (2004) explain the contradiction of expression-nonexpression by the struggle to seek equilibrium between "candor as central to discretion and the business of relating" (p. 449). Although these concepts are evident in almost every kind of relationship, Baxter never intended these particular dialectical tensions to be the most frequent (Baxter, 2004a). This knowledge of the most common dialectical tensions is important in blended family research because the tensions perceived in the relationship between adult children and the shared biological parent of their half sibling include integration-separation, stability-change, and expression-nonexpression. These dialectical tensions are expressed differently internally within the relationship and externally between the participant and outsiders, a community, or in public. These contradictions are discussed late in chapter four.

RDT explains how tensions and contradictions are managed by relating and interacting with others. Using a dialectical perspective allows researchers to explore the process of how people relate to one another, manage the tension in their relationships, and how individuals make

sense of these relationships. Researchers using RDT have previously explored the contradicting communication and complex relationships within divorced families, stepfamilies, and blended families. Half siblings are expected to be mostly part of a divorced family dynamic. Although death of a parent could result in future half siblings, the most common producer to stepfamilies is divorce (Coleman et al., 2001). Over half of marriages end in divorce and of those divorced, most are likely to remarry within the following two years (Glick, 1989). Thus, past findings on the contradictions within these different family types (divorced, step, and blended) is needed in order to expand research to half siblings and second families.

Dialectical Tensions in Divorced Families

Afifi conducted multiple studies on the contradictions and tensions in post-divorce families. First, Afifi and Schrodt (2003) explored uncertainty avoidance in different post-divorce family types. Surveys were completed by children who identify as either from a divorced family or a first-marriage family. Results concluded children in first marriage families have the least uncertainty in their family and the least avoidance in explaining the state of their family, followed by children in post-divorce families, and then children in stepfamilies. This finding reveals tensions in family relationships are least perceived in first marriage families and increase due to divorce or remarriage. This notion is echoed in Laumann-Billings and Emery's (2000) research stating distress about family life is more prevalent in adult children from divorced families than adult children from married families. Divorce displays certain dialectical tensions within the family dynamic and has a significant impact on parent-child relationships.

Secondly, Afifi (2003) explores how children can 'feel caught' in post-divorce families. In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 stepfamilies and two dialectical tensions and multiple themes emerged that help reveal conflict within a divorced family. One theme explains

how many children feel 'caught' in their family when their privacy boundaries of communication are broken. Inappropriate disclosures from parents to their children about the other parent or circumstances surrounding the divorce led to broken privacy boundaries (Afifi, 2003). Children felt caught when their parents discussed the divorce with them because the messages about the other parent were hurtful or made them feel uncomfortable. Even further, some parents would avoid confronting their former spouse, forcing the children to relay information to them instead. This proves problematic for the children and made them feel 'caught' between their parents. This inappropriate request to exchange information between former spouses creates the first dialectical tension of loyalty-disloyalty that is seen in many post-divorce families. The children wanted to be both loyal to their parents, but also felt the pressure to only be loyal to one and disloyal to another. The second dialectical tension of revelation-concealment is also evident in this post-divorce family research when the parents disclose too much information about the divorce to their children (Afifi, 2003). Children want their parents to be open with them, but they do not want to hear them speak openly or negatively about their former spouse. These contradicting emotions can even be carried over from childhood into adulthood where although most children from divorced families function normally in youth, as young adults they might become disturbed by a divorce from many years ago (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000).

In a third study, Afifi and McManus explore the communal coping dilemmas in post-divorced families (2006). The dialectic of openness-closedness is seen in post-divorce research where adult children want to speak openly, but may not want detailed information and desire their parents to be ambiguous in divorce related topics (Afifi & McManus, 2006; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011). Included in the dialectic of openness-closedness, is the difficulty parents encounter when regulating whether or not to cope communally with their children about

financial issues or difficulties. Parents sometimes misdirect their stress from divorce onto their children, who in turn can either reject responsibility for the stressor, or assume a level of responsibility for it. One stressor can be from the previously mentioned openness of financial difficulties. This transference of stress can lead to a difficulty in coping with divorce and can lead children to be anxious, depressed, and possibly unhappy in their relationships (Afifi & McManus, 2006). Half siblings are likely to perceive these tensions with the shared biological parent if the family recently went through a divorce or if the individual is harboring the stress of one of his or her biological parents due to divorce.

Divorce Conflict Management

The most frequent conflict management strategy employed in divorced families is avoidance. Afifi et al. (2008) determined many parents and children of divorce use Petronio's (1991) Communication Privacy Management theory where they avoid talking about certain topics and engage in avoidance behaviors to protect themselves or others. This strategy influences family members of divorce to put up boundaries between them that are hard to break down. The more trustworthy a person is, the more likely a child of divorce will share information with them. Children from divorced families are likely to avoid talking about one parent in front of the other to avoid confrontation (Afifi et al., 2008). Although not necessarily healthy, avoidance is one strategy to circumvent conflict within a divorced family.

Divorce creates particular tensions when a family restructures from a traditional family to a divorced family. Further, different tensions can be seen when a divorced family restructures again into a stepfamily. Although stepfamilies can form as a result of a parental death followed by remarriage, stepfamilies are more likely to form from divorced couples (Glick & Lin, 1986).

Restructuring a family from a divorced family to a new dynamic as a stepfamily creates additional tensions.

Dialectical Tensions in Stepfamilies

A stepfamily is identified by one parent having children that are not related to their current spouse and instead are connected by remarriage only. One or both of the parents may introduce biological children from a previous marriage into the newly formed family. There is a multitude of complications that can arise within stepfamilies, between stepsiblings, and while parenting stepchildren.

For example, stepchildren spend less time with their stepfather than with their biological father or even their biological father who is a nonresident of their regular household (Hofferth & Anderson, 2003); however, stepparents still have a great impact on how the family communicates with one another. Couples will sometimes use their experience from their previous marriage as a guide for a new developing stepfamily. Stepparents may even hold the same expectations they had in the first marriage (Cissna et al., 1990). This can be one of the many causes for tension within stepfamilies.

Past research shows distinct dialectical tensions that are evident in the stepfamily dynamic. The dialectic of autonomy-connection is seen in stepfamilies, especially involving adolescent children. Adolescent stepchildren wanted to feel connected to their stepparent, but also wanted to be independent from them (Speer & Trees, 2007). Stepchildren who reported being more satisfied with their family relationship engaged in more connection seeking behavior. Stepchildren who exhibited autonomy-seeking behaviors towards their stepparents showed negative reports of family satisfaction (Speer & Trees, 2007). The dialectical tension of loyalty-disloyalty was also seen within stepfamilies. Stepchildren report feeling “caught” between their

custodial and noncustodial parents in stepfamilies (Afifi, 2003). In turn, parents also expressed the tension of loyalty-disloyalty between the children in the stepfamily. Privacy boundaries frequently support this dialectical tension and involve parents feeling torn between loyalty to each other and allegiance to their own [biological] children (Afifi, 2003).

Children in stepfamilies display the desire to feel centered in the new family and do not want to feel 'caught' between their residential and nonresidential parent (Braithwaite et al., 2008). This desire is seen through the dialectics of freedom-constraint and openness-closedness in stepfamilies. Children want the freedom to negotiate and communicate with their parents, but also want constraints in parental communication (Braithwaite et al., 2008). Openness-closedness is seen in how both revealing and concealing information can impact the relationship and interaction between parents and their children. Children wanted intimate and open communication, but also wanted a level of closedness where they were free from conversations involving the dismissal or belittlement of the nonresidential parent (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006). Openness-closedness is also characterized by stepparents and their stepchildren wanting expression that involves both candor and discretion (Baxter et al., 2004). Stepchildren had the desire for open communication with their stepparent, but also desire for only favored communication that lacked candor.

The contradiction of distance-closeness is seen in communication with stepparents (Baxter et al., 2004; Schrodts, 2006). Stepparent-stepchild communication is described by the dialectic of integration which is defined by both closeness and distance. Stepchildren reported wanting space and feeling an awkward emotional distance from the stepparent. At the same time, the children reported the desire for emotional closeness with the stepparent, but only if the stepparent desired this closeness as well (Baxter et al., 2004; Schrodts, 2006).

Lastly, the dialectic of parenting-nonparenting emerged in the research of stepfamilies. This dialectic is also referred to as the dialectic of parental status in which the stepparent was and was not granted legitimacy in a parent role (Baxter et al., 2004; Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006). The latter explains children's desire for family authority to reside in one parent (the residential parent) but also desire for both the residential and the stepparent to share parenting authority. The dialectic of parenting-nonparenting is seen by children wanting parental involvement, but also resisting it from the stepparent or nonresidential parent, finding the communication awkward (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006). The dialectics of parenting-nonparenting and openness-closedness are considered a totality of relational dialectics or are interwoven with each other.

Stepfamily Conflict Management

Cissna, Cox, and Bochner (1990) developed a strategy to manage certain conflict within the stepfamily dynamic. The dialectic of freely chosen marital relationship and the not-so-freely chosen stepparent relationship is seen in stepfamilies and a metacommunication process was developed as a coping strategy to help alleviate the tensions these opposing forces create. Cissna, Cox, and Bochner derived this coping strategy from Bateson's (1951) process of metacommunication or communication about communication. Bateson's metacommunication involved discussing cues and propositions regarding codification of the relationship (1951). This concept that discussing or communicating how a family or couple should alter their interpersonal communication served as a basis for this conflict management strategy within stepfamilies.

In order to apply a metacommunication process to cultivate this dialectic, the couple needs to accomplish two tasks. First the couple needs to establish the unity of the marriage in the minds of the children by making clear statements that their marriage is important and they are an undivided, strong couple. The couple then needs to use that strong marital front to establish

credibility of the stepparent as an authority in the family (Cissna et al., 1990). For example, a child's biological mother and new stepfather should engage in conversations during dinner that include statements of thankfulness for one another and declaration of love for one another. This conversation, if repeated at regular dinner times, will reinstate the couple's unity and commitment to the children. This same couple must then incorporate statements and conversations where they declare that disciplinary decisions will be made as a single unit, having both the biological mother and stepfather agreeing to a co-parent discipline. This especially requires the biological mother to declare her agreement with the new policy and support of her new husband. The unity and statements of devotion for each other, coupled with the mutual decision to discipline the children as a single unit, helps bridge this dialectical tension because the children understand this action is out of unity, love, and their biological parent credits the stepfather to be a co-disciplinarian. Understanding how to discipline in a stepfamily is important because intensity of parent-child conflict varies as a function of the family structure (Montemayor, 1986); therefore, parenting and discipline techniques must be altered to fit specific family structures.

Many dialectical tensions emerge in the relational communication of stepfamilies. Everyday talk and the satisfaction of stepfamilies vary widely due to unique characteristics of different stepfamily relationships and the personalities of the children and parents (Schrodt, Soliz & Braithwaite, 2008); however, dialectical tensions still form. The communication triad that works best for conflict management within stepfamilies occurs when stepchildren experience a sense of "real family" with open communication with both residential parent and stepparent (Baxter, Braithwaite, & Bryant, 2006). This complete triad that creates a functional and positive communicative relationship, was realized through perceptions from adult children. This shows

the importance of family research from the perception of an adult child where higher levels of thinking and maturity are exhibited during interviews. The current study explores the dialectical tensions of half siblings through this same “adult child’s” perspective.

The dialectical tensions of stepfamilies are important in half sibling research because similar tensions are perceived in this type of family dynamic and successful communication techniques for blended families are unveiled. A stepfamily can be expanded to a blended family by the remarried couple-producing children together. A blended family is a bit more complicated than a stepfamily and can include stepchildren, biological children, and half siblings. This further complex dynamic of blended families and the inclusion of half siblings creates a unique set of conflict and tension.

Many consider a remarried couple with existing children who then have children together, as forming a “second family”. This second family refers to the parent starting over as the father or mother to children who do not share the same biological parents as their existing children, therefore creating a whole new family unit different from the one formed by the previous marriage or relationship. Research has yet to fully untangle the complex web of “second families”, thus the need for half sibling research. Research on blended families can serve as a base to further research into the relationship between half siblings and their shared biological parent.

Dialectical Tensions in Blended Families

There is minimal research on blended families and existing blended family studies mainly focus on one dialectical tension. Braithwaite and Baxter (1998) explore this dialectical opposition of the “old family” and the “new family” in blended families. This includes difficulties around rituals performed in the old and new family dynamic. Rituals can change in

the new family dynamic, other rituals will cease to exist, and new rituals will form. Some rituals will cease to happen because in the child's eyes the old family (the biological parents) did the ritual best or continuing this ritual could hurt the feelings of the new family. Creating new rituals within a blended family can be problematic by possibly leaving members from the old family out. One example of the tension created by this dialectic can be seen around holidays. A family may have a particular ritual for opening presents on Christmas morning, but after their parents divorce and remarry, the ritual changes. The new blended family includes a family that opens presents on Christmas Eve. This change of holiday ritual may cause tension in the family when one ritual will be chosen over the other; therefore, one "family" will be chosen over the other. Rituals are also included in Baxter, Braithwaite, and Nicholson's (1999) discussion of how turning points affect family communication.

Conflict occurs around turning points in all relationships (Baxter, Braithwaite & Nicholson, 1999), and family relationships are no exception. When a change occurs in the household configuration, such as divorce or introducing new members to the original family dynamic (i.e. remarriage, stepsiblings or half siblings and creation of a blended family), conflict can ensue. Besides household configuration, perceived tension in blended families occurs most during conflict, holidays, special events, or family crisis (Baxter, Braithwaite & Nicholson, 1999). Although studies on blended families show evidence of the evolutionary theory where the differences children perceive in their biological father and stepfather disappear (Hofferth & Anderson, 2003), tensions may still arise due to this complex family dynamic.

Further research is needed on the dialectical tensions in families that "start over" (blended families). Specifically, we do not fully understand the effects sharing a biological parent with a half sibling can have in an untraditional family dynamic. This shared parent will

either be a half sibling's biological mother or father. Understanding the different parenting tactics of mothers and fathers is important to the study of half siblings, because these differences may help define or recognize certain tensions that develop in this relationship due to parenting. Further, exploring the notion of parents as friends is needed to identify particular tensions that might arise in the relationship. Finally, research on the relationship between parents and their children as adults is necessary to help explain the tensions half siblings perceive as adults.

Parenting

Motherhood and Fatherhood

If a half sibling is female and her shared biological parent is her mother, it is important to keep in mind key research on mothering. Daughters report more disagreements with mothers in adolescents than fathers (Laursen, 2005). Female half siblings who share their mother with a half sibling may perceive more tension than male participants who share a biological father. Children with single or unmarried mothers report more conflict than remarried mothers (Laursen, 2005). Research also shows mothers become more open about their feelings with their residential children after a divorce, sometimes disclosing circumstances of the divorce that places too much responsibility on the children (Afifi, 2003). This causes children to sometimes assume the position of peer or co-parent to their mother.

In the same way mothering research is needed in the study of half siblings, so too is research on fatherhood. Hofferth and Anderson (2003) explore fatherhood and stepfatherhood and explain evolutionary theory leads children to perceive their stepfather to have less fathering attitudes than biological fathers. Evolutionary theory states that biology matters more than marriage does, although this difference sometimes disappears in blended families (Hofferth & Anderson, 2003). Further, fathers who are unmarried spend just as much time with their children

as they would if not divorced from the mother. If the father remarries, children will spend more time with him than with a stepfather or partner of their mother. Additionally, children are known to spend less time with their stepfather than their nonresidential biological father after a divorce. The existence of a stepfather also appears to make adolescent children desire the practices and investments of their biological father more (Hofferth & Anderson, 2003). Hofferth and Anderson's sociological perspective to fatherhood explains that fathers spend more time, do more activities, and are warmer with the biological children with whom they lived with longer. Divorce proves to affect fatherhood by causing the children to perceive their father as less engaged and less warm (Hofferth & Anderson, 2003; Stewart, 2003).

This notion parallels Stewart's (2003) research identifying fathers as more comfortable discussing grades and school related activities than personal issues. Fathers who show more authoritative parenting behaviors correlate with children having negative feelings towards them (Stewart, 2003). This might explain the difference in tensions perceived by half siblings whose shared biological parent is their nonresidential father. Research also shows being close with a nonresidential biological father leads to emotional distress for children (Stewart, 2003) possibly creating tension that will resurface in half sibling research.

Parents as Friends

Rawlins (1995) made considerable contributions to the study of dialectical tensions. Rawlins explored six dialectical tensions occurring in the continual communication within friendships. Rawlins's findings include the dialectics of private and public; ideal and the real; freedom to be independent and the freedom to be dependent; affection and instrumentality; judgment and acceptance; and expressiveness and protectiveness (Rawlins, 2000).

Understanding the common dialectics of communication in friendships is vital to the study of the relationship between half siblings and their shared biological parent, because past research shows some children consider their parents to be *friends* (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006). Baxter and Braithwaite (2006) determined the dialectical tension of parenting-nonparenting in the relationship between children and the biological parent who does not live with them. This dialectical tension explains how children want their nonresidential parent to be involved, but also resist that involvement at the same time referring to the communication as awkward and challenging. Many children viewed their nonresidential parent as more of a buddy or friend than parental figure, leading to the parenting-nonparenting dialectic (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006). The same tensions apply in the research of half siblings if the shared biological parent is also the nonresidential parent and someone whom they consider more of a friend than parental figure.

A lack of research on adult sibling relationships is due in part to the assumption that siblings have little contact and or little influence upon each other after childhood (Cicerelli, 1995). This assumption explains the importance of sibling and blended family research from an adult perspective. Relationships evolve over time and the relationship you have with your parents as a child may differ from your relationship with your parents as an adult (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Understanding the relationship between parents and their grown children is needed before continuing half sibling research from this particular perspective.

Parent-Adult Children Relationships

College age students and their parents may be more satisfied with and more secure in their relationships than a more general population (La Valley & Guerrero, 2012). Young adults are also more tolerant of one another's insecurities in family relationships. Parents with adult

children report using more compromising, collaborating, and yielding action; yet, their adult children report using more competitive fighting, avoiding, and indirect fighting. This could reflect a maturity level where parents are able to control negative emotions during conflict and focus on how to solve the conflict more than adult children (La Valley & Guerrero, 2012). Half siblings in the adult children age range are subject to perceive more tension or conflict than participants from a younger or older age group. Further, the change principle in relational dialectics explains how relationships are constantly changing and evolving (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) leaving the relationships children have with their parents as adults distinctly different from their relationships with them as children.

Parent-child relationships are not isolated from the relationships between siblings. Sibling relationships can affect parent relationships and vice versa. Although the main focus of this research is not the relationship between half siblings, understanding the basics of sibling relationships provides insight into the tensions that arise in the relationship with the shared biological parent of half siblings.

Siblings

Older children tend to protect their younger siblings (Anderson, 1999), possibly leading to a closer perceived bond in disclosure from older half siblings. Females also have more positivity, empathy, and directness (Anderson, 1999), possibly leading to more disclosure from female half siblings in this study than male. Siblings also serve as buffers against the negative impact of family stress on their other siblings (Cohen et al., 2002). If a half sibling is the buffer in his or her half sibling relationship, more tensions might arise due to added stress of protecting their sibling. Shared environments also affect relationships, implying the impact siblings living

in the same house can have on perceived tension. However, a shared environment is more crucial in the development of brother relationships (Anderson, 1999).

Research exists on the general knowledge of siblings; however, there is little research on the unique relationship of half siblings. Most research on half siblings is briefly included in the research on other sibling types, such as full biological siblings or stepsiblings. Research is also limiting due to studies conflating half siblings and stepsiblings in a common group, juxtaposed against full biological siblings. The few studies including half sibling research are addressed and explained next.

Half Siblings

Roe, Bridges, Dunn, and O'Connor (2006) identified how children view their family through interpretations of children's drawings. This longitudinal study asked five-year-olds to draw a picture of their family. Two years later, the same participants were instructed again to draw their family. 80% of the then seven-year-olds stayed consistent with their drawing content, proving their drawings reflected their perceptions of family life and not their current mood towards their siblings. Half siblings and stepsiblings were more likely to be excluded from young children's drawings than biological siblings were, creating a link in full biological relativeness. A link was also seen between siblings who lived in the same home, because nonresidential siblings were often left out of drawing (Roe et al., 2006).

White and Riedman (1992) also looked at half siblings, although their study was conducted over twenty-five years ago, possibly leaving out current trends in stepfamily and blended family dynamics. White and Riedman used a national survey of households to compare frequency of contact between step and half siblings versus full siblings. Results determined participants had significantly lower contact with half and stepsiblings than they do with full

siblings. Moreover, children in remarried families gave priority to full over step and half siblings, but maintained both types of relationships into adulthood (White & Riedman, 1992).

Mikkelson, Floyd, and Pauley (2011) looked at six different types of sibling relationships to determine social support within adult sibling relationships. Sibling relationship types included identical twins, fraternal twins, full biological twins, half-biological siblings, stepsiblings, and adopted siblings. Surveys revealed siblings who are more genetically related to one another receive more social support than siblings who are less genetically related. Identical twins receive the most social support from siblings with 100% of shared genetics, followed by fraternal twins and biological siblings who share 50% of genetic relatedness with their siblings, and lastly half siblings who share 25% of sibling DNA (Mikkelson, Floyd & Pauley, 2011). This research is in contrast to Anderson's (1999) research proving an almost full biological connection among half siblings.

Anderson (1999) briefly explores half siblings in his general sibling research and characterizes half sibling relationships as displaying more negativity, aggression, and heightened rivalry than in stepsibling relationships. Although these aspects are greater in half sibling relationships, half siblings see their relationship with their half sibling(s) as the same as a full biological sibling (Anderson, 1999). This strong connection between half siblings led to the contemplation of whether the relationship with their shared biological parent was as strong; further, to the curiosity of what tensions do half siblings encounter with their shared biological parent. This resulted in my main research question.

Research Questions

RQ1: What dialectical tensions do adult children perceive in their relationship with the biological parent they share with a half sibling(s)?

Although the purpose of this study is to identify and make meaning of the relationship between a child and a parent who has “started over” with a second family, this relationship does not develop in isolation of other relationships within this complex family dynamic, especially the relationship between the half siblings. This connection between half siblings and the parent they share also resulted in the second research question:

RQ2: What dialectical tensions do adult children perceive in their relationship with their half sibling(s)?

Relational dialectics theory has explored the difficult relationships within families. There is extensive research on divorced and stepfamilies, but research on blended families that include half siblings is largely left out of literature. Little is known about how parent-child relationships are affected when a biological parent “starts over” and creates a second family. A relational dialectic approach was used to identify the tensions within this complex family dynamic by attaining detailed and descriptive data of half sibling’s experiences with their parents and with their siblings. The dialectical tensions that emerged were accompanied with possible conflict management strategies to apply in blended families that include half siblings.

The definition of family is changing. Family is no longer narrowly defined as two married parents and their biological children (Holtzman, 2008). Research on the tension perceived in the relationship between half siblings and their shared biological parent could help society gain further understanding on blended families and the untraditional family dynamic. More than half of marriages today end in divorce, making research on different family dynamics important to determine successful communication strategies for untraditional family types that are becoming the standard in our society. This research helps shed light on how parents starting second families affect the relational communication with and between their children. This

research also gathers further understanding of how the relationship with their shared biological parent is challenged, changed, and affected due to parenting another child with someone who is not biologically related to them. Half sibling research is beneficial in exploring different types of family dynamics and contributes to research on divorce, stepfamilies, remarriage, blended families, parenting, and siblings.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD & PROCEDURES

The complex nature of blended families and the role half sibling relationships play within this dynamic deserves scholarly attention. To date, not much is known about half siblings and their relationship with their shared biological parent. To better understand this relationship, this study applies a relational dialectic perspective to better understand the communication within blended families.

Paradigmatic Rationale

As a qualitative method, relational dialectics falls under the interpretive paradigm where the goal of the theory is to produce understanding and meaning-making (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). Qualitative research is a form of inquiry where you conduct research in a natural setting and analyze the disclosure of participants in order to explore and understand a social or human problem (Creswell, 1998). A researcher's goal is to interpret the lives of participants and make meaning of the everyday experiences in their lives. The design to this study was in this qualitative/interpretive paradigm where understanding of the complex experiences of half siblings was achieved through a qualitative interview study.

Participants

Criteria for Participation

In order to participate in this study, participants had to meet two criteria. First, the participant must have one or more half siblings. Participants were only required to have one half sibling, although some participants had many half siblings. Participants also varied in family

composition, number of siblings, sibling types (stepsiblings, half siblings, biological siblings), and birth order (See Table 2). All participants were half siblings and reflected upon their relationship with their shared biological parent. Participants with half siblings from each biological parent were asked to disclose about each relationship separately.

The second criterion for participation required participants to be between the ages of 19 and 30 years old. Age was required because participants in this age range are at the age to best reflect on their past and current relationship with the shared biological parent, and can reflect on how the relationship has evolved overtime from their childhood into adulthood. Further, the basis of the research is on how adult children perceive this relationship. Recruitment began only after submitting all study material and an interview protocol to the Institutional Review Board and receiving approval (see Appendix A).

Sample and Recruitment

Sample

Participants in my study were 17 adult children who have at least one half sibling. Recruitment procedures, interviews, and analysis stopped at saturation. Saturation is a verification process that means the research has obtained “sufficient data to account for all aspects of the phenomenon” (Morse et al., 2002, pg. 18). Saturating data also confirms the comprehension and completeness of the data (Morse, 1991). Interviews were conducted until a redundancy in the emerging themes or patterns appeared and no further categories emerged (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). All interview participants (17) met the required criteria and were used in data analysis. As indicated in Table 1, among the 17 participants, the slight majority were female with 9 (52.9%), while 8 (47.1%) were male. As required for participation, all participants were between the ages of 19 and 30; however, all participants fell between the ages

of 19 and 24 with an average age of 20.41. In reference to race, the majority of participants identified as White/Caucasian, with 10 (58.8%) followed by 4 African American/Black participants (23.5%), 2 Hispanics (11.8%), and 1 other (5.9%).

Table 1. Sample Demographic Descriptions

Variables	Category	Frequencies	Percentage
Sex	Male	8	47.1
	Female	9	52.9
	Total	17	100%
Age	19	6	35.3
	20	4	23.5
	21	3	17.65
	22	3	17.65
	23	0	0.0
	24	1	5.9
	Total	17	100%
Race	Hispanic	2	11.8
	African American/Blacks	4	23.5
	Whites/Caucasian	10	58.8
	Others	1	5.9
	Total	17	100%

As shown in Table 2, most participants (10, 58.8%) had a father who was the biological parent they share with a half sibling(s). Four participants (23.5%) identified their mother as the shared biological parent, and three (17.7%) had half siblings from both parents. As expected, most half siblings were products from a remarriage after a divorce (14, 82.35%). Two half siblings (11.8%) were from a previous unwed relationship of the shared biological parent and one (5.9%) participant revealed their half sibling was born from a relationship after a parental death (post-bereavement). The residence of the shared biological parent was evenly split. Seven participants (41.15%) identified their shared biological parent as the residential parent or parent they live/lived with for the majority of their life. Seven other participants (41.15%) identified their shared biological parent as the non-residential parent who lives/lived outside their home. The three remaining participants (17.7%) had half siblings from both their residential and

non-residential parents. Finally, the majority of participants were from a blended family structure that included both half and stepsiblings at 8 (47%). Six (35.3%) participants had half siblings and full biological siblings, and three (17.7%) only had half siblings. A majority of participants were from a divorced family that restructured into a stepfamily. However, the most common family structure was the blended family including step, half, and sometimes full biological siblings.

Table 2. Family Composition Descriptions

Variables	Category	Frequencies	Percentage
Shared Biological Parent Gender	Mother	4	23.5
	Father	10	58.8
	Has Half Sibling(s) from Both Parents	3	17.7
	Total	17	100%
Birth Order	Older than Half Sibling(s)	10	58.8
	Younger than Half Sibling(s)	5	29.4
	Has Older and Younger Half Sibling(s)	2	11.8
	Total	17	100%
Sibling Type	Has Half Siblings & Stepsibling(s)	8	47.0
	Has Half Siblings & Full Biological Sibling(s)	6	35.3
	Has Half Siblings Only	3	17.7
	Total	17	100%
Shared Biological Parent Residence	*SBP is the Residential Parent	7	41.15
	SBP is the Non-Residential Parent	7	41.15
	Has Half Sibling(s) from Both Parents	3	17.7
	Total	17	100%
Circumstance of Half Sibling	From Divorced and Remarried Relationship	14	82.3
	From Previous Never Married Relationship	2	11.8
	From Relationship Post-Bereavement	1	5.9
	Total	17	100%

*SBP = Shared Biological Parent

Participants must have met certain criteria in order to participate and therefore are defined as a purposive sample. Purposive sampling refers to “selecting particular units (e.g., individuals, groups of individuals, institutions) based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study’s questions” (Teddlie & Yu, 2007, pg. 77). This research uses purposive sampling because a particular group of people was needed: half siblings. By using this

sampling technique, participants were deliberately selected based on the information they can provide on a specific subject or experience that others would not identify with, because they are not a half sibling (Maxwell, 1997).

Recruitment

In order to find participants who met the above criteria, participants were first recruited through personal contacts. Personal contacts were asked if they knew anyone who had one or more half siblings between the ages of 19 and 30 who were willing to participate. Interested participants were given contact information and instructed to contact via email stating they are willing to participate and met the criteria. Contact through email was used to preserve participant identity and to discuss interview times. Participants recruited from personal contacts were also asked if they knew anyone who meets the criteria and were willing to participate through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique that uses possible participants as a source for locating other participants who meet the criteria (Lindlof, 1995). Participants were instructed to forward study contact information to others who met the criteria and were willing to participate. Many participants recruited through personal contacts and snowball sampling were students at a large Southeastern University.

Participants were also recruited through advertisements (see Appendix D). Flyers were placed around the communication building at the same large Southeastern University to seek participants. The flyer included contact information and the criteria for participation. Network sampling was also used to find participants. Network sampling is a technique that calls for participants through the researcher's social and professional networks (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). Network sampling was conducted through an online *Facebook*¹ advertisement. The *Facebook* post was posted to the researcher's personal *Facebook* page, asking for participants who have

one or more half siblings to participate if willing to volunteer for the study. The *Facebook* advertisement also included criteria for participation and contact information.

Interview Procedures

Interviews are one way to study relationships and can reveal participant's true feelings, memories, and thoughts (Charina & Ickes, 2006). Using interviews provided comprehensive and detailed accounts of the relationships between adult children and the biological parent they share with a half sibling. A question set was created to correlate with the study of relational dialectics and to parallel past research detailing dialectical tensions in relationships (see Appendix C).

Interview Procedure

13 of the 17 (76.5%) interviews were conducted in a conference room inside the communication building on a large Southeastern University campus. This room was secure, private, and participants were able to disclose information safely. Before the actual interview, participants were emailed an informed consent form (see Appendix B). Participants had the option of printing their own consent form to bring to the interview; or, if the participant did not have a printer, a blank consent form was provided for them at the interview site to review and sign. Interviews were also offered virtually through the online software *Skype*² if participants were unable to attend an on-site interview. 4 (23.5%) of the interviews were conducted through this software and participants were instructed to hold the interview in a private room with no interaction with other people. Online interviewees were instructed through email to print, scan, sign, and email the consent form back before interview times could be scheduled. All interview times were determined through email and were set at a time of convenience for the participant. The main investigator was the only one present and conducting the interviews and all participants were provided with the option of not answering any of the questions in the interview.

Interviews were audio recorded and handwritten notes were made during the interviews. After interviews were completed, recordings were transcribed using pseudonyms.

Type of Interview

Data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews that included open-ended and depth-probing questions. Semi-structured interviews are characterized by having a general structure in advance of the interview that includes questions the researcher will ask each participant (Drever, 1995). These questions are covered in all interviews but will elicit different responses where the participants explain their own personal experiences. Semi-structured interviews follow a set interview schedule (list of questions), but allow the researcher to include other questions that may deviate from the prepared questions. The prepared questions in semi-structured interviews are structured depending on a researcher's concerns or theoretical framework (Wengraf, 2001). Using semi-structured interviews is important to the research of half siblings because specific questions are designed to determine the conflicts that exist between the participants and their shared biological parent. These questions were constructed with knowledge of relational dialectics and the contradictions that arise within relationships.

Open-ended questions allowed participants to provide thick descriptions of their life experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Interviews also included depth-probing questions where researchers "peruse all points of interest with variant expressions that mean 'tell me more' and 'explain'." (Glesne, 2011, p. 134). Depth-probing questions were needed to instruct the participant to explain their experiences more or clarify their interpretation of a particular event or encounter.

Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes to an hour and were comprised of questions referring to the relationship between the participant and their shared biological parent.

Participants were instructed to disclose as much information as they felt comfortable in response to each question, allowing for detailed and descriptive data. The same questions were asked from an interview schedule to each participant, along with open-ended questions that arose spontaneously depending on the responses of participants, and depth-probing questions that requested the participants to elaborate or disclose further on their experiences.

Interview Questions

At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked if they had any questions or concerns about the interview or the consent form. If the interview was on site, consent forms were collected before the interview began. The beginning of each interview (before questions from the interview schedule were asked) was reserved for friendly conversations elicited by the researcher to make the participant feel comfortable. These conversations were brief, but included discussions of the weather, their hometown, hobbies, or year in school. These conversations proved necessary to achieving rapport with the participants and gaining their trust to disclose information about their personal relationships. After bonding conversations, the study was briefly explained to each participant to reinstate the overall purpose of the study noted in the consent form. Participants were told the study aims to understand the relationship between half siblings and the parent they share, and that questions pertaining to those relationships would be asked. Participants were asked to disclose as much information as they felt comfortable and that the option of withdrawing from the interview and research at any point during the interview existed, as well as skipping any of the interview questions.

The first question participants were asked was to describe the ideal parent-child relationship. This question was designed to elicit each participant's vision of what the ideal parent-child relationship or family *should* look like. This question was followed by asking how

they would describe their own family (“Describe your family to me.”). These two questions were juxtaposed to reveal how the participant feels their parent-child relationships or family differs from their perceptions of other families or how their own family/relationships are failing in comparison to others.

When asked to describe their family, participants were also prompted to reveal their family composition. This question provided information on how many siblings and the types of siblings (biological, half, step) of each participant. This question also provided information on if the participant has stepparents. The participants were also asked to explain their current living situation, revealing diverse living situations across participants. This is a notable factor to half sibling research due to findings conducted on residential and non-residential parent-child relationships (Stewart, 2003; Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006). Table 2 details the many family compositions between participants.

The following questions in the interview were designed to determine the conflicts that exist between the participants and their shared biological parent. These questions were designed to allow participants an opportunity to reflect on their parent-child relationships.

1. How involved in your life is your shared biological parent?
2. If anything, what would you want to improve on in your relationship with the shared biological parent?
3. Does your relationship with the shared biological parent differ from your other parental relationships? (step-parent relationships, other biological parent relationship)

These questions identified how the participant values or devalues their parental relationships and revealed if participants have a positive or negative relationship with their shared biological parent. Further, the question “Describe your family’s transition once your half sibling(s) was

born” was used to identify how these parent-child relationships changed since introducing a half sibling(s) into the family dynamic.

Other questions were designed to extract the conflict the participant perceives in the relationship with the shared biological parent.

1. Can you talk about any changes, if any, you’ve seen in your relationship with the shared biological parent since your half sibling was born? (If younger than half sibling, do you perceive any differences in your relationship with your shared biological parent and your half sibling(s) relationship with the shared biological parent?)
2. Describe ways having a half sibling impacts your relationship with the biological parent you share?
3. Describe the most recent fight you had with the shared biological parent. Describe it to me. What and whom did it involve? Was the fight resolved? If so, how was the fight resolved?

These questions allowed the participant to describe narratives or stories that involve confrontation in their relationship with the shared biological parent. These questions also provided detailed information and examples of the tensions that occur in this parent-child relationship.

Although the focus of this research was mainly on how adults perceive their relationship with their shared biological parent, this parent-child relationship was not isolated from a participant’s interactions with their half sibling(s). Therefore, concluding questions inquired about the participant’s relationship with their half sibling. These questions included the following.

1. Describe the ideal half sibling relationship.

2. Describe your relationship with your half sibling.
3. What do you think is the biggest challenge with having a half sibling with whom you only shared one biological parent?
4. What advice would you give others who have a half sibling(s)?

These questions provided opportunities to engage in conversations with participants about their experiences and relationships. Further, while participants were disclosing personal information about their lives and sharing stories, they were also making sense and applying meaning to these relationships. A semi-structured interview technique allowed me to identify the dialectical tensions most perceived between adult children and the biological parent they share with a half sibling.

Data Analysis

Interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed using pseudonyms to insure participant anonymity. Transcriptions were printed off, coded, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Glesne (2011) explains thematic analysis as an analytical technique where a researcher looks for themes and patterns throughout their data. To determine the dialectical tensions, themes throughout interviews were identified and the patterns of tensions evident across interviews as a whole were determined. Thematic analysis requires data coding where researchers define what the data means (Gibbs, 2007) and provides researchers an opportunity to determine tensions and contradictions through interpretive coding techniques. Coding is a “progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting scraps of collected data that are applicable to a research purpose” (Glesne, 2011, p. 194). To determine the dialectical tensions in half sibling/shared biological parent relationships, analytic coding (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) was used in conjunction with a four-part review process designed by the researcher.

Analytical coding is a process within thematic analysis where researchers develop codes and categories to identify major themes of importance to a particular study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), in this case to identify perceived contradictions in the relationships within a blended family. Further, emerging codes are compared to prior data collected within a study to identify newly formed categories as well. Codes in this study were determined by the nature of events and relationships expressed by the participant: specifically, disclosure of positive and negative events, emotions, or communication within their family relationships.

Analytical coding was achieved through four steps. First, all interviews were reviewed as a whole to gain familiarity with the data and to identify what different family compositions participants were a part of (see Table 2). Each participant's pseudonym name was drawn on a large poster and codes were written below the corresponding participant. During the second review, each interview transcription was reviewed individually and coded for particular conflicts participants said they experienced in their relationships. Conflict was determined by participants expressing negative emotions or disclosing a confrontational moment within a relationship. For example, one participant expressed they felt abandoned when their shared biological parent went to their half sibling's sporting events but never appeared for a single game of theirs. The themes of abandonment and favoritism were categorized as a conflict between this participant and their shared biological parent. Perceived conflicts were placed in two sections below each participant's name to identify if the conflict was between half siblings or a parent and child. On the third review, each individual interview was reviewed again to see if any comments or explanations from the participant contradicted or opposed the conflicts they said they experienced. For example, the participant who disclosed feeling abandoned also expressed wanting space from the shared biological parent, contradicting his original plea for connection.

Contradicting opposites were identified on the poster by connecting lines. In the final review, all interview transcriptions were reviewed again as a whole to identify the codes of conflicts and contradictions that were most common. This final step was completed by grouping codes to identify themes and counting the recurrences to see which themes were most prevalent among participants as a whole. The most recurrent conflicts and their correlating opposites were then identified as the dialectical tensions most perceived in the relationships between the participants and their shared biological parent or between the participants and their half sibling(s).

Lastly, validity of the research was established through negative case analysis. To attain trustworthiness and validity of data, negative case analysis was used. This verification strategy seeks out negative cases that are essential to the research and ensures validity by indicating aspects of the developing analysis that are initially less obvious (Morse et al., 2008). This process was used to refine and confirm the patterns emerging from data analysis. In order to understand the patterns and trends that were emerging from the data, the researcher noted exceptions that did not fit these trends, yet simultaneously confirmed them. For example, the researcher was interested in seeing how having a half sibling affected the relationship between an adult half sibling and his or her shared biological parent, and prove this relationship was altered due to a parent producing a child with someone else who is not biologically related to their existing children. To the researcher's surprise, some participants noted they did not feel having a half sibling affected this relationship *at all*. However, the researcher unveiled these statements of a lack of change did not hold true (or exist in reality) when examples of conflict were expressed throughout the remainder of the interviews with these same participants. These participants said they did not feel the relationship was affected by having a half sibling; however, later in the interview they would provide narrative examples of their shared biological parent

spending less time with them due to parenting their half sibling or a fight that occurred due to a change in a ritual event. These negative cases of displaying the relationship between a parent and adult half sibling child as unchanged were disproven by disclosure that expressed existing conflict in those parent-child relationships. Negative case analysis was used to identify participant disclosures that offered a differing viewpoint from other participants; however, these respondent's experiences were used to help confirm the dominant patterns identified through data analysis.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

As discussed in the first chapter, the three main families of contradictions most evident in relational dialectics research were integration-separation, stability-change, and expression-nonexpression (Baxter, Braithwaite, Bryant & Wagner, 2004). Reasonably, these three main families of contradictions were also seen in the relationship between half siblings and their shared biological parent. However, the tensions within these contradictions were expressed differently when internalized within a dyad and externalized between participants and those outside their parental or sibling relationships. Common themes in the study are identified first, followed by the dialectical tensions and various conflict management strategies. The dialectical tensions in each relationship (between participant and shared biological parent; between half siblings) will be broken down by internalized and externalized tensions (see Table 3).

Table 3. Typology of Dialectical Contradictions

Relationship	Placement of Tension	Dialectic of Integration-Separation	Dialectic of Stability-Change	Dialectic of Expression-Nonexpression	Other
With Shared Biological Parent (RQ1)	Internal	Autonomy-Connection	Predictability-Novelty	Openness-Closedness	Parent Before-Parent After
	External	Inclusion-Seclusion	Conventionality-Uniqueness	Revelation-Concealment	
With Half Sibling(s) (RQ2)	Internal	Autonomy-Connection			
	External	Inclusion-Seclusion		Revelation-Concealment	

Common Themes

Before the dialectical tensions are revealed, importance should be placed on three themes that were consistently mentioned alongside the perceived conflict in blended families. These themes were said to be a factor in the closeness and success of parent-child and sibling relationships within the blended family dynamic. Reading through the transcripts, the most dominant themes that emerged were residence, age, and evaluation of involvement through activities and these themes were overwhelmingly visible throughout the study.

The most common theme that emerged was residence. Many participants identified residence as a contributing factor to the success or failure of their relationship with their half siblings and their shared biological parent. Many said they feel closer to the parent they live with (the residential parent) even if this parent was also the parent they share with a half sibling. One participant, Tyler, explains how residence is a factor in the closeness of family members. “Oh, [my shared mother] is *a lot* closer with my [half-sister]. Definitely... because they live together and are together with each other every day and see each other every day, and with me, I was splitting time between houses.” Tyler felt residence was the reason his shared biological parent is closer with his half sibling. Participant Dylan also explains that distance has not only affected the closeness in the relationship with his shared biological parent, but also the role this parent now takes on.

My mom did most of the parenting. And that has been different because my dad has been more of the friend because he hasn't had the opportunity to be the parent since he's lived away from me. So my mom was more of the parent and my dad was more of the friend to talk to about little things.

Dylan felt his mother was more of a parent because she lived in the same residence as he did. In contrast, Dylan felt his father was more of a friend because he lived outside his home. This echoes Braithwaite & Baxter's (2006) research on how residence can affect the relationship

between parents and their children. Sibling connection was also considered stronger with the brothers and sisters one lived with, no matter the sibling type. Some participants even said residence caused them to be closer with their stepsiblings than their half siblings. Caitlin explains how this theme affects her sibling relationships.

I was never really around my half-brother a lot or consistently because he lived with our dad, so I think that is why we are not as close. I'm closer with my stepbrothers because they actually lived with me and my mom, so I was around them more.

Further, residence often was used to distinguish between full biological siblings and half siblings. Many participants explained they knew their half sibling was different from a full biological sibling relationship because they did not live with them full time and had to split residences between the shared and non-shared biological parent.

Secondly, the theme of age was mentioned throughout interviews as an aiding component in relationship development. Many participants said they were closer with the siblings who were similar in age. Participants with significantly older half siblings found the relationship to be awkward, challenging, and some considered those sibling relationships to function more like aunts and uncles than brothers and sisters. Participant Michelle explains this awkwardness in her half sibling relationship.

[My half-sister] is 15 years older than me, so she is at a completely different point in her life. Like, she is married with kids! She acts more like an aunt sometimes than a sister. She will send me Christmas presents, and she has been sending me Christmas presents for years, but I never I guess thought of sending them to her all the time because of the awkward dynamic of our relationship.

Michelle used the theme of age to define the difference in her half sibling relationship. The large age difference caused her to compare her siblinghood to a relationship with an aunt, a member who is removed from the immediate family unit. Participant William also explains how age affects his sibling relationships.

I think I have less fights with my [half-siblings] because the age difference. They are so much older than me and the age difference thing is like they are adults and I am a kid. I mean, I have a niece that is older than me... and one that is only a few months younger. People will say, what is wrong with your family? They ask me like how old my dad is because when I tell them how old my mom is and then my [half siblings'] ages, they get all confused!

The age difference between him and his half siblings led William to think of his siblings as more mature than him. Even the ages of his nieces made him feel his connection with his siblings were altered. William notes that he does not fight with his half siblings as much as others might because he thinks of them more as adults than siblings, possibly alleviating moments where sibling rivalry would ensue.

The final theme emerged in conversations about parental or sibling involvement. Most participants identified their parent as being involved if they participated in particular activities. When asked how involved in their life the shared biological parent is, almost every participant explained the participation of their parent or lack thereof by activity examples. These examples included activities such as attending sporting events, hobbies, dance recitals, shopping, or simply driving them to a practice or event. Adult-children determined the involvement of their parent by the activities they participated with them in as children. Tyler, explains.

I would say my dad was the one who raised me. I spent more time with him because he was my baseball coach. As I got more serious in baseball, he was always the one driving me to my tournaments and he was the one who would travel with me every fall and summer until my regular school season started. He was a lot more involved than my mom was.

Tyler evaluated parental involvement around the activities each parent participated in. His father participated in baseball with him, an activity his mother did not share interest in. This activity involvement led Tyler to feel closer with his father than his mother.

This theme was often connected to gender. Female participants often reported being closer with their mothers and male participants closer with their fathers because they enjoy similar activities they considered “gender related”. Participant Brad provides an example:

I am close with both my parents, but I would say because the activities we do with them are different, I am closer with my dad. Growing up I was the boy and my sister was the girl, so I spent more time with my dad because I was interested in things like fishing and Boy Scouts and my sister and mom just wanted to go shopping.

Brad felt mothers made a stronger connection with daughters and fathers with sons, because they shared interests in similar activities that were implied to be related to gender. John mirrors this response when he says, “the ideal father-son relationship would be going fishing together or going to sporting events together.... for a mother and her daughter, probably going shopping together.” John also echoed the theme of activities as involvement, specifically in relation to gender.

Sibling involvement was also expressed through activities. The closeness of half sibling relationships was explained by sharing hobbies, even at the expense of one sibling’s enjoyment.

Participant Martin explains:

I would say we’re pretty close. [My half-brother] and I like watching movies and playing video games, even though I do *not* like playing video games. That is his thing, he loves basketball [video] games, but I do it because he likes it and he definitely brings out my athletic side a little more than anyone else.

As an older half sibling, Martin made sure to participate in a shared hobby to show his half-brother that he is involved in his life. Michelle also explains her half sibling relationship was enhanced by a shared interest in a particular activity. Michelle says, “We watch *The Bachelorette*³ together! And we text during. She even sent me a *US Weekly*⁴ that had the Bachelorette on the cover.” Michelle mentioned this new ritual activity of watching a television show together, made her closer with her half sibling.

Research Question 1 – Relationship with Shared Biological Parent

All three main families of contradictions were evident in the relationship between participants and the biological parent they share with a half sibling. The contradictions manifested in different ways when expressed internally between the participant and their shared biological parent and externally between others outside this relationship. While some dialectical tensions were experienced more than others, all three main families of contradictions were experienced by half siblings in this study. The contradiction of integration-separation was expressed internally as autonomy-connection; stability-change was internalized as predictability-novelty; and expression-nonexpression was seen as openness-closedness between participants and their shared biological parent. A new dialectical tension was also internally formed, the dialectic of the parent before and the parent after. Externally, the contradiction of integration-separation was expressed as inclusion-seclusion; the contradiction of stability-change was expressed as conventionality-uniqueness; and the contradiction of expression-nonexpression was expressed as revelation-concealment. These dialectical tensions convey how the relationship between an adult half sibling and the biological parent they share is often full of tension, change, conflict, and confusion.

Internal Dialectical Tensions

Autonomy-Connection

The most dominantly perceived internal dialectical tension between shared biological parent and child was autonomy-connection. This dialectic was expressed by participants wanting to spend time with their shared biological parent, also wanting independence from them, and refusing to admit that the relationship was altered due to having a half sibling. This dialectic explains a half sibling's need to be connected to their shared biological parent, but also be

distanced or independent from their shared biological parent. Almost every participant said they wished they were closer with the biological parent they share with a half sibling; however, many of participants said having a half sibling did *not* affect this relationship. This idea that having a half sibling did nothing to affect the parental bond was disproven in each interview by the participant expressing frustration, joy, tension, or giving other examples as to how their relationship with the shared biological parent had changed due to parenting another child with someone else. The lack of identifying how having a half sibling affects their relationship shows the need for participants to display their parental relationship as unbroken and fully connected. Participants needed to not only feel a connection within the relationship, but also a need to display this relationship as unbroken to others (in this case, the researcher). Although many complications were noted, some participants described how having a half sibling improved the parental bond with their shared biological parent. Tyler explains how the birth of his half-sister improved his relationship with his shared biological mother and helped in connecting a mother and son.

I think having a half sibling has improved my relationship with my mom. [My half-sister] was something that could bring us together even more so than we were. I wasn't getting along with my mom very much then and now I notice since [my half-sister] was born, we fight less frequently. We got closer because, I mean we both equally love her and she was the center as a little baby, and I was always over there wanting to help out if she ever needed anything.

Tyler felt having a new sibling (his half-sister) helped alleviate the tension in his parental relationship by providing a common focal point between him and his mother. Tyler also explained having a half sibling compelled him to visit his mother more to help with his little half-sister. Another participant, Michelle, says her relationship with her shared biological parent was successful because he had parented a half sibling before and learned from past mistakes.

She explains:

I remember my dad telling me that he use to sit around a basement and smoke pot and I was like what?! He said yes Michelle, remember I got a girl pregnant right out of high school!... because I would forget that my [half-sister] was born then. But now he tells me about these experiences and explains it to me and I understand like why I have these strict rules on dating. It makes him seem more human to me and more real.

Michelle felt her relationship with her shared biological father was more genuine and successful because he could explain what he has learned from the past. Michelle felt their relationship was strengthened by having a point of reference for why her father enforced certain rules: a conversation that would not have existed without her father having her older half sibling. Having an older half sibling allowed Michelle to better understand her father and the rules he instilled within their family, bringing them closer together as parent and child. Although both Tyler and Michelle noted an improvement in their relationship with the shared biological parent once their half sibling was born, tension and change was also determined in this relationship from their interview responses.

Participants also said they wanted to be closer with their shared biological parent and did not like sharing their half sibling. Connection in this dialectic was seen through the theme of time and attention of the shared biological parent. Many participants were bitter over having to share their parent and said splitting time between them was unfair. Participants recalled acting out as a child to gain their shared biological parent's attention, noting the need for parent-child connection. Sarah explains this struggle for time with her shared biological father:

I think the biggest challenge for my older half siblings is probably that they do not feel like they get all the attention from my dad. My [full biological sister] and I get all his time and attention and they only get half, so that causes tension.

Sarah expresses apprehension for her half siblings' struggle to connect with their shared biological parent. Sarah felt connection was sought by all siblings in the family, but the conflict

derived from dividing this attention or time among multiple people. The theme of connection through shared time was also seen within Martin's family dynamic:

I think [my younger half-brother] and I struggled with the fact that I had two dads and he only had one... because I had my [biological] dad and his dad as a stepdad. So when I was little he was kind of jealous that I was sharing his dad and then I also had my own, ya know? So I think that is the biggest concept to kind of understand.

Martin explains that his younger half-brother struggled with sharing parental time, even though this time was not between a participant and a shared biological parent.

At the same time connection was sought, half siblings also wanted to feel independent from their shared biological parent and be free to make decisions without them. Caitlin says that parents should "give children enough space to kind of mature and become your own person". Michelle echoes this need for independence by saying the ideal parent will "let you fail just enough to where you learn. I can tell my dad that I just don't want to talk about something, and he understands that and gives me the space I need." Some participants said their shared biological parent 'tried too hard' after a divorce because they felt guilt for separating the family. Further, after having a half sibling this guilt was amplified and the shared biological parent's force for connection was described as awkward by the participants. Participant Caitlin explains:

My dad got remarried after he divorced my mom within like a year. And then he had my half-brother a year after that, so it was quick. I think he had some guilt that followed the divorce with my mom, and then it became more about [my half-brother] and stepmom and he couldn't really balance his time. But then I guess he would feel bad and get on *Facebook* and add me and my mom and my stepdad and try to connect with us on there. He has tried to reach out to me, my mom, and my stepdad and it's weird!

Caitlin wanted to be connected with her shared biological father, his attempt to connect with her and other members of her family seemed awkward and weird. She resisted this connection and wanted independence or distance from him as well as connection.

Openness-Closedness

The second most perceived internal dialectical tension in the parent-child relationship was the openness-closedness dialectic. This dialectical tension was manifested in two themes, the need for openness in an ideal parent-child relationship, and closedness in communication about the non-shared biological parents. Participants wanted to have open communication with their shared biological parent, especially when detailing how an ideal parent-child relationship functions. Martin explains the ideal parent relationship as being “a very open relationship that has lots of communication and no boundaries with communication”. Vicky echoes this need for openness when she says, “[The ideal parent] would be someone you can just be open with.” Both Vicky and Martin express the need for parents to be open to their children and accept openness from them in return. Participants often longed for their shared biological parent to be more approachable and open to share information. However, many participants also felt the need to keep information about their half sibling’s other parent to themselves, fearing that negative information about them was unwelcome in conversations with the shared biological parent. Caitlin felt she could not express her frustration with her half sibling’s mother with their shared biological father.

I have learned to just ignore the conflict between me and [my half-brother’s mom]. My mentality is just to be the bigger person and not say anything to my dad about how much she bothers me. Holidays come and go and I might get frustrated about something, but I’m not going to voice it or anything. When I was younger I would get mad and be like dad, this is not fair! When she yelled at my [full biological] brother for scolding [our half-brother] once, I told her exactly what I really thought about her and it was just this really big awkward blowup fight and my dad got mad at *me* for yelling at *her*. So after that I just kind of realized to just keep my thoughts to myself. It wasn’t worth it to make things more awkward so I just tend to ignore it and not say anything because I know my dad is not going to do anything about it.

Caitlin felt she could not talk to her shared biological father about any issues related to the other parent of her half sibling. Like Caitlin, other participants felt this closedness

when the other non-biological parent was involved. Participant Teresa reveals this dialectic in her family dynamic.

[My half-brother] reminds me of this constantly, but if we got in trouble, my mom would get out this wooden spoon and spank [my half-brother] with it as punishment. That was like his thing. But when I got in trouble, I just got told Teresa, go to your room now! That was it for me, but my brother got the spoon, the hard spoon. He hated that my mom did that to him but never talked about it with [our dad], just me.

Teresa's half-brother was being punished in significantly different ways than she was by the parent they did not biologically share. However, her half-brother did not share this information with the shared biological parent and felt closedness in discussing negative characteristics of the non-biological parent.

This closedness made some participants feel frustrated, but others said they welcomed the closedness in order to avoid confrontation. Half siblings would often express their frustration with their half sibling's other parent by talking to the biological parent they do not share in order to manage this tension. In Caitlin's case, she would discuss her anger with her stepmother to her biological mother who does not share a child.

The Parent Before-The Parent After

The dialectical tension of the parent before versus the parent after emerged during this study. This dialectic newly formed apart from the three main families of contradictions and explains how half siblings view their parent as two distinct people, the one before the half sibling was born and the one after. This dialectic often was expressed by participants saying their parent "changed" after their half sibling was born, noting different parenting styles and disciplines than they experienced growing up. Michelle explains the difference in her shared biological father's relationships with her older half sibling's mother and her own.

My dad found out his girlfriend at 18 years old was pregnant and so he married her and had my half-sister. But then they divorced, he became a Christian, and he married my mom and had me. It's almost like he is two different people. He was a completely different person when he was with my [half-sister's mom]. I have all these rules and am sheltered and I can't believe my dad got someone pregnant in high school, yet alone that he could be married to anyone else besides my mom!

Michelle felt her shared biological father was a completely different person when he had her half-sister, in contrast to her father now. Once she learned of the circumstances surrounding her half-sister's birth, Michelle's existing strict household rules seemed to be in stark contrast to the lifestyle her father once lived. Michelle dichotomized her image of her father as the parent he was before she was born and the parent he is now. Another participant, Vicky, says in fact her shared biological father *is* a different person now than when he was a father to her older half siblings.

I think it's hard in my relationship with my half siblings because I know my dad a lot better than they do. And what I know about my dad is not what they know about my dad, and sometimes that's a struggle because they have a different image of him.

Vicky says her older half siblings do not know who her father really is because he is a completely different person now. Martin also explains how his shared biological mother changed her parenting style after his younger half-brother was born.

My mom is definitely more of a parent with my half-brother and to me is kind of like a friend. I got a lot more freedom when I was his age than what he has now. When I was 16, I didn't have a curfew and he does and is a lot more sheltered than I was. So I feel like she is a lot more of a protective parent to my little half-brother than she was with me.

Martin notes how his shared biological mother has changed parenting styles over the years.

Martin sees his mother as a strict parent before his half sibling was born, and as a lenient parent after the half sibling's birth. This dialectic is full of both positive and negative components that cause tension. For example, many participants wanted their parent to change and improve for

their half sibling's sake. Caitlin explains how she struggles with wanting the parent before and a version of the parent after:

I have definitely had a little bitterness when I see my dad doing stuff with [my half-brother] or doing things for him, or attending his events... because he didn't do those things for me. But, I kind of also am happy for [my half-brother] because I want him to have that stuff that I didn't have and I want my dad to be improving in his parenting, and I want him to recognize that he needs to make more of an effort and be a better dad.

Although she feel bitter about the change, Caitlin wanted her father to progress as a parent and improve on his parenting style now that he has another child. Isaac also explains that his shared biological mother is a new and changed parent now, to the benefit of his younger half sibling.

Like, I mean, before my mom met my stepdad and had [my younger half-sister], we struggled because my mom was young and stuff. But now, she has her life together and has a good job so things are awesome and she can do a lot more for [my half-sister] now than she could for us and I'm proud of her for that.

Isaac uses the word *proud* to describe his appreciation for the change his shared biological mother has made. Isaac is pleased with the new parent his mother is now, because his younger half sibling is taken care of more so than he was as a child. Half siblings often viewed their shared biological parent as two distinct people before and after the birth of their half sibling(s). This change was both feared and welcomed because participants wanted their parent to stay the same, but evolve or improve as a parent for their half sibling(s).

Predictability-Noveltly

The last internal dialectical tension between half siblings and their shared biological parent is predictability-novelty. This dialectic was expressed through two themes: ritual events and reactions to half sibling's birth. First, this dialectic was often situated around rituals and holidays. Participants wanted their family rituals and the relationship with their shared biological parent to stay the same, but also wanted rituals and the relationship to evolve and

change, specifically to include their half sibling(s). Caitlin says she knew and wanted rituals to change in order to include her half-brother, but she did not welcome how the ritual change played out.

Even things as stupid and shallow as Christmas presents bother me now. It has always been that me and [my full biological brother] would get a set amount of things for Christmas from our dad, and now [our half-brother] gets the set amount plus a lot more! Or even just birthdays... it becomes blatantly obvious that this is our present on one level, and then our half-brother's is on a completely different level.

Caitlin was upset that the ritual of giving a set amount of presents each holiday was altered once her half sibling was incorporated into the family. Caitlin's story is similar to tension identified in Braithwaite and Baxter's (1998) research on the Old and the New Family dialectic discussed earlier in Chapter 2. Further, some participants welcomed the change in rituals and enjoyed including novelty events. Vicky elaborates:

Christmas is crazy! But it is just fun memories. Like, I am always going to remember that we now do tacky Christmas each year and it is so much fun. We decided to get everyone together, like the whole family, and wear footy pajamas and do fun stuff like that. It's fun because you have a big family to be around now.

Vick welcomed this change in ritual event in her family. She attributed excitement and fun with this change. Half siblings feared or resisted the unexpected changes in their relationship with the shared biological parent, especially when the parent changed ritual events. However, participants also welcomed the novel moments in their parental relationship where the half sibling(s) was included.

The final theme in the dialectic of predictability-novelty was centered on participant reactions to becoming a half sibling. For participants who were the younger half sibling, this dialectic was identified in recalled conversations with their older half siblings about when they learned of their expected birth. Participants were both excited and upset for this huge change in their family structure. Participants were often excited about their half sibling's birth and

welcomed this change, although they also longed for stability and for their family to stay the same. Isaac explains his experience once he learned his mother was going to have a child with his stepfather:

When I was younger I thought it was going to be for the worse because I was a selfish kid and had basically been an only child all my life because my older half siblings didn't live with me. I was like really upset, well not upset, but mad that it wasn't going to be just me anymore. That's what originally went through my head when they told me. So it was tough at first, but I grew to like it and got to be a big brother that I didn't really embrace at first. I definitely like it now though!

Isaac did not welcome this change to his family dynamic at first and wanted things to stay predictable as he was used to being the only child in his home. However, later on he learned to embrace the change. Below, Caitlin explains why she resisted her father having a child with someone other than her biological mother:

I wasn't excited when I found out. I mean I didn't let it show, but I wasn't excited. I think you act excited, but I wasn't really because I was still upset about the divorce. I didn't think my dad needed any more kids because I don't know... he didn't really have time for the ones he had, so it definitely changed things. It was more of a wedge between my dad and I for sure. And a wedge between me and my stepmom because it gave her something to value and prize over me and my [full biological] brother.

Caitlin resisted the change in her family structure and longed for predictability over novelty.

Other participants, such as Tyler, were excited for this novel event.

I was super excited because I had always wanted a sibling. I remember when they were telling me about it and asking me what I think, I was like definitely, I would love to have a little sibling! Especially since I am older and can just watch her grow and try to be as helpful as I can and help her learn as she gets older and give her someone else to talk to other than her parents.

Tyler welcomed his family's transition and longed for novelty in his family dynamic. Isaac echoes this sentiment when he says, "I was definitely excited once I learned my mom was having another kid, especially with my stepdad who has been around for a lot of my life." For Isaac, this novel event was welcomed because of his successful relationship with the non-shared

biological parent. Half siblings both resisted and welcomed the change in their family structure. Participants even felt the need to appear as if they embraced the change to their shared biological parent in order to avoid conflict.

External Dialectical Tensions

Revelation-Concealment

The most recurrent tension that was expressed externally was revelation-concealment. This dialectic was demonstrated through parents revealing or concealing the backstory of the blended family. Half siblings wanted their shared biological parent to be honest and reveal that their siblings had different parents. Almost every participant recalled a conversation they had with their shared biological parent where they learned what the term ‘half sibling’ truly meant. Some felt anger that their shared parent had not described the difference earlier; others felt embarrassed that they did not discover it on their own. Other participants understood the difference prior to the conversation because they met other family members of the half sibling or figured the difference out because their half sibling would live between different residences. However, all participants placed heavy importance on the shared biological parent clearly explaining the backstory of their blended family dynamic. Participants who were kept in the dark about their half siblings reported deeper conflict with their shared biological parent. Participants such as Sarah were angry and upset when their shared biological parent finally revealed the true composition of their family.

I didn't know I had older half siblings until I was in maybe third grade? My dad just told me one day that I had three brothers and I was mad and upset because I had never heard about them before. And I was like... they're not mom's child?! He said no, I had them with another woman and it was weird because it was like I had a brother, but they really weren't my brothers because I had never met them.... Actually just this past year I learned that those three brothers don't have the same mom. They all have different moms... like papa was a rolling stone.

Sarah was angry her shared biological father had concealed her half siblings from her.

Sarah later said she wished he had told her earlier and feels that revelation would have improved her relationship with her half-brothers. Participant Terrance also expressed anger after having to discover the true structure of his family on his own.

When I was younger I just thought that my half-sisters were my mom's daughters too. I didn't even know they had other moms until I would say I was in like sixth grade maybe? I started actually figuring it out once I started seeing their mom and stuff more. Sometimes I would be mad because they would leave for the weekend [to go to their mom's house] and stuff and I would be like, where are yall going? Why are yall leaving? I started realizing, like ok... and *then* my mom finally broke it down for me.

Terrance was upset that he had to come to this revelation on his own. He even expressed anger when questioning why his half-sisters did not live with him fulltime.

Although participants sought revelation, they simultaneously wanted concealment where they were free from confusion of the true family dynamic. Confusion was often attached when the shared biological parent revealed their family structure. Tyler explains how this explanation affected his younger half-sister:

I think the biggest challenge with having a half sibling is when they start to get old enough to understand. It's hard to just explain it to them and have them understand that not all people stay together... because [my half-sister] has always had two parents who have stayed together, and she doesn't quite understand divorce. She understand I come from a different dad, but I feel like once she gets older she will have more questions and be curious and want to know more and I worry about how she will deal with that.

Tyler worries how his younger half-sister will react to this revelation of family structure.

Teresa also talks about the importance of explaining a backstory to the blended family structure.

I think understanding how things happen and the story behind it and who was with who is important. The confusion of knowing there was someone who was not your mom, especially at that young of an age, you may think that your dad cheated or something! So your parents need to explain everything so you can be like no, daddy didn't cheat, this was *before* mommy. A kid that young and trying to understand all this is hard, but you

need to explain it early so they can get used to it and see [their half siblings] as just their brothers and sisters.

Teresa expresses how important it is to clearly explain the true family history to the children in a blended family, specifically to avoid negative assumptions or questions regarding infidelity.

Michelle also recalls when she learned of her blended family dynamic.

Whenever we were going up for my half-sister's wedding, my mom had to explain to me that *her* mom was going to be there and had to explain that her mom wasn't really related to me. She told me to just call her by her name and that that was how that relationship was supposed to work. So there was that type of conversation but it was so confusing.

When Michelle learned her family backstory, she was confused but appreciative of the explanation. Another participant, Tabitha, was frustrated because her shared biological mother refused to reveal much about her and her sister's fathers. Tabitha explains her need for parental revelation:

I don't really discuss my father with my mom that much. I believe it's gotten better since I'm in college, but growing up when I was living in the house with her we didn't really discuss it at all. I wish she had discussed our fathers with [me and my half-sister] more because we could appreciate our differences and how we are different.

Tabitha longed for revelation in her blended family, where she and her half-sister would know more about their different fathers. Although all participants agreed that the shared biological parent should clearly explain the backstory of their blended family, some participants reacted differently and resisted or embraced the explanation. Participants wanted their shared biological parent to reveal their family dynamic, but also yearned for concealment of the difference where they were free from confusion.

Importance should be placed on the location of this dialectic: externally between the parent-child relationship and others. Revealing the family backstory was not only important within the dyad, but also to include the whole family (biological and non-biological) in the conversation. Many participants said bringing the whole family

together and meeting the ‘other parent’ of their half sibling was important in understanding the family backstory. Terrance explains how tensions in his blended family could be managed by incorporating and accepting all family members, even those of his half siblings.

I think families like mine should spend time with each other as much as possible, like everyone. Showing each other that you love each other and that you don’t have to have both of the same parents even though... like, we can all come together and be one family. Even though their mom might not be my mom, I can still show that I love their parents too, because they brought them into this world to be my half sibling.

Terrance expressed the need for his family, including both biological and non-biologically related members, to support and love one another. This all-inclusive involvement would not only improve his parental relationships, but his sibling relationships as well. Like Terrance, other participants said meeting the other parent of the half sibling helped them understand how their blended family works. Tyler describes his blended family as “successful” because all parents and siblings are incorporated. He explains:

My half-sister will call my dad by his name, saying Mr. Bart, Mr. Bart! And she loves him! And I remember when my mom brought her over to me when I was with my dad once, and he said do you know who I am? And she said you’re Tyler’s daddy! So she understands it because she has met him. She understands it and doesn’t think of anything different, she just knows we have the same mom and different dads.

This is an example of how incorporating both sides of the family was used as a helpful conflict management strategy and facilitated coping with the tensions between half siblings and their shared biological parents.

Inclusion-Seclusion

The second external dialectical tension between half siblings and their shared biological parent is inclusion-seclusion. This dialectic was expressed through the theme of parents starting

second families or creating a new family. Many participants felt their shared biological parent started over with a second family once their half sibling was born. This led participants to feel secluded from the new family unit and their shared biological parent. Participant Amanda explains:

I would go to my dad's house and see my brother and then sometimes my brother's real mom would be there and it would be confusing. I knew my half-brother wasn't a part of *my* family unit meaning me and my mom and dad, so I knew there was this separation.

Amanda identifies a separation between *her* family unit and the family unit of her half sibling. She defines her family unit as her mother and father and places her half sibling outside this structure. Amanda has an older half sibling; therefore defining her dad as starting over or creating a new family unit apart from the first family which includes her half sibling and her shared biological father's ex-wife. Caitlin also explains the seclusion from her shared biological parent's second family:

My relationship with my dad has definitely been impacted since they had my half-brother. It kind of became an *us versus them* kind of thing. It was [my full biological brother] and I with dad, and then it was our half-brother and our stepmom with dad.

Caitlin takes this theme of second families further by attributing the *us versus them* label to distinguish the difference between the family before and after the birth of a half sibling.

Terrance echoes this theme:

I wish I spent more time with my dad. I'm from Alabama and he is from Georgia so we don't see each other that much. But even when I am there, I rarely get to see my dad because he has his own family now.

Terrance made the distinction that the new family with half siblings is apart or distinct from his original family that once included his shared biological father.

Half siblings in this study wanted to be included in their half sibling's family, but also wanted to be distinct or secluded from that second family. This dialectic mirrors the dialectic of

the Old Family vs. the New Family in Braithwaite and Baxter's (1998) research in blended families, although not only evident in ritual events. Half sibling research is unique where the half sibling has a biological connection to both the new and the old family, further complicating this inclusion-seclusion dialectic where half siblings want to be both secluded and included within their shared biological parent's old and new families.

Conventionality-Uniqueness

The final external dialectic of conventionality-uniqueness was expressed through the theme of failing traditional definitions of family, while also considering their blended family dynamic to be "normal nowadays". Although many participants said a blended family and having half siblings was not abnormal in today's society, their ideal relationships were described around the traditional definitions of family. This finding is similar to Holtzman's (2008) research on how young adults' discussions of parent-child bonds tend to reinforce the traditional definition of family although they use socially expansive definitions as well. Many participants felt that their blended family was failing the ideal sense of family. However, participants made sure to note that the ideal sense of family is changing and half siblings are not abnormal. This created the conventionality-uniqueness dialectic where participants wanted to portray their blended family as normal or standard in our society, but also defined ways their family is unique and different from other family structures. Amanda explains:

I thought the ideal family situation was having both your mother and your father there... but after gaining a stepdad, I learned that the terms mother and father can also mean a presence in your life, a very real presence of someone who takes a position of like a mother or father. I even think having a half sibling is almost common now. Like, I don't feel weird. I would say in grade school, even if people didn't have perfect households, everyone would come to school kind of acting like they did. So it bothered me back then, but now I'm not uncomfortable sharing that with people and I mean people, know what a half sibling is... and if they don't, they just have to figure it out.

Amanda discussed how her view of what a typical family looks like changed since she was younger. Being in a blended family altered her perception of the traditional family. However, later on in the interview, Amanda expressed her need for conventionality in a family structure. She says, “For me the ideal family would have kids living and raised in the same household. In my family, I feel like I would closer with my half sibling if that was the case.” Here, Amanda also sought the traditional definition of family.

Participant John expressed that the ideal family would be, “Like *The Brady Bunch*⁵. You know, the father going with his sons to fish or a sporting event and the mother going with her daughters, probably going shopping together.” Further in the interview, John went on to describe how the ideal sibling relationship should mirror the show *Drake and Josh*⁶, a Nickelodeon sitcom following the lives of two stepbrothers with opposing personalities. The two examples John uses explain the conventionality-uniqueness dialectic where he compares his family structure to those in the media. Both shows John mentions include a stepfamily dynamic where the children have one biological parent and one stepparent. John felt his family structure was normal because he shared the same family reconstructions as those displayed in the media. Participant Robin agreed with this trend, concluding her interview by saying, “I think it’s pretty cool to have half siblings and lots of parents. I don’t think it is that abnormal to have half siblings.” Robin and other half siblings used newly expansive definitions for their family structure displaying how the traditional definition of family is slowly changing and evolving to fit the trend of step and blended families; however, they still longed to fit in the traditional or conventional descriptions of family.

Overall, the first research question asked what dialectical tensions half siblings perceive with the biological parent they share. All three main families of contradictions were seen in this

relationship and expressed differently when internalized and externalized. A new dialectical tension was also identified. The most frequently perceived internal dialectical tensions were autonomy-connection, openness-closedness, the parent before-parent after, and predictability-novelty respectably. External tensions, however, were expressed as revelation-concealment, inclusion-seclusion, and conventionality-uniqueness. Half siblings falsely identified their relationship with the shared biological parent as unchanged by having a half sibling, displaying the need to present the dyad as strong and connected even when they needed independence. Half siblings also both feared and welcomed changes to rituals and family structure and felt open to talk with their shared biological parent as long as the discussion did not involve conflict with the other parent of a half sibling. Further, the shared biological parent was seen as two different people before and after the birth of a half sibling, and many half siblings felt they started over with a second family that both secludes and includes them. Half siblings also expressed the need for the shared biological parent to clearly explain the family backstory and integrate all family members in their children's lives. Lastly, half siblings felt they failed the traditional definitions of family, although this definition is expanding to include the regularity of blended families including half siblings.

Research Question 2 – Relationship with Half Sibling(s)

Although the relationship with the shared biological parent was wrought with conflict, tension and change, many participants wanted to validate their half sibling relationships as successful and strong. Similar to RQ1 results, the dialectical tensions between half siblings were expressed differently when internalized between the siblings and externalized between half siblings and those outside their relationship. One internal dialectical tension emerged in the half sibling relationship: the contradiction of integration-separation was expressed internally as

autonomy-connection. Externally, the contradiction of integration-separation was manifested as inclusion-seclusion and the contradiction of expression-nonexpression was expressed as revelation-concealment. These three dialectical tensions communicate how half sibling relationships are complex and contradictory with both positive and negative characteristics.

Internal Dialectical Tensions

Autonomy-Connection

The most recurrent internal dialectical tension perceived between half siblings was autonomy-connection. As discussed earlier, this dialectic involves individuals seeking both connection and distance. Almost all participants stated they wished they were closer with their half sibling(s), noting the need for half sibling dependence or connection. Amanda discusses her need for connection with her half-brother:

Growing up we lived in Virginia until and I was eight and I would see him very frequently and we had more of a brother-sister relationship. I would tell people I had a brother and we would see each other and he would call me melon-head and give me noogies or whatever... and I felt that kind of connection every brother and sister should have. Then we moved to Huntsville, Alabama when I was eight and I didn't see him for ten years... so I stopped telling people I had a brother because it was too complicated. At that point, he was 18 and so my mom felt that he was old enough to continue a relationship with us if he wanted to, and it just never happened... so for ten years I didn't see him and I didn't really understand it at first. I didn't understand why I wasn't hearing from him anymore, and I remember feeling sad and I was really lonely. Mainly because I knew what it felt like to have a brother or sister and I think the fact that I knew what it was like when I was younger made me miss it even more. So it made me sad.

Amanda was deeply affected when her brother did not contact her once they moved. She desired to be connected to him and dependent on each other as siblings. Vicky also longed for connection with her half sibling:

My sister has always been there to talk and we've had moments where we were really close, like during summers when we lived together. But we just weren't super close because we lived so far away [from each other]. But like, my sister came up here a couple of years ago to visit and that was so much fun because it actually felt like she was my *real* sister, instead of just like half, ya know?

Vicky's need for connection with her sister was apparent throughout her interview. Geographic distance amplified this need for connection and is even used to evaluate her perception of the distinction between *real* and half siblings.

This need for connection was also expressed by the overwhelming agreement that half siblings should function and be considered the same as full biological siblings. All 17 participants agreed that either their half siblings should be just as connected as full biological siblings or their ideal half sibling relationship would function this way. This strong connection was first noted in Anderson's (1999) work on siblings and this current research identifies the strong bond between half siblings. Caitlin says, "you should treat [your half siblings] like you would a full biological sibling." Participant Ashland agrees, contributing to a trend that linked this closeness to sharing bloodlines.

Honestly, just think of them as just your family. Family is family and you have the same blood. It might be different in ways, but you share the same blood at the end of the day, and they are your real family that will be there for you.

Ashland expressed that sharing some relation in blood made someone your family. Robin also echoes this strong connection is linked to sharing genetics, even if only half.

I didn't feel like [my half-brother] was *half*, I just felt like he was my legit brother and we have a relationship that would be the same as full biological siblings. I mean if anything, half siblings do share blood, so they're never 100% distant.

Robin uses the bloodline theme to distinguish the difference in half siblings and those who have no biological relatedness. Tyler explains how he feels his half sibling connection plainly reflects a full biological siblinghood:

[Half siblings] need to treat each other like there is no half. Whenever I tell people about [my half-sister], I don't throw in the word half, because even though we are technically only half blood related, I am going to treat her like she is my full blood sibling. I mean, when I found out that I was going to have a half-sister, the half was never there. Even

though yea, we have different dads, she's still going to be my sister and one of my best friends.

Tyler emphasizes the need to ignore the distinction of *half* due to sharing bloodlines. Not even contrasting looks were considered a hindrance in the strong connection between half siblings.

Even though Martin looks vastly different than his half-brother, the siblinghood was considered the same as a full biological relationship.

I vaguely remember my mom like cramming the fact that no matter what, this is your half sibling and you probably will look different, but that has nothing to do with it. This is your brother, he is your full brother. Basically, she made sure that I knew that... because my mom is white and she remarried a white guy, so my [half] brother is white with blonde hair and blue eyes and I'm not. We don't look anything alike, but she made sure that we knew that even though we're half siblings, we are brothers. So I never used the word half and never brought up the fact that we are half siblings into an argument. I left it at we were full brothers because we share the same parent. We laugh about it though to ease the controversy. Like, I say I am mom's chocolate son and he is mom's vanilla son. That was a very easy way to put it.

Martin's story shows the need to erase boundaries that define a half sibling from a full biological sibling; even if the siblings have a drastically different physical appearance. Martin explains coming from the same parent and sharing a similar bloodline defines them as brothers and they use humor to negotiate this difference. In spite of this strong connection between half siblings, participants who have full biological siblings made a distinction between their half siblings when explaining to those outside the family, a concept that is later discussed in the external dialectic of inclusion-seclusion.

A few conflict management strategies were developed around this dialectic where the need for half sibling connection should be facilitated. Some participants explained how their relationship with their half sibling(s) was improved through seeking sibling connection.

Participant Brad says his half sibling relationship has improved through social networking.

We actually stay in contact through *Facebook* and stuff like that. *Facebook* and email have been really helpful and we can share photos with each other and see more of each

other's lives than we would otherwise since we don't live close. It gives us a place to constantly be in contact if we want to be.

Brad and his half sibling use social network to stay in contact and engage in conversations about everyday life. Brad also says the benefit of constant picture sharing helps strengthen their connection, especially when living far away from each other. Michelle reveals her relationship with her older half-sister was improved through writing letters:

Writing letters has really been a game-changer in my relationship [with my half-sister]. I just sat down one day and decided I wanted to write a letter to her and then she responded! And then my niece drew me a picture and it was so cute. Now that we write back and forth, it's just really cool to have someone who's been through life with my dad and can relate to me. I can tell she cares about me and we are working towards strengthening our relationship. It's hard to work towards a relationship when like you have a [non-shared-biological] mom as an obstacle, but the letters have helped. We talk a lot more now and have a stronger relationship that has gotten easier because we write letters.

Writing letters became a ritual event in Michelle and her half-sister's relationship. Through letters, the half-sisters were able to express their emotion for each other and work towards a stronger relationship.

Many participants said their half sibling relationship was also improved by seeking help from others outside the immediate family. Amanda explains how family outsiders helped connect her with her half-brother after ten years apart:

For those ten years, we did not talk much at all. Then my sister-in-law kind of facilitated us having a reconnection. Since she kind of started making him part of our lives again, I've actually gone and visited them a few times and they've come here with my two nephews and we're trying to bring the whole family together again. I'm really thankful for my sister-in-law because she is removed from the family in a way and she can see our issues from a different point of view. Finally she was just like, listen you have to keep in touch with your sister; you have to keep in touch with your mom! If it wasn't for her, I don't know where we would be at this point.

Amanda felt those outside the immediate family were in a productive position to mediate inner family conflict. This ‘outside perspective’ allowed for unbiased knowledge into the inner family relationships.

Although connection was desired and exceptionally important in half sibling relationships, participants also wanted to be independent from their half sibling. The autonomy sector of this dialectic was often expressed by participants not wanting to be compared to their half sibling. Ashland explains:

I fight the most with my [shared biological father] about comparing me to my [half-sister]. She went to school in the south and my dad was pushing the south on me. He would say it’s up to you where you go, but [your half-sister] went here and all this stuff. I don’t even like the south, but here I am today [living in the south]. He compared me to her... even when it came to high school. She used to party and stuff and I don’t party as much... but the one time I wanted to go out he was like, well your [half-sister] did this so you can’t go. And I’m like, I’m not even like her! So this is not fair!

Similar to Ashland’s story, half siblings felt competition for parental preference when they wanted to simply be identified as two separate individuals, sometimes even to the extent of separating the shared biological parent from their half sibling. Michelle explains her need for independence where she would be the sole bearer of the shared biological father.

I remember talking to [my half-sister] one time when I would go up there, and I would say *my* dad, not even thinking that we share the same dad, you know? I would have to stop myself from doing that, like I would say the other day *my* dad did this, not think to just say *dad* did this.

Michelle felt the need to separate her version of the shared biological parent from her half-sister’s version. Even though she says she unknowingly did so, she subconsciously felt the need to distance herself from her half sibling.

External Dialectical Tensions

Inclusion-Seclusion

Inclusion-seclusion was the most dominant external dialectical tension between half siblings. This dialectic was expressed through four themes: sibling labels, public displays of affection, contrasting sibling types, and separating the parent relationship from the sibling relationship. First, participants did not want to label their half-brother or sister as a *half* sibling. When talking to those outside their relationship, participants described their half sibling as simply “my brother” or “my sister”. Participants attributed using the term “half” as secluding their half sibling from another part of the family. Brad explains why he does not use a half label:

When I was young it was just explained that this is your sister, they are blood, they are your family. Everything for the family. The minute you start addressing this as your half sibling, it sort of sets up boundaries, and my [shared biological] dad didn't want there to be that.

Brad felt the use of the ‘half’ label would create unnecessary boundaries between siblings and seclude them from other family members. Isaac echoes this response when he says, “I never used the words half sibling; I just grew up knowing they were my sister and brother. And my advice would be to cherish your [half-siblings] because that is your brother or sister regardless of what is going on.” Like Brad, Isaac dismisses the use of the word ‘half’ and refers to those siblings as simply brothers or sisters.

This dialectic was also expressed as participants desiring and resisting public displays of affection from their half siblings. Participants sought inclusion through displays of affection, mainly online through social networking sites. Inclusion on these sites shows the public they are united in sisterhood or brotherhood. Michelle explains how her half-sister included her on *Facebook*:

I remember the first time [my half-sister] told me she loved me was when she put it on my *Facebook* page when I was going into college and moving in. She said this is an awesome opportunity, I am proud of you, and I love you... and she had never said that to me before. It was just something we had never said, but now we say it since then and it was special.

Michelle was grateful for her half-sister's public display of affection because the statement led to a continued response. Participant Sarah says public displays of affection are what brought her closer with her older half-brothers who she did not know at the time. She says, "I had always been kind of scared, well not scared, but awkward with them and felt like I didn't really know them until we followed each other on *Facebook* and could talk there where everyone else was part of it too." Sarah felt comfortable having conversations with her estranged half-brothers because the setting was in the public's view. She felt using *Facebook* to express connection publicly made those once strained sibling ties less awkward or intimidating. However, this inclusion in the public's eye was also resisted by participants like Caitlin who wanted a sense of seclusion from her half-brother in social networks.

[My half-brother] added me on *Instagram*⁷ and will comment on *all* my stuff and it's annoying. He's [a fan of my school's rival] and will post about it all over my *Instagram* too and all that stuff and I'm just like, don't do that! Why do you do that? I don't know... it's weird.

Caitlin felt her half-brother's public connection with her was annoying and she resisted the communication.

Thirdly, participants as a whole agreed there was a distinction between half and full biological siblings and then step siblings. Teresa explains:

I don't use the word half, we're just brother and sister. Our relationship, like when I tell people, I'm never like oh my *half*-brother, I just say my brother. With my stepsister, I'm like this is my *stepsister*. You get what I'm saying? Like with [my half-brother], we've been close and I didn't even realize what that word meant until I got older and heard people say half sibling. But it still doesn't apply. I'm just like brother, my brother... I don't see a difference in full biological siblings and half siblings. But if you were to say what about your stepsibling? I would say oh she is my *stepsister*.

Teresa made sure to clearly identify her stepsiblings, while leaving her half siblings ambiguous.

Martin furthers this notion:

I think half-sibling relationships are the same as regular sibling relationships. I think that in most circumstances, one of the half siblings have been there through the whole life of the other sibling, so it is a lot different than having stepsiblings... because you could be fully grown up and not know each other, but you basically have known your half-sibling, well one of you, your whole life. So it is the same as a regular sibling relationship.

Martin's distinction between stepsiblings and other sibling types correlates with the length of time of the relationship. For Martin, this division is created because one half sibling has existed throughout the entire life time of another, a condition stepsiblings do not require. Isaac seconds this distinction:

Having stepbrothers is different from having a half-brother because I can't talk to him like I talk to my [half-brother] because I wasn't there when he was like 6 or 7 years old. Like, I just jumped into his life and can't be like, hey little brother you need to do this and do that! I can't do that.

Isaac also displays the difference between stepsiblings and other sibling types by the length of relationship. This concept is important to sibling research where existing studies conflate half siblings and stepsiblings together (Roe, Bridges & O'Connor, 2006, White & Reidman, 1992). However, if the participant had a full biological sibling, there was a further distinction between full biological siblings and half siblings when describing their family to others. Although we previously explained half siblings feel their relationship is more like a full biological sibling relationship, blended families that include full biological siblings are likely to distinguish between the full biological siblings and other sibling types. Caitlin clarifies: "I have an older brother who is *completely* my brother and we have the same mom and dad, then there is my half-brother from my dad and stepmom". Caitlin identified her full biological brother as complete

and her half-sibling was clearly identified as half to show the distinction between the two.

Ashland echoes this sentiment:

Me and [my full biological sister] are super close. We are best friends. We talk about everything and do everything together and I actually don't know if that's because we share the same... actually I think it has to do with the fact that we both share the same mom and dad and I don't share both with [my half-sisters].

Ashland made a revelation in the interview where she determined her sibling connections were contingent upon how biologically related she was to them.

The final theme in the inclusion-seclusion dialectic places importance on secluding parental relationships from the half sibling relationship. Participants wanted to distance their sibling relationship from the relationships of their shared and non-shared biological parent. Half siblings felt the connection between them was being affected by parental drama. When asked if their family relationships changed once their half sibling was born, most participants noted the divorce or fights between their parents as cause for tension and not their half siblings' birth. A recurring theme of not blaming their half sibling for parental conflict was clear. Caitlin explains how the concept of divorce affected her half sibling relationship:

I think the divorce in and of itself affected my relationship [with my shared biological father] and our bond and made me put up walls... because you know, you're 11 years old and you can't figure out why your parents aren't staying together, and then for him to remarry so quickly and have a baby really quickly, I think that just added even more to affect that.

Caitlin felt the divorce of her father and mother was more influential on the conflict within her family relationships than her half sibling's birth. Brad resonates with this feeling where divorce was more of a concern than his father having another child with someone other than his biological mother.

The biggest way this all affects me would be... the only confrontations that really ever came up I would say conversation wise concerning half siblings would be the divorce I guess. It was more of an interest to our relationship because when I was growing up,

divorce wasn't a thing because I had grown up with my mom and my dad and they had been married for years... my family is Roman Catholic and we do not believe in divorce. And in the Catholic faith, if you get a divorce without an annulment, you're not allowed to take communion. So I was confused as to why my dad couldn't take communion, and then I would remember he had been divorced. So I was learning all these things in school and church about how divorce was unreligious and bad, but my dad had had a child and then a divorce.

For Brad, having an older half sibling was not a cause for concern; however, his father's divorce was more of a source for conflict due to their religious beliefs. Further, Teresa explains how divorce and parental conflict affected her:

When I was in middle school, it got like rough and stuff through the divorce with my mom and dad because they were fighting over me... so it got rocky. But I don't think having a half sibling affected my relationship with [my shared biological father]. The divorce was worse and more weird compared to the half-brother thing. That's what changed it.

Teresa says having a half sibling did not affect her family relationships; however, past parental conflict caused tension. Divorce confrontation, such as child custody, was more of a contributing factor to relational conflict than having a half sibling within Teresa's blended family dynamic. Many participants also gave advice to others in blended families to not let their parents interfere with the success of their half sibling relationship(s). Amanda explains:

My mom had a lot of issues with her ex-husband who is my [half-brother's] dad... so she didn't really try to keep me and him connected once we didn't live in the same state. So the biggest thing for me is that the parent-drama got in the way of us having an authentic sibling connection. It's hard because you have to remember that neither you or they are guilty of anything. Neither of you had anything to do with your parent's issues.

For Amanda, the confrontation between parents seeped into sibling relationships. Dylan echoed the importance to make sure blame was not placed on his half sibling for the reconstruction of their family dynamic. He says, "You just have to do your best to treat them like your normal siblings if you have any, because when you think about it, it's not their fault that he is a half-brother to you. So just try not to be prejudice." Both Amanda and Dylan clearly identify the

need to separate the parent relationship from the sibling relationship. Participants were adamant that blame for familial conflict should not be placed on the siblings, specifically if the parents have a challenging relationship history.

Revelation-Concealment

The final dialectical tension in the half sibling relationship involved participants explaining their family to others. Participants wanted to reveal to those outside their family that they had brothers and sisters; however, they also wanted to conceal if one of those siblings was only half biologically related to them. Further, participants concealed their shared biological parent's relationship with their half siblings other parent. Half siblings said revealing the full complexity of their blended family was too confusing or complex for others to understand. Those who did not have full biological siblings often left out their half siblings all together in conversations to outsiders. This dialectic is interesting given the importance participants placed on not distinguishing between half and full biological siblings. Amanda says, "It is difficult to explain because people will ask me all the time, like do you have siblings? And sometimes I say no, because I just don't want to explain it." Amanda valued not confusing others over revealing the true structure of her family. Other participants would conceal their sibling types until a contributing factor made them reveal and explain their true family composition. Michelle confirms this sentiment after she learned to not include her half-sister's age in conversations with others.

I didn't really know how to explain it to people... like the one thing that has come across is when people ask you, you just have to be vague. Because you would think how many siblings do you have would be a simple question to answer! I use to say, well I have a brother who is 16 and a sister who is 34... and people would hear that and be like what?! So I then had to explain that she's my half-sister and be like, well my dad and her mom got married before my parent did... and then come all the questions! It was just too much.

Michelle would reveal she had half siblings; however, once questioned for sibling ages she was confronted with shock and confusion. This response led her to refrain from exposing the true composition of her blended family. Further, participants did not want to explain their shared biological parent's past relationships with others. Amanda continues:

[My family] is a little bit more difficult to explain and it is embarrassing because you have to admit that your parents had another relationship, and then I feel like people silently look down at that. They're like oh, it's not just your unit family, there's other stuff going on! So it's kind of difficult to explain, but I mean I'm not embarrassed anymore, but in grade school I was uncomfortable.

Amanda refers to explaining her family as 'embarrassing' when she was younger. Amanda felt others would look down at her blended family dynamic, especially since past parental relationships would be revealed. Concealing the shared biological parent's past relationships was seen specifically if the half sibling was born out of wedlock. Tabitha elaborates:

I think the biggest challenge with having a half sibling is dealing with the reactions to it. Like, especially having a sister who shares a different dad... sharing mothers is different than sharing fathers. It's different because, like if a man goes and gets remarried it's ok, but for my mom to have two kids from different men... when we tell people that we have two different fathers, they automatically place us in a category and place my mom in a category and automatically write our stories for us.

Tabitha feared explaining her family to others would lead to a negative representation. She defines the difference in having a shared biological mother than a shared biological father, where her mother suffers a shameful social stigma. This fear led Tabitha to often conceal her half siblings in conversations with others.

Overall, the second research question revealed what dialectical tensions half siblings perceive between each other or within the half sibling relationship. The perceived internal dialectical tension was autonomy-connection and the external tensions were inclusion-seclusion and revelation-concealment. Half siblings in this study seemed to be conflicted about how others outside their family viewed their family dynamic. Internally, half siblings felt a strong

connection with each other and identified the siblinghood to be indistinguishable from full biological sibling relationships; however, when discussing the family to outsiders, participants were concerned their family was too complicated or complex to understand. Half sibling connection was extremely strong although participants also desired to be independent from their half sibling, specifically if a shared biological parent showed preference to one over the other. Stepsiblings were considered vastly different from half and full biological siblings, although participants with full biological siblings distinguished between all other sibling types. Parent relationships had significant impact on the half sibling relationship: specifically divorce or parental conflict influenced the relationship between half siblings. This research question identified conflict management strategies to alleviate tension in half sibling relationships, including connection through social media, writing letters, and employing members outside the immediate family to intervene.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The results of this study highlight ways in which contradictions operate within a blended family dynamic, creating tension between parent and child and among half siblings. Seventeen participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. Participants for this study were restricted to individuals who have one or more half siblings and are between the ages of 19 and 30 to achieve an adult child's perspective. The seventeen participants in this study ranged in gender, ethnicity and family structure type; although the overwhelming majorities were members of a blended family dynamic created from a divorce and remarriage.

General Discussion and Implications

The findings of this study are telling of the conflict perceived by adult children in a blended family. The recurrent themes of residence, age, and activities as involvement were seen between half siblings and their shared biological parent, as well as between their half sibling relationships. The theme of residence promotes Baxter, Braithwaite and Bryant's (2008) consideration of residence as a factor in parent-child relationships. Participants who lived with their shared biological parent had a closer parent-child bond in contrast with a nonresidential parent who was perceived as more of a friend. Further, half siblings who lived in the same residence had a stronger relational closeness, a concept that contributes to Hofferth and Anderson's (2003) research on residence and siblinghood. Participants also mentioned age as a contributing factor in the closeness of their blended family relationships. Finally, activities as involvement was a cyclical theme identified throughout the study. Participants evaluated the

involvement of their shared biological parent by what activities they participated in with them as a child. The perspective of adult children allowed this theme to emerge where participants determined how involved their parent was after reflecting on their childhood. This theme was also linked to gender where participants revealed a difference in mothering and fathering that revolved around gender-specific events. In addition to these themes, seven dialectical tensions were identified between participants and the biological parent they share with a half sibling: autonomy-connection, openness-closedness, the parent before-the parent after, predictability-novelty, revelation-concealment, inclusion-seclusion, and conventionality-uniqueness. Three dialectical tensions were also identified between half siblings: autonomy-connection, inclusion-seclusion, and revelation-concealment.

The dialectic of autonomy-connection highlighted how participants seek both connection and distance with their shared biological parent. This dialectic provided an unexpected theme where some participants claimed there was no change in their parent-child relationship with the shared biological parent due to parenting a half sibling; however, the same participants continued to provide narrative stories and examples that clearly identified change within the relationship. These negative cases provided confirmation of the relational change between adult children and their parent due to sharing them with a half sibling. This idea that they must display their parent-child bond as unaltered or fully connected was unexpected, but proved necessary in the revelation of this connection dialectic. Participants longed to be closer with their shared biological parent and not only feel connected to them, but appear united in the public's eye as well. This was particularly seen by the participants voicing their point to not talk negatively about the shared biological parent, but doing so due to the confidentiality of the interview.

Connection was also seen by participant frustration with the shared biological parent sharing time between them and their half sibling(s). Although connection was needed in this parent-child relationship, participants also sought independence, detailing the need for the parent to give them space to grow and make their own mistakes. Autonomy was also expressed by participants referring to their shared biological parent's attempts to connect with them as exaggerated due to guilt after the divorce. Overbearing attempts to connect with the child were perceived as awkward and weird and distance was desired.

The openness-closedness dialectical tension demonstrates a half sibling's need for their shared biological parent to be both open in communication and closed in certain conversations. Half siblings wanted their parent to be open and have no boundaries of communication. However, participants were closed with their shared biological parent when it came to conversations detailing interactions with the other parent of their half sibling(s). Participants felt conversations about the other parent were unwelcome and met with confrontation. Half siblings also sought closedness with the shared biological parent and did not want to talk about conflict with the other parent in order to avoid familial tension. This theme contributes to Afifi's (2003) research on how children of divorce do not want to 'feel caught' between parents. Similarly, children in blended families did not want to feel caught between their shared biological parent and the other parent of their half sibling(s).

The parent before-the parent after was a newly formed dialectical tension perceived between half siblings and their shared biological parent. This dialectic contributes to existing literature on blended families, specifically because this tension has not been identified in previous research. Although past research (Braithwaite & Baxter, 1998) has identified a separation between the Old and New Family in blended families, until now research has yet to

identify the concept of perceiving a parent as two distinctly different people due to divorce or remarriage. This dialectic articulates a half sibling's dichotomous view of their parent before the half sibling was born and after they parented a child with someone else. Half siblings viewed their parent as two distinct people who changed parenting styles and behaviors once they had a child with someone other than the biological parent of their existing children. Participants often had trouble visualizing how and why their parent changed once their half sibling was born. Half siblings wanted their parent to stay the same as they were before; although they also wanted the parent after the half sibling's birth to change and improve for their sibling's sake.

The predictability-novelty dialectic conveyed half sibling's need for both change and stability within their family. These contradicting desires mainly involved ritual events where participants were excited to incorporate new members of the family during holidays, but also resisted changing such events. This dialectic contributes to past research on how changes in ritual events affect members of untraditional family structures (Braithwaite & Baxter, 1998) and how turning point events contribute to tension in family relationships (Baxter, Braithwaite & Nicholson, 1999). Further, half siblings both accepted and contested the birth of their half sibling(s). Some participants were excited to gain a sister or brother, others were upset their shared biological parent felt the need to add to and change the family dynamic, specifically if the participant was the youngest prior to the half sibling birth.

The dialectic of revelation-concealment was the most perceived tension between half siblings and the shared biological parent when expressed externally with those outside the dyad. This dialectic voiced the need for shared biological parents to reveal the backstory of their blended family structure. Participants wanted their shared biological parent to be honest and reveal and include all family members, even those who are not genetically related to them (i.e.

the other parent of a half sibling). However, participants also resisted this revelation, where concealment would free them from confusion and the true complex construction of their family.

The inclusion-seclusion dialectic was expressed through the theme of the shared biological parent starting over with a second family. Half siblings felt included in the second family where they share one biological parent, but also secluded from the family that was viewed as a replacement for the first. The concept of a second family contributes to Braithwaite and Baxter's (1998) dialectic of the Old Family vs. the New Family; however, half siblings in this study specifically referenced their shared biological parent as "starting over" to replace an existing family unit. Participants felt their shared biological parent started over and secluded them from a new family unit, even referring to the concept as an *us vs. them* dialectic. Half siblings pined for this inclusion where the old and new family conjoined as one, although half siblings also longed for their old family unit to be secluded as the original and true family.

The last dialectical tension perceived between half siblings and their shared biological parent was conventionality-uniqueness. This dialectic revealed half siblings felt their blended family was failing traditional definitions; however, they felt the blended family structure was not abnormal in today's society. Participants notably said this perception has changed over the years where having a half sibling is more common now. Half siblings revealed ideal parent-child relationships would function in traditional ways: with both parents being married and living together with biological children. In contrast, half siblings also felt the uniqueness of their blended family was understood by others due to the collective knowledge of what a half sibling is.

Like the parent-child relationship, participants felt both positive and negative emotions in the relationship with their half sibling(s). The internal dialectical tension of

autonomy-connection parallels the emotions described earlier between half siblings and their parent: the need for both connection and independence. Participants wanted to be closer with their half sibling(s) and even developed strategies to connect if geographic location or residence distanced them. The connection most evident between half siblings was the dismissal of a difference between half and full biological siblings. Half siblings reported their relationship to be the same as full biological siblinghood, although participants who have full biological siblings made a distinction between full biological siblings and all other sibling types. In conversations with their half siblings, participants said they never used the word half and that doing so would create an unnecessary boundaries between them. This confirms Anderson's (1999) revelation of the strong connection between half siblings. Although the connection between half siblings was unanimously strong, participants sought independence from their half sibling when they were expected to live up to their achievements. Autonomy was expressed by the need for half siblings to be individuals and not compared to one another.

The external dialectic of inclusion-seclusion was articulated through sibling labels to the public, public displays of affection, contrasting sibling types, and separating the parent relationship from the sibling relationship. The inclusion component describes half sibling's refusal to apply the half sibling label when talking to others outside the family. Using the word half employed a disconnection and secluded that sibling from the family. Interestingly, seclusion was pursued if the participant had stepsiblings: half siblings were disguised as simply brother or sister; stepsiblings were clearly identified as step. This concept makes an essential contribution to sibling research where past studies conflate half and step siblings together in contrast with full biological siblings (Roe, Bridges & O'Connor, 2006; White & Riedman, 1992). Instead, half siblings made the distinction between half and full biological siblings in contrast with

stepsiblings. Further, both inclusion and seclusion were expressed by participants and the public displays of affection by their half sibling: public displays of love for one another were needed, but excessive amounts were considered annoying and strange. The final theme in this dialectic involved the participants secluding the half sibling relationship from their relationship with the shared biological parent. This was needed to place blame off of the children and not allow parental drama to negatively affect the sibling relationship. Participants felt divorce or past parental conflict was more of a challenge in their family relational development than their parent producing a half sibling. Regardless of the relationship with the shared biological parent, participants wanted to validate their half sibling relationships as successful and strong.

The final dialectical tension perceived between half siblings was revelation-concealment. This dialectic explains how half siblings conceal their true blended family structure due to their interpretation of a negative public perception. Participants felt embarrassed when those outside the family learned they were a blended family. This embarrassment came from fear others would look down on their parent for having relations with more than one partner. Participants would often conceal they had a half sibling all together to avoid social stigma. A few, if asked how many siblings they had, would respond saying they were an only child to avoid further questions leading to the revelation of their blended family dynamic. This struggle between what to tell to the public and what to keep private is a challenge half siblings experienced that Petronio's research on family secrets can elaborate on. Petronio (1999) explains the main issue in this dialectic is "understanding how to achieve goals that allow both disclosure and the ability to keep private or secret those things that make us feel vulnerable" (p. 2). Individuals want to choose what to disclose in order to minimize possible risks in interaction. This concept is seen in the revelation-concealment dialectic of half siblings where participants did not disclose the true

structure of their family in order to avoid risks such as confusion or shock from the public or to illuminate feeling vulnerable. Further, this dialectic proves interesting to the before mentioned autonomy-connection dialectical tension. Internally, half siblings felt a strong connection with each other and identified the siblinghood to be indistinguishable from full biological sibling relationships; however, participants were concerned their family was too complicated or complex for those outside the family to understand

This research concludes that the blended family structure holds unique conflict that displays tension in varying ways within relationships and externally between family members and others. Considering both research questions, one can conclude that some tensions are more frequently perceived than others, yet both the relationship between half siblings and their shared biological parent and the relationship between each other is wrought with both positive and negative characteristics and contradicting emotions. In conjunction with Anderson's (1999) research, half siblings consider their relationship to be as strong as full biological siblings, although vastly different from stepsibling relationships. This study also concludes that half siblings do not define their blended family as a traditional family, but consider the family structure to be well understood in today's society although not fully un-stigmatized. Similar dialectical tensions in blended families were seen in past research of divorced and stepfamilies, although new tensions such as the parent before-the parent after also developed and are specific to the blended family structure. Being a half sibling in a blended family is not abnormal, but unique tensions are experienced and this research can help provide useful coping strategies.

Conflict Management Strategies

The most valuable contribution to family research originated from this study was the emergence of conflict management strategies for members within blended families. Many of the

half siblings in this study have learned how to make their blended family dynamic work in a society that seeks traditional definitions for family. This study revealed countless conflict management strategies for half siblings in a blended family. In order to overcome tensions perceived in the autonomy-connection dialectic between half siblings, participants used social media and post mail to connect them with their half siblings. These forms of contact kept the half siblings connected and social media provided an instant involvement to share family pictures and publicly express affection for each other. Participants also sought the help of others who were removed from the immediate family, such as sibling in-laws whose detachment gave a perspective to see the family relationships in a different light than those within. The most influential conflict management strategy developed around shared biological parents explaining the whole family backstory to half siblings. This explanation was cultivated in the revelation-concealment dialectic between half siblings and their shared biological parent, where participants longed for their shared parent to be honest in revealing who their sibling was. Those who were kept in the dark about their half sibling background experienced anger and said their sibling relationships suffered due to concealment. Half siblings voiced the need for all family members (both biologically and non-biologically related) to interact together as a whole to enhance all relationship within a blended dynamic. This inclusion and meeting the other parent of half siblings was consistently seen as a helpful strategy to alleviate the tensions between half siblings and their parents.

This study also is an example of how Baxter & Montgomery's (1996) relational dialectics theory explains the negotiation of everyday relationships. The four central principles of RDT (contradiction, change, totality and praxis) were revealed throughout this research. Tension was created in response to opposing contradictions resulting in the dialectical tensions mentioned

throughout this study. Change occurred when half siblings tried to negotiate these tensions, resulting in conflict management strategies. Totality was seen when contradictions were connected or viewed as a knot or web throughout the blended family dynamic. For example, the conventionality-uniqueness dialectic between half siblings and their shared biological parent involved failing the traditional sense of family, a concept which is connected to the revelation-concealment dialectic between half siblings where they did not reveal their true family structure to others for fear of not fitting their expectations of normal. Finally, praxis details how people are everyday actors who reconstruct the future out of the past (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Many participants did not reveal conflict with the other parent to the shared biological parent because past conversations were met with hostility and anger. Some half siblings learned to not be open with their shared biological parent because past experiences proved to be confrontational.

Relational Dialectics Theory provides researchers with a method for understanding relationships through a perspective that identifies contradicting opposites that force tension and cultivate change. This study augments the practicality of RDT by revealing the recurrence of seven dialectical tensions between half siblings and their shared biological parent, and three dialectical tensions between half siblings. Although this perspective has been applied to nontraditional family structures, previous studies have not clearly identified how blended families encounter unique tension different from a step or divorced family. Parents “starting over” and producing half siblings provides a new layer to the family not yet clearly revealed until now. This study began with the declaration that the definition of family is changing (Holtzman, 2008). Although the traditional definition of family is still the ideal for half siblings, the overwhelming knowledge and prevalence of blended families is forcing society to alter their

perception of 'normal'. This research identifies conflict management strategies that half siblings can employ in a blended family dynamic and to further be explored by clinicians and blended family members themselves.

Limitations and Direction for Future Research

Although many findings were concluded, this research is not without limitations. First, some may consider having one researcher coding the data for common themes and connections a limitation. Any qualitative research has the issue or possibility of generalizability if only one coder is involved in the data analysis process. However, in this study the researcher was not necessarily coding for the number of recurrences alone, but also for the prominence and richness of the language within a code. Although the number of codes ended up coinciding with the richness, (i.e. the most dominant codes were simultaneously the codes expressed by the most in-depth descriptions) the coding technique could be considered limited by other methodologies without a second coder to eliminate bias. However, negative case analysis was used to establish the validity of the data in this study as well. Nevertheless, future studies should possibly incorporate multiple coders to improve the validity of the data.

Next, the participants were not representative of the wide diversity of half siblings today. Although participants with varying ethnicities were used in this study, the majority were White-Caucasian. Further, this study was narrowly focused on the perceptions of adult children between the ages of 19 and 24. Future studies should recruit half siblings from varying ages and see how the blended family dynamic affects them as a child in contrast to this study as an adult. A more diverse participant pool should also be established in future half sibling research.

Thirdly, the number of participants in this study (seventeen) may be perceived by some as a limitation. However, due to the richness of data and attained saturation where themes

became redundant, the study is no less valid due to number of participants. In addition to number of participants, interview times could also be considered a limitation by others. The average interview time ranged between thirty minutes to an hour. However, as stated earlier, due to the richness of data, this limitation made the study no less valid.

Lastly, the researcher herself is part of a blended family structure that includes half siblings. This experience may be considered a limitation if the researcher enforces her own perspective onto those of her participants, especially during coding where certain narratives or tensions might appear more salient than others because the researcher experienced those events herself. However, this closeness to the data created resonance with the participants and provided expert knowledge to help untangle the complex web of blended family tension. Incorporating a researcher who understands the complexity of the topic enhanced the coding process where she aligned her story with others to evaluate if her experience is common to those in a blended family or different.

Several dialectical tensions were discovered among the half siblings who participated in this study. Future research should seek to validate the presence of these dialectical tensions in other blended families. Due to half siblings being a newly researched group, future studies should continue to investigate how a blended family dynamic affects the family members within. The researcher intends to use this newfound knowledge to develop coping management strategies for blended families. Further, to apply this research to clinical or community programs where families can benefit from discussing their family dynamic with others who share this structure.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, this study provides important information on blended families and half siblings. Overall, the findings and conclusions of this investigation

shed light on new ways to understand blended families and the relationships between parents and their children and/or between half siblings themselves. Tension proves to be an important element in relational and familial development, and certain dialectical tensions are outwardly more perceived than others. How half siblings manage these dialectical tensions can increase our understanding of what management strategies help in alleviating conflict in a blended family, a structure that is quickly becoming the standard in our society.

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ENDNOTES

¹*Facebook* is an online social networking site founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg. The site allows anyone over the age of 12 to create an online profile and communicate by exchanging pictures, videos, and messages online or join common-interest groups.

²*Skype* is a free instant messaging client offered online since 2003 where people can communicate via live video.

³*The Bachelorette* is a reality television show that has aired on ABC since 2003. The show revolves around a single woman deemed the ‘bachelorette’ and a number of male romantic interests who compete for her love and attention. She chooses one by the season finale, and that suitor has the opportunity to propose to her.

⁴*US Weekly* is a weekly celebrity and entertainment magazine that was founded by The New York Times Company in 1977.

⁵*The Brady Bunch* is an American television sitcom that originally aired from September 1969 to March of 1974 on ABC. The series revolves around a large family that includes six children who become a family after their parents’ remarriage.

⁶*Drake and Josh* is an American television sitcom that aired on Nickelodeon from January 2004 to December of 2008. The series follows the lives of two teenage boys with opposing personalities who become stepbrothers and deal with their everyday life.

⁷*Instagram* is an online photo and video-sharing social networking service that allows users to take pictures and videos and apply digital filters to them and then share them with a variety of social networking services. These photos are taken using mobile devices and users of *Instagram* can comment on each other photos or videos.

APPENDIX A.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD CERTIFICATION

Office for Research
Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects



June 13, 2013

Bailey Oliver
Dept of Communication Studies
CCIS
Box 870172

Re: IRB#: 13-OR-202 "Half-Siblings and the Perceived Dialectical Tensions with the Shared Biological Parent: From the Perspective of Adult Children"

Dear Ms. Oliver:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Your application will expire on June 4, 2014. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent forms to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.



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APPENDIX B.
CONSENT INFORMATION

1

Half Siblings and the Perceived Dialectical Tensions with the Shared Biological Parent: From the Perspective of Adult Children
Informed Consent Form

Bailey Oliver, Graduate Student in Communication Studies, University of Alabama

Study Information & Research Investigators:

You are being asked to take part in a research study.

This study is called Half Siblings and the Perceived Dialectical Tensions with the Shared Biological Parent: From the Perspective of Adult Children. The study is being done by Bailey Oliver, who is a graduate student in Communication Studies at the University of Alabama. Ms. Oliver is being supervised by Dr. Carol Mills who is a professor of Communication Studies at the University of Alabama.

What is this study about (What are we trying to learn)?

This study is on adults with half siblings and their relationship with the biological parent they share with a half sibling(s). (***A half sibling is a brother or sister who has the same biological mother as you, but different father; or a brother or sister who has the same biological father as you, but different mother.***) This study is trying to learn how the relationship with a biological parent is challenged, changed, or affected due to parenting another child with someone who is not biologically related to the participant. There has been little research on half siblings and even less research on parents starting second families and the tensions that are then presented within the family dynamic. This research is interested in gathering information on what tensions adult children are most likely to perceive with the biological parent they share with a half sibling. This research will be beneficial in exploring different types of family dynamics and contribute to research on remarriage, divorce, blended families, and stepfamilies.

Why have I been asked to take part in this study?

You have been asked to be in this study because you have one or more half siblings and responded to our advertisement on Facebook, or our flyer advertisement. You may also have heard about this study through personal contacts. You have stated in an email that you are interested in participating, are between the ages of 19 and 30, and have one or more half siblings.

How many people will be in this study?

This study will interview 10 to 20 adults who identify as having one or more half siblings.

What will I be asked to do in this study?

If you meet the criteria and agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview. Interviews will be held in a conference room in Reese Phiifer Hall on the University of Alabama campus and can be scheduled at a time of your convenience. If you are not able to

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interview on site, you may set up a time to do a virtual interview using Skype videoing software that may also be at a time of your convenience. You will set up your interview times via emailing Bailey Oliver at bmoliver@crimson.ua.edu. Prior to your interview, you will be emailed a list of the interview questions. Consent forms must be received before an interview can take place. Each interview will be from 30 minutes to an hour in length for each participant and will be audio recorded.

How much time will I spend being in this study?

Interviews should last between 30 minutes to an hour in length.

Will being in this study cost me anything?

The only cost to you from this study is your time and cost of travel to the University of Alabama campus if you choose to do an on-site interview.

Will I be paid for being in this study?

You will not be compensated for being in this study.

What are the benefits (good things) that may happen to me if I am in this study?

There are no real, concrete benefits for participating in this study. However, you will gain the opportunity to reflect upon your relationships through the interview and responses to the questions. You may also be able to note the strengths and weaknesses or the possible tension that is occurring in your relationships. This could lead to a better understanding of your relationship with your parent(s) or sibling(s). However, the rewards of reflecting on your relationships in the interview may not always occur and depend on how much you self-disclose about your relationships. These benefits cannot be promised in this research.

What are the benefits to scientists or society?

The primary benefit of this research is scientific and the findings could help gain further understanding of the relational communication in the family dynamic. This research could contribute to exploring different types of family dynamics and contribute to research on remarriage, divorce, blended families, and stepfamilies.

What are the risks (dangers or harm) to me if I am in this study?

This study does not involve any more risks than those encountered in everyday life. However, there is a minimal potential risk for your psychological well-being. This chief risk is that there is a potential for discomfort or being upset during the interviews due to disclosing information about your personal relationships. Discomfort and becoming upset can particularly be seen if you have a strained relationship within your family that you are disclosing about. You will be interviewed in a private room so others will not be able to overhear us. If you are upset and wish

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to stop the interview at any time or wish to no longer participate in the study, you may do so. All data from those who wish to withdraw from the research will be immediately destroyed.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your privacy will be protected by interviews being held in a private conference room or for online participants, interviews are asked to be held in a private location of your choosing with no interaction from others. Your privacy will also be protected by providing you with the interview questions beforehand and also informing you that you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer during the interview. However, the investigator must report signs of spouse, child, or elder abuse or certain diseases if reported during an interview.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

The researcher will voice record the interview to ensure your responses are captured accurately. This data, as well as emails, will be deleted once the analysis of the research is complete. Only the researcher, Bailey Oliver, will listen to the audio recordings and intercept emails. Bailey Oliver will be the only person in the room where interviews take place and the only person involved in online interviews. All information will be kept on a password protected computer in a password protected file and be deleted once the research is complete. Any clearly identifying information such as locations, physical descriptions, or other names used will be changed. Handwritten notes taken during the interviews will include no identifying information.

What are the alternatives to being in this study? Do I have other choices?

The alternative or other choice is not to participate.

What are my rights as a participant in this study?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary- it is your free choice. You do not have to take part in this research if you do not want to. You can stop the interview at any time or not answer any questions you do not wish to. All participants in this study will be given fake names that have no relation to your identity. All data will be completely confidential. There will be no effects on your care or your relations with the University of Alabama.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (IRB) is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study right now, please ask them. If you do have any questions or concerns about this research project, please contact Bailey Oliver at bmoliver@crimson.ua.edu and by phone at (205) 215-9317 or Dr. Carol Mills at cbmills@ua.edu and by phone at (205) 348-6165. If you have questions about your rights as a

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person taking part in a research study, you may call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University at (205)-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html. You may e-mail the Research Compliance Office at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it. Mail it back to the University of Alabama Office for Research Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127.

Please print out and sign this consent form. Bring the signed consent form with you to your interview. If you do not have access to a printer, please review this form and blank forms will be provided for you at the interview to sign. If you are giving an online interview, please print, sign, scan, and email the consent form to bmoliver@crimson.ua.edu. Interviews cannot be conducted without signed consent. Please print a copy of this consent form for your own records as well. Additional printed copies to keep will also be available at face to face interviews.

Audio Taping Consent

As mentioned above, the individual qualitative interview will be audio recorded for research purposes to adequately archive and report the tensions perceived. These tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked room and only available to the lead researcher, Bailey Oliver. We will only keep these tapes for no more than 6 months and will destroy them after they have been transcribed.

I understand that part of my participation in this research study will be audiotaped and I give my permission to the researchers to record the interview.

- Yes, my participation in this study can be audiotaped.
- No, I do not want my participation in this study to be audiotaped.

I have read and understand the consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions regarding the research I am volunteering for.

Name (Please Print) _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Email address: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

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APPENDIX C.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

****Note “Shared Biological Parent” refers to your biological parent who is also the biological parent of your half sibling****

Interview questions: ****questions in parentheses are to be asked if the participant does not cover these in their answer to the original questions****

1. Describe the ideal parent/child relationship.
2. Describe your family to me, (How many siblings do you have? What are their ages? How many are half/step/adopted/biological siblings?)
3. Describe your living situation to me. (What parental figures and siblings do you share a residence with? If older and moved out, who lived in the house you grew up in?)
4. How involved in your life is the shared biological parent? How involved is the shared biological parent in your half sibling’s life?
5. Does your relationship with your shared biological parent differ from your other parental relationship(s)? If so, how. Explain. (Compared to your step-parent relationships or the relationship with your other biological parent)
6. Describe your family’s transition once your half sibling(s) was born. (Describe your transition into this “new” family. Smooth/challenging/hard? Explain.)
7. Can you talk about any changes, if any, you’ve seen in your relationship with the shared biological parent since your half sibling was born? (If younger than half sibling, Do you perceive any differences in your relationship with your shared biological parent and your half sibling(s) relationship with the shared biological parent?)
8. Describe ways having a half sibling impacts your relationship with the biological parent you share.
9. If anything, what would you want to improve on in your relationship with the shared biological parent?
10. Describe the most recent fight you had with the shared biological parent. (Describe it to me. Who or what did it involve? Was it resolved? If so, how was it resolved? What effect did this fight have on your relationship with the shared biological parent?) (If no fights, what is the most confrontational topic between you and your shared biological parent or what do you argue about the most?)
11. Describe the ideal half sibling relationship.
12. Describe your relationship with your half sibling(s) to me.
13. What do you think is the biggest challenge with having a sibling with whom you share only one biological parent, if any?
14. What advice would you give others who have a half sibling?
15. How have you tried to get over the conflicts or tensions in your relationship with the shared biological parent? With your half sibling(s)?
16. Do you have any additional comments to add regarding your family, parents, siblings, or relationship with the shared biological parent?
17. How old are you?
18. How do you identify yourself? (race, gender)

APPENDIX D.
STUDY ADVERTISEMENTS

Do you have a half sibling?



Do you have a sibling who has the same biological mother as you
but different father?

OR

Do you have a sibling who has the same biological father as you
but different mother?

**If so, we want to talk to you about your
relationship with the biological parent you
and your half sibling(s) share!**

- If you are willing to participate in an interview, please email Bailey Oliver at bmoliver@crimson.ua.edu.
- Volunteers must be 19 to 30 years old, have at least one half sibling, and be willing to participate in an interview.
- Interviews will take approximately 30 minutes to an hour, be held at Reese Phifer Hall, and can be scheduled at your convenience!
- No compensation will be provided in exchange for your participation.

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Advertisement: Facebook Post

I will be conducting an independent study through my graduate department of Communication Studies. This study is on adults with half siblings and their relationship with the biological parent they share with a half sibling. This study requires 10 to 20 adults who have one or more half siblings to participate. (***A half sibling is a brother or sister who has the same biological mother as you, but different father; or a brother or sister who has the same biological father as you, but different mother.***) Interviews will be held in a conference room in Reese Phifer Hall on the University of Alabama campus and can be scheduled at a time of your convenience. If you are not able to interview on site, you may set up a time to do a virtual interview using Skype videoing software that may also be at a time of your convenience. Each interview will be from 30 minutes to an hour in length for each participant and will be audio recorded. Recordings will only be heard by me and all participant names and identifiable information in the research will be changed. There is no compensation for your participation. If you have one or more half siblings and are willing to volunteer for an interview, please email me to set up a time at bmoliver@crimson.ua.edu. You must be 19 to 30 years of age to participate. Thank you so much and I appreciate your help in my research!

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