SISTERS: EXPLORING A FUNDAMENTAL FEMALE BOND

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the nature and significance of supportive and satisfying relationships between adult sisters and how these ties are facilitated. The importance of this fundamental female bond has been implied by a number of investigators in the areas of women's studies (Bernard, 1976; Caplan, 1981; Miller, 1976; Smith-Rosenberg, 1975), and in the sibling interaction research (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Cicirelli, 1982; Lamb & Sutton-Smith, 1982). The specific topic of the sister relationship however, has not yet been researched.

An abbreviated Social Support Questionnaire - SSQ - (Sarason, Levine, Basham & Sarason, 1983) was used as an objective measure to draw a sample of women who had supportive sister relationships. Twenty-five female university students ranging in age from 17-35 were randomly chosen from the sample of women whose questionnaire responses indicated supportive and satisfying sister bonds. The women rated their sister relationship and a female friendship on the Friendship Behavior Inventory - FBI - (La Gaipa, 1977). Respondents were then interviewed using the The Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954). This qualitative interview procedure was used to elicit and analyze the critical incidents which were perceived as facilitating supportive sister relationships.
The SSQ results indicated that 82% of the women with sisters, surveyed, reported close relationships with their sisters, and indicated that these were a major source of support. The ratings of sisters and friends on the FBI showed that sisters were rated significantly higher on measures of self-disclosure, help and support, authenticity, empathic understanding and positive regard. There were no significant differences in the areas of similarity and strength of character. The facilitating factors elicited by the Critical Incident Technique were categorized in 3 major areas:

1. External Influences - The early sibling relationship is shaped by environmental influences and factors outside the control of the sisters themselves.

2. Intra-personal and Inter-personal Characteristics - The affective nature and compatibility within the relationship itself are important in strengthening and maintaining a positive bond.

3. Specific Life Events - Strengthening in the sister relationship can be triggered by specific life events --- both expected or developmental events and unexpected incidents.

The implications of these findings for counselling, parenting and sistering are discussed.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

A. OVERVIEW

This research investigates the nature and significance of adult female sibling relationships. Women who identify their sisters as important in their social network are asked to describe their relationship, differentiate it from same-sex friendships, and describe the critical incidents which facilitated their level of closeness.

This research is relevant to the growing body of literature suggesting that women's social support networks and particularly relationships with other women are vital to a woman's self-identity, satisfaction and mental health (Bernard, 1976; Caplan, 1981; Davidson & Packard, 1981; and Miller, 1976). It is not only the high capacity for support and intimacy within the adult sister relationship which makes it significant and worthy of investigation, but also the theoretical assertion that sisters have an important influence in development, socialization and relationship patterns which have implications for future adult same-sex relationships (Bank & Kahn, 1982a; Lever, 1978; Sutton-Smith & Rosenberg, 1970). A healthy and supportive relationship between sisters can provide validation, support and intimacy. This in itself often provides satisfaction for many women and/or may encourage women to seek out similar quality relationships with other women, thus supplying a strong support system.
There is a scarcity of information investigating the sister bond, which is a primary source of interaction and support for many women (Adams, 1968; Komarovsky, 1967; Stivens, 1978), and one which has the potential for being one of the most intimate of human relations (Cicirelli, 1982; Cummings & Schneider, 1961; Mead, 1972). This research contributes to the understanding of the nature of the bond between adult sisters, the role sisters play in the support network and the factors which facilitate a close, supportive relationship.

B. THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S HOMOSOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Women's same-sex relationships have been shown to be very important to women's mental health (Bernard, 1976; Davidson & Packard, 1981), to self-esteem, identity formation and self-actualization (Caplan, 1981; Harris, 1984; Miller, 1976), and to social support (Adams, 1968; Komarovsky, 1967). The therapeutic value of female same-sex friendship is known to be particularly beneficial during crisis, transition and stress (Brown, Bhrolchain & Harris, 1975), and is important in alleviating the feelings of loneliness and depression in women (Bernard, 1976; Weiss, 1973).

Having a female confidante seems to buffer these adverse effects and can further be very important in the maintenance of healthy self-esteem, because in recognizing an important female relationship, a woman in effect, validates herself and
her own female experience. Although it does not seem to matter to whom a woman turns for support, whether a female friend or relative, her health and satisfaction do rely on that connection and support (Bernard, 1976).

It is important to note that the homosocial or same-sex relationships discussed here are based on social, non-sexual bonds that women have with other women and that men have with other men, which include relationships with friends, relatives, neighbors, workmates, etc. Homosociality is not linked to either homosexuality or heterosexuality. It refers, quite simply, to the common bonds between people of the same-sex regardless of sexual orientation.

The definition of homosociality is based on the theoretical conceptions of various writers (Bernard, 1976, Lipman-Blumen, 1976; Smith-Rosenberg, 1975; Woolsey, 1984), and has been used both as a domain for research inquiry and as a personality construct. The definition applies to people's actual same-sex social ties --- the actual behavior of being involved in same-sex relationships. Homosociality is described by Lipman-Blumen as "seeking enjoyment and/or preference for the company of other people of one's own sex", and by Bernard, as the "different ways men and women relate to their own sex". Homosociality can also be viewed as a personality construct, --- the predisposition or tendency to affiliate in same-sex relationships.
The present study examines the relationship between sisters within the framework of homosociality. Since homosocial relationships are increasingly being recognized and valued for the important role they play in women's support networks (Bernard, 1976; Smith-Rosenberg, 1975), understanding more about fundamental same-sex bonds between women, and what facilitates them is a worthwhile pursuit. This study looks at women who have supportive and satisfying relationships with their sisters. These women are interviewed in an open-ended manner and asked to describe their sister relationships, to differentiate them from other female friendships and to describe specific incidents or events which they perceive as important facilitators of their relationship.

The study of the sister relationship, as a fundamental female bond contributes significantly to the concept of female homosociality and highlights the special qualities which are inherent to female interaction. The quality of homosocial bonds between women has been described as significantly different from cross-sex and men's same-sex relationships and these differences have been elucidated in friendship studies. For example, women's relationships are described as more affectively rich and enduring (Davidson & Packard, 1981) and tend to emphasize and encourage the social and emotional aspects within friendship, whereas men tend to maintain a more task or activity-oriented basis for interaction (Caldwell &
Peplau, 1980; Parsons & Bales, 1955). Women are also more empathic and are more interpersonally oriented than men probably due to the socialization process of childhood (Block, 1984; Chodorow, 1971). Higher levels of intimacy have also been shown in women's same-sex (non-sexual) relationships as compared to male/male and male/female interactions (Fischer & Narus, 1981). And though same-sex relationships are equally important for both men and women, both sexes prefer the intimate nature of interaction that women more often provide in supportive relationships (Gibbs, Auberbach & Fox, 1980).

Given these findings, the potential for an intimate and supportive bond between sisters seems high. Investigating the relationship more thoroughly, with qualitative and quantitative measures, should provide more insight into the nature of the relationship, its unique features and factors which facilitate a strong, positive bond.

C. FEMALE SOCIALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Females in our society, and in many other cultures are socialized from an early age to play a particular role in relationships (Barry, Bacon & Child, 1957). They are encouraged to provide nurturance and emotional support to friends and family members and to value relationships whereas males are conditioned to be more independent of relationships (Block, 1984; Dunn, 1985). It is within the family where girls learn their role and begin interacting in a nurturing,
supportive and intimate manner. It is hypothesized that the nature of early interaction provides the basis or pattern for how individuals behave in future social relationships (Abramovitch, Pepler and Carter, 1982; Chodorow, 1978; Kohut, 1971; Lever, 1978; Toman, 1969). Therefore early interaction for females may be particularly important for the development of strong female relationships of adulthood.

Chodorow (1978) theorizes that women's embeddedness in social networks directly reflects the early childhood social context. She argues that the social contexts experienced by boys and by girls over the childhood years is different, and that this difference accounts for the development of many psychological sex differences, but particularly for women's affiliative behavior as compared to men's individualism. She explains that since girls are socialized by their mothers who are of the same-sex, the process of merging and separation is ongoing, whereas differentiation for boys is more clear cut. This continual process encourages affiliation and allows for the greater sensitivity girls have for another person's feelings and needs (Chodorow, 1978).

Other theorists have also discussed the importance of relationships to female development. According to Erikson (1959), a woman's identity is contingent upon achieving intimacy with another, while this is not necessary for development of male identity. Gilligan (1982) suggests that
women come to know themselves through their relationships with others. Thus, the relationship between mother and daughter has been identified by many as being central to the daughter's identity formation and to her ability to develop close relationships with other women (Caplan 1981; Chodorow, 1978; Deutsch, 1945; and Fischer, 1981). This formulation does not, however, recognize other important female family members. These relationships can be as significant as the mother-daughter relationship. One such important and often overlooked relationship is that between sisters.

Siblings, in general, are just beginning to be recognized for the important role they play in socialization and development. Previously siblings were regarded primarily in reference to rivalry or birth order effects, but not for their interactional influence and value (Aldous, 1977; Irish, 1964).

More recently, theorists (Aldous, 1978; Bank & Kahn, 1982a; Cicirelli, 1982; Rosenberg, 1982) have adopted the view that siblings have a profound impact on one another -- both during early formative stages and throughout the lifespan. Cicirelli (1982), for example, extends Bowlby's attachment theory beyond parents, to include siblings. This formulation has been supported in research studies (Ross, Dalton & Milgram, 1980(as cited in Cicirelli); Troll & Smith, 1976), and helps to explain the pervasiveness of strong sibling relationships across time and geographical distance.
Bank & Kahn (1982a) also argue that siblings are very important during the process of identity formation. They propose that self-identity develops in individuals by a process of comparison with those around them; boundaries are defined by way of similarities and differences with siblings and parents. When there are many similarities, as for same sex siblings, close in age, the task of boundary-setting and differentiation is more difficult, but when accomplished, there is heightened awareness and understanding of one another and self.

McNaron (1985) contends that the capacity for a deeply felt connection is particularly salient for sisters given their process of identity formation in and through relationships. She adds that the dilemma sisters face in differentiating from one another is an evolving process which enables sisters to know themselves and their relationships to others. McConville (1985) also recognizes that a sister is a constant reference point on which a girl gauges her own identity, and in coming to terms with their likenesses and differences, girls establish the nature of their relationship. Even when there are major differences between the two -- each identity depends of being unlike her sister's and, thus, still uses the sister as a reference point.

When sisters are very much alike, as for twins, the process of differentiation can be complicated, and/or never
fully resolved. However, the level of intimacy which often results is phenomenal. Schave and Cirello (1983) for example, found that many twins are highly "adept, aware and empathic in communication", and often "seek to establish close and intimate relationships of a qualitatively similar nature as their original twinship, with people throughout life" (p. 100).

This is of relevance to the study of sisters, because as the age difference between sisters decreases, the more closely their situation approaches that of twins (McNaron, 1985), and as explained by Bank & Kahn (1982a), it is the "high access" between siblings which intensifies sibling influence. Although the situation of twins often predisposes high accessibility, it is entirely possible that non-twin siblings reared in a physically and emotionally close environment may have more influence on one another, than twins who are raised separately or who have different interests, friends, rooms schools, etc. It is the high accessibility which promotes awareness and understanding of one another. These discoveries, along with the finding that females learn and practice affiliative skills from an early age compound the potential for intimacy and understanding in the relationship between sisters. Though the relationship between a girl and her mother can be foundational to her future development and relationship satisfaction, the relationship between sisters
has been seen by some writers as even more significant (Adams, 1968; Bank & Kahn, 1982b; Cicirelli, 1982; Fischel, 1979; McConville, 1985; McNaron, 1985). The primacy of the sister bond lies in the structure of the relationship. As peers "the channels between sister and sister are more easily viable, less guarded and defended against than the byways between mother and daughter" (Fischel, 1979; p. 147). The egalitarian relationship allows more sharing, understanding and intimacy.

There is growing evidence which suggests that the sister relationship can be a very important one for women. Sisters are frequently a primary source of support for one another and often report high levels of communication and understanding (Adams, 1968; Komarovsky, 1967; Stivens, 1978). The sister relationship has been presented as the closest of all sibling combinations and one which becomes particularly strong for elderly women (Cicirelli, 1982; Cummings & Schneider, 1961; McGhee, 1985; Mead, 1972). Although not all women have sisters, McConville (1985) proposes that many of the issues sisters face -- issues of love, support, conflict and rivalry -- are mirrored in our society, in general relationships between women and therefore have relevance to a wider sphere of women.

Though the previous studies imply that adult sisters have the potential for highly significant relationships, no systematic research has investigated these or other same-sex
sibling bonds. Distinguishing the subset of same-sex relationships within the sibling realm is an important basic distinction which should be made, given the sex differences in the socialization and relationship patterns of males and females; and by studying the nature of supportive sister bonds important information relevant to women's homosocial bonds (in general) and sibling same-sex interaction can be discovered.

D. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions are set out to provide a focus for the exploration of sister relationships, which is the main aim of this study.

1. Is the sister relationship an important one for women, as indicated by the frequency with which they are included in the support network?

2. What is the nature of the sister relationship and how does it compare to the relationship between female friends?

3. What critical incidents encourage or facilitate the supportive bond in a sister relationship and how?

Three measures were used to investigate these areas. The Social Support Questionnaire (Sarason, Levine, Basham & Sarason, 1983), was used as an unobtrusive method for finding the sample of women who had supportive and satisfying sister relationships in their support networks. The Friendship Behavior Inventory (La Gaipa, 1977) was used to compare the
friendship behaviors of sisters and friends and the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954) was used as a qualitative interview procedure for eliciting, then analyzing critical incidents which were perceived as facilitating a supportive sister bond.

E. DEFINITIONS

Sisters - female family members related genetically by having one or both parents in common.

Support - an action or behavior that is perceived by the individual to assist in dealing with demands of any particular situation or in meeting personal goals. This assistance may be tangible, in the form of assistance or intangible, in the form of personal warmth, love or emotional aid, and includes all social, emotional and instrumental services (La Gaipa, 1981).

Support System - individuals including: family members, close friends, co-workers, neighbours, helping professionals, and others who are designated by the individual as providing social, emotional and/or instrumental assistance.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In reviewing the literature on sisters --- biologically related female siblings --- very little is found. It is suggested that this is because women's relationships in general have not been given much attention by historians and researchers (Seiden & Bart, 1975; Smith-Rosenberg, 1975), and because siblings, as a group, had not, until just recently, been considered an important influence in psychosocial development (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Lamb & Sutton-Smith, 1982). As relatively new investigative fields, neither field of inquiry has focused on the pure (biological) sister bond.

A. WOMEN'S STUDIES

Ties between women have received relatively little attention in the historical, anthropological and psychological literature (Seiden & Bart, 1975; Smith-Rosenberg, 1975). They are often regarded as a peripheral part of the social system (Blau, 1973). Though they have seldom been examined, bonds between women have existed and served very important functions in healthy development (Bernard, 1976).

In 1975, Smith-Rosenberg presented the notion that female relationships are and always have been a primary part of social structure, they have just been denied and/or devalued by theorists. She outlines how these bonds have changed during the course of history and what effects these changes have had on women's lives.
In the nineteenth century, women had a social world grounded in female kinship. At the foundation was an intimate mother-daughter bond which modeled the positive strength and support and intimacy of female relationships. The female experience was further celebrated and validated with rituals linking sisters, cousins, nieces, aunts and female friends throughout life. Smith-Rosenberg suggests that female bonds were accepted and valued from an early age which fostered identity-formation and healthy self-esteem. These relationships served both expressive and instrumental functions and they were supported and encouraged whereas cross-sex relationships of adolescent and young adults were strongly discouraged.

Then in the twentieth century, changes occurred at a structural level. With modernization came an emphasis on the nuclear family, the separation of the 'home' and 'work' place, and subsequently of men's and women's worlds. The devaluation of women, of their roles and relationships resulted as women became isolated from one another.

This trend toward decreased contact between women has had detrimental effects according to many scholars (Bernard, 1976; Miller, 1976; Safilios-Rothschild, 1981). Women have increasingly relied on men to provide them with reciprocal, emotional nurturance and intimacy, however most men are not sufficient in these skills. Due to the socialized sex
differences and because of the psychological and social constraints on female same-sex relationships, many women do not seem to have these needs satisfied (Blau, 1973; Caplan, 1981). Bernard (1976) uses the term "relational deficit" to describe the social deprivation women often experience when they rely solely on men to meet their needs for nurturance and intimacy. Women who lack the emotional support in their marriage and do not have female confidantes suffer much higher levels of loneliness, depression and mental and physical illnesses (Bernard, 1976; Miller, 1976; Weiss, 1973). This has also been supported by various studies (Bernard, 1973; Gove, 1972; and Gurin, Veroff & Feld, 1960), which have basically shown that married women have a higher rate of mental illness in comparison to married men; and single men are at higher risk than single women. In effect, single women and married men fared better in terms of psychological health.

The married women who have not suffered homosocial deprivation to such a great extent are those who, despite societal changes, have maintained strong ties with other women -- family and friends. Studies have indicated that working-class women as compared to middle class women value and maintain stronger female ties, particularly with kin (Adams, 1968; Allan, 1977; Komarovsky, 1967). For example, Komarovsky (1967) found that 63% of the blue collar wives she interviewed stated their primary confidantes were either their
mothers or sisters; and 35% of the women in the blue collar sample admitted that they shared some significant segments of their lives more fully with their confidantes than with their husbands.

Other women who have reportedly maintained or reaffirmed strong female family bonds have been women active in the women's movement (Seiden & Bart, 1975). They have valued their female relationships in and outside the family even though female same-sex relationships have been widely depreciated in our society.

Considering the important impact positive female relationships have on girls and women, it seems pertinent that primary female ties -- mother/daughter and sister/sister -- be revitalized, and extended to female friendship.

The concept of "sisterhood" is an ideal to which many female relationships aspire. The term has been used widely in the women's studies literature and has been acknowledged in religious orders, in union movements, and in civil rights and women's movements to connote the special bond of love and solidarity between its female members. Although the biological sister bond has not yet been studied from within this area of literature, the concept has been used as a model for highlighting the value and significance of female same-sex bonds.
B. SIBLING RESEARCH

Sibling research also lacks information exclusively on sisters. There is a growing accumulation of data investigating the nature and significance of siblings in general, but studies have not separated and examined male/male or female/female sibling interaction. This is an important distinction which should be made.

In the past, sibling interaction was largely unrecognized by theorists in the social sciences. Although numerous birth order studies exist, they do not address the significance of sibling interaction. Aldous (1977) in her review of family interaction research recognizes the lack of information in this area. She comments that "neither group of social scientist (sociologist nor psychologist) has had much to say about sibling relations despite periodic injunctions in articles which say something should be done" (p. 105).

1. Psychoanalytic and Psychological Research.

It is assumed that this oversight has been a direct result of Freud's infant deterministic model of development, which presumed that all major life outcomes were preset in the early formative years by the shaping influence of parents alone. When psychotherapists have acknowledged siblings they tended to focus on the childhood rivalry between siblings over the affection of their parents (Levy, 1937; Oberndorf, 1929).
Alfred Adler (1959) was the first neo-Freudian to consider siblings from a different perspective. His theory, stemming from the self-reports of individuals, introduced the concept that birth order is a major factor in sibling rivalry. Many other researchers adopted Adler's theory and a vast amount of information relating birth order to a wide range of variables was compiled. Sutton-Smith and Rosenberg (1970) summarize this birth order and sibling status research thoroughly. Basically the studies tested large groups of people (usually students) on some aspect of personality or intellectual development and looked for significant correlations based on birth order position. Due to the limitations of correlational studies, and many inconsistent findings, birth order research has been widely criticized (Schooler, 1972; Sutton-Smith & Rosenberg, 1970). In any case, these studies did not provide information on sibling interaction.

Then in 1969, Toman developed his theory based on individual therapy sessions he had had with his patients. He was the first to emphasize the importance of obtaining complete sibling histories in diagnostic interviewing because he asserted that sibling relationships were a crucial developing ground for subsequent relationships. He presented the idea that the closer new relationships -- particularly marital relationships -- replicate the sibling relationships
of a person's childhood, the more successful and free from conflict they will be.

After Toman, researchers increasingly began to give siblings more credit for their role in socializing one another and, in some cases, actually rated sibling impact higher than parental influence (Landy, Rosenberg & Sutton-Smith, 1969). They also began to see that sibling influence continued well beyond the period of parental impact and recognized that rivalry was not necessarily the norm of sibling interaction -- it was merely the prevailing assumption based on the preponderance of research which looked at siblings primarily during "conflict-prone childhood and adolescence", not in adulthood (Bank & Kahn, 1982). Generally siblings have been shown to have intense relationships with one another, particularly same-sex siblings, close in age (Bryant, 1982), and it is the intensity which also has been shown to be facilitative of strong bonds of friendship and loyalty between siblings (Bank & Kahn, 1982a, 1982b).

Evidence of close and loyal sibling bonds were documented in earlier research literature. However, due to the prevailing assumptions of the time, important work was overlooked. One such important contribution was a 1956 study by Bossard and Boll. This work involved interviews with one hundred adult siblings from large families. The authors found that siblings had a very important influence on one another --
especially in large family systems where parental impact was diluted. They also discovered "intra-sibling combines", sub-units of siblings (usually dyads) who provided loyalty and primary socializing functions for each other. These sibling coalitions were analyzed as being drawn together on a basis of likeness, similarity and complementarity of interest and mutual need. More recently researchers in psychology (ie., Bank & Kahn) and in sociology (ie., Cicirelli) have drawn on Bossard and Boll's work and extended the study of adult sibling relationships.

Bank and Kahn (1982a, 1982b) have investigated coalitions between siblings in some detail. Their work involves focusing on sibling relationships within family therapy. They feel that siblings of an individual in therapy are often much more effective than parents in understanding and helping the person in need. Siblings exert power, exchange services and express feelings in a reciprocal way with one another. When they are seen apart from parents, they are often more direct, spontaneous, less competitive, and more "tuned in" to each other. Bank and Kahn believe that understanding the sibling subsystem can provide a therapist with a greater range of intervention options.

In their study of sibling loyalty, Bank and Kahn (1982b) argue that loyalty is a major theme of sibling interaction, which can coexist with rivalry and competition. They outline
characteristics of a loyal sibling relationship as one where siblings:
1) actively try to be together, and experience negative reactions to being separated,
2) maintain a positive, cooperative and helpful attitude toward each other,
3) often share a special language, not always understood by others,
4) protect and defend one another from physical or psychological attacks by outsiders,
5) are able to contain and resolve conflict openly and quickly among themselves and
6) acknowledge their distinct identities which are compatible and complementary.

The development of a loyal sibling relationship, according to the authors, is primarily stimulated by a basic weakness, absence or failure of parents and/or parent surrogates. Other factors which intensify the effect are that as children, the siblings were reared together rather than apart, there was some compatibility such as closeness in age and/or same sex, they were not played against each other by parents, and they had at least one nurturing role model who set an early example of nurturing and interpersonal sensitivity. A variety of psychological studies support this notion that parental overinvolvement diminishes sibling
loyalty while underinvolvement can emphasize it (Bossard & Boll, 1956; Sutton-Smith, Rosenberg & Landy, 1968).

However, in limiting their research to only siblings in therapy, Bank and Kahn can not be sure how normal, well-adjusted, intimate sibling relationships evolve. They summarize by saying:

We can only imagine that intense loyalty can be instilled by parents who are emotionally available to their children, but who refuse to become involved in settling their differences. It is entirely possible that sibling loyalty, as an ethic of conduct can be deliberately modeled, taught, and reinforced by thoughtful parents who have not abandoned their children (p. 265).

2. Sociological Research.

Sociological investigation has also contributed to the understanding of sibling interaction and the nature of adult sibling relationships. Researchers, such as Adams (1968), Aldous (1978), Cicirelli (1982), Troll (1971) and others have identified some important features of these intra-familial ties. The first important characteristic is the duration of the relationship. From beginning to end, the timespan is remarkable long. Whereas friends and neighbours are forgotten or dropped, family relations endure, usually between 50-80 years, and can outlast parent-child ties by 20-30 years.

Secondly, the quality and consistency of interactions are also unique. Generally siblings know each other at a core level, they can be very comfortable engaging in casual and informal activities, and most feel some obligation to maintain
regular contact. Siblings rarely lose contact with one another entirely (Cicirelli, 1982).

A third characteristic is the egalitarian nature of most sib interaction — particularly in adulthood, when birth order effects and childhood rivalries are largely minimized (Allan, 1977). It is also true that siblings have a similar perspective in life-course and historical events, whereas parents often have a different generational view (Aldous, 1978).

Finally, the bond between siblings is often reinvoked during crisis. Sibs are a major source of mutual aid: emotionally, financially, with childcare and household responsibilities; and in protecting and looking after one another (Troll, 1971).

Cultural changes which have increased sibling interdependence also have been identified by sociologists. It is argued that shrinking family size heightens rather than lessens sib interaction, because in small families where children are close in age, the impact they have on one another, particularly when both parents work outside the home is intensified. There also has been some indication that siblings in two child families are emotionally closer regardless of age and sex, than siblings in larger families (Bowerman & Dobash, 1974).
Another bonding factor is geographic mobility. When families move, friends, schools, and environments change; siblings provide constancy for one another, as well as emotional support and nurturance. Increased daily stress and societal pressures also affect family life. Family problems such as: marital discord, separation or divorce, spousal abuse, child abuse or neglect, alcoholism and other serious conditions can deeply affect children and may lead to emotional bonding.

In the end, longer life spans add to the amount of time siblings have with one another. Their relevance is especially important for elderly, single women (Cummings & Schneider, 1961) and increases the level of life satisfaction for elderly, rural women (McGhee, 1985).

Examining the nature of normal adult sibling interaction, sociological investigators have identified some important variables. Cicirelli (1982) claims that siblings are capable of intimacy and extraordinary understanding of one another's problems, but not all sib relationships reach this level. In one of his studies, Cicirelli (1980) asked 100 college women to indicate the strength of their feelings for each of their siblings and parents using a 7 point scale ranging from "not at all" to "very much". On average, the women rated their siblings higher than both their mothers and fathers. They often felt "very close" to one particular sibling, "very"
friendly and relaxed, "very" much understood and felt their views were "very" similar. In this study, Cicirelli did not collect information on the sex of this "closest" sibling. However, in a later study (1982), he reports that sister pairs have the closest affectional family ties, and he found that there is a growth in closeness in early adulthood as sibs are likely to be supportive of efforts to establish independence from parents and to take on new roles and values.

Other studies have also uncovered strong sibling relationships. In Allan's (1977) study of adult sibling relationships, he found a tendency for his working class respondents to have a very strong and important bond with one particular sibling. These relationships were characterized by more than the friendliness and compatibility of "sibling solidarity". Siblings displayed a greater range of involvement, interacted more for the enjoyment than the obligation, and recognized one another as the most important person in their social network. The term "best friend" was often used. A common feature identified was that these relationships occurred between same-sex siblings and always with the one nearest in age.

Adams (1968), in his study of young to middle aged adults, asked about feelings of affection toward siblings. He reported that 48% of those interviewed had a high degree of closeness to the sibling closest in age. Women with sisters
were closest of all, with 60% reporting a high degree of closeness. By contrast, only 39% of brother pairs reported the same level of closeness. Adams explains this finding in terms of role similarity for women. An alternative explanation for this finding may be found in the friendship literature where women's friendships are found to be affectively richer (i.e. closer) than those of men (Davidson & Packard, 1981; Fischer & Narus, 1981).

Another important finding was that respondents emphasized the voluntary nature of their sibling contacts -- 70% of siblings said they stayed in contact because of enjoyment rather than obligation. Aldous (1978) has expanded on this phenomena suggested by Adams. She maintains that although children in a family begin in an obligatory relationship, the nature of the bond changes during adolescence to a voluntary status. She lists factors which highlight the voluntary interpersonal commitment as being: similarity of interests as indicated by age closeness and same gender status, residential proximity, common family obligations and the absence of invidious comparisons. Adams further presented data that showed sisters to maintain contact across vast geographical barriers by writing letters, but that brothers and cross-sex siblings more often lost touch when they lived a distance from one another.
More recent researchers have found women with sisters to be most concerned with helping others and with maintaining social relations (Dunn, 1985; Troll, 1971). They are also primary providers of emotional support for other family members and play a major role in keeping family relationships together over time. In elderly years, women provide a basic sense of emotional security for brothers and draw even closer to their sisters -- who apparently have the closest relationships of all elderly sibling combinations (Cicirelli, 1977; Cummings & Schneider, 1961).

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that the relationship between sisters is unique; they have a high capacity for intimacy and socio-emotional support. Consistent with the information on differences in male and female friendship bonds (Bell, 1981; Caldwell & Peplau, 1980; Fischer, 1981a; Woolsey, 1984) it seems clear that the relationship between female siblings is different from that between male siblings and cross-sex combinations.

This study begins the exploration of this important, yet neglected relationship. It is hoped that by examining the nature of positive bonds between sisters, more can be learned about basic female homosociality and that by raising awareness of the potential value in women's relationships, they can again be validated and revitalized.
C. SISTERS AND FRIENDS

Studying this relationship between sisters as a fundamental female bond, distinct from the sibling realm, provides a new framework of investigation, and generates new research questions, such as: How is the relationship between sisters different from that between female friends? and What effect does having a sister have on a woman's support network and on her homosocial relationships?

In attempting to answer these questions, again very little pertaining specifically to women was found in the research literature. Often necessary information is missing. Studies on social networks, for instance, have attempted to examine the differences in family and friendship relationships, however, differences between same-sex and opposite-sex support system members are usually not made. Pattison, Llamas and Hurd (1979), for example, analyzed the importance of kin and non-kin relationships, but did not distinguish the networks by sex, so no conclusions can be drawn about the effect of same-sex relationships.

From the area of social networks, however, general data on the nature of kinship and friendship relationships have been examined. In general, family relationships are characterized as permanent ties which are bound by a certain amount of obligation. Friendships, usually lack high level interconnections which are maintained by frequent and regular
family interactions, however, they are characterized by a more spontaneous and voluntary nature. They do not provide the security found in family associations, but they also can provide freedom from the family constraints (La Gaipa, 1981).

Adams (1967) suggests that the distinguishing feature of friendship is consensus — a high degree of similarity in values, interests and attitudes; and the major characteristic of kinship is positive concern — obligation and mutual need coupled with long term involvement, interest and affection. He adds that consensus and positive concern are not mutually exclusive and that in the closest social relationships — whether between parent-child, siblings or friends — a high degree of both are likely to exist.

It also has been thought that an important feature of friendship is equal status, which is replaced in kinship, by a hierarchical system, primarily related to inheritance. It is argued though, that in our Western technologically advanced society, inheritance divisions are usually made equally between siblings, unlike previous generations, when the tradition of primogeniture, entitled the first-born male to receive all the family's resources. This process has been replaced by a more egalitarian system of distribution and the effect is reflected in more egalitarian sib relationships (Bank & Kahn, 1982b; La Gaipa, 1981).
In fact, it seems that the distinction between the lines of kinship and nonkinship are even less marked when considering sibling and peer relations. As previously suggested, there is a large voluntary component to adult sibling bonds (Aldous, 1977), and these relationships often take on an egalitarian nature as siblings approach adulthood.

An indication of this overlap is also reflected in our language. The generalizability of the term "sisterhood" is one example, as well as reports of women who name their sisters "best friends" (Allan, 1977), and women, who, when speaking of a good friend, say, "She's just like a sister". It appears that, as La Gaipa (1981) suggests "the boundaries of friendship and kinship in western society are disintegrating, if they really ever existed" (p. 86).

To further investigate the relationship between friendship and kinship, Clark and La Gaipa (1979) attempted to analyze the extent of friendship behavior in the sibling relationship. They studied a sample of 213 adolescent males and females using an instrument developed and validated by La Gaipa (1977). The Friendship Expectancy Inventory measured six dimensions of the relationships including: self-disclosure, authenticity, helping behavior, positive regard, similarity and empathy. They asked male and female adolescents to rate their relationships with brothers, sisters and same-sex friends.
Their findings showed that opposite-sex sibling relationships were weaker than same-sex sibling and friend relationships in all areas, but they concluded that same-sex siblings were a significant part of the support networks of adolescents --- particularly strong between brothers. Apparently boys felt as positively towards their brothers as to their best, same-sex friends in all the areas measured.

For girls though, the authors found a different pattern. They found that girls showed more investment in friendship with same-sex friends outside the family than with sisters, because friends were rated higher in the areas of authenticity, empathy and self-disclosure. On the other dimensions no significant difference were found between sisters and friends.

The authors explained that the difference in these female relationships was due to the nature of adolescence --- typically a period when girls look beyond the family for close, "best-friend" relationships. However, it seems more likely that this finding is an artifact of the samples used. Included in the sample of 117 females were 48 girls from a convent-boarding school. This was not matched in the male sample. It seems likely that when girls are away from home the intimacy between sisters would be reduced and perhaps replaced by available female friends.
There is also another weakness in the study. In using the Friendship Expectancy Inventory, the authors measured subjects' relationship expectations rather than actual relationship behaviors. There is a difference in asking if one expects a friend to help during a crisis, and in asking if a friend actually helps during a crisis. It would seem for purposes of this study, asking for actual behavior would provide more information on the actual nature of these relationships. As well, McCarthy (1981) reports that cognitive distortions are less likely when calling for behavioral self-reports, than when asking for reports of a cognitive or affective nature.

The present study examines the relationship between women's same-sex sibling and friend relationships analyzing the extent of friendship behavior in the sister relationship using La Gaipa's Friendship Inventory, but the form which rates actual behavior has been used.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This study consisted of two parts. The first part, used quantitative comparisons to test hypotheses and the second part employed a qualitative and descriptive interview technique to explore more general research questions.

A. THE QUANTITATIVE STUDY: INSTRUMENTS & HYPOTHESES

1. Social Support Questionnaire (Appendix I).

An abbreviated form of the original Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ) developed by Sarason, Levine, Basham and Sarason (1983) was used as an objective instrument to draw a sample for this study. This questionnaire was designed to investigate two aspects of social support: the perceived social supports in a person's life and the degree of support satisfaction. Each item on the 27-item test asked respondents to a) list the people to whom they could turn and on whom they could rely in given circumstances and to b) indicate how satisfied they were with these supports on a scale of "1-very dissatisfied" to "6-very satisfied".

The number score (N) for each item of the SSQ was the number of support persons listed and the satisfaction score (S) was the number corresponding to the scale of satisfaction. The overall N and S scores were obtained by dividing the sum of N or S scores for all the items by the number of items.

The authors found the N scores ranged from 2.92 to 5.46 with a mean of 4.25 when they administered the S.S.Q. to a
sample of 600 college students. They reported an internal reliability of .97 (between items). The S scores ranged from 5.12 to 5.57 with a mean of 5.38. They again reported a high level of internal consistency. Factor analyses for N and for S scores showed evidence that one strong factor underlied each of the two SSQ scores and that they represented different dimensions of the general concept. The test-retest correlations for N and S scores over a 4 week interval were .90 and .83 respectively. Along with the high level of reliability, the authors reported that the SSQ did not seem to be highly biased by the social desirability response set and indicated that correlating the SSQ with other personality measures gave greater understanding to the concept of social support.

During pilot testing of the SSQ for this study, it was discovered that students were much more willing to answer the test if it required relatively little time. Because the intended use of this instrument, for this study, was primarily as a screening device to find women who had supportive sister relationships, and because all 27 items required 30-45 minutes, on average, to complete, it was decided to reduce the number of items from 27 to 9 items. The 9 items were selected to represent the areas of social support tapped by Sarason et al. in their original questionnaire. Therefore 2-3 items from the different areas: support during crisis, support
dependability, unconditional support and acceptance, and support in forms of love and advocacy were chosen. Recognizing the implications shortening an instrument has on its psychometric properties, careful consideration was given to both the advantages and disadvantages of taking this action. It was decided that the benefits derived from shortening the test, (ie, that students were more willing to answer the test when it required only 10-15 minutes; that they were more likely to complete all the items, and to volunteer to be interviewed) outweighed the loss of established reliability -- particularly since the test was used mostly as a screening instrument.

Another page with an additional two items was also attached to the revised SSQ, asking respondents to list sex and age of siblings, and to indicate if they were interested in further participation by giving their first name and telephone number. These items along with the material from the revised SSQ provided information as to the number of women in 110 who had sisters, the number who had supportive relationships with sisters and their general level of support satisfaction.

It was decided that only women satisfied with their support networks (ie. with satisfaction scores of 4 or higher on the SSQ) would be included in the major study. This restriction seemed necessary considering the research
framework -- concerned with the nature of positive and supportive sister relationships, their comparison to positive female friendship relationships and the incidents which facilitate a supportive and satisfying sister bond.

Those women who included a sister and a female friend in their support networks, rated their networks as satisfying and also indicated further interest in the study met the selection criteria for continuing in the study. Of these respondents, 25 were randomly chosen. They were called and individual interview times were scheduled.

2. Friendship Inventory (Appendix II).

During the interview, each volunteer was asked to rate her relationship with her sister and her relationship with a same-sex friend using a paper-pencil measure. As it is difficult to directly compare and statistically analyze the relationship between a family and a friendship relationship (La Gaipa, 1981), it was decided that the sister relationship would be analyzed in terms of friendship content (Clark & La Gaipa, 1979).

The measuring instrument used was a version of La Gaipa's (1977) Friendship Inventory (FI). This inventory was developed out of the content analysis of over 1800 friendship statements to identify major friendship themes. The seven major themes which he isolated were:

1. Self-disclosure - feeling free to express and reveal
personal and intimate information.

2. Authenticity - openness and honesty in the relationship; being real, genuine and spontaneous.

3. Help and support - expressing concern for one's well being and giving help readily without being asked; providing psychological support.

4. Positive regard - providing ego reinforcement; enhancing one's feeling of self worth; treating one as deserving of respect and as an important, worthwhile person.

5. Strength of character - striving to achieve and conform to the objective value system of the society.

6. Similarity - possessing similar points of view; agreeing on controversial issues; possessing similar attitudes and interests.

7. Empathic understanding - interpreting accurately the feelings of the other person; understanding how one really feels; really listening to what one has to say.

These 7 major factors were isolated by four separate factor analyses using the principal component technique with rotation to simple structure. Subsequent factor analytic studies have replicated La Gaipa's original findings and generally from 4 to 7 factors were typically found for different levels of friendship (La Gaipa, 1969).

The reliability and validity of the Friendship Inventory and the friendship dimensions have been tested in various
studies. The factors, themselves, have been identified across various populations -- children (Bigelow & La Gaipa, 1980), adolescents (Clark & La Gaipa, 1979) and in "normal" and "psychiatric" adult populations (Engelhart, Lockhart & La Gaipa, 1975).

The validity of the items was tested by Heilbronn (1973) who conducted a longitudinal study comparing the friendship items and the "amount of friendship rewards" between friends and non-friends. He found that all the friendship dimensions discriminated friends from non-friends in terms of received rewards. To test the question of whether individuals choose friends and do not choose friends in terms of the identified dimensions, Wengreniuk (1971) tested a Canadian, male college sample, and found a significant interaction between most and least chosen friends and the friendship scales (F=12.16, p<.01). Individually, the most discriminating item was "helping", followed by "authenticity", "similarity", "positive regard". "Self-disclosure" and "strength of character" were least discriminating.

In another study La Gaipa (1972) found that personality factors were relatively unimportant as determinants of friendship values. By administering a variety of personality tests and the friendship scales to a sample of 2651 subjects and computing the difference between means on the personality measures; he found the amount of variance accounted for, by
the personality tests, was seldom over 10%.

The predictive validity of the friendship scales was assessed by Lischeron and La Gaipa (1971). They measured 76 male college roommates on the degree of importance ascribed to maintaining a "close friendship" and the degree to which the friend's behavior was characterized by the 7 friendship items, at 2 separate times --after 5-6 weeks of acquaintance and after 6 months of sharing a room. The correlation between the "degree of importance" and level of friendship ranged from r=.67 for Similarity to r=.34 for Strength of Character (all significant at .01 level), suggesting that the growth of friendship could be predicted using the friendship scale.

Using 5 statements to tap each dimension, La Gaipa compiled 35 items which formed the basis for his Friendship Inventories. By changing the specific instructions and rating formats, his measure can be adapted to investigate different aspects of friendship.

During this study the Friendship Behavior Inventory was used to compare the actual relationship behaviors of a woman's sister and a female friend. This was done by asking each woman to rate the 35 items on a Likert-type 5 point scale, indicating how often a behavior was present in her relationship with her sister, then to rate the same 35 items for supportive same-sex friend relationship. To counterbalance any order effects, half the women rated their
sister first, then their friend; the other half rated their friend, then their sister.

The measure compared a women's relationship with her sister and her relationship with a female friend in the 7 above mentioned areas. The statistical analysis of the data involved using t-tests to measure the significance of the difference between means of the two groups in these seven areas.

B. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses were designed to help explore the questions: Are sisters an important part of a woman's support network? Are they listed more frequently than brothers? On what dimensions is the relationship a woman has with her sister different from her relationship with a female friend?

1. It is hypothesized that when women who have sisters are compared to women who have brothers proportionately more sisters than brothers will be listed among the support network members on the Social Support Questionnaire.

2. Also, following the theories of homosociality (Bernard, Smith-Rosenberg) it is hypothesized that the relationship between sisters and female friends will be highly similar and there will be no significant differences between the means of the friendship dimensions measured by the Friendship Inventory.
3. Alternately, consistent with the findings of Clark & La Gaipa it is hypothesized that adult women will rate their female friends significantly higher on measures of "authenticity", "self-disclosure", and "empathic understanding" on the Friendship Inventory, but that no significant difference will be found on "positive regard", "help and support" and "similarity".

4. Consistent with Adams's findings (1968), it is hypothesized that women will rate their friends significantly higher than their sisters on the rating of "similarity".

In addition to these statistical hypotheses, an interview provided a focus for exploring the sister bond in an open-ended and descriptive manner.
C. THE QUALITATIVE STUDY: THE CRITICAL INCIDENT TECHNIQUE

1. Development and Application.

As indicated in the previous sections, the study of relationships between sisters has not been specifically examined. This situation necessitated the use of a method of data collection that would be descriptive and exploratory.

The Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954) provided a method which satisfied the descriptive criterion because it accessed data in an exploratory and open-ended manner. This technique was devised by Flanagan as a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles. It was developed from early aviation studies in the United States Air Force during World War II for purposes of selecting and training pilots and combat leaders. It has since provided a useful methodology for a wide variety of psychological studies.

The procedure consists of gathering a series of specific events that facilitated or hindered a certain behavioral outcome from individuals who are in positions to make such observations. The data, or incidents, are then subjected to an inductive categorization process which enhances the meaning. This is done by sorting the incidents into descriptive categories. New incidents are added, refining and
resorting categories as needed until all data are summarized and described in an efficient manner.

Interviewing is completed when enough information is compiled to meet Flanagan's criterion of redundancy in which relationship descriptions and critical incidents begin to seem similar and patterns become recognizable. This is the method of confirming content validity according to Flanagan. He suggests that this criterion of redundancy occurs after approximately 100 incidents.

Flanagan identified 3 problems in categorization: 1) selecting a frame of reference that will be most useful in describing data, 2) developing a set of major area and sub-area headings and 3) selecting the level or levels of specificity-generality to use in reporting the requirements. Therefore, he outlines several considerations which aid in establishing headings for major areas and in stating critical requirements. These are:

1) the headings should indicate clear cut and logical organization.
2) the titles should convey meaning in themselves,
3) the list of statements should be homogeneous,
4) the headings should be of the same level of importance,
5) they should be comprehensive and cover all incidents having significant frequencies, and
6) they should be such that findings will be easily applied
and maximally useful.

Flanagan also advises submitting the incidents to independent raters for categorization to check reliability. He predicts that if categories are well formed and the raters sufficiently trained, a high degree of agreement (i.e. reliability coefficient of .75 or more) can be expected.

The Critical Incident Technique has been formally reviewed on a number of reliability and validity checks by Andersson and Nilsson (1964). They analyzed the reliability of collecting procedure, the saturation and comprehensiveness of the incidents, the control of categorization, the analysis of content of training literature and the importance of sub-categories, and concluded that the checks were very supportive of the Critical Incident Technique. They found that it very accurately represented the information it intended to measure.

2. Rationale and Research Questions.

The rationale for choosing the Critical Incident Technique was to allow exploration of this new area of investigation. Due to the amount of information generally accessed with this type of methodology the design was limited to look at facilitative incidents only, and not hindering ones. Although this limited the study considerably, the decision was made to narrow the subject matter and to do a thorough investigation of the chosen area, within this
potentially massive study. Additional research questions were posed to probe for details of the nature of the supportive and satisfying sister relationship, which were not addressed in the other segments of the study.

Research Questions

1. What are the general qualities of a supportive sister relationship?

2. How is the sister relationship unique? How does it differ from female friendship? from mother/daughter relationships? and from cross-sex family ties?

3. What are the incidents or factors which facilitate a supportive and satisfying bond between sisters?

The information derived from Research Question #3 was analyzed using the Critical Incident Technique and followed Flanagan's method for categorizing and analyzing information. Research Questions #1 and #2 were used to supplement the research findings and were recorded as additional exploratory information.
3. The Interview.

The interview itself began with an introductory statement about the nature of the study. "There has not been much research done on the relationship between sisters, so I am doing exploratory research in this area. During this interview I would like to know what your experience of having a sister is like for you. I will be examining three main areas, but would like you to feel free to add any insight, comments or questions that you have."

Participants were assured of confidentiality and permission to tape-record was obtained. Some demographic information was collected - ie. age of subject and of the sister with whom she has the closest, most supportive relationship, their marital statuses, whether they have children, whether they live together, their socio-economic status and ethnicity. Then the interviewing began.

1. To begin, please describe your relationship with your sister - How often do you contact one another? What do you do when together? Have you always been close or has your relationship changed over time? In what ways is your relationship supportive?

2. Next, I would like you to focus on how your relationship with your sister is unique. How is it different from a female friendship? How is it similar? How is it different from the relationship you have with your mother?
How is it similar? How is it different from your relationship with male members in your family?

3. Now, I'd like you to think of a specific incident or several incidents, when you felt really close to your sister, when your relationship was very supportive and important to you. What happened? What led up to it? Why was it important? Are there other factors which you feel facilitated or strengthened your relationship with your sister?

Once interviewing was completed, information was transcribed to index cards from the tape recordings. The data pertaining to each research area were separated. (Information collected from the first two research questions were recorded descriptively and appear in Chapter IV as "Additional Exploratory Questions".) Information generated from Research Question #3, the facilitating incidents, were tallied and the procedure for examining critical incident material, as outlined by Flanagan was initiated.

Categories were formulated by sorting a small sample of incidents into piles. After these tenative categories were established, brief definitions for each were developed, then additional incidents were classified using them. During this process, categories were resorted, redefined, and clarified until all incidents were classified in a clear and organized manner.
After categorization was completed, a summary report was drafted and submitted to the participants to ensure correct interpretation of their data. In order to further check reliability of the system, the incidents and descriptions were submitted to two independent raters who resorted the incidents into the categories provided. The raters, both graduate students in Counselling Psychology, placed the specific incidents into the appropriate categories with accuracy of 88% and 91% respectively, and both raters placed the 11 subcategories into the appropriate superordinate category with 100% accuracy. These high rates attest to the distinctiveness of major-area and sub-area category headings and the clarity of incident descriptions.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS

A. PARTICIPANTS

The research was conducted with female students, ranging in age from 17-35, recruited from the University of British Columbia. Women were approached directly in cafeteria and lounge areas on campus and asked to voluntarily take part in a study of women's support networks by completing a questionnaire about their social support networks.

One hundred and ten women participated. Those women who included a sister and same-sex friend in their list of support network members, for the Social Support Questionnaire, and were interested in further participation, became the sample for this study. From this sample, a subsample of 25 women (out of an eligible 49) were randomly chosen for continued participation in the study, which involved rating friends and sisters on a Friendship Inventory as well as describing the influences which facilitated their supportive and satisfying sister relationship.

The random sample of 25 women ranged in age from 17 to 35, with an average of age of 25.8. They attended university in a variety of disciplines and were from different socio-economic backgrounds --5 from lower levels; 12 from the mid range; and 8 from upper levels -- as determined by the Revised Sociological Index (Blishen & McRoberts, 1976).
These women were the focus of the study. In addition, the original data collected from all 110 women who completed the Social Support Questionnaire also were used.

B. OCCURRENCE OF SUPPORTIVE SISTER RELATIONSHIPS

The data generated by the Social Support Questionnaire indicated that a high percentage of women in this sample had sisters, and that sisters were frequently included in these women's support networks. Of the 110 women surveyed, 88 (80%) had sisters; and of the women with sisters, 72 (82%) included their sister in their support networks.

In comparison, fewer women had brothers, and of those who had, recorded them less frequently on the SSQ than sisters. Only 38 (52%) of the 73 women with brothers listed them as supportive. Pearson's Chi-square statistic confirmed that women rely more on their sisters than on their brothers ($x^2=15.55; p<.001$). These results supported the first research hypothesis: Sisters were listed more frequently than brothers.

Table 1 identifies the differences between support provided by male and female siblings in the areas tapped by the SSQ. Although the information is speculative because the instrument was not used in its original form, it is of descriptive and heuristic value.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.S.Q. Items</th>
<th>Brothers</th>
<th>Sisters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependable when I am in need of help.</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive (or would be) if I was married and had just separated from my spouse.</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With whom I can feel free to totally be myself.</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believes I have something positive to contribute to others.</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listens openly and is uncritical of my personal thoughts and feelings.</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive (or would be) if I was fired from a job or expelled from school.</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting of my best and worst points.</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truly loves me.</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive (or would be) of major decisions I make.</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C. THE NATURE OF THE SISTER BOND

1. Demographic Information.

Focusing on the 25 women who volunteered to present their relationships for investigation, demographic information revealed that the women came from families-of-origin with from 1-11 brothers and sisters --- an average of 1.1 brothers and 2.4 sisters.

The women themselves ranged in age from 17-35 with an average of 25.8 years. The sisters (who were focused on) ranged from 19-46 with an average of 26.3. Thirteen of the women talked about a close relationship with an older sister; 11 about a younger sister, and 1 about her twin. Differences in age ranged from 0-11 years between the two.

2. Frequency of Contact.

The frequency of contact between sisters varied with the physical distance or proximity between the women. Three of the women (12%) lived at home with siblings; 9 (36%) lived in the same city as their sister; 2 (8%) lived in the same province, but not the same city; 9 (36%) lived in different provinces; and 2 (8%) lived in different countries. All the women sampled reported maintaining regular contact, which ranged from "more than once a day" for women in the same household, to "once a month" by mail or telephone, for women living in different provinces or different countries. No one reported less frequent contact than "once a month".
When asked about the reason for contact, the overwhelming response was "for the enjoyment". In addition, 5 participants also listed "needing her help" or "she needs my help" for reasons for contact.

3. Sisters vs Friends.

To further describe the nature of the sister bond, the relationship was compared to female friendship using the Friendship Behavior Inventory, which measured 7 dimensions of these relationships. Statistical analysis of the data involved the use of t-tests of the significance of difference between means.

The results showed that the women rated their sisters significantly higher than their friends in the areas of "authenticity", "help and support", "self-disclosure", "positive regard" and "empathic understanding". No difference was found between the sister relationship and friend relationship in the areas of "similarity" and "strength of character". The t-test values are shown in the following table.
TABLE II

Summary of Significant Mean Score Differences for Women's Relationships with their Sisters and their Friends on the 7 Dimensions of the Friendship Behavior Inventory. (N=25)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>F.B.I. Dimensions</th>
<th>Sisters</th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>t-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Regard</td>
<td>22.12</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>20.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>22.56</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>20.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping and Support</td>
<td>22.56</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>19.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Disclosure</td>
<td>21.40</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>18.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarity</td>
<td>19.72</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>18.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathic Understanding</td>
<td>22.60</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>20.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of Character</td>
<td>19.32</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>19.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: df=48

*p<.05

**p<.01
Given the significant differences reported in these relationships the second research hypothesis was not supported. It appeared that women experience differences in their relationships with their sisters and their female friends.

The findings in this study were not consistent with Clark and La Gaipa's study which found girls' relationships with their friends higher in areas of "authenticity", "self-disclosure" and "empathy". Therefore, research hypothesis #3 was not supported. Explanations for these inconsistent findings are discussed in the next chapter.

In fact, the only finding which proved consistent in both the Clark and La Gaipa (1979) study and the present study was that there was no significant difference in the relationships in the area of "similarity". Women reported an equal level of similarity in both relationships. This finding, therefore, did not support the fourth research hypothesis suggested by Adams, that there is more similarity between friends than kin.

It also should be noted that although these results have been presented in a similar manner as Clark & La Gaipa's original study, based on the way the Friendship Inventory has been used, it may be more appropriate to say that: There is a high friendship content in the relationship between sisters, particularly in the areas of helping and support, disclosure, empathy and authenticity.
D. FACILITATING FACTORS

The 25 women interviewed described 180 factors which they felt significantly encouraged or facilitated the development of their supportive relationship. Although the participants were asked primarily for facilitating incidents, it was found that other factors -- such as environmental conditions and relationship qualities were cited as frequently and considered as important as the specific incidents. The factors which were reported to facilitate strong relationships between sisters separated into 3 major categories:

CATEGORY #1 - External Influences

This superordinate category consisted of factors, outside the control of the relationship itself, which acted on or shaped the relationship, usually from an early age; and/or which directly or indirectly forced siblings together in such a way that it reinforced the bond. The factors included are:

a. Sibling status effects and family coalitions
b. Home environment and physical living arrangements
c. Parental values and actions for affirming close family ties
d. Parental (and subsequent family) problems
CATEGORY #2 - Intra-personal and Inter-personal Factors

The second major category of responses related to the existing or evolving personal and relationship attributes which produced an increasingly satisfying relationship for the women. The facilitating factors reported include:

a. Specific characteristics the sister possessed
b. Relationship qualities
c. Communication skills
d. Maturity or development

CATEGORY #3 - Life Events

The third superordinate category included specific life events which triggered special sharing within the relationship. The relational response to stressful, transitional, traumatic and joyful life circumstances provided a direct impetus for deepening the bond. Such events included:

a. Actual or expected physical separation
b. Special, positive life events
c. Difficult, even traumatic occurrences

A more detailed description of each category, with its subcategories is presented below, along with examples.
#1 - External Influences

a) Sibling status effects

Being close in age and of the same sex often resulted in bonding. Nineteen of the 25 women interviewed (76%) named their only sister or sister closest in age as their closest family tie. As a result of their commonalities, the women reported identifying with each other from an early age and having many similarities and shared interests. Often they were treated similarly -- grouped together as "the girls".

EXAMPLE:
My sister and I have always been close. We are the only 2 girls in the family and are only 13 months apart, so we were always treated as "the girls". We shared a room, had identical clothes, toys and were always together.

b) Home environment and physical living arrangements

Whether the family lived in the city or on a farm and whether they were relatively stable or moved frequently seemed to affect the relationship. Sisters, who came from a rural environment and those whose families moved frequently reported spending a lot of time together, relying on one another (sometimes almost exclusively) as playmates, and
companions. Sharing a room also increased the amount of contact sisters had with one another. Sharing clothes, toys and friends added to the list. Ten incidents were reported in this category.

EXAMPLE:
We grew up on a farm and only had each other to play with. When we moved to the city, we lost the cohesion, but every summer my parents took us back to the farm for a few weeks vacation and we'd quickly regain the closeness.

c) Parental values and actions
Parents who valued close family ties; emphasized the importance of supportive sibling relations and arranged family interactions, seemed to contribute to the sibling bond. Twelve incidents were reported in which parents encouraged the siblings to support and look after one another; to spend time together and to resolve conflicts, and/or where they facilitated the unity by arranging regular family get-togethers; and by encouraging siblings to maintain regular contact (even by paying for long-distance telephone charges!).

EXAMPLE:
My mother values positive sister relationships, she is very close to her own sister and always plans family get-togethers
so that we spend time together and have good times.

d) Parental problems

When major difficulties occurred in the family, either between parents or between a parent and child, siblings seemed to bond together with one another. Nineteen incidents were reported here. Examples include: alcoholism; debilitating physical or mental illness in a parent; child abuse or neglect; parental marriage problems, separation and/or divorce; and difficult parent-child relations. Women who cited these incidents emphasized the importance of their sister and other siblings at the time. They often supported and protected one another; talked and cried together; shared secrets; defended each other and understood one another deeply. Many women felt that their deep loyalty for one another originated at the time of their early problematic experience.

EXAMPLES:
When my mom was married to an alcoholic, that was the closest we've ever been. We sort of clung to each other, we would talk and cry together. We also had a common hatred for him.

When I was 16, my parents separated. It was that crisis which
brought (my sister) and I together. My parents were so involved with their problems, they were not there for us -- so that really knit the rest of us (siblings) together.

When my 2 older sisters left home, my younger sister and I were left to deal with our mother. We both had to hold hands to join forces to deal with her because she's so dominant and old-fashioned.

In total 60 incidents were reported by 20 women in this superordinate category. These preset and circumstantial conditions seemed to have quite a profound effect on the developing relationship between the sisters interviewed.

#2 - Intra-personal and inter-personal factors
a) Specific characteristics possessed by the sister

When asked for factors which facilitated their relationship with their closest sister, eight women said that their sister's personality was an important factor. Qualities, which were reported included: strong, intelligent, understanding, supportive, dependable, accepting, non-critical, non-competitive, honest, loyal, positive, caring, easy-going and affectionate. (The complete description given by each woman was used as one
distinct incident, therefore 8 incidents were counted.)

EXAMPLE:
She's very easy-going and accepting, I can say anything to her and she doesn't judge me. She's very supportive and I know she's there if I want to talk about anything.

b) Relationship Qualities
Some women also said that something in the relationship itself helped to encourage a special closeness. The interpersonal compatibility of the two provided an atmosphere that was/is: secure, comfortable, supportive, understanding, loyal, respectful, non-competitive, validating and enjoyable. Similarities between the two women, in terms of personalities, values, perceptions and/or interests were also given as contributing to the affective compatibility of the relationship. Sharing the same sense of humour was another commonality. Eleven women named general relationship qualities, which were categorized as eleven separate incidents.

EXAMPLE:
Our personalities are so similar and so different in the right ways that we click. We fought until we were about age 10, but
not much since then. We can resolve any differences now. We
don't compete and we are both intensely loyal.

c) Communication skills

Being able to communicate and resolve difficulties
were seen as important factors in facilitating and
maintaining the relationship at a meaningful level.
Communication qualities included: communicating at a
deep, intimate level; being open and honest;
trusting one another; being empathic and being able
to express one's self at a core level --- including
the expression of affection as well as anger.
Conflict was minimized by sensitive awareness of the
other person's space and needs and resolved by
communicating and reaffirming the bond. Fourteen
incidents were reported in this category.

EXAMPLE:
We can also talk at a really meaningful level. I think
becoming feminists together--reading a lot of the same books,
sharing ideas, understanding each other at a deep level and
making sense of a lot of shared experiences has been very
important for our relationship. We also laugh a lot at the
same sort of things.

d) Maturity or development
Closeness was reported to increase as one or both sisters matured. Sixteen women felt their relationships with their sister improved from when they were younger. They described their adult relationship as more egalitarian, more respectful, and more open and intimate. The age difference did not seem as marked as it was earlier. Their relationships were valued more; similarities of interests, values and experiences were recognized and validated.

EXAMPLES:

I don't think it's a specific event as such—it seems more a matter of time--age gap becoming less important. She's grown up enough. I don't treat her like a younger sister any more. I enjoy her being part of the crowd. She really grew up when she went to university. She had some emotional problems and worked through a lot. She realized what friendship is, and what values are important.

Now we are very close. Our ages don't matter so much. There is a change in our relationship too. We talk more, are more open about things. Our careers are similar too and we have other similar interests. We are more equal and there is a mutuality in support and respect.
In total, 19 women described 49 incidents which fit this second major category. These factors, considered inherent to the relationship itself, were apparently, very important in establishing and maintaining a close relationship.

#3 - Critical life events

a) Actual or expected physical separation

Many women observed that they did not fully recognize the importance of their relationship until they were separated (i.e., one sister moved away). With this recognition, came increased appreciation for one another’s support and contact; they valued their time together more -- having very special and important visits during the period of separation. When they were reunited, temporarily or actually living near one another again, sisters became more involved in each other’s lives, and/or began communicating at a deeper level. Some began expressing the importance of the relationship for a first time; others became more affectionate and loving. Eighteen incidents were noted.

EXAMPLES:

Since I moved away, we have really begun to appreciate each other more. We miss each other a great deal. We write, send gifts or special cards and we phone each other at least once a
week (outrageous phone bills). And when we do actually get together we have great visits.

Within the past year since I've moved back, we've become closer. We spend time together and talk a lot. We have opened up to each other and begun to deal with past issues -- talking at a meaningful level is very important to me.

b) Special positive life events

Celebrating a special life event such as marriage or childbirth was a highlight for some women. Other women named events such as a special party or shared adventure. The relationship was strengthened by preparing for, and anticipating the event together, by sharing the special time, then by remembering it. Memories of other special times were also included, such as: just spending time with each other or with one another's children or other special family members -- feeling the importance of close female bonds. Fourteen positive life events were given.

EXAMPLES:

My sister and her husband wanted me to be present when she had her second baby. That was a really special time that reinforced our relationship even more.
When I was 12 and she was 14, I liked this guy and she helped me make this terrific costume for a party -- it was the first time she really helped me like that, selflessly, all night. I was touched by that and we started to get closer after that.

c) Difficult or traumatic life events

Supporting one another through times of difficulty was the largest subcategory, with 39 reported incidents. Types of difficulties included: death of a family member; relationship with boyfriend or husband terminated; illness and/or hospitalization; emotional difficulty or crisis; and other generally stressful events. When both experienced the trauma, sisters helped one another by spending time together, being mutually supportive and by talking intimately about the grief and/or crying together. When one experienced difficulty, the other was available and dependable, was nurturing and provided practical and emotional support through the times of need. As well, sisters helped each other solve problems and make decisions. They provided each other with acceptance, support, courage and strength.

EXAMPLES:

After our mother's death, she felt guilty and had a difficult
time, because she didn't have a good relationship with our mother, whereas my older sister and I had already resolved our differences with her, passed the stage. I realized that she was having a really difficult time and I tried to help her, to be understanding.

When I was having problems in my marriage, I called her. She told me I could come out and stay with her for as long as I wanted or needed to.

We're always helping each other in crises and we always seem to be in crises, one or the other. They may not be that big later, but at the time it seems like the end of the world.

All 25 women contributed to make this the largest superordinate category with a total of 71 incidents.

1. Frequencies of Factors.

This information is presented in graphic form in Figure 1, and a compilation of the specific incidents and their subcategory and superordinate categories is provided in the Appendix III.
FIGURE 1

Frequencies of Facilitating Factors and their Categorization

External Influences
A. Sibling Status Effects
B. Home Environment
C. Parental Influences
D. Family Problems

Relationship Qualities
E. Sister's character
F. Relationship Qualities
G. Communication Skills
H. Maturity & Growth

Critical Life Events
I. Separation
J. Positive Events
K. Difficult Events
E. ADDITIONAL EXPLORATORY QUESTIONS

When asked about how the sister bond compared with other relationships and if it influenced female friendship, the majority of women found it difficult to express the subtleties. This section is therefore sketchy, but the descriptions are presented below.

DO YOU FEEL YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SISTER HAS AFFECTED YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR FEMALE FRIENDS? Four women said "no"; 3 were undecided and 5 said "yes, but weren't sure how" and 13 women said "yes" and gave the following explanations. Some respondents said they felt they had learned social skills and patterns of relating to females in their early relationships which transferred to their friendships. Others said they felt comfortable in female company and felt they understood themselves and other women from their experience in growing up with sisters. Another response was that they looked for relationships which were of a similarly satisfying intensity and comfort, and/or for friends who had similar qualities and values as their sisters, including being non-competitive, respecting and valuing women's relationships.

HOW IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SISTER DIFFERENT FROM THE RELATIONSHIP WITH A FEMALE FRIEND? Women emphasized the permanence, shared history, and unspoken understanding; they also felt that they could express anger more easily with a
sister than with a friend because they felt "fighting" with a sister would not jeopardize the relationship. One woman also felt that she sometimes "took her sister relationship for granted" and didn't put as much into it as she did with her friendships.

HOW IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SISTER DIFFERENT FROM THE RELATIONSHIP YOU HAVE WITH YOUR MOTHER? A majority of women (68%) also reported close bonds with their mothers -- felt loved and supported -- however, if given a choice on whom to turn to, most women (80%) felt that their sister would understand more, or would give more appropriate information or advice.

HOW IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SISTER DIFFERENT FROM THE RELATIONSHIP YOU HAVE WITH MALE FAMILY MEMBERS? Women, generally felt their cross-sex family relationships were not as personal as same-sex ties. They didn't share the same level of intimacy. However, many women (40%) described close bonds in which they participated in different activities and talked about different things than they did with their sisters. For example, women participated in social activities - sports and games with their brothers while they would "just spend time with their sister - talking". Conversations with brothers were more general, covering such topics as work, school and sometimes relationships, but not at the same level of intimacy as with sisters.
These additional exploratory questions raise some interesting points which, when examined in future research, will provide valuable and interesting information.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

A. STATEMENT OF RESULTS

The results of this study confirm that many women have a unique, specialized sister relationship, which is an important part of their support network. This is shown by a large number of women in this study who have sisters and who rely on them for the intimacy and support found characteristic of this relationship. This is an important finding as previous literature, in both the areas of women's studies and sibling research, has only hinted at this importance.

The relationship is marked by regular and frequent contact, characteristic of family ties, but contact is also voluntary and maintained primarily for the enjoyment of being together rather than for obligatory reasons. In this way, the sister relationship is similar to friendship.

In analyzing the friendship content in sister relationships, it is found that women rate their sisters significantly higher in areas of "help and support", "authenticity", "self-disclosure", "empathic understanding" and "positive regard" than their same-sex female friends, but rate the relationships equally in the areas of "similarity" and "strength of character". They respect and feel similarities with both.

These findings vary from the results found in Clark and La Gaipa's original (1979) study. The differences may be
accounted for by the samples themselves. The present study asks adult women with a supportive sister and a supportive female friend relationship to rate each on the Friendship Behaviour Inventory; whereas Clark and La Gaipa sampled adolescent girls who merely had sisters -- regardless of their availability or supportiveness. It may be that adolescent girls reach beyond family relationships for a same-sex best friend, then in early adulthood reaffirm the sister relationship, but such a premise would require further investigation, optimally, longitudinal investigation.

What is apparent from the research findings of the present study is that the relationships women have with their sisters and female friends do have similarities. On the dimensions where sisters are rated higher, it seems likely that the long shared history and common identity of close sisterhood would provide a "core" knowledge of one another, unspoken understanding, and deep level communication. The high reliance on sisters for "help and support" could also be associated with the history of commitment and dependability, often found in family relationships. This is supported by Adams (1968), who indicates that family members are more frequently called upon and more often provide practical and emotional support during difficult life events than non-family members. The apparent skew towards higher sister ratings could also be explained by the selection procedure, which
chose women on the basis of their supportive sister relationships.

The 25 women interviewed described 180 factors which they felt significantly encouraged or facilitated their relationships with their sisters. Although the women were asked for specific facilitating incidents, other factors -- such as environmental factors and relationship characteristics were cited as frequently and considered as important as the specific incidents. Therefore the factors were categorized into the following framework.

1. External Influences - The relationship develops within a context or environment which is conducive to fostering a strong sibling bond. These factors are largely outside the control of the child -- such as when one is born, one's gender, the age span and gender of siblings, where one lives (rural or urban environment), frequency of moves, one's family's socio-economic status, whether one shares a room and possessions, as well as parental attitudes and actions which have a powerful influence on sibling solidarity. Another subcategory which had profound effects on the developing relationship was major parental problems, such as: alcoholism; physical or mental illness; abusive, neglecting or difficult parent; and marital difficulties which often lead to family break-up. Various arrangements of the above conditions were
cited as strong influences which shaped the early relationship.

2. Intra-personal and inter-personal characteristics - The second set of factors are the more subtle ones operating within each sibling and between the two which determines the affective nature of the relationship itself. These include specific personality characteristics, the compatibility of the two personalities and characteristics of the relationship, including the ability to communicate, resolve conflict and allow for personal growth and development which consequently changes and expands the relationship.

3. Specific Life Incidents/Events - Life events, both developmental events, such as the sister's marriage, or moving away from the family home; and unexpected life incidents, like serious illness or sibling death, trigger strengthening in the sister bond.

It is noted that, in other studies examining the effects of critical life events on a sibling relationship, virtually identical life events can elicit opposite reactions and consequences (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Ross & Milgram, 1982). The researchers contend that whether siblings draw closer or distance themselves depends on the quality of the bond existing prior to the incident. Thus the importance of early
environmental factors and relationship maintenance abilities found in this study are supported and validated.

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1. Theoretical Significance.

This study supports the assumption that sisters play an important role in each others lives. These results have general significance in confirming the importance of sibling relationships and in affirming the supportive and intimate potential of women's relationships.

The findings are consistent with theories proposed by Bank and Kahn (1982), Cicirelli (1982), Dunn (1985) and others who hold siblings as important agents of socialization and development throughout life; and as capable of developing intense bonds of loyalty and support.

It also extends the understanding of Bank and Kahn's assertion that sibling bonding occurs primarily as a result of parental abandonment. The study supports the idea that parental abandonment is one major factor, but it is not the only one and does not appear to be necessarily the "primary" factor. As would be expected, other factors also appear to promote strong relationships. Preset environmental conditions and positive parental values and actions can also produce a conducive atmosphere which is then dependent on the nature and compatibility of the sisters themselves and what they do to maintain the relationship.
Other characteristics found to be descriptive of the sibling relationship -- that sib interaction is largely voluntary and egalitarian (Aldous, 1978); that siblings provide major socio-emotional functions (Cicirelli, 1982) and maintain regular and frequent contact (Adams, 1968); and that they rely on one another significantly during crisis (Troll, 1971) are all supported in this study between adult sisters.

The important and unique qualities of the sister relationship are voiced in this study by women who recognize and value their relationships as intimate, empathic and supportive. These qualities, previously acknowledged in the women's studies literature, as female affiliation skills accentuate the unique nature of the sister bond, which should be recognized apart from the larger sibling structure.

Awareness of the sister relationship, of its durability, and tremendous potential for lifelong intimacy and support, provides a new perspective and insight into dealing with a variety of issues faced by individuals with sisters (and brothers), for their parents and counsellors.

2. Practical Significance.

Implications for Counselling:

The previous theoretical neglect has minimized the importance of a positive sibling relationship and therefore has limited the use of sibling-specific concepts in individual and family counselling. Bank and Kahn (1982a) believe that
there has not been an outstanding model for sibling based therapy because helping professionals are not taught about the importance of and how to deal with major sibling events (apart from rivalry).

They also assert that therapists are invested in maintaining authoritarian parent-child relationship with clients/patients rather than a more egalitarian relationship. By avoiding the strength and power in sibling interaction and maintaining parental control, the therapist gives the message that parents and parent-like therapists have the power and control and the siblings do not. They contend that "sibling-like relationships, if the therapist permits them, are more egalitarian, promote faster change and deny the patient the illusion that he or she can be protected and nurtured interminably" (p. 300).

This concept also is paralleled in feminist counselling theory. It is recognized that an egalitarian client/therapist relationship promotes growth and autonomy and minimizes dependencies "...a therapy of equals will have a greater generalization of effects to real life than conventional therapy because it affords the client a chance to learn egalitarian interaction between peers rather than to see human relationships in terms of parent and child, or expert and supplicant" (Sturdivant, 1980, p. 159).
The recognition of the profound impact siblings can have on one another can provide vital information for a counsellor or therapist. By knowing each other at a "core" level, siblings have enormous power, and if this source can be tapped, the therapeutic process can be enhanced. This is particularly true for siblings close in age -- whose life experiences are similar and who identify closely with each other. It is the loyalty between sibs that the therapist counts on in intervention. Loyalty ties will also determine the appropriateness of working with the siblings of an individual in therapy. Bank and Kahn (1982) suggest that even if the siblings are in a distant relationship, most are willing to participate as "consultants". After an initial session the therapist can determine how appropriate it would be to involve the sibling as a therapeutic ally.

Bank and Kahn (1982) make reference to therapists who have worked with the siblings of individuals in therapy with equivocal results. Their explanation is that not all siblings can be brought together to resolve differences and to support the one in "crisis", and they emphasize the importance of exploring the sib relationship within individual counselling sessions, then if it seems appropriate, to arrange for the siblings to work together.

If a potentially useful sibling relationship is conflicted the therapist should take some time to explore the
difficulties, resentments and misunderstandings with the individual in therapy, then with the sibling subgroup. As adults, siblings can be taught to use more effective communications skills and can work at resolving their differences in a mature manner.

When a positive bond does exist, siblings can provide powerful levels of support for the one suffering difficulty. They can problem-solve together, try out new behavior with each other and be very effective in role play techniques given their common familiarity with parents and the family situation. The therapist can assist siblings to get past rigid family role patterns, to accept developmental changes and to help create equality between siblings, thus showing them the potential power and strength in the relationship. Working with the sibling(s) of an individual in need, can provide a therapist with a powerful tool, by providing more options and greater leverage in counselling.

The benefits to the client also are maximized. By reaffirming ties between siblings who have been blocked, or by strengthening already positive, but weak ties -- the support network of each sibling is reinforced. This can be essential for both men and women suffering from stress or facing a crisis. As siblings often willingly provide their assistance when they are aware of their sibling's pain, helping to reconnect this natural link could be a preventative measure
for the client's future well-being.

For women, this could be especially important. As previously shown, women suffer drastically when cut off from important supportive affiliations. Reaffirming female ties can be vital -- as women are generally quite efficient in affiliative nurturing skills and can provide reciprocal support and understanding to one another, which in turn, helps to enhance self-esteem and life satisfaction.

Feminist counselling recognizes this strength in women's relationships. It is one of it's major therapeutic goals to improve the quality of women's relationships with other women and to help women to trust, respect and value these bonds (Sturdivant, 1980).

Due to theoretical similarities, sibling based therapy lends itself well to a feminist counselling framework. By actually working with a woman and her sister(s) a feminist counsellor might work with the issues which split the women -- perhaps competition and/or giving priority to male relationships. Then, these issues could be used as a basis for talking about how society wedges women apart. The women may want to look at their early family experience and/or explore the origins of their conflict. Once the barriers are discerned, the women can begin to reaffirm their relationship and discover what they have been missing. Helping the women to value themselves and their relationship with each other,
and emphasizing the life long potential of their bond can encourage women to redirect their loyalties.

The application of sibling-concepts can be used in a variety of settings. Bank and Kahn (1982a) suggest this resource can be useful in group therapy, by indicating how members may be relating to each other based on early sibling role patterns and power struggles; in marital counselling by helping partners to accept the importance of sibling loyalty bonds, if these are a threat; and in family counselling, where children, when seen in the sibling subgroup, provide important and helpful information.

**Implications for Parenting:**

From the findings, it is apparent that sister relationship patterns evolve from an intricate combination of parental influence, the particular givens of the environmental context and the sisters themselves. Although the purpose of the research was not concerned specifically with appropriate child rearing strategies, the findings and conclusions lead to some recommendations for parents who want to facilitate positive sibling relationships.

Parents consciously and unconsciously influence the sister inter-relationship. The age span between siblings is important -- the closer siblings are in age, the more similar their perceptions and common life experiences. Such
similarities are enhanced by close physical proximity, such as sharing a bedroom, walking to and from school together and/or living in a geographically isolated area.

Parents must recognize that the siblings need space and time alone together to negotiate the bounds of their relationship. This includes allowing siblings to settle their differences. Bank and Kahn (1982a) suggest that the most effective parents "use their power to enforce rules and administer consequences for violent or abusive behavior; but they also possess a finely tuned sense of when to intervene and when to let the children work it out themselves" (p. 202).

Parental values, expectations and modelling behavior also influence sibling relations. Those parents, who value family unity and positive sibling relationships, and instill these values by encouraging siblings to help and support one another often see positive results. Modeling positive marital and/or sibling relationships can also be a powerful influence, as well as providing the opportunities for siblings to interact and have fun (ie. family celebrations).

Parents also need to be aware of the effects of comparing siblings. As Ross and Milgram (1982) point out, the most intense and long lasting rivalries are caused by comparisons and competition over achievement, intelligence, physical attractiveness, social competence or maturity which is/are overly emphasized by a parent and perceived as uncontrollable
by the children. They find that conflict and rivalry can be minimized considerably by avoiding favoritism, and by recognizing individual talents and accomplishments. When siblings, particularly those close in age, are treated uniquely and valued for their individual strengths, they can differentiate more easily from one another, as well as maintain a positive inter-relationship.

**Implications for Sistering:**

"The quality of the (sibling) relationship will be deeply affected by the parents, but it is left increasingly to each sibling to determine the final shape of the relationship" (Bank & Kahn, 1982, p. 50).

From the interviews with women who have positive and supportive bonds, important information emerged concerning the nature of their relationships and what women did to actively maintain them.

Communication was found to be both a major strength and a dynamic accomplishment. Although some sisters felt a deep, intuitive understanding for one another from early childhood, others attained a meaningful level at later stages of their relationship. What was very important for the women, was the deep level of trust and honesty in their interactions. Being empathic, sensitive and non-critical were also essential in
achieving an atmosphere of comfort, security and supportiveness.

Another issue which these women dealt with successfully was "growth and change". This meant that older sisters gave up some of their power and control and younger sisters took more responsibility in the relationship. This was an important developmental stage for a majority of the women interviewed and resulted in a more egalitarian relationship which was less critical, more respecting, and more intimate. Allowing for the change and valuing the equality in the new relationship provided these women with a more satisfying relationship.

Competition and conflict can be major obstacles to a positive relationship. These issues were managed in a variety of ways. Some women said that they avoided competition by developing opposite aspects of their personalities and different talents. This is an effective defense against sibling rivalry, according to Schacter (1982) who observed that by deidentifying with each other, siblings provide each other with enough psychological space, and can thereby admire each other's accomplishments from within their own niche in the family.

Other women avoid conflict by recognizing each other's need for privacy and physical space --- achieving a balance of the length and frequency of visits and time apart. This
sensitive awareness was also considered important when discussing a potentially difficult subject. One woman exemplified this by saying, "it is a matter of waiting until she says her boyfriend is a "schmuck", before I agree with her, and say, 'I always knew he was'". When conflicts do errupt, women said that talking openly about the problem usually helps to resolve it and reaffirm the bond.

Lastly, it was recognized that a strong bond between sisters must be based on the value that the relationship is important. This value is demonstrated by loyalty to one another and by investing a certain amount of time and energy into the relationship. For most women, this realization evolved as the women matured and recognized that their adult sister relationship was very special.

C. LIMITS OF THE STUDY

1. Generalizability.

The generalizability of the results is limited to the population of women, who as in the present study, are university students between the the ages of 17 and 35 and who, acknowledge supportive sister relationship. Although this narrows the population considerably, the preliminary sampling of 110 university women in the early stage of this research indicated that a large number of women reported such positive relationships. Also, given the suggestion that women from lower socio-economic levels (who are underrepresented in this
study) report higher incidents of positive sister bonds than middle and upper classes (Adams, 1968; Komarovsky, 1967; Seiden & Bart, 1975) it would seem that the prevalence of supportive adult sister relationships is high in the general population.

It must also be noted that the nature of the volunteer sample may not be representative of a general population.


The measuring instruments used also limit the findings. The Social Support Questionnaire was not used in its complete form. It was shortened to increase response and completion rates. For purposes of this research the abbreviated version allowed for a wide range of women to be sampled, and was used as a selection instrument for the interview process.

Observing La Gaipa's caution, that it is difficult to measure the relationships between siblings and friends because as yet, there are no measurement techniques which are useful for equating friends and kin along the same metric dimensions, it was decided to analyze the friendship content of sister relationships as Clark and La Gaipa had done, and to use La Gaipa's (1977) Friendship Inventory. To decrease cognitive distortions, actual friendship behaviors as opposed to friendship expectancies were drawn. But despite these actions true comparisons can not be made between the two types of relationships, and therefore the comparisons are speculative.
As well, the Critical Incident Technique was used to find facilitating factors in the sister relationship. As a descriptive technique, these findings are also of a suggestive, rather than a conclusive nature. Further research involving the testing of statistical hypotheses would be necessary in order to report conclusive results.

Finally, the research focussed only on the nature of and facilitating features of positive relationships. This restriction significantly narrows the wide possible range of relationships and influences experienced by sisters, but it was considered a necessary boundary for this study.

D. FUTURE INVESTIGATION

The exploration of sibling bonds has only recently begun. This study has suggested the importance of differentiating female same-sex sibling bonds from male and cross-sex combinations. These should also be investigated separately, perhaps using an exploratory method which could highlight the unique features of each.

As for the continued investigation of the relationship between sisters, it would now be appropriate to test the derived categories quantitatively with hypothesis testing. Also investigating the relationship or role of a supportive sister bond in a) social support, b) kinship support, c) homosociality and d) well-being and/or life satisfaction would be of interest and value.
Further, the study of sister relationships should be extended to include all sister relationships, both positive and negative, and to do hypothesis testing of the derived facilitating factors on a representative sample of the entire range of sister relationships. Incidents which hinder a supportive bond should also be examined in this context.

Given that a supportive sister relationship can be very important in a women's support network -- further investigation of this bond has direct implications for the mental health and life satisfaction of many women.

E. SUMMARY

The strength and significance of the adult sister bond have been acknowledged in this study. It is recognized and valued for the high levels of intimacy, support, and understanding which provide validation and satisfaction for many women.

Three major categories of factors were identified which were reported as facilitating the close and supportive connection, including: environmental factors, relationship qualities and critical life events.

Implications for counselling, parenting and sistering were drawn from the findings and from the proposition that supportive and loyal sibling relationships are possible and may be a major strength in the natural support systems of women who value these bonds.
REFERENCES


Appendix A: Revised Social Support Questionnaire
Social support networks have been shown to be very important to people's self-esteem and general happiness. We are presently doing research investigating some important aspects of women's support systems. If you would like to know more about your support system please complete the following questionnaire. It should take approximately 15 - 20 minutes. The information you give will be kept completely confidential and used for research purposes only. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time or to refuse to answer any questions. It will be assumed that if this questionnaire is completed, consent has been given. Your involvement or non-involvement will in no way affect any aspect of your academic standing.

INSTRUCTIONS

The following questions ask about people in your environment who provide you with help or support. Each question has two parts.

For the first part, please indicate who you rely on most for help or support in the manner described. You do not need to list them in order of importance — just give the person's initials, their relationship to you, and their sex (see example). Do not list more than six persons per question, and try not to spend too long on each question — list those people who come to your mind first.

For the second part, rate how satisfied you are with the overall support you have, in each situation using the following scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Dissatisfied</td>
<td>Quite Slightly</td>
<td>Slightly</td>
<td>Quite</td>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough support</td>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>Enough support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you feel you have no support for a question, check the words "No one", but still rate your level of satisfaction. Please answer all questions as best you can.

EXAMPLE

Ex) Who do you know whom you can trust with information that could get you in trouble?

No one 1) B.L. · Friend · F. 4) L.S. · Sister · F. How satisfied: 5
2) T.S. · Mother · F 5)
3) N.R. · Friend · M. 6)
1. Whom can you really count on to be dependable when you need help?
   - No one  1)  2)  3)  4)  5)  6)  How satisfied: ___

2. Whom do you feel would help you if you were married and had just separated from your spouse:
   - No one  1)  2)  3)  4)  5)  6)  How satisfied: ___

3. With whom can you totally be yourself:
   - No one  1)  2)  3)  4)  5)  6)  How satisfied: ___

4. Who helps you feel that you truly have something positive to contribute to others?
   - No one  1)  2)  3)  4)  5)  6)  How satisfied: ___

5. Whom can you count on to listen openly and uncritically to your innermost feelings:
   - No one  1)  2)  3)  4)  5)  6)  How satisfied: ___

6. Whom could you really count on to help you out if you had just been fired from your job or been expelled from school:
   - No one  1)  2)  3)  4)  5)  6)  How satisfied: ___

7. Who accepts you totally, including both your worst and your best points:
   - No one  1)  2)  3)  4)  5)  6)  How satisfied: ___

8. Whom do you feel truly loves you deeply:
   - No one  1)  2)  3)  4)  5)  6)  How satisfied: ___

9. Whom can you really count on to support you in major decisions you make:
   - No one  1)  2)  3)  4)  5)  6)  How satisfied: ___
Please list your siblings below in order from oldest to youngest. Include yourself.

(Note: Names are not necessary, instead number the oldest - 1 and give his/her sex and age.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sibling</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oldest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Youngest

On the basis of your responses, I would like to contact a number of students to give more detailed information. This would take less than an hour of your time, to be arranged at your convenience at some time during the next 3 months. If you are interested or just have questions or comments about this research, please give your first name and a telephone number where you can be reached.

First name: __________________

Telephone: __________________

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION.
Appendix B: Sisters Package
CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Sisters: An Unique and Important Relationship
Principal Investigator: Rita I. Knodel

I am presently studying the relationship between sisters. I will be asking you to describe your relationship in detail by using a two-part questionnaire and an interview.

The questionnaire will take approximately 10 - 15 minutes; the interview, approximately 20 - 30 min. totaling 30 - 45 minutes, to be arranged at your convenience. Each interview will be tape-recorded. The tape will allow me to study your comments and to extract a summary of the experiences you describe. Once this is completed the tape will be erased. All information you provide me, in either the questionnaire or the interview will be strictly confidential and will be used anonymously for research purposes.

Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to answer any questions and to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. As well, participation or non-participation will in no way affect your academic standing.

In light of these facts, I consent to be a participant in this study

Participant: 
Researcher: 
Date: 
SiSTERS QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Please provide the following information about yourself, your sister (the sister to whom you feel closest or by whom you are most supported), and your other family members by filling in the blanks or by circling the most appropriate answer.

1. Your first name: ___________________________ Age: ______ Birthdate: ___________________________
   Marital Status: ___________________________ Children: No Yes (Ages: ______ ______ ______)

2. Your sister's first name: ___________________________ Age: ______ Birthdate: ___________________________
   Marital Status: ___________________________ Children: No Yes (Ages: ______ ______ ______)

3. Do you and your sister, both live in B.C.: Yes No

4. Do you both presently live in the same city: Yes No

5. Do you both presently live in the same household: Yes No If No, how long since you have lived in the same household: ___________________________

6. How often do you and your sister see one another in person:
   More than Once a day More than Once a week More than Once a month More than Once a year Less than a few times a year
   Once a day day once a week week once a month month once a year year few times a year

7. How often do you talk on the phone:
   More than Once a day More than Once a week More than Once a month More than Once a year Less than a few times a year
   More than Once a day day once a week week once a month month once a year year few times a year

8. How often do you write to one another:
   Once a week Several times About once a month Several times On special occasions Never
   Once a week week once a month month once a year year never

9. In general, which of the following is your most important reason for keeping in touch with your sister:
   You feel obligated You need her help She needs your help You simply enjoy keeping in touch
   Other: ___________________________

10. What is your father's occupation: ___________________________ What is your mother's occupation: ___________________________
   How would you characterize your family's socio-economic level: Lower Middle Upper

11. In general, how close-knit do you consider your family to be, on the scale below:
    Not close at all Somewhat close Fairly Close Quite Close Extremely Close
    To what extent do you feel this affects your relationship with your sister:
    Not at all Slightly Somewhat Quite a lot Very much

12. What ethnic designation would you give yourself: ___________________________
    To what extent do you feel this affects your relationship with your sister:
    Not at all Slightly Somewhat Quite a lot Very much

B. On the next two pages you are to rate a close and supportive female friend and your sister (the one mentioned in Part A) on a series of statements. Using the following scale, please write the corresponding number in the space provided.

Never or Almost Never (20-40% of the time) Sometimes (40-60% of the time) Often (60-80% of the time) Usually (80-100% of the time) Always or Almost always

   1 2 3 4 5
Please read each statement and decide how the statement fits your present relationship with your sister (your most supportive sister) according to the scale shown below.

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
1 2 3 4 5

1. Shows praise and appreciation for my accomplishments.
2. Enjoy spending a lot of time together.
3. Concerned with my welfare and helps promote it.
4. Has abilities and skills and uses them well.
5. Considerate of my feelings.
6. I feel free to express my most inner private feelings.
7. Stands up and defends what she believes in.
8. Could turn to her for support in time of need.
9. Possesses similar personality traits and characteristics.
11. Could reveal to her my most secret hopes and ambitions.
12. Is herself — does not try to impress me.
13. We have similar attitudes and opinions.
14. Has seriousness of purpose and achieves her goals.
15. Is respectful of me — does not try to "use" me.
16. Thinks my ideas are important.
17. Could disclose to her things I have done that I am ashamed of.
18. Does not let differences of opinion to come between us.
19. Keeps up my courage.
20. I feel free to be my own genuine self.
21. Does things for me willingly, and doesn't expect anything in return.
22. Feels that our relationship is very important.
23. Recognizes her responsibility as a member of our society.
24. Could talk to this person about intimate family problems.
25. We could spend an enjoyable social evening together.
26. Stands by me through anything.
27. I feel secure and relaxed with this person.
28. Acknowledges my right to my convictions even if she disagrees with me.
29. We have many common interests.
30. Advice given honestly when asked for.
31. Has strength and endurance of character.
32. I can drop all defences and be myself.
33. Feels that I am an important, worthwhile person.
34: Could talk to this person about my personal problems.
35. More interested in me as a person than what I can do for her.
Please read each statement and decide how the statement fits your present relationship with a close and supportive female friend, according to the scale shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Shows praise and appreciation for my accomplishments.
2. Enjoy spending a lot of time together.
3. Concerned with my welfare and helps promote it.
4. Has abilities and skills and uses them well.
5. Considerate of my feelings.
6. I feel free to express my most inner private feelings.
7. Stands up and defends what she believes in.
8. Could turn to her for support in time of need.
9. Possesses similar personality traits and characteristics.
11. Could reveal to her my most secret hopes and ambitions.
12. Is herself — does not try to impress me.
13. We have similar attitudes and opinions.
14. Has seriousness of purpose and achieves her goals.
15. Is respectful of me — does not try to “use” me.
16. Thinks my ideas are important.
17. Could disclose to her things I have done that I am ashamed of.
18. Does not let differences of opinion to come between us.
19. Keeps up my courage.
20. I feel free to be my own genuine self.
21. Does things for me willingly, and doesn’t expect anything in return.
22. Feels that our relationship is very important.
23. Recognizes her responsibility as a member of our society.
24. Could talk to this person about intimate family problems.
25. We could spend an enjoyable social evening together.
26. Stands by me through anything.
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28. Acknowledges my right to my convictions even if she disagrees with me.
29. We have many common interests.
30. Advice given honestly when asked for.
31. Has strength and endurance of character.
32. I can drop all defences and be myself.
33. Feels that I am an important, worthwhile person.
34. Could talk to this person about my personal problems.
35. More interested in me as a person than what I can do for her.
Appendix C: Annotated Bibliography
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Psychological and Sociological Reviews of Sibling Research


This book contains a number of very interesting chapters by various researchers on siblings at different stages of life.


A recent look at the influence siblings have on one another beginning in childhood and continuing on throughout life.


Two clinicians discuss the emotional relationship between siblings and the influence siblings have on one another's development.

Popular Psychology on Sisters


This is an interesting and well written collection of perceptions and experiences by sisters -- including well known women such as: Margaret Mead, Carly Simon, Simone de Beauvoir, etc.


Based on interviews with sisters, McConville organizes common themes between sisters along with interesting stories and comments.

An exploration of sisters as portrayed in our literature by Simone de Beauvoir, Bronte sisters, etc.

Great Fiction by and about Women with Sisters


Poetry


Appendix D: Facilitating Factors and their Categorization
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACILITATING FACTOR</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>SUBORDINATE CATEGORY</th>
<th>SUPERORDINATE CATEGORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maturity in age/experience</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td>Relationship Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitalization or serious illness of sister or self</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Difficult experience</td>
<td>Life Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimate communication</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Relationship Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being close in age</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sibling status</td>
<td>External Factor effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional crisis or difficulty</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Difficult experience</td>
<td>Life Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister's personality</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sister's qualities</td>
<td>Relationship quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being of the same sex</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sibling status</td>
<td>External Factor effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental marriage problems, divorce or separation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Family problem</td>
<td>External Factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compatible personalities</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Relationship Qualities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special visits during period of separation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>Life Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with husband/boyfriend terminated</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Difficult experience</td>
<td>Life Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing a bedroom, possessions as children</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Home environment</td>
<td>External Factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General stressful times</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Difficult experience</td>
<td>Life Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased recognition of similarities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td>Relationship Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death in the family</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Difficult experience</td>
<td>Life Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making difficult life decisions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Difficult experience</td>
<td>Life Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family interaction - Sunday dinners or family vacations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Parental values &amp; actions</td>
<td>External Factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for and sharing a special event (ie., marriage)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Positive experience</td>
<td>Life Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarities - values, perceptions, interests</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Relationship characteristics</td>
<td>Qualities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased communication due to separation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>Life Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living near one another after a period of separation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>Life Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult relationship with a parent</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Family problem</td>
<td>External Factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental illness - physical or psychological</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Family problem</td>
<td>External Factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental emphasis on positive sib relationship</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Parental values &amp; actions</td>
<td>External Factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelling together or sharing an adventure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Positive experience</td>
<td>Life Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive and/or alcholic parent</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Family problem</td>
<td>External Factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being grouped together - &quot;the girls&quot;</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sibling status effects</td>
<td>External Factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to resolve conflict</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Relationship Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Weight</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciating each other more after period of separation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>Life Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing memories of special/fun times</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Positive experience</td>
<td>Life Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents model positive marital and/or sibling bonds</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Parental values &amp; actions</td>
<td>External Factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending time together - feeling special bonds</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Positive experience</td>
<td>Life Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to express affection</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Relationship Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing up on a farm</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Home environment</td>
<td>External Factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving frequently during childhood</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Home environment</td>
<td>External Factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time and space apart</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td>Relationship Quality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>