

Family Dynamics and Sibling Relationships

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The term 'family dynamics' refers to the patterns of connections, interactions and relating among all family members. Families exist in their configuration composed of individuals who share ties, history, and undertakings to fulfill each other's requirements. Though there exist some common patterns between the families, the dynamics and family system of every family are different and unique in their own way. These dynamics can be helpful and healthy and also can take unhelpful and unhealthy forms.

Every individual is impacted by the family dynamics. It is through these dynamics the way each member views himself or herself the external world and is able to shape his or her behaviors. Many factors play a role in the differences in family dynamics, such as the relationship between the parents, the nature of each parent, the number of children, the inborn personality of every member, the presence of a single parent, joint family system, the presence of any disabled child, distressing events, culture and traditions, religion, race, dynamics of old generations, and some [social aspects](#). All these factors establish a change in how each family lives and what kind of connection the family members have among them. Family dynamics consist of responsibilities, functions, and roles that each member has to play for the successful continuation of the family system. If these responsibilities aren't fulfilled, the whole system of the family gets disrupted and disturbed. This makes every member of the family lose that strong connection with other members. Communication is the key factor in strengthening the family bond.

In the family dynamics, the relationship of siblings plays an important part. (Millman, 2004) They are more connected to themselves as compared to other family members as they share common genes, family experiences, social heritage, and cultural values. When the family is going through some disturbing situations, such as the divorce of parents, financial complications, or death of any parent or sibling, the emotional bond among the siblings becomes extremely significant. Four main characteristics are common and prominent in this relationship.

1. Siblings are tied emotionally with positive, negative, or sometimes emotions of ambivalent quality.
2. Intimacy has existed in this relationship since childhood times; knowing each other by means of playing together and sharing toys. This intimacy leads to a supportive and emotional relationship, listening to and respecting each other's opinions and feelings.
3. The quality of the relationship among the siblings depends on individual differences.
4. Age difference among the siblings establishes notions of conflict, power, and control. Jealousy and rivalry also tend to occur. Positive aspects are caregiving connections, teaching, and helping. Differential parental treatment also comes into play due to the age differences impacting the siblings' relationship.

In order to understand and examine the relationship among the siblings and changes in the family dynamics among different families, I decided to interview two extremely different families. Different in the sense that they belonged to two different religions and cultures. Through the open-ended interviews, I discovered the type of connection family members had with one another, what factors determined their relationship, and how they responded and reacted to those factors. Both families had three children, who were the main focus of this study. All the similarities and differences were noted after the interview with both the families. The interview helped identify how each family deals with different situations, what do the siblings think of each other, what did they learn from one another, and what kind of relationship they had in the past and how it changed over time. This knowledge can be useful for predicting different social factors affecting the relationships among family members and their impact.

General overview

The two families I interviewed had three children. One had two girls and a boy; the other possessed three daughters. Family no.1 had the eldest 25-year-old daughter, a 22-year-old son, and an 18-year-old daughter. The eldest daughter of family no.2 was 20 years old, then 18 years old, and the last was 16 years old. I interviewed all six individuals since they were all grown-ups and had developed mature thinking. Family no.1 had both parents, while family no.2 had been raised by a single mom. Both families had some similarities and differences, and both had to face different challenges in sustaining their family system.

Type of relationship among the siblings

When asked to describe the relationship among the siblings, the eldest one replied diplomatically, “sweet but annoying too.” Middle children thought that they went along well with both the eldest and the youngest ones, while the youngest ones believed they had problems with the eldest, but with the middle sibling, it was smooth. Both the eldest children of the two families thought many of their wishes or demands could not be fulfilled due to the presence of the youngest child. “I remember I was ten years old when I asked mom for, maybe, a diary, can’t remember the thing, but I know she refused by saying that if I let you have it, your sister will also ask for the same,” said the eldest one of the family no.1. Apart from that, they think their privacy is always interfered by the youngest ones as they are always on a search for a point where they could complain about their eldest siblings to their parents. Family no.2’s eldest daughter narrated a story when she accidentally broke her mom’s favorite cup, and her youngest sister saw the scene and how she used to blackmail her after that. “Well, this was all when we were kids. Everything has changed now”, says the eldest no.2. Many changes occur with the passage of time, which accounts for the changes in relationships among the siblings. Middle child no.1 says, “My sister and I used to be like best friends when we were kids.

She never refused to share her toys with me, though she knew I always ended up breaking them all.”

Certain factors were thought to be the cause of a gap between the eldest and the middle child after they grew up. One main factor was being busy with studies and not being able to give time to family members, as told by the eldest no.1. Being busy in private life is the major concern of all eldest children, which becomes a major cause of their ignorance. "I always felt ignored as a kid. I thought my sister and brother were friends, and they didn't want me in their lives. This made me stubborn and an attention seeker child. I literally hated them once. But now they're an important part of my life", said the youngest no.1. It was my common observation that all youngest children feel the same towards their eldest siblings, but listening to the youngest no.2's response, I think that age difference does have an important impact. She says, "My sisters are like two mothers to me. They've always been a lot caring, and even now, they treat me like a small child."

The most interesting comments to hear were the replies I got in response to the question of what they felt when their brother or sister was born. "I don't remember what I felt when Robert (middle child no.1) was born, but I do remember the time I held Cynthia in my hands for the very first time. It was amazing. At that time, I thought that she was going to be someone I would always care for and would never let go, like the most favorite toy", says the eldest no.1. Middle children commonly feel ignored when someone takes their place. "When I saw everyone loving and caring for Katy (youngest no.2), I felt that nobody loved me anymore. Then I used to do stuff to make everyone attentive towards me", says the middle child no.2.

According to all six individuals, the factors that made their relationship stronger are mainly related to their parents. "After my father's death, my mom became more sensitive and emotional. We three had to take care of her. We had to compromise on our personal wants and wishes to take care of our mom, and in doing so, our bond became stronger than before. The strength of our relationship gave mom a reason to live", said the eldest no.2. All good and bad events of our lives shape our behaviors and attitudes towards the people we live with and share everything. And sometimes gradual changes in the personality help change the nature of the relationship. The youngest, no.1, says, "When I stopped whining about why am I being ignored by my siblings and got busy in my own world, everything started changing. My siblings are like friends to me now, especially my sister."

Interviewing both families, I learned that the eldest ones are mostly responsible beings and are always wanting to make their family members happy in different ways. Middle ones are the peacemakers, cool-tempered and not easily offended. The youngest ones are stubborn and want everyone to give them the full attention they seek, but they are also loving. "I am an introvert and don't like much interaction with my family members or the outside world. That's why I feel good when I see my sisters gossiping, laughing, and having a good time. They don't have to feel that I don't give much time to them as they are enough for each other", said middle no.1. The eldest no.2 says, "I still remember how Mary (middle no.2) used to tease little Anna (youngest no.2) and then Anna used to cry with such a loud noise which used to make us all angry on Mary. However, I still managed to be polite to Mary and make her say sorry to Anna."

I discovered that the eldest ones were more inclined towards reading novels and listening to music.

Middle ones loved sports, while the youngest ones were artistic people. "I love reading novels. There's a small library which my parents had set up for me in the house", says the eldest no.1. These different habits and interests also contribute to making the relationship stronger. Siblings learn different and new things from one another in this way. The youngest, no.2, says, "I have a passion for acting and singing. My family and friends simply adore my voice and request me to sing at gatherings and parties." Siblings may also find each other's interests and habits boring or uninteresting. Middle no.1 confesses, "Well, I find this habit of reading novels boring. I advise my sister to get out of these books sometimes and do something physical like playing sports or going to the gym. Books have made her lazy." "I get so annoyed with Mary all the time playing basketball. Her academic performance gets so weak", says the eldest no.2.

The impact of siblings on each other was mostly noticed to be good. The eldest ones fulfilled their responsibilities and considered their siblings' demands and wishes. Middle ones helped both the eldest and the youngest in their troubles. The youngest ones respected and supported their elder siblings. "I learned a lot from my sisters. Lizzy (eldest no.2) used to help me with my homework, and from Mary, I learned a lot about sports. And now I've learned how to be responsible like Lizzy and how to live life to the fullest like Mary", says the youngest no.2. There are some who think they are the most intelligent ones in the family. The middle no.1 admits, "I don't think I learned much from my sisters. In fact, it's me who they learn new things from." Much of the conflicts among the siblings arise from being possessive about things and not being able to share anything, invasion of privacy, hating some natural habits, etc. "God, how much I hate Mariana's (eldest no.1) laziness! She's always busy doing her own stuff, and only I have to get things done which my mom orders us both to be done, and about Robert, he's a good brother, but I don't like his introverted nature", says the youngest no.1, "And I hate it when she wears my clothes. I can share anything but not clothes. She always ends up making them dirty. And when I say something, she fights as if she hasn't done anything wrong", says the eldest no.1 in response to her sister's comments. "We never had fights over clothes or any other stuff. We used to fight over toys when our father was alive, but after him, we three became mature girls, and I'm proud of my younger sisters for that", says the eldest no.2.

Conclusion

Hence, the role played by the siblings in each other's development is evident from the interviews, and as discovered, after the parents, it's the siblings we mostly follow and bond with. They share their childhood, cultural and social heritage, etc. A lot of similarities and differences were noted between the two families. A loving and supportive relationship was found among the sisters in both families. The involvement of a brother between the two sisters in the first family showed some changes, which indicates that gender difference also contributes to shaping the dynamics of the family. Siblings of the first family had an age difference greater than those in the second family. This could also be the reason behind more friendliness among the sisters in the second family. Having either parents, or single parents also creates a difference. The death of the father established a strong supportive force among the siblings of the second family while those in the first family weren't enough maybe due to

the age difference, or they all were getting equal love from both of their parents. We learned how each sibling played his or her role in the family dynamics, what kind of impact each had on others, and what did they think of each other as a kid and as an adult. Siblings proved to be the source of motivation, support, encouragement, and fun. A Single child is mostly observed to be highly stubborn, possessive, and short-tempered, and this is because they don't know how it feels to have a partner with whom they can share their parents, toys, and everything. Thus, the presence of siblings helps in the development and shaping of one's personality. Moreover, we become able to understand many values and things which couldn't be possible without the siblings.

References

Millman, M. (2004). *The perfect sister: What draws us together, what drives us apart*. Harcourt.