

“WE DIDN’T REALIZE THE LOSS UNTIL IT ACTUALLY HAPPENED”:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL, DIALOGIC ANALYSIS OF SIBLING PAIRS’
RELATIONAL TALK ABOUT MOVING APART

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School
At the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

By

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MAY 2016

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the
dissertation entitled

“WE DIDN’T REALIZE THE LOSS UNTIL IT ACTUALLY HAPPENED”:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL, DIALOGIC ANALYSIS OF SIBLING PAIRS’
RELATIONAL TALK ABOUT MOVING APART

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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This dissertation is dedicated to the 44 brothers and sisters who allowed me to glimpse into their relationships and share their stories on these pages. Thank you for helping me fulfill my dream.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Like many people faced with the daunting task of completing a dissertation, I “occasionally” took breaks from writing to search the Internet for inspiration. On one such occasion, while scanning a list of Amy Poehler quotes that BuzzFeed promised would change my life, I stumbled upon this pearl of wisdom: “It’s easier to be brave when you’re not alone.” Although perhaps not life-changing, those words made me realize how much more challenging and scary this journey would have been without an amazing support system to lean on. I am immensely grateful that, at every step along the way, I was surrounded by people who believed in me and gave me the strength and courage I needed to keep going.

I would like to sincerely thank my advisor, Dr. Colleen Colaner. During our first meeting, you gave me a framed quotation with the words “Yes I can” written in bold letters. That frame stayed on my desk all five years, and I can’t tell you how many times I looked at those three little words for motivation and to remind myself that someone was rooting for me. Thank you for helping turn my many insecurities into newfound self-confidence, my darkest moments into glimmers of hope, and my “I can’t do it” attitude into the realization that “Yes I can.” You’ve taught me to take risks and believe in myself more than I ever thought I could, and I am a stronger person and scholar because of you. I am forever grateful for your mentorship, guidance, and encouragement.

I also could not have asked for a more supportive committee. First, Dr. Rebecca Meisenbach, you have helped me in more ways than you realize. Without your guidance in qualitative methods, I would not have had the confidence, knowledge, and ability to overcome the challenges and embrace the opportunities that come with interpretive

research (nor would I fully understand the importance of clearly explaining the term ‘saturation’). You also helped foster my passion for teaching, and the lessons and insights I learned from you in Comm 3050 and the summer institutes will always stay with me. Thank you for all you’ve done for me during my time at Mizzou. Second, Dr. Haley Horstman, thank you for being such a positive and helpful presence throughout this process. With your encouragement, guidance, and expertise in IFC, you pushed me to tell a more meaningful and compelling story (see what I did there?) in this dissertation, and I truly appreciated your input at every step. Third, Dr. Nicole Campione-Barr, I am immensely grateful for your time and dedication as my outside committee member. Thank you for sharing your expertise in and passion for sibling research with me, and for challenging me to think about sibling relationships in different and more complex ways. I am honored to be a member of the “sibling researcher club,” and your work will continue to inspire me in the future.

I am also thankful for the support and guidance I received from the MU Department of Communication faculty. Through your valuable instruction in coursework, mentorship in teaching, guidance in my service roles, and endless words of encouragement, each and every one of you has helped me tremendously. A special thanks to Dr. Debbie Dougherty – you’ve also played an important role in my qualitative methods training, and the project from your methods course served as a pilot study for this dissertation. Furthermore, your thoughtful advice has helped me find my way and gain confidence as a scholar. And Dr. Colin Hesse, although you were not here for my last three years at Mizzou, your courses enhanced my understanding of and passion for interpersonal and family communication. I truly appreciate you sharing your knowledge

and expertise with me, as well as teaching me the importance of developing a strong rationale in a manuscript. Because of your guidance, I am constantly pushing myself to answer the “so what?” question and conduct research that matters.

I cannot imagine what this experience would have been like without the many awesome, thoughtful, and supportive graduate students I’ve crossed paths with along the way. From those who went out of their way to make me feel welcome when I first entered the program to the people I am incredibly sad to part ways with now (and everyone in between), you have all inspired me, encouraged me, and helped me make the most out of my time in graduate school. Thank you for the many, many office chats (aka venting sessions), the happy hours, the cohort dinners, the thoughtful cards, the coffee dates, and the countless other ways you’ve touched my life over the last five years. The friendships I’ve made in Switzler Hall will always hold a special place in my heart, and I look forward to seeing all the amazing things my fellow “#MizzouComm” colleagues will accomplish in the coming years.

To my wonderful friends beyond Columbia, Missouri – thank you for being a constant source of love and support through it all. Your phone dates, visits, pictures of your adorable children (keep them coming), flowers, care packages (who doesn’t need socks with pictures of mac and cheese on them?), letters, texts, and persistent advice to give *Parks and Rec* a try brought me more comfort and relief than you’ll ever know. Thank you all for reminding me that there’s more to my life and who I am than graduate school, and for always, always being there for me no matter the distance or time apart.

To my loving grandparents, William and Joan Telscher and William and Gertrude Ross, thank you for showing me what it means to work hard, be kind, and put family

first. You will always be a part of me and a part of my journey, and I love you all dearly. Dale, Terri, Ben, Julie, Carson, Mason, and Anna – thank you for welcoming me into your family and providing me with an extra source of support, love, and laughter that I didn't even know I needed. I am truly honored to be a Halliwell and look forward to many more years of shenanigans with all of you. Thank you to my one and only Zoë VanGogh (aka Z-Rock) – your drive and determination are an inspiration to me and I could not be more proud of the intelligent, beautiful, and goofy young woman you've become. I am blessed to be your (favorite) aunt.

Thank you to my siblings, Sara and Sam, for always loving me and supporting me in your own special ways. It is my quirky, yet loving, relationships with both of you that sparked my desire to learn more about the intricacies of the sibling bond. Sara, thank you for being my first best friend and supporting me through all of life's triumphs and challenges. Despite the miles between us, I've never felt closer to you than I have the last few years. I am immensely grateful for our bond, and take comfort in knowing that you'll always be there to "walk halfway" with me. And remember, I love you more. Sam, thank you for always reminding me to look for beauty in the simple things and that it's OK to dance to the beat of a different drummer. Being your older sister has been one of my life's greatest gifts and most cherished roles. No matter how old you are, you'll always be my baby brother, my Sammy Doodle, and my Boo. And Jeff, thank you for your constant encouragement over the years. The letters, pictures, and newspaper stories you've sent have been a comforting reminder that, regardless of where life takes me, there's only one place I call "home" (and only one baseball team I'll ever root for).

Absolutely none of this would have been possible without my parents. Dad, thank you for always believing in me and being proud of me, whether from the stands at basketball games, while walking me down the aisle, or through my many, many years of school. Your patience, love, and understanding during my “I don’t know what I want to do with my life” phase (and when I decided to tack on one more year of graduate school for good measure) always gave me the little push I needed to press on. I love you, dad. Mom, you’ve always been an inspiration, and I would not be here without your love, unfailing support, and many sacrifices. Through your example, you’ve instilled in me the strength, determination, humility, and passion I need to chase my dreams and never give up. Thank you for always being my number one fan and my safe place to fall back on. I love you to the moon and back.

And finally, to my Michael Ross – meeting you on day one of the Master’s program and creating our little world together has been, by far, the most rewarding part of this journey and what has carried me through the toughest of days. You are my everything, and I don’t even want to think about what any of this would have been like without you by my side. Although I could write pages and pages about how much you mean to me and how grateful I am for your unwavering love and support, we both know I need to wrap this up so I’ll keep it simple: Thank you for being my best friend. Thank you for making me laugh every single day. And above all, thank you for loving me.

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ABSTRACT

Though research on family ties during the transition to adulthood has typically focused on parent-child relationships, scholars have begun to explore how this important transition impacts the relationship between siblings. Due to the benefits associated with maintaining strong ties with sisters and brothers throughout adulthood and particularly in old age, it is important to understand the communication behaviors that help siblings transition into and develop an emotionally close and supportive adult sibling bond. Thus, the present study used a phenomenological, dialogic approach to explore siblings' communicative sense-making as they transitioned from living together to living apart for the first time. In-depth, qualitative interviews were conducted with 22 sibling dyads who had moved away from one another within the past twelve months. During the interviews, sibling pairs were encouraged to engage in a conversation with one another about their relationship and talk about their experiences of transition in storied form.

The current project involved two phases. In part one of the study, I conducted a phenomenological analysis to achieve a deeper understanding of siblings' lived experiences of moving away from one another for the first time (RQ1), the changes they described related to the transition (RQ2), and how, if at all, they engaged in the recentering process (RQ2a). Findings for the first research question revealed that siblings characterized the experience of moving away from a brother or a sister as: (a) taking time to "sink in," (b) a "weird" experience, and (c) a difficult experience. In terms of the second research question, siblings described specific *relational changes* (i.e., a strengthened bond and a disrupted bond) and *communication changes* (i.e., reduced contact, needing to put in more effort to stay in touch, and improved communication)

resulting from the transition. Finally, while a few siblings appeared to be in the early stages of recentering their relationships, most participants emphasized that their brother or sister was still a significant part of their primary social circle.

For the second part of the study, relational dialectics theory was used as a lens to investigate how siblings communicatively co-constructed meaning of their changing relationships in their conversations about moving apart (RQ3), as well as how they voiced competing ideologies of siblingship to construct a dialogue of adult sibling relationships (RQ4). Specifically, I engaged in contrapuntal analysis—a methodological practice useful for identifying competing discourses and analyzing their interplay—to uncover the cultural and relational meanings animating siblings’ relational talk. My analysis of the third research question revealed that siblings constructed meaning of their changing relational identities and their experiences of transition through three main discursive struggles: (a) distance as good for the relationship vs. distance as bad for the relationship, (b) moving apart as a normal transition vs. moving apart as a “weird” transition, and (c) certainty as still possible vs. uncertainty as unavoidable. Finally, for the fourth research question, two overarching discursive struggles were identified as central to how participants viewed adult sibling relationships: (a) siblingship as a voluntary bond vs. siblingship as an obligatory commitment, and (b) siblings as a unit vs. siblings as separate individuals.

Throughout their stories of transition, most sibling pairs in the present study described moving apart for the first time as a significant event that held meaning for both their own lives and their sibling relationships. Although prior literature suggests that siblings assign less priority to their bonds as they move apart and focus on new

relationships, the current findings propose that they continue to consider one another an important member of their inner circle even when they incorporate new friends, co-workers, and romantic partners into their networks. The analysis of siblings' relational talk also revealed that despite being an uncertainty-evoking event and prompting a decline in contact, the experience of moving apart encourages sisters and brothers to connect on a more mature level and develop a greater appreciation of their relationship. Thus, as a whole, the present study illuminated both the communicative challenges and the opportunities for relational growth siblings experience during the transition to adulthood.

Chapter 1: Rationale

Although research on siblings has generally lagged behind research on parent-child and marital relationships (Fingerman & Hay, 2002; Mikkelsen, 2014), the body of scholarly work on sibling relationships has grown considerably in recent years. Cicirelli (1995) attributed the early lack of research on siblings to the assumption that adult siblings rarely interact and have little influence on one another as they age, but studies have consistently highlighted the significance of the sibling bond in adulthood. For example, White and Riedmann (1992) found that the average adult has contact with a sibling once or twice a month for 60-70 years after leaving home. Along these lines, White (2001) concluded that the “dominant pattern of sibling relationships over the adult life span is reduced contact and exchange coupled with strong staying power” (p. 565). Thus, while sibling relationships inevitably change in adulthood, most siblings appear to maintain at least some contact with one another across the lifespan.

Given the longevity of most sibling bonds, siblings are likely to experience many of life’s milestones and transitions together. In the younger years, many sibling relationships are characterized by shared experiences and daily interactions in the childhood home (Cicirelli, 1995). As they get older, siblings’ relationships with one another typically undergo varying degrees of change as they transition into adolescence and become more involved in peer relationships (Milevsky, 2011). Following adolescence, siblings often experience more relational changes as they leave the family home and transition into adulthood (Conger & Little, 2010). Throughout adulthood, many sibling relationships are impacted by such life events as marriage, divorce, having children, and the death of a parent (Connidis, 1992; Goetting, 1986; White, 2001). There

is also evidence that some siblings are drawn closer during their later years as they reflect on their shared histories and resolve lingering rivalries (Goetting, 1986).

Arguably one of the most significant transitions siblings experience is the shift from living together in the family home to living apart for the first time, which often occurs when an older sibling leaves home to pursue education or work (Conger & Little, 2010). Because leaving the family home typically begins the transition into adulthood, sibling relationships often undergo a transformation as older siblings establish independence from their family-of-origin and take on adult roles (Conger & Little, 2010). Accordingly, Tanner (2006) argued that the transition into adulthood prompts a *recentering* of significant relationships, in which emerging adults decrease their involvement in family relationships to focus more on new friendships and romantic relationships. From this perspective, sibling relationships may take a backseat during the transition into adulthood as individuals give priority to new relationships outside their family-of-origin.

Research examining how siblings maintain their relationships when they move away from one another for the first time is important for at least two reasons. First, given that the communication patterns established in early adulthood often set the stage for how siblings interact later in life (Goetting, 1986), the way they communicate with one another and maintain contact when they move apart for the first time has implications for their future bond. For example, siblings who establish a strong and supportive connection in early adulthood may sustain such closeness as they age. Likewise, siblings who interact infrequently or do not get along as young adults are likely to maintain these unsupportive behaviors throughout adulthood. Aquilino (2006) also suggested that the

central task of siblings during emerging adulthood may be to simply sustain ties that are strong enough to establish the foundation for a long-term relationship. Thus, examining the way siblings interact with one another during the initial transition into adulthood may provide valuable insight into how they form the basis of their adult sibling bond.

Second, exploring how siblings communicate and renegotiate their relationship amidst the changes they experience during the transition to adulthood is also valuable given that many brothers and sisters serve as a vital source of support in old age (Goetting, 1986; White, 2001). During late adulthood, siblings often rely on one another for general aid, to reminisce about their shared past, or to provide comfort following other kinship losses (Goetting, 1986; Van Volkom, 2006). Additionally, research shows that regular contact with siblings is linked to enhanced well-being in old age (Cicirelli, 1995; Van Volkom, 2006). However, siblings who do not maintain a strong connection or drift apart as young adults may have trouble bonding later in adulthood when they are in need of companionship or support. Thus, due to the benefits of maintaining strong and supportive sibling relationships throughout adulthood and particularly in old age, it is important to understand the communication behaviors that contribute to a successful transition into an adult sibling relationship. With this in mind, the present study explores how young adult siblings communicatively construct meaning of their changing relationship during the transition from living together to living apart for the first time.

Sibling Communication During the Transition into Adulthood

Scholars have long noted that sibling relationships are susceptible to change and disruption during the transition into early adulthood (e.g., Cicirelli, 1995; Conger & Little, 2010; Goetting, 1986). For siblings who grow up in the same household, an older

sibling leaving home often triggers significant relational changes and the transformation into an adult sibling relationship. Specifically, when siblings establish separate residences for the first time, it prompts a change from daily, face-to-face interactions to reduced contact maintained from a distance (Cicirelli, 1995). Along these lines, siblings must also adopt new methods to communicate with one another in adulthood. Rather than interacting in person every day as is often the case in childhood and adolescence, young adult siblings must rely on phone calls, e-mail messages, social media, and personal visits to stay in contact (Lindell, Campione-Barr, & Killoren, 2015; Mikkelson, 2004). It is not surprising, then, that it becomes more difficult for siblings to stay in contact once they no longer live together (Mikkelson, 2014).

When siblings move away from one another, staying in touch also becomes more voluntary (Cicirelli, 1995; Mikkelson, 2014). In other words, while siblings are “forced” to interact when they are living at home, they have a choice regarding whether and how often they contact one another once they move apart (Conger & Little, 2010). To that end, contact patterns between siblings in adulthood can vary from relationship to relationship. For instance, some adult siblings may interact daily, but others may only communicate a few times a year or less (Mikkelson, 2014). In general, the literature shows that the amount of contact between adult siblings is influenced by a range of factors, such as marriage, having children, and geographical distance (Connidis, 1992; Lee, Mancini, & Maxwell, 1990; Milevsky, Smoot, Leh, & Ruppe, 2005). Therefore, contact patterns can also vary within a specific sibling relationship throughout adulthood, depending on the particular life stage, the events in the siblings’ lives, and how often they choose to communicate with one another.

To date, most research studies have demonstrated a curvilinear relationship between contact and age for adult siblings, with contact declining throughout early and middle adulthood and increasing later in life (see Mikkelson, 2014). It has been established that the decline in contact begins when siblings move out of the family home (Leigh, 1982) and continues as they become committed to their own families and careers (Goetting, 1986; Myers & Knox, 1998). Furthermore, scholars are beginning to explore how the tasks of emerging adulthood—such as identity exploration, experimenting with love and work, and establishing independence from the natal family—impact sibling relationships (Conger & Little, 2010; Scharf, Shulman, & Avigad-Spitz, 2005). Although it is clear that siblings must renegotiate how they maintain their relationships once they move out of the family home and transition into new adult roles, little is known about how siblings interact with one another as these relational changes are occurring. As Whiteman, McHale, and Crouter (2011) lamented, existing research on adult siblings has largely skipped over the transition into adulthood, instead focusing on siblings' reports of their relationships after they have moved out of the family home and embarked on their adult lives. They argued that it is problematic to ask young adults to reflect retrospectively on how leaving home impacted their sibling relationships because the changes they report may be confounded by other life events such as entering a long-term partnership or establishing a career. In other words, most empirical knowledge about adult sibling relationships pertains to their experiences *after* they have already experienced, endured, and managed the initial transition into adulthood and the relational changes that accompany it. Therefore, research is needed that specifically examines how

siblings communicate with one another during the transition from living together to living apart for the first time.

The literature focusing on how siblings navigate and are impacted by various life transitions has demonstrated the stability of the sibling bond. Numerous studies have shown that most siblings maintain their relationships, and some become closer, during even the most challenging life events throughout adulthood (Conger & Little, 2010; Connidis, 1992; Goetting, 1986). Although these findings are promising for adult siblings, it might not always be closeness and commitment that motivate siblings to maintain their relationships during times of change and transition. As Mikkelson (2014) pointed out, the permanence of the sibling status may encourage siblings to withstand and overcome major problems that other relationships would not survive. For example, while a friendship might dissolve when one person moves to another state, most sibling relationships would stay intact following the same move. For most siblings, then, it is not a matter of whether their bond will survive a particular transition, but how they manage the transition and make meaning of the changes in their relationship. With its focus on how relationship parties communicatively construct their relational identities amidst change and transition, relational dialectics theory (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Baxter, 2011) was applied in the present study to examine siblings' communication during the transition from living together to living apart for the first time.

Theoretical Perspective: Relational Dialectics Theory

Rooted in Mikhail Bakhtin's work on dialogism (Holquist, 2002), relational dialectics theory (RDT) explores how relational partners construct meaning through the interplay of competing discourses (Baxter, 2011). Discourses, from an RDT perspective,

are systems of meaning that circulate among a culture or a group and render our communication understandable to others (Baxter, 2006). According to the theory, speakers invoke multiple systems of meaning every time they talk, and these discourses often compete with and oppose one another in the struggle for meaning (Baxter, 2011). For example, when making sense of the changes in their sibling relationship during the transition into adulthood, siblings may invoke both discourses of connection and autonomy.

With RDT's primary goal of understanding how the interplay of competing discourses constructs meaning for relationship parties, it is important to note that discourses are rarely on an equal playing field in their struggle for meaning (Baxter, 2011). To highlight the inequality of discursive struggle, Bakhtin (1981) made a distinction between centripetal and centrifugal discourses. Centripetal discourses move toward the center and are easily regarded as normative, such as the discourse of individualism in U.S. culture. Centrifugal discourses, on the other hand, move away from the center and toward the margins. Whereas centrifugal discourses are typically silenced or overlooked, centripetal discourses are more powerful and function "as a baseline against which all else is somehow positioned as a deviation" (Baxter, 2011, p. 123). Using the example above, many siblings may give the discourse of connection the centripetal position in their talk due to the cultural notion that closeness in relationships is more favorable than autonomy and emotional distance.

According to Baxter (2011), relationship transitions are "likely candidates for highlighting dialogic struggles in bold relief" (p. 154). For example, Baxter and Erbert (1999) found a number of discursive struggles animated romantic partners' talk about

various turning points in their relationship. In addition, Pawlowski (1998) identified competing discourses in marital partners' accounts of their relationship's turning points at the beginning, middle, and present stages. Given that leaving the family home marks a significant transition in siblings' relationships with one another, they likely give voice to multiple and competing discourses as they deal with the challenges of emerging adulthood and reconstruct their relational identity. For this reason, RDT is well-suited to capture how young adults make meaning of the changes in their sibling relationship as they move out of the family home and transition into adulthood.

Expected Contributions

The present study has the potential to make important contributions to the sibling literature, as well as extend relational dialectics theory in new directions. I discuss the expected practical implications for sibling communication research and the possible theoretical contributions in turn.

Implications for Sibling Communication Research

Despite the increasing scholarly interest in sibling relationships, the bonds between adult siblings remain understudied compared to parent-child and marital relationships (Mikkelsen, 2014; Stamp & Shue, 2013). Furthermore, in his review of adult sibling literature, Mikkelsen (2014) concluded that few studies specifically focus on how "actual communication behaviors" influence adult sibling relationships (p. 30). In particular, he noted that researchers often focus on the frequency of contact or levels of closeness or support between adult siblings without examining how their communication behaviors influence these variables. For example, exploring how frequently siblings interact or the level of closeness they report does not shed light on what siblings talk

about or the quality of their communication. Thus, although the body of literature on adult siblings has grown considerably in recent years, Mikkelsen (2014) argued that adult sibling research from a communication perspective remains relatively limited. By exploring how young adult siblings communicate with one another and make sense of the changes in their relationship when they move apart for the first time, the present study adds to the relatively sparse literature focusing specifically on the communication between adult siblings.

The present study also seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on how siblings maintain their relationships during the transitional life stage of emerging adulthood (Conger & Little, 2010; Milevsky, 2005; Scharf et al., 2005). Emerging adulthood is a period of self-exploration following adolescence in which individuals explore different options in worldviews, love, and work (Arnett, 2000). As emerging adults seek independence from their natal families and focus on their own identities, it is likely that their major relationships, such as those with siblings, undergo significant changes. In particular, sibling relationships inevitably change when older siblings first move out of the family home and enter emerging adulthood. However, despite the impact leaving home has on sibling relationships, few research studies focus specifically on siblings' experiences of living apart for the first time (Conger & Little, 2010; Dunn, 2007). Therefore, the present study seeks to answer Conger and Little's (2010) call for research examining the role sibling relationships play during the multiple transitions of emerging adulthood.

Beyond addressing important gaps in the sibling literature, the present study will shed light on how siblings lay the groundwork for their adult sibling relationship.

Although sibling relationships generally become less central to everyday life in adulthood (White, 2001), many siblings continue to play important roles in one another's lives throughout the lifespan (Cicirelli, 1995; Goetting, 1986). As Goetting (1986) demonstrated in her overview of sibling tasks across the life course, siblings benefit from maintaining supportive sibling relationships in adulthood. During early and middle adulthood, siblings perform such tasks as providing companionship and emotional support, exchanging aid and services, and helping with the care of elderly parents. Later in life, sibling relationships become especially important as siblings turn to one another for comfort and support following other kinship and friendship losses. Thus, adult siblings with troubled relationships or who fail to stay in contact may miss out on a vital source of companionship and support during significant events and transitions in adulthood and old age. Because the communication patterns siblings establish during the initial transition into adulthood likely influence the course of their adult sibling relationship, it is important to investigate how siblings communicate and manage the changes in their relationship when they move apart for the first time. In doing so, the present study may uncover the communication behaviors that contribute to a successful transition into an adult sibling relationship, which can help siblings better understand and navigate the changes in their relationship during this stressful and uncertain time.

Although contact between siblings typically declines in adulthood, it appears that sibling relationships still play a role in the lives of most adults. Whether adult siblings maintain their relationships voluntarily or due to feelings of familial obligation, they have the potential to significantly influence one another—for better or for worse—throughout the course of their lives. Thus, maintaining strong and supportive adult sibling ties has

implications for individual well-being during adulthood and old age. Because the way siblings communicate in emerging adulthood may set the tone for their future bond (Aquilino, 2006), it is important for siblings to have positive interactions during the transition into adulthood. With the goal of capturing how siblings communicatively construct and make meaning of their new relational identity in adulthood, the present study will contribute valuable knowledge to the adult sibling literature.

Implications for Relational Dialectics Theory

In addition to providing new insights into adult sibling relationships, the current study also has the potential to make important theoretical contributions. Although relational dialectics theory has greatly enhanced our understanding of how relational partners communicate in numerous interpersonal and family contexts, researchers have yet to adequately explore the communication between siblings through an RDT lens (see Halliwell, 2016 for an exception). Given that many siblings express feelings of love and support while simultaneously experiencing conflict and rivalry (Mikkelsen, 2014), it is likely that sibling relationships are sites of discursive struggle. Recognizing the dialogic potential of sibling relationships, Baxter (2006) called for RDT research examining the communication between siblings. The present study, then, addresses a theoretical gap by extending relational dialectics theory to sibling relationships.

Along with contributing to a new area of RDT research, the present study also aims to broaden how the theory is applied. In articulating her new iteration of relational dialectics theory, Baxter (2011) noted that many earlier RDT studies reflected simplistic or incorrect uses of the theory. In particular, she lamented the lack of dyadic data in RDT-informed research, emphasizing that “the heavy reliance on self-report data

(whether in surveys or interviews) gives us talk about relationships rather than relationships in talk” (p. 122). Given RDT’s focus on understanding how individual and relational identities are constructed and given meaning in the communication between relationship parties, it is important for researchers to examine interactions in real time via joint interviews. However, as Baxter pointed out, what we typically see instead are research studies utilizing individual interviews that provide one person in a dyad’s perceptions of his or her relational talk with a partner. To address this methodological limitation in the present study, I collected dyadic data by conducting joint interviews with sibling pairs.

Collecting dyadic data is particularly important because it will allow for a focus on the proximal sites of the utterance chain, which have been underexplored in existing RDT-informed research. In an individual interview, the interviewer (not the participant’s relational partner) becomes the “proximal other” (Baxter, 2011, p. 90). Because the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is generally not the focus of the research, the proximal links of the utterance chain cannot be adequately examined in an individual interview. In other words, in the absence of dyadic data, researchers cannot truly study how both parties in a dyad give voice to past meanings in their relationship (proximal already-spoken) or how they frame their utterances in anticipation of the other’s response (proximal not-yet-spoken). Baxter (2011) addressed this issue as follows:

In order to make productive use of the proximal already-spoken and proximal not-yet spoken concepts, future researchers will of necessity need to attend to interactions between relating parties more than they have to date. Until this shift

in the research is achieved, we are left with second-hand self-reports by relationship parties about the two proximal links in the utterance chain. Such data are better than nothing, but they are obviously limiting. (p. 91)

As Baxter noted, research examining the interactions between relationship partners is needed to make full use of RDT's core concepts. Though the lack of dyadic data is often cited as a limitation in research studies using RDT, there does not seem to be a move toward addressing this flaw. To be sure, a "shift in the research" is no small task and will inevitably take time. However, unless RDT researchers begin answering Baxter's (2011) call for dyadic research, the theory will continue to fall short of its full potential. By exploring how siblings co-construct meaning of their relationship in joint interviews, the present study addresses important limitations in existing RDT literature and moves the theory in the direction envisioned by Baxter (2011).

The current study also contributes to the existing body of RDT-informed research by its use of contrapuntal analysis, a methodological practice useful for analyzing how the interplay of competing discourses constructs meaning in the talk of relational partners. Baxter (2011) introduced contrapuntal analysis to encourage scholars to conduct RDT-informed research that focuses specifically on language use and the theory's most important concepts. Along these lines, she expressed that earlier studies using RDT did not appropriately apply the concepts of diachronic separation (i.e., spiraling inversion and segmentation) and synchronic interplay (i.e., antagonistic-nonantagonistic, direct-indirect, serious-playful, and polemical-transformative). Specifically, she noted that exploring the four synchronic practices in research will demand that researchers focus more closely on the details of talk that have been glossed over or ignored in existing

research. In the present study, engaging in a careful contrapuntal analysis enabled me to thoroughly analyze siblings' relational talk and utilize previously underexplored concepts.

Summary

Throughout the lifespan, siblings experience numerous transitions and challenges that impact their relationships with one another. For many siblings, moving out of the family home is a particularly significant transition because it marks their first time living in separate residences. Although it is common for siblings to interact less frequently when they leave home, a decline in contact does not necessarily result in a diminished bond. At the same time, regular contact between adult siblings may not always lead to a close and supportive relationship. In this sense, it is important for researchers to examine not just the frequency of contact between adult siblings, but also how they construct and maintain their relationships through their communication with one another. However, most existing research on adult siblings has utilized quantitative measures to highlight general patterns of relational quality, which often overlook the complexities of sibling interaction (Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013). Thus, grounded in the interpretive paradigm, the present research study used qualitative methods to uncover the communicative processes siblings engage in to maintain their relationships and make sense of relational change during the transition from living together to living apart for the first time.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Due to their common lifespans and shared experiences, siblings have the potential to profoundly influence one another throughout the course of their lives (Cicirelli, 1995). In fact, because sibling relationships are difficult—if not impossible—to dissolve completely (Mikkelson, 2014), sibling influences are likely unavoidable for most individuals with brothers or sisters. As Goetting (1986) emphasized, siblings often play important roles in one another's lives during each developmental stage across the lifespan (i.e., childhood and adolescence, early and middle adulthood, and old age). Building on Goetting's work, numerous researchers have also demonstrated that siblings continue to influence one another throughout their adult years (e.g., Cicirelli, 1995; Mikkelson, 2014; Van Volkom, 2006), long after they leave their childhood homes. However, despite the increase in research on adult siblings over recent decades, much remains unknown about the adult sibling bond (Mikkelson, 2014).

One area of research pertaining to adult siblings that has not been adequately explored is how leaving home influences sibling relationships (Conger & Little, 2010). The transition from living together in the same household to living apart for the first time inevitably changes how siblings interact and maintain their relationships. Moreover, given that moving out of the family home is often associated with the entry into adulthood, leaving home may prompt the transition into an adult sibling relationship for many brothers and sisters. Therefore, how siblings communicate and navigate the changes in their relationship when they first move apart may set the tone for how they maintain their relationship in adulthood and the role they play in one another's lives across the lifespan. In other words, whether adult siblings feel close, distant, or

indifferent toward one another may depend, to some extent, on the communication behaviors they establish during the initial transition into adulthood. To date, however, researchers have largely overlooked siblings' experiences of transition and relational change when they move away from one another for the first time.

In order to highlight the importance of exploring the impact that home-leaving has on sibling relationships, it is necessary to review several areas of scholarship. Because leaving home typically begins the transition into adult life, I first provide an overview of the characteristics of emerging adulthood. Next, I highlight specific changes siblings experience when they move out of the family home and transition into adulthood. In doing so, I discuss how home-leaving may lead siblings to *recenter* (e.g., Conger & Little, 2010; Tanner, 2006) their relationships with one another as they tackle the tasks of emerging adulthood and seek independence from their natal family. Finally, by drawing on previous research, I demonstrate how relational dialectics theory is well-suited to explore how siblings communicate with one another and make meaning of their changing relationship when they initially move away from one another.

Leaving Home and the Transition to Adulthood

Earlier research suggests that most young adults in the United States move out of the family home by the time they are 18 or 19 years old, either to attend college or to gain independence from their parents and natal family (Arnett, 2006; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999). In recent years, however, more young adults appear to be delaying when they move out of the family home and transition into independent living (Mykyta, 2012). The decline in independent living among young adults, often described as a “failure to launch,” has been linked to the economic downturn spanning the years 2007-

2010 (see Mykyta, 2012). Consistent with this view, recent census data indicate that 59 percent of men and 50 percent of women age 18-24 lived with their parents in 2012, an increase from 53 percent and 46 percent, respectively, in 2005 (Vespa, Lewis, & Kreider, 2013). However, it is important to note that young adults living in college dormitories are considered to be members of their parents' household and are therefore included in the above percentages. Given that approximately 41% of 18-24 year-olds in the United States were enrolled in either a 2- or 4-year college in 2012 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013), it is likely that many young adults counted as residing with their parents had actually moved out of the family home to attend college. Thus, despite recent evidence of a "failure to launch" among young adults in the U.S., it appears that a considerable number of Americans continue to move out of the family home around 18 or 19 years of age.

For many individuals, leaving home and establishing an independent residence is the first step in the transition from adolescence into adulthood (Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2011), a period that Arnett (2000) has defined as *emerging adulthood*. According to Arnett, emerging adulthood is a developmental stage spanning the late teens to the mid-late twenties, typically ages 18-25. During this time, individuals explore a variety of possibilities in the areas of love, work, and worldviews, while postponing long-term commitments such as marriage and parenthood (Arnett, 2000). Sandwiched between adolescence and adulthood, emerging adulthood is considered a transitional period characterized by change, uncertainty, and self-exploration. In the following section, I review the specific characteristics of emerging adulthood outlined by Arnett (2004;

2006), and then discuss how sibling relationships may be impacted by the challenges, changes, and opportunities associated with this life stage.

The Characteristics of Emerging Adulthood

Drawing from his research on emerging adults, Arnett (2006) identified five features of emerging adulthood that make it distinct from adolescence and young adulthood. Specifically, he argued that emerging adulthood is the age of identity exploration, the age of instability, the age of focusing on the self, the age of feeling in-between, and the age of possibilities.

The age of identity exploration. Arnett (2006) described emerging adulthood as a time of identity exploration because individuals are likely to experiment in several areas of life, particularly love and work. During this period of self-exploration, emerging adults strive to clarify their identities by learning more about “who they are and what they want out of life” (p.8). According to Arnett (2000), emerging adulthood provides a window of time for experimentation and gaining new experiences that might not be possible in one’s thirties and thereafter. Most emerging adults have moved out of the family home and established some independence from their parents, but have not quite settled into the adult roles that come with marriage, parenthood, and long-term careers (Arnett, 2006). Therefore, the relative lack of long-term commitments in emerging adulthood allows individuals the freedom to pursue a variety of life experiences, experiment with their career paths and love interests, and figure out who they are.

The age of instability. Such experimentation and self-exploration makes emerging adulthood a period of instability for many individuals. Although most emerging adults have a plan about the path that will lead them from adolescence into adulthood, that plan

is subject to constant revision—such as changing one’s major in college or deciding to attend graduate school after a couple years in the workforce (Arnett, 2004). The instability and profound changes individuals experience during emerging adulthood can be attributed to the frequency with which they move from one residence to another (Arnett, 2004; 2006). Typically, the first residential change occurs at 18 or 19 when individuals move out of the family home for the first time (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999). After that, according to Arnett (2006), comes a series changes and moves as emerging adults experiment with different directions in love, work, and education. For those who attend college, there is typically a move from a dormitory to an apartment following their first year of school. Emerging adults often live with roommates, with some moving again when the living situation is not preferable (Arnett, 2004). Many others move in with a boyfriend or girlfriend during their twenties, prompting a residential change when they initiate the cohabitating relationship (Arnett, 2006). Further, given that more than half of cohabiting partners break up within a few years (Cherlin, 2010), another move may follow if the relationship ends. In some cases, emerging adults move across the country or to a different part of the world for education or work, to follow a romantic partner, or simply for the excitement of moving to a new place (Arnett, 2006). Without a doubt, the numerous residential changes that take place during the emerging adult years highlight the instability and uncertainty of the period.

The age of self-focus. Emerging adulthood is an especially self-focused stage in life, which Arnett (2006) emphasizes is different from being self-centered. Rather, emerging adults are considered self-focused because they have very few social obligations or commitments to others, which is generally not the case during other life

stages. As Arnett (2004) pointed out, most children and adolescents must answer to their parents, teachers, and even their siblings, and are required to follow a certain set of rules in the family home. In their thirties and beyond, most adults have a spouse, children, and/or an employer who need their time and attention. However, during emerging adulthood, individuals have very few, if any, people to answer to, which allows them to focus on themselves, make decisions on their own, and essentially run their own lives (Arnett, 2004).

Although being self-focused can seem selfish or negative, Arnett (2004) asserted that it is a normal and healthy part of emerging adulthood. Specifically, he argued that being self-focused aids in the process of becoming self-sufficient. As emerging adults focus on themselves and experiment with different directions in love and work, they figure out what they want in life and prepare for adult life and roles (Arnett, 2006). Thus, this period of self-focus is viewed as an important step before individuals are ready to take on enduring obligations and commitments in adulthood.

The age of feeling in-between. Emerging adulthood is also considered a period of feeling in-between, during which individuals are free from the constraints of adolescence but have not yet taken on the responsibilities typically associated with adulthood. In one study, Arnett (2001) asked emerging adults aged 18-25 whether they felt like they had reached adulthood, and about 60% answered ambiguously: *in some ways yes, in some ways no*. By the time they reach their late twenties and early thirties most individuals felt as if they had reached adulthood, but Arnett found that it was not until about age 35 that the feeling of being “in-between” seemed to disappear for most people. Thus, it appears that it takes some time to establish the feeling of being fully

adult, with many individuals experiencing a transitory period in which they are “emerging into adulthood but not there yet” (Arnett, 2006, p. 12).

The feeling of being in-between stems from the criteria emerging adults use to define what it means to be an adult. For many emerging adults, adulthood is not tied to specific events or milestones, such as getting married or graduating from college, that people clearly have or have not attained. Rather, they tend to rely on criteria that are reached gradually, so that the feeling of reaching adult status is achieved gradually as well (Arnett, 2006). In general, Arnett (2004; 2006) has found that emerging adults view the following criteria as important markers of adulthood: (a) accepting responsibility for oneself, (b) making important decisions, and (c) becoming financially independent. As these standards suggest, the traditional milestones of adulthood are not as important as feeling independent and being in full control of one’s life. Therefore, until these criteria are reached, most emerging adults continue to feel caught between adolescence and full-fledged adulthood (Arnett, 2006).

The age of possibilities. Emerging adulthood is viewed as the age of possibilities for two reasons. First, for many individuals, it is a time of optimism and high expectations (Arnett, 2006). Emerging adults face a wide open future, where many directions are possible and their aspirations have yet to be tested by the ups and downs of reality (Arnett, 2004). Therefore, according to Arnett (2004), they are often full of optimism and envision a future of success and happiness, complete with a well-paying job, a satisfying marriage, and happy children. The belief among emerging adults is that even if they are not where they want to be yet, they will get there one day soon—

eventually settling into careers and relationships that are successful and personally fulfilling (Arnett, 2006).

Second, Arnett (2006) argued that emerging adulthood is an age of possibilities because it provides an opportunity for people with difficult upbringings to leave home and take their life in new and more promising directions. While children and adolescents typically cannot move away from an unhealthy family environment, emerging adults have the ability to move out on their own and begin an independent life. Along these lines, emerging adulthood gives young people a chance to leave behind a destructive or painful past, pursue their dreams, and ultimately change their lives for the better. Thus, due to the opportunities and freedoms it offers, emerging adulthood is considered an age of hope, optimism, and possibilities.

As the above discussion suggests, the transition from adolescence to adulthood is a long and complicated journey for many individuals, a journey that often begins when they leave home for the first time. Moving out of the family home is a critical transition in a young adult's life (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999; Mouw, 2005), leading to inevitable changes in the family system (Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2011). While research on family relationships during the transition to adulthood has typically focused on parent-child relationships (Aquilino, 2006), scholars have begun to examine how siblings maintain their relationships during this important transition (see Conger & Little, 2011; Lindell, Campione-Barr, & Greer, 2013; Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2011). Below, I turn my attention to how home-leaving and the characteristics of emerging adulthood discussed above impact the relationships between siblings.

Sibling Relationships During the Transition to Adulthood

Studies have consistently shown that sibling relationships change from childhood and adolescence to adulthood (Cicirelli, 1995; Goetting, 1986, Scharf et al., 2005), but very few researchers have focused specifically on how siblings' bonds are impacted when they establish separate residences for the first time. However, despite the fact that current research focusing on adult siblings leaves us with very little understanding of how siblings communicate and negotiate relational changes *during* the transition into adulthood, it does provide a starting point for exploring how moving away from home and taking on adult roles impacts sibling relationships. Based on existing literature, home-leaving appears to be connected to numerous changes in sibling relationships, especially in terms of the following: (a) contact, (b) voluntariness, and (c) relational quality.

Changes associated with contact. Scholars have long noted that leaving home significantly reduces the frequency of contact between siblings (see Mikkelsen, 2014). Whereas siblings often interact daily in the family home during childhood and adolescence, they must maintain their relationship from a distance once they no longer live together (Cicirelli, 1995). Thus, given that maintaining contact becomes more difficult, it is not surprising that siblings interact less frequently when they move out of the family home. Accordingly, Scharf and colleagues (2005) found that emerging adults report spending less time and being less involved in joint activities with their siblings than adolescents. As evidenced by these findings, contact between siblings often decreases from adolescence to emerging adulthood, due in part to moving out of the family home and living in separate residences.

Home-leaving typically marks the entrance into emerging adulthood, which also introduces various challenges and changes that impact contact patterns between siblings. Given that one of the primary tasks of emerging adulthood is to establish independence (Arnett, 2000), siblings may distance themselves from one another and reduce their contact as they break ties from their natal family. Similarly, the self-exploration that is characteristic of emerging adulthood likely contributes to a decline in sibling contact. In a phenomenology examining siblings' experiences during emerging adulthood, some participants reported that moving away from their brother or sister allowed them to establish their own identity and become their own person (Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013). Therefore, as emerging adults leave home and seek new experiences, they may devote less time to interacting with their siblings.

Additionally, the numerous residential changes that many emerging adults experience can lead to decreases in sibling contact. In general, previous research has shown that adult siblings who live geographically close to one another interact more frequently than those separated by greater distances (Lee et al., 1990; White, 2001). Likewise, Milevsky and colleagues (2005) found that geographical distance made it difficult for some emerging adults to maintain a close relationship with their brothers or sisters. With this in mind, repeated residential changes during emerging adulthood may result in less frequent contact between siblings, especially when the move involves great distances. As Arnett (2006) noted, many emerging adults move far from home for work, to live with a romantic partner, or for a sense of adventure. When individuals move to a different state or to another country, maintaining relationships with siblings inevitably becomes more difficult.

Overall, leaving home and the transitions associated with emerging adulthood significantly impact siblings' contact with one another, both in terms of frequency and method. In his recent review of adult sibling research, Mikkelson (2014) concluded that contact can vary from daily interactions via e-mail, phone calls, and visits for some adult siblings to interacting only once or twice a year for others. However, he found that most research indicates a curvilinear relationship between age and sibling contact, with contact dropping in early and middle adulthood and increasing in later adulthood. Thus, beginning with the transition out of the family home, sibling contact appears to vary greatly throughout adulthood.

Changes associated with voluntariness. Although siblings are often “forced” to interact while growing up together in the family home, maintaining contact becomes more of a personal choice once they no longer live together (Mikkelson, 2014). In other words, when siblings leave home, their relationship shifts from involuntary to voluntary; that is, they have a say regarding how often they interact and the role they play in one another's lives. Despite the voluntary nature of adult sibling relationships, however, research suggests that most siblings remain committed to one another across the lifespan (Rittenour, Myers, & Brann, 2007) and are unlikely to dissolve their relationships as they get older (Cicirelli, 1995). In most cases, then, it is not a question of whether siblings will remain in contact with one another when they leave the family home, but rather how they maintain their relationships and why they choose to do so. With this in mind, Myers and colleagues (e.g., Myers & Goodboy, 2010; Goodboy, Myers, & Patterson, 2009; Myers, Brann, & Rittenour, 2008) have taken an interest in examining the specific behaviors adult siblings engage in to maintain their relationships throughout adulthood.

According to Myers (2011), studies examining the use of relational maintenance behaviors between adult siblings have revealed three general findings. First, research has demonstrated that adult siblings report using the tasks behavior the most often and the openness behavior the least often (Goodboy et al., 2009; Myers et al., 2008; Myers et al., 2001). The *tasks* relational maintenance behavior involves sharing responsibility for the duties relational partners face that are specific to their relationship (Stafford, 2011). For adult siblings, these tasks may include providing companionship and support, offering aid in times of need, and sharing caregiving responsibilities for elderly parents (see Goetting, 1986). Second, siblings' use of relational maintenance behaviors has been positively linked to constructive relational outcomes such as sibling liking, relational satisfaction, commitment, trust, and relational closeness (Eidsness & Myers, 2008; Goodboy et al., 2009; Myers et al., 2008; Myers et al., 2001). Third, research generally indicates that female siblings use relational maintenance behaviors more frequently than male siblings, and female-female pairs use relational maintenance behaviors more frequently than male-male and cross-sex sibling pairs (Myers et al., 2001).

Although it is well-established that most adult sibling engage in some form of relational maintenance throughout adulthood (Myers & Rittenour, 2012), less is known about the reasons why siblings choose to sustain an active relationship with one another after they move out of the family home. In a study specifically addressing this gap in the literature, Myers (2011) found that adult siblings maintain their relationships for reasons related to either circumstance (i.e., *we are family* and *we live close to each other*) or choice (*we provide one another with support, we have common interests and experiences, we are friends, I love my sibling, and we are relationally close*). He concluded that adult

siblings who engage in relational maintenance behaviors due to circumstance may perceive their relationships as obligatory or involuntary, while those who maintain their relationships by choice possibly view their brothers and sisters as friends and enjoy interacting with them. Thus, although perceptions of obligation may persist for some siblings in adulthood, it appears that many adult siblings voluntarily maintain their relationships due to feelings of closeness, love, and support.

Along these lines, Myers, Bryant, Frisby, and Mansson (2011) found that siblings use affectionate communication (i.e., verbal statements, nonverbal gestures, and social support behaviors) as a relational maintenance behavior more strategically (i.e., intentionally) than routinely (i.e., unintentionally). These findings suggest that adult siblings who communicate affection in order to maintain their relationship may do so because they have a sincere desire to remain involved in their siblings' lives. Myers and colleagues (2011) also speculated that perhaps adult siblings strategically use affection as a relational maintenance behavior because it serves as a means of reducing any relational or partner uncertainty they may experience. Various events in adulthood—such as moving away from home, getting married, and having children—can significantly alter siblings' relationships with one another, resulting in increased levels of uncertainty. Therefore, adult siblings may use affectionate communication strategically to maintain a desired state of closeness amidst relational uncertainty and change. Overall, research on adult siblings' use of relational maintenance behaviors indicates that most brothers and sisters have a desire to stay in contact and choose to maintain their relationships even after they no longer live together.

Despite the evidence that maintaining sibling relationships becomes more of a personal choice when individuals move out of the family home, the reasons adult siblings stay in contact with one another may not always be entirely voluntary. In particular, research has shown that many adults feel a sense of obligation or responsibility to stay in contact with their siblings (Lee et al., 1990; Myers, 2011). Accordingly, there are cultural expectations that adult siblings should maintain their relationship (Allan, 1977) and provide support for one another throughout adulthood (Connidis, 2005). Furthermore, detached siblings often remain informed about one another indirectly through parents and other third parties (Allan, 1977), making complete dissolution of the sibling relationship difficult. As Cicirelli (1995) pointed out, even if siblings choose to not maintain an active relationship, their sibling *status* will always remain intact. The permanence of sibling ties makes it more likely that siblings relationships will endure and overcome significant challenges and problems that other types of relationships—such as friendships and romantic relationships—would not be able to survive (Mikkelsen, 2014).

Because sibling ties are difficult to dissolve and siblings are generally expected to stay in touch, individuals may continue to feel “forced” to maintain their sibling relationships even after they have moved out of the family home. However, once they are living on their own, siblings can essentially communicate on their own terms and decide how they will maintain their relationships. In this sense, sibling relationships become more voluntary—despite any lingering feelings of obligation—when siblings move away from one another for the first time.

Changes associated with relational quality. Some studies have shown that home-leaving has a positive impact on the bond between siblings. For example, there is

evidence that both first- and second-born siblings experience increases in intimacy and decreases in conflict after older siblings move out of the family home for the first time (Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2011). Similarly, Lindell and colleagues (2010) found that frequent and intense conflicts between brothers and sisters during adolescence is associated with less negative sibling relationships during the firstborns' transition to college. The authors suggested that siblings who fight often while growing up together may perceive their relationship more positively after an older sibling moves out because it gives them a "break" from one another (p. 88). In support of this view, Conger and Little (2010) posited that siblings with strained and combative relationships during adolescence may feel relieved when an older sibling leaves home because it removes a daily source of stress and annoyance.

By giving one another space after a firstborn leaves home, siblings often have the opportunity to develop a stronger bond without the day-to-day hassles. For instance, Milevsky and Heerwagen (2013) found that some emerging adults reported being closer to their siblings because they no longer live together. In general, their findings suggest that siblings benefit from giving one another space because they have fewer opportunities for conflict and begin to appreciate their relationship more. In another study, Scharf et al. (2005) found that emerging adult siblings experienced lower levels of conflict and rivalry than adolescent siblings. Furthermore, compared to adolescents, emerging adults indicated that they engaged in more emotional exchanges with and felt more warmth toward their siblings. As the researchers concluded, the physical distance between emerging adult siblings may make it easier to exchange personal information and attend to the others' needs. Adolescent siblings typically live together, and therefore may be too

involved in resolving conflicts to focus on personal matters. On the other hand, emerging adult siblings who are free from daily contact may be better able to avoid conflict and develop a stronger emotional connection.

Leaving home also allows individuals to explore the world on their own and develop a more mature perspective on life, which can result in more positive relationships between siblings. While living under the same roof, it can be difficult for adolescent siblings to overlook minor transgressions; however, once they move out of the family home, they tend to realize that these annoyances are childish and relatively insignificant (Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013). Similarly, Scharf and colleagues (2005) interviewed both adolescents and emerging adults about their perceptions of their siblings and found that the latter constructed a more coherent and mature account of their relationship. They further noted:

[Emerging adults] better understood their siblings' wishes and needs, respected emergent needs, such as a growing involvement in a romantic relationship, and did not experience it as a sign of distancing. Also, emerging adults could better reflect on the changes in their relationships with their siblings and perceive the positive aspects of the changes. (p. 83)

It is possible that, by leaving home and gaining new experiences, emerging adults develop important skills and a sense of maturity that help them adapt more easily to the changes in their sibling relationships. As Arnett (2006) argued, emerging adults tend to be more respectful of others' feelings than adolescents, as well as better able to understand the perspective of others. Additionally, he noted that individuals begin to empathize with their parents more and view them as individuals (and not simply as

parents) during emerging adulthood. Similarly, emerging adults may begin to see their brothers and sisters as more than siblings once they move out of the family home, which can improve the quality of their bond.

Although home-leaving can give siblings a renewed appreciation of their relationship and bring them closer emotionally, distance can also have a negative impact on sibling relationships. In Milvesky and colleagues' (2005) investigation of sibling relationships in emerging adulthood, some participants reported that moving away from their siblings hindered their relational closeness. Emerging adults in the study also expressed that geographic distance caused undesirable changes in their sibling relationship, with some feeling that they no longer knew their sibling as well as they did prior to moving out of the family home. These findings suggest that emerging adults may distance themselves from their siblings as they engage in identity exploration and seek new experiences, which can result in a diminished emotional connection. In line with this view, White (2001) noted that the drop in sibling proximity and contact in the early adulthood years are "consistent with the hypothesis that a reduced sibling bond is part of a nearly universal individuation process in which individuals increase physical and psychological distance between themselves and their families of origin" (p. 566). In some cases, then, home-leaving may create a rift between siblings and lead to reduced closeness.

Other challenges associated with home-leaving and emerging adulthood may also negatively impact sibling relationships. As discussed previously, emerging adulthood provides an opportunity for individuals who experienced difficult conditions in the family home to explore new paths and better themselves and their lives (Arnett, 2006).

Therefore, as emerging adults attempt to leave behind an unhealthy family environment, they may disengage from their siblings and leave them “behind” as well. For example, research shows that individuals who experienced parental divorce or living in a stepfamily report difficulties in their sibling relationships during emerging adulthood (Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013). In an investigation of sibling relationships among college students, Van Volkom, Machiz, and Reich (2011) also found that participants whose parents were married were more likely to turn to their siblings for support during difficult times than those with widowed or separated parents. Furthermore, there is evidence that emerging adults whose families face economic hardship engage in less communication and more conflict with their siblings than individuals from families with fewer financial problems (Milevsky et al., 2005). It may be that when sibling relationships are strained by challenging family experiences, such as parental divorce and economic hardship, it becomes more difficult for siblings to maintain close and supportive relationships after they leave home and move away from one another.

Though siblings’ experiences vary greatly in adulthood (Mikkelsen, 2014), it is evident that leaving home marks an important turning point for most sisters and brothers. Indeed, scholars have long emphasized that sibling relationships undergo significant changes during young adulthood (e.g., Cicirelli, 1995; Goetting, 1986; Newman, 1991). Accordingly, in their overview of sibling relationships during the transition to adulthood, Conger and Little (2010) argued that a “dynamic recentering” approach may be useful for understanding the changes siblings experience as they enter their adult years. Below, I explain the recentering process and explore how home-leaving may prompt siblings to restructure their relationships.

Recentering of Sibling Relationships

According to Tanner (2006), a critical developmental task of emerging adulthood is the process of recentering, which involves “a relational restructuring between the emerging adult and his or her family-of-origin” (p. 34). She argued that emerging adults progress through three stages during the recentering process. In the first stage, which is considered the end of adolescence, individuals are still embedded within their family-of-origin and are just beginning to seek self-sufficiency and independence from their parents. The second stage is the period in which emerging adults engage in identity exploration and experiment with love, work, and worldviews. Although many of these commitments are temporary, emerging adults become involved in a variety of systems (e.g., school and work) and relationships (e.g., romantic partnerships and friendships) outside of the family home. Yet, despite their growing independence, many individuals continue to rely on their parents for financial and other types of support. In this sense, emerging adults remain attached to, but are no longer embedded within, their natal families during the second stage of the recentering process (Tanner, 2006). Finally, the third stage marks the beginning of young adulthood, during which individuals establish enduring commitments to careers, spouses, and children. It is at this point that many individuals give up the instability and self-exploration associated with the emerging adult years for the stability and commitments of adulthood (Tanner, 2006).

During the three stages of the recentering process, emerging adults strive to attain self-sufficiency, whereby they shed their dependencies on their parents and become responsible for themselves (Tanner, 2006). Taking this into account, a recentering framework demonstrates how individuals decrease their focus on family relationships—

including those with siblings—as they incorporate new roles and relationships into their inner circle (Conger & Little, 2010). Thus, one of the challenges of emerging adulthood is establishing and managing new relationships while also renegotiating existing family relationships, which are changed by the transition into adulthood (Aquilino, 2006; Parker, Ludtke, Trautwein, & Roberts, 2012; Tanner, 2006). In terms of sibling relationships, previous research indicates that new experiences and life events—such as attending college and starting a family—often reduces the intensity and frequency of sibling contact (Cicirelli, 1995; Goetting, 1986; White, 2001). Therefore, as emerging adults restructure their social networks and assume new responsibilities and roles after leaving the family home, sibling relationships often become less central to everyday life (Conger & Little, 2010; White, 2001).

The perception that sibling relationships become secondary, or less central, in adulthood has been well-documented in the family literature. For decades, scholars have proposed that family ties can be understood as a group of “nested circles,” in which one’s closest relationships occupy the inner circle and less significant attachments fall into the outer circles (Parsons, 1943; White, 2001). From this perspective, siblings are generally considered to be members of the inner circle during childhood when ties to the natal family are most significant. In adulthood, however, individuals restructure their inner circles to incorporate spouses and children, therefore moving siblings to the outer circles in the process (Parsons, 1943). Given that daily life for most adults typically revolves around one’s family of procreation and/or their career, sibling relationships are often assigned less priority in adulthood than in childhood and adolescence (Goetting, 1986). In support of this view, White’s (2001) investigation of sibling relationships across the

lifespan revealed that siblings do not play a major role in the day-to-day lives of most adults. Therefore, it appears that many individuals restructure their sibling relationships during adulthood—often shifting them from the inner to the outer circles—as they become immersed in their careers, spouses, and expanding social networks.

According to Conger and Little (2010), the manner in which young adult siblings restructure their relationships often depends on a number of factors, such as the quality of their bond during childhood and adolescence, their family structure, and the various transitions and changes they experience during emerging adulthood (e.g., attending college, becoming employed, entering a long-term romantic partnership, etc.). However, for most siblings who grow up together in the same household, the recentering process likely begins when they move out of the family home and away from one another for the first time. As Goetting (1986) argued, a critical transition and period of change for siblings is when they move out of their parents' home and no longer live together. It is at this point, she emphasized, that sibling ties become less structured and that the siblingship tasks of childhood and adolescence begin transforming to meet the needs of adulthood. Further, because moving out of the family home also marks the point in which siblings have more of a choice regarding how they structure and maintain their relationships (Goetting, 1986), it is likely that home-leaving initiates the recentering process for many siblings. Thus, in order to understand how sibling relationships change during the transition into adulthood, it is necessary to examine how they experience and manage the home-leaving process.

Research on how siblings recenter their relationships when they leave home and move away from one another for the first time is important because the way siblings

interact with one another and restructure their bond during this transition may set the tone for how they maintain their relationship throughout the rest of adulthood. Therefore, examining sibling relationships during the initial transition into adulthood may provide insight into the types of interactions that lead to positive and fulfilling adult sibling bonds, as well as the behaviors that contribute to hostile or indifferent relationships between brothers and sisters in adulthood. In addition, exploring how siblings describe the changes in their relationships when they establish separate residences for the first time will address Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter's (2011) critique that very little existing research can connect what we know about how sibling relationships change from adolescence to emerging adulthood *directly* to their experiences of leaving home. For these reasons, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: How do siblings describe the experience of moving away from one another for the first time?

RQ2: What changes to their relationship, if any, do siblings describe during this transition?

RQ2a: How, if at all, do siblings describe recentering their relationships after they move apart for the first time?

Beyond exploring the relational changes siblings describe experiencing when they move out of the family home, the present study also sought to understand how they communicate with one another and construct meaning of their changing relationship during the transition into adulthood. To achieve this additional research goal, relational dialectics theory was used as a guiding framework.

Theoretical Perspective: Relational Dialectics Theory

As discussed in Chapter 1, the goal of relational dialectics theory (RDT) is to understand how speakers construct meaning of their relational experiences through the interplay of competing discourses. According to Bakhtin (1981), not only are multiple discourses given voice in any utterance, they often compete with one another on unequal ground in the struggle for meaning; that is, some discourses are given the dominant position (i.e., centripetal discourses) and others are pushed to the margins (i.e., centrifugal discourses). Thus, as speakers communicate and make sense of their experiences, they center some discourses and marginalize others, and it is through this centripetal-centrifugal discursive struggle that they construct meaning in the moment (Baxter, 2011). A dialogic perspective, then, argues that individual and relational identities are not preformed entities that can be finalized prior to interaction; rather, they are meanings constituted in the communication between relational partners (Baxter, 2011).

RDT (and dialogism more generally) also assumes that an individual's utterance cannot be understood as an isolated speech act, but instead is a part of a larger utterance chain (Bakhtin, 1986; Baxter, 2011). In other words, any given utterance is a point on the utterance chain that responds to that which was uttered before and anticipates utterances that might follow. Along these lines, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) identified four "links" in the utterance chain that interact with any individual speech act: distal already-spoken, distal not-yet-spoken, proximal already-spoken, and proximal not-yet-spoken. The distal already-spoken link refers to normative or established cultural meanings that speakers draw on in their talk. Thus, distal already-spoken are the

dominant perspectives, ideologies, and systems of meaning that circulate in the larger culture, such as the discourse of individualism in mainstream U.S. society (Baxter, 2011). At the distal not-yet-spoken link, speakers anticipate how generalized others might respond to their utterances. The proximal links in the utterance chain, on the other hand, refer to the past, present, and future meanings of a given relationship. Specifically, proximal already-spoken reflect how speakers give voice to past relational meanings and discourses in their talk, while proximal not-yet-spoken concern the immediate response from the hearer in an interaction.

The distal not-yet-spoken and the proximal not-yet-spoken sites of the utterance chain highlight the *addressivity* of an utterance, which is an utterance's potential to be oriented to an anticipated listener (Bakhtin, 1986). In other words, speakers construct their utterances in anticipation of how proximal addressees (i.e., fellow participants in an interaction) or distal addressees (i.e., a superaddressee) will respond (Baxter, 2011). Specifically, speakers consider whether their utterances will be viewed as good or bad by proximal and distal others, and then adjust their communication accordingly (Baxter & Bratithwaite, 2010). Thus, as Baxter (2011) noted, an utterance's addressivity denies the individual speaker sole ownership of the speech act. She further argued:

The expression of an utterance is constructed as much by the anticipated listener as by the particular speaker. In this sense, an utterance can never be owned by a single speaker but is instead jointly owned by the speaker and its (super)addressees. (p. 31)

Viewing an utterance as "jointly owned" by a speaker and an addressee aligns with RDT's premise that meaning does not reside in the individual. Rather, true to its focus on

the social aspect of relational communication, RDT posits that meaning is located in the interplay between competing discourses (Baxter, 2011). In RDT literature, the interpenetration of discourses is described in terms of various praxis processes, which are characterized by either *diachronic separation* or *synchronic interplay* (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Baxter, 2011). I review these concepts below.

Diachronic Separation

Diachronic practices are characterized by a change over time regarding which discourse is privileged and which discourse is marginalized (Baxter, 2011). Thus, rather than highlighting the interpenetration of opposing voices, diachronic praxis processes involve isolating competing discourses from one another (Baxter, 1988). Baxter and Montgomery (1996) identified two praxis processes characterized by diachronic separation: spiraling inversion and segmentation. Spiraling inversion reflects a back and forth separation of discourses based on time, such that prominence is first given to one discourse and then shifted to another (Baxter, 2011). The diachronic practice of segmentation also involves a shift over time regarding which discourse is centered; however, the separation of competing discourses is not based on time specifically, but on a topical domain (Baxter, 2011).

Synchronic Interplay

Whereas diachronic practices serve to evade discursive struggles, synchronic processes are characterized by the mixture, or co-occurrence, of competing discourses (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). Characterized by the interpenetration of voices at a given point in time (Baxter, 2006), synchronic processes are enacted at each of the utterance chain's four discursive sites (Baxter, 2011). To illustrate synchronic interplay, Baxter

(2011) outlined four discursive struggles that interpenetrate across the utterance chain: *antagonistic-nonantagonistic*, *direct-indirect*, *serious-playful*, and *polemical-transformative*.

Antagonistic-nonantagonistic struggle. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) made a distinction between antagonistic and nonantagonistic struggles that are featured in relational life. An antagonistic struggle arises when two speakers privilege different discourses (Baxter, 2011), such as when one relational partner assigns prominence to a discourse of openness and the other aligns with a discourse of privacy. Although some may refer to this struggle of discourses as a conflict between two people, Baxter (2011) cautioned against using the term “conflict” to describe an antagonistic struggle. In contrast with the mainstream view of conflict in communication research, Baxter argued that “the clash is between different systems of meaning, not between two persons with competing goals” (p. 132).

While an antagonistic struggle involves both partners in a relationship, a nonantagonistic struggle emerges within the utterances of an individual (Baxter, 2011). In other words, a nonantagonistic struggle occurs when an individual’s speech act gives voice to multiple and opposing discourses. For example, an individual’s utterance about a new romantic relationship may invoke a struggle between a discourse of certainty and a discourse of uncertainty. However, a nonantagonistic struggle does not always remain “inside the utterance” constructed by the speaker (Bakhtin, 1984). According to Baxter (2011), a nonantagonistic struggle for meaning at the individual level may be grounded in an antagonistic struggle at the relationship level. Furthermore, a given conversation between relational partners may move across different sites on the utterance chain, and

therefore weave in and out of antagonistic and nonantagonistic interplay (p. 134). Thus, both together and separately, antagonistic and nonantagonistic struggles permeate relational communication and create possibilities for the construction of meaning.

Direct-indirect struggle. Based on Bakhtin's (1984) discussion of open and hidden speech, the direct-indirect struggle is a synchronic process that calls attention to the ambiguity of meaning. Direct unambiguous speech, according to Baxter (2011), allows for the direct interplay between competing discourses. Although centrifugal discourses may not achieve equal discursive footing with the centripetal discourse, they are at least acknowledged and not easily evaded or dismissed. Thus, in instances of direct speech, at least two voices are directly and openly implicated in a discursive struggle. Indirect speech, on the other hand, refutes alternative discursive positions without naming them directly (Baxter, 2011). When speakers acknowledge discourses only indirectly, they leave meaning open to multiple interpretations and allow for ambiguity.

Baxter (2011) highlighted three discursive functions of ambiguous, or indirect, speech. First, ambiguity can allow relational partners to evade the direct interplay of competing discourses. As Baxter (2011) explained, "So long as parties have semantic wiggle room and don't have to confront the different systems of meaning which they contribute to a communicative utterance, each party presumes that his or her interpretation is the centered one" (p. 135). Ambiguity, then, allows relational partners to align with different systems of meaning but assume similarity in their interpretations. In this sense, the partners avoid the direct interplay of their competing perspectives.

Second, ambiguous speech can discursively marginalize opposing discourses by addressing them only indirectly (Baxter, 2011). Bakhtin (1984) referred to this

synchronic practice as polemical hidden speech, in which a competing discourse is given a “sideward glance” (p. 196) or an “ambiguous verbal nod” (Baxter, 2011, p. 135) with the intent of indirect negation. Although both centripetal and centrifugal discourses are acknowledged, the latter is never referenced directly and is therefore marginalized.

Finally, ambiguous speech can serve to indirectly weaken the authoritativeness of a centripetal discourse. This synchronic practice occurs when a dominant discourse is somehow exposed as flawed. According to Baxter (2011), “indirect hedges such as ‘sometimes’ (as opposed to ‘always’)...indirectly admit that the centered discourse is not without criticism of its presumed all-encompassing totality” (p. 136). Similar to the “sideward glance” discussed above, “indirect hedges” only indirectly attend to the alternative discourse. As a result, the dominant discourse is still given the centripetal position.

Serious-playful struggle. With a focus on the tone of an utterance, the serious-playful struggle is a synchronic practice that highlights the role of playfulness in communication (Baxter, 2011). Specifically, Bakhtin (1981) claimed that competing discourses can be challenged through the use of three different playful devices: the *rouge*, the *fool*, and the *clown*. First, the *rouge* is employed to parody or ridicule a competing discourse for the purposes of mocking a specific person or group who aligns with it. Second, enacting the persona of the fool is a playful and indirect means of refuting a competing discourse (Bakhtin, 1981). Playing the part of the fool involves feigning misunderstanding regarding a particular discourse, thus revealing its given assumptions (Baxter, 2011). Third, the playful device of the clown reflects a union of the *rouge* and the fool. Specifically, adopting the stance of the clown involves an exaggerated distortion

of a competing discourse, which creates “the possibility for laughter at the absurdity of the targeted discourse” (Baxter, 2011, p. 137).

Polemical-transformative struggle. According to Baxter (2011), the fourth synchronic practice differs from the other three dimensions (i.e., antagonistic-nonantagonistic, direct-indirect, and serious-playful) in its move away from polemical utterances. Whereas polemic speech is characterized by an aggressive, zero-sum reasoning where discourses are in competition with one another, the polemical-transformative struggle allows for the repositioning of discourses so that new, noncompetitive meanings are constructed. In this sense, the centripetal-centrifugal struggle is downplayed in favor of a more idealized dialogue.

In the polemical-transformative struggle, polemical interplay is not evaded completely. However, the oppositional nature of alternative discourses can be neutralized through the synchronic practice of *balance* (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Although the discourses are still in competition with one another, neither is given the centripetal position. Rather, both alternative discourses are partially attended to in what Baxter (2011) called a “discursive compromise” (p. 138). For example, a couple in a long distance relationship may enact a discursive balance between autonomy and connection by deciding to communicate via Skype on some weekends rather than visiting one another every weekend. This practice allows the couple to partially satisfy both a discourse of autonomy (not visiting one another every weekend) and connection (seeing one another via Skype). It is important to note that, while the synchronic practice of balance may appear to “resolve” the struggle between opposing voices, this is not the case. To the extent that neither discourse is fully embraced nor fully denied, the

compromise still frames the discourses in a zero-sum competition with one another (Baxter, 2011).

In contrast, the transformative end of the polemical-transformative struggle is characterized by idealized dialogue where competing discourses are no longer positioned in opposition to one another (Baxter, 2011). Such transformation is considered idealized dialogue because it allows for the creation of new meanings and highlights the potential for creativity in language use (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2009). As a way of illustrating transformative processes, Baxter and Braithwaite (2008; 2009) identified two types of meaning making possibilities originally articulated by Bakhtin: a *hybrid* and an *aesthetic moment*. The formation of a hybrid (Bakhtin, 1981) involves a mixing of two or more disparate meaning systems in a way that creates new meaning (Baxter, 2011). Baxter and Braithwaite (2008) described discursive hybrids in this way: “The discourses (oil and vinegar) are distinct, yet they combine to form a new meaning—salad dressing” (p. 354). Similar to oil and vinegar in salad dressing, competing discourses retain their distinct properties in a discursive hybrid. Yet, when combined, the discourses form a new and creative meaning. For example, Norwood (2013) found that family members of transgendered individuals made sense of the gender transition by constructing a discursive hybrid she labeled *evolution*. These family members expressed that the transgendered person progressed, or evolved, into an updated version of the same self. Through this discursive hybrid, male and female are still separate identities, but they are framed in a way that a person can naturally progress from one gender identity to another. The discourses of male and female coexist, but rather than competing with one another,

they are transformed into a noncompetitive, creative meaning of transition (i.e., a person can be both male and female, but not simultaneously).

The second kind of transformation is the aesthetic moment (Bakhtin, 1990), in which discourses are reframed so they are no longer in opposition to one another and instead interpenetrate in a way that significantly and profoundly reconstructs each system of meaning (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2009; 2008; Baxter, 2011). Baxter and Braithwaite (2008, p. 355) likened aesthetic moments to chemical reactions, such as the mixing of hydrogen and oxygen to create an entirely new and different entity—water. Thus, the discourses that constitute an aesthetic moment are entirely transformed in their construction of meaning (Baxter, 2011). Along these lines, Baxter (2004) further conceptualized aesthetic moments as any conversational segments in which the struggle between centripetal and centrifugal forces is reconstructed to create a sense of temporary wholeness. Drawing again from Norwood's (2013) work on trans-identity, some family members constructed an aesthetic moment she labeled *removal*. As family members made sense of gender transition, they expressed that neither sex nor gender were relevant to their loved one's identity. Rather than viewing the transition as a replacement of a male for a female (or vice versa), these family members recognized that the transgender individual's core personhood remained the same. By removing sex/gender from their conceptualization of a person's identity, participants constructed an aesthetic moment in which they transcended the discursive struggle between maleness and femaleness.

Although competing discourses are at play in all interactions, Baxter (2011) argued that some communicative enactments hold more dialogic potential than others. In particular, she suggested that instances of rupture or change—such as relationship

transitions—are prime sites for identifying discursive struggles. Below, I review RDT-informed research that has focused on how relationship parties make sense of challenging experiences and relational change. In doing so, I argue that RDT has the ability to shed valuable light on how siblings communicatively construct meaning of their changing relationship when they move away from one another for the first time.

RDT, Relational Change, and Transition

Baxter, Braithwaite, and their colleagues have focused extensively on the competing discourses that characterize stepfamily life (e.g., Baxter, Braithwaite, Bryant, & Wagner, 2004; Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006; Braithwaite, Baxter, & Harper, 1998; Braithwaite, Toller, Daas, Durham, & Jones, 2008). Through this line of research, they have generated important knowledge about how stepfamily members communicate with one another and negotiate their relationships during times of change. For instance, in an early study of stepfamily communication from an RDT perspective, Braithwaite, Baxter and Harper (1998) examined how stepfamily members communicate with one another and develop their relationships through the enactment of rituals. Their analysis revealed that stepchildren, parents, and stepparents articulated a tension between old and new family rituals; specifically, some stepfamily members had difficulty honoring rituals from their previous family system as they transitioned into a new stepfamily system. The authors concluded that, rather than privileging rituals from either their old and new families, it was important for stepfamily members to honor both families in their ritual enactments and relationships with one another.

RDT scholars have also focused on the competing tensions that stepchildren face in their relationships with other stepfamily members as well as with their nonresidential

parent (see Baxter et al., 2004; Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006; Braithwaite et al., 2008). In one study, Baxter and colleagues (2004) found that stepchildren expressed a simultaneous need for both intimacy with and separation from their stepfamily. In particular, participants felt that being close with their stepparent was a sign of disloyalty to their “old” family system and their nonresidential parent. Participants also indicated a struggle between wanting parental authority to come from the nonresidential parent and wanting the nonresidential parent and stepparent to share parental authority. Thus, for these stepchildren, it was difficult to accept the stepparent as an authority figure within the stepfamily system. In other work, Braithwaite and Baxter (2006) found that stepchildren perceived a tension between wanting a close relationship with their nonresidential parent and feeling that maintaining such closeness was challenging and disruptive to their daily lives. Many participants also expressed simultaneous desires between wanting to be open with their nonresidential parent and wanting to keep details pertaining to the stepfamily private in order to avoid angering the residential parent or hurting the nonresidential parent’s feelings. Along these lines, Braithwaite and colleagues (2008) conducted research focusing specifically on how stepchildren negotiated feelings of being “caught” between households. They found that, rather than being caught in the middle, stepchildren wanted a *centered* position in the stepfamily. In other words, they wanted their parents to inform them about issues that were relevant and important to them, but to refrain from telling them about issues that would put them in the middle.

In addition to illuminating the relational changes and challenges associated with stepfamily life, RDT has also been applied to understand how family members negotiate changes in their relationships when a loved one comes out as lesbian or gay (Breshears &

Braithwaite, 2014) or transgender (Norwood, 2012; Norwood, 2013). For example, Breshears and Braithwaite (2014) found that children whose parents came out as lesbian or gay did discursive work to cope with the stigma surrounding their family's identity. In particular, participants in their study strategically marginalized negative discourses regarding lesbian and gay identities in order to construct their family identity and their relationship with their parents as positive. Similarly, Norwood (2013) explored how family members of transgendered individuals made sense of the changes and loss associated with their loved one's gender transition. Although some participants reported experiencing ambiguous loss, others reconstructed meanings of sex and gender to frame the gender transition as less significant in order to overcome or avoid feelings of grief. In this sense, RDT exposed how family members were able to come to terms with the changes in their relationships with loved ones who transitioned from one gender to another.

In other RDT-based research, scholars have examined how relationship parties construct meaning of transitions that occur later in life (e.g., Baxter, Braithwaite, Golish, & Olson, 2002; Wenzel & Poynter, 2014). For example, Baxter et al. (2002) examined the competing tensions perceived by wives whose husbands suffered from adult dementia. Most of the women in their sample described a presence-absence discursive tension, rooted in their struggle to interact with a husband who was physically present but cognitively and emotionally absent. The struggle between presence and absence for these wives reflects the experience of "married widowhood" (Rollins, Waterman, & Esmay, 1985), in which the "women felt that they were still married to their husbands, but at the same time widowed by their husbands' cognitive absence" (Baxter et al., 2002, p. 11).

Through the lens of RDT, the authors demonstrated how the wives managed the changes in their marital relationship brought on by their husbands' limited communicative abilities and mental decline.

In another study, Wenzel and Poynter (2014) applied RDT to examine how elderly parents constructed meaning of the relational changes they experienced once they became dependent on their adult children for tasks related to mobility, finances, and/or their health. Although it is not unusual for parents to rely on their adult children as they get older, many participants found it challenging to relinquish some of their independence and cope with their children taking care of them instead of the reverse. Thus, an independence-dependence discursive struggle featured prominently in the older parents' stories, reflected in their attempts to maintain an autonomous identity despite their growing dependence on their children. In addition, many older parents articulated an antagonistic struggle in which they centered a discourse of anticipating death and their children privileged a discourse of sustaining life. While participants were often reminded of their advanced age and eventual passing, they reported that their children were mostly concerned with keeping them alive and healthy for as long as possible. Overall, RDT illuminated how elderly parents evoked multiple and competing discourses to construct meaning of the aging process and the changing nature of their relationship with their adult children.

Particularly relevant to the present study is Wozniak, Lollis, and Marshall's (2013) use of RDT to examine the communication between parents and adolescents about extracurricular activities during the transition into high school. They found that all of the parent-adolescent dyads in their study drew on the competing discourses of autonomy

and connection in their conversations, especially in reference to the expected level of parental involvement in the adolescent's high school activities. In addition, many dyads voiced a tension between openness and closedness as they negotiated which conversational topics adolescents felt comfortable discussing with their parents and which topics were off-limits. Finally, to a lesser extent, a certainty-uncertainty discursive struggle emerged in the communication between parents and adolescents. For some parent-child dyads, the competing discourses of certainty and uncertainty co-occurred with autonomy-connection and openness-closedness, highlighting their struggle to make sense of how the impending transition to high school might change their relationship and the way they interact with one another. Given that adolescence is a transitional period in which parents and children experience significant relational changes due to the adolescent's growing independence (see Collins & Laursen, 2004; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986), it is not surprising that parents and adolescents faced discursive struggles surrounding autonomy-connection, openness-closedness, and certainty-uncertainty.

The above review of RDT-informed research demonstrates the theory's potential to capture how relational partners communicatively construct meaning of their experiences and their relationships during times of change and transition. Because moving out of the family home inevitably changes how siblings interact and maintain their relationships (Conger & Little, 2010), they likely experience unique communicative challenges during this significant relationship transition that can be understood through the lens of RDT. For example, in a pilot study for the current project, Halliwell (2016) applied RDT to understand the relational changes siblings experience when they move away from one another and transition into adulthood. The findings indicated that siblings

faced discursive struggles between their “old” and “new” relational meanings and between their certainty and uncertainty related to their move out of the family home. As for the old relationship-new relationship discursive struggle, some participants expressed that they missed certain aspects of their “old” relational identity with their brothers or sisters—such as taking a picture together for an annual Christmas card—now that they no longer lived with their sibling(s). Thus, when making sense of the changes they experienced in their sibling relationships since moving out of their family home, these participants privileged “old” relational meanings while marginalizing the “new” state of their sibling bond.

Many young adults also voiced a discursive struggle between certainty and uncertainty in their stories about moving away from their sibling(s) (Halliwell, 2016). In particular, some participants expressed a new sense of uncertainty about their brother or sister as a result of being physically separated from him or her for the first time. In light of cultural expectations that siblings should know and feel certain about one another, these participants positioned their uncertainty as deviant and undesirable. For example, some participants used words like “weird” or “strange” to describe the feeling of not knowing their sibling(s) as well as they did before they moved out of the family home. For many siblings, uncertainty was a new relational meaning that competed with past (and more favorable) feelings of certainty.

In addition to the old relationship-new relationship and certainty-uncertainty discursive struggles, some participants also constructed an aesthetic moment in which they expressed that physical separation enhanced the connection they shared with their sibling(s). In these cases, siblings emphasized that they got along better with their brother

or sister and/or appreciated their sibling relationship more now that they no longer lived in the same house. Without the everyday hassles that come with living together, participants expressed that being separated from their sibling helped, rather than hindered, the closeness in their relationship. Thus, the separateness-connectedness discursive struggle was reconstructed into a new meaning that emphasized wholeness—that is, separation fostering a stronger connection. As indicated by these findings, RDT can be productively applied to explore how brothers and sisters navigate and make sense of the changes in their relationship when they establish separate residences for the first time.

Although Halliwell's (2016) research adds to the literature on sibling relationships during the transition into adulthood, it is limited in at least two ways. First, the amount of time passed since the participants had moved out of their family home ranged from less than one year prior to the time of the interview up to four years earlier. Several of the young adults who had moved out of their parents' home three or four years earlier had a difficult time reflecting on how the transition itself impacted their sibling relationships, and focused instead on their current communicative experiences with their brothers or sisters. For these participants, it was unclear whether the changes they described in their sibling relationships were related to their departure from the family home or to other factors such as establishing a new network of friends, entering long-term relationships, or becoming involved in college life. Thus, in order to focus specifically on how home-leaving impacts sibling relationships, Halliwell relied extensively on the limited data from participants who had moved away from their siblings within the past year. The current study addressed this limitation with its focus on young adults who met the

following criteria: (a) they had moved out of their family home within the past twelve months, (b) they had at least one sibling still living at home, and (c) their recent transition out of the family home marked the first time they had moved away from their sibling(s). These criteria allowed me to more accurately capture how participants make sense of the relational changes they experience when they move away from their siblings for the first time.

Second, Halliwell (2016) conducted individual interviews to collect data, which only allowed for the examination of the participants' *perceptions* of their relational communication with their sibling(s). Though this research still provides insight into the communicative experiences of siblings, it fails to utilize RDT to its full potential. As noted in Chapter 1, Baxter (2011) argued that relying on self-report data in the form of surveys and individual interviews does not adequately address the theory's primary goal of understanding how relationships are constructed in the communication between relationship parties. She further emphasized that, in order to move the theory forward, researchers must make a stronger effort to examine the talk between relating partners in future work. For this reason, I collected data for the current project using joint interviews with sibling pairs. Thus, the present study's third research question explores how siblings co-construct meaning of their relationships during the transition from living together to living apart for the first time. This research question asked:

RQ3: What competing discourses, if any, animate siblings' talk about moving away from one another for the first time, and what meanings are constructed in their interplay?

Double-voiced Dialogue vs. Single-voiced Monologue

The interplay of competing discourses implies that more than one discourse can be identified in a given utterance or communicative text. However, it is important to note that multiple voices can be silenced by a single, authoritative discourse. To illustrate this point, Bakhtin (1984) noted the distinction between single-voiced discourse and double-voiced discourse. Single-voiced discourse, referred to as *monologue*, occurs when a single perspective or system of meaning is so dominant that alternative, competing meanings are silenced (Baxter, 2011). In cases of monologue, meaning often becomes calcified, rigid, and resistant to change and negotiation (Baxter, 2011). Simply put, single-voiced monologue is the absence of discursive struggle.

In contrast, double-voiced discourse, referred to as *dialogue*, is present when multiple voices or perspectives are acknowledged either directly or indirectly (Bakhtin, 1984; Baxter, 2011). Rather than silencing all but one discursive position, double-voiced discourse allows for alternative discourses to compete with one another in the struggle for meaning. Thus, according to Baxter (2011), discursive interplay is inherent to double-voiced dialogue because competing discourses “must of necessity come into semantic contact with one another” (p. 127). In other words, when multiple discourses are given voice (i.e., dialogue occurs), the discourses will inevitably play with and against one another in centripetal-centrifugal struggle. Therefore, unlike single-voiced monologue, double-voiced dialogue creates opportunities for new meanings to emerge from discursive struggle.

In general, Bakhtin’s work reflects a suspicion toward monologue, or any attempts to finalize meaning with a single, authoritative discourse. Baxter (2011) echoed

Bakhtin's critique against single-voiced monologue, arguing that dialogic interplay is necessary for potential meanings and identities to emerge. As she noted, "Communication is a dialogic struggle, and out of this struggle identities are shaped" (p. 11). In the absence of dialogic interplay, then, relational meanings become fixed and relationship parties miss out on opportunities for adapting and revitalizing their individual and relational identities (Baxter, 2010). It is through double-voiced dialogue—and the interplay between and among multiple discourses—that relationship parties communicatively construct their relational identities. Thus, in advancing a dialogic approach to communication and relationships, Baxter (2004; 2010; 2011) has posited that relationships themselves can be usefully conceptualized as dialogues.

Viewing relationships as dialogues requires an understanding of the constitutive approach to communication. I briefly discuss the constitutive perspective below, and then review scholarship on the dialogic approach to relationships. Lastly, I argue that studying sibling relationships as dialogues can make important contributions to the literature on adult sibling communication.

The Constitutive Approach to Communication

The constitutive view of communication, as articulated by Baxter (2004), examines how our social world, our identities, and our relationships are constructed in our communication. She argued that individual identities and relationships are not independent from communication; instead, these entities are constituted in, or created by, communication (p. 3). In contrast to traditional approaches to interpersonal communication and relationships, the constitutive approach does not view communication as a variable to be examined. Along these lines, relationships are not

conceived of as containers in which communication can be observed and studied. Thus, rather than studying “communication in relationships” as the container metaphor suggests, Baxter (2011) asserted that RDT researchers study “relationships in communication” (p. 15).

Because RDT assumes that selves and relationships are constituted in communication, the theory clearly takes a constitutive approach to studying communication and relationships. In addition to explaining how relationships are constructed in interaction, the constitutive process also explains RDT’s conceptualization of relational closeness. As argued by Baxter (2004), relational partners are close *not* because they get to know one another and reveal their preformed selves through communication the way mainstream, nonconstitutive approaches suggest (e.g., Social Penetration Theory; Altman & Taylor, 1973), but because selves are constituted in the communication between relational partners. In other words, relationship parties are close with one another to the degree that they allow selves to become. *Becoming* selves, according to Baxter (2004), are “not developing or progressing in some linear manner toward some idealized state of completion” but are engaging in the “ongoing process of constituting selves” (p. 4). Therefore, by adopting a constitutive approach, RDT positions relationships as ongoing dialogues between relational partners.

Relationships as Dialogues

In numerous articulations of relational dialectics theory, Baxter encourages scholars to view relationships not as preformed entities, but as a complex, sometimes messy, process of dialogue (see Baxter 2004; 2010; 2011). In fact, the title of her most recent book on RDT—*Voicing Relationships*—emphasized the point that relationships

are constructed in talk (see Baxter, 2011). Relationships, as noted above, are not static containers in which communication takes place; rather, they are *discourses* that are voiced by relationship partners. Although RDT argues that all relationships are constructed in communication, the discourses at play in the meaning-making process may differ depending on the relationship. For example, Baxter (2010) identified several discursive struggles that are unique to marital unions and therefore constitute the meaning of marriage in U.S. culture. Specifically, she argued that, rather than relying on rigid meanings of marital quality based on the criteria of stability, satisfaction, adjustment, and commitment, it is more productive to view the meaning of marriage as a dialogue between multiple discourses—both relational and societal (see Baxter, 2010). I review Baxter's (2010) discursive struggles of marriage below, and then demonstrate how they provide a useful framework for exploring a dialogue of adult sibling relationships.

Distal competing discourses of marriage. The meaning of marriage in mainstream U.S. society is rooted in and shaped by cultural discourses circulating at the distal already-spoken site of the utterance chain (Baxter, 2010). Thus, when people marry, they encounter various perspectives and ideologies regarding marriage—some of them competing—that have already been uttered by cultural members. As spouses talk to one another and others about their union, their communication is interwoven with already-spoken competing cultural discourses of marriage (Baxter, 2010). According to Baxter (2010), two conflicting views of marriage pervade U.S. culture and compete with one another for centripetal dominance. The first view, grounded in a discourse of individualism, constructs marriage as a private union that is formed for the purposes of meeting the emotional and psychological needs of the spouses. The second vision of

marriage, reflecting a discourse of community, conceives of marriage as a social institution in which spouses are expected to fulfill societal obligations, maintain traditional values, and put their partner's and the relationship's needs above their own. Baxter (2010) identified six competing discourses of marriage stemming from the individualism-community discursive struggle, five of which may apply to the sibling relationship: (a) the identity of marriage as dyadic versus socially embedded, (b) marital love as romantic versus pragmatic, (c) marriage as a bond of commitment versus a bond of voluntary choice, (d) marriage as two individuals versus marriage as a unity of one, and (e) marriage as a site of candor versus discretion.

The identity of marriage as dyadic versus socially embedded. Most Americans favor the view of marriage as a dyadic relationship of two individuals, reflecting the dominance given to individualism in mainstream U.S. society. As Baxter (2010) pointed out, this privileging of the dyadic view of marital relationships stands in contrast to other cultures where marriage is considered a part of the larger societal landscape or where arranged marriages commonly take place. Rather than viewing themselves as a social unit embedded in their larger societal and familial networks, marital partners in Euro-American culture tend to construct an identity as a couple that reflects their private relationship. It is important to note, however, that a construction of marriage as socially embedded also exists in U.S. culture, giving a discourse of community some footing in the struggle for meaning. For example, research has shown that many spouses express a struggle between prioritizing alone time as a couple and spending time with friends, family members, and other members of their social networks (e.g., Pawlowski, 1998; Prentice, 2009). At stake in this discursive struggle is a pair's marital identity as a dyadic

versus a social unit, or traces of both. Thus, through the interplay between the competing discourses of individualism and community, marital partners communicatively construct meaning of their marriage and their relational identity.

The dyadic-social radiant of the individualism-community discursive struggle likely extends to sibling relationships. In particular, sibling relationships may shift from more dyadic in childhood and adolescence to more socially-embedded in adulthood. While growing up in the family home, siblings typically share intimate daily contact and serve as playmates and friends (Cicirelli, 1995; Goetting, 1986). Furthermore, throughout the entire span of their developmentally formative years, siblings spend more time with one another than with their peers or other family members (Fitzpatrick & Badzinski, 1994; Sanders, 2004). Due to these shared experiences, siblings may construct a dyadic identity as an intimate sister-sister, brother-brother, or brother-sister pair during childhood. However, as siblings recenter their relationships in adulthood, their time spent together is likely to include other members of their social network such as peers, romantic partners, and children (Goetting, 1986). Adult siblings may therefore construct meaning of their relationship through a discourse of community in which they emphasize their shared involvement with other family members and significant others. At the same time, some adult siblings may strive to honor their dyadic identity by making an effort to spend time alone as a pair. Thus, similar to marriage, adult sibling relationships are likely constructed out of a dyadic-social discursive struggle.

Marital love as romantic versus pragmatic. Grounded in a discourse of individualism, romantic love in U.S. culture is viewed as enduring, idealistic, voluntary, and personally rewarding (Baxter, 2010). Pragmatic love, on the other hand, evokes a

discourse of community and is perceived as realistic, challenging, and a necessary obligation in order to sustain a marriage. Research has shown that most marital partners center a discourse of pragmatic love in their day-to-day talk about their marriages, confining romantic love to conversations about significant points in the relationship, such as the courtship, the decision to marry, and the wedding (Swidler, 2001; Holmberg, Orbach, & Veroff, 2004). As these findings demonstrate, the competing discourses of pragmatic and romantic love are both at play in constructing meaning of modern marriage (Baxter, 2010).

Although romantic love is not typically associated with family relationships, there are likely competing views regarding what it means to “love” one’s sibling. Specifically, for adult siblings, a struggle may exist between pragmatic, obligatory love and personally fulfilling, voluntary love. As discussed earlier in this chapter, many siblings continue to feel a sense of obligation and responsibility to their brothers and sisters in adulthood, even after the relationship becomes more voluntary (Lee et al., 1990; Myers, 2011). For example, Myers (2011) found that some adults maintain their relationships with their siblings simply because they are family and feel obligated to keep them close. These findings suggest that some adult sibling relationships may be defined by pragmatic love, as reflected in one participant’s statement: “I have to love her, even if sometimes I may not like her” (p. 55). In contrast, other adult siblings likely base their relationships on personally rewarding, idealistic love that they offer voluntarily. In Myers’ (2011) study, many adults also reported that they maintain sibling relationships because they love their siblings, because they provide one another with support, and because they view their siblings as friends. These participants seemed to love their siblings because they

genuinely cared and enjoyed being around them, not because they felt obligated to do so. However, due to the importance placed on family ties in U.S. culture (Baxter, 2011; Floyd & Morman, 2014), as well as cultural expectations that suggest siblings should be emotionally close (Lee et al., 1990) some adult siblings may make an effort to express voluntary, idealistic love and downplay or push aside their feelings of obligation. As such, it is possible that conflicting meanings of love inform how we view adult sibling relationships in our culture.

Marriage as a bond of commitment versus a bond of voluntary choice. Within the discourse of community, marriage is understood as a bond of commitment; the discourse of individualism, however, conceives of marriage as a bond of voluntary choice (Baxter, 2010). Given that the decision to marry is typically voluntary in U.S. society, the meaning of marriage is largely constructed through a discourse of voluntary choice among cultural members. Driven by the discourse of individualism, the conception of marriage as a voluntary bond allows marital partners to end their union should it no longer be satisfying (Baxter, 2010). To the extent that couples can freely decide to enter or leave a marriage, it may appear on the surface that the discourse of voluntary choice completely silences the discourse of commitment in U.S. culture. However, according to Baxter (2010), marriage is considered by some to be a moral contract promising a lifelong commitment. Through a discourse of community, marital partners are “accountable not only to themselves but also to others; performing marriage is an act of public declaration that functions to support the institution of marriage in society, modeling its success to younger generations” (p. 375). Thus, although the discourse of

voluntary choice dominates in our culture, it does not escape competition from the alternative view of marriage as a bond of commitment.

Adult sibling relationships can also be conceived of as both a bond of commitment and as a bond of voluntary choice. Once siblings leave home and no longer live together, they can decide for themselves whether and how often they interact. Thus, because most siblings have the freedom to structure their relationships on their own terms in adulthood, adult sibling relationships are often understood as a bond of voluntary choice. However, despite the voluntary nature of adult sibling relationships, there are expectations that siblings remain committed to one another. As the longest-lasting relationship that most individuals experience in their lives (Cicirelli, 1995), sibling relationships are often viewed as a lifelong commitment (Bank & Kahn, 1997; Goetting, 1986). The commitment between siblings is evident when considering the roles they play in one another's lives across the lifespan. Specifically, according to Goetting (1986), siblings provide companionship and support (both emotional and tangible) during childhood, early adulthood, and old age. Even disengaged siblings are often brought together to care for elderly parents in middle adulthood or to reminisce about the past and provide comfort in their later years. Thus, throughout their enduring bond, siblings play important roles in one another's lives and are generally expected to maintain their relationships (Allen, 1977). This notion that siblings should remain committed to one another across the lifespan stands in contrast to the view of adult sibling relationships as a bond of voluntary choice. When adult siblings talk about their relationship, they likely draw on these competing discourses of commitment and voluntary choice as they construct their relational identity and make sense of their experiences.

Marriage as two individuals versus marriage as a unity of one. Out of this discursive struggle, married partners construct their identities as either two, autonomous individuals or as a unified couple (Baxter, 2010). From this view, a discourse of community emphasizes the importance of devoting time and energy to the other relational partner, while a discourse of individualism acknowledges the individual's need to invest in other demands outside the marriage. Underlying these two competing conceptions of marriage is the fear of surrendering one's autonomous identity for the sake of the marriage (Baxter, 2010). In this sense, marital partners face the challenge of honoring their marriage while simultaneously maintaining separate, individual identities.

Adult siblings also likely express a struggle between constructing a relational identity as a sibling dyad and constructing their own identities separate from one another. During childhood and adolescence, many siblings develop close and intimate bonds through daily interactions in the family home. Siblings who are "alike" one another, such as being similar in terms of age, sex, personality traits, physical appearance, and/or interests, may be particularly likely to view themselves (and be viewed by others) as a unit rather than distinct individuals. In addition, younger siblings often "follow in the footsteps" of their older siblings or model their behaviors (Milevsky, 2011), which can further detract from siblings' individual identities.

The sibling literature also emphasizes the "different-ness" of siblings, both in terms of who they are and how they are treated (Sanders, 2004). In order to reduce competition, many siblings attempt to differentiate or "de-identify" from one another by forming different personalities and pursuing different activities and interests (Milevsky, 2011; Whiteman, McHale, & Soli, 2011). According to Schacter, Gilutz, Shore, and

Alder (1978), sibling deidentification occurs when siblings consciously or unconsciously differentiate themselves from one another in order to establish their own identities.

Siblings may be especially likely to differentiate themselves from one another as leave home and seek independence from their family-of-origin during emerging adulthood. By setting out on their own, emerging adults have the opportunity to shed their identity as their brother's or sister's sibling and create a new, autonomous persona (Milevesky & Heerwagen, 2013). The emphasis some siblings place on differentiating themselves from one another and constructing separate identities competes with the view that siblings are similar selves who form a unified pair. Therefore, these conflicting perspectives of adult sibling relationships likely come into play as siblings construct meaning of their relational experiences.

Marriage as a site of candor versus discretion. Although the competing discourses of candor and discretion are expressed by relational partners in a number of ways, they are often grounded in the broader individualism-community discursive struggle (Baxter, 2010; 2011). In terms of the discourse of individualism, both expression and non-expression are legitimated. On one hand, the discourse of individualism privileges expression (i.e., candor) because it is viewed as an individual right and a form of self-presentation; on the other hand, it frames nonexpression (i.e., discretion) as an individual's right to maintain privacy and engage in self-protection (Baxter, 2010). In a similar way, both acts of candor and discretion are validated through a discourse of community. While honesty and expression are valued from a discourse of community because they can build relational trust, complete openness can cause harm to the other person or to the relationship (Baxter, 2010). Therefore, discretion can allow relational

partners to avoid hurt and protect their relationship. With this in mind, marriage as a site of candor and marriage as a site of discretion reflect two competing visions of marriage in U.S. culture.

Similarly, the meaning of adult sibling relationships is constituted in a discursive struggle between expression and nonexpression. In light of cultural expectations that siblings should be emotionally close (Lee et al., 1990), they may be expected to emphasize openness and self-disclose in their relationships. For example, Fowler (2009) found that the strongest motive for communicating with siblings across the lifespan is intimacy, suggesting that many siblings are relationally close and likely share personal information with one another. Goetting (1986) also noted that siblings serve as friends and confidants throughout adulthood, which further depicts the sibling relationships as a site of candor. However, in contrast to the view that sibling relationships are characterized by openness, some adults might favor privacy and discretion in their interactions with their siblings. Emerging adults may confide in their siblings less as they recenter their relationships and distance themselves from their natal families. Moreover, individuals who marry or develop long-term relationships may prefer to share personal information with their partners rather than their siblings. At the same time, other life events, such as a parent's illness or divorce, often trigger an increase in contact and closeness between siblings (Connidis, 1992). Adult sibling relationships, then, can be viewed as a complex interplay between the competing discourses of candor and discretion.

In addition to the five discursive struggles discussed above, there are likely other competing perspectives that shape our understanding of adult sibling relationships in U.S.

culture. Often described as a love-hate relationship, sibling relationships are considered a source of paradox (Mikkelson, 2014). For example, siblings are typically viewed as both allies and rivals and as both similar to and different from one another (Sanders, 2004). Similarly, sibling scholars often describe the bond between brothers and sisters as a “forced” and “permanent” relationship, but then emphasize its friendship-like qualities and voluntary nature in adulthood (see Cicirelli, 1995; Mikkelson, 2014). The paradox of the sibling relationship also stems from the way many siblings feel about one another. For example, many siblings experience great conflict and competition while simultaneously feeling intense affection and closeness. To that end, Mikkelson (2014) asserted, “Some people would probably express that they love their siblings but cannot stand to be around them” (p. 22). Such contradictory feelings, although certainly present during childhood and adolescence, may become particularly salient for siblings as they move out of the family home and face the challenges and changes associated with adulthood. Thus, a final goal of the current study is to examine how siblings draw on competing discourses to construct a dialogue of adult sibling relationships. As such, the following research question is posed:

RQ4: How, if at all, do emerging adult siblings communicatively construct a dialogue of sibling relationships?

Summary

Moving out of the family home is a momentous life transition for young adults. Not only does it represent the transition from adolescence into adulthood for many individuals, home-leaving has important implications for family relationships (Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2011). In particular, leaving home can significantly alter the

relationships between siblings as they navigate the shift from daily interactions to reduced contact managed from a distance (Cicirelli, 1995). Maintaining contact with siblings also becomes more voluntary once they no longer live together (Mikkelsen, 2014), so siblings must adjust to their newfound freedom and the fact that they can negotiate their relationship on their own terms. In addition, there is evidence that establishing independence from siblings can impact relational quality. Although it has been shown that home-leaving has a positive impact sibling relationships (Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013; Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2011), researchers have also found that geographic distance can diminish the closeness between siblings (Lee et al., 1990; Milevsky et al., 2005). Despite these mixed findings, it is clear that the transition from living together to living apart for the first time is a significant turning point for many siblings.

The present study aimed to shed light on the complex nature of the adult sibling bond by focusing specifically on the changes siblings face when they move away from one another for the first time. Furthermore, the project sought to understand how siblings communicate with one another and construct meaning of their changing relationship during this important transition. To achieve these research goals, the present study was guided by the following two frameworks: (a) Tanner's (2006) concept of *recentering* and (b) Baxter's (2011) updated articulation of relational dialectics theory. First, Tanner (2006) argued that individuals engage in a recentering process during emerging adulthood, whereby they restructure their family relationships as they seek self-sufficiency and expand their social networks. Accordingly, Conger and Little (2010) suggested that applying a "dynamic recentering" approach may be useful for

understanding the relational changes siblings experience during the transition into adulthood. Thus, with this framework as a guide, my first goal was to explore how siblings described the experience of moving away from one another for the first time and the specific changes they faced, as well as whether they reentered their relationships during this transitional period.

Second, relational dialectics theory provided a useful framework for examining how siblings constructed meaning of their changing relationships when they established separate residences for the first time. Highlighting the contradictory nature of many sibling bonds, Baxter (2006) noted that RDT is aptly suited for research on sibling relationships. Further, as demonstrated earlier in this chapter, RDT has extended important knowledge about how relational partners make sense of the changes and transitions they experience. It stands to reason, then, that RDT can be productively applied to understand the meaning-making processes of siblings during the transition into adulthood. Thus, in order to add to the limited research examining how home-leaving impacts sibling relationships, the present study investigated the following research questions:

RQ1: How do siblings describe the experience of moving away from one another for the first time?

RQ2: What changes to their relationship, if any, do siblings describe during this transition?

RQ2a: How, if at all, do siblings describe recentering their relationships after they move apart for the first time?

RQ3: What competing discourses, if any, animate siblings' talk about moving away from one another for the first time, and what meanings are constructed in their interplay?

RQ4: How, if at all, do emerging adult siblings communicatively construct a dialogue of sibling relationships?

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

The goal of the present study was to explore how young adult siblings construct meaning of their relationship and the changes they experience during the transition from living together to living in separate residences for the first time. In order to achieve this proposed goal, I drew from the interpretive paradigm and engaged in qualitative methods and methodology. The first two research questions, which focused on siblings' experiences of change and transition, were aptly suited for phenomenological methods (Van Manen, 1990). Research questions three and four, rooted in dialogism, were explored utilizing contrapuntal analysis (Baxter, 2011). Data were collected using in-depth, qualitative interviews with sibling pairs.

In this chapter, I explain the methodology and methods that guided the present research study. First, I review the interpretive paradigm and discuss why it was the appropriate approach for investigating the proposed research questions. I also describe my philosophical commitments and note how my own lived experiences may influence the research process. Next, I provide an overview of hermeneutical phenomenology and highlight its usefulness for investigating the first two research questions. I then briefly discuss how RDT was an appropriate lens for exploring the third and fourth research questions. A detailed overview of the specific methods, procedures, and data analysis techniques will follow. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the validation practices that were used to enhance the trustworthiness of this research.

Methodology

Interpretive Paradigm

Researchers using interpretive methodologies strive to understand the lives and experiences of the people they study, or the “web of meanings in which humans act”

(Baxter & Babbie, 2004, p. 59). Interpretivists assume that humans construct subjective meanings of their experiences and that these meanings are varied, multiple, and complex (Creswell, 2007). From this view, social reality is a complex system of meanings constituted in language and interaction that varies from individual to individual (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). Rather than seeking generalized claims, interpretive researchers attempt to understand how individuals interpret and communicatively construct their individual identities and social realities (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Mumby, 1997).

To the extent that humans communicatively construct meaning of their social worlds, interpretivism assumes that human action and experience are separate from the natural, physical world and are best understood through language use (Baxter and Babbie, 2004; Mumby, 1997). The goal, then, is to encourage participants to describe their experiences in their own words in order to gain a complex and detailed understanding of an issue or phenomenon from their perspective (Creswell, 2007). Thus, interpretivists typically rely on qualitative methods of inquiry, such as participant observation or in-depth interviewing, that allow them to see the world through the eyes of the people they study (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). With my goal to understand young adult siblings' experiences of transition from their perspective, the present research was conducted using qualitative methodologies and methods.

Before I review the assumptions of qualitative research, it is important to note the relationship between interpretivism and qualitative inquiry. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), communication scholars often use *qualitative research* as a broad term that encompasses other approaches, such as interpretivism. However, rather than the terms being true synonyms for one another, they argued that qualitative methods are a

way (but not the only way) of conducting research within the interpretive paradigm. With awareness that qualitative research and interpretivism are not one and the same, I describe qualitative research methodologies and methods as the means by which I sought to achieve interpretivism's goal of understanding of human meanings and action. Below, I discuss the characteristics of qualitative inquiry and then describe the qualitative research methodologies (i.e., phenomenology and dialogism) that were used in the present study.

Qualitative Research

The overarching goal of qualitative inquiry is to analyze and understand social phenomenon from a situated, localized perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). As Creswell (2007) noted, researchers engage in qualitative research methodologies and methods when they want to understand the specific contexts or settings in which people experience a problem or issue. In other words, qualitative researchers explore how the meanings participants construct of a particular situation are shaped by and situated in their historical, cultural, and personal settings. Corbin and Strauss (2008) further emphasized that qualitative research “allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed in and through culture, and to discover rather than test variables” (p. 12). Often driven by a natural curiosity, qualitative researchers attempt to connect with the people they study and learn as much as possible about their lives and experiences.

Although definitions of qualitative research vary from textbook to textbook, Creswell (2007) identified several characteristics of qualitative inquiry that are commonly recognized by scholars. Among these characteristics are the use of inductive

data analysis, a focus on participants' meanings, the application of a theoretical lens, and engagement in interpretive inquiry. First, data analysis in qualitative research is an inductive process that involves deriving themes and patterns from the "bottom up" (Creswell, 2007, p. 38). In other words, rather than starting with a theory and analyzing whether a hypothesized pattern or relationship is reflected in the data (i.e., deductive reasoning), qualitative researchers use specific observations from their data to develop themes and categories that shed light on the phenomenon under study (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). Thus, inductive data analysis is an interactive process during which researchers compare their data segments for similarities and differences and move back and forth between data collection and data analysis to refine their themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Second, qualitative research seeks to explore and understand the meanings participants construct regarding a particular problem or issue (Creswell, 2007). According to Baxter and Babbie (2004), qualitative research conducted within the interpretive paradigm focuses on uncovering the meanings that characterize a group of people or a situation. By exploring what something means to people, qualitative researchers strive to understand what guides human behavior and interaction. Likewise, the present study's goal was to explore the ways siblings constructed meaning of their changing relationship in order to understand how they navigated the transition from living together to living apart for the first time.

Third, Creswell (2007) noted that qualitative researchers often apply a theoretical lens to make sense of their data. Unlike post-positivistic researchers who typically use theory for the goals of prediction and causal explanation, qualitative researchers apply theory as a sensitizing device (Baxter, 2011). As a sensitizing tool, a theory functions to

illuminate different aspects of a phenomena in ways that other theories would not. Therefore, applying theory in qualitative studies can help researchers see or understand something in the data more clearly than if they had not utilized a theoretical lens. In terms of RDT, Baxter (2011) emphasized that the theory is descriptive/sensitizing device that can be applied to “render the communicative social world intelligible” (2011). Thus, in the present study, RDT was used as a theoretical lens to shed light on siblings’ meaning-making processes during the transition into adulthood.

Fourth, qualitative research is defined as a type of interpretive inquiry that relies on the interpretations of the researcher (Creswell, 2007). Throughout the research process, qualitative researchers make interpretations regarding what they see and understand (Creswell, 2007; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). According to Creswell (2007), researchers cannot separate their interpretations from their own backgrounds, histories, and prior knowledge and assumptions. For this reason, he argued that researchers often “position themselves” when conducting qualitative interpretive research by highlighting how their interpretations are rooted in and shaped by their own experiences. In the following section, I reflect on how my own experiences and philosophical assumptions may have influenced the current research project.

Philosophical Commitments

The manner in which scholars conduct research is shaped by their ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions. Ontological assumptions involve the stance researchers take toward the nature of reality (Creswell, 2007). As an interpretive scholar, I embrace the idea that there are multiple, subjective realities. Rather than believing a single, objective truth that can be discovered, “truth” to me depends on the

moment, the situation, and the person. In other words, I align with the social constructivist stance that knowledge and meaning are socially constructed through our language use and interactions. Furthermore, I position myself within Mumby's (1997) discourse of understanding, which privileges *understanding* reality over *representing* it. I believe that research should illuminate important elements of communicative life in order to develop a better understanding of the human experience. Accordingly, my goal in the present study was to shed light on how siblings co-constructed meaning of their relationship and the changes they experience during the transition into adulthood.

Epistemological assumptions concern how we know what we know about reality. Rather than believing that knowledge is objectively obtained through observation, I am committed to more subjective ways of knowing. Qualitative interpretive scholars strive to get as close as possible to the participants under study in order to understand their subjective experiences. Thus, by minimizing the distance between themselves and those being studied, qualitative researchers "know what they know" from firsthand accounts (Creswell, 2007, p. 18). Likewise, I attempted to limit the distance between me and my participants and listened closely as they described their experiences.

Axiological assumptions focus on the role that values play in research. While post-positivists generally strive to limit the role that values play in the research process, interpretive scholars recognize that conducting research is a value-laden endeavor. In other words, from an interpretive perspective, values shape the type of research that is conducted, how data is collected, and the way data are analyzed. As Creswell (2007) noted, qualitative researchers "admit the value-laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of the information

gathered from the field” (p. 18). With this in mind, I recognize that my own values and my experiences as a sibling shaped the way I carried out the present research project.

Methodology: Hermeneutical Phenomenology

In simplest terms, phenomenology is the study of lived experiences. In the present study, I explored the first two research question using Van Manen’s (1990) hermeneutical approach to phenomenology. From Van Manen’s perspective, the goal of phenomenological research is to gain a rich, detailed understanding of the meaning of individuals’ everyday experiences. Phenomenologists, he emphasized, are not interested in whether something occurs or how frequently it takes place, but in capturing the nature or essence of a particular experience. Thus, rather than striving to predict, explain, or quantify the phenomenon under study, phenomenologists seek to describe and interpret the meaning that a particular situation or experience holds for a group of people. In so doing, researchers aim to bring both themselves and their readers in closer contact with the lifeworld and experiences of participants (Van Manen, 1990).

With its goal of understanding lived experiences, a phenomenological approach was ideal for exploring how siblings describe the experience of moving away from one another for the first time (RQ1) and the relational changes they report experiencing during this transition (RQ2 and RQ2a). Specifically, the purpose of the first two research questions was to shed light on the nature or the essence of the experience of moving away from one’s sibling(s) and what this transition meant for participants. Through a phenomenological lens, I aimed to capture both the momentous and mundane aspects of siblings’ experiences. As Van Manen (1990) argued, phenomenology demands a great level of thoughtfulness and insight:

[Hermeneutical phenomenological research] encourages a certain attentive awareness to the details and seemingly trivial dimensions of our everyday educational lives. It makes us thoughtfully aware of the consequential in the inconsequential, the significant in the taken-for-granted. Phenomenological descriptions, if done well, are compelling and insightful. (p. 8)

Given that research on home-leaving and the transition into adulthood generally focuses on parent-child relationships or individual development (see Arnett, 2006; Aquilino, 2006; Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2011), the impact that moving out of the family home has on siblings often seems inconsequential. Moreover, the notion that sibling relationships become less central to everyday life in adulthood (Parsons, 1943; White, 2001) may further trivialize the impact that moving apart has on siblings. Therefore, by exploring the first two research questions from a phenomenological perspective, I sought to uncover the meaning and significance that home-leaving has for siblings. Illuminating siblings' experiences of moving apart will demonstrate that the transition into adulthood is a critical turning point not only for the individual and for parent-child relationships, but for siblings as well. Thus, by identifying common themes in participants' stories, my goal was to create an interesting and compelling description of the lived experiences of siblings who have recently moved away from one another for the first time.

Methodology: Relational Dialectics Theory

In addition to understanding how siblings describe their experiences of moving away from one another, the present study's third and fourth research questions explored how they construct meaning of transition and their relational identities through the interplay of competing discourses. With their focus on discursive competition, the final

two research questions cannot be adequately examined from a phenomenological approach alone; rather, they must be analyzed through the lens of relational dialectics theory. Thus, in line with RDT-informed research, I followed Baxter's (2011) steps for conducting a contrapuntal analysis to explore the third and fourth research questions. Applying RDT and engaging in a contrapuntal analysis allowed me to move beyond describing siblings' lifeworlds in order to analyze how they gave voice to competing discourses to give meaning to their experiences. In the following section, I describe the specific methods that were used to investigate the four proposed research questions.

Methods

The present interpretive study utilized qualitative methods of data collection and analysis in an attempt to understand how young adults make sense of the changes in their sibling relationship following the transition out of the family home. In this section, I outline the specific methods I used to carry out the present research study and achieve its proposed goals. First, I discuss the recruitment methods used to locate siblings who had recently moved away from one another for the first time, and then I describe the sample of participants. Next, I discuss the method of data collection utilized in the present study and provide a rationale for engaging in joint interviews with sibling pairs. I then describe how the data were analyzed, noting the different data analysis techniques that were used to explore the first and second (i.e., thematic analysis) and third and fourth (i.e., contrapuntal analysis) research questions. Finally, before concluding the chapter, a discussion of verification techniques is provided.

Recruitment Procedures

The goal of the present study was to understand how siblings communicate with one another and make sense of the changes in their relationship when they move out of the family home and establish separate residences for the first time. Rather than ask young adults to retrospectively assess how home-leaving impacted their sibling relationships, I sought to capture siblings' meaning-making processes while they were currently experiencing the transition. Therefore, I recruited participants based on the following criteria: (a) they had moved out of their family home within the past twelve months, (b) they had at least one sibling still living at home, (c) their recent transition out of the family home marked the first time they had moved away from their sibling(s), and (d) they were at least 18 years-old. In addition, per the University's institutional review board, the sibling still living at home had to be at least 13 years-old and obtain consent from a parent or guardian to participate. Overall, these criteria ensured that sibling pairs were currently experiencing the challenges and changes associated with moving apart, and that this transition represented the first time they had lived separately from one another.

Participants were recruited from undergraduate communication courses at a Midwestern university. Students earned extra credit in the class if they participated in a joint interview with their sibling or if they completed the alternative assignment. I targeted introductory courses because it was likely that many of the students enrolled in these classes were freshman who had recently moved away from home for the first time. I visited each class to explain the purpose of the project, the criteria for participation, and the data collection procedures. In addition, I informed students of the alternative

assignment in the event that they did not meet the study's criteria or did not wish to participate in the research project. Finally, I passed around a sign-up sheet and students wrote down their name, email, and whether they were interested in participating in the study or completing the alternative assignment.

After visiting the classrooms, I followed up with each student on the sign-up sheet. For those who were not eligible to participate or chose not to, I emailed instructions for completing the alternative extra credit assignment. Then, I emailed students who indicated that they were interested in participating in the project to provide more information about the project and to explain the consent process. In the email, I attached the following documents: (a) an adult consent form for participants 18 years-old or older (Appendix A), (b) a child assent form for participants between 13-17 years-old (Appendix B), and (c) a parental consent form for parents or guardians providing consent for minors to participate (Appendix C). All of the students I contacted were at least 18 years-old, so I instructed them to review the adult consent form and, if they agreed to participate, to seek consent from their sibling and parent/guardian. Although most of the siblings still living at home were minors between the ages of 13-17 years-old, there were four cases in which the student's brother or sister was 18 years-old or older and therefore did not need to obtain parental consent. In two of these cases, the student's sibling was older than him or her but was living at home at the time the student moved out; thus, these sibling pairs still recently experienced the transition from living together to living apart for the first time. In the other two cases, the student was a twin whose brother or sister was the same age as him or her and thus was not a minor. Because the siblings in these four cases were at least 18 years-old, they were able to provide consent for

themselves by signing the adult consent form and did not need to obtain consent from a parent or guardian.

There were two options for obtaining consent from the minor siblings under the age of 18 and their parent/guardian. First, many students emailed the child assent form and the parental consent form to their family members and asked them to provide consent electronically. The parent and sibling were asked to print the forms, sign them, scan them, and then email them back to either the student or to me. The electronic copies of signed consent forms were printed for filing purposes. Second, some students emailed me a mailing address and I mailed the forms and a self-addressed stamped envelope to their sibling and parent/guardian. After reading and signing the forms, they mailed them back to me in the enclosed envelope.

Once I obtained consent from a student's sibling and (if necessary) his or her parent, I contacted the student to schedule the joint interview. Specifically, I gave students a list of potential dates and times within a two week timeframe and asked them to check with their sibling and decide on a time when they were both available. In order to accommodate the siblings' busy schedules and (in some cases) to account for different time zones, I provided ample evening and weekend slots for the interviews. Once an interview was scheduled, I sent students a reminder the day before and encouraged them to remind their siblings as well. When students arrived for the interview, they signed the adult consent form and filled out a brief demographic survey (Appendix D).

Participants. The participants for the present study included 22 sibling pairs who had moved apart for the first time within the last twelve months. This sample consisted of thirteen sister-brother dyads, eight sister-sister dyads, and one brother-brother dyad. For

all of the sibling pairs in the present study, the transition from living together to living apart for the first time occurred when one of the siblings left home to attend college. In most cases ($N = 18$), an older brother or sister had recently left home and moved away from a younger sibling. However, in two cases, it was the younger sibling who moved out first while the older sibling remained at home. Two other sibling pairs were twins, with one pair leaving home at the same time to attend different colleges and the other pair experiencing a separation when one twin moved out and the other stayed home to attend a local university. Of the 22 sibling pairs included in the sample, nine moved apart within the last three months, five moved apart between 4-6 months earlier, four moved apart between 7-9 months earlier, and four experienced the transition between the last 10-12 months.

The siblings who left home were between 18-20 years-old ($M = 18.4$) and the brothers and sisters they moved away from ranged in age from 13-22 ($M = 16.3$). The sibling pairs identified as Caucasian ($N = 18$), African American ($N = 2$), Hispanic ($N = 1$), and bi-racial (Caucasian/African American; $N = 1$). Further, although I allowed participants to define the concept of “sibling” for themselves, the majority of the sibling pairs in the present study were full siblings (19 full sibling pairs, 1 half sibling pair, 1 identical twin pair, 1 fraternal twin pair). Fourteen sibling pairs did not have any other brothers or sisters, seven sibling pairs had one more sibling in addition to themselves, and one sibling pair had three half siblings and four stepsiblings not counting each other (they were each other’s only full siblings). Finally, most of the sibling pairs’ parents were married ($N = 16$), while the rest were divorced ($N = 5$) or widowed ($N = 1$).

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected using joint interviews with sibling pairs between October 2014 and April 2015. The students who were earning extra credit in their Communication course for participating—that is, the siblings who had recently left home to attend college—met me in a private conference room on campus. Once they arrived, they signed their consent form and completed the demographic questionnaire. Next, I asked whether they preferred to contact their sibling using Skype, FaceTime, or a phone call. Although I always offered to use my laptop to talk with their sibling via Skype, all but two chose to use FaceTime on their own mobile phone. The other two siblings used their personal Skype accounts on their own laptops. Thus, all 22 interviews were conducted using a video chatting service that allowed the sibling pairs to interact face-to-face.

Interviews. The goal of qualitative interviewing is to elicit detailed accounts from participants regarding their experiences, feelings, and actions (Kvale, 2007). By asking broad, open-ended questions, interviewers encourage participants to highlight the aspects of their lived experiences that they find significant or meaningful. Accordingly, Kvale (2007) asserted that qualitative research interviews are ideal for exploring how participants describe and give meaning to their everyday experiences. With the present study's focus on how siblings construct meaning of their relationship during the transition into adulthood, interviews were an appropriate method of data collection.

In the interviews, I explored five main areas (see Appendix E for interview protocol). First, I asked participants to describe their relationship with their sibling(s). Second, I inquired about their experiences growing up with their sibling(s) during childhood and adolescence. Third, I asked siblings to tell me about the experience of

moving out of their family home and away from their sibling(s). Fourth, I asked about how their sibling relationship(s) have changed since they moved out of their family home. Finally, I asked siblings how they imagined their relationship unfolding throughout adulthood, as well as what they hoped for their bond in the future.

Interviews were conducted until saturation was achieved; that is, when no new categories related to the four research questions emerged (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As Lindolf and Taylor (2002) argued, data should be collected until “we cease to be surprised by what we observe or we notice that our concepts and propositions are not disconfirmed as we continue to add new data” (p. 129). In the present study, I started to notice a sense of repetition in what participants were saying and felt that saturation had occurred after about the fifteenth interview. However, I conducted seven additional interviews to ensure that I did not declare saturation prematurely and to add richness to the data set. In total, I conducted 22 joint interviews with sibling pairs lasting an average of 34 minutes (with a range of 15 minutes to 68 minutes). Each interview was transcribed verbatim by a paid professional through a transcription service, yielding 231 pages of single-spaced data.

Justification for dyadic interviews. As noted in chapter two, dyadic data are necessary to achieve RDT’s primary purpose of understanding how meanings and relationships are constituted in the communication between relational partners. To date, however, most of RDT-informed research relies on self-report data in the form of individual interviews, which provides “talk about relationships rather than relationships in talk” (Baxter, 2011, p. 122). According to Baxter (2011), the reliance on individual interviews is also problematic because it does not allow researchers to make sufficient

use of all four sites of the utterance chain. She further emphasized that, in order to address these limitations in existing RDT literature, more researchers must utilize dyadic data in future work. Therefore, by conducting joint interviews with sibling pairs in the present study, the present study answered Baxter's (2011) call for more dyadic research that is consistent with RDT's primary goals and assumptions.

Joint interviews are a particularly useful method of data collection for RDT-informed research because they bring researchers a step closer to observing naturally-occurring conversation and therefore produce a rich dialogue between relationship partners (Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Morgan, Ataie, Carder, & Hoffman, 2013). Through their dialogue in a dyadic interview, participants co-construct meaning and a shared narrative of their relational experiences (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010; Morris, 2011). Furthermore, according to Morris (2011), dyadic interviewing "places emphasis on the relational possibilities of the pair's situation, asking them to represent themselves not just as individuals but also as concurrent participants in a relationship; mutually created meaning is highlighted as they speak" (p. 558). Whereas individual interviews can only capture the perceptions of one member of a dyad, joint interviews can highlight how relationship partners co-construct meaning of their relational experiences and communicatively enact their relationship.

By conducting joint interviews, researchers can also gain valuable insight into the relationship between participants that they may not have access to in an individual interview. As participants jointly explore a topic, they may help one another remember shared histories, stimulate thinking on a topic, and ask one another questions the researchers may not think to ask (Morgan et al., 2013). With both people in a relationship

contributing their thoughts and perspectives, the researcher gains a fuller account of the event or experience (Morris, 2001). Morgan and colleagues (2013) argued that participants construct detailed accounts in joint interviews through a process of sharing and comparing. Sharing, or converging on an aspect of a story, allows participants to build on one another's statements. Comparing, on the other hand, highlights differences in the participants' perspectives and moves the discussion in an alternative direction. Both sharing and comparing provide richness to the data that cannot be obtained in an individual interview (Morgan et al., 2013). Given that brothers and sisters typically share a long family history with similar experiences (Cicirelli, 1995; Goetting, 1986), dyadic interviewing was an appropriate method for eliciting joint storytelling and sharing/comparing processes between siblings.

Data Analysis

As noted previously, the proposed research questions required that I utilize two different methods to analyze the data. To explore the first and second research questions, a thematic analysis was conducted. For the third and fourth research questions, I engaged in a contrapuntal analysis. I describe these two data analysis techniques in turn.

Thematic analysis: RQ1, RQ2, & RQ2a. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify and analyze themes and patterns related to RQ1 (*How do siblings describe the experience of moving away from one another for the first time?*), RQ2 (*What changes to their relationship, if any, do siblings describe during this transition?*), and RQ2a (*How, if at all, do siblings describe recentering their relationships after they move apart for the first time?*). Specifically, I followed the six-step process of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, I read through the interview transcriptions multiple times

to familiarize myself with the data set. Second, I engaged in open coding, which involved generating an initial list of categories in the data. The goal in phenomenological data analysis is to highlight significant statements or quotes that highlight how participants experienced the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, my analysis focused on identifying significant passages that reflected how participants experience transition and relational change when they move away from one another for the first time. As themes were identified, they were assigned to either an existing code category or to a new one. For example, initial coding categories that captured what it was like to move away from a sibling (RQ1) included “not realizing the impact until it happened,” “differences in day-to-day lives,” and “difficulty adjusting.” This process was continued until all significant passages had been assigned to a category.

Third, I carefully examined the list of initial coding categories to identify whether different categories could be combined to create broader themes. At this stage, for instance, I observed that the coding categories “differences in day-to-day lives,” “emphasizing the strangeness of sibling’s absence at home,” and “finding it weird to not have sibling around 24/7” all centered on the idea that moving apart was a “weird” experience for siblings. As such broader categories were developed, I returned to the data to locate additional passages that could be placed under these new themes. I also examined the passages for subtle nuances that might create variation within a theme. For example, although all siblings in the present study described the experience of moving apart as “weird,” younger siblings were more likely to emphasize a noticeable difference at home (e.g., an empty bedroom, more silences at the dinner table, etc.) whereas older siblings often focused on how strange it was to be in a new place without their brother or

sister living across the hall. I continued this process until all coding categories were assigned to a theme and no new passages related to RQ1 (siblings' experiences of moving apart), RQ2 (siblings' experiences of relational change), and RQ2a (siblings' experiences of relational recentering) emerged. At this point, I determined that the themes for each research question created a sufficient description, or common essence, of what it is like to move apart from a sibling for the first time.

In the fourth and fifth steps, I reviewed the themes to assess their validity and to finalize the name of each theme. The data within a theme should create a meaningful, coherent pattern (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, I re-read the textual segments within each theme to check whether they “fit” together and created a cohesive unit of data. Finally, I examined the data to locate exemplars, which are textual segments that encapsulate the essence of a particular theme. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), exemplars are used to tell a story about the data and make an argument related to the research question(s). For the first two research questions in the present study, exemplars were chosen that illuminated participants' experiences of relational change and transition following their own or their siblings' departure from the family home.

Contrapuntal analysis: RQ3 & RQ4. Contrapuntal analysis is a methodological technique developed by Baxter (2011) that examines the interplay of competing discourses in spoken and written texts. It is a specific kind of discourse analysis that focuses on language in use and how meanings are constructed in discursive struggle. Although Bakhtin (1984) introduced the term “contrapuntal” to describe “rudiments of counterpoint” (i.e., *competing discourses* or *discursive struggles* in RDT terms), Baxter (2011) noted that he did not develop specific guidelines for identifying the meaning

constructed in these instances of counterpoint (p. 151). According to Baxter, contrapuntal analysis involves three steps: identifying the text, identifying competing discourses in the text, and identifying how the interplay of competing discourses constructs meaning in the text.

Identifying the text. In the first step, researchers must identify the text to be analyzed. A number of recent RDT-informed studies have analyzed texts from online sources (e.g., Baxter, Scharp, Asbury, Jannusch, Norwood, 2012; Norwood & Baxter, 2011; Norwood, 2013), but most research to date has used interview transcripts as the text for analysis. While all texts contain competing discourses, Baxter (2011) pointed out that rituals, relationship transitions, and relational challenges are prime sites for exposing the communicative enactment of discursive struggles in the talk between relational partners. Thus, for the present study, I gathered texts in which relational transition and change were the focus and identity shifts were likely to occur. Specifically, the texts I selected for analysis were the transcribed interviews with sibling pairs who had recently moved away from one another for the first time.

Identifying competing discourses in the text. After identifying the text, the second step in contrapuntal analysis focuses on identifying the competing discourses in the text. This step is further divided into two stages: 1) identifying discourses and 2) identifying whether discourses are competing. A thematic analysis can be conducted to identify discourses in the text. Baxter (2011) drew from Braun and Clarke (2006), but also pointed readers to other examples of thematic analysis. In the proposed study, I followed Baxter's recommendation and engaged in Braun and Clarke's (2006) process of conducting a thematic analysis.

As noted in my discussion of thematic analysis above, Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend that researchers first familiarize themselves with the data set by reading it thoroughly multiple times. I already read through the transcriptions several times while analyzing the first two research questions and marked segments that I thought might be useful for RQ3 and RQ4, but I had not yet read through the data with an emphasis on locating sites of discursive struggle. Thus, I read through the entire data set again to re-orient myself with the data and to carefully examine it through the lens of RDT. Then, I coded the data for segments that spoke to siblings' experiences of transition and relational change. In contrapuntal analysis, the coding categories researchers identify and develop are referred to as *discourses*. Baxter (2011) explained:

Discourses—systems of meaning—can be sociocultural or interpersonal in nature. Sociocultural discourses—those emphasized in the distal already-spoken and the distal not-yet-spoken—are invoked whenever relationship parties talk, individually or jointly; parties talk culture whenever they open their mouths. Interpersonal discourses are those systems of meaning that are crafted jointly between relationship parties and reflect their unique history together. (p. 157)

Thus, as I examined the data, I was interested in locating communicative segments that demonstrated how siblings relied on cultural discourses and/or private relational meanings to make sense of the changes in their relationship. For example, many siblings described ways that moving apart had helped strengthen their bond, thus acknowledging both cultural assumptions about distance in relationships and their relational past in which their relationship was not as strong. Such statements focusing on the positive relational outcomes stemming from the separation were combined to create a discourse

labeled *distance as good for the relationship*. As more coding categories (i.e., discourses) were identified, I compared them to prior codes and assigned them to either new or existing categories (Baxter, 2011). I continued this process until saturation was achieved (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

After identifying discourses in the data set, I sought to determine whether they were in competition with one another. Baxter (2011) discussed three discourse markers useful for identifying whether discourses are in contrapuntal relation to one another: (a) negating, (b) countering, and (c) entertaining. Negating is a type of disclaiming in which an alternative discourse is acknowledged for the purpose of negating it or rejecting it. Countering occurs when a discursive position supplants or replaces a discourse that would typically be expected in its place. Lexical choices such as *even though*, *although*, *however*, *still*, and *surprisingly* are generally indicative of countering. For example, in the statement “We still talk every day even though we don’t live together,” the use of “even though” counters the implicit expectation that it would be difficult or unlikely for relational partners who do not live together to communicate daily. Finally, entertaining involves positioning a given discourse as but one possibility among alternative discursive positions. Speakers indicate that there is more than one discursive possibility when they use words and phrases such as *may*, *might*, *it is possible that*, and *it seems* (Baxter, 2011).

In addition to identifying discourse markers in the text, I also considered how participants’ utterances responded to and anticipated discourses circulating in the larger culture (Baxter, 2011). Analyzing how participants’ stories are culturally embedded is an analytic technique known as *unfolding* (Bakhtin, 1984; Baxter, 2011). This process involves asking two types of questions: (a) “What could have been said in a prior

utterance (the ‘already-spoken’) to make this particular meaning segment intelligible?” and (b) “What does this particular utterance suggest or reveal about the anticipated response of the addressee (the ‘not-yet-spoken)?” (see Baxter et al., 2012, p. 62). By considering these analytic questions, I analyzed how participants’ utterances competed with cultural discourses (both prior and anticipated) located in the utterance chain.

Identifying the interplay of competing discourses. The final step of contrapuntal analysis involves demonstrating how the interplay of competing discourses constructs particular meaning(s) in the text. According to Baxter (2011), researchers in this step must determine where utterances fall on a continuum between dialogically contractive (total monologue) and dialogically expansive (idealized dialogue) talk. Discursive competition, most often in the form of polemic interplay, falls in between the two endpoints of the continuum. When discursive interplay is polemic, some discourses are given the dominant, centripetal position while others are pushed to the centrifugal margins. Polemic interplay can take many forms, but at the most basic level it is either explicitly or implicitly expressed (Baxter, 2011). Explicit polemic interplay is typically revealed by the presence of discourse markers. On the other hand, implicit, or hidden, polemic interplay is most often identified through the process of unfolding when an utterance is positioned in the cultural context. Bakhtin (1984) described hidden polemic interplay as speech that gives a “sideward glance” to an alternative discourse.

While discourses often compete in polemic interplay, meaning(s) can also be constructed in the absence of discursive struggle. Baxter (2011) noted that some discourses emerge as so dominant that they silence alternative discourses, thus enacting dialogically contractive monologue. On the other hand, at the dialogically expansive

endpoint, discourses elide competition and move closer to or reach idealized dialogue. When utterances are dialogically expansive, new meanings are wrought from the competing discourses in the form of either a *hybrid* or an *aesthetic moment* (Baxter, 2011).

Validation of Findings

An important step in qualitative research is utilizing validation strategies to assess whether the findings are a valid, or accurate, representation of the meanings constructed by participants. According to Creswell (2007), the validation process is an important and distinct strength of qualitative inquiry because “the account made through extensive time spent in the field, the detailed thick description, and the closeness of the researcher to the participants in the study all add to the value or accuracy of a study” (p. 207). With this in mind, he recommended that researchers employ at least two validation techniques to ensure the trustworthiness of their findings. In the present study, I engaged in member checking and provided rich, thick descriptions of the participants and their experiences.

Member checking involves contacting participants to determine whether the study’s findings resonate with them and accurately represent their experiences (Creswell, 2007). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), allowing participants to assess the validity of a study’s themes is the most important strategy for establishing credibility in qualitative research. For the present study, I emailed a summary of the findings to a subsample of participants. The summary, which included three sections, provided a brief description of the major themes related to each research question. At the end of each section, participants were asked report whether one or more of the themes “rang true” regarding their experiences of moving away from a sibling for the first time. If they

responded “no,” they were encouraged to explain what aspect(s) related to the themes did not align with their experiences.

During the member checking process, I contacted all participants whose email address I had on file. In all, I reached out to 28 of the 44 participants, including all 22 siblings who had moved away from their brother or sister to attend college and six siblings who still lived at home at the time of the interview. Of the 28 siblings I emailed, 17 responded and completed the member check. All 17 siblings (38% of the total sample) indicated that one or more of the themes in each of the three sections accurately described their experiences of moving away from a brother or sister for the first time.

In addition to engaging in member checking, I also provided detailed descriptions of the participants and their relational experiences. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative studies containing rich, thick description allow readers to assess whether the findings can be transferred to other settings or to similar populations. In the present study, I aimed to provide a vivid, detailed account of each theme in order to best capture the siblings’ perspectives and fully describe the essence of their experiences. When describing an exemplar, I included extra details about the siblings’ relationship or their experiences that they may have revealed throughout the interview. For instance, two sisters—Anna and Essie—repeatedly described their relationship while growing up as emotionally distant. Pointing out their lack of closeness during childhood made their assertions that they appreciated their relationship more and missed one another now that they moved apart particularly meaningful and highlighted how their relationship had evolved in recent months. Thus, including the added detail about their history provided a more complete, as well as valid, interpretation of their relational experiences.

Creating thick, detailed descriptions of the participants and their relationships also allows readers to assess the plausibility of the findings and whether they can be transferred to siblings beyond the present study. By providing rich descriptions of the participants and a detailed context for their exemplars, I sought to bring the siblings to life and accurately depict their experiences. Capturing the true, yet unique, nature of each sibling pair's relationship can remind the reader that the siblings are actual people experiencing real relationship challenges and opportunities. In this sense, the reader may be more likely to notice connections between the participants' relational experiences and their own sibling relationships and/or the experiences of other siblings they know. Thus, in the present study, using thick description to strengthen the transferability of the siblings' lived experiences further demonstrates the validity and trustworthiness of the findings.

Summary

In sum, the goal of the present study was to understand siblings' experiences of transition and relational change when they move away from one another for the first time. Although research on adult siblings has grown considerably in recent decades, very few studies focus specifically on how home-leaving impacts sibling relationships. The existing body of research on adult siblings also largely relies on quantitative approaches that seek general trends and patterns (Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013). The present study, then, sought to contribute to adult sibling literature through its use of qualitative methods to gain an in-depth understanding of siblings' experiences during the transition into adulthood.

Chapter 4: Findings

The present study was guided by three overarching goals. First, I aimed to achieve a deeper understanding of siblings’ lived experiences of moving apart for the first time and the changes they described related to their separation (RQ1, RQ2, & RQ2a). Second, I applied relational dialectics theory to capture how siblings communicatively constructed meaning of their changing relationship during this transition (RQ3). Third, I explored whether participants voiced competing discourses to construct a dialogue of adult sibling relationships (RQ4). In this chapter, I discuss the main themes and subthemes that emerged in the data related to each research question. In order to facilitate the presentation of the findings, a summary of these key themes is provided below.

Table 1

Key Themes and Subthemes Identified in Siblings’ Talk

Summary of Findings	
Themes/Subthemes	Description
Research Question 1	
RQ1: How do siblings describe the experience of moving away from one another for the first time?	
Theme 1: Taking Time to “Sink In”	Not realizing the significance of the transition until it happened
Theme 2: A “Weird” Experience	Expressing that it was strange to not have their sibling around
Theme 3: A Difficult Experience	Not knowing how to say goodbye; having trouble adjusting
<i>Subtheme: I Was Really, Really Sad</i>	<i>Crying and/or experiencing sadness, often for an extended period of time</i>
Research Question 2	
RQ2: What changes to their relationship, if any, do siblings describe during this transition?	
Theme 1: Relational Changes	Ways the nature of their bond changed
<i>Subtheme 1: A Strengthened Bond</i>	<i>Arguing less often; developing a greater appreciation of sibling and their bond</i>

<i>Subtheme 2: A Disrupted Bond</i>	<i>Losing a constant companion; ritual changes</i>
Theme 2: Communication Changes	Changes in the quality and frequency of their communication
<i>Subtheme 1: Reduced Contact</i>	<i>No longer having daily contact; interacting less often than before</i>
<i>Subtheme 2: Taking More Effort</i>	<i>Exerting more effort to find times to talk; having to make a point to “check in”</i>
<i>Subtheme 3: Better Communication</i>	<i>Engaging in deeper, more meaningful, and more mature conversations</i>
Research Question 2-A	
RQ2a: How, if at all, do siblings describe recentering their relationships after they move apart for the first time?	
Theme 1: Preserving Siblings’ Place in Inner Circle	Emphasizing their sibling was still an important member of their inner circle
Theme 2: Relational Recentering – The Early Stages	Recognizing that changing priorities prompted a shift in their relationship
Research Question 3	
RQ3: What competing discourses, if any, animate siblings’ talk about moving away from one another for the first time, and what meanings are constructed in their interplay?	
Theme 1: Distance as Good vs. Distance as Bad	A discursive struggle between the view that distance improves relationships and the view that distance hinders relationships
<i>Subtheme 1: Polemical Interplay</i>	<i>Privileging the the distance as good discourse by directly negating the assumption that being apart negatively impacts relationships</i>
<i>Subtheme 2: Hidden Polemical Interplay</i>	<i>Privileging the distance as bad discourse by emphasizing negative outcomes associated with being apart; refuting the distance as good discourse indirectly by overlooking positive relational changes</i>
<i>Subtheme 3: Aesthetic Moment</i>	<i>Transforming the discursive struggle between the distance as good and distance as bad discourses to construct a new meaning emphasizing wholeness (e.g., missing one another a sign of renewed hope for a troubled relationship)</i>
Theme 2: Moving Apart as Normal vs. Moving Apart as “Weird”	A discursive struggle between the view that moving apart is a normative transition and the view that it is “not normal” and unexpected

<i>Subtheme 1: Hidden Polemical Interplay</i>	<i>Privileging the moving apart as “weird” discourse by describing their separation as strange or difficult; indirectly negating the unstated perspective that moving apart is a natural and expected transition</i>
Theme 3: Certainty as Still Possible vs. Uncertainty as Unavoidable	A discursive struggle between the view that it was still possible to maintain certainty about their sibling and the view that uncertainty was inevitable due to the separation
<i>Subtheme 1: Polemical Interplay (Privileging Certainty)</i>	<i>Favoring certainty by stressing that they “still” knew one another; refuting the idea that separation increases uncertainty</i>
<i>Subtheme 2: Polemical Interplay (Privileging Uncertainty)</i>	<i>Privileging uncertainty by referencing the belief that it is difficult to maintain the same level of certainty about a person or a relationship after moving apart</i>
<i>Subtheme 2: Discursive Hybrid</i>	<i>Allowing certainty and uncertainty to retain their distinct meanings, but reframing them in a noncompetitive manner to construct a new meaning (e.g., being separated and experiencing some uncertainty as an opportunity for siblings to see one another in a different light)</i>
Research Question 4	
RQ4: How, if at all, do emerging adult siblings communicatively construct a dialogue of sibling relationships?	
Theme 1: Siblingship as Voluntary vs. Siblingship as Obligatory	A discursive struggle between the view that adult sibling bonds are voluntary and the view that they are an obligation
<i>Subtheme 1: Polemical Interplay</i>	<i>Favoring the voluntary discourse by stressing that they maintain their bond by choice and refuting that it is an obligation</i>
<i>Subtheme 2: Polemical Interplay</i>	<i>Privileging the voluntary discourse by likening their bond to a friendship</i>
Theme 2: Siblings as Separate Individuals vs. Siblings as a Unit	A discursive struggle between the view that siblings develop independent identities in adulthood and the view that they are part of a sibling pair
<i>Subtheme 1: We’ve both grown as our own person</i>	<i>Privileging the view that siblings are separate individuals by emphasizing how they have developed unique identities</i>
<i>Subtheme 2: I didn’t know I could do that on my own</i>	<i>Privileging the view that siblings are separate individuals by emphasizing their growing independence from one another</i>

Research Question One:

Siblings' Lived Experiences of Moving Apart

The first research question asked, “How do siblings describe the experience of moving away from one another for the first time?” Using a phenomenological approach, the purpose of this research question was to uncover the essential themes that characterize siblings’ experiences of moving apart. In other words, I was interested in the meaning that this particular transition held for siblings. Three themes emerged that captured the essence of siblings’ experiences of moving away from a brother or a sister for the first time. First, participants expressed that it took some time for the reality of not seeing their sibling every day to “sink in.” Second, many participants focused on how different their lives were now that they no longer lived with their sibling, and thus described the experience of moving apart as “weird.” Third, several participants emphasized that being separated from their sibling for the first time was a difficult transition. In the following sections, these three themes and accompanying subthemes are discussed in detail.

Taking Time to “Sink In”

For several participants in the current study, the fact that they or their sibling moved out of the family home did not “sink in” right away. Specifically, participants expressed that the reality of the situation did not “hit” them until the move was very near or had already happened. Essie, 14, whose eighteen year-old sister Anna moved out of the family home seven months prior to the interview to attend college, stated:

It didn't really hit me that she was moving away until like probably right before the move, and I was like, "Wow, I'm not going to see you anymore." And it really

made me realize that, I don't know, like I wish we could've spent more time together and like made more time for each other. [16: 92-97; denotes interview number and line numbers]

Essie expressed that once it “hit” her that she was not going to see her sister regularly anymore, she regretted that they had not made the most of their time together while they lived under the same roof. Throughout the interview, she repeated that if she had really thought about the fact that Anna would no longer be around, she would have made more of an effort to spend time with her before the move. Fifteen year-old Greg also indicated that it took some time for it to “sink in” that his older sister Ashton, 18, was moving away:

Well, it was...we had a tough time getting her dorm ready and getting different stuff...but it was definitely weird when we said the final goodbyes. And it didn't really sink in until the way home, like, "We're not gonna see her for a little bit."
[8: 184-187]

In this quote, Greg described how the reality of dropping his sister off at college did not “hit” him until he and his parents were driving home without her. Siblings who live together growing up, like Greg and Ashton, go to the same home at the end of the day. Thus, the fact that his sister was not going home with him for the first time ever and that he would not see her for a while took some time to sink in. As Essie’s and Greg’s comments suggest, younger siblings may not fully realize the significance of an older sibling leaving home until after it happens.

Similar to many younger siblings in the present study, older siblings also expressed that the impact of the move did not “sink in” right away. Alli, 18, who moved

to college about three months prior to the interview, stated that she was too busy and frustrated with packing before the move to really think about what it meant or how she felt about it:

So, like, that whole week I was just anxious to get there because I was sick and tired of packing all my stuff and putting things away...I didn't really think about it much. I was excited. [11: 420-422]

However, once she was settled in at college, the reality of being on her own and moving away from her family “hit” her:

But, I think when I finally got unpacked and like all my stuff was in its place and it was time to say good-bye, that was the moment when it was like, wait I was really going to miss everyone even though I was really fed up with them all week. I don't know, it was just like by the time it was like time to go, I was like oh wait, this is it, I am not going to be home until November and it's August. Like that is 3...what, 3 months? So I got like... My parents were crying and I was crying and Scott cried. When Scott cried that kind of threw me off because I didn't think you were going to miss me that much or be so upset. I thought he was going to be “woo-hoo only child.” [11: 434-447]

Because leaving home and moving to college is an exciting experience that requires extensive preparation and planning, Alli did not have a lot of time to think about what it was going to be like to say goodbye to her family until the time came. Along those lines, she did not realize how much her 13 year-old brother, Scott, was going to miss her or be affected by her move. Thus, as with several other siblings in the present study, Alli was too caught up in getting ready for the move to college to think about how it would impact

her sibling relationship. Likewise, 18 year-old Ross and his 16 year-old sister Laura explained how the excitement of Ross's move to college four months earlier served as a distraction:

Laura: It was busy. We didn't have much time for sentimental stuff because we were cleaning out his room a lot. Go for it. [*Directed to her brother.*]

Ross: Moving here, I moved into the fraternity house. It was such a busy day that we didn't really have a lot of time to get too emotional. I don't think it hit either of us until a few days later when—

Laura: It was more exciting than sad. You were going to a new place. Everything was new. It wasn't all sad at the moment. For me it was when we came inside and Ross didn't come in with us. It was weird.

Ross: The next few days, for me waking up not at home, not just like hey, I'm going to go hang out with my sister. It was, "I've got to go make new friends today" so that was a big adjustment for me. [5: 70-80]

Ross and Laura, who described themselves as "really close," expressed that different tasks related to the move—such as cleaning his room at home and moving him into the fraternity house—kept them from getting emotional leading up to the transition.

However, after he was all moved in and they had gone their separate ways, the fact that they were no longer a constant presence in one another's lives started to "sink in" for both siblings. In Laura's case, it "hit" her when she walked into her family's house without her brother; for Ross, it was not waking up at home or having his sister there to hang out with. Thus, although they were initially distracted by the anticipation of Ross's

move, the sudden absence of one another in their day-to-day lives made them realize what the transition meant for their relationship.

In the stories above, siblings expressed that even if they did not give much thought beforehand to how the move would impact their sibling relationship, they realized after it happened how much it affected them and their bond. While some participants seemed unable to fully grasp the reality of the situation until after the move, others reported that the weeks leading up to the move were too chaotic for them to really think about what it would be like to be separated from their sibling. Regardless, the fact that many participants in the present study indicated that it took some time for it to “sink in” that they were moving apart suggests that it is a significant event for siblings. Rather than casting off the transition as unimportant, siblings attached meaning to the move and described how they came to realize the impact it had on their sibling relationship. In addition to expressing that it took some time for the transition to “sink in,” several participants also indicated that it was a “weird” experience.

A “Weird” Experience

All 22 sibling pairs in the present study discussed how different it felt to no longer live together, with most using the words “weird” or “strange” to describe their experiences of moving apart. In many cases, siblings expressed that once some time passed and it “sunk in” that they or a sibling had moved away, they realized how weird it was to be separated from their brother or sister. Other participants reported that being separated from a sibling was strange or different because it created a change in their day-to-day lives. For instance, Greg, 15, and his 18 year-old sister, Ashton, described how weird it was when Ashton left home for college three months prior to the interview:

Greg: It was definitely weird because now I have like the whole basement to myself. And just different things like, um, like I've gone to football games and not seeing her dance, and stuff like that. It's just kinda weird.

Ashton: Um, and yeah, I'd kinda say the same thing. I feel like it's just now starting to slow down with homecoming and everything. Like, it was really, really busy. Um, and getting to know everyone was just so weird. It was weird not having that comfort zone of your family and all your old friends and stuff. Um, so I'd say those first few weeks were just, I felt off. It was really weird. And obviously it was weird not having my little brother to take care of and drive to school and stuff. [8: 193-206]

Given that Greg was accustomed to sharing the basement with his sister and seeing her dance at football games, it was strange to not have her around anymore for those parts of his life. In agreement, Ashton noted that it was a “weird” experience to not have her brother to “take care of” and to not have her family around while she adjusted to college.

As Ashton and Greg demonstrated in their comments, *both* siblings who had moved out and siblings still living at home expressed that the transition was a “weird” or different experience. However, in some interviews, it was the sibling who still lived at home who emphasized the most that the experience was weird, strange, or different. One participant, 20 year-old Jacob, recently moved away from home to play a sport at his university. While he and his 16 year-old sister, Angela, indicated that they were very close, his school work and commitment to the team kept him extremely busy. Angela, on the other hand, noticed how “weird” it was when her brother left home:

Interviewer: Think about when he first left. What was it like when he first left?

Angela: Quiet.

Interviewer: Quiet? Anything else?

Angela: Um, it was just weird because, like, I mean me and my brother have always been so close. I don't know, but he was just always home and I'm just like by myself now. So I felt like I was the only child or something. [7: 110-115]

In two-child families, the sibling still living at home after a child moves out may feel like an only child. Likewise, the transition from always having Jacob around to being the only child in the house was a “weird” experience for Angela. Although Jacob expressed in the interview that it was difficult to be separated from his sister, he did not emphasize the changes or “weirdness” that his sister described—perhaps due to his busy schedule at college. Similar to Angela’s experience, Zoe, 17, explained why it was so weird when her older sister Dana, 19, moved out:

It was really different. One because...I just felt like the only child. It was boring. I just woke up and sat and watched TV by myself, went with my mom by myself. It was a transition for me too because I no longer went to my old school that we both went to. I transferred to a new school so I wasn't with the same crowd of people. It seemed like a whole life change. I felt lonely, like real lonely. [15: 128-133]

Throughout the interview, Zoe and Dana emphasized that they were very close and spent a lot of time together when Dana still lived at home. Thus, when Dana moved out, Zoe stated that she felt like an only child because she was forced to do things by herself without her sister. Her loneliness appeared to be compounded by the fact that she recently transitioned to a new school, as it is implied that Dana would be able to help her through

the experience if she still lived at home. Being separated from her sister, then, was a different experience that disrupted aspects of her day-to-day life.

It is important to note that most participants who expressed that being separated from their sibling was a “weird” and different experience also reported that they shared a close relationship with their brother or sister, or at least spent a lot of time interacting with their sibling when they lived together. In this sense, if a sibling was a strong presence in an individual’s life while growing up, suddenly not having that sibling around on a daily basis was a new and different experience. For these siblings, being separated from a brother or a sister was “weird” or “not normal” because it was different than what they were used to and changed how they interacted and maintained their relationship in some way.

In contrast, a few siblings in the present study indicated that nothing really changed when they or a sibling moved away, a theme that was most prominent among siblings who reported that they were not that close or did not interact that much prior to the move. For example, Miles, 16, had this to say about his relationship with his 18 year-old sister Heidi after she moved out: “Uh, it's really not that different. I mean, she would just sit upstairs on her computer and so it's really not any different than now” [6: 92-93]. Because he and his sister did not spend a lot of time together before she moved out, it was not that different for him that she no longer lived at home. This finding suggests that moving away from a sibling is more likely to feel weird or different if it introduces noticeable and/or significant changes for the individuals and their sibling relationship. In several cases, participants also reported that being separated from a sibling for the first time—and dealing with the changes in their relationship—was a difficult experience.

A Difficult Experience

Almost all of the participants revealed that moving away from their sibling for the first time was a challenging experience and that they had difficulty adapting to the separation. Overall, this theme encompasses the two themes discussed above; that is, the fact that it did not “sink in” right away and that it felt “weird” for many siblings in the present study suggests that the transition from living together to living apart for the first time was a difficult experience to navigate. For instance, in their interview, Ashton, 18, and Greg, 15, described the difficult emotions they experienced during and after Ashton’s move to college:

Ashton: I was really busy because of rush, so the last time I said “bye” to them was the morning of an event that we had for rush. I had to straight to that, so I was like, "Okay, we cannot think of this in a sad way." So we really tried to focus on like, you know, "It's not gonna be that long. Like, it's gonna be okay." So the actual day that we separated wasn't as bad as I thought. I mean, obviously it was hard, but it was a few days later that it sunk in that, "Oh, they're not here anymore." And I think it would have been a lot worse if like I wouldn't have been going straight to that sorority thing because I would have cried, then. But I know my mom and my dad and my brother said that they were crying on the way home.

Greg: She wrote a little note for us on the way home so that was a little tough. But saying goodbye, because she had to go to rush, it wasn't too bad. But on the way home it was a little more hard....with reading her letter and her not being in the car with us.

Ashton: Yeah, I wrote a note and said “Don't open it ‘till I leave.”

Greg: She just handed it to us before she left [for rush] and we read it on the way home.

Interviewer: Why did you write the note?

Ashton: Well, like I said, they stayed a few extra days to help me get everything I needed, and I was so busy with rush stuff, and then suddenly they were leaving. And so I wanted to let them know, um, how much I was going to miss them and how much I loved them. And I knew it might be difficult to get everything out when we were saying goodbye. [8: 149-167]

Although saying goodbye to her parents and brother was less difficult than she had imagined, Ashton expressed that they had to cognitively reframe their feelings about the experience (“it’s gonna be okay”) in order to come to terms with the transition and not view it in a “sad way.” Her words also revealed that, because she anticipated that saying goodbye would be difficult, she decided to express her feelings about her parents and brother in a note. Greg similarly noted that even though it “wasn’t too bad” parting ways with Ashton, it was “a little more hard” on the drive home because he and his parents read her note and felt her absence in the car. Thus, despite the distraction created by Ashton’s busy rush schedule at the time of the move, both siblings expressed that saying goodbye and adjusting to their separation was a tough experience.

Ashton’s and Greg’s account suggests that, when siblings move apart for the first time, the brothers and sisters who remain at home might experience different challenges than those who move out. Specifically, in some cases, coming to terms with the separation may be less difficult for the siblings who leave home because they are juggling numerous life changes and are busy meeting new people, taking on new responsibilities,

and adjusting to life on their own. In contrast, siblings who remain at home may immediately notice their brother's or sister's absence and have difficulty adjusting to it, as implied by Greg's comment about the drive home with his parents. Tyler, 17, also recalled a difficult moment he experienced in the car after dropping off his sister Camille, 18, at her college:

Tyler: Um, for a moment, like, maybe 30 seconds, I got a little emotional.

Camille: [*Laughs.*] "Maybe" 30 seconds.

Tyler: I was, like, "Oh, she's gone," then I was, like, "Okay."

Interviewer: Only 30 seconds?

Tyler: Okay, um, we were driving home-

Camille: You were counting?

Tyler: I was jamming out, because they let me put the music, my music on; I was jamming. [*Laughing.*] I think, like, I can't remember what song it was, but it came on and I was, like, "Camille likes this song." And I got a little emotional and then the song went off and I was good and we just kept driving. [18: 388-403]

Despite downplaying his feelings and jokingly insisting that he was only emotional for "maybe 30 seconds," Tyler's narrative indicated that it was a difficult experience to drop his sister off at college and then drive home without her. He made a point to emphasize that the moment of feeling emotional about Camille quickly passed, but it was clear throughout the interview that he continued to grapple with his sister's absence. Beyond the difficulty associated with adjusting to their separation, several siblings expressed that moving apart was a challenging experience because it triggered feelings of sadness.

I was really, really sad. Not surprisingly, participants who reported being close to one another were most likely to feel sad about moving away from a brother or sister. William, 16, described the sadness he felt when his older brother Mason, 19, moved away to college four months earlier:

I knew that he was gone and I adapted to it quickly but I didn't like it because it was...It's just kind of sad knowing that someone that you are so close to is going to be gone for a long time and you won't get to see them every day, you won't get to hang out with them. I mean, you can text them but that's all you can really do.

So for the first few days I was adapted to it but I was upset about it. [13: 374-383]

As William shared, it was upsetting to transition from seeing and hanging out with his brother every day in person to keeping in touch with him from a distance. He also noted that while he quickly adapted to his brother being gone, he still "didn't like it" and was sad about it. As William's words suggest, just because siblings have grown accustomed to the idea of being apart does not necessarily mean that they are no longer upset about the separation. Accordingly, sisters Dana and Zoe described the difficulty they had adapting to Dana's move out of the family home and the sadness they experienced:

Zoe: For me, I kept it secretive but I was really, really sad. I used to cry and stuff.

I used to cry just knowing she was leaving me. Then when it came closer to the move, when we were preparing for her party and stuff, I was more out and emotional about it. But then when she left, it was terrible. It's like we're almost twins, you never see me without her and her without me so me being here by myself with my mom was just the worst. My mom is fine to be around but without Dana it was bad.

Dana: Yeah. We talked every day soon as I left. It was different at first. I was sad, I didn't get over it but I just talk to her now, like we're used to it now.

Zoe: Yeah, she'll come [home] and go back and I won't be as sad because I'm used to it kind of. My mom, she cries every time but yeah I'm used to it. [15: 111-124]

In Zoe's first comment, she constructed her separation from her sister as an extremely sad experience. Although Dana was also sad and stressed that she "didn't get over" those feelings, she declared that she was now used to not living with her sister—and Zoe quickly agreed that she was "kind of" used to it as well. Thus, for siblings who are upset about the separation, it might not be a matter of getting over their sadness completely but rather adapting to the changes in their relationship as best they can.

As demonstrated by the two exemplars above, it was predominately participants with close sibling relationships who described the experience of moving away from a brother or sister as sad or upsetting. However, a few participants reported that they were not particularly close to their sibling but still felt sad about being separated from him or her. Anna, 18, described her feelings related to moving away from her 14 year-old sister Essie:

I knew that it was, like, gonna be kinda sad, and like I don't know, that made me kind of like realize like how much I wished we had like spent more time together, um, because you know, I'm like gonna like do the residency thing over summer too so we knew it was going to be more of a permanent move, you know. [16: 65-70]

Throughout the interview, both Anna and Essie referred to their lack of closeness and expressed that they wished they had spent more time together before Anna moved away. In this sense, Anna's sadness appeared to stem from her regret that she and her sister did not establish a closer connection while they lived together. Therefore, siblings who are not particularly close may feel like they missed their chance to develop a strong bond after one of them moves out of the family home, which can be a sad and upsetting realization.

By expressing that the impact of moving away from their sibling did not "sink in" right away, and describing the transition as both a "weird" and difficult experience, participants alluded to the changing nature of their sibling bond. In the next section, I discuss the various relational and communication changes emphasized by siblings in the present study.

Research Question Two:

Relational and Communication Changes

The second research question explored the specific changes to their relationship that siblings described during the transition from living together to living apart for the first time. The purpose of this research question was to build on RQ1 by focusing on participants' accounts of how the transition impacted their sibling relationship. Overall, the changes siblings described can be categorized into two different types: relational changes and communication changes.

Relational Changes

In the present study, all of the participants and their siblings indicated that their relationship changed in some way after moving away from one another for the first time.

The relational changes expressed by participants are captured in the following two themes: a strengthened bond and a disrupted bond.

A strengthened bond. Despite the distance, siblings in the present study overwhelmingly reported that being separated from their brother or sister helped strengthen their bond. For example, Ross and his younger sister Laura described how Ross's recent move to college positively impacted their relationship:

Ross: We definitely got closer as I got closer to moving away to college, I would say.

Laura: Yeah, definitely.

Ross: When we were younger we definitely argued a lot but as we got older we understood it more, understood what was going to happen.

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about that? What did you understand or think about?

Ross: To me, I realized that I wasn't going to see her every day so I wanted to try to spend as much time as I could with her before I left. I don't know what it was for you, Laura.

Laura: It's just unspoken that there wasn't going to be much seeing each other after he left because we knew he wouldn't have a car so he wouldn't be able to come home all the time. [5: 26-38]

For Ross and Laura, the realization that they would not be able to see one another as often once they no longer lived together motivated them to put more effort into their relationship leading up to the move. Ross implied that as he and his sister got older and his move to college drew nearer, they shifted their focus from arguing with one another to

trying to spend as much quality time together as possible. In this sense, the transition from living together to living apart for the first time helped them understand how much their bond meant to them and ultimately brought them closer to one another. Similar to Ross and Laura, many participants expressed that moving away from their sibling strengthened their bond due to the following two reasons: (a) the separation made them appreciate their relationship more and (b) the separation resulted in less conflict. In the next sections, I discuss these two subthemes in more detail.

We took it for granted. Given that siblings who live together while growing up typically interact every day (Cicirelli, 1995), and that many children spend more time with their brothers and sisters than with anyone else (Sanders, 2004), it is understandable that siblings become accustomed to one another's presence in their daily lives. Due to the stability and predictability of the sibling bond during childhood and adolescence, many siblings likely do not need to put much thought into maintaining their relationships and may take their brothers and sisters for granted at times. For many participants, moving away from a sibling for the first time threatened the stability they had grown accustomed to and made them realize how much their sibling relationship meant to them. In light of their renewed appreciation for their sibling relationship, siblings in the present study appeared to enhance their efforts to maintain a bond—resulting in a stronger connection with their brother or sister. For example, Haley, 18, and her younger sister Layna, 13, described how they became closer due to their transition apart and no longer took their relationship for granted:

Haley: Being at home, I knew I didn't have to hang out there 24/7 because she always was there, kinda thing. So it's like, now that I'm here I'm not with her all

the time and so it's like I have to make...we have to make that effort through both of us to stay in contact, and, you know, be close together. So I think it's just, like, kind of made it closer and a stronger bond.

Layna: Yeah...we knew, like, this was going to happen when one of us was going to go to college, but we didn't realize the loss until it actually happened. So we just, like, stared at each other, we didn't really do anything that much. Now, we take it seriously and text each other, because we realize that we're actually gone.

[2: 425-437]

Although Haley did not feel the need to constantly hang out at home before she moved out because Layna was “always there,” moving away made her realize that she needed to put in more effort to maintain a close bond. Layna also pointed out that they did not understand the “loss” until Haley left home and that their recent separation triggered a renewed appreciation of their relationship. Specifically, she noted that rather than just “staring at one another” like they did when Haley lived at home, they now “take it seriously and text each other.” Thus, moving away from one another for the first time made both sisters realize that they had taken their relationship for granted when they lived together, which motivated them to work harder to remain close and develop a stronger bond.

For some siblings, the transition from living together to living apart for the first time allowed them to appreciate their relationship more because it gave them much-needed space from one another. Siblings whose relationships were strained or troubled when they were living together were especially likely to report that the separation resulted in a greater appreciation for one another and their bond. One sibling pair,

Christine, 18, and Jasmine, 16, who emphasized throughout the interview that they “don’t really get along” and “can’t stand one another,” described how their relationship changed for the better since Christine moved to college eight months earlier:

Jasmine: I feel like we're more kind of appreciative towards each other when we do talk now. It's not like, “oh, my annoying little sister is complaining to me about her high school drama.” I kinda feel like now she ...actually likes to talk to me when we talk. Like I'm not annoying her, so I guess that's a good thing.

Christine: Actually no. I feel like I'm being nicer to her now but she's still kinda like got the same tone with me, like one-word messages and stuff. But, um, she sometimes, like, texts me and [will] be like, “I miss you Christine,” and she would never say that if I was there. Or like just sit there and be like, “I love you.” So I think that she's voicing her appreciation for me way more than when I was there. She'd be like, “I can't wait till you go to college. Um, I'm not gonna miss you, blah blah blah.” I know that's not how she feels but that's what she used to say.

Interviewer: Why would you say those things?

Jasmine: That’s honestly how I felt. I’m sorry. [20: 323-337]

In this excerpt, both Christine and Jasmine described ways that they feel the other is showing more appreciation since Christine moved out. Jasmine first asserted that they are more appreciative of each other because, rather than casting her off as an annoying little sister, Christine now enjoyed talking to her. Christine initially disagreed with the idea that their appreciation for one another has grown and focused on their past struggles (“she’s still kinda like got the same tone with me”), but then acknowledged that Jasmine is “voicing her appreciation for me way more than when I was there.” She also stated that

she knew her sister was not being honest when she said “I’m not going to miss you,” but Jasmine disagreed with her by emphasizing that she did, in fact, feel that way. However, despite their continued struggle to see eye-to-eye, the sisters ultimately agreed that the distance made them appreciate one another and their relationship more.

Younger siblings were especially likely to report that an older brother or sister moving out gave them the space they needed to realize how much they appreciated their sibling or their relationship. Several younger siblings emphasized that, while growing up, their older siblings were too protective and often tried to tell them what to do or gave unsolicited advice. Although they were annoyed by or indifferent about their brother’s or sister’s efforts when they lived together, being separated from him or her helped younger siblings realize that they did appreciate or miss the guidance that their sibling provided. For example, when asked how his relationship with his eighteen year-old sister Addie changed in the three months since she moved to college, Sam, 16, shared:

Sam: I don't know if this Addie's opinion, but for me, I honestly think it got a little bit closer, because having her [here] every single day, we took it for granted, and we don't realize how much we're going to miss that person until you realize that, wow, they're 6 and a half hours away. So once Addie left, I'm like, wow, I'm really like, on my own now. I don't have anybody to tell me what to do, or help me through high school. So, um...I personally think that, um, it's gotten stronger, and I realize that every time I see her, it's not ... it's not like she's going to be here every single day, so I personally think it got stronger. I don't know what Addie thinks about that, but...

Addie: Yeah, it definitely got stronger, because there'd be days where he'd come home from football, or whatever, and he'd just want to kind of be alone by himself and I'd like go in there and bother him. And I guess now, he doesn't really take it for granted as much...because now when I come home for Thanksgiving, you best believe I'm going to be sitting there with you, talking to you forever. [10: 645-661]

Throughout the interview, Addie emphasized how she always gave her younger brother advice and looked after him while they were growing up. As she acknowledged above, her attempts to keep tabs on him and hang out when he wanted to be alone would often “bother” him when they lived together—a point that Sam also alluded to during the interview. However, once Addie moved to college and was not around every single day, Sam realized that he had taken his sister and her support for granted. He further noted that the separation strengthened their bond because it made him realize how much he missed her and that he should make the most of his time with her because “it’s not like she’s going to be here every single day.” Addie agreed with her brother, indicating that their relationship got stronger because *he* does not take it for granted as much. This suggests that, while Sam may have been bothered by Addie’s constant involvement in his life when they lived together, being separated from her gave him the time and space to recognize that he did appreciate her guidance and day-to-day presence in his life. Several other participants expressed that moving away from a brother or sister strengthened their bond and resulted in a greater appreciation of their sibling because they argued less often than when they lived together.

We argue less. Because young siblings begin competing for resources such as food, sustenance, and parental love and approval at early age, sibling rivalry has long been noted as a common and expected experience for brothers and sisters during childhood and adolescence (Cicirelli, 1995; Felson, 1983; Sanders, 2004). Along these lines, Sanders (2004) argued that the sibling relationship is typically an individual's first experience engaging in a competitive relationship. The competition and rivalry between young siblings is likely exacerbated by the fact that they live together and often have no choice but to interact, which makes it difficult to disengage from a conflict and give one another space. It makes sense, then, that some siblings in the present study indicated that they argued less once they were no longer forced to share a living space and see one another every day. Ashton, 18, and her brother Greg, 15, described how their relationship is less combative now that they do not live under the same roof:

Ashton: I'd say, um, we don't argue as much because we're not next to each other all the time. Um, but off of that, I've really, I guess, appreciated that I have a sibling. Because I've met so many people that don't have siblings and don't have that relationship. And I've really grown to realize how thankful I am to have a brother. And sometimes you're just like, "Oh, he's so annoying." But [laughter]...I've really gotten to realize that I'm very thankful that I have a sibling.

Greg: Yeah, it's like we used to, you know, once in a while, have an argument. But we don't have that really at all. Because, I mean, I just go down there [to visit her at school] and it's all like "hi," like there's not much to argue about. But when

you're here all the time seeing them all the time, it's- you find more to argue about. But when you go there it's like—

Ashton: We're happy. [8: 300-314]

Rather than identifying specific issues that triggered arguments when they lived together, Ashton and Greg attributed many of their previous conflicts simply to the fact that they were around one another all the time. Specifically, Greg asserted that although he and his sister found reasons to pick fights when they lived together, “there’s not much to argue about” now that Ashton moved away. Additionally, for Ashton, being separated from her brother for the first time in her life helped her realize how much she appreciated having a sibling. Mason, 18, and his brother, William, 16, also discussed how they engaged in fewer conflicts and appreciated their relationship more now that they lived apart. When asked how their relationship has changed since Mason left home for college, they shared:

Mason: We argue less.

William: That’s true. We ... whenever we see each other, we instead of just saying like, “He's my brother” like, “There he is, I’ve seen him,” we have more of a realization that being together is so important.

Mason: Yeah, that’s completely true. [13: 207-210]

Similar to Ashton and Grant, Mason and William explained that they do not argue as much now that they do not live together, which has made them value the time they have together more. It is interesting to note that William agreed with his brother’s comment that they argue less often (“That’s true”) by emphasizing that they no longer just go through the motions when they see each other and that they “have more of a realization that being together is so important.” In this sense, he implied that their arguments when

they lived together were an artifact of constantly being around each other and not fully appreciating their relationship. Thus, while the decline in conflict and renewed appreciation reported by participants in the present study may be a result of growing maturity, it seems that having the ability to give one another space after a sibling leaves home may also lead to fewer arguments and less antagonistic sibling relationships during the transition to adulthood. Although nearly all the sibling pairs described positive relational changes related to moving apart, many participants also reported that being separated from a brother or a sister for the first time disrupted the nature of their sibling relationship. This theme, which constitutes the second relational change described by participants, is discussed next.

A disrupted bond. Many sibling pairs expressed that, while living together at home, they grew accustomed to having one another as a constant companion to talk to and hang out with on a day-to-day basis. Thus, for several participants, moving away from a brother or sister disrupted a sense of predictability surrounding their sibling relationship and prompted a change in how they maintained their bond. For example, after she left home for college, Elizabeth, 18, and her sister Erica, 16, grappled with losing one another as a daily companion:

Erica: We have those TV shows that we both like and we'd always be like, "It's on tonight." We would get ready and watch them. Now it's like, "Well I have to text her or call her" and be like, "This is so good" instead of just sitting there turning to her and be like, "Wasn't that a good episode?"

Elizabeth: Yeah. We don't get to do that. Or sometimes, because my dad travels a lot, and if my mom would take my brother to football practice, we'd both be home

alone so we would be forced to go get dinner ourselves. Now I feel like she doesn't have that so I don't know what she does.

Erica: This football season, I would text her all the time and be like, "They're gone again" because they would go out to football games and then they would go out with their friends and I'd be home alone all day. Usually I'd have her to be like, "Hey Elizabeth, let's go out to dinner" but no one's home.

Elizabeth: It's like that best friend that's always there. I mean, I never had to pick up the phone and call her and be like, "Do you want to come over?" because she's there. I could just go into her room and be like, "All right, we're going to go eat."

It was just the simple things like that. [9: 224-23]

While living at home together, the sisters developed various rituals that became a natural part of their lives and their sibling relationship. In a sense, they served as a "built-in" friend for one another who they could always turn to for companionship without much thought. However, when Elizabeth moved out, the sisters realized that they could no longer engage in the same activities together or hang out with one another on a moment's notice. They appeared to especially rely on one another for company when their parents and little brother were not home, and thus had to come to terms with the fact that Erica did not have anyone to grab dinner with and keep her company on the nights she was home alone. Elizabeth also pointed out that rather than watching their favorite TV shows together, they have to text one another if they want to chat about an episode. Thus, although they attempted to maintain certain rituals across distance, doing so is more difficult and not as satisfying. Haley, 19, and her sister Layna, 13, expressed a similar

sentiment when asked to describe the biggest change to their relationship following Haley's recent move to college two months earlier:

Haley: I think...not being able to do activities together. She used to, like, paint my nails, and we'd sit and watch TV together. We'd always watch this one show *Nashville* together and *Modern Family*. And since I've been here, I haven't had the time to watch them, so I have a DVR here and I have to sit down and watch them when I have time. So I'll be watching them on my laptop and I'm like, "Hey, did you see this episode?" And she's like, "Yeah, that's like 3 weeks old." [Laughs.] So that's different. And just not being able to go out together, like, go to lunch together. It's just always over the phone, you know.

Layna: Yeah, the biggest change for me is just not seeing her in general. Because every day, like I know what you would have done every day, like what time you'd usually come home, like, whether you'd be home for dinner or not. So I used to see you every single day, coming home from school, and stuff. [2: 354-374]

Similar to the previous sisters' experience, Haley described how moving away from home disrupted a TV-watching ritual she shared with her younger sister when they lived together. Her attempts to keep the ritual going by recording the shows and watching them on her laptop at school have fallen short because the episodes were old news to her sister by the time she was able to talk with her about them. Haley then remarked, "It's just always over the phone, you know," which showed her disappointment regarding the fact that she and Layna cannot engage in certain activities together in person anymore and must rely on technology to maintain their relationship. Layna agreed with her sister, adding that the main change she has noticed is not seeing Haley "every single day" and

not knowing her daily schedule. For both sisters, Haley leaving home threw a wrench into their relationship's routine—a routine that they were not quite able to sustain in the same way across distance and via technology now that they were separated.

Like Haley and Layna, other siblings viewed their newfound reliance on communication technologies to stay in touch as a sign of relational disruption. For example, brothers Mason and William emphasized that maintaining their bond through text messaging and Skype did not compare to hanging out and interacting in person as they did when they lived together:

William: We don't really get the opportunity to talk so much which is...it's a lot more difficult. You know, texting is okay but it's just not the same thing as being with each other.

Mason: Yeah.

William: We can't really...all we can do pretty much is talk over text because we have school and everything else. So we can't play games, we can't Skype, we can't do that much as we want to.

Mason: I'd say I agree. I mean it's as much texting and talking on the phone as we can. Skyping is great, but...I mean, it isn't practical for every day. And back at home obviously we can go hang out places, we can play games together, we can go grab food or sit down and have a conversation. The distance makes it hard to...I wouldn't say *maintain* our relationship because I still feel like I'm close to William. When I go home it's like nothing has changed. But it's hard to be close, like...day to day. [13: 158-171]

For siblings who live together while growing up, moving apart for the first time likely disrupts their established relational patterns, prompting a shift from communicating frequently face-to-face to maintaining their relationship from a distance using mediated forms of communication such as text messaging and Skype. Similarly, because Mason and William primarily enacted closeness by engaging in shared activities in person, Mason's recent move to college significantly altered how the brothers were able to interact and maintain their relationship. Specifically, Mason lamented that texting was "just not the same" as hanging out in person and that it was difficult for him and his brother to remain close "day to day." He further emphasized that "it's like nothing has changed" when he returns from college, implying that it is only when he and William are reunited at home that they are able to regain the closeness they lost and go back to their pre-separation relational state.

Overall, many siblings expressed that moving away from one another for the first time disrupted the "natural order" of their relationships because it forced them to abandon rituals and ways of interacting that they had grown accustomed to while living together and adapt to negotiating their bond across distance. For instance, when asked what was most challenging about moving away from his younger sister, Ross, 18, eloquently captured how the transition impacted the very nature of their connection: "It's not having that person there the whole time any time you really want them." Similarly, numerous participants reported that moving away from a brother or sister disrupted the predictability of their sibling relationship and the comfort of having a "built-in" person to lean on.

Though many participants expressed some disappointment when talking about how the separation disrupted their bond with their brother or sister, it is worth noting that most did not allow any unexpected or unwelcome relational changes to overshadow the positive outcomes they experienced. Specifically, with a few exceptions, the experience of a disrupted bond was described by siblings who also indicated that the separation brought them closer and strengthened their relationship. Thus, on one hand, siblings realized that giving one another space relieved them from daily squabbles and allowed them to develop a stronger appreciation for their relationship. On the other hand, however, they felt that moving apart disrupted their bond and deprived them of the comfort and daily companionship they experienced while living with their sibling. Though these disruptions were undesirable and difficult to adapt to at times, participants in the present study largely emphasized that they still felt close to their sibling and had developed a greater appreciation for their relationship.

Communication Changes

In terms of communication, siblings described the following changes: (a) reduced contact, (b) it taking more effort to stay in touch, and (c) improved communication. I discuss these three themes and their accompanying subthemes in the following section.

Reduced contact. Overwhelmingly, siblings stated that they communicated with one another less often now that they no longer lived together. Siblings Camille (18) and Tyler (17), who reported that they talked every day when they lived together, jokingly blamed one another for their decline in contact since Camille moved to college seven months earlier:

Tyler: You can call me.

Camille: Oh, yeah, but you don't answer your phone. Ever.

Tyler: You don't try.

Camille: You never answered your phone when I was there!

Tyler: That's because you were here!

Camille: Ok. [*Playful sarcasm.*]

Interviewer: So you don't talk a lot while you're at college?

Camille: Not really. He never answers his phone. He has a phone problem.

Tyler: You don't call me.

Camille: He never answers his phone. [18: 378-386]

Regardless of whose “fault” it was that they did not talk more often, Camille and Tyler were both aware of their recent decrease in communication. Their banter, although playful in nature, shows how difficult it is for many siblings to find times to talk when a brother or a sister leaves home. Without the convenience of living under the same roof, staying in touch requires more time and effort; as a result, siblings generally communicate with one another less often once they move apart. Jonathan, 18, and his older sister Ashley, 20, also discussed the decline in contact they experienced after they both moved out of their family home a year earlier to attend separate colleges:

Jonathan: We definitely talk a lot less.

Ashley: Yeah, a lot less.

Jonathan: I mean...I think I haven't even talked to mom and dad really at all this semester due to pledgship which sucks, but I know you I text you every once in a while for just random things.

Ashley: Yeah we text every once in a while. [4: 220-226]

Although Jonathan implied that he communicated with his sister more often than he talked to his parents, both siblings agreed that they “talk a lot less” now than when they lived together at home. Jonathan attributed his reduced contact with his family to the fact that he was busy pledging a fraternity, suggesting that the demands of college—not simply the distance—make it difficult for siblings to keep in touch during the transition to adulthood. For instance, sisters Haley and Layna stated that they sometimes “forget” to check in with one another due to Haley’s busy schedule at college. When asked what motivated them to stay in contact, they shared:

Haley: I think it's just that like, wow, I haven't talked to my sister in a week and it's just not...I'm not home all the time to see her so it's just weird. So, I'm like, “I should really text her, I haven't texted her in a week.” It’s like a realization, because sometimes I just get all-consumed in my life here that I forget I have a life at home. And it would freak me out if I went home and it was just like, “Oh, like so what have you been doing for the past few months?” So, I mean, I feel that need obviously to stay in contact, because otherwise there won't be a relationship there so...

Layna: Yeah, like you said, it's a realization because one day you'll forget about me and sometimes I'll forget you and then I'll be, like, just watching *Vampire Diaries* or something, and then the next day and realize like, oh my God, I haven't like texted you or anything in a while, or like, I can't believe it's like this, or something like that.

Haley: Yeah, I can't believe I haven't talked to my sister in 4 days, that I used to spend...like literally live in the same house with so it's just different, it's just adapting to that. [2: 568-590]

Because they were used to interacting every day at home, Haley and Layna found it hard to believe that they often went several days without talking now that they did not live together. Both sisters described moments when they suddenly “realized” amidst their busy lives that they had not been in contact for a while, which motivated them to send a text and get in touch. Similar to Haley and Layna, many participants were concerned about their reduced contact and made sure to “check in” with their siblings as much as possible. Thus, along with a noticeable decline in communication, siblings also noted that they had to put more work into maintaining contact once they moved apart.

Staying in touch takes more effort. Another communication change reported by many siblings was that staying in touch took more effort now that they were maintaining their relationship across distance. Although participants who voiced this theme often referred to a decline in contact, they focused more on emphasizing the dedication and effort it now required to communicate with their sibling. For example, when eighteen year-old Katie left home for college three months earlier, she realized that she had to work harder to keep in touch with her twenty-two year-old sister Amanda who still lived at home. Amanda had moved out four years earlier for school, but moved back home after one year and enrolled in a local college. Thus, after a brief separation, the two sisters had lived together in their family home for the previous three years. Katie shared how much more difficult it was to communicate with her sister now:

Something would happen, I'd be like, "Oh, I want to tell Amanda," like, I mean, I could call her, but it wasn't like just the same thing as like going right next door...like to the next room and be like, "Hey," you know. And like scream down the hall from her. It was like, okay, I had to call her and make sure she could talk and you know, figuring that out. [3: 263-268]

When Katie lived at home, she could "scream down the hall" if she wanted to talk to her sister. However, now that she moved away, she had to put in the extra effort to see if her sister was available and then pick up the phone and call her. Like Katie, many participants had a difficult time "figuring out" and adjusting to new methods of communication when they moved away from their sibling for the first time. For instance, Addie, who left home three months earlier for college, described her struggle to stay in touch with her younger brother Sam:

Addie: I'll always be busy, or he'll be busy, and then I can't FaceTime him because I'm doing something. Or then I'll be free and he can't, and stuff like that. And...I don't know, just kind of the communication, like, we don't communicate as much as we used to. That's basically the hardest part for me.

Interviewer: So how much do you communicate with one another?

Addie: Right now, we communicate basically as much as we can. Like, I text him maybe once or twice a day...yeah, maybe one or twice a day. Like, whenever I have time to text him, I text him, and I Snapchat him, and ...I FaceTime him when I can, and ... just basically whenever I have time to. Whereas back home, I would've been walking past his room, and been like, "Hey, what's up?" And then

like, we would've just sat there and talked for like half an hour, and then I would've left and done something. [10: 145-164]

In the above excerpt, Addie emphasized how much more effort she now had to put into maintaining contact with her brother compared to when she still lived at home. Rather than simply stopping by his bedroom to chat, she and her brother had to find time in their busy schedules to set up a FaceTime conversation. Further, despite the convenience of cellphones, Addie implied that it was still difficult to take a break during the day to send her brother a quick text message or Snapchat. Similarly, many other siblings indicated that using technology to stay in touch was not as convenient as talking face-to-face at home. One sibling pair, Carson, 19, and his younger sister Lexi, 16, described the challenges of communicating via text messaging:

Lexi: Carson usually sends me a text message about every day. And then I'll respond, but writing any kind of lengthy message and stuff, um, is more difficult to...maybe every once in a while after school. And then of course when he comes home, I'll talk to him for like a little bit and stuff.

Carson: Yeah, I try to like...recently, I've been really trying to talk to her every day. The past couple weeks I like to think I've been doing pretty good, but you know, she's right. You just...I mean, it's just hard between me doing homework and her doing homework to actually have a real conversation. You know, so occasionally when we actually both are sitting down, sometimes we can get a real conversation started through text messaging and everything, so... [12: 432-449]

As with Addie and her brother, it is clear that Carson and Lexi had to work at staying in contact and finding time to talk. Carson stressed that he had been “really trying” to talk

with his sister every day, which suggests that maintaining regular contact with her required a deliberate effort on his part. Though both siblings were committed to staying in touch, they admitted that their demanding school schedules often kept them from engaging in lengthy, meaningful conversations through text message. For Carson and Lexi, as well as several other siblings, their recent transition from living together to living apart marked the first time they had to make a concerted effort to keep in touch and communicate on a regular basis. Many siblings also noted that, once they were relieved of the forced, mundane conversations in their family home and were able to interact on their own terms, their communication improved.

Improved communication. As siblings reflected on how moving apart impacted their bond, many described improvements in how they communicated with one another. Specifically, siblings expressed that the distance enhanced their interactions in two ways: (a) by encouraging them to communicate on a deeper level, and (b) by encouraging them to communicate on a more mature level. These two subthemes are reviewed below.

Deeper communication. Just as giving one another space helped siblings become closer and appreciate their relationship more, it also created the opportunity for more meaningful communication. For example, Haley discussed how her move to college prompted her and her younger sister Layna to communicate on a more personal level:

I think we do have a good relationship and we do stay in touch. I'm surprised at how well we stay in touch, just because, like, back home, we didn't do as many things or make a point to, like, ask how the other person was doing because she was always there and I'm always there. So it's just different how it kinda forces you to make that relationship closer and talk as much as you can. [2: 717-721]

As Haley's excerpt illustrates, siblings may not go out of their way to talk often and engage in meaningful conversations when they live together because they take one another's constant presence for granted. When they move apart, however, siblings may realize that maintaining the same nonchalant attitude toward one another will not suffice if they want their relationship to survive the transition. Thus, concerned that the distance might cause them to grow apart, some siblings felt compelled to move beyond their typical perfunctory conversations and get to know one another more.

The theme of improved communication often emerged in conversations between siblings who were not particularly close when they lived together. For instance, Heidi, 18, and her younger brother Miles, 16, stated early in their interview that they did not have a strong connection while growing up, but both agreed that their communication had improved since Heidi left home four months earlier to attend college. When asked to describe the biggest change in their relationship since Heidi moved away, they responded:

Heidi: Uh, I think we talk a lot more actually. Like about more interesting stuff.

At home we would just talk about what happened that day, but now we're talking about, I don't know, deeper stuff I guess.

Miles: Yeah we definitely have more in-depth conversations now than when we were living with each other.

Interviewer: That's good. And do you think that is related to you moving away?

Heidi: Probably yeah. Because like I said, if I was living there I probably wouldn't talk to him about what he was doing because I could see it. But now I actually have to, like, talk about it. [6: 232-241]

While Heidi and Miles only discussed banal topics when they lived together and saw one another every day, the siblings expressed that they had deeper and more meaningful conversations now that they are not around each other all the time. Heidi also pointed out that, because she could not simply observe what her brother was up to anymore, she was forced to talk to him about what was going on in his life. Freed from the predictability and boredom that comes with seeing someone every day, several other siblings were also motivated to communicate on a deeper level after they moved apart. For example, Ashley noticed an improvement in the communication between her and her brother Jonathan in the year since they moved away from one another: “Now whenever we talk, you know...our conversations are just, like, much deeper and straight to the point and it’s not like ‘beat around the bush’ type stuff anymore” [4: 421-424]. Because they have fewer opportunities to talk once they no longer live together, many siblings sought to make the most out of their conversations and discuss significant matters rather than waste time on small talk.

More mature communication. In addition to engaging in more meaningful conversations, many siblings also stated that they communicated in a more mature manner now that they were not living in the same house. During their interview, Elizabeth, 18, and Erica, 16, emphasized that they were often overly involved in one another’s lives when they lived together, which made it difficult to tolerate and accept the other’s advice. Thus, despite being close, the sisters were frequently annoyed with each other and argued all the time. It was not until Elizabeth left for college that they were able to give one another space and interact on a more mature level:

Erica: I feel like when she gives me advice now, I take it to heart.

Interviewer: Why do you think that's changed?

Elizabeth: I think because we're not...our rooms are right next to each other. I don't know, I think also we're not as involved in each other's lives as we were because we went to the same high school. I feel like we were always there [together]. I was always putting my two cents in her life and she was always putting her two cents in my life. I didn't want that because she's my younger sister. She didn't want that because I was the older sister. Now it's just, I don't know, it just works because she has to come to me. I don't bother her because I don't know what's happening.

Erica: Yeah, I agree with that. I'll want to call her because I can't just be like, "Hey Elizabeth, this happened today." I have to make the effort and call her up. Then if she's busy with something, like her sorority, and then if I'm busy...basically, when we do get to talk to each other, I really value that time. [9:29-44]

Once they moved apart and no longer attended the same school, Elizabeth and Erica were able to focus on their own endeavors rather than interfering with one another's lives. As Elizabeth asserted, their new way of interacting "just works" because they had to seek the other person out if they wanted to talk and were not forcing their "two cents" onto one another anymore. Likewise, now that she had established independence from her older sister, Erica was more open to her advice—possibly because she felt that she had a say in whether she accepted it.

Research Question Two-A

Siblings' Experiences of Relational Recentering

The purpose of RQ2a was to understand how if at all, siblings described recentering their relationships during the transition from living together to living apart for the first time. According to Tanner (2006), the recentering process involves a shift between emerging adults and their family environment, often experienced “as a period during which parent regulation is replaced by self-regulation” (p. 27). Conger and Little (2010) further argued that, as emerging adults lessen their dependence on their family-of-origin and establish new social circles, they may also recenter their relationships with siblings. Through this relational restructuring, emerging adults begin to prioritize new relationships over those with brothers and sisters, thus pushing siblings from their inner circle to their outer circle. In line with this view, I speculated that moving apart for the first time and establishing independence from one another would prompt a decline in the significance siblings attached to their relationships. However, as revealed through two main themes, the present study’s findings offered little evidence of relational recentering for siblings. First, contrary to the assumptions of the recentering framework, most participants expressed that their sibling continued to be an important member of their inner circle. Second, although they still emphasized the significance of their sibling relationship, some participants suggested that they were experiencing the early stages of the recentering process.

Preserving Siblings' Place in Inner Circle

Despite no longer being a consistent presence in one another’s daily lives, many siblings expressed that their relationship remained a priority to them. In fact, several participants viewed their sibling as one of the most important people in their lives, no

matter the changes they experienced or the new relationships they formed. For instance, when reflecting on whether any new friendships had impacted their bond, siblings Sam, 16, and Addie, 18, shared:

Sam: I still have the same base group of friends. I think my sister knows who those people are. She, um, obviously, has tons of more friends. Literally, countless people. There's new friends she meets every day, so, um, yeah...I don't think personally for me it's changed a lot, but I'm sure for Addie, she's made plenty of new best friends. One being her roommate Sydney, I know her. I met her personally the day Addie moved in, so...yeah. Addie, what do you think about it?

Addie: Yeah, um, I definitely made a lot of friends here, and my close friends from [college], whenever they come in my room, they see pictures of him, and they're like, "Oh my gosh! You guys look so much alike!" And then I'll like send them Snapchats of my brother or I'll send him Snapchats of them. Or just like, I don't know...I'll Facetime and my friends will come in, and I'll be like, "Sam, this is so and so," and stuff like that, just as if he was with me.

Interviewer: So is it important for you to...when you meet these new friends, for them to know who Sam is?

Addie: Yeah. Definitely, because like I said, my family is my number one, and they're basically always going to be my number one. So I feel like family's very important to me, so they should—all my friends need to know about my brother, need to know about my family. [10: 417-434]

Likely because his environment had not changed, Sam reported that he still had the same friendship group Addie knew about and that he had not formed any new relationships that would affect their sibling bond. However, he then acknowledged that Addie might have a different perspective because she had made “countless” new friends at college. Although Addie confirmed that her social circle had grown considerably since leaving home, she immediately emphasized that it was important for her closest friends to know about her brother and how much he meant to her. Specifically, by introducing Sam and her friends to one another on FaceTime and through Snap Chat, she attempted to involve him in her life and connect him to the new people she met. Thus, rather than allowing her friendships at college to take precedence over her brother, Addie made sure he retained his place in her inner circle—even as it expanded to include her new friends. Similarly, sisters Haley (19) and Layna (13) described how they remained central to one another’s lives despite their separation:

Haley: I always feel like I need to check in every week otherwise there's not going to be that relationship there and that's just not like something I would like, obviously, so, um, I just check in every week, just cause I think that's a good you know, mark. There's plenty to talk about for a week, the things that she's done, and then she'll ask me like, “What have you done?” I remember she was like, “good luck at initiation,” or things like that. That way I'm like still involved in her life and she's still involved with mine, even though we're in different places.

Layna: Yeah and over here, we always tell, like, old stories and memories we had with you. Like, I know you probably don't know that, but we always tell stories, like “Remember when?” Or we're like, “Oh, I want to go back to [name of state]

and drive a golf cart.” We always want to do activities that we've done with you and stuff, and mom's like, “Oh, Haley would love this.”

Interviewer: So you're kind of including Haley even though she's not in the house anymore?

Layna: Honestly, it feels like she's here most of the time. When we tell stories, we picture her, like here and laughing, and then we picture what she would say next.

We just know her so well, we like know what she's gonna do next. [2: 655-670]

For Haley, it was important to “check in” with her sister once a week because “otherwise there’s not going to be that relationship.” By catching up on a weekly basis, she felt that she and Layna kept their relationship intact and remained involved in one another’s lives. Agreeing with her sister, Layna chimed in and described how she and her parents continued to include Haley in their daily lives by talking about her often and imagining that she was a part of their interactions. Even though she no longer lived at home, Haley still played a prominent role in her family members’ lives—to the point that Layna often felt like she was still there. Similar to Haley and Layna, both participants who had recently moved out and those who still lived at home stressed the importance of preserving their siblings’ place in their inner circle.

Relational Recentering: The Early Stages

Whereas most participants felt that their sibling relationship had not become any less central to their lives following the transition, a few siblings appeared to be engaged in the early stages of the recentering process. In all cases, siblings in this category characterized the shift in their relationship as an inevitable consequence of moving apart, and most appeared discouraged by this relational change. Sisters Dana (19) and Zoe (17),

who described themselves as “best friends” with an “unbreakable bond” in their interview, appeared to have a particularly difficult time adapting to and making sense of the recentering process. As she reflected on how her relationship with Zoe had changed since she left for college a year ago, Dana commented:

It's just, like, you become distant from [your family], so you have to grow up, you have no one there to legit go through what you're going through. Like we've always been together so we know everything that each other's gone through, but when you're here and no one is here with you but your friends...I mean, I have good friends and they help me if I need it, but it's just, like, you have to do it on your own when no one is there for you. And you realize that what you've got here, like, once I got here, is that you will have friends and you will have people there, but they're not going to be there all the time. [15: 719-725]

Here, Dana described her emerging independence from her family-of-origin and increased self-sufficiency, both of which are characteristic of the recentering process (Tanner, 2006). In becoming more “distant” from her family, Dana also recognized that the role her sister played in her day-to-day life had inevitably changed. Specifically, rather than Zoe always being there for her, she was forced to expand her support system and rely on people other than her sister (i.e., her new friends at college). When asked to describe what had changed the most for her since Dana left home, Zoe offered a similar perspective:

Zoe: I think it brought more independence for me because, um, my sister always went to the same school so like, we've never been the type to care about friendships outside of our friendship, like our relationship. You know, everyone

liked us, it's just...it really didn't matter if I had friends or not, being with my sister. But now that she's not here, I've just wanted to be more social...I mean I was always social but I always ended up clicking with her friends, it was weird but it happened all the time. And being that she, um, she's not here, I found friends on my own. I mean, like, more friends, other people to talk to, more people to hang out with. [15: 736-743]

Zoe expressed that, until Dana left home, their relationship was their main priority and they did not need to put much effort into other friendships. She further noted that it “didn’t matter” if she made other friends because she was always a part of her sister’s social circle. Thus, not having Dana around forced her to become more independent and make new friends on her own—thereby lessening her dependence on and attachment to her sibling bond. For both sisters, Dana’s move to college encouraged the sisters to expand and reorganize their social circles to compensate for losing one another’s day-to-day support and companionship.

As suggested by Dana and Zoe, siblings who are especially close may engage in the recentering process out of necessity; that is, they may feel they have no choice but to make new friends once they no longer live together in order to fill the void left by their sibling. Other siblings in the present study, however, simply described the recentering process as a natural consequence of moving apart, regardless of the closeness they shared. Sisters Anna (18) and Essie (14), who reported that they did not have a particularly close bond, discussed some of the changes they had experienced since Anna left home seven months earlier:

Essie: Well, you know, when she first came home, she had a friend that came over and I was like, I don't even know who this is. Just like things like that, I feel like I've like missed out on like parts of her life, but ...

Anna: Yeah, and when I'm, like, at home and I see like who you have over and like whatever, who you're talking about and everything. And I mean, I guess you kind of keep the most consistent people in your life, but obviously we're both in times that I feel like we're meeting a lot of new people and making a lot of new connections, and it's just hard because I don't know...I feel like people are coming in and out of your life all the time and it's hard if I'm not there to like keep up with that. [16: 202-216]

Despite not sharing a strong emotional connection, Anna and Essie considered it important to know who one another's closest friends were. However, Anna acknowledged that she and her sister were in a stage of their lives in which they were "meeting a lot of new people and making a lot of new connections." Along these lines, both sisters expressed that it was difficult to keep up with the other's new friends and changing social circles, and therefore felt as if they were "missing out" on important aspects of one another's lives. Thus, though not a common theme in the present study, Anna and Essie demonstrated how moving apart may initiate the recentering process for siblings in which they increase their focus on new relationships and become less involved in one another's lives.

Research Question Three:

Meanings Constructed in Siblings' Talk about Transition

The third research question focused on the competing discourses that animated participants' talk about moving away from a sibling for the first time, as well as the

meanings that were constructed in their interplay. The purpose of this research question was to understand the cultural and relational discourses siblings evoked as they attempted to make sense of how their relationship changed through the transition. Three main discursive struggles were identified in sibling pairs' talk about their recent separation from one another: (a) distance as good for the relationship vs. distance as bad for the relationship, (b) moving apart as a normal transition vs. moving apart as a "weird" transition, and (c) certainty as still possible vs. uncertainty as unavoidable. For each of these three themes, I first describe the discourses individually, and then demonstrate their discursive interplay in siblings' talk about their experiences of transition.

Competing Discourses: Distance as Good vs. Distance as Bad

The most prevalent discursive struggle voiced by siblings was between the discourse of distance as good for the relationship (hereafter referred to as the 'distance as good' discourse) and the discourse of distance as bad for the relationship (hereafter referred to as the 'distance as bad' discourse). Below, I discuss each of these systems of meaning in turn.

Distance as good. As they discussed their experiences of moving away from one another for the first time, many siblings voiced the idea that being separated was good for their relationship. This discourse occurred primarily at the proximal already-spoken point of the utterance chain in the form of established relational messages; that is, siblings referenced aspects of their relationship's past to show that their bond was stronger in the present now that they no longer lived together. For instance, twin sisters Maggie and Jessica, both 19, described how being separated helped improve their bond:

Maggie: Before we would argue a lot, and then once we were separated, we became, like, way better friends because we were never fighting. And so then when we got back together, we weren't fighting anymore, and it was just good.

Jessica: Yeah, we just get along a lot better than before. [14: 146-151]

Here, the sisters' talk about their experiences of separation revealed the distance as good discourse at the proximal already-spoken level of the utterance chain. Specifically, Maggie and Jessica alluded to their conflict-ridden relational history ("before we would argue a lot"), thereby characterizing their pre-separation relationship as more distressed than their current bond. In emphasizing the distinction between their rocky past and their more harmonious relational state in the present, the sisters aligned with the perspective that distance had been good for their relationship. Similarly, siblings Jonathan (18) and Ashley (20) referenced prior relational meanings as they discussed how moving apart has had a positive impact on their relationship:

Jonathan: With us not being able to communicate as much as we used to, it makes each conversation I guess a little bit more personal, if that makes sense.

Ashley: Yeah, I agree with that. It's like when we do talk we want to pack in more, that kind of thing.

Jonathan: Yeah, definitely.

Ashley: We give, live, deeper updates. Not just like, "oh hey, how are you?" But it's more like, "hey this is what's going on, like, this is what's drastically changed in my life lately." [4: 304-311]

Throughout this excerpt, the distance as good discourse emerged in the form of established relational meanings circulating at the proximal already-spoken site of the

discourse chain. In particular, Jonathan noted that their conversations had become “*more personal*” since they moved apart, which implied that their interactions were less meaningful or intimate in the past (emphasis added). Agreeing with her brother, Ashley then stated that they strive to “pack in more” and give “deeper updates” than they did when they lived together. Overall, as the exemplars above demonstrate, reflecting on the frustrating and/or flawed characteristics of their previous relational state prompted siblings to view their relationship as “better off” since moving apart.

Distance as bad. In making sense of their experiences of separation, siblings were also aware of a competing perspective: distance as bad for the relationship. Across the sample, participants voiced this discourse in the form of both prior relational messages (i.e., proximal already-spoken discourses) and established cultural meanings (i.e., distal already-spoken discourses). Shelby, 19, and her twin brothers Marty and Nate, both 16, described the various relational challenges they encountered since Shelby moved to college almost a year earlier:

Shelby: I was so set on going out-of-state and everything. I didn't realize...I don't want to say “jeopardizing” because I don't think our relationships have gotten worse, but in a way, it has kind of been a setback with being further away from them. I mean, you're just so caught up in college, it's something that's so self-centered. I was so caught up in like, where I want to go, and I want to do this, this, this, and this, and then I get here and it's like, "Oh my God. I miss my brothers.” You know? And I can't...it's just hard. You can only FaceTime and text and talk as often as you can. And it's hard because when something initially happens, I don't necessarily think, like, "Oh, I need to call them, and let them know" the way

I might have at home, you know? So with everything going on, I don't talk to them as much as I should.

Marty: I agree that that. And I would just say too, like, you not being here, if I ever need to talk to you, it's not always possible right then. And If I ever want to hang out with you, or I need to tell you something, like, I used to be able to just tell you. But since you're in [the state where Shelby lives] now, since we don't live together, it's hard.

Nate: Yeah, it's just hard...like, we're so far apart. And so it's hard to stay in touch and just keep you updated. [19: 265-284]

In this exchange, the siblings constructed meaning of their relational experiences at both the proximal already-spoken and distal already-spoken sites of the discourse chain. First, Shelby evoked an established proximal discourse by alluding to the idea that her relationships with Marty and Nate were stronger in the past before she moved away from them. Her brothers voiced a similar perspective, with Marty drawing on previous relational meanings (“I used to be able to just tell you”) to demonstrate how the distance has hindered their current connection (“since we don't live together, it's hard”). Second, drawing on the distal already-spoken utterance link, Shelby expressed awareness of the cultural expectation that siblings should interact on a regular basis (“I don't talk to them as much as I should”). She also framed the fact that she does not immediately call her brothers when something happens as troubling, which further acknowledged the societal assumption that siblings should be intimately involved in one another's lives. Similar to Shelby and her brothers, many siblings in the present study expressed that their separation not only made it difficult to maintain their desired relational state from the

past, but it also hindered their ability to live up to cultural standards of the “ideal” sibling relationship. Often, as participants emphasized how being apart was bad for their relationship, they simultaneously granted legitimacy to the opposing viewpoint: the discourse of distance as good for their relationship. In the next section, I describe the interplay between these two competing perspectives.

Interplay of Distance as Good vs. Distance as Bad for the Relationship

The discursive interplay between the distance as good discourse vs. the distance as bad discourse emerged in siblings’ talk in three distinct ways. First, participants’ relational talk often embodied polemical interplay, whereby they centered the distance as good discourse and directly refuted the idea that being apart hinders relationships. Second, to a lesser extent, some siblings engaged in hidden polemical interplay by negating the distance as good discourse indirectly and granting centripetal dominance to the distance as bad discourse in their talk. Third, siblings occasionally positioned the opposing discourses in a noncompetitive manner, allowing them to evade discursive struggle through an aesthetic moment.

Polemical interplay. In their stories about separation, many siblings positioned the distance as good discourse and the distance as bad discourse in a competitive, zero-sum relationship. This communication practice is referred to as polemical interplay, which occurs when the discourses at play compete against one another for centripetal-centrifugal positioning (Baxter, 2011). Overwhelmingly, siblings whose talk demonstrated polemical interplay favored the distance as good discourse by emphasizing that being apart helped them develop a closer bond and openly dismissing the idea that their separation had a negative impact on their relationship. For instance, when talking

about how their relationship has changed due to their recent separation, sisters Elizabeth (18) and Erica (16) marginalized the distance as bad discourse:

Elizabeth: I mean we don't talk that often, just because she's really busy and I'm really busy. We text more. I think when we do talk, we both can say that we do miss each other and that we can't wait for-

Erica: -a lot of times you call me for ten minutes, on your way to class or whatever. I think those kind of things are what's making us, our relationship, still strong, even though she's far away.

Elizabeth: Yeah. I definitely agree with that. I think just now that she does realize that I'm older, she comes to me with a lot more help. Before that, she would never ask me for advice, ever. If I gave her my advice, she would just be like, "I don't believe you." She does come to me for a lot of advice now. [9: 153-164]

Although Elizabeth briefly acknowledged the distance as bad discourse by noting that they do not talk that often, she and Erica spent the rest of their conversation downplaying the possibility that being apart has had a negative impact on their bond. Specifically, with her comment that their relationship is "still" strong "even though" Elizabeth moved, Erica countered the implicit expectation that distance diminishes relational closeness. Agreeing with her sister, Elizabeth also centered the distance as good discourse by noting that Erica comes to her for more advice now that they live apart. Likewise, siblings Ross (18) and Laura (16), who lived together in their family home until Ross moved to college four months earlier, stressed that being separated for the first time has not jeopardized their bond:

Laura: We don't have as much contact as we used to, like just having him right by just to talk whenever. At the same time, though, in a way we've gotten closer because we can't see each other as much as we want so we value our relationship more.

Ross: I feel like it's leveled off because we can't see each other but I don't feel like it's going away whatsoever because we still stay in contact fairly well. [5: 288-293]

At first, Laura referenced past relational meanings to show how the distance has negatively impacted their relationship (“we don’t have as much contact as we used to”). With her next statement, however, she aligned her talk with the distance as good discourse by asserting that being apart has enhanced their closeness and appreciation for one another. Ross also admitted that their relationship has “leveled off,” but immediately countered the idea that he and his sister are less close than they were before he left for college. Thus, although both discourses are engaged in a struggle for legitimacy, the siblings ultimately privileged the distance as good discourse over the distance as bad discourse in their talk.

Like the sibling pairs above, most participants marginalized the distance as bad discourse by emphasizing that a decline in contact—a potentially negative consequence of moving apart—did not result in a decline in closeness. For example, when asked how his relationship with his older sister Ashton has changed since she left for college, Greg replied: “Well, we’re definitely more close, like we're still really close, but we don't talk as much because she's farther away and we both got our own things” [8: 483-484]. Although he showed awareness of the distance as bad discourse (“we don’t talk as

much”), Greg focused more on the fact that the separation has brought him and his sister closer. By highlighting the positive effects and downplaying the negative ones, Greg and many other siblings gave the distance as good discourse the centripetal position in their talk.

Hidden polemical interplay. Although most participants in the present study stressed that moving apart was good for their sibling relationship, some siblings centered the opposing view—the distance as bad discourse—through hidden polemical interplay. Whereas polemical interplay occurs when speakers reference multiple discursive positions but center one over others in their talk, hidden polemical interplay involves marginalizing a given discourse without acknowledging it directly (Baxter, 2011). Accordingly, although they did not openly discuss—and then reject—the notion that being separated might prompt positive relational changes, several siblings refuted the distance as good discourse in indirect ways. Throughout one interview, Scott (13) overlooked potential benefits associated with the transition and repeatedly expressed that he missed his older sister Alli (18) and struggled to adjust to her absence at home since she left for college three months earlier. When asked whether they had discussed the transition and what it would mean for their relationship prior to Alli moving out, they responded:

Alli: Ummm...we didn't really. We knew it was there. Like, I was getting ready for it, but we didn't talk about it that much and I was actually very surprised to see how upset he was when he dropped me off.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about that? [*To Scott.*]

Scott: I don't know.

Alli: You were very upset, Scott.

Scott: I know.

Alli: You missed me.

Scott: Ahh, yeah. I know.

Alli: I mean, part of it too was that all of the attention was focused on me for a while because it was like, “get your ACT score up, make sure your grades are good, get your college applications done.” And so most of the attention was on me when I was home and now everything is focused on him. So I think he was also stressed out. I remember him telling me...he was like, "Oh my gosh, Mom is just going to be riding me to do all my stuff and it's not going to be equal anymore. You're not going to be here, it's just going to be me."

Scott: Yeah, it's harder, with the whole “attention on me now” thing. [11: 103-123]

With his reluctance to discuss how he felt about Alli leaving home, as well as his eventual admission that he was upset, Scott's words revealed a sense of longing and sadness. Further, as Alli encouraged her brother to express his feelings, she emphasized the difficult aspects of their separation, such as how upset he was when she first moved and how much he missed her. Thus, by focusing only on the negative outcomes associated with the transition, she diverted attention from any positive relational changes they may have experienced since they moved apart. In this sense, the siblings never directly acknowledged the distance as good discourse in their conversation; however, it was indirectly refuted through their emphasis on the hardships created by their

separation. Mason, 18, and William, 16, also discussed how being separated put a strain on their relationship:

Mason: I mean, obviously I would love to talk even more. Our schedules are very, you know, I think both of us are busy with...now he's a sophomore and they really start to ramp up the workload now because, I mean, freshman starting off high school is big jump. And obviously I'm two hours ahead so I can't really call him in the mornings and so I'd say just the fact that we're not...we can't talk as much as we'd like to and so that would be the thing I'd change. But other than that I'd say our relationship is still strong. Like, I know I will go home and hang out with William all the time and I can tell him about anything.

William: Yeah, just being able to talk more would be nice. Not just text or call, but actually Skype so we can kind of get that face-to-face interaction. Like he said, since we are both busy we don't really have much time to do that. But...just if we could find a time where we could talk more then that would definitely be the first thing to change. [13: 429-440]

Possibly due to cultural assumptions that siblings should talk often (distal already-spoken discourses), as well as their established relational beliefs about what constitutes an acceptable amount of communication with one another (proximal already-spoken discourses), Mason and William repeatedly described their reduced contact as an undesirable consequence of being separated. In particular, by referring to their recent decline in communication as something they wish they could change, the brothers ignored any positive aspects of living apart and aligned their talk with the distance as bad discursive position. Although Mason acknowledged that they have still been able to stay

in touch and remain close since he left for college, his words ultimately suggest that physical proximity (i.e., visiting home) is more conducive for maintaining their closeness than being separated. Likewise, William's comment that he would like to keep in touch "not just" through texting and calling but also through face-to-face interactions on Skype indicated his preference for methods of communication that minimize the distance between him and his brother. Overall, by emphasizing that they are unable to achieve their desired closeness from a distance, Mason and William indirectly rejected the notion that being separated could be good for their relationship.

As the quotes from Alli and Scott and Mason and William show, sibling pairs who centered the distance as bad discourse in their conversations generally co-constructed similar meanings of their separation and how it impacted their relationship. However, one sibling pair—Carson and Lexi—favored opposing perspectives within the distance as bad for the relationship versus distance as good for the relationship discursive struggle:

Carson: So, you know, I'm kind of glad that she gets to do...she gets to live a life by herself and get to kind of experience it. But at the same time, I'm sad because I always enjoyed being a part of her life. I always enjoyed...and not so much just the aspect of always, you know, maybe ruining a date she was on, or, you know cancelling one for her. But just...just the fact that I was a part of it. And that's, that's what I enjoyed the most is, you know, not always being the bad guy, but just that I'm a part of her life. [*Pause.*] And there's not...there's hardly any of that, to be quite honest, because we just don't get to see each other that much.

Lexi: Well, I will say it's been nice that boys don't run screaming from me as much. But you still make sure to put in your 2 cents about all my dates.

Carson: Yeah, I do. I try, but it's not as effective, you know, 90, 100 miles away.

[12: 679 -696]

Here, Carson was reluctant to admit that it was good for Lexi to experience life on her own and focused more on the negative aspects of their recent separation. He also implied that moving away from his sister has made it difficult to be a part of her life, thereby aligning with the viewpoint that distance hinders relationships. Lexi, on the other hand, privileged the distance as good discourse by stating that it has been nice that her brother is less involved in her life. Rather than agreeing with her, Carson again privileged the competing perspective with his comment that providing input about her dates is less effective from “90, 100 miles away.” In this sense, Carson’s perspective of their relationship—rooted in the distance as bad discourse—clashed with Lexi’s view that being apart has resulted in positive relational changes. Along these lines, the siblings’ talk illustrated an antagonistic struggle, which occurs when speakers align with opposing systems of meaning (Baxter, 2011).

Aesthetic moment. Although the distance as good discourse and the distance as bad discourse most often interacted in a competitive manner through polemical interplay, at times participants transformed the discursive struggle between the competing discourses, resulting in an aesthetic moment. An aesthetic moment occurs when the oppositional nature of discourses is temporarily suspended, thus constructing a sense of fleeting wholeness and allowing a new meaning to emerge in the moment (Baxter, 2011). Sisters Christine, 18, and Jasmine, 16, who constantly wavered between feelings of

extreme affection and extreme hostility toward each other, struggled throughout the interview to make sense of how their relationship had changed since Christine's move to college eight months earlier. In the following excerpt, the sisters constructed an aesthetic moment as they discussed how the distance has impacted their relationship:

Christine: So...I don't know. I don't know, but now I feel like every time we talk it's kind of like, "Hey Christine," like she's more happy to see me but when I would go in her room she's like, "Get out." So once I moved, it makes...every time we see each other it's happy.

Interviewer: Would you agree with that Jasmine?

Jasmine: At first. At first, yeah.

Interviewer: At first?

Jasmine: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Like I haven't seen her in a while. I miss her.

Interviewer: That's something that a lot of the siblings are saying is that now when they do see each other it's a little bit better, so is that what you're saying too?

Jasmine: Yes, it is better.

Interviewer: And what makes it better?

Jasmine: Distance makes the heart grow fonder.

Christine: Say something from you.

Jasmine: I don't know. Um, I guess we hadn't been together so she wasn't annoying me. So it's like I wasn't...I guess it's because I...when I do see her it's only for a short time and I don't wanna spend that time like arguing with her.

Christine: I really miss her too, sometimes. [20: 118-137]

Despite their difficulty articulating how they felt, it is clear that being apart has allowed Christine and Jasmine to see one another in a different, more positive light. Because their interactions were usually strained and they were rarely happy to see one another when they lived together, it took Christine moving away for them to realize that they do value their relationship. Thus, for Christine and Jasmine, the fact that they missed one another was not a negative or painful consequence of being separated, but showed that their relationship had gotten “better.” As the sisters made sense of their changing relationship, then, the discourses of distance as good and distance as bad were not pitted against one another in a struggle for center-margin positioning; rather, the competing discourses were transformed through an aesthetic moment in which an entirely new meaning in the moment emerged. In particular, the sisters constructed the experience of missing one another’s presence—which was unfathomable before their separation—as a sign of renewed hope for their troubled relationship.

An aesthetic moment also emerged in the talk between twins Lillian and Oliver, both 18, who experienced their first separation from one another eight months earlier. While Lillian lived at home and was enrolled in a local college, Oliver moved two hours away to attend a different university. When asked how the transition from living together to living apart had changed their relationship, they stated:

Lillian: Um, if anything I'd say, it might sound weird, but I think it's grown stronger. Because we do have to keep in touch more often, and he's not just conveniently...we're not conveniently in the same house anymore. So we really want to know what's going on in each other's lives since we don't have that day to day, "Oh, this is what happened today." So I think it's made it stronger.

Oliver: Yeah, and because of moving away to college, and just like she was saying before about kind of, both of us maturing and everything, we definitely have a more, like, mature relationship. We can talk about deeper things, we can give better advice, and so we...you know, we're both transitioning to adults at the same time, so I think that definitely strengthens our relationship because we're going through the exact same things. [21: 514-529]

With her assertion that being apart has strengthened her bond with Oliver because it motivated them to touch base more often than if they still lived together, Lillian centered the distance as good discourse in her talk. For Oliver, however, the fact that he and his sister have become closer had less to do with their separation and more to do with the fact that they were “going through the exact same things.” By removing distance as the primary factor in determining whether moving apart was “good” or “bad” for his sibling relationship, Oliver’s talk demonstrated the transformative nature of an aesthetic moment. Specifically, the discursive struggle between the distance as good discourse and the distance as bad discourse dissolved into a new meaning whereby the siblings’ ability to relate to one another based on their similar experiences with transitioning to adulthood (and not their motivation to stay in touch across distance) was framed as the catalyst for their strengthened bond.

Along with Oliver and Lillian, several other siblings attributed their level of closeness more to being in a similar place in life than to the amount of distance between them. When asked where they saw their relationship in a few years, sisters Amanda (22) and Katie (18) shared:

Amanda: I feel like it's definitely going to have a shift because, you know, I'm working now, saving up, and hopefully I...I really want to move out soon. So I feel like then, you know, she'll still be in college so hopefully like, with me being out on my own too, I feel like it will shift. You know, in some aspects, when she comes home, I think we'll be closer because she can come and stay with me and, you know, she'll be older so we can go do more things together.

Katie: Yeah, I totally agree. I feel like...Obviously, when you came back [home from college], you were more mature, and so that helped mature our relationship and make us closer. And I feel like we'll be even closer once I get to that level too. [3: 559-565]

Here, an aesthetic moment emerged at the proximal not-yet-spoken level of the utterance chain as the sisters anticipated how their relationship will change in the future. Rather than focusing on how the distance will impact the quality of her sibling bond in a few years, Amanda expressed hope that their similar experience of being out on their own will cause a positive “shift” in their relationship. Likewise, Katie anticipated that once she reached her older sister’s level of maturity and experience, their relationship would become even stronger in the future. In this sense, the sisters’ understanding of how their relationship will change was not a matter of aligning their perspectives with either the distance as good discourse or the distance as bad discourse. Instead, they emphasized that going through the same experiences will help them remain emotionally close despite being apart, thus positioning physical proximity as irrelevant to relational quality. In so doing, siblings such as Katie and Amanda sidestepped the dominant assumption that distance hinders relationships and achieved the interactional wholeness of an aesthetic

moment. As siblings' made sense of their recent separation, a second discursive struggle emerged in their talk: moving apart as a normal transition vs. moving apart as a "weird" transition.

Competing Discourses: Moving Apart as Normal vs. Moving Apart as "Weird"

The second discursive struggle animating siblings' relational talk was between two competing ideas regarding transition: moving apart as a normal or easy transition (hereafter referred to as the 'moving apart as normal' discourse) vs. moving apart as a "weird" or difficult transition (hereafter referred to as the 'moving apart as weird' discourse). I describe these discourses individually in the following section.

Moving apart as normal. In all cases, the moving apart as normal discourse carried traces of prior meanings at both the distal already-spoken and proximal already-spoken levels of the utterance chain. Katie (18), whose older sister Amanda (22) lived at home and attended a local college, described the experience of moving apart as a normal transition in their relationship:

Well, it's like we knew we were going to, like, end up moving apart. I think it's kind of just expected. It's not like...no one looks forward to it, but everyone expects it, almost. It's just kind of unspoken. I mean, it's not like siblings live together forever, or live with their parents forever. [*Laughs.*] [3: 626-30]

Katie first subtly acknowledged that, even before the transition occurred, she and her sister always expected that they would one day move apart (proximal already-spoken discourse). By referring to the idea of not living with her sister at some point as an "unspoken," she then demonstrated an understanding of implicit cultural expectations suggesting that siblings should eventually leave their parents' home and establish

separate residences (distal already-spoken discourse). Additionally, Katie's laughter at the thought of brothers and sisters living together forever—implying that such an arrangement is absurd or inappropriate—further reinforced the idea that siblings moving apart is a normal and expected family transition in U.S. culture. Overall, due to their awareness of established cultural and relational discourses indicating that siblings should go their separate ways as they get older, Katie and other participants in the present study legitimized the discourse of moving apart as normal in their talk.

Moving apart as “weird.” Often competing with the moving apart as normal discourse in siblings' talk was the idea that moving apart was a “weird” or difficult transition. Similar to its opposing perspective, the moving apart as “weird” discursive position emerged in the form of both distal already-spoken and proximal already-spoken discourses. For example, Haley, 19, and her 13 year-old sister, Layna, described how strange it felt when Haley moved to college:

Haley: It was just, I don't know...they helped me a bunch. They moved almost all my belongings, and like the whole family came, so like my brother, sister, mom and dad. And then we went out to lunch, and then like, I don't know, we just kind of dragged it on the whole day and then finally when they're leaving I was like kind of emotional, so...

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about that? What was it like saying goodbye?

Layna: It wasn't normal. I thought whenever you say goodbye in our family, you always see them the next day, that's why it's not normal.

Haley: Right. I don't think you realize it till it, like, happens. I know for me, I didn't realize like, being on my own until I was actually here and they had left and

you know it's just different, so...It's just strange to not see your family every day.

[2: 150-169]

Here, Haley struggled to describe and make sense of what it was like to move into her dorm room and say goodbye to her family, suggesting that it was a strange experience for her. Similarly, Layna referenced established meanings in their family at the proximal already-spoken level of the discourse chain (“whenever you say goodbye in our family, you always see them the next day”) to emphasize that it “wasn’t normal” to say goodbye to Haley and leave her at college. With her comments that “you don’t realize it till it happens” and “it’s just so different,” Haley further positioned the experience of moving away from her family as weird and “not normal.” Additionally, by pointing out that it is “strange to not see your family every day,” she drew attention to the cultural expectation, or distal already-spoken discourse, that family members should see one another often. Similar to Haley and Layna, many siblings framed the experience of moving apart as a “weird” experience because it challenged established meanings circulating at both the proximal already-spoken and distal already-spoken levels of the utterance chain regarding what is considered “normal” for families.

Interplay of Moving Apart as Normal vs. Moving Apart as “Weird”

Although it is normal in the U.S. for siblings to leave the family home and establish separate residences in adulthood, participants predominantly viewed the transition from living together to living apart as a “weird” or unexpected event. Rather than explicitly negating the moving apart as normal discourse, however, siblings dismissed it indirectly through hidden polemical interplay. Below, I describe how

siblings engaged in this discursive tactic to displace the discourse of moving apart as normal with the competing discourse of moving apart as a “weird” in their talk.

Hidden polemical interplay. The relational talk of siblings in this category most often embodied hidden polemical interplay, wherein they indirectly negated the moving apart as normal discourse by stressing that moving away from one another for the first time was a “weird” and difficult event in their lives. In other words, the idea that it is normal to move apart was never acknowledged directly in their talk; rather, participants’ assertion that the experience was strange or difficult refuted the unstated perspective that moving away from a sibling is a natural and expected transition. For instance, in their story about the day they moved away from one another, sisters Elizabeth (18) and Erica (16) emphasized that the transition was a weird and difficult experience:

Elizabeth: She actually, she wanted to say goodbye to me the night before, instead of that morning. I was like, "No, I want to take you to school" or whatever. She was like that whole time she's like, "I'm not going to cry. I'm not even sad that you're moving away."

Erica: I did not-

Elizabeth: Yes, you did.

Erica: -I was so sad.

Elizabeth: But the week leading up to it, you're like, "Whatever. It's not even that big of a deal."

Erica: I didn't want to show you that I was upset about it because then you're going to be upset about it. College is a really fun experience and it should be a

happy moment in your life. If I was weak and showing that I was sad, I feel like that would have ruined it.

Elizabeth: That's sweet. That's sweet, Erica. [Pause] Yeah, I mean it was a hard day just in general. We drove out there with my parents so I didn't have to say goodbye to them. I just had to say goodbye to my brother and sister. I took them to school. I think what made it hard was mostly the fact, not so much that I was of course going to miss them, but just that I wasn't...the realization that I was never going to live with them ever again. Coming home for Christmas break is a nice chunk but it's still like I'm never going to be able to experience waking up and driving her to school in the morning. You know? That morning was pretty hard and then-

Erica: She wrote me and my brother a letter and she said goodbye and then gave me the letter.

Interviewer: When did you read it?

Erica: When I got home. I couldn't read it at school.

Elizabeth: I think that was my way of saying how much, like in the letter, I said how much she's important to me and just how much she means to me and how lucky I am to be an older sister to her. That was really just important to say because I'm not the type of person to say those things over text. I just don't think that's something that should be done. We would always have talks and I would say those things. I mean, there's a lot of things I wanted to say. I put everything in a letter. I wasn't going to say it that morning when I said goodbye to her. I just ended up writing her a letter. [9: 357-393]

Here, Elizabeth quoted her sister as saying “I’m not even sad that you’re moving away” and “It’s not even that big of a deal” in order to point out that Erica viewed the transition as easy and normal. Quoting another person verbatim in this manner is referred to as *direct reported speech*, which serves to personify a particular discursive meaning by referring to the speaker in question as its author (Baxter, 2011). However, with her confession that she was *pretending* to not be upset about Elizabeth’s move to college, Erica indirectly dismissed the discourse of moving apart as normal—as well as her sister’s assumption that the move was not difficult on her. Thus, rather than aligning with opposing discursive positions as Elizabeth thought, both sisters similarly viewed moving apart as a strange and difficult transition.

The discourse of moving apart as normal was also indirectly negated by Elizabeth as she recounted her experiences of moving away from her brother and sister. Even though it is relatively common for siblings to establish separate residences in adulthood, she viewed the idea of never living with her siblings again as anything but easy or normal. The fact that Elizabeth could not express her feelings in person and had to write her siblings letters also shows that she struggled with the transition; if moving apart from her brother and sister felt natural to her, she could have said a simple goodbye the morning she left. Along these lines, her comment that she “wasn’t going to say it that morning” indirectly negated the idea that this was an ordinary “goodbye.” By saying that she could not read the letter at school, Erica also implied that it was difficult to say goodbye and thus aligned with her sister’s discursive position. Thus, through their combined sense-making efforts, the sisters centered the discourse of moving apart as “weird” to construct meaning of their experience of transition.

In addition to focusing on the difficult emotions they experienced leading up to and during the actual move, many participants also indirectly refuted the moving apart as normal discourse by describing the strangeness of their sibling's absence in their daily lives in the weeks and months following their separation. For instance, sixteen year-old Laura described how different life at home has been since her older brother Ross left for college four months earlier:

Laura: Ross was the talker in our family. He filled a lot of the quietness so when he wasn't here it was really quiet around the house. He was gone a lot towards the end of summer, hanging out with friends and stuff, but [my parents and I] still didn't expect it to be so different when he actually moved. When we sat down at the dinner table it was quiet. No one really knew what to say. I don't know. There was more space on the couch. We used the word "weird" a lot when he wasn't home.

Ross: It was just weird and different, would you say, Laura?

Laura: Yeah. It wasn't bad or anything, it was just so different from what any of us were used to. [5: 88-95]

For Laura and her family, Ross leaving for college created noticeable changes at home that drew attention to his absence and how "different" their day-to-day lives were without him. Although she gave a "sideward glance" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 196) to the moving apart as normal discourse by implying that they should have anticipated the changes to some degree, Laura emphasized that the differences were not really apparent until he moved. In particular, her talk demonstrated that while families may expect various changes when a child or sibling leaves home, there are seemingly subtle differences—such as the recent

quietness at the dinner table and extra space on the couch—that can catch them off-guard and give them the sense that things are “not normal” at home. It is also interesting to note that when Ross chimed in to confirm his sister’s description of her experiences, Laura again gave an indirect nod to the discourse of moving apart as normal (“It wasn’t bad or anything”) but ultimately validated the alternative discursive position (“it was just so different from what any of us are used to”). Thus, through her emphasis on the unexpected and weird changes resulting from her brother’s move, Laura indirectly negated the discourse of moving apart as normal.

Tyler, 17, also discussed the void created when his sister Camille, 18, left home for college seven months prior to the interview. When asked what has been the most difficult aspect of living apart from her, he shared:

Tyler: Um, sometimes I'll just be, like, walking around and I'll, like, look in her room and I'll be like, "Whoa, it's empty."

Mother: [*In the background.*] You close the door.

Tyler: Yeah, and I'll shut the door because I don't want to trick myself anymore. Because sometimes it, like, messes with my mind. [*Pause.*] But yeah, like, I'll expect her to be there, just because she's always been there and then when she's not it's, like, "Whoa."

Interviewer: What do mean, like, whoa? Can you describe that a little bit more?

Camille: Like, whoa. It's, like, whoa. [*Laughing; teasing her brother.*]

Tyler: I don't know how to word it. Um, it's kind of, like, like, "Dang, she's not here. Like, "Man ..."

Interviewer: And you said you shut the door to “trick” yourself. What do you mean by that?

Tyler: Like, so that way I won't...I'll stop assuming that she's here. Like...because she's always been there. So my mind just automatically thinks that she's still here. But I shut the door so that I won't...I'll be, like, "Oh yeah, she's in college." So I won't miss her, yeah. And it works.

Interviewer: Did you know that? [*Directed to Camille.*]

Camille: Nuh-uh. He's goofy. Like, “whoa.” [18: 450-465]

For many younger siblings in the present study, seeing their older brother's or sister's empty bedroom was a strange experience that drove home the reality that their sibling had left home. As Tyler's talk revealed, coming to terms with his sister's absence at home was so difficult that he made a point to shut her bedroom door to remind himself that she was gone. Thus, rather than “automatically” thinking Camille was still at home because her bedroom door was open and then being disappointed by her absence, her closed door helped him “stop assuming that she's here.” In this sense, he avoided her empty bedroom in an attempt to make her absence seem less strange and to keep from missing her. Despite his indirect nod toward the discourse of moving apart as normal (“Oh yeah, she's in college”), Tyler primarily asserted that Camille's move out of the family home was a strange and difficult relationship transition.

By describing their sibling's absence as rather noticeable and almost jarring, many participants positioned the discourse of moving apart as “weird” as the dominant meaning in their talk. In other cases, however, siblings framed the transition from living together to living apart as “weird” or difficult simply because they did not expect to miss

seeing one another on a daily basis. For instance, while reflecting on the relational changes she has experienced since her older sister Haley, 18, moved to college, Layna, 13, shared:

We knew this was going to happen when one of us was going to go to college, but we didn't realize the loss until it actually happened. It's almost like I didn't think it would be that different because at home we just, like, stared at each other, we didn't really do anything that much. Now, we like take it seriously and text each other, because we realize that we're actually gone. [2: 433-437]

In stating that she and her sister “knew this was going to happen,” Layna indirectly referenced the viewpoint that it is normal and expected for a sibling to leave home for college. Further, with her comment that she “didn’t think it would be that different” because they just “stared at each other” when they lived together, she implied that she did not expect it to be a difficult transition. However, Layna immediately countered the idea that the separation was normal or easy by emphasizing the sense of loss she and Haley felt once they were faced with one another’s absence in their day-to-day lives. In realizing that being apart from her sister was different and challenging, Layna marginalized the discourse of moving apart as normal in her talk. Similarly, when asked to describe the biggest changes to their relationship during the transition, sisters Anna (18) and Essie (14) shared:

Anna: I mean probably that like, I don't know, I really do miss home and I've started to miss my sister and like, you know, along with everything else. And like before, I never would've thought...I was just like, “Oh my god, I just want to go to school already.” [*Laughs.*] But yeah, that's definitely been something...I didn't

expect to miss home that much, like miss our relationship really. So, yeah...I don't know, how about you?

Essie: I agree that I didn't expect to miss you really that much. I didn't expect to, like, miss your presence just next to the wall, like me yelling at you to be quiet. Like I didn't expect to miss that.

Anna: Yeah, I know when I surprised...when I came home for a weekend before Thanksgiving as a total surprise to my family, and Essie was like running to hug me, I was like, "What is going on?" [*Laughs.*]

Interviewer: Aw. That was surprising?

Anna: Yeah, yeah, because we were never like, you know...she's always like, "Don't hug me. Don't touch me." [*Laughs.*]

Interviewer: I see. Why were you so excited to see her, Essie?

Essie: Because I missed her. [16: 468-487]

Anna and Essie, who noted during their interview that they did not have a close relationship when they lived together, indirectly acknowledged the moving apart as normal discourse by implying that they thought Anna's move out of the family home would be a relatively easy and uneventful transition. However, the sisters asserted that being separated was more difficult than they anticipated, and both were surprised at how much they missed one another. In particular, Essie was surprised that she missed her sister's mere presence and yelling at her to be quiet. Anna similarly aligned her talk with the discourse of moving apart as "weird," referencing her sister's past behaviors ("Don't hug me") at the proximal already-spoken link to show how unexpected it was that Essie wanted to hug her when she came home. Their experiences suggest that the transition

from living together to living apart may be particularly unsettling for siblings who are not as close because they may not expect to be upset by the move and thus are not adequately prepared to cope with some of their feelings. Overall, siblings whose talk embodied hidden polemical interplay never explicitly referenced the discourse of moving apart as normal; rather, they negated this discursive position indirectly by emphasizing that the transition was weird, difficult, or otherwise problematic.

Competing Discourses: Certainty as Still Possible vs. Uncertainty as Unavoidable

The final discursive struggle present in the data was between the discourse of certainty as still possible and the discourse of uncertainty as unavoidable. In the next section, I provide an overview of these two opposing perspectives regarding (un)certainty.

Certainty as still possible. In siblings' relational talk about their experiences of moving apart, the discourse of certainty as still possible most often occurred in the form of proximal already-spoken and distal already-spoken discourses. One sibling pair, nineteen year-old twins Jessica and Maggie, evoked prior cultural and relational messages discounting uncertainty in an attempt to show that moving apart did not diminish their certainty about one another and their relationship. When asked how well they knew one another at this stage in their lives, they shared:

Jessica: My mom says we know each other as well as she knows herself.

Maggie: Yeah.

Interviewer: So there are no secrets between you two?

Maggie: I can't think of anything. Even not living together didn't make me feel like I know her any less. I think I still know literally almost everything about her.

Jessica: Yeah. I don't think I have a single secret from her. Being twins, there's just, like, so much history that it doesn't matter where she is or where I am. [14:307-313]

Through indirect reported speech (Baxter, 2011), Jessica first paraphrased a prior utterance from their mom about how well they knew one another, which positioned certainty as the dominant meaning in their relationship. Next, by asserting that she “still” knows “literally almost everything” about her sister, Maggie countered the implicit assumption that moving apart would hinder her certainty regarding her twin. Agreeing with her sister, Jessica also demonstrated an understanding of the cultural assumption that siblings—and twins in particular—should be emotionally close and know one another well. Moreover, by mentioning their rich, shared relational history, she further positioned the discourse of certainty as an established meaning that characterized their bond. As this conversational exchange between Jessica and Maggie captured, both prior messages emphasizing how well they knew one another (proximal already-spoken meanings) and cultural messages privileging certainty (distal already-spoken meanings) shaped siblings' perceptions that certainty was still possible after moving apart.

Uncertainty as unavoidable. In making sense of their (un)certainty stemming from the transition from living together to living apart for the first time, some siblings also expressed an understanding of an opposing perspective: uncertainty as unavoidable. This discourse, which competed with the discourse of certainty as still possible, also occurred at both the proximal already-spoken and distal already-spoken sites of the utterance chain. Throughout their interview, sisters Christine (18) and Jasmine (16) emphasized that the discourse of uncertainty featured prominently in their relationship,

despite Christine's efforts to connect with her sister. For instance, when asked how well she thought her older sister understood her, Jasmine responded:

Jasmine: Not at all.

Christine: I try. I ask her and she thinks that I'm judging her by asking her questions, but I'm really trying to figure out the things that go through her mind to make her say and do some of the things that she says and does.

Jasmine: I'm kinda mean at home but I'm a total different person around my, like, friends at school. And she doesn't really know that side of me and she thinks she does. She's always thought that she knows everything about me and she doesn't. Especially now that she's gone. [20: 524-533]

In this quote, Christine described her prior (mostly unsuccessful) attempts to understand her sister better, thereby revealing the discourse of certainty as unavoidable at the proximal already-spoken site of the utterance chain. Jasmine followed with the assertion that Christine does not know everything about her and is unaware of a particular "side" of her personhood, which reinforced her sister's perspective that achieving certainty has been difficult, if not impossible, throughout their relational past. Furthermore, Jasmine's comment that her sister does not know her well "especially now that she's gone" can be understood as a response to the distal already-spoken assumption that distance diminishes closeness and certainty between relational partners. For these sisters and several other siblings in the present study, reflecting on prior relational patterns and established cultural meanings surrounding (un)certainly contributed to their belief that experiencing uncertainty was an inevitable consequence of moving apart.

Interplay of Certainty as Still Possible vs. Uncertainty as Unavoidable

Amid cultural discourses that suggest distance hinders relational intimacy, participants attempted to make sense of how the transition impacted their ability to know their sibling and/or their relationship well. Participants' talk about their experiences of (un)certainty was largely polemic in nature, with the discourse of certainty as still possible and the discourse of certainty as unavoidable in competition with another for center-margin positioning. Overwhelmingly, siblings assigned centripetal dominance to the discourse of certainty as still possible and rejected the cultural assumption that distance inevitably makes it more difficult to know a person well. In some cases, however, siblings privileged the opposing view by acknowledging that some uncertainty was unavoidable due to the transition. Finally, although not prevalent in the present study, some siblings transformed the discursive struggle between the two competing meanings in the form of a discursive hybrid.

Polemical interplay: Stressing that they still know one another. Many participants countered the discourse of uncertainty as unavoidable by stressing that they “still” knew their sibling well despite the separation. Siblings Laura, 16, and Ross, 18, captured this theme in the following exchange:

Interviewer: How well would you say you know one another at this point in your lives?

Laura: Pretty well.

Ross: I'd definitely say pretty well. I don't know how else to say it but I know a lot of the things that have been happening in her life, her likes, her interests. Laura, do you feel the same way about me?

Laura: Yeah, I mean I don't think I could name every single thing about you but I pretty much know what you're into and what you're not into and your values and stuff.

Ross: At least up until move-in day.

Laura: Yeah.

Ross: Before move-in day we pretty much knew everything about each other and since then it's tapered off a little bit, but we definitely know a lot about each other still.

Interviewer: And why would you say it's "tapered off" a bit?

Ross: Well, just because one, we don't see each other and it's hard to have a conversation like that that's not face to face and also because like she said, we're really busy all the time. But again, really, it hasn't changed how much we know about each other too much. [5: 202-217]

By asserting that they know one another "pretty" well, Ross and Laura allowed for both competing perspectives regarding (un)certainty to be entertained in their talk.

Specifically, their tempered claims imply that while their relationship is mostly characterized by certainty, some uncertainty about one another or the relationship is possible. The siblings again evoked the discourse of uncertainty as unavoidable by stating that how well they know one another has "tapered off" since Ross moved to college.

However, both Ross and Laura emphasized that they "still" know the other person, which countered the unstated assumption that distance increases relational and partner uncertainty. Thus, although the siblings directly acknowledged both the discourse of certainty as still possible and the discourse of uncertainty as unavoidable throughout their

conversation, the former is ultimately given the centripetal position while the latter is dismissed. Sisters Dana, 19, and Zoe, 17, similarly positioned certainty as the dominant meaning in their relationship:

Dana: We don't really keep...we tell each other everything.

Zoe: Yeah, I mean, it's like—

Dana: -and, like, even right now we know each other's...I still probably know what she has on. She has on this hoodie with either some jeans or jogging pants and some gym shoes. And they probably either Jordans or Foams.

Zoe: I took my shoes off when I got in the house and they were Foams.

Dana: See? It's just like, you know like, and we learned each other's style, we learned each other's...like, if something in the house is messed up, I'll be like, "Oh Zoe did this." Just because of how it's done. And she be like, "Dana did this because..." We just know each other's habits and stuff.

Zoe: Yeah, like, or she's coming down the stairs, I know if it's her or my, my mom. Like, I know their walk. [15: 504-516]

Throughout their conversation, Dana and Zoe co-constructed a relational identity based on certainty by referencing past interactions at the proximal already-spoken level of the utterance chain that demonstrate how familiar they were with another's habits and mannerisms when they lived together. In light of the assumption that being apart might make it difficult to continue knowing these specific and intimate details about one another, the sisters emphasized that the transition has not hindered their certainty. In particular, Dana's comments that "*even* right now" and "I *still* probably know what she has on" served to counter the idea that she would not be able to guess what her sister is

wearing due to the distance (emphasis added). Thus, Dana and Zoe evoked the discourse of certainty as still possible in an attempt to reproduce their past relational identity in the present.

Siblings also privileged the view of certainty as still possible by emphasizing that being apart could not diminish the significant level of intimacy they had achieved through their shared experiences over the years. In other words, siblings expressed that by growing up side-by-side and sharing their lives for so long, they had developed a deep understanding of one another that was strong enough to maintain from a distance. Twins Oliver and Lillian, both 18, described how moving apart did not affect their ability to know one another well:

Oliver: I mean I think...I think we both know each other pretty well. Um, especially with last semester. We've gone through a lot together, especially recently, and I think that has just like, kept us in the loop. And especially over Christmas break, we hung out a lot as well. I think right now the short-term things—like maybe who we're talking to right now or something like that—we have to catch up to know. But the long-term things, we know each other so well. We know everything about each other, and also it helps the fact that we're twins. We've just spent our entire lives together, so...

Lillian: I would agree. I'd say that there's really not much that someone could tell me about Oliver that I wouldn't know. Like, besides like he said, the day-to-day things. But like, as a person, I feel like there's nothing someone could tell me that I'd be like, "That's not true." [21: 483-501]

Similar to many other siblings in the present study, Oliver stated that he and his sister knew one another “pretty” well, which alluded to both discursive possibilities; that is, that certainty is still possible and that some uncertainty might be unavoidable due to the transition. Accordingly, both siblings evoked the discourse of uncertainty as unavoidable by pointing out that being apart has limited their ability to know details about the other’s day-to-day life, but then voiced the opposing viewpoint by emphasizing that they still know “everything about each other” despite their recent separation. With both systems of meaning at play, Oliver emphasized that his shared experiences with his twin have helped them stay “in the loop,” thus positioning the discourse of certainty as still possible as the centripetal discourse and pushing the alternative view to the centrifugal margins. Lillian constructed a similar meaning of their present relational state, implying that the minor details about her brother’s daily life that she may not know are insignificant compared to her ability to know him as a person. Similarly, siblings Ashton (18) and Greg (15) discussed how Ashton’s move to college three months earlier did not impact their certainty about one another:

Greg: I think we know each other pretty well, because we were really close when she was here, and we're still pretty close now that she's away.

Ashton: Yeah.

Greg: And she’s been pretty good at, like, letting me know what's going on a lot of the time.

Ashton: Yeah. And I can “read” him (laughs).

Interviewer: You can?

Ashton: Yeah. I mean, we've grown up together our whole lives, and it's just been us two. So I'd say we know each other pretty well.

Interviewer: From a distance too?

Ashton: Yeah, I mean, obviously we don't talk as much as before, but I still know him and can, like, "read" him through text or whatever. [8: 412-423]

Both Ashton and Greg cited their shared history and the close bond they developed while living together in the family home as reasons why they were able to know one another well even though they were apart. Ashton also attributed her ability to "read" her brother to the fact that they grew up together and that "it's just been us two." When I introduced the cultural assumption that distance might impact how well a person can know a relational partner, she countered this viewpoint by saying that she can still "read" her brother through text. In so doing, she framed the belief that uncertainty is unavoidable when siblings move away from one another as invalid, and gave the discourse of certainty as still possible the centripetal position in her talk. Like many other sibling pairs in the present study, then, Ashton and Greg emphasized that the certainty that defined their relationship when they lived together was still present even though they were apart.

Polemical interplay: Framing uncertainty as inevitable. While most participants centered the discourse of certainty as still possible in their talk, there were a few instances of polemical interplay where the alternative discourse was given the centripetal position. For instance, when asked to describe any changes she has noticed since her younger sister moved to college, Amanda emphasized the discourse of uncertainty as unavoidable:

Amanda: Nothing surprising has really happened...well, except I think the one thing was you wearing a dress to a football game.

Katie: I mean, everyone wears dresses here to football games.

Amanda: But we don't know you like that...that's new. Like, that was weird. I was like, "Who are you?" Like, it makes sense that you would do different things in college, but it was weird to see you—

Katie: -I wore dresses for football games before I left, Amanda.

Amanda: Well, I didn't see it. [3: 752-758]

At first, Amanda honored the discourse of certainty as still possible (“nothing surprising has really happened”), but she immediately countered this perspective by pointing out something that *did* surprise her—Katie wearing a dress to a football game. Although Katie stressed that her behavior was not that strange or new, Amanda refuted her comments with the statement “but we don’t know you like that.” Furthermore, by noting that it “makes sense” that her sister would act differently in college, she implied that she views some uncertainty following her sister’s move as unavoidable. Thus, for Amanda and other siblings represented in this category, the distance hindered their ability to know their brother or sister as well as they did prior to the separation. Carson, 18, also discussed how he knew less about his sister Lexi, 16, since leaving home for college:

Carson: I think she keeps things from me sometimes, you know, she doesn't want me to worry or something. And so sometimes I'll find things out through the grapevine, be like, "Hey, sis. I heard about something." She's like, "Oh!" And I was like, "Yeah, oh!" It's like, "You didn't tell me on purpose." So, you know, it's not like it used to be when I was there, where she kind of knew I might know. But

I definitely think I know her like a good friend. You know, like, I definitely could tell her anything.

Interviewer: Lexi?

Lexi: Yeah, um, I would say about the same. Especially like, believe it or not, whether Carson wants to admit it or not, I know there are quite a few things that he doesn't tell me anymore, I just found out on my own. I just don't necessarily bug him about it as much as he attempts to bug me. But, yeah, I would say that we would know each other like good friends. [12: 855-867]

Carson's talk highlights the belief that it is difficult to maintain the same level of certainty about a person or a relationship after moving apart. He first referenced how he used to be able to keep up with details of his sister's life when they lived together (i.e., proximal already-spoken discourse), and then demonstrated how such certainty was no longer possible now that he left home. With her comment that there are things that Carson does not tell her "anymore," Lexi similarly gave the discourse of uncertainty as unavoidable the centripetal position in her talk. Thus, while both siblings insisted that they "know each other like good friends," they both acknowledged that moving apart has inevitably introduced some uncertainty into their relationship.

Discursive hybrid. Although most participants positioned the discourse of certainty as still possible and the discourse of uncertainty as unavoidable as opposing meanings, some siblings evaded discursive competition in their talk through the creation of a discursive hybrid. Hybridization is a type of discursive interplay wherein competing discourses retain their distinct and separate meanings but are no longer framed as oppositional, thus allowing for new meanings to emerge (Baxter, 2011). Accordingly,

rather than viewing certainty and uncertainty as oppositional meanings that canceled one another out, a few participants in the present study emphasized that being separated from their brother or sister and experiencing some uncertainty allowed them to gain new or different insights into their sibling's personality. For instance, when I asked Heidi, 18, how well she knew her younger brother Miles, 17, she responded:

Heidi: Pretty good. I mean, we've spent our entire lives together so I feel like I know him pretty well. Especially now that I've gone away I can see him sort of from the outside.

Miles: Yup.

Interviewer: What do you mean "from the outside"?

Heidi: Like, just seeing his profile and not really living with him. You know, I can see what the public sees. [6: 174-180]

As Heidi made sense of her recent separation from her brother, her words revealed a discursive hybrid in which the discourses of certainty and uncertainty were at play without competing against one another in a zero-sum manner. On one hand, she gave voice to the discourse of certainty as still possible by asserting that in addition to knowing Miles on a personal level through their shared experiences, she has also recently gained the "outsider" perspective that others see now that they moved apart. At the same time, by stating that she "just" sees his profile because she no longer lived with him, she demonstrated awareness that some uncertainty was unavoidable due to their separation. Rather than centering one discourse and marginalizing the other, then, Heidi viewed her newfound *uncertainty* regarding her brother (i.e., only having access to his public profile) as an opportunity to enhance her *certainty* about him (i.e., having access to a new side of

him that was not previously visible to her). Thus, the discourse of certainty as still possible and the discourse of uncertainty as unavoidable both retained their distinct meanings in Heidi's talk; however, their oppositional nature was dissolved in a discursive hybrid that created a new, noncompetitive meaning of her relational transition.

Research Question Four:

A Dialogue of Adult Sibling Relationships

In light of RDT's assumption that all relationships are constituted in communication, the purpose of the fourth research question was to explore how, if at all, emerging adult siblings communicatively constructed a dialogue of sibling relationships. In particular, the goal was to identify whether there are discursive struggles unique to sibling relationships that constitute what it means to be an adult sibling in U.S. culture. Thus, whereas the third research question sought to understand the competing discourses siblings evoked to construct meaning of their experiences related specifically to the transition from living together to living apart for the first time, this final exploration focused more broadly on how siblings make sense of their developing adult relationship. Two overarching discursive struggles were identified as central to how participants viewed adult sibling relationships: siblingship as a voluntary bond vs. siblingship as an obligatory commitment and siblings as a unit vs. siblings as separate individuals. I discuss these competing ideologies of the adult sibling bond in the following sections.

Siblingship as a Voluntary Bond vs. Siblingship as an Obligatory Commitment

As participants attempted to make sense of the shift into an adult sibling relationship, they discursively wrestled with whether their bond was maintained by choice or out of obligation. Carrying traces of both distal and proximal discourses, these competing views of siblingship mirror those Baxter (2010) identified as constituting

marital love in U.S. culture (i.e., marriage as a bond of commitment versus marriage as a bond of voluntary choice). Siblings primarily gave the discourse of siblingship as a voluntary bond the centripetal position and downplayed the idea that they were obligated to maintain a relationship with their brother or sister. This positioning of discourses was accomplished by siblings using the following discursive tactics: (a) stressing that they maintain their relationship by choice, and (b) constructing their relationship as a friendship.

Polemical interplay: We're choosing to still stay in contact. One way siblings privileged the view of siblingship as a voluntary bond was by stressing that they maintained their relationship by choice; that is, they stayed in touch because they wanted to and not because they felt a sense of obligation to do so. In this sense, both perspectives—siblingship as voluntary and siblingship as obligatory—were given voice and competed in a centripetal-centrifugal struggle, but the former discourse was ultimately centered over the latter. Throughout their interview, siblings Ross, 18, and Laura, 16, emphasized that they shared an extremely close bond and made an effort to talk on a regular basis since Ross left home four months earlier. When asked whether they felt obligated in any way to stay in touch, they responded:

Laura: I don't know, I'll always want to be close to Ross. I don't feel obligated to be close to him. I just want to be close with him.

Ross: I definitely feel like it's a choice. I feel like even after I leave college and I'm on my own, I definitely feel like I'd visit her when she's at college or maybe she'll come visit me for a weekend, something like that.

Laura: Yeah, definitely. [5: 239-244]

By asserting that they strived to stay close because they *wanted* to and not because they felt obligated, Ross and Laura directly refuted the discourse of siblingship as an obligatory commitment. Furthermore, they agreed that maintaining their relationship will continue to be a matter of personal choice as they navigate various changes and transitions in the coming years. In this way, Ross and Laura framed their current relational state—as well as their anticipated adult sibling relationship—within the discourse of siblingship as a voluntary bond. Siblings Ashley, 20, and Jonathan, 18, also negated the idea that they felt obligated to stay in touch with one another:

Ashley: I think we both genuinely care, like, how one another is doing when we haven't talked like for a while and just in general really want to be a part of each other's lives.

Jonathan: Yeah, I definitely think so. There hasn't been any time...well I guess there's definitely been times where we've been forced to do stupid stuff, but...I mean, I definitely think it's mostly based on the fact that we want to stay in touch and know how the other is doing and stuff.

Ashley: Oh yeah I agree.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. So no sense of obligation or anything, since you've been apart?

Jonathan: No, not that I know of...

Ashley: No, not that I think of anyway. I mean, I do genuinely want to know, like, how he's doing if we haven't talked in a while. [4: 705-720]

Similar to Ashley and Jonathan, many participants expressed that they voluntarily maintained their sibling bond because they “genuinely” cared about how their brother or

sister was doing. Thus, rather than feeling as if it was their responsibility to check in, they insisted that they stayed in touch out of a sincere interest in their sibling's welfare.

However, with his comment that he and his sister have been "forced to do stupid stuff" at times, Jonathan implied that obligation *has* played a role in their relationship in the past (proximal already-spoken discourse) and may still impact their current relational state.

Several other participants echoed the idea that, even after moving apart and transitioning into a more adult relationship, maintaining ties with siblings was not always a matter of choice. For instance, when asked whether his relationship with his younger sister Lexi had become more voluntary since leaving home three months earlier, Carson responded:

Well I mean, I guess at a level, it's voluntary. You know, it's like I could not come home except for on breaks when I'm forced to, you know, move out of my dorms...but I mean it's not much of a choice to me on the inside because I don't know what I would do without seeing her often, you know? There's times like last week, when I knew I was coming [home], I was anticipating. I was like, "Oh, just 2 more days until I get to go home," you know? And any time I start to really think back, it's like, you know, Thanksgiving break is coming up. Another month. I mean it's even a month away, and I'm still anticipating, it's like I get to go home and I get to spend time with Lexi, I get to spend time with my family.

[12: 637-643]

In this quote, Carson acknowledged his freedom to decide the amount of contact he had with his sister, yet was hesitant to describe his relationship with her as entirely voluntary.

In particular, he stated that maintaining a connection with Lexi was "not much of choice," due to what he alluded to as an innate, and perhaps involuntary, desire to see her

often. However, although Carson hinted that his relationship with his sister was influenced by a sense of obligation, he ultimately aligned his talk with the discourse of siblingship as a voluntary bond. Rather than only seeing Lexi when he was “forced” to come home, he voluntarily made frequent trips back to hang out with her. Furthermore, he repeatedly emphasized how excited he was to see his sister, which implied that he chose to spend time with her because he enjoyed it and not because he felt obligated.

Although Carson assigned centripetal dominance to the discourse of siblingship as a voluntary bond, he did not completely silence the alternative perspective as he constructed meaning of his changing relationship with his sister. Embedded in his words was the idea that, for some siblings, an instinctive sense of obligation may persist in adulthood even when they technically have a choice regarding whether and how often they interact. When asked to describe what they hoped for their adult sibling bond, sisters Anna (18) and Essie (14) expressed a similar sentiment:

Anna: Well, I hope that we can talk. I mean, I know my mom calls her sisters, like, every day and is best friends with them. They live like ten minutes away and stuff. That'd be cool to just like, you know, be that close. And, like, everyone says your sister will become your best friend and stuff and...you know. I don't know, that's what I hope.

Essie: Yeah, definitely, I agree with that too. I mean, I think it'd be really nice to have someone like you're, like, related to that you're really close with.

Anna: Yeah, a person that you know will always be in your life, like you can't get rid of them. [*Laughs.*] [16: 395-403]

Although the sisters appeared to have a genuine and voluntary desire to remain close throughout adulthood, their words simultaneously granted legitimacy to the discourse of siblingship as an obligatory bond. Specifically, Anna constructed her vision of their adult sibling relationship based on the distal already-spoken discourse that siblings—and sisters in particular—should be emotionally close (“everyone says your sister will become your best friend”), an expectation that was modeled and reinforced by their mom’s closeness with her sisters. Essie also implied that her desire to maintain a strong bond with Anna was, at least to some degree, motivated by the fact that they were related and therefore had little choice but to remain involved in one another’s lives. With her comment that you “you can’t get rid of” siblings, Anna again called on the discourse of siblingship as an obligatory commitment and revealed that her longing for closeness was also influenced by her awareness of the permanence of their bond. Thus, although the sisters emphasized that they genuinely wanted to remain close, they simultaneously recognized that they did not maintain their relationship entirely by choice. In this sense, the sisters’ talk embodied direct interplay whereby both the discourse of siblingship as voluntary and the discourse of siblingship as an obligation were validated, but neither discursive position was pushed to the centrifugal margins. Unlike Anna and Essie, however, most siblings in the present study downplayed the obligatory nature of their bond and instead privileged the idea that they were free to interact on their own terms. Along with stressing that they maintained their relationships by choice, participants also centered the discourse of siblingship as a voluntary bond by constructing their relationship as friendship.

Polemical interplay: It's becoming more of a friendship thing. By describing their sibling relationships as a friendship, many participants in the present study dismissed the idea that they were obligated to stay in touch and implied that they maintained a connection voluntarily as friends. For example, when asked to describe the most positive change in their relationship since moving apart, siblings Tyler (17) and Camille (18) stated:

Tyler: Um, I'm not very good with words as you can tell, but it's kind of like we can be more, like, friends I guess, instead of just being like, "Yeah, that's my sister."

Interviewer: You said you're not good with words, but that's really interesting that you said you guys are like friends. Can you tell more about that? What makes it more of a friendship now?

Tyler: Um, it's not as much, like, that I *have* to deal with her.

Camille: It's like you don't see somebody every day so it—

Tyler: -it's like I choose to deal with her, like a friend.

Camille: Right. Yeah, so it's like we choose to be friends with each other now.

[18: 679-702]

As Tyler and Camille described, not being forced to “deal” with one another every day gave them a new outlook on their sibling relationship. Specifically, rather than viewing one another as a sibling they *had* to stay in touch in with, they now saw themselves as friends who were free to choose to maintain a connection. Siblings Ashton, 18, and Greg, 15, also stated that their relationship evolved into a voluntary friendship as they got older and moved apart:

Ashton: I'd say as we've gotten older it's become more of a friendship thing.

When we were younger it was more like just brother sister, like arguing more. I mean, not necessarily all the time, but like, you know, like little kids things like who got to push the elevator button and stuff.

Interviewer: Yeah. [*Laughs.*]

Ashton: But I'd say now we are becoming more of like siblings and friends, I guess.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. What makes it like taking on those friendship qualities? What makes it more of a friendship?

Ashton: I'd say respecting each other, too, and valuing each other.

Greg: You know that each other's there for one another. And we enjoy spending now together more now, too.

Ashton: Yeah. And I feel like that's kinda where the friendship thing comes in, too. Because, um, with siblings it's is more of—not necessarily forced—but you're always together. But friendship's more of a choice. And so I kind of feel like that's why it's becoming more of a friendship thing, because we're choosing to still stay in contact and stuff. [8: 428-437]

Similar to Camille and Tyler, Ashton and Greg negated the discourse of siblingship as an obligatory commitment by portraying their relationship as friendship. In contrast to the forced, involuntary status often attributed to sibling relationships, they emphasized that their bond now resembled more of a friendship because it was based on respect, genuine enjoyment of one another's company, and a voluntary commitment to stay in contact. Ashton also noted that, despite no longer living together, she and Greg chose to *still* stay

in touch, which countered the implicit assumption that they would not voluntarily make the effort to interact once they were no longer forced to do so in the family home. In this sense, moving away from one another for the first time allowed Ashton and Greg to view their relationship less as an obligatory commitment and more as a friendship that they chose to maintain.

Likening their relationship to a friendship was a discursive tactic that allowed siblings to make sense of their newfound freedom to maintain ties on their own terms, which was at odds with the “forced” interactions that characterized their bond when they lived together. Thus, as demonstrated by the above exemplars, many participants emphasized that the transition to adulthood prompted a shift from viewing their brother or sister as merely a sibling to viewing him or her as a friend. Whereas these siblings asserted that their relationship only began to take on friendship-like qualities after they moved apart, others in the sample implied that they had always considered their sibling to be one of their best friends. By drawing attention to the strong and intimate foundation of their sibling bonds, participants attempted to justify why their desire to maintain a connection with their brothers and sisters was stronger than their commitment to their friendships. Siblings in this category, which I discuss below, described their sibling relationships as a “step above” friendship.

Hidden polemical interplay: A step above friendship. By constructing their relationship as more meaningful than the average friendship, some participants indirectly refuted the unspoken assumption that siblings might feel a sense of obligation to maintain their relationships. Thus, through hidden polemical interplay, these siblings privileged the discourse of siblingship as a voluntary bond without referencing the opposing view

directly in their talk. A conversation between twins Oliver and Lillian, both 18, illustrated this theme:

Oliver: I would say we're the type of, like, best friends that even if we go a really long time without talking, nothing really changes obviously. I'm still here, she's still there. So it's just...we don't have to talk every single day to, I guess, really make it work. It's like a step above a friendship.

Lillian: Yeah, I would say like, the main difference between our friendship and like, a regular friendship, is you don't have to put forth effort every day to know they still care. Like, you know, I know he'll always be there for me, I'll always be there for him. And it's just like, I guess a deep—it's hard to explain—but it's like a deeper level of friendship. You have your close friends you can tell anything, but I can literally tell him *anything*, and I just feel like it's a lot deeper of a relationship that you just can't have with anyone else, because we have known each other for, well I guess tomorrow will be 19 years, so...(laughs)

Interviewer: Is it your birthday tomorrow?

Oliver: Yeah! (laughs)

Lillian: Yeah.

Interviewer: Awww, happy birthday!

Oliver: Thank you.

Lillian: Thanks.

Interviewer: Aww, that's really nice. So then, you were kind of comparing your relationship to a friendship. Can you explain that more?

Lillian: Yeah, I would say you can't really like...I don't know, I feel like you couldn't have a friendship with anyone else that's as deep. People are like, "What's it like to have a twin?" And it's like a best friend that you know who is always there. They won't leave you. Yeah, you fight. But at the end of the day, you know that you're always going to be better and get over whatever it is. No matter how much we fight, no matter what we say to each other, we just know that we will always be there for each other because that's just a given understanding between us. [21: 400-440]

Here, Oliver and Lillian repeatedly described their relationship as stronger and more meaningful than a “regular” friendship to drive home the point that their bond was able to withstand anything and that they would always be there for one another. At no point did they state that they felt obligated to stay in contact; in fact, Oliver emphasized that they did not need to talk “every single day” to remain close, thus implying that they felt comfortable maintaining a connection on their own terms. Lillian expressed a similar sentiment, stating that it was a “given understanding” that they would always be there for one another no matter what happened. Although the discourse of siblingship as an obligatory commitment was never challenged explicitly, the twins negated it indirectly by portraying their relationship as an extremely close friendship that they wanted to maintain. Likewise, when asked why it was important to stay in touch with one another, Mason (19) and William (16) responded:

Mason: I'd say it's important for us to maintain our relationship because at the end of the day friends are going to come and go whether I'm here, there, wherever I'm working or whatever. Friends are going to come and go but I know at the end of

the day my brother is always going to be someone that's in my life. I mean, I've had great friends from high school. It's an all guy high school and I made great friendships there I know I'm going to have for the rest of my life. But the big thing with brotherhood, and it's totally true...like some of my best friends are all kids from back home, but I know that I won't stay close with all of those guys my entire life. I mean, I know I will stay close to some of them but I know at the end of the day my best friend is always going to be my brother.

William: Yeah, I would also say it's really important to maintain the relationship because friends come and go but with siblings...when you're not together your sibling relationship shouldn't really be distant since you've known each other your whole life. I wouldn't want the fact that we're gone from each other to separate that relationship.

Mason: And at the end of the day, I mean, obviously you want your parents to live forever but that's not ... I mean, nobody lives forever. So at the end of the day, the bottom line is it's going to be myself and William and Cassie continuing our family. Your family is still close and obviously you want ... I want to be, when I'm married with three kids or whatever like my parents are, I want to be able to sit at a Thanksgiving table with my brother and sister, if geography allows it. [13: 450-473]

In this excerpt, Mason and William highlighted the sometimes tenuous and fleeting connections between friends to demonstrate that the stability and significance of their bond transcended that of a friendship. They both stressed that they cannot count on their friendships to survive the passage of time in the same way they can rely on their sibling

relationship to last, drawing attention to the idea that sibling ties are not as easily dissolved as other, more voluntary relationships. Along these lines, William noted that while “friends come and go,” siblings are expected to maintain a close relationship across distance due to the long and intimate history they share. Although he subtly acknowledged the cultural expectation for siblings to endure certain challenges and remain close, his insistence that he “wouldn’t *want*” the distance to hinder their bond negated the idea that his commitment to his brother was motivated by a sense of obligation (emphasis added). Likewise, as Mason constructed a vision of how his sibling relationships will evolve throughout adulthood, he stressed that he *wanted* to spend Thanksgiving with his brother and sister and still be close with them after their parents were gone.

Although participation in family rituals is often viewed as an obligation, Mason’s hope to share future Thanksgivings with his siblings demonstrated that adult sibling relationships are essentially maintained voluntarily. Rituals, by nature, are enacted by choice. As Baxter and Braithwaite (2006) noted, families may hold expectations for attendance at a dinner or a gathering, but members can ultimately choose whether and how to participate. Rituals likely become especially voluntarily for siblings during adulthood once they are free to maintain their relationships on their own terms and are no longer bound together by their parents and/or a shared living space. Thus, the fact that Mason hoped to spend the holidays with his siblings—even when he could choose not to—showed that his commitment stemmed not from a perceived obligation to stay in contact, but from a genuine desire to remain close with his brother and sister. Overall, by pointing out the expected longevity and intimacy of sibling relationships, participants

framed their bond as superior to—and therefore more important to maintain—than any friendship.

Siblings as Separate Individuals vs. Siblings as a Unit

The second discursive struggle that emerged as siblings constructed meaning of their adult sibling relationships was rooted in issues of identity. Specifically, participants wavered between discourses honoring their identity as part of a sibling unit and discourses honoring their identity as a unique and independent individual. Although some expressed nostalgia for their old relational identity in which they were viewed as a sibling pair, most participants acknowledged that the transition to adulthood allowed them and their siblings to grow as separate individuals. Siblings framed their individual and relational identities within a discourse of individualism in the following two ways: (a) by highlighting their emerging individuality, and (b) by emphasizing their growing independence from their sibling.

We've both grown as our own person. For many participants in the present study, moving away from a sibling for the first time provided an opportunity to cultivate their own, unique identity separate from their relational identity as a brother or a sister. Whereas they were accustomed to others treating them as a unit while growing up, and often viewed themselves that way as well, these siblings began to see one another as separate individuals as they transitioned into adulthood. For instance, when reflecting on how their relationship changed in the four months since they moved apart, Ross, 18, and his sister Laura, 16, expressed:

Ross: I feel like we've both grown as our own person now. I feel like before we were “Ross and Laura” and now I'm “Ross” and she's “Laura,” like a separate kind of thing.

Laura: Yeah, at church I was known as Ross's little...or at school I was always “Ross's little sister” but now I'm just my own person. I totally agree with that,
Ross. [5: 125-130]

Here, a discursive struggle emerged at the proximal already-spoken site of the utterance chain as the siblings positioned their past relational meaning system in direct competition with their relationship's new meaning in the present. In the past, their relationship was defined by a discourse of community in which their relational identity as siblings “Ross and Laura” was privileged over their identity as separate individuals. Their recent separation, however, allowed the siblings to grow separately from one another, thus prompting them to construct a new relational meaning system that honored their separate and unique identities. Sisters Christine, 18, and Jasmine, 16, described a similar relational change:

Christine: We went through everything together. And we would fight in our room and stuff, but it was like us against everyone else. So in a really weird way she's like my best friend that I fight with every single day. I could fight with her about anything but I love her for everything, so...

Jasmine: We've always been a package deal.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. What do you mean by that?

Jasmine: Um, like she said, I've never been apart from her for more than like a couple of weeks in summer. Everywhere we went we were together. Like, we've

been separated from our big brother and our little sisters but we have always been together and everyone, when they refer to us they refer to us as “the girls” because we're always together-

Christine: -even when we were babies.

Jasmine: Now she's in college and she lives like 12 hours away and I'm trying to, like...having to go through high school without her, without anybody guiding me.

Christine: I feel like that's the worst part, is like we didn't go to high school as “the girls.” And that was, like, the beginning of us being separated. And it will probably just continue like that. [21: 174-194]

Whereas Ross and Laura embraced their emerging individuality, Christine and Jasmine seemed saddened by the loss of their relational identity as a cohesive sibling pair.

Christine’s comment that “it was like us against everyone else” showed that the sisters identified as a unit while they were growing up, and Jasmine agreed by asserting that they have “always been a package deal.” The sisters also noted that their family members have always referred to them as “the girls,” a label that they have willingly embraced and were reluctant to let go. However, despite their preference for their past relational meaning system, both Christine and Jasmine were aware of their growing autonomy from one another and the possibility that their identity as “the girls” may continue to fade as they navigated various transitions throughout adulthood.

Brothers Mason, 19, and William, 16, experienced a similar relational change when Mason graduated from their high school and moved to college. The brothers described how this transition impacted their relationship:

Mason: William is well-known [in high school] because...especially as a senior I was very involved in a lot of different things. All the teachers knew me, I was on student government, everyone knew who I was. And so people knew William's last name and put two and two together. So he's told me before that he kind of likes how everyone would say, "Oh, you're Mason's little brother." And-

William: -That reminds me, Mr. Miller messed me up with you today.

Mason: He called you "Mason"?

William: Yeah.

Mason: That's funny. So there's, like, another example of the teachers seeing him and associating me with him. I mean, William has been in his class for four months now and he called him "Mason" today. And I never even had him. He was never even my teacher. He just...he knew me. He was involved in student government but he...I never even had him as a teacher and he called William "Mason" so it's the type of thing that I was like a well-known kid on campus, and so now everyone will recognize the name. But he also now has kind of been building his own thing because he's a sophomore and the freshman class now—the class below him—has no idea who I am. And he's now the only "Foley" there so he's being able to kind of build his own name which is kind of cool.

William: Well, with the upper class I still a lot feel like I'm Mason's younger brother because I can say, "I'm a Foley kid" or somebody else will say, "He's Foley's brother." And then they'll immediately know. [13: 278-311]

In this conversational exchange, both past and present relational meanings were at play as the brothers struggled to make sense of their relationship's changing identity. At first,

Mason referenced their past relational meaning system by describing how, when they both attended the same high school, William was often recognized by others as “a Foley kid” or “Mason’s little brother” rather than as an individual in his own right. Although he acknowledged that some people continued to view them as a unit, he then asserted that William has been able to “build his own name” now that he was the only Foley brother at their high school. Thus, while Mason granted some legitimacy to their past meaning system (i.e., the discourse of siblings as a unit), he alluded to a new relational identity that privileged the perspective of individualism (i.e., the discourse of siblings as separate individuals). However, with his comment that he felt like the upperclassmen still viewed him as “Mason’s younger brother,” William countered the idea that he had completely developed his own identity separate from Mason.

The fact that the brothers held different views of their relationship’s identity suggests that siblings may not always make sense of their experiences of relational change and transition in the same way. Mason talked about his high school days fondly and appeared proud that others associated his brother with him, but he also viewed their separation as a “cool” opportunity for William to shed his identity as “Mason’s little brother” and grow as his own person. On the other hand, because his teachers and friends still associated him with Mason on a daily basis, William was reluctant to embrace his brother’s perspective and recognize his growing independence from their relationship. The opposing relational meanings that the brothers constructed are likely informed by their different vantage points at this stage in their lives. While Mason was enmeshed in a new environment where he was not constantly viewed as part of a sibling unit, William was still surrounded by messages reinforcing his identity as one of the Foley brothers. It

makes sense, then, that William dismissed the idea that he and Mason are no longer defined by their connection to one another, and attempted to reproduce past relational meaning systems as he constructed meaning of their relationship in the present. Along with describing how the separation helped them develop their own identity separate from their sibling, participants also expressed that they became more independent after moving away from their brother or sister.

I didn't know I could do that on my own. Several participants in the present study highlighted their growing independence from their sibling and their relationship, thus supporting the view that siblings begin to focus more on their own identity development and self-interests in adulthood. Nineteen year-old twins Jessica and Maggie captured this perspective as they described how their relationship changed since moving apart for the first time:

Jessica: I've never been, like, independent because I've always had her, so I came here with zero friends. And so I met a ton of people and I didn't know I could I do that on my own, without her, because we've always...like whenever she meets a friend, then we're both friends, and...yeah. It's bad. Oh man.

Maggie: Yeah, I think that's the main thing that's changed. Just like doing our own thing, and...

Jessica: Yeah, like even going to the grocery store. I would never go by myself at home, and now I enjoy going by myself.

Maggie: Yeah.

Jessica: Just little things like that. I just became a lot more of an individual. [14: 319-331]

In contrast to the mutual dependence that characterized their bond throughout childhood and adolescence, Jessica and Maggie now valued their ability to experience life and meet new people on their own. While they clearly viewed themselves as a unit in the past, being separated for the first time gave them a new perspective about their relationship and their own, unique identities—as indicated by Jessica’s comment that she did not know she could make friends without her sister. Maggie validated the new relational meaning her sister constructed, stating that the “main thing that’s changed” was their ability to do their “own thing.” Through this interaction, the twins framed their growing independence from one another as a positive relational change that has allowed them to grow separately as individuals.

In many cases, participants expressed that they became more independent after they moved away from their sibling not out of a desire for autonomy, but out of necessity. For instance, sixteen year-old Sam described his struggle to become more independent after his eighteen year-old sister Addie moved to college:

Sam: It was great being a freshman and a sophomore with her there. Having a sister that was an upperclassman was awesome because she always taught me, like, what to do, what not to do, who to be friends with. And...yeah, she always had my back in school and taught me a lot.

Interviewer: So it sounds like you were close in high school?

Addie: Yes.

Interviewer: So then tell me a little bit about leading up to the move, the end of Addie’s senior year. You knew it was coming. Was it something you talked about, or was it just something you thought about? What was that like?

Sam: Um, we talked about it a lot, but, um, I was prepared for it, and I knew it was going to happen. So, I mean it was...when Addie was a senior in high school last year, she started to like, um, be a lot more responsible for herself and focusing on her individual stuff, so I started getting used to it, and, you know, I'm doing my own thing. So yeah, it was sad seeing her go away, but we still talk a lot, so it's not...it's not too bad. [10: 47-62]

Sam's words revealed a discursive struggle between two competing relational meanings: the cohesiveness that defined his relationship with his sister during high school and their emerging independence from one another that shaped their current relational state.

Although he clearly missed the attention Addie gave him and their relationship before she moved to college, he asserted that he has accepted her greater focus on self-interests ("I started getting used to it") and was establishing his own independence ("I'm doing my own thing"). Thus, for Sam and many other siblings in the present study, the discourse of siblings as separate individuals emerged as a dominant meaning system that defined their relationship during the transition to adulthood—even if some aspects of their past relational identity lingered.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Chapter 5 begins with a detailed description of the findings for each research question. As each main theme is explored, I draw from and make connections to relevant research in order to emphasize the implications offered by the present study's findings. Next, I demonstrate how these findings extend existing literature on relational dialectics theory and sibling communication, as well as how they make important contributions in terms of method and methodology. Practical implications are then explored, followed by a discussion of the present study's strengths and limitations. Finally, I propose directions for future research and offer concluding thoughts.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of the present study was to explore siblings' lived experiences of moving away from a brother or a sister for the first time, as well as to understand how they communicatively make sense of their changing relationship during this transition. In pursuit of these goals, the following research questions were explored: (RQ1): How do siblings describe the experience of moving away from one another for the first time? (RQ2): What changes to their relationship, if any, do siblings describe during this transition? (RQ2a): How, if at all, do siblings describe recentering their relationship after they move apart for the first time? (RQ3): What competing discourses, if any, animate siblings' talk about moving away from one another for the first time, and what meanings are constructed in their interplay? (RQ4): How, if at all, do emerging adult siblings construct a dialogue of sibling relationships? Below, I summarize and discuss each of these research question's main findings in light of previous literature.

Siblings' Lived Experiences of Moving Apart

The first research question sought to understand the essential essence of siblings' experiences of moving away from a brother or sister for the first time. Three primary themes emerged from siblings' communication about their lived experiences of this transition. First, they expressed that the reality of being separated from their sibling for the first time did not "sink in" right away. Second, siblings described the experience of moving apart as strange or "weird." Third, siblings revealed that it was difficult to be separated from their brother or sister, with some experiencing feelings of sadness.

As a whole, RQ1's findings support the growing body of research showing that the transition from living together to living apart for the first time is a significant life event for siblings (e.g., Conger & Little, 2010; Lindell et al., 2013; Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2011). Nearly all siblings in the present study expressed that moving apart from a brother or a sister disrupted their day-to-day lives in some way and required ongoing adjustment and mental processing. Given that many siblings spend more time with one another than anyone else during their early years and essentially grow up side-by-side (Fitzpatrick & Badzinski, 1994; Sanders, 2004), it makes sense that not living together for the first time in their lives would be a strange, emotion-evoking experience. Being separated for the first time was an especially difficult adjustment for siblings who shared a close bond, as illustrated by William's (16) comment about his older brother Mason's (19) recent move to college: "It's just kind of sad knowing that someone that you are so close to is going to be gone for a long time and you won't get to see them every day, you won't get to hang out with them." Like William, many other siblings described the experience of moving apart as sad or challenging because they sensed that

it threatened the closeness of their bond and their ability to sustain their desired relational state.

It is important to note, however, that participants who were not particularly close to their siblings prior to the move also described the transition as difficult to process, challenging, or weird. For instance, Essie (14)—who did not share a close relationship with her older sister Anna (18) while they lived together—described how she felt about Anna leaving home: “I knew that it was gonna be kinda sad, and I don't know, that made me kind of like realize how much I wished we had spent more time together...” For siblings who remain emotionally distant throughout childhood and adolescence, the experience of moving apart for the first time may cause them to regret that they did not make more of an effort to spend time together and develop a closer bond when they lived down the hall from one another. Although Conger and Little (2010) speculated that siblings who share close and supportive bonds would be the most upset by a sibling's departure from home, Essie's words suggest that those who struggle to get along or who do not foster a strong connection may be just as—if not more—likely to experience a sense of loss during the transition. For some siblings, these feelings may be fleeting and thus not result in any positive relational changes; for others, though, such feelings of loss and regret may motivate them to establish a closer connection. However, given that most participants described their sibling relationships as close, the findings from the present study offer little insight into what the experience of moving apart is like for siblings with weaker ties. Thus, future researchers should further explore whether siblings with detached, unsupportive, or conflictual relationships commonly describe a sense of loss

after they move apart for the first time, and how, if at all, their sense-making processes impact the quality of their bond during the transition.

In sum, the findings from RQ1 highlight the importance of studying how siblings describe and make sense of their experiences when they move away from one another for the first time. Based on the portrait of emerging adulthood circulating throughout the scholarly community and popular culture (e.g., Arnett, 2006; Arnett & Fishel, 2013), it seems that many young adults would be too self-focused to give much thought to their sibling relationships during the transition out of the family home. The majority of the siblings in the present study, however, described moving away from a brother or sister for the first time as a significant experience that held meaning for both their own lives and their sibling relationships. Often, participants expressed interest in and concern for their siblings while simultaneously conveying excitement about leaving home, establishing independence from their families, and embarking on new adventures at college. Thus, in addition to engaging in the self-focused behaviors typically associated with leaving home, participants also spent considerable time processing what this transition meant for their sibling relationships. These findings suggest, then, that negotiating ties with siblings may be an additional task of emerging adulthood that warrants continued scholarly attention.

Siblings' Lived Experiences of Relational Change

The purpose of the second research question was to explore what changes to their relationships siblings experience during the transition from living together to living apart for the first time. Siblings' descriptions of how the transition impacted their bond revealed two main thematic categories: relational changes and communication changes.

First, in terms of relational changes, many siblings indicated that being separated strengthened their bond because it allowed them to develop a greater appreciation for their relationship and because it led to a decline in conflict. Furthermore, siblings expressed that the transition disrupted the predictability of their bond, thus requiring them to adjust to life without a constant companion. Second, participants expressed that moving apart created changes in the frequency and quality of their communication with their siblings. The main communication changes they described were a decline in contact, the fact that it took more effort to stay in touch, and improved communication. In the following sections, each of these themes are discussed in turn.

Relational changes. The most common relational change described by participants was that moving away from their brother or sister helped them develop a stronger bond. This theme is consistent with earlier research demonstrating that the relationships between siblings often improve during emerging adulthood once they move apart (e.g., Milvesky & Heerwagen, 2013; Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2011). In particular, the tendency for participants to report that they argued with their brothers and sisters less often than they did while living together suggests that siblings likely benefit from the space and freedom they experience after they move away from one another. For instance, fifteen year-old Greg stated that he and his eighteen year-old sister Ashton “found more to argue about” when they saw one another every day, but had fewer reasons to fight now that Ashton had left home and moved to college. Similarly, research has shown that personal domain invasions, such as going into one another’s room or borrowing an item without asking, are a source of frequent conflict between adolescent siblings (Campion-Barr & Smetana, 2010). However, once siblings no longer live

together, the potential for such invasions of personal territory—and the arguments that come with them—likely diminishes.

Along with fewer arguments, siblings also expressed that moving apart resulted in a stronger bond because it allowed them to develop a greater appreciation for one another and their relationship. Because siblings who live together while growing up generally have no choice but to interact and, for the most part, cannot “get rid” of one another, they may not fully value their relationship and the time they spend together. Accordingly, several participants in the present study reported that they took their siblings for granted when they lived together and did not realize how much they would miss them after they moved apart. A small number of participants also expressed that, because it was nearly impossible to avoid their siblings at home, they sometimes viewed interactions with them as a burden or an annoyance; however, being freed from these forced, daily interactions helped them develop a more positive view of their sibling and their bond. These findings suggest that moving apart may relieve siblings of some of the frustrating aspects of their relationship, thereby giving them the clarity to realize how much they truly appreciate their brother or sister.

The concept of *idealization* may offer an additional explanation for participants’ likelihood to cast their relationship, as well as their siblings, in a positive light following their separation. Generally studied in romantic relationships, idealization is the tendency for individuals to hold an unrealistically positive view of their partner and their relationship (Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996; Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Research has shown that, compared to proximal couples, long distance dating partners are especially prone to engage in such idealistic distortion because they can focus on the positive

aspects of one another and their relationship without being exposed to or reminded of the day-to-day hassles of relating (Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1990). In a similar sense, siblings may develop a distorted or overly optimistic vision of their relationship once they are free from the daily annoyances that come with living together. Suggesting that idealization may have played a role in the present study's findings is not meant to diminish participants' assertions that their sibling relationships had, in fact, improved since moving apart. In emphasizing the positive relational changes associated with their separation, however, some siblings perhaps overlooked unresolved issues or ignored the possibility that certain annoyances may resurface over time. In future work, then, communication scholars should investigate how the concept of idealization influences siblings' perspectives of their relationships when they move away from one another for the first time.

In addition to focusing on the ways moving apart strengthened their sibling ties, participants also expressed that the transition disrupted the nature of their relationships. Siblings predominantly described this disruption as losing a constant companion they were accustomed to hanging out with whenever they wanted. Specifically, siblings experienced a change from daily face-to-face contact and spending time together on a regular basis to negotiating contact and attempting to maintain certain rituals from a distance. These results demonstrate that being separated for the first time threatens the predictability of siblings' bonds and prompts changes in how they maintain their relationships with one another.

Changes in rituals were also a primary concern for many siblings in the present study. In particular, participants emphasized that moving apart from siblings made it

difficult—and in some cases impossible—to maintain rituals such as weekly shopping trips, hanging out in one another’s bedrooms, and watching favorite TV shows together. For instance, when asked what changed the most since moving away from her thirteen year-old sister Layna, nineteen year-old Haley stated: “I think...not being able to do activities together. She used to, like, paint my nails, and we'd sit and watch TV together.” Although painting nails and watching TV together may seem like mundane or insignificant activities, they clearly held meaning for Haley and Layna’s relationship. According to Baxter and Braithwaite (2006), simple routines become rituals when they symbolize something important to family members, such as togetherness or some aspect of their relational identity. Accordingly, many sibling pairs expressed that engaging in certain activities together represented not only their closeness and shared interests, but the very fabric of their siblinghood. In this sense, having to abandon or alter the rituals they established throughout childhood and adolescence was a significant relational change for siblings that required ongoing adjustment. Whereas some siblings were able to sustain rituals in a fulfilling way (e.g., recapping favorite television shows over the phone), others felt that the rituals lost their significance in their altered form or gave up on trying to maintain them altogether. These findings shed some light on how siblings adapt existing rituals or develop new ones during the transition to adulthood, but additional research is needed to understand the role ritualizing plays in adult sibling relationships. In particular, given the limited research on how family rituals change across the lifespan (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2006), scholars should engage in longitudinal work that explores the extent to which siblings’ rituals become less meaningful

throughout adulthood or are renegotiated in a way that sustains their significance over time.

For the most part, participants who expressed some sadness over losing a cherished ritual or their sibling's constant companionship were still aware of the positive relational changes associated with moving away from their brother or sister for the first time. Many siblings who described their bond as "disrupted" also noted the ways their relationship had become stronger since moving apart; thus, just because their relationship was thrown off its regular course did not necessarily mean it became weaker. This finding is consistent with prior research showing that although siblings inevitably experience changes in their relationship when they leave home and take on adult roles, many maintain close and supportive ties throughout adulthood (Cicirelli, 1995; Goetting, 1986; Mikkelsen, 2014). As Goetting (1986) asserted, the companionship and support siblings provide one another while growing up often continues throughout adulthood, but it is communicated differently and with less intensity. In line with this view, siblings in the present study described how moving apart demanded that they develop new, long-distance rituals and find different ways to express their love and support. Thus, rather than being entirely negative or problematic, many siblings' experiences of relational disruption were accompanied by positive, meaningful changes.

Communication changes. Along with noting how the transition altered the nature of their relationship, siblings also described specific changes regarding the way they communicated with one another. The most common communication change among siblings was that they talked less frequently now that they lived apart, which supports the well-established empirical finding that contact between siblings declines in young

adulthood (see Cicirelli, 1995; Mikkelsen, 2014). Although a decline in contact is nearly inevitable once siblings no longer live under the same roof, many participants expressed guilt, concern, and/or disappointment regarding the fact that they interacted less often than they did when they lived at together. Many participants, for example, reported that it would suddenly “hit” them that it had been awhile since they communicated with their brother or sister, resulting in guilt that they had let so much time pass in between conversations.

The regret siblings expressed over their decline in contact likely stems from the fact that they were accustomed to interacting every day and staying updated on one another’s daily lives, so it felt wrong to go an extended period of time without talking or checking in. Thus, after they first move apart, it may take siblings some time to establish new norms of contact and adjust to the idea of not being able to engage in frequent face-to-face interactions anymore. From this perspective, the transition from living together to living apart for the first time may be a period of “limbo” for siblings during which they can no longer sustain the day-to-day contact that characterized their relationship in childhood and adolescence, yet they have not quite settled into a consistent pattern for staying in touch in emerging adulthood. Some participants noted that, over time, they got into the habit of texting their siblings regularly or calling them at specific times, such as after their favorite television show or while walking to class. Although most siblings still did not talk to one another quite as often as they did when they lived together, establishing new contact patterns helped them adapt to the transition and regain a sense of normalcy in their relationship.

The second communication change siblings described was that staying in touch required more effort once they moved apart, which typically contributed to their decline in contact. While living at home, siblings could simply yell across the hall or walk down to the living room if they wanted to talk to their brother or sister. In fact, many participants reported that it was impossible to *not* interact with their siblings because they were always there at the dinner table, on the couch, or barging into their bedrooms. After they moved apart, however, they were forced to put in more effort if they wanted to maintain regular contact with their siblings. For instance, Addie (18) described how she and her younger brother Sam (16) struggled to find time to chat: “I’ll always be busy, or he’ll be busy, and then I can’t FaceTime him because I’m doing something. Or then I’ll be free and he can’t, and stuff like that.” Addie’s experience, which was common among siblings in the present study, supports the notion that staying in touch becomes more challenging for siblings once they establish separate residences (Mikkelson, 2014). Yet, it is important to note that most participants were willing to exert the extra effort to maintain some degree of contact with their siblings amidst their demanding, hectic schedules. These findings suggest that, despite the difficulty of negotiating contact from a distance, sibling relationships remain a priority for many individuals during the transition to adulthood.

Not surprisingly, siblings reported that they relied on technology to communicate with one another after they moved apart. While mediated technologies such as texting, phone conversations, Skype, and social media certainly make it easier for geographically separated relational partners to stay in touch, they did not completely reduce siblings’ difficulties with maintaining contact. As captured by Addie’s quote above, many

participants indicated that they struggled to identify a time when they and their sibling were both free to talk. Several siblings also noted that their busy schedules made it difficult to even find time in their day to send each other a quick text message. These findings suggest that siblings may struggle to stay in touch after moving apart because—despite the relative ease and convenience of using technological devices—they still require more forethought and effort than simply chatting with a sibling at home.

The fact that the presence of technology did not necessarily increase the frequency of contact between siblings in the present sample is consistent with Lindell and colleagues' (2015) recent findings. In their examination of the frequency with which 250 first-year college students maintained contact with their siblings using eight different methods (i.e., checking their updates on social media, posting to their Facebook timeline, messaging them privately on Facebook, e-mailing, texting, talking on the phone, using video chat such as Skype, and talking in person), *low communicators* (those who reported using all eight methods infrequently) represented the largest group in the sample, followed by *passive communicators* (those who checked their sibling's social media pages often but reported low use of the other methods), *synchronous communicators* (those who mostly used phone conversations, text messages, and face-to-face communication to stay in touch), and *technological communicators* (those who reported frequent use of communication technologies but low levels of face-to-face communication). Additionally, they found that the two largest groups—low communicators and passive communicators—reported less positivity in their relationships than siblings who reported more frequent use of synchronous and technological forms of communication. As Lindell and colleagues (2015) noted, staying

connected with siblings through synchronous and technological forms of communication appears to enhance the quality of sibling relationships during emerging adulthood. Accordingly, future work in this area is needed to uncover ways siblings can utilize technology to maintain positive, fulfilling ties during the transition from living together to living apart for the first time.

The third communication-related change siblings experienced was an improvement in how they communicated with their brothers and sisters. Once they were separated from their siblings, participants found themselves having deeper conversations and demonstrating more maturity in their interactions. Whereas they could passively keep up with their sibling's lives when they lived together, participants expressed that they now had to ask their siblings how they were doing and engage in longer, more meaningful conversations with them. For instance, Miles (17) noted that he and his sister Heidi (18) "definitely have more in-depth conversations now than when we were living together," with Heidi agreeing that "if I was living there I probably wouldn't talk to him about what he was doing because I could see it. But now I actually have to, like, talk about it." Another sibling, Haley (19), observed that her communication with her younger sister Layna (13) improved after they moved apart because "it kinda forces you to make that relationship closer and talk as much as you can." Overall, while siblings reported that they did not interact as often after they moved apart, their conversations were more meaningful and intimate when they did get a chance to touch base. These findings suggest that the quality of siblings' interactions with one another may reveal more about the strength of their bond than how often they actually talk.

Participants also indicated that their communication with siblings became more mature and less conflictual after they moved apart. While living together in the family home, conversations between siblings tend to involve disputes over their possessions and personal space invasions (Campione-Barr & Smetana, 2010; McGuire, Manke, Eftekhari, & Dunn, 2000). However, Milevesky and Heerwagen (2013) discovered that after emerging adults leave home, they often recognize the petty and childish nature of their past grievances with their siblings. Similarly, for siblings in the present study, moving apart decreased the likelihood for petty fights over domain issues and allowed them to focus on more mature topics in their conversations. While these findings build on previous work showing that siblings generally have a more mature perspective on their relationship in emerging adulthood than in adolescence (Scharf et al., 2005), little is known about the specific topics they discuss or the details they choose to share with one another following their departure from the family home. Thus, by more closely examining the nature of siblings' conversations during the transition to adulthood, future researchers can extend useful knowledge about the communication behaviors that contribute to close, supportive, and mature sibling relationships.

Siblings' Experiences of Relational Recentering

The goal of RQ2a was to understand how, if at all, siblings recentered their relationships as they navigated various relational and communication changes during the transition from living together to living apart for the first time. Relational recentering occurs when individuals decrease their focus on family relationships—including those with siblings—and become immersed in new roles and relationships during the transition to adulthood (Conger & Little, 2010; Tanner, 2006). In other words, a recentering

framework suggests that, as emerging adults' networks expand beyond their family-of-origin and they begin to prioritize new relationships with friends, co-workers, and significant others, they shift their sibling relationships from their inner circle to their outer circle (Conger & Little, 2010). Based on this recentering literature, I anticipated that sibling pairs who recently moved away from one another for the first time—particularly the siblings who left home—might feel that their bond had become less central to their day-to-day lives whereas other relationships had gained significance.

The present study's findings, however, provided little support for the recentering framework. Rather than placing less importance on their sibling ties in favor of new relationships, most siblings expressed that being apart led to a renewed appreciation for one another and their relationship. Even participants who reported a decline in contact or closeness did not attribute these changes to other relationships becoming more important, but to their busy schedules and the inevitable constraints of living apart. Furthermore, most siblings were disappointed by the reduced intimacy they experienced, which increased their motivation to stay in touch and maintain closeness as much as possible from a distance. Thus, although several siblings felt that being apart diminished their bond to some degree, all but a few of the 44 participants in the present study still considered their sibling to be a part of their inner circle.

It is important to note, though, that several siblings described changes that suggested they were in the early stages of the recentering process, such as establishing independence from their natal families and taking on new roles. A number of participants also acknowledged that it became increasingly more difficult to give attention to their sibling relationship as they made new friends and incorporated them into their primary

social sphere. However, rather characterizing these transitions as a sign of recentering, they focused on how their sibling relationships had changed—for better or for worse—and how they could maintain a close bond amidst (and despite) these changes. Overall, even though their stories suggested that their sister or brother played a less prominent role in their daily life now that they moved apart, most participants seemed to resist the idea that they were recentering their sibling relationships in favor of new friendships or romantic partnerships.

There are a couple possible explanations for the lack of evidence regarding the recentering process in the present study. First, though my goal was to capture the communication between sibling pairs who were currently experiencing the transition from living together to living apart for the first time (rather than relying on retrospective accounts), it is possible that not enough time had passed for siblings to endure any significant relational shifts. All 22 sibling pairs included in the sample had moved apart from one another sometime in the last year, with more than half ($N = 14$) having experienced the transition within the last six months. Given that they had been living apart for such a short period of time, siblings may not have had the opportunity yet to develop a strong network of social relationships that might impact their closeness with their brother or sister. Further, due to the uncertainty and challenges associated with moving away from home and starting college, most participants who left home appeared to make an effort to maintain close ties with their family members—including their siblings. However, as they adjust to being on their own and establish significant and meaningful relationships at college, older siblings may distance themselves more from their family-of-origin and devote less time and attention to their sibling relationships.

Thus, because the recentering process likely occurs over a longer period of time than captured in the present study, future researchers should engage in longitudinal work or recruit emerging adult siblings who have been living apart for more than one year.

The fact that most participants did not describe recentering their sibling relationships may also be an artifact of the study's dyadic design. Specifically, given that siblings were interviewed together, it is possible that some did not want to hurt their brother's or sister's feelings by admitting that their relationship had become less central to their day-to-day life. Among those who left home to attend college, many acknowledged that they had made a number of new friends; however, they were quick to emphasize that their sibling relationship was just as much of a priority to them as it was before they moved apart. Although it is likely that some were being sincere, others may have downplayed the significance of their other relationships or not revealed how much their social circle had grown for their sibling's benefit. Had I interviewed siblings separately, then, they may have been more comfortable divulging how they had begun to prioritize new roles and relationships over their siblings. Therefore, to ensure that participants do not withhold important details about the recentering process out of concern for their sibling's feelings, it will be important for researchers to talk with siblings individually or combine joint and individual interviews in future work.

Discursive Struggles Surrounding Siblings' Experiences of Moving Apart

The purpose of the third research question was to explore the multiple and competing discourses that animate siblings' talk about their experiences of moving away from a brother or a sister, and how these discourses interplay to construct meaning of this relationship transition. Centered in relational dialectics theory (RDT; Baxter, 2011), this

question sought to understand the cultural and relational discourses that siblings evoke to make sense of their changing relationship during the shift from living together to living apart for the first time. Three main discursive struggles emerged in siblings' communication about this transition in their relationship: (a) distance as good for the relationship vs. distance as bad for the relationship, (b) moving apart as a normal transition vs. moving apart as a "weird" transition, and (c) certainty as still possible vs. uncertainty as unavoidable.

Distance as good vs. distance as bad. Overall, RQ3's findings revealed how cultural and relational discourses influence the way siblings construct meaning of their changing relationship during the transition from living together to living apart. In particular, the first discursive struggle—distance as good for the relationship vs. distance as bad for the relationship—highlights the competing cultural assumptions regarding the role proximity plays in personal relationships. Specifically, whereas mainstream views of relating have traditionally privileged geographical closeness and frequent face-to-face communication (e.g., Duck, 1994), scholars have begun to emphasize the positive relational outcomes associated with maintaining relationships from a distance (Sahlstein, 2004; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford, 2010). Likewise, most siblings in the present study expressed that being apart improved their bond and subsequently downplayed the opposing view (i.e., the notion that distance may have a detrimental impact on relationships). For instance, Laura (16) noted that she and her older brother Ross (18) became closer after he left home because "we can't see each other as much as we want so we value our relationship more." While she briefly acknowledged the distance as bad discourse by lamenting the decline in their face-to-face encounters, her words

predominantly put a positive spin on their separation. Similarly, most siblings were aware of the negative relational consequences associated with moving apart, yet placed more emphasis on how it benefitted and improved their bond.

The finding that most siblings privileged the distance as good discursive position in their talk speaks to their awareness of cultural assumptions surrounding relationships circulating at the distal already-spoken site of the utterance chain. Participants often described ways their sibling relationships had been strained by the separation, but then quickly negated their statement or emphasized that they were “still” close despite experiencing some setbacks. In many cases, siblings’ efforts to downplay the negative relational consequences associated with moving apart can be understood as a response to the cultural expectation that siblings should talk often and be emotionally close. Further, given my position as a cultural member and immediate addressee who could potentially judge their utterances, some siblings appeared to stress the positive aspects of their separation for my benefit. While it is clear that many siblings did become closer once they no longer lived together, they may not have given appropriate attention to the challenges of being apart. Therefore, further research is needed to expand our understanding of the ways in which distal already-spoken discourses shape siblings’ relational talk during the transition to adulthood, and whether these cultural assumptions encourage siblings to construct unrealistic or overly positive views of their relationship.

As siblings centered the distance as good discourse in their talk, they also called upon established relational meanings at the proximal-already spoken site of the utterance chain. Specifically, they emphasized negative or less ideal aspects of their relational history to demonstrate how their relationship was better off due to their separation.

Elizabeth, 18, employed this discursive tactic when she noted that her sister Erica, 16, was more willing to listen to her advice now that they had space from one another: “Before that, she would never ask me for advice, ever. If I gave her my advice, she would just be like, ‘I don’t believe you.’ She does come to me for a lot of advice now.” By framing their past relational meaning (i.e., Erica refusing to accept or “believe” her advice) as problematic, Elizabeth positioned their current relational state (i.e., Erica willingly seeking her advice) as a positive change stemming from their recent separation. Likewise, the few siblings who aligned with the view that distance hindered their relationship cast old relational meanings in a positive light to show how their current relational state was flawed in comparison. In this sense, as siblings constructed meaning of their changing relationship at the proximal-already-spoken site of the utterance chain, their established relational meanings became a discursive backdrop against which they evaluated distance as having a “good” or “bad” impact on their bond.

The fact that most siblings demonstrated awareness of both the distance as good discourse and the distance as bad discourse in their talk supports Sahlstein’s (2004) work on long distance dating relationships (LDDRs), in which she found that being apart has the potential to both enable and constrain the relationship between romantic partners. On one hand, her results revealed that being separated enhanced dating partners’ connection because it added excitement to their relationship, made them appreciate one another more, and encouraged them to make the most of their time together. On the other hand, however, she found that spending time apart put a strain on their relationship because it created pressure to make their time together extra special and exciting, produced uncertainty about one another and their relationship, and increased the possibility of

drifting apart. Overall, Sahlstein's (2004) findings demonstrate the value of embracing multiple perspectives regarding long-distance relating rather than viewing it as *either* positive *or* negative. In terms of the present study, siblings who privileged the distance as good discourse may have been ignoring potential downfalls, rendering them ill-prepared to overcome the challenges they encounter. At the same time, those who favored the idea that the distance hindered their bond were possibly closing themselves off to opportunities for positive relational change. In line with this perspective, the quality of siblings' relationships when they move apart for the first time may hinge on their ability to appreciate how distance can enhance their connection while simultaneously recognizing—and attempting to address—the ways it puts a strain on their bond.

Moving apart as normal vs. moving apart as “weird.” The second discursive struggle that emerged in siblings' talk was between the perspective that moving apart was a normal transition and the opposing viewpoint that moving apart was a “weird” and unexpected event. Even though it is customary for siblings to leave home and establish separate residences in young adulthood (Conger & Little, 2010; Goetting, 1986), participants overwhelmingly viewed the transition from living together to living apart as a “weird” experience. The idea of moving apart appeared to be particularly unsettling for the younger brothers and sisters in the present study, many of whom expressed how strange their older sibling's absence was at home. One younger brother, Tyler (17), was so perturbed by the fact that his older sister Camille (18) had left home that he often closed her bedroom door to remind himself that she was not there. He noted that, while it was normal and expected for his sister to be at home (“she's always been there”), her absence was both weird and troubling (“it, like, messes with my mind”). Similarly, Laura

(16) gave the discourse of moving apart the centripetal position as she talked about her brother Ross's (18) recent move to college:

He was gone a lot towards the end of summer, hanging out with friends and stuff, but [my parents and I] still didn't expect it to be so different when he actually moved. When we sat down at the dinner table it was quiet. No one really knew what to say. I don't know. There was more space on the couch. We used the word "weird" a lot when he wasn't home. [5: 88-93]

Although Laura and her parents were somewhat prepared for Ross's departure from home, she implied that there was no way they could have anticipated how "weird" it would be once he was gone. In emphasizing how they were often reminded of—and thrown off by—their older brother's or sister's missing presence at home, many younger siblings negated the discourse of moving apart as normal in their talk.

As the stories told by Laura and Tyler demonstrate, the discursive struggle between the discourses of moving apart as weird and moving apart as normal often emerged from siblings' talk about issues of presence and absence. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that, as commuter wives constructed meaning of their relational experiences, they voiced a discursive struggle between the norms of closeness and physical co-presence that previously defined their marriage and the absence they regularly faced (McBride & Bergen, 2014). In a similar manner, younger siblings stressed that it was their older sibling's current absence in their day-to-day lives—which stood in contrast to their constant presence they were accustomed to—that made the transition from living together to living apart such a weird and difficult experience. Empty bedrooms, extra space on the couch, and long pauses at dinner became

symbols of absence and reminded younger siblings of a time when their brothers or sisters lived in the room across the hall, sat beside them on the couch during a Netflix binge, and filled silences at the dinner table. Thus, by framing their current relational experiences with absence as problematic, challenging, and strange, siblings refuted the idea that moving apart is a normal and expected transition for brothers and sisters.

In many respects, it makes sense that younger siblings in the present study viewed the transition from living together to living apart as more weird and unexpected than older siblings. Although many older siblings also stressed that it was strange to be separated from their younger brother or sister, several commented that they were too busy juggling classes, extracurricular activities, and spending time with new friends to *really* notice their sibling's absence in their day-to-day lives. Additionally, older brothers and sisters tended to focus on how weird it was to leave home in general, often describing what it was like to move away from their entire family rather than focusing specifically on their sibling. Thus, for the siblings who left home, moving away from their brother or sister was just one change among many that required their thought and attention. In the case of younger siblings, however, adjusting to their older sibling's absence at home and in their daily lives was the primary focus.

In general, the presence of the discursive struggle between the discourses of moving apart as normal and moving apart as "weird" in the data highlights how siblings' sense-making experiences were influenced by both cultural and relational norms. First, at the cultural level, definitions of family privilege the idea that family members "live together, interact on a frequent basis, or otherwise create lives of interdependence in which they affect one another in some meaningful way" (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2006, p.

2). Because moving apart makes it more difficult to maintain these societal expectations for interdependence, siblings may—at least initially—view the idea of not living together as “not normal.” Second, moving apart challenges siblings’ previously established relational norms that emphasize living together, interacting frequently, and sharing experiences. With these relational norms as a point of reference, living separately for the first time can be a strange and bewildering experience for siblings. These findings revealed how, by acknowledging both cultural assumptions surrounding family and established relational discourses, siblings constructed a normative family transition in U.S. culture as anything but normal. In future studies, RDT researchers should build on these findings and further examine the ways distal and proximal already-spoken may impact siblings’ ability to adapt to living apart for the first time.

Certainty as still possible vs. uncertainty as unavoidable. The third discursive struggle that emerged from the data concerned issues of (un)certainty. In their efforts to construct meaning of their changing relationship, siblings acknowledged the belief that uncertainty is an unavoidable consequence of being apart while also granting legitimacy to the competing idea that certainty was still possible. This finding further supports prior work showing that siblings grapple with uncertainty during early adulthood, particularly when one or both leave home for college (Bevan, Stetzenbach, Batson, & Bullo, 2006; Halliwell, 2016). In the present study, most siblings negated the assumption that moving apart is an uncertainty-evoking experience for relational partners and instead gave the discourse of certainty as still possible the centripetal position in their talk.

The most common way participants constructed certainty as the dominant meaning in their relationship was by emphasizing that they “still” knew their sibling as a

person despite being apart. For example, in an effort to show that moving apart did not lessen her certainty about her sister, Dana (19) asserted that she could accurately guess the type of pants and shoes her sister Zoe (17) was wearing during the interview (both of which were not visible on the FaceTime screen). When Zoe confirmed that her sister was correct about her outfit, Dana stated: “See? It's just like, we learned each other's style, we learned each other's habits...like, if something in the house is messed up, I'll be like, ‘Oh Zoe did this.’” Though no one had questioned her ability to know her sister well, Dana felt it was important to “prove” that certainty continued to characterize her relationship—likely to counter the distal already-spoken assumption that physical distance diminishes emotional closeness between relational partners. Moreover, by addressing me directly with her “See?” comment, Dana revealed that she anticipated I would be skeptical of her claim that she still knew her sister well. Likewise, across the sample, siblings sought to downplay their uncertainty both in response to established distal discourses and in anticipation of potential evaluative judgments at the proximal not-yet-spoken site of the utterance chain.

The finding that most siblings marginalized the discourse of uncertainty as unavoidable in their talk might also be explained by certainty's privileged position in both U.S. culture and in mainstream conceptualizations of relating (see Baxter & Braithwaite, 2009). Specifically, uncertainty has traditionally been viewed as an undesirable quality in relationships that impedes closeness and creates relational problems (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2009; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Thus, based on the negative connotation surrounding the concept of uncertainty in U.S. culture, it is likely that siblings emphasized their certainty about their relationship and one another in an

attempt to align their relational experiences with cultural standards. In particular, the societal expectation that relationships between closely-connected kin should be especially intimate may explain why some siblings went to great lengths to demonstrate how well they knew one another. Thus, for many siblings, being uncertain about their brother or sister was incompatible with their vision of the “ideal” sibling relationship rooted in both their own and cultural expectations. Similarly, in his work examining the communication between friends, Rawlins (1992) argued that cultural expectations of friendships “are produced and reproduced through a dialectical interplay of ideal conceptions and real constraints across a continuum of private and public discursive realms in the actual communication of a variety of types of friends” (p. 15). Because moving apart may threaten siblings’ ideal conceptions of closeness and certainty, examining the ways they evoke a discursive struggle between the real and the ideal in future studies can contribute to our understanding of how siblings adjust to various relational changes during the transition to adulthood.

In addition to demonstrating that they “still” knew their sibling, participants also privileged the discourse of certainty as still possible by emphasizing that their lifelong, intimate connection could withstand being separated. Specifically, many siblings stressed that because they were able to develop such a deep understanding of one another through their countless shared experiences while growing up together, they were still able to maintain a high degree of certainty after moving apart. Although participants admitted that moving apart made it difficult to keep up with day-to-day details, they regarded these details as insignificant compared to knowing their siblings’ intrinsic character, as shown in an exchange between eighteen year-old twins Oliver and Lillian:

Oliver: We've gone through a lot together, especially recently, and I think that has just like, kept us in the loop...I think right now the short-term things—like maybe who we're talking to right now or something like that—we have to catch up to know. But the long-term things, we know each other so well. We know everything about each other, and also it helps the fact that we're twins. We've just spent our entire lives together, so...

Lillian: I would agree. I'd say that there's really not much that someone could tell me about Oliver that I wouldn't know. Like, besides like he said, the day-to-day things. But like, as a person, I feel like there's nothing someone could tell me that I'd be like, "That's not true." [21: 483-501]

In many ways, siblings' ability to embrace the fact that some uncertainty is unavoidable—while asserting that they still knew their sibling on a deep and meaningful level—can be viewed as a sign of maturity and an important step in developing a strong, enduring adult sibling bond. Given the longevity of siblings' relationships and their extensive history of shared experiences, Bank and Kahn (1997) asserted that brothers and sisters often serve as reminders of “how we have aged, who we have been, and whom we have become” (xvii). Thus, as siblings establish their separate lives and endure rises and falls in contact throughout adulthood, the quality of their relationship may depend less on whether they know “short-term things” and more on their ability to bond over past experiences and understand the nature of one another's personality.

Although drawing from shared experiences often enhances the connection between brothers and sisters as they age (Bank & Kahn, 1997; Goetting, 1986), siblings should also be aware of how nonshared experiences and potential uncertainty can

encourage positive relational growth. Not only do nonshared environments contribute to individual differences between siblings, they can also promote greater similarity as siblings talk about their respective lives and empathize with one another's different experiences (Cicirelli, 1995). From this perspective, moving apart for the first time may provide opportunities for siblings to bond as they share their dissimilar experiences and discover new and interesting things about one another. Heidi (18), for example, asserted that moving out helped her gain new insight into her brother's personality because it allowed her to see him from the "outside." When asked to clarify, she stated: "Like, just seeing his profile and not really living with him. You know, I can see what the public sees." This finding supports Halliwell's (2016) claim that the uncertainty siblings experience when they move apart for the first time may prompt them to see one another more as unique individuals and less as the brother or sister they had no choice but to live with while growing up. Accordingly, in arguing for a dialogic approach to (un)certainty, Baxter and Braithwaite (2009) advised against striving for total certainty because it can stifle creativity in relationships and discourage relational partners from embracing new meanings. Siblings, then, should not view uncertainty about one another or their relationship as entirely negative, but appreciate the ways their nonshared experiences move their relationship in new and different directions.

Exploring a Dialogue of Adult Sibling Relationships

The present study's fourth and final research question sought to understand the competing discourses siblings evoke to communicatively construct a dialogue of adult sibling relationships. In making sense of what it means to be an adult sibling, participants

voiced two main discursive struggles: siblingship as a voluntary bond vs. siblingship as an obligatory commitment and siblings as a unit vs. siblings as separate individuals.

Most siblings in the present study gave the discourse of siblingship as a voluntary bond the centripetal position in their talk, thus negating the assumption that adult siblings may maintain their relationships out of obligation. The two ways siblings constructed their bonds as voluntary was by emphasizing that they stayed in contact by choice and by likening their relationship to a friendship. These findings support the long-standing view that while siblings are generally forced to maintain a bond during childhood and adolescence, their relationships take on a more voluntary status in adulthood after they leave home (Cicirelli, 1995; Goetting, 1986; Mikkelsen, 2014). For many siblings, years of observing their parents' relationships with their siblings reinforced the notion that adult sibling relationships are maintained by choice. For example, Anna (18) pointed out that her mom called her sisters every day to emphasize that she would like her own adult sibling relationship with her sister Essie (14) to be characterized by a genuine desire to talk regularly. Along these lines, a number of sibling pairs stressed that they will always *want* to stay close and be a part of one another's lives throughout adulthood, indicating that they consider it a personal choice to maintain their relationships.

Although it is encouraging that most participants viewed their emerging adult sibling bonds as voluntary and genuinely wanted to maintain contact, it may be beneficial for them to recognize how obligation might also play a role in their relationships throughout adulthood. Although Anna and Essie expressed hope that they would stay in touch voluntarily as they got older, they also implied that keeping close ties may not always be a matter of choice:

Essie: I mean, I think it'd be really nice to have someone like you're like related to that you're really close with.

Anna: Yeah, a person that you know will always be in your life, like you can't get rid of them. [*Laughs.*] [16: 399-403]

Although the sisters truly wanted to remain involved in one another's lives, their comments suggested that, to some extent, they felt that they *should* remain close because they were related and cannot "get rid of" each other. Another sibling, Carson (19) made it clear throughout the interview that he stayed in touch with his younger sister Lexi (16) by choice, but then referenced an innate impulse to check in on her:

Well I mean, I guess at a level, it's voluntary. You know, it's like I could not come home except for on breaks when I'm forced to, you know, move out of my dorms...but I mean it's not much of a choice to me on the inside because I don't know what I would do without seeing her often, you know? [12: 637-640]

Carson's words revealed that, in some ways, he felt forced or compelled to maintain contact with his sister. These feelings of obligation, however, competed with his belief that their relationship was voluntary and that he genuinely *wanted* to see Lexi on a regular basis, which resulted in confusion and uncertainty regarding how he viewed their bond.

The above exemplars illuminate how, despite siblings' newfound freedom to interact on their own terms in adulthood, their bond likely continues to be characterized by obligation in some ways. By viewing their relationship as completely voluntary and ignoring any feelings of obligation, siblings may be less motivated to check in regularly and remain a part of one another's lives throughout the years. Relationships that are

maintained entirely by choice are prone to fade or dissolve once it is no longer convenient for the parties involved or other priorities emerge. Even the closest of friends, for example, will often drift apart when they move away from one another and become busy with their families, careers, and new acquaintances. In the same way, adult siblings may let their relationships fall to the wayside during busy times if there is little motivating them to stay in touch, which may make it challenging to reconnect down the road when they are in need of support. Although a sense of obligation can make relationships feel like a burden at times, it can also encourage siblings to sustain regular contact and be there for one another when others may not come through. Thus, the present study's findings demonstrate the merit of embracing a dialogic approach, which rejects unitary definitions of relationships and instead argues that relational identities are defined and given meaning from the interplay of multiple, competing discourses in the talk between relationship parties (see Baxter, 2004; 2010, 2011). From this perspective, then, it is not productive to characterize a pair's bond as *either* voluntary *or* obligatory, but to explore how their relationship's identity is (re)constructed through an ongoing struggle between voluntariness and obligation.

Along with stressing that they stayed in touch by choice, siblings in the present study privileged the discourse of siblingship as a voluntary bond by likening their relationships to a friendship. A defining feature of friendships in U.S. culture is that they are essentially voluntary and cannot be forced upon parties; thus, ideally, individuals are free to form, maintain, and dissolve friendships as they choose (Rawlins, 1992). Siblingship, in contrast, is generally not a matter of choice but is instead imposed on individuals through birth or legal means (Cicirelli, 1995). For this reason, sibling

relationships are often viewed as involuntary bonds that people are forced or obligated to maintain (Mikkelson, 2014; Cicirelli, 1995). By constructing their relationships as a friendship, however, participants discursively framed adult sibling bonds as voluntary and therefore dismissed the view that siblingship is an obligatory commitment in their talk.

The fact that siblings drew on assumptions regarding friendships in order to demonstrate that they were close and maintained their bonds by choice speaks to prominence of the discourse of siblingship as an obligatory commitment in U.S. culture. Although empirical and anecdotal evidence support the idea that sibling relationships become more voluntary in adulthood, siblings are still considered to be bound by an involuntary permanence throughout their lives (Cicirelli, 1995; Mikkelson, 2014). Because adult sibling relationships are viewed as less of a choice than friendships, siblings call themselves “friends” in order to combat the assumption that they only maintain their bond out of obligation. For instance, siblings Greg (15) and Ashton (18) explained why they now viewed their relationship as a friendship:

Greg: You know that each other's there for one another. And we enjoy spending now together more now, too.

Ashton: Yeah. And I feel like that's kinda where the friendship thing comes in, too. Because, um, with siblings it's is more of—not necessarily forced—but you're always together. But friendship's more of a choice. And so I kind of feel like that's why it's becoming more of a friendship thing, because we're choosing to still stay in contact and stuff. [8: 428-437]

These siblings' comments, which reflect the view of several other participants in the present study, capture the idea that enjoying spending time together and "choosing to still stay in contact" while apart are more characteristic of a friendship than a sibling relationship. Further, given the assumption that relationships between siblings during childhood and adolescence are defined by competition, rivalry, and forced co-existence, siblings may describe their adult bonds as friendships to emphasize that those frustrating qualities no longer apply to them.

While many siblings implied that the ideal adult sibling bond mirrored a close friendship, a few others expressed that their relationship was stronger and more meaningful than those between friends. Participants constructed their sibling relationships as a "step above" a friendship in order to justify their stronger desire to maintain their sibling bonds than their relationships with friends. Although they valued their friendships, they constructed them as weaker, less meaningful, and more fleeting than their sibling bonds. Thus, the message underlying many siblings' comments was that if their relationship was simply on the same level as a friendship, they might not be as motivated to stay in contact. This finding is consistent with Rawlin's (1992) claim that friendships embody a marginalized status in U.S. culture because they do not have formal recognition through blood (e.g., kin relationships), law (e.g., marriage), or professional contracts (e.g., work relationships). For instance, eighteen year-old twins Oliver and Lillian described their bond as a "deeper level of a friendship" to explain their commitment to always be there for each other, thereby reproducing the societal assumption that the ties between friends are less important to maintain than those between siblings. By putting their sibling relationships on a pedestal in this way,

participants negated the assumption that they might stay in touch out of obligation and instead emphasized that they genuinely wanted to maintain this special bond.

The second way siblings made sense of what it means to be an adult sibling was through a discursive struggle between the discourse of siblings as separate individuals and the discourse of siblings as a unit. As Baxter (2010) noted in her work articulating the competing ideologies surrounding marriage, the inclination for relationship parties to grapple with whether to base their self-concept on individual or relational characteristics can be understood as a discursive struggle between individualism and community. From the perspective of the discourse of individualism, participants emphasized their newfound independence from their siblings and their ability to establish an autonomous identity. Conversely, they called upon the discourse of community as they alluded to the cohesiveness and loyalty that defined their bond in the past. However, despite granting both discourses some legitimacy, most siblings embraced their growing independence from one another and asserted that the discourse of siblings as a unit no longer defined their relational identity.

Participants may have privileged a discourse of siblings as separate individuals because it was a refreshing change to no longer be viewed as a unit. Because siblings often cannot escape being associated with one another while growing up together in the family home, moving apart may be the first time they feel like others see them as an individual and not as part of a sibling unit. Siblings Ross (18) and Laura (16) captured this sentiment as they explained how their relationship changed since Ross left home:

Ross: I feel like we've both grown as our own person now. I feel like before we were “Ross and Laura” and now I'm “Ross” and she's “Laura,” like a separate kind of thing.

Laura: Yeah, at church I was known as Ross's little...or at school I was always “Ross's little sister” but now I'm just my own person. I totally agree with that,
Ross. [5: 125-130]

This exchange between Ross and Laura suggests that, when others treat siblings as a pair and overlook their unique identities, they may feel that they are always in the other's shadow and therefore struggle to grow as their “own person.” Furthermore, being constantly compared to one another or reminded of their similarities can trigger competition and rivalry between siblings (Cicirelli, 1995). Previous research shows that siblings attempt to alleviate their rivalrous feelings by engaging in deidentification, which involves differentiating themselves from one another and adopting different personalities, hobbies, and likes/dislikes (Cicirelli, 1995; Whiteman, McHale, & Soli, 2011). It makes sense, then, that siblings would embrace the opportunity to further develop their separate identities once they move away from one another in emerging adulthood.

The finding that most participants privileged their current relational identity in which they were viewed as two separate individuals over their old identity as a sibling pair is also likely explained by the tendency for individuals to establish independence from their natal families during emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2006). According to Arnett (2006), when emerging adults leave home, they embark on a journey of identity exploration during which they learn about who they are without restriction from their parents. Similarly, the transition out of the family home may allow emerging adults to

explore their sense of self separately from their siblings. As White (2001) argued, siblings typically experience a “reduced bond” during early adulthood due to “a nearly universal individuation process in which individuals increase the physical and psychological distance between themselves and their families of origin” (p. 566). By showing how sibling pairs constructed a relational identity that honors their growing independence from one another, the present study’s findings offer additional insight into this individuation process between siblings during the transition to adulthood.

Study Contributions

The findings from the present dissertation make several important theoretical and methodological contributions to existing communication scholarship. In addition, the findings have a number of implications for research on sibling communication and the transition to adulthood, as well as practical implications for siblings, their families, and professionals. These implications for theory, research, and practice will be discussed in more detail below.

Theoretical contributions. The results from this study make several contributions to existing RDT scholarship. First and foremost, the present study’s dyadic design addressed an important limitation in existing RDT research. Despite the theory’s primary goal to understand how relational partners co-construct meaning of their relationship in their talk, RDT scholars have typically relied on self-report data in the form of individual interviews rather than dyadic data from both parties in a relationship (Baxter, 2011). When introducing an updated version of relational dialectics theory (i.e., RDT 2.0) half a decade ago, Baxter (2011) emphasized that, in order to move the theory forward, RDT researchers needed to make a stronger effort to examine the interactions between relational parties in future work. Similar calls have been made over the past

several years to address the lack of dyadic data in existing RDT scholarship (e.g., Baxter & Braithwaite, 2010; Halliwell 2015), but these calls have remained largely unanswered. As one of the first RDT 2.0 studies to date to utilize joint interviews and examine the interactions between relational partners, the current project is a vital step in advancing the theory as Baxter (2011) intended.

The present study's dyadic design is especially valuable because it allowed for the examination of several concepts that are underexplored in existing RDT scholarship. In particular, as Baxter (2011) asserted, dyadic data are necessary for researchers to adequately study how relational partners construct meaning at the proximal already-spoken and proximal not-yet-spoken sites of the utterance chain. When only one member of a relational dyad is interviewed, the interviewer—rather than the participant's relational partner—becomes the true proximal counterpart. In this sense, the existing body of RDT research utilizing individual interviews has only been able to provide “second-hand self-reports by relationship parties about the two proximal links in the utterance chain” (Baxter, 2011, p. 90). Thus, the present study's dyadic design addressed this current weakness in RDT research by making it possible to examine the interplay of both prior and anticipated proximal utterances in the relational talk between sibling pairs.

Across the sample, sibling dyads often drew on the proximal already-spoken site of the utterance chain as they attempted to co-construct meaning of their changing relationship and their experiences of moving apart for the first time. For example, while some participants acknowledged established relational meanings to demonstrate that they were still just as close as they were prior to moving apart, others lamented that they could no longer engage in the same rituals or talk as much as they did in the past. Additionally,

at the proximal not-yet-spoken link, several participants framed their utterances in anticipation of how their brother or sister might respond. For instance, Anna (18) appeared reluctant to admit to her sister Essie (14) that she was surprised by how much she missed her:

Anna: ...I really do miss home and I've started to miss my sister and like, you know, along with everything else. And like before, I never would've thought...I was just like, "Oh my god, I just want to go to school already." [*Laughs.*] But yeah, that's definitely been something...I didn't expect to miss home that much, like miss our relationship really. So, yeah...I don't know, how about you?

Essie: I agree that I didn't expect to miss you really that much. I didn't expect to, like, miss your presence just next to the wall, like me yelling at you to be quiet. Like I didn't expect to miss that. [16: 468-476]

Rather than coming right out and stating that she did not expect to care about moving away from her sister, Anna "beat around the bush" and hesitated several times. More than likely, she struggled to choose her words carefully because she anticipated that Essie might perceive her comments as uncaring and wanted to avoid hurting her feelings. In order to gauge Essie's reaction to what she said, Anna then addressed her directly ("how about you?"), and Essie responded that she agreed with her sister's perspective.

Had the interview been conducted with just Anna, Essie's anticipated response would essentially be a non-issue and the proximal not-yet-spoken site of the utterance chain could not be productively examined. At best, Anna could only speculate about how Essie might respond to her admission that she did not expect to miss her or their relationship. However, Essie's presence in the interview made her an immediate

addressee in the interaction, thus prompting Anna to frame her utterances in anticipation of her sister's immediate response. Interviewing the sisters together also uncovered the fact that Essie identified with Anna's viewpoint and that they constructed meaning of their changing relational identity in a similar way, which would have been impossible to glean from an individual interview with Anna. Given the lack of such dyadic data in existing RDT research, the present study's findings extend new knowledge about the proximal sites of the utterance chain and demonstrate the importance of examining the interactions between relational partners in future work.

The second theoretical contribution is that the present study's findings expand our understanding of the discursive struggles surrounding sibling relationships. Scholars have showcased RDT's heuristic value by applying the theory to a wide range of family contexts including stepfamilies (e.g., Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006; Braithwaite et al., 2008), LGBTQ families (e.g., Breshears & Braithwaite, 2014; Norwood, 2012; 2013), adoptive families (e.g., Baxter et al., 2012; Scharp, 2013), marriage and parenthood (e.g., Baxter, 2010; Stamp, 1994), and parent-child relationships (e.g., Wenzel & Poynter, 2014; Wozniak et al., 2013). Although these studies have contributed valuable knowledge to family research, the lack of scholarly attention given to sibling relationships represents an obvious gap in RDT scholarship. A decade ago, Baxter (2006) pointed out the dialectical nature of the sibling bond and called for scholars to extend RDT to the study of siblings, but sibling relationships remain largely understudied from an RDT perspective. In fact, a recently published pilot study for this dissertation is one of the first known studies to apply RDT exclusively to the study of siblings (see Halliwell, 2016). The current study builds on this work by further highlighting the dialogic potential of the

sibling bond, particularly during the transition to adulthood. Along these lines, the findings from the present study suggest that RDT is a productive lens through which to examine how siblings communicate and construct a relational identity as they navigate other transitions and changes across the lifespan.

The third way the present study contributes to RDT scholarship is by showing the merit of studying relationships as constituted in a dialogue between multiple and competing discourses. Although the constitutive approach to defining relationships has gained momentum in recent years with the help of RDT and other social constructionist perspectives (e.g., discourse dependency; see Galvin, 2006), the assumption that relationships are static, preformed entities continues to dominate most interpersonal and family communication scholarship. Even within the existing body of RDT research, very few studies explicitly conceptualize relationships themselves as communicatively constructed phenomena. An important exception is Baxter's (2010) work articulating a dialogue of marriage, rooted in the assumption that "the meaning of a pair's marriage and the spousal identity of each partner are constructed from the struggle of competing discourses in talk between the partners and in talk by the spouses about their marriage directed to third-party outsiders" (p. 371). In extending this dialogic framework to siblings, the present study uncovered two distinct discursive struggles that constitute a dialogue of sibling relationships. These findings not only provide additional support for RDT's constitutive approach, they also demonstrate the value of applying Baxter's (2010) dialogic framework to other relational contexts.

Methodological contributions. Along with extending RDT research in important ways, the present study also offers several methodological contributions. First, by

including minor siblings between the ages of 13-17 years-old in the sample, the findings capture the experiences of an important population that is typically overlooked in communication research. In a content analysis examining the representation of children in communication scholarship, Miller-Day, Pezalla, and Chestnut (2013) found that only 3.7% of all published articles in 14 major communication journals from 1997-2010 focused on children under the age of 18. When only studies that investigated children directly (rather than indirectly through a parent, teacher, etc.) were included, the percentage dropped slightly to 3.5%. In light of these results, Miller-Day and colleagues (2013) called for communication researchers to “build research programs that serve to represent the voices of youth and describe life as lived by those not in the adult world” (p. 163). Among their suggestions for including more children in communication studies, they encouraged scholars to rely less on survey designs and instead employ qualitative methods such as interviewing to examine children’s communication. The present study, then, responds to this call and offers a rare glimpse into the communicative experiences of children under the age of 18.

The second methodological contribution involves the use of joint interviews, which is an under-utilized method of data collection in qualitative research (Morgan et al., 2013; Morris, 2001). In addition to its ability to expose important and underexplored RDT concepts as discussed above, joint interviewing has the potential to generate rich insights into a dyad’s relationship that cannot be achieved through individual interviews or self-report survey methods. Specifically, interviewing participants together allows them to create a shared narrative, often resulting in a more detailed account of their relational experiences than they would provide individually (Eisokovitz & Koren, 2010;

Morris, 2001). As Morris (2001) also asserted, conducting dyadic interviews provides direct insight into a pair's relationship, allowing the researcher to examine how they mutually construct meaning, respond to one another, and align with similar and different priorities and concerns. In a joint interview, participants can also help stimulate new thoughts on a given topic in ways the interviewer cannot by triggering one another's memory about shared experiences and asking one another questions that the researcher did not think to explore (Morgan et al., 2013). Despite the benefits of interviewing relational partners together, most of the existing research on adult siblings has focused only on the individual perspective of one sibling in a dyad, prompting Mikkelsen (2014) to call for sibling researchers to collect dyadic data in future work. By exploring the relational talk between sibling pairs through joint interviews, the present study adds depth to current knowledge about sibling communication.

The third methodological contribution is the use of online communication technologies such as Skype and FaceTime to conduct joint interviews with geographically separated siblings. In recent years, scholars have argued that online interviewing methods represent a practical supplement and/or alternative to traditional face-to-face interviews in qualitative research (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Hanna, 2012). For instance, Deakin and Wakefield (2014) posited that video calling is particularly useful for conducting interviews across long distances, allowing researchers to reach participants who they normally might not be able to access. In the present study, using Skype and FaceTime gave me the opportunity to interview a population that I would not have had access to otherwise: minors who lived in different cities and/or states than their sibling's university (where the interview was conducted). Simply put, without utilizing

online interviewing methods, conducting dyadic interviews with geographically separated sibling pairs would not have been possible. Hence, the current project demonstrates how utilizing online communication technologies can assist with dyadic research and create access to populations that are understudied or difficult to reach.

The use of Skype and FaceTime to contact the sibling still living at home also highlights the advantages of conducting interviews via videoconferencing rather than by telephone. Although telephone interviews are a convenient way to overcome issues of distance, they lack the visual component of face-to-face encounters. Video calling, however, allows the researcher and participant to both see and hear one another as they talk, thus giving them access to important nonverbal cues and enhancing the interpersonal nature of the interaction (Hanna, 2012). For example, while a long pause can be difficult to interpret over the phone, interacting with siblings face-to-face in a video call helped me discern whether they were pausing because they were thinking, unsure about how to respond, or confused by the question. Furthermore, using Skype or FaceTime (instead of speaker phone) to contact the sibling who still lived at home allowed me to observe the way siblings interacted with one another and capture a more complete picture of their relationship. Overall, the present study's success with using Skype and FaceTime to collect data provides additional evidence that online interviewing methods are a valuable option for qualitative researchers (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Hanna, 2012).

Contributions to sibling communication research. The findings from the present study also make several important contributions to sibling communication research. First, the results add to the limited body of research focusing specifically on how home-leaving impacts sibling relationships. Although scholars have long noted that

many siblings experience a decline in contact in early adulthood (Goetting, 1986; Mikkelson, 2014), and that their bonds may become less significant to their day-to-day lives (Conger & Little, 2010; White, 2001), few studies have examined how, if at all, these relational changes are associated with siblings' experiences of leaving home and moving apart for the first time. Much of the existing knowledge about the changes siblings face from adolescence to adulthood cannot be tied to home-leaving because, as Whiteman, McHale, and Crouter (2011) pointed out, sibling researchers have relied extensively on self-report data from individuals ranging in age from their late teens to mid-20s. They further argued that, "for many respondents, the transition out of their parents' home may have occurred many years in the past, and as such, may be confounded with other developmental changes (e.g., entering long-term romantic partnership, starting a job, starting a family)" (p. 462). Thus, the present study helps address this gap in adult sibling research by uncovering the relational and communication changes siblings attributed specifically to their transition from living together to living apart for the first time.

Second, the present study also contributes to research on sibling relationships during the transition to adulthood through its qualitative approach. Two decades ago, Cicirelli (1995) observed that there was very little research examining sibling discourse—or how siblings talk with one another—after they move apart in adulthood. More recently, Mikkelson (2014) noted that while contact, closeness, support, and rivalry have been studied extensively in adult sibling research, scholars have failed to explore how siblings' actual communication behaviors affect these variables and their relationship as a whole. Despite these calls to examine the communication between adult

siblings, most studies in this area are quantitative in nature and focus on siblings' self-reports about their communication patterns (see Mikkelsen, 2014, pp. 30-32). Thus, with its qualitative design, the present study responds to the current need for more research examining the communication between adult siblings.

The present study's focus on the ways siblings communicate with one another and jointly describe their experiences of moving apart is particularly valuable because it provides an idea of how siblings establish new communication patterns and renegotiate contact from a distance during the transition to adulthood. Because the communication behaviors siblings develop as young adults typically set the tone for how they will interact throughout the rest of adulthood (Goetting, 1986), the way they adapt their contact patterns when they first move apart can speak volumes about how their relationship will evolve over the course of their lives. The results of the current study demonstrated that, while many siblings became less involved in one another's day-to-day lives and were not able to talk as often as they wanted, they still considered their relationship highly important and made it a priority to touch base whenever possible. The effort most siblings put in to maintain regular contact amidst their busy schedules and the changes they were experiencing suggests that they will also do their best to stay in touch throughout other transitions they will face during adulthood (e.g., starting a career, having children, etc.). Further, the displeasure many siblings expressed regarding their reduced contact is likely a sign that they care about their relationship and want to stay close, which bodes well for the quality of their bond in years to come. Accordingly, several sibling pairs likened their bond to an especially strong friendship and anticipated that they would remain involved in one another's lives throughout the future. Thus, by

examining siblings' talk about their experiences of moving apart, the present study provides support for the argument that the way siblings interact throughout their adult years and old age is likely influenced, to some degree, by the communication patterns they establish during early adulthood. In the future, qualitative researchers should expand on these findings with longitudinal work and examine the extent to which siblings' communication patterns vary or remain stable during different stages in adulthood.

Gaining insight into how siblings describe their experiences of moving apart using qualitative methods is also important because it adds depth to existing knowledge about adult sibling communication. For example, the results of the current project provide context and meaning for the oft-cited finding that siblings communicate less frequently in young adulthood after they move apart (Mikkelson, 2014; Goetting, 1986; White, 2001). While many participants in the present sample also described a decline in contact, most felt it was important to check in with their sibling as much as possible and made an effort to find times to talk. Additionally, a number of siblings reported that their communication improved and their bond became stronger once they were separated. These findings show that just because siblings may experience a decline in contact during the transition to adulthood does not necessarily mean they will become less close or that they consider their relationship less important, as is often implied in quantitative research reports (see White, 2001). In fact, many siblings in the present study indicated that having space from one another and interacting less often helped strengthen—rather than hinder—their bond. These findings build on existing quantitative findings that rely on siblings' self-reports regarding their perceptions of how their communication has changed during early adulthood. Thus, given the rich detail siblings provided in their responses and in their

interactions with one another, the present study extends new knowledge about how siblings talk about the changes they experience and what they mean for the quality of their bond.

Third, the results of the present study have implications for how the concept of *closeness* is conceptualized and studied in adult sibling research. Although research examining closeness between adult siblings has produced mixed findings, numerous studies have shown that siblings experience a decline in closeness in early adulthood once they leave home and no longer interact on a daily basis (see Lee et al., 1990; Mikkelsen, 2014; White, 2001). However, as previously emphasized, the present study found that a reduction in contact generally did not result in diminished closeness between siblings, with many reporting that it actually helped strengthen their bond. In general, siblings expressed that their bond improved after they moved apart because they argued less often and began to appreciate one another and their relationship more. Participants also noted that, although they did not interact as often as they did when they lived at home, they engaged in deeper and more meaningful communication when they did talk. These findings suggest that letting go of petty disagreements, connecting on a more mature level, and recognizing how much their bond means to them may be more important for determining closeness between adult siblings than frequency of contact. Furthermore, the fact that siblings in the present study still felt intimately connected despite their decline in contact and lessened focus on their relationship is likely a testament to their closeness and not a sign of a weakened bond. Rather than needing to talk every day to feel close to one another, many siblings expressed that they took comfort in knowing that the other was always there and that they could always “pick up”

right where they left off like old friends. Thus, when siblings move apart for the first time, they may develop new ways of expressing and maintaining an emotional connection that do not align with how *closeness* is typically operationalized in the literature. Along these lines, future researchers should further explore how siblings define closeness for themselves during transition to adulthood.

Practical applications. Beyond its important theoretical, methodological, and scholarly contributions, the present study's findings also yield several practical implications. First, the findings suggest that siblings may not fully understand how moving apart for the first time will affect them and therefore do not adequately prepare for the transition beforehand. Many siblings in the present study described their experiences of moving apart as weird, difficult, or sad, with several indicating that they did not expect to be as upset or for it to feel like such a huge loss. When asked, most sibling pairs stated that they did not really talk with one another about the transition before it occurred, citing a variety of reasons (e.g., they were too busy to think about it, they did not realize the impact moving apart would have on them, they were sad and wanted to avoid thinking about it, etc.). Although it is impossible for siblings to anticipate exactly what it will be like to no longer live together, talking with one another about how the transition might impact their bond can help them adjust when the time comes. Furthermore, by discussing the upcoming move, siblings will likely become more accustomed to the idea of being separated, which can lessen the initial shock that many siblings in the present study described.

Second, the findings suggest that parents may need to help their children prepare for the transition from living together to living apart for first time. Given that many

siblings did not realize the importance of talking about the move, intentionally avoided discussing it, or were too busy to give it much thought, they may need to be encouraged to touch base with one another. Specifically, parents can coax them to think about some of the changes they may experience and suggest that they discuss a plan for staying in contact with one another. If it seems that their children are too busy and are not making time for each other before the move, parents can arrange a family night or an outing that gives the siblings an opportunity to talk. For parents who have brothers or sisters of their own, talking with their children about what it was like to move away from their sibling(s) for the first time may also help them anticipate some of the changes they will face. Finally, parents should be careful to not let their own concerns about one of their children leaving home prevent them from recognizing the importance of helping siblings through the transition. Parenting websites such as parenting.com and parentingteens.com provide helpful articles about how parents can help their children cope when an older sibling leaves home. A simple Google search about “siblings moving away from one another” or “siblings leaving home for college” can also direct parents to a number of websites and articles containing helpful tips on the topic. Parents can use these resources to educate themselves, as well as refer them to their children to read. Overall, by encouraging their children to think about and discuss how the transition will impact their relationship, parents can help make the adjustment smoother for siblings.

Third, siblings may benefit from the present study’s findings by learning the importance of maintaining realistic expectations for contact after they move apart. Many siblings expressed disappointment, concern, and/or guilt regarding the fact that they could not talk as often or engage in certain rituals now that they no longer lived together.

Though these difficult feelings are certainly valid to an extent, especially immediately following the transition, they may be intensified or prolonged if siblings fail to accept that maintaining their relationship in the same way as before is an unattainable goal. Thus, instead of ruminating over how things are different or “worse,” siblings should strive to create new rituals and communication norms that they can maintain from a distance and realistically fit into their busy schedules. For example, given that most siblings said that they were too busy during the week to text or call, they could designate a day on the weekend to catch up. By scheduling a specific time to call or Skype, siblings may feel less guilty or disappointed about not keeping in touch on a day-to-day basis because they know they will talk soon. Agreeing on new norms for how they will stay in contact can help siblings let go of unrealistic expectations and adjust to the changes in their relationship.

Fourth, colleges can use the present study’s findings to create resources for freshmen who have recently moved out of their family home and away from their sibling(s) for the first time. Drawing from the key points of this study, these resources can remind freshmen that some change to their sibling relationships is inevitable and encourage them to talk with their brothers and sisters to create realistic goals for maintaining contact. Information could also be provided about the potential positive changes that may stem from their separation, such as experiencing less conflict, connecting with their sibling on a more mature level, and developing a greater appreciation for their sibling and their relationship. Furthermore, the resources can emphasize that rather than viewing their emerging uncertainty about their sibling as a problem or a sign of a weakened bond, they should appreciate how it allows them to see

their sibling as a unique individual and recognize its potential for creating new and interesting topics of discussion. Colleges could make these resources available in wellness centers and dorms, as well as hand them out during freshman orientation. Additionally, organizations and learning groups geared toward freshmen should consider including presentations about the importance of maintaining ties with siblings during the transition to college.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although the present study contributes to research on sibling communication during the transition to adulthood, it is not without its weaknesses. In particular, there are a few limitations worth noting associated with the study's population and data collection procedures. In the next section, I discuss each limitation and provide suggestions for overcoming these pitfalls in future work. Then, I offer specific directions for future research exploring sibling communication during the transition to adulthood.

Limitations. A significant limitation was the paucity of brother-brother pairs included in the sample. Because I recruited from college communication courses, there were more females than males initially targeted for participation. Further, of the few males I was able to recruit, most conducted the interview with a sister because they either did not have a brother or their brother was not old enough to participate. In the end, only one brother-brother pair participated in an interview, which provides just a small glimpse into the communication between brothers during the transition to adulthood.

The inability to delve deeper into male-male sibling relationships in the present study is unfortunate because there is limited research focusing specifically on the closeness and communication between brothers. Nearly two decades ago, Floyd (1997)

lamented the lack of scholarly attention given to the fraternal union, and this largely remains true to this day. Van Volkem (2006) also speculated that many brother-brother unions may be just as intimate as sister-sister bonds, but this claim cannot be supported because the relationship between brothers has not been adequately explored. Thus, future researchers should make a stronger effort to gain a more in-depth understanding of the fraternal dyad. Such investigations are important because, as Floyd (1997) pointed out, the brother-brother bond is often the most important same-sex relationship men report having, possibly providing the type of supportive connection that they struggle to develop in contexts outside their family. Accordingly, the two brothers in the sample—Mason and William—appeared to be extremely close and to view their relationship as one of the most meaningful in their lives. However, without data from additional brother-brother pairs, the present study cannot make any major claims about the closeness and communication between brothers.

Another limitation is the lack of diversity regarding the reasons siblings moved away from one another for the first time. With few exceptions, all of the sibling pairs in the present study experienced a separation because the older sibling left home to attend college. Twins Jessica and Maggie both left home at the same time to attend separate colleges, and twins Oliver and Lillian were separated when Oliver moved away for school while Lillian stayed home to attend a local university. Additionally, in one case, a younger sibling (Katie, 18) left home for college while her older sister (Amanda, 22) lived at home and went to a school close by. However, for all sibling pairs, the transition from living together to living apart for the first time was prompted by one or both of the siblings leaving home to attend college.

The disproportionate focus on college-bound young adults has been noted by other scholars examining sibling relationships during the transition to adulthood (e.g., Conger & Little, 2010; Lindell et al., 2014). In the present study, recruiting from a large, Midwestern university resulted in a sample that was largely Caucasian and middle to upper-middle class. In future work, scholars should examine the perspectives of siblings who leave home for reasons other than to attend college, as well as the experiences of minorities and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Although many young adults leave home to begin work and do not take part in the college experience, their perspectives are underrepresented in research on sibling relationships during the transition to adulthood (Conger & Little, 2010). Likewise, the present study's findings fail to acknowledge the various pathways individuals may take to adulthood, and can only shed light on sibling communication surrounding the transition to college.

It is important to consider how the lack of noncollege emerging adults in the present sample may have impacted the findings. Specifically, the fact that many sibling pairs reported having close relationships, maintaining regular contact with one another, and experiencing relative difficulty adjusting to the separation may stem from the tendency for college students to keep close ties to home. Given that many college students rely on their parents for financial support and return home for summer and winter breaks, they may be more likely to maintain regular contact with their parents and younger siblings living at home than emerging adults who move out to enter the workforce. Furthermore, research demonstrates that older siblings who attend college often serve as positive role models and mentors for their younger siblings, providing a source of support as they pursue their own educational goals (Conger & Little, 2010;

Connidis, 2001). Similarly, many older siblings in the present study enjoyed telling their younger brothers and sisters about their college experiences, and the younger siblings showed genuine interest in hearing details about college classes, Greek life, homecoming, and other aspects of their sister's or brother's day-to-day life on campus. Although these findings are encouraging, it may be that attending college creates more opportunities for siblings to bond and relate to one another than other routes to adulthood, such as entering the workforce. Thus, as Conger and Little (2010) argued, future research should include both college and noncollege siblings to allow for a more complete understanding of how different pathways and life experiences impact the quality of the sibling bond during the transition to adulthood.

Finally, three limitations concerning the data collection process warrant consideration. First, while my initial goal was to recruit freshmen during the fall 2014 semester so that the sibling pairs I interviewed would have experienced moving away from one another within the last four months, recruitment difficulties required me to conduct several interviews in the spring after the siblings had been living apart for a longer period of time. Although all the sibling pairs in the present sample were still in the midst of adjusting to and processing the transition, they could only provide retrospective accounts about their communication and experiences at the time when they were first separated. Future researchers should strive to interview siblings within an even closer timeframe after they move apart for the first time, and perhaps utilize diary methods to allow siblings to record their experiences before, during, and after they move apart. Second, because longitudinal data were not collected, I was not able to examine how the relational meanings siblings construct change across time. Given RDT's assumption that

individual and relational meanings are constantly in flux, scholars will want to examine siblings' communication with one another at multiple time points in future studies.

The third limitation related to data collection concerns the interview setting. Interviewing sibling pairs provided rich data and allowed me to observe how siblings co-construct meaning of their relational experiences, but the overall data collection method was not conducive to eliciting naturally-occurring conversations. I encouraged siblings to engage in a conversation with one another about the topics and discussion questions I raised, but some tended to give brief responses and needed to be prompted to provide more detail. In particular, many younger siblings were hesitant to speak up and would let their older brothers or sisters do most of the talking, and then respond with simple comments such as "I agree with that" or "Same for me." For some dyads, the tendency for younger siblings to allow their older siblings to dominate the conversation appeared to reflect their typical interaction behaviors. However, in some cases, younger siblings' hesitation to talk or provide in-depth responses seemed to stem from the environment of the interview. Because they joined the interview via Skype or FaceTime and were not in the same room with me and their older sibling, younger siblings may have felt like "the odd one out" or less involved in the conversation. At times, I got the sense that siblings who were not physically in the room felt like the interview was primarily focused on their brother or sister and therefore assumed that their own responses were not as valuable. Despite my insistence that it was important to hear both siblings' perspectives, the interview setting made it difficult for some siblings to fully engage in a conversation.

Given these obstacles with the interview process, it would be beneficial for sibling communication researchers to explore different methods and techniques for

collecting dyadic data in future work. Although it is understandably difficult to arrange joint interviews in which both siblings are physically present in the same room, there are ways to make it possible. For instance, researchers could aim to recruit during the times when college students are home with their siblings over summer and winter breaks. Further, directing recruitment efforts to the broader public beyond the college population might help researchers locate emerging adults who have recently left home for various reasons (e.g., to establish independence, to live with a roommate or significant other, etc.) but still live in the same area as their siblings. If conducting face-to-face interviews with both siblings in a dyad is not possible, researchers could create opportunities for more naturally-occurring conversations by leaving the room and asking sibling pairs to tape-record themselves discussing a given topic in private. Thus, even if the siblings are communicating via Skype or FaceTime, they may feel more comfortable talking with one another naturally if the researcher is not present.

Directions for future research. Beyond the research suggestions stemming from the limitations discussed above, the present study's findings point to several other potential avenues for future scholarship. First, the current project may spark further research on siblings' meaning-making processes surrounding other transitions they experience throughout adulthood. Previous research shows that closeness and contact between adult siblings varies based on different life events (see Mikkelsen, 2014). For example, Connidis (1992) found that marriage often causes siblings to become less close, whereas having children, divorce/widowhood, and a family's member's death or decline in health all lead to enhanced closeness. In future work, scholars could apply RDT to explore, for instance, how siblings make sense of the changes in their relationships and

(re)construct their relational identity when they become parents (and aunts/uncles to one another's children) or when they must join forces to care for an elderly parent. Examining siblings' relational talk at times of transition through the lens of RDT will expand our understanding of the unique role siblings play in one another's lives throughout the lifespan and the extent to which they provide support during various life events.

Second, scholars interested in studying siblings' relationships transitions should engage in turning point analyses to gain deeper insight into which life events trigger relational change and how closeness between siblings varies over time. Turning points, or times of significant relational disruption, impact a relationship's development and often prompt major changes in a pair's relational identity (Baxter, 2011; Bolton, 1961).

Researchers conducting turning point analyses ask relational parties to think back to a specific point in time (e.g., when they first moved apart) and identify important events between then and the present that caused a shift in some aspect of their relationship, such as closeness (e.g., Golish, 2001) or relational satisfaction (e.g., Dun, 2010; Sahlstein, Maguire, & Timmerman, 2009). Accordingly, future investigations of adult sibling relationships should use this approach to uncover the specific life events that siblings view as having a significant impact on their contact and closeness. Whereas sibling researchers typically ask participants to report on specific transitions they have already identified as potential sites of relational change, turning point analyses would allow siblings to share their own perspectives of their relational history. In so doing, siblings may identify life events that researchers have not yet considered to study, thus extending new knowledge about adult sibling relationships.

Third, future research on siblings' experiences of moving apart for the first time could apply communicated narrative sense-making (CNSM; Horstman, Maliski, Hays, Cox, Enderle, & Nelson, 2015; Koenig Kellas & Kranstuber Horstman, 2015) to obtain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how siblings use storytelling in conversation with others to construct meaning of relational transition and change. CNSM, according to Koenig Kellas and Kranstuber Horstman (2015), conceptualizes storytelling as a relational process whereby people communicatively make sense of their lives by creating and telling stories. One way individuals accomplish sense-making is through jointly told stories, which are "collaborative constructions through which people recount events by assigning plot, character, and setting in a way that helps them make sense of and give meaning to the event(s) and to the relationship in which they are told" (Koenig Kellas, 2008, p. 244). Thus, through the lens of CNSM, researchers could examine the sense-making processes sibling pairs engage in as they jointly narrate their relational experiences.

Fourth, the results of the current study demonstrate the need for future researchers to further explore how siblings use technology to maintain their relationships when they move away from one another for the first time. Many siblings in the current sample reported that various communication technologies made it easier to stay in touch and remain involved in one another's lives, yet others indicated that their busy schedules made it difficult to send regular text messages or find times when they were both available to talk via Skype, FaceTime, or the phone. When siblings struggle to take advantage of mediated technologies to maintain contact from a distance, their relationships may suffer. For instance, Lindell and colleagues (2015) found that siblings

who engaged in frequent synchronous communication (e.g., phone conversations, texting, etc.) during the transition to college were more likely to report positive relationships than siblings who passively kept up with one another on social networking sites or rarely communicated using any method. Based on these findings, it will be important for sibling researchers to continue examining how siblings' use of technology enhances and/or hinders the quality of their relationships during the transition to adulthood. In particular, qualitative scholars should build on Lindell and colleagues' (2015) work by asking siblings to describe how they use technology to stay in touch, and whether they find communication technologies helpful in maintaining their relationships when they move apart.

Finally, the current project may inspire future researchers to capture how minor siblings feel about and adjust to an older sibling's departure from home. Although younger siblings have been included in research on home-leaving, most of these studies have utilized quantitative methods to examine first- and second-born siblings' self-reports of relational change on various measures (e.g., Lindell et al., 2013; Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2011). Though these studies contribute valuable knowledge about younger siblings' experiences, additional work is needed to shed light on how they make sense of the changes in their sibling relationship and their shifting roles at home. As the present study's findings revealed, younger siblings face their own set of opportunities and challenges that differ from their older sibling's experiences. Further, given that older siblings often become immersed in new roles and responsibilities when they leave home, and parents may direct increased concern and attention to their newly independent child, it is possible that younger siblings' feelings are overlooked at times. Thus, in future

studies, qualitative scholars should interview younger siblings to gain a deeper understanding of what it is like for an older sibling to leave home from their perspective.

Conclusion

Due to the enduring nature of sibling bonds, brothers and sisters have the potential to influence one another in profound ways across the lifespan. During times of transition, siblings may serve as a particularly important source of support, providing a stable presence amidst uncertainty and change. With this in mind, the present study sought to explore the communicative challenges and relational changes siblings face when they move away from one another for the first time during the transition to adulthood. Findings indicated that despite being an uncertainty-evoking event and prompting a decline in contact, the experience of moving apart helped many siblings connect on a more mature level and develop a greater appreciation of their relationship. By examining the communication between sibling pairs, the results also illuminated how brothers and sisters made sense of their experiences and (re)constructed meaning of their relationship through multiple and competing discourses. Taken together, the findings demonstrate the utility of applying relational dialectics theory to study siblings' relationship transitions, and offer a number of practical implications for researchers, families, and university personnel working with freshmen who have recently left home. Finally, by extending and contributing to the growing body of research focusing on sibling ties during the transition to adulthood, the present study will perhaps stimulate future scholarship on the enduring and influential bonds that siblings share.

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Appendix A - Written Consent Form (Adults 18 years old and older)

Project Title: Siblings' Experiences of Leaving Home

Researchers: Danielle Halliwell is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication. Colleen Colaner, project advisor, is a faculty member in the Department of Communication

Purpose: This study involves research on how siblings communicate with one another after they move away from one another for the first time.

Time: The study should take between 45 minutes to 1 hour, depending on how much you and your sibling have to say.

Procedure: Siblings pairs will be interviewed about how they communicate and maintain their relationship after an older sibling moves out of the family home. After you agree to participate, we will schedule a day and time for you and your sibling to conduct an interview with me about your sibling relationship. The interview will be conducted via Skype, FaceTime, or Google Hangout. If those internet technologies are not convenient for you or your sibling, the interview may be done over speaker phone.

Once the interview has begun, I will ask you and your sibling questions about your relationship. The questions will primarily focus on how your relationship has changed since you no longer live together in the family home. Sometimes the questions will be written down, and sometimes the questions will follow up on topics you mention during the interview. The interview will be audiotaped.

Voluntary: Your participation is voluntary. You may quit at any time and you may refuse to answer any questions.

Risk: There is minimal risk involved with the study. There is no more risk than you would experience in your daily interactions.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits for participating in this study. However, talking about your experiences of moving away from your sibling may help you understand your relationship more and recognize ways you can improve your communication with your sibling.

Other: You will receive no monetary payment for taking part in this study. However, if you were recruited from a Communication class, you will receive 10 points of extra credit for recruiting a sibling who still lives at home and participating in a joint interview with him or her. Your grade in the course will not be affected if you choose not to participate in the study.

If you do not wish to participate in an interview you may complete an alternative assignment for the opportunity to earn 10 extra credit points in the class. Students completing the alternative extra credit assignment will be given a link to a scholarly article on sibling communication and will write a 2-3 page response on the article. The alternative assignment will take students 75-90 minutes to complete (the same amount of time it will take to recruit a sibling and participate in a joint interview).

Confidential: Neither your identity, the identity of your place of employment, or the identity of the people you discuss will be revealed in either transcripts, written documents, or verbal presentations of the data. The following steps will be taken to protect your identity and confidentiality.

1. Documents and transcripts will be stored in a secured location.
2. This Consent form will be separated from the data.
3. Identifying information will be deleted from the transcripts of the group discussion.
4. Participants will never be mentioned by name or specialty.
5. You can refuse to answer any questions asked.

Contact: If you have any questions, feel free to contact the primary investigator, Danielle Halliwell, at daniellepoynter@mail.missouri.edu. You may also contact the study advisor, Colleen Colaner, at 882-3522. You may also email her Colanerc@missouri.edu.

Questions: If you have any questions about your rights, contact:

Campus IRB
483 McReynolds Hall
Columbia MO 65211
(573) 882-9585

Thank you for your participation!

Signing this Consent Form indicates that you understand and agree to the conditions mentioned above

Signature

Date

Appendix B - Child Assent Form

Hello! My name is Danielle Halliwell and I am a graduate student at the University of Missouri. I am conducting research on how siblings communicate and maintain their relationships after an older sibling moves out of the family home. You are receiving this email because your sibling, xxx, mentioned that you might be interested in participating in a joint interview with him/her about your sibling relationship.

If you are interested in participating, please take the following steps: (1) sign and date at the bottom of this form and (2) have a parent or guardian read and sign the attached document labeled "parental consent form." Then, mail the two forms back to me in the provided self-addressed stamped envelope.

Once I hear back from you, I will coordinate with your brother or sister and set up a time for the interview. Please let me know if you have any questions about the study.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Danielle Halliwell

Doctoral Candidate
Department of Communication
University of Missouri

Thank you for your participation!

Signing this consent indicates that you understand and agree to the conditions mentioned above

Signature

Date

Appendix C - Parental Consent Form

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Danielle Halliwell and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri. I am conducting research for my dissertation on how siblings communicate and maintain their relationships after an older sibling moves out of the family home. I am conducting joint interviews with sibling pairs—that is, with both the older sibling who has moved out of the family home and the younger sibling who still lives at home.

Your son/daughter xxxx has expressed interest in participating in an interview. I am now seeking to obtain assent from his/her younger sibling, xxxx. Here is some additional information about the study:

Project Title: Siblings' Experiences of Leaving Home

Researchers: Danielle Halliwell is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication. Colleen Colaner, project advisor, is a faculty member in the Department of Communication

Purpose: This study involves research on how siblings communicate with one another after they move away from one another for the first time.

Time: The study should take between 45 minutes to 1 hour, depending on how much the siblings have to say.

Procedure: Siblings pairs will be interviewed about how they communicate and maintain their relationship after an older siblings moves out of the family home. The interview will be conducted via Skype, FaceTime, or Google Hangout. If those internet technologies are not convenient for the siblings, the interview may be done over speaker phone.

Once the interview has begun, I will ask the siblings questions about their relationship. The questions will primarily focus on how your relationship has changed since you no longer live together in the family home. Sometimes the questions will be written down, and sometimes the questions will follow up on topics you mention during the interview. The interview will be audiotaped.

Voluntary: The siblings' participation is voluntary. They may quit at any time and they may refuse to answer any questions.

Risk: There is minimal risk involved with the study. There is no more risk than the participants would experience in their daily interactions.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits for participating in this study. However, talking about their experiences of moving away from one another may help them understand their relationship more and recognize ways they can improve their communication with one another.

Other: They will receive no monetary payment for taking part in this study.

Confidential: All information in the interview will be kept confidential. The siblings' identities, the identities of the people they discuss, or other identifying information (e.g., hometown, university, etc.) will not be revealed in either the transcripts, written documents, or verbal presentations of the data. The following steps will be taken to protect their identities and confidentially:

1. Documents and transcripts will be stored in a secured location.
2. Identifying information will be deleted from the transcripts of the group discussion.
3. Participants will never be mentioned by name or specialty.
4. They can refuse to answer any questions asked.

Contact: If you have any questions, feel free to contact the primary investigator, Danielle Halliwell, at daniellepoynter@mail.missouri.edu. You may also contact the study advisor, Colleen Colaner, at 882-3522. You may also email her Colanerc@missouri.edu.

Questions: If you have any questions about the participants' rights, contact:

Campus IRB
483 McReynolds Hall
Columbia MO 65211
(573) 882-9585

Signing this Consent Form indicates that you understand and agree to the conditions mentioned above and agree to allow your child to participate in the study.

Signature

Date

Appendix D – Demographic Questionnaire

Name _____

1. Your age:

2. Your sex:

3. How would you describe your ethnic background?

____ Black/African American ____ Native American ____ Caucasian

____ Asian/Pacific Islander ____ Hispanic ____ Other

Family Questions

1. Please list your sibling(s), noting their sex, age, and sibling type (i.e., identical twin, fraternal twin, full sibling, half sibling, stepsibling, adopted sibling):

Example: female, 20, half sibling

2. Which of the following describes your parents?

____ Married

____ Not married, but together

____ Never married, not together

____ Divorced/separated (neither remarried)

____ Divorced/separated (one remarried)

____ Divorced/Separated (both remarried)

____ Raised by guardians other than biological parents

Other (please explain) _____

3. How long ago did you move away from your sibling for the first time?

Appendix E –Interview Protocol

Background questions

(Obtained via Demographic Questionnaire)

Relationship with sibling

1. Please tell me about your relationship with one another. (Grand tour question).

Relationship during childhood and adolescence

1. What was it like growing up together?
2. Tell me about one of your earliest memories that involves your relationship.
 - a. What makes this memory stand out?
3. How would you say your relationship with one another changed from childhood to adolescence?
 - a. What do you think caused this change/these changes?

Experience of moving away from one another

1. What was your relationship like leading up to the move?
2. How, if at all, did you both talk about the upcoming move with one another?
 - a. Can you describe a specific conversation you had about it?
3. Describe what it was like to move away from one another.
 - a. Tell me about that day.
 - b. Tell me more about your emotions at the time.
4. What was the most difficult part about moving away from one another? The best part?
5. How did your sibling react when you moved away? (Ask each sibling to reflect on how the other reacted.)
6. I want you to think about the first few weeks right after you moved apart. How did your relationship change when you *first* moved away from one another?
 - a. What makes you say this?

Changes since moving away from one another

1. Now I want you to think about your relationship with one another right now. How has your relationship changed in the time since you first moved apart?
2. Tell me about how often you talk to one another.
 - a. Describe a recent conversation you had. How is this different from when you lived together?
3. What motivates you to stay in contact (or not stay in contact) with one another?
4. Who puts more effort into staying in touch? What makes you think this?

5. Tell me about any rituals, traditions, or activities that the two of you always engage in together.
 - a. How, if at all, have any of these rituals changed (or stopped) since you moved apart?
6. Tell me about any *new* rituals the two of you have developed since you moved apart.
7. What new relationships have you established since moving away from one another? How have these relationships impacted your relationship with your sibling(s)? (Recentring)
8. How well do you know one another at this stage in your lives?

Vision of their future bond

1. I am interested in this transition because it is often considered to be the transition into an adult sibling relationship. Do you feel as if you are transitioning into a more adult bond?
 - a. Why or why not?
2. How do you see your relationship unfolding as you navigate through adulthood?
3. What do you hope for you relationship in the future?

VITA

Danielle Halliwell (B.A., Communication, University of Cincinnati, 2009; M.A., Interpersonal Communication, University of Cincinnati, 2011) earned her doctorate in Interpersonal and Family Communication from the University of Missouri in May 2016. Her research primarily focuses on how family members communicatively construct meaning of their relational experiences during times of transition and change. She has published single and co-authored work exploring such topics as family caregiving, siblings' experiences of leaving home, sibling loss, and adoptive family communication.