“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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ABSTRACT

The present study explored 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. In part one of the study, a phenomenological analysis was conducted to achieve a deeper understanding of siblings’ lived experiences of moving apart. In 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, as well as how they voiced competing ideologies of siblingship to construct a dialogue of adult sibling relationships.

Most sibling pairs described moving apart for the first time as a significant event that held meaning for both their own lives and their sibling relationships. Though prior literature suggests that siblings assign less priority to their bonds once they move apart, 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.