

The Role of Affective Relationship on Children's Motivation To Be Like Their Sibling

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INTRODUCTION

Research investigating siblings suggests environmental sources contribute to the differences between siblings (Rowe and Plomin, 1981). These findings are surprising given that siblings share home, school and community environments (Plomin & Foch, 1981; Scarr & Grajek, 1982). Environmental sources of sibling differences have been examined in four central ways: (1) sibling constellation variables, such as birth order and birth interval (e.g. Zajonc & Markus, 1975; Zajonc, Markus & Markus, 1979), (2) siblings' differential perceptions of their environments (e.g. Daniels & Plomin, 1984; 1985; Daniels, Dunn, Furstenberg & Plomin, 1985), (3) the nature of the sibling relationship (e.g. Dunn, 1983; Dunn & Kendrick, 1982), and (4) sibling deidentification (e.g. Schacter 1976; 1978; 1982), which is defined as the phenomenon of children perceiving themselves as different from their siblings.

Of these four areas of research, only the theory of sibling deidentification has an implicit motivational component as part of the explanation for why children become different from their siblings. According to this theory, siblings seek to become different in order to assuage conflict and rivalry with one another. In a test of this hypothesis Schacter et al (1979; 1982) also found that siblings who were more alike in terms of age and gender were more likely to perceive themselves as different from one another in terms of their personalities. They attributed this difference to the motivational component of deidentification but did not test this assumption directly. Moreover, this research does not test they hypothesized role of affect in children's desire to be different from or similar to their siblings. The present study investigates the role of the affective relationship between siblings on children's motivation to become different from one another. Based on Schacter's (1979; 1982) work, we predicted that the more similar children are, the more they would want to be different from their sibling. Like Schachter, the objective similarities assessed were age and gender. In addition, we hypothesized that children's motivation to be similar to their sibling would depend on the tone of the affective relationship between the siblings.

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SUBJECTS

Ninety-six sibling pairs were selected from the sample of a larger longitudinal investigation being conducted at the University of Michigan (Elementary School Years Study, Pls=J. Eccles, A. Wigfield & R. Harold). The larger sample was recruited from four school districts located in predominantly white, low-to-middle-income communities. All siblings in the larger sample, from kindergarten through sixth grade were invited to participate in the sibling study, of those, 95% agreed to participate.

METHODS

Interviews were administered in the spring and summer of 1989. The siblings were asked a variety of open- and closed-ended questions about their sibling, their relationship with their sibling, and their parents. Single items, measured via a 7-point Likert scale were used to assess children's perceptions of their relationship with their sibling, as well as their desire to be similar to their sibling. The differential treatment items were based on the Sibling Inventory of Differential Experience (SIDE) questionnaire (Plomin & Daniels, 1985). Factor analysis yielded a three factor solution from which unit weighted scales were created (see Table 1). Analyses were conducted via multiple regression. Age was controlled for to partial out maturational effects. The results reported are all significant at the .05 level or better.

HYPOTHESES

1. Siblings who are closer in age will be less motivated to be like each other, than those farther apart in age. This hypothesis is based on Schacter's deidentification model which claims that siblings who are closer in age will be motivated to deidentify more than those who are farther apart in order to reduce negative affective encounters.
2. Siblings of the same sex will be more motivated to be different and less motivated to be alike than siblings of opposite sex, based on Schacter's model.
3. Younger siblings will be more motivated to be like their older siblings than older siblings will be motivated to be like their younger siblings.
4. Children's desire to be like their sibling will be related to the affective nature of the sibling relationship. A positive relationship should increase the desire to be alike while a negative relationship should decrease this desire.
5. The impact of the objective characteristics, age interval and sex, on children's desire to be like their sibling will be mediated by the impact of the objective characteristics on the affective nature of the sibling relationship.

6. The impact of the objective characteristics, age interval and sex, on children's desire to be like one's sibling will be moderated by the impact of the objective characteristics on the affective nature of the sibling relationship.

**TABLE 1
SCALE ITEMS**

Positive Relationship (1-7 scale)

Alpha=.84

1. How much do you like/enjoy being with your sibling?
2. How much do you look up to or admire your sibling?
3. When you have a personal problem, how often do you go to your sibling for help?
4. How well do you think you get along with your sibling?
5. How much do you think your sibling looks up to or admires you?
6. How much time do you spend with your sibling?
7. How much do you think your sibling likes being with you?

Negative Relationship (1-7 scale)

Alpha=.73

1. How often does your sibling try to boss you around?
2. How often do you think your sibling gets mad at you?
3. How often do you tease your sibling?
4. How often does your sibling tease you?
5. How often do you get mad at your sibling?
6. How often do you try to boss your sibling around?
7. How often do you and your sibling fight or argue?

Differential Treatment by Parents*

Alpha=.68

1. Who gets blamed for things they didn't do more in your family?
2. Who gets yelled at more?
3. Who has more privileges to do things like go to the movies away from the family?
4. Who gets along with your mother better?
5. Who gets along with your father better?

*scale:

1=me a lot more	2=me a little more	3=both the same	4=My sib a little more	5=My sib a lot more
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RESULTS

1. Factor analyses yielded three factors pertaining to the affective relationship of siblings: sibling support, sibling conflict, and differential treatment by parents (Table 1). Items loaded on each of the three factors at .5 or better.

In order to assess the effect of ordinal position and gender constellation on the dependent variables, these predictor variables were contrast coded as follows: older siblings - positive; younger siblings - negative; same sex sib pairs -positive; opposite sex pairs - negative.

2a. The hypothesis that the impact of age span and gender constellation on children's desire to be like their sibling would be mediated by the impact of these factors on the affective nature of the sibling relationship was not supported. Thus, the results reported here are the direct effects of the objective characteristics and of the affective relationship on children's motivation to be like their sibling (Figure 1).

2b. In general, across ages, younger children were more motivated to be like their sibling than older children. Within sibling pairs, the youngest of the pairs was significantly more motivated to be like their sibling than were the oldest in the pairs. Moreover, the strength of the effect of birth order was greater than that of absolute age.

2c. There was no main effect of age span between siblings on their motivation to be like one another. Age interval also had no significant impact on any of the three affective relationship variables. Furthermore, there was no significant effect of gender constellation on children's motivation to be like their sibling. The relative birth order of the child did not influence this lack of effect.

2d. The more children perceived their relationship with their sibling as being positive and supportive, the more they were motivated to be like their sibling. Moreover, the more a child perceived their relationship with their sibling as conflictual, the less they were motivated to be like their sibling.

3. Figure 2 indicates that both age and relative order significantly predicted to each of the three affective relationship qualities. The direction of effect was the same for both characteristics. Younger children perceived their relationships with their siblings as being more supportive and less conflictual than their older counterparts. Younger children also perceived more differential treatment by their parents on behalf of their older sibling.

4. There was a significant interaction between children's ordinal position and their perceptions of support in their relationship with their sibling on children's motivation to be like their sib (Figure 3). For the older of the sib pairs, the more supportive they perceived their relationship with their sibling, the more desire they had to be like their sib. Motivation for the younger of the sib pairs was not significantly related to their perceptions of support.

5. Similarly, older sibs' desire to identify with their sibling was significantly more influenced by perceptions of conflict in their relationships with their sibling than was the case for the younger of the sib pairs (Figure 4). For the older sibs, the more conflictual the relationship, the less the motivation to identify.

6. There was a significant interaction between age interval and perceptions of support in the sibling relationship (Figure 5). Support had a bigger impact on sibs close in age than on sib pairs with a large agedifference between them.

CONCLUSIONS

These results do not support the Schacter et al. (1978) assertion that the more similar siblings are in terms of objective characteristics, the less these children will be motivated to be like each other. There was no direct effect of gender constellation nor age interval on children's desire to be like their sibling. Furthermore, these results do not support the hypothesis that the influence of objective characteristics on children's motivation is mediated by the impact of these characteristics on the affective nature of the sibling relationship. Instead, it seems that objective characteristics and the affective relationship between siblings have independent effects on children's motivation to be like their sibling.

That the factor analysis yielded three distinct factors with regard to affective relationship is important. This finding indicates that a positive relationship with one's sibling is not necessarily the absence of conflict and vice versa.

That older children's desire to be like their sib depends on their perceptions of the nature of their relationship with their sib while this is not the case for the younger siblings, suggests that the younger siblings' desire to be like their sib is based on respect and adulation of the older sibling. This respect is not dampened by a negative affective relationship. This finding suggests that younger siblings could be particularly at risk for low self-esteem or poor self-concept since their motivation to be like their sibling does not appear to be modulated by internal processes or by personal experience. Since motivation for the older children of the sib pairs appears to be more modulated by these means, these children are not at as great a risk.

The finding that the motivation to be alike for siblings who are farther apart in age is less effected by perceptions of support than is the case for siblings who are closer in age is important. This finding, coupled with the notion that age interval was not predictive of perceptions of support, suggests that it is not that those siblings farther apart in age perceive their relationships as less supportive compared to closer siblings, but rather that support has less of an effect for siblings who are farther apart.

The effect of absolute age on children's motivation to be different from their sibling may be an artifact of a confounding of age and birth order. By virtue

of sampling, the younger children in the study also tended to be the later born children of the sib pairs.

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FIGURE 2
THE RELATIONSHIP OF AGE
AND BIRTH ORDER
TO CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR
AFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR
SIBLING

	SUPPORT	CONFLICT	DIFF'T TREATMENT
AGE	-.122* (.024)	.134** (.042)	-.126*** (.087)
ORDER	-.217* (.026)	.232** (.042)	-.321*** (.188)

Unstandardized regression coefficient
 (Proportion Variance Explained)

FIGURE 1

THE RELATIONSHIP OF OBJECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS AND
AFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIP TO CHILDREN'S MOTIVATION TO BE LIKE
THEIR SIBLING

	MOTIVATION TO BE LIKE SIBLING
AGE	-.318*** (.080)
ORDER	-.688*** (.125)
SUPPORT	.607*** (.182)
CONFLICT	-.398*** (.054)
DIFF'T TREATMENT	N.S. ---