I, Danielle M. Poynter, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication.

It is entitled:
Siblings, Emerging Adulthood, and Facebook: A Dialectical Analysis

Student's name: Danielle M. Poynter

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: Teres Chandler Sabourin, PhD
Committee member: Nancy Jennings, PhD
Committee member: Heather Zoller, PhD
Siblings, Emerging Adulthood, and Facebook:

A Dialectical Analysis

A thesis submitted to the

Graduate School

Of the University of Cincinnati

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In the Department of Communication

May 2011

by

Danielle M. Poynter

B.A., University of Cincinnati, 2009
Abstract

This study applies Relational Dialectics Theory (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) to the sibling relationship, focusing on how dialectical tensions are expressed and negotiated between siblings during emerging adulthood. Specifically, this study investigates how the popular social network site Facebook might introduce and influence these tensions siblings experience. Using RDT as a framework, the research analyzes siblings’ survey responses, interview data, and Facebook posts for evidence of competing discourses (i.e., connectedness vs. separateness, openness vs. protections, etc).
Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to everyone who encouraged me and supported me throughout this process. I am especially thankful for my Chairperson, Dr. Teresa Sabourin. I do not know how I would have completed this thesis without your ongoing support and words of encouragement. I am also thankful for my committee members, Dr. Nancy Jennings and Dr. Heather Zoller, who provided helpful and valuable input. This thesis would not have been possible without the guidance of my wonderful committee. I would also like to thank Dr. Stephen Haas, whose Interpersonal Communication course helped me develop the foundation for this project. Furthermore, I am grateful for the excellent faculty and staff in the Department of Communication, who provided me with a sense of direction during both my undergraduate and graduate work.

I would also like to thank my amazing friends and family, who continued to cheer me on me even when they had not seen or heard from me in weeks. You are all special to me and I would not be here if I did not have such wonderful people supporting me. I am forever indebted to my mom, who has always been my biggest fan and spared no words of encouragement as I endured the ups and downs of writing a thesis. I am also grateful for the friends and fellow graduate students who helped me recruit participants for this project. I do not think I would have been able to complete this thesis without your help.

Finally, I would like to thank my awesome cohort in the program. I could not have asked for a better group of people to share this experience with, and I am extremely grateful for your help and encouragement over the past two years.
# Table of Contents

**Chapter 1: Introduction – pp. 1-2**  
Research Questions – pg. 2

**Chapter 2: Literature Review – pp. 3-30**  
The Sibling Relationship – pp. 3-6  
Siblings and Emerging Adulthood – pp. 6-8  
Relational Dialectics Theory – pp. 8-20  
Management Patterns – pp. 20-25  
Facebook – pp. 25-30

**Chapter 3: Method – pp. 31-41**  
Participants – pp. 31-34  
Procedure – pp. 34-36  
Data Analysis – pp. 37-41

**Chapter 4: Results – pp. 42-106**  
RQ 1: Dialectical Tensions – pp. 42-58  
RQ 2: Most Common Dialectical Tensions – pp. 58-62  
RQ 3: Sex Differences – pp. 62-66  
RQ 4: Management Patterns – pp. 66-78  
RQ 5: Siblings’ Use of Facebook – pp. 78-106

**Chapter 5: Discussion – pp. 107-125**  
Discussion – pp. 107-120  
Limitations – pp. 120-122  
Conclusion – pp. 122-125

**Appendix A: Survey – pp. 126-132**

**Appendix B: Interview Protocol pp. 133-134**

**References – pp. 135-140**
Chapter 1

Introduction

The sibling relationship is an important and unique relationship that affects most people. It has been reported that up to 96% of Americans have at least one sibling (National Opinion Research Center, 1998). Further, it is estimated that nearly 80% of the population spends one-third of their lives with their siblings (Fitzpatrick & Badzinski, 1994). Despite its pervasiveness, the sibling relationship has been understudied in family communication research (Nussbaum, Pecchioni, Robinson, & Thompson, 2000). In particular, the communication between adult siblings has received the least amount of scholarly attention (Lee, Mancini, & Maxwell, 1990; Mikkelson, 2006). Cicirelli (1995) attributes the lack of research on adult siblings to the assumption that siblings interact less and have little influence upon one another as they age. However, recent research studies have challenged this assumption, finding that the sibling relationship remains influential throughout adulthood (Mikkelson, 2006).

To further investigate the significance of the adult sibling relationship, the present study focuses on the communication patterns between siblings during emerging adulthood. Over a decade ago, Arnett (2000) introduced the term *emerging adulthood* to define the period from the late teens through the mid-to late twenties. He argues that individuals during this time are exploring and developing their identities, extending their education, putting off marriage, and generally prolonging the transition into adulthood. Given the apparent changes that occur during this life stage, it is likely that siblings experience uncertainty and change in
their relationships. Accordingly, Bevan, Stetzenbach, Batson, and Bullo (2006) found evidence of relational and partner uncertainty in the sibling relationship during early adulthood, suggesting that "uncertainty may be a more significant issue between siblings than previously believed" (p. 378).

With this in mind, it can be argued that the change and uncertainty that characterizes emerging adulthood will influence the way siblings communicate with one another. In recent years, scholars have suggested that applying relational dialectics theory (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) might further our understanding of how siblings negotiate complex issues during early adulthood (Bevan et al., 2006; Fowler, 2009). As such, this study will analyze the manifestation and management of relational dialectics between sibling dyads during emerging adulthood, focusing on how they use the popular social network site Facebook to communicate. Thus, the following research questions will guide this study:

RQ1: What dialectical tensions are evidenced in the communication between siblings during emerging adulthood?

RQ2: Which are the most common dialectical tensions communicated between siblings during emerging adulthood?

RQ3: How does sex influence which dialectical tensions are communicated between siblings during emerging adulthood?

RQ4: What management patterns are used by siblings during emerging adulthood to manage the dialectical tensions in their sibling relationship, and what are the implications?

RQ5: What role does Facebook play in the manifestation and management of dialectical tensions in the sibling relationship during emerging adulthood?
Chapter 2

Literature Review

I begin the literature review by discussing the unique characteristics of the sibling relationship, and then highlight the changes that siblings experience during emerging adulthood. Next, I review relational dialectics theory and present it as a useful framework with which to study sibling communication. Finally, I look at how siblings might use Facebook to communicate and manage tensions in their relationship during emerging adulthood. In light of the literature reviewed, five research questions are proposed.

Unique Characteristics of the Sibling Relationship

The sibling bond has characteristics in common with all interpersonal relationships. However, the sibling relationship differs from other relationships in several distinct ways. First, unlike typical romantic and platonic relationships, sibling relationships are involuntary and relatively permanent (Mikkelson, 2006). Although dissolution of the sibling relationship is possible, the sibling status will always remain intact (Cicirelli, 1995; emphasis added). Thus, while it might not be possible or necessary to maintain an unsatisfactory friendship or romance, the permanence of the sibling relationship encourages siblings to work through problems and maintain a bond. Even when siblings choose not to maintain an active relationship, they are likely to remain informed about one another indirectly through parents and other third parties (Allen, 1977). As it is nearly impossible to dissolve all mutual ties, disengaged siblings almost always have the opportunity to revive their relationship (Mikkelson, 2006).
Second, Sanders (2004) argues that sibling relationships significantly influence an individual's development during childhood. He notes that previous family research has overlooked sibling influences, citing parents as the primary influence on a child's development and behavior. However, the impact of the sibling relationship on an individual’s development has attracted some research attention (Cicirelli, 1995). Throughout the entire span of their developmentally formative years, siblings have greater access to one another than to their peers or other family members (Fitzpatrick & Badzinski, 1994). Therefore, while parental influences remain important, it is also likely that siblings influence one another’s development.

A third factor is that sibling relationships are often the longest-lasting relationships people have in their lives (Cicirelli 1995). Likewise, Bank & Kahn (1997) describe the sibling relationship as a lifelong bond, spanning from one’s earliest memories until the end of life. Although there is very little research on the sibling relationship from a life-span perspective (Fowler, 2009), there is evidence that the relationship can be significantly impacted by its duration (Cicirelli, 1995). Throughout this enduring relationship, siblings play important roles in one another's lives. Early in life, siblings act as teachers, playmates, and friends; as they age, they become companions and provide support (Goetting, 1986). The duration of the sibling relationship is perhaps most apparent after the parents die, as siblings then become the sole ties to their immediate family (Bank & Kahn, 1997).

Fourth, the sibling relationship is unique in that siblings share a common history with similar personal, social, and cultural experiences (Goetting, 1986). When siblings are young, they create intimate patterns of communication as they
discuss common family experiences (Cicirelli & Nussbaum, 1989). Similarly, Bank & Kahn (1997) assert that siblings co-construct their bond through the telling and retelling of their remembered experiences. Furthermore, they state, “Each of us who has brothers or sisters reminds the other(s) of how we have aged, who we have been, and whom we have become” (xvii). Thus, siblings’ long shared history often has a considerable influence on both the sibling relationship and the individual.

Finally, during adulthood, the sibling relationship is subject to unique changes not typically experienced in other relationships. In childhood and adolescence, the sibling relationship is characterized by intimate daily contact and interactions in the home (Cicirelli, 1995). However, as siblings get older, they are likely to move away from home and from each other. Thus, because adult siblings no longer live in the same household, maintaining the sibling relationship becomes more voluntary (Lee et al., 1990). Moreover, due to commitments to their families and careers, siblings typically have few opportunities to communicate with one another (Myers & Knox, 1998). In this sense, communication between siblings requires more effort in adulthood than in childhood and adolescence. As a result, the adult sibling relationship may change as siblings become immersed in the daily activities of their own families (Mikkelson, 2006) and interact less. In addition, siblings must come to terms with the new role of aunt or uncle for one another’s children (Myers, Brann, & Rittenour, 2008).

Despite the reduced contact and uncertainty that may occur between some siblings in adulthood, many researchers have noted that siblings provide continued support for one another as they age (Connidis, 1992; Goetting, 1986; Stocker,
Lanthier, & Furman, 1997). In particular, the death of a parent can bring even distant siblings together as they make arrangements and mourn their loss (Goetting, 1986). Connidis (1992) also notes that various life transitions in adulthood, such as divorce, often strengthen the sibling bond. Furthermore, White (2001) suggests that siblings place increased importance on the sibling relationship later in life, perhaps because they look back and recognize the impact the sibling relationship has had on their lives over several decades.

As the discussion above suggests, the sibling relationship is influenced by various changes and events during adulthood. However, as noted earlier, many young people are taking longer to reach what are considered adult “milestones.” In this sense, individuals are extending the transition into adulthood. As such, Arnett (2007) argues that the transition into adulthood is “not merely a transition but a separate period of the life course” (p. 69). In the next section, I discuss the transitional period Arnett (2000) calls emerging adulthood, and consider how the sibling relationship is influenced during this time.

The Sibling Relationship During Emerging Adulthood

As previously mentioned, Arnett (2000) proposed emerging adulthood as a developmental stage that spans the period from the late teens through the early twenties, typically ages 18-25. He asserts that individuals in this stage no longer feel like adolescents, but also do not feel as if they have reached adulthood. He argues that changes in society, such as delayed marriage and parenthood, have left 18-25 year-olds with no name for the stage they are experiencing. Individuals in this stage are likely to focus on individual goals, engage in intimate relationships
without pursuing marriage, and participate in risky behaviors (Nelson & Barry, 2005). Moreover, 18-25 year-olds are also likely to experiment with work, love, and worldviews, and are often uncertain about the future (Arnett, 2000). Thus, individuals during this time period experience change, turbulence, and uncertainty.

Although emerging adulthood is a relatively new conceptualization, the term is receiving considerable research attention. The fact that many emerging adults demonstrate ambivalence about their own adult status supports the argument that emerging adulthood is a distinct period of development (Nelson & Barry, 2005). When asked whether they felt as if they had reached adulthood, Arnett (2000) found that the majority of Americans in their late teens and early twenties answer ambiguously: *in some respects yes, in some respects no*. This suggests that the transition into adulthood is longer and more complicated than in previous generations.

Given its high degree of change and uncertainty, it can be concluded that the emerging adulthood stage is a confusing time period for many individuals, with evident changes in the sibling relationship. For instance, during their late teens and early twenties, siblings may experience uncertainty in the relationship as they go away to college or decrease contact with one another (Bevan et al., 2006). Also during this time, siblings are managing the pressures involved with leaving home and establishing independence (Myers et al., 2008). As noted earlier, many individuals experience a significant change when they move out of the family household because they no longer have immediate access to daily interactions with siblings. Therefore, some siblings during the emerging adulthood stage may
experience conflicting desires to remain close to one another, yet establish autonomy outside the sibling relationship. To that end, this study proposes that communication between siblings is influenced by various dialectical tensions during emerging adulthood.

*Relational Dialectics Theory*

Relational dialectics theory is an approach to communication that focuses on the contradictions that naturally arise in close relationships (Sahlstein & Baxter, 2001). A dialectical view recognizes that, in everyday communicative encounters, people express numerous opposing impulses and voices that work against one another in an effort to be heard (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). For example, people may simultaneously experience the competing desires for both stability and change in any given relationship. These contradictory impulses, or dialectical tensions, create the ongoing and constantly changing nature of interpersonal relationships (Sahlstein & Baxter, 2001). Thus, the theory examines the interplay between dialectical tensions to provide insight into the dynamics and communication patterns within close relationships.

It is important to note that, unlike mainstream interpersonal and family communication theories, relational dialectics theory does not privilege the individual actor (Baxter, 2011). Whereas other perspectives seek to understand how individuals relate to and impact one another, relational dialectics theory is concerned with how the interplay of discourses create meaning. In other words, relational dialectics theory posits that meaning is not located in the individual actors, but in the communication occurring between relational partners. As such,
Baxter (2011) argues that the identity of the individual is not determined prior to the interaction. Rather, the identities of both individuals and relationships are shaped through the interplay of competing discourses. In this sense, relational dialectics theory draws attention to the social, rather than the individual, aspect of communication.

Relational dialectics theory also challenges the widely-accepted view that relationships are static containers within which relational partners communicate. The theory argues that relationships are not fixed entities, but are constantly changing in communication. As Baxter (2011) asserts, relationships are “constructed in communication, rather than being mere settings in which communication occurs” (p. 15, emphasis added). Thus, she argues that it is important to study how relationships are created and given meaning in the communication between relational partners.

According to Baxter (2004), relational dialectics theory also differs from a systems approach in important ways. She argues that the core distinction rests in systems theory's emphasis on equilibrium, or achieving a steady state. A dialectical approach, on the other hand, emphasizes the ongoing and competing discourses of unity and difference. Thus, relational dialectics theory acknowledges and accepts the inherent contradictions within the family (Sabourin, 2003), whereas systems theory attempts to bring everything back to a balanced state. By emphasizing balance, a systems view focuses on stability; a dialectical view, however, focuses on change (Baxter, 2004).
Scholars have identified various dialectical tensions that influence relational experiences. For the present study, the dialectical approaches taken by Baxter and Montgomery (1996) and Rawlins (1992) will provide a framework for the analysis. These frameworks are reviewed below.

*Primary Dialectical Tensions*

Particularly relevant to family communication research is the work of Baxter and Montgomery (1996), in which they discuss what have been referred to as the three primary dialectical tensions: connectedness vs. separateness, openness vs. protection, and novelty vs. predictability. The connectedness vs. separateness tension represents competing desires to be close with others, yet maintain distance from them. This tension illuminates the struggle between interdependence and independence in a relationship. From this view, relational partners face the opposing desires to create a cohesive unit while also maintaining their distinct and independent selves.

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) argue that personal relationships in our culture are often defined and understood in terms of closeness and distance. In general, a "good" relationship is characterized by closeness and a "bad" relationship is characterized by distance. This way of thinking promotes an “either/or” property of relationships. In other words, relational partners are *either* close to one another, *or* they are distant from one another. A dialectical approach challenges this perspective, arguing for a “both/and” quality of relationships in which people continuously and simultaneously negotiate their needs of closeness and distance.
The openness vs. protection tension defines the conflict between wanting to communicate openly about personal information, and wanting to be protective and strategic in our communication. While earlier theories have placed importance on openness in relationships, and associated expressiveness with relational satisfaction, dialectical theory proposes that both openness and protection are necessary for a healthy relationship (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). This view recognizes that the openness and protection dialectical tensions occur at the same time in relationships, and that relational partners feel compelled to both disclose and not disclose.

The novelty vs. predictability tension represents our conflicting desires to experience the comfort of stability and the excitement of change in our relationships. In other words, relational partners express simultaneous demands for both certainty and uncertainty. According to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), this “both/and” perspective is not supported by previous approaches to personal relationships. For instance, they note that uncertainty reduction theory proposes that people strive to reduce uncertainty in their relationships, and that certainty is associated with relational satisfaction. Thus, uncertainty reduction theory suggests that people do not recognize the interdependence of novelty and predictability in their relationships. Rather, they pursue one polarity (certainty) and avoid the other (uncertainty). In contrast, dialectical theory recognizes that the presence of both novelty and predictability are necessary to achieve a satisfying relationship.

Family communication research has typically focused on the three primary dialectical tensions reviewed above. However, other dialectical approaches can also
enhance our understanding of family communication and relationships. One such approach is Rawlins’ (1992) discussion of contextual dialectics. These dialectics, hereafter referred to as secondary dialectical tensions, are reviewed in the following section.

Secondary Dialectical Tensions

Although Rawlins’ (1992) research on contextual dialectics focuses specifically on the communication in friendships, it is likely that these tensions also occur in all personal relationships. Siblings may be particularly inclined to experience these tensions for a few reasons. First, the sibling relationship serves as a friendship for many people, especially later in life (Connidis, 1989). Moreover, Cicirelli (1995) notes that common phrases used to describe friends, such as “like a brother” or “like a sister,” suggest that there are significant similarities between sibling relationships and friendships. He describes additional parallels between the two relationships:

- Siblings and friends are typically age peers (at least in childhood and adolescence); they both play a broad range of roles and have ready access to one another; the relationship is characterized by egalitarianism, equal power, and an emphasis on sociability, with limited obligation (p. 58).

Thus, although there are several characteristics unique to the sibling relationship, siblings and friends do share important qualities. As such, Rawlins’ (1992) dialectical approach can be appropriately extended to study the communication between siblings.

In his research on the communication and experiences between friends, Rawlins (1992) describes two categories of dialectical tensions: contextual and interactional. Contextual dialectics stem from the position friendship holds within
the existing social structure, as well as the cultural expectations ascribed to friendship. Rawlins (1992) defines two contextual dialectics that impact friendships: public vs. private and ideal vs. real. With a few exceptions, his description of interactional dialectics bears a close resemblance to Baxter and Montgomery’s (1996) review of the three primary dialectical tensions discussed earlier. Therefore, to avoid repetition, only Rawlins’ (1992) discussion of contextual dialectics will be reviewed and applied in this analysis.

According to Rawlins (1992), the private vs. public dialectic describes the tensions associated with how friendships are perceived publically and how friends negotiate the relationship privately. In terms of the public sphere, he argues that friendship holds a marginal position because it lacks the recognition and definitive statuses of other relationships. For example, a friendship is not legally and religiously authorized the way a marriage is. It also does not have the sexual and possessive qualities that constitute a romance. Further, a friendship does not fall into the clearly defined categories of a work or professional relationship. Perhaps most importantly, a friendship is not determined by a blood relationship, as family ties are. For these reasons, Rawlins (1992) contends that a friendship does not have a clearly defined status in the public realm.

Despite the struggle for public recognition, friendship is characterized by a strong and moral private bond. As Rawlins (1992) asserts, a friendship is established voluntarily between people and is managed and maintained privately. He further notes that a friendship cannot be forced onto people, and it is not confined to the formal requirements of other personal relationships. For example,
co-workers are often required to develop and sustain a professional relationship for the good of the company. Likewise, a young child likely has little say in the management of a parent-child relationship. However, friends are free to continuously and privately negotiate the terms of their relationship as they see fit.

According to Rawlins (1992), the private and public management of friendship intersect to create a complex dialectical tension. On one hand, friends work to maintain the privacy of certain agreements and behaviors within their relationship. On the other hand, they strive to publicize certain aspects of their behavior so that the public perceives their friendship in the way they want it to be perceived. Thus, from a dialectical view, friends face the challenge of simultaneously negotiating and communicating their private and public behavior. The management of the public and private aspects of friendship is not an easy task. Rawlins (1992) asserts that, in a friendship, an individual may be applauded or scolded by a friend for emphasizing either a public or private facet of the friendship. He further suggests that the same individual may encounter public approval or disapproval for the same behavior. As follows, the public vs. private dialectic draws attention to what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior in a friendship.

It is likely that siblings also face the challenge of negotiating the private and public aspects of their relationship. Although the sibling bond is clearly defined in society, siblings often develop a very private and personal bond. Noting the long history that siblings share, Bank and Kahn (1997) describe the sibling relationship as “a repository of secrets, some shame-filled, some nostalgic, some painful, of times in our childhood when no parents were present to observe, deter, or punish” (xvii).
Siblings, then, must decide what parts of their past and their relationship to keep private and what parts to publicize. As with friends, siblings establish private agreements and commitments within their relationship. However, they also attempt to reveal certain behaviors so that public perceptions of their relationship are consistent with how they want it to be perceived.

Adult siblings may also experience the public vs. private tension in their relationship because they have more freedom to manage their relationship in adulthood than they did as children. As discussed earlier, the sibling relationship is involuntary and essentially forced upon people. When siblings are young, it is likely that parents manage and have a significant impact on the sibling relationship. As siblings enter adulthood, however, the relationship becomes more voluntary (Mikkelson, 2006) and most siblings begin to manage the relationship on their own terms. Thus, like friends, adult siblings are generally free to decide what aspects of their relationship to keep private and what aspects to publicize.

The ideal vs. real dialectic highlights the conflict between the expectations of friendship and the reality of the communication and experiences that friends share. Rawlins (1992) discusses five ideal characteristics that our culture attributes to friendship. First, a friendship is voluntary. As noted earlier, a friendship is not forced on people; rather, people are free to initiate, maintain, and terminate a friendship. Second, a friendship is a personal relationship managed privately between people. Third, a friendship is based on equality. While certain inequalities between friends may exist, the relationship is essentially egalitarian. Fourth, a friendship is characterized by mutual involvement. In other words, a friendship
reflects the collaborative efforts of two individuals to develop and foster a relationship based on trust, acceptance, commitment, and assistance. Fifth, a friendship is an affective bond involving care and concern for one another. In general, these feelings are distinct from the exclusive and sexual qualities of a romantic relationship.

However, to what degree each of these ideals are actually practiced or communicated between friends depends on the situation and the friendship. As friends attempt to meet these expectations, they may face certain obstacles or constraints that contradict their efforts (Rawlins, 1992). For example, an individual might develop romantic feelings for a friend that are more appropriate for a dating relationship than a friendship. In this sense, the individual experiences a tension between the expectation that a friendship does not involve romantic feelings and the reality of how he/she actually feels. Thus, how the individual communicates and manages this tension reflects the ideal vs. real dialectic of friendship.

As with friendship, there are various expectations that are attributed to the sibling relationship. According to Lee et al. (1990), there are “cultural expectations that the sibling relationship should be more emotionally close, meaningful, and enduring” than other interpersonal relationships (p.431). This suggests that, ideally, the sibling relationship is a close and influential bond. However, some adult siblings feel indifferent about their relationship and have little contact with one another (Cicirelli, 1995). Moreover, scholars have found that conflict (Bank & Kahn, 1997) and rivalry (Ross & Milgram, 1982) continue to impact the sibling relationship during adulthood. Therefore, it is likely that siblings are faced with the
tension between what is expected of the sibling relationship and what they experience in reality.

As evidenced by the discussion above, dialectical tensions influence the nature and dynamics of personal relationships. According to Sabourin (2003), all families experience dialectical tensions in their daily lives. Therefore, it is important to understand how these tensions are communicated between family members. Although the dialectical approach has been applied to parent-child and spousal relationships, the dialectical tensions communicated between siblings has yet to be studied (Fowler, 2009). To that end, the following research question is proposed:

RQ1: How are relational dialectics manifested in the communication between siblings during emerging adulthood?

As mentioned earlier, close contact and daily interactions define the sibling relationship during childhood. However, during emerging adulthood, siblings experience reduced contact with one another and have an opportunity to establish independence outside of the family. As a result, it is likely that siblings during emerging adulthood struggle with the conflicting desires of being independent from and being close to one another. Because establishing independence and creating an identity are significant endeavors of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), it is possible that the dialectical tension of autonomy vs. connection is more prevalent for emerging adult siblings than the other tensions. As follows, a second research question is proposed:

RQ2: Which are the most common dialectical tensions communicated between siblings during emerging adulthood?
Research has found that women often take on the responsibility of keeping family members in contact (Hagestad, 1986; Gerstel, 1988; Di Leonardo, 1987). As such, Hagestad (1986) describes women as the family “kin-keepers,” noting that they typically perform such tasks as “maintaining communication, facilitating contact and the exchange of goods and services, and monitoring family relationships” (p. 150). There is also evidence that women are more likely than men to coordinate family gatherings and spread news among family members (Di Leonardo, 1987). With this in mind, many scholars have also explored how sex influences communication and closeness in the adult sibling relationship. White (2001) found that women typically place more emphasis than men on maintaining and improving their sibling relationships in adulthood. Furthermore, Myers and Members of COM 200 (2001) found that female siblings use more relational maintenance behaviors than male siblings, and that sister-sister pairs use relational maintenance behaviors more often than other sibling pairs. These findings suggest that women put more effort than men into maintaining sibling relationships in adulthood, which supports the “women as kin-keepers” perspective.

Research also indicates that women, whether reporting on a brother or a sister, are more likely than men to report intimacy as a motivator of communication with their siblings (Fowler, 2009). Similarly, Spitze and Trent (2006) found that women are more likely than men to report feeling close with their sibling. They also found that sister-sister dyads talk more often on the phone and exchange more advice than other sibling dyads. Moreover, there is evidence that sister pairs
typically place more importance on self-disclosure than brother pairs or brother-sister pairs (Lee et al., 1990).

The findings above support the long-standing view that women experience more closeness in their relationships than men. However, there is a growing awareness that women’s relationships are not necessarily closer than men’s; rather, men and women simply communicate closeness differently (Cancian, 1986; Wood, 2008). Floyd (1996) refers to these differences in terms of the *gendered closeness perspective*, which suggests that women express closeness through shared dialogue, while men experience closeness through shared activities. When applied to the sibling relationship, Floyd (1996) found support for the *gendered closeness perspective*. Therefore, sister-sister pairs reported self-disclosures as more significant to their relational closeness than did brothers or brother-sister pairs. Further, brother-brother pairs indicated that shared activities were more important to their closeness than did the other sibling pairs. This suggests that sex commonality may be an important factor in determining the amount of closeness between siblings. For example, Fitzpatrick and Badzinski (1994) posit that same-sex sibling pairs may experience a greater emotional connection than opposite-sex sibling pairs.

Based on the findings above, it is worthwhile to explore whether there are sex differences in the amount of connection and closeness communicated between siblings during emerging adulthood. Therefore, the following research question is proposed:
RQ2: How does sex influence which dialectical tensions are communicated between siblings during emerging adulthood?

According to Turner and West (2006), dialectical tensions are ongoing and never completely settled. For this reason, relational partners must continuously manage and negotiate their conflicting needs. As Sabourin (2003) states, coping with dialectical tensions within the family requires “ongoing, creative, communicative management” (p. 10). As follows, she has identified four management strategies that people commonly employ to negotiate the contradictions they experience in relational life. These management patterns are selection, separation, neutralization, and reformulation.

Management Patterns

According to Sabourin (2003), relational partners using the selection management pattern consistently stress one polarity over the other. While they acknowledge the contradictory desires in the relationship, they choose to focus solely on one polarity and ignore the other. In this sense, they deny that both polarities require attention (Sabourin, 2003). For this reason, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) refer to the selection management pattern as denial. They argue that by completely avoiding one polarity, relational partners deny the presence of the contradiction.

To the extent that the selection management pattern emphasizes one dialectical pole and denies the other, it indicates an “either/or” view of communication and relationships (Sabourin, 2003). As previously noted, however, a dialectical perspective argues for a “both/and” quality of relationships in which
relational partners continuously experience and manage opposing desires.

Relational dialectics theory also posits that change is constant in relationships, and that neglecting to acknowledge the change has negative consequences (Sabourin, 2003). For example, a family that pursues only connectedness and ignores the need for separateness inhibits its members from developing individually. Thus, relational partners using the selection management pattern deny the change and contradiction that naturally occurs in relationships. Although the selection management pattern may work to a certain extent or temporarily, a relationship based exclusively on either polarity will not produce healthy or satisfying outcomes.

While selection indicates a constant denial of one polarity, the separation management pattern involves isolating situations and times in which one polarity is emphasized and the other is disregarded (Sabourin, 2003). Thus, in situations where predictability is preferred, novelty is avoided. According to Sabourin (2003), relational partners enacting this strategy accept the interplay of both polarities, but strive to separate them from one another either temporally (by time) or topically (by situation). Temporal separation, or spiraling inversion (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), is where parties engage in a “back-and-forth spiral over time” (p. 63) between two competing needs. Topical separation, or segmentation, occurs when relational partners assign prominence to a particular polarity depending on the topic or the activity (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). For example, a family employing topical separation might designate dinner time as an activity suited for connection, but allow for autonomy in after dinner activities. In this sense, the family permits
both dialectical forces to exist, but attempts to ignore their interdependence (Sabourin, 2003).

Separation, whether temporal or topical, appears to be an ideal response to dialectical tensions. According to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), spiraling inversion and segmentation represent the most efficient dialectical management patterns. Likewise, Sabourin (2003) notes that separation is a practical tactic because the family recognizes and attempts to fulfill contrasting desires. Yet, despite the rationality behind this strategy, it cannot permanently solve the tensions associated with dialectical oppositions. Given the persistent and simultaneous nature of dialectical contradictions, they can only be separated on a temporary basis (Sabourin, 2003). Permanently separating the oppositions is ultimately not possible.

Another response to dialectical tensions is what Sabourin (2003) calls neutralization. As with selection and separation, relational partners using the neutralization management strategy acknowledge the existence of their contrasting needs. However, they attempt to reach a balance, or middle ground, between the tensions and decrease their force (Sabourin, 2003). This management pattern, referred to as balance by Baxter and Montgomery (1996), appears on the surface to be a favorable and healthy response to dialectical tensions. As Sabourin (2003) points out, “A common notion about healthy family functioning is that the family achieves a balance between stability and change or togetherness and separateness” (p. 12). This emphasis on achieving balance, although a central tenet of systems theory, contrasts with the dialectical view that change is inevitable and constant. As
such, striving for balance is considered a precarious and unreliable management strategy (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996; Sabourin, 2003).

According to Sabourin (2003), reformulation is a management pattern in which relational partners redefine the dialectical tensions they experience so they are perceived as “one,” rather than as opposites. Thus, unlike the aforementioned management patterns, reformulation does not view the polarities as competing against one another. Rather, relational partners develop a new reality where the conflicting desires are not viewed as opposites. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) refer to this strategy as recalibration, in which the expression of a contradiction is reframed so that the dialectical poles are perceived to encompass one another. For instance, a family that experiences ongoing chaos might view the constant change and unpredictability as evidence of stability. Rather than acknowledging stability and change as opposing forces, the family reframes the polarities to reflect a unified whole.

Reformulation, like the other management strategies, is only temporarily effective as a response to dialectical tensions (Sabourin, 2003). As Baxter and Montgomery (1996) note, the strategy is “a praxical improvisation of the moment that transcends the form of contradiction without altering its ongoing presence” (p. 66). This suggests that reformulation may be an effective response to dialectical tensions temporarily or in certain situations, but it cannot eliminate the existence of the contradiction permanently. In other words, reframing dialectical tensions to reflect a unified whole ultimately does not change the fact that they are inherently and persistently in opposition to one another. However, relational partners may
practice reformulation as an attempt to ignore the ongoing tensions in their relationship. Accordingly, Sabourin (2003) argues that, in some cases, reformulation is a simply a form of denial.

At best, the four management patterns discussed above are temporary responses to the constant tensions that relational members face. As discussed previously, dialectical tensions are ongoing and cannot be completely resolved. To that end, siblings must continuously negotiate the competing desires in their relationship. To explore the strategies that siblings use to manage the dialectical tensions in their relationship, a third research question is proposed:

RQ4: What management patterns are used by siblings during emerging adulthood to manage the dialectical tensions in their sibling relationship, and what are the implications?

As previously discussed, many siblings move out of the childhood home during emerging adulthood and live in separate residences for the first time. As a result, it becomes more difficult for adult siblings to communicate and keep in touch with one another (Mikkelson, 2006). While face-to-face visits remain a common way adult siblings stay in contact (Cicirelli, 1995; Mikkelson, 2004), the demands of adulthood likely make it difficult to arrange regular visits. For this reason, adult siblings may rely on technology to stay in contact with one another. Accordingly, Mikkelson (2004) found that some adult siblings use e-mail and IM to communicate more than any other method. Given the growing popularity of social network sites (SNSs) in recent years, I argue that many adult siblings are now using Facebook to communicate with one another. In the following section, I justify why Facebook use
among siblings during emerging adulthood deserves research attention, and propose a final research question.

*Facebook*

In recent years, social network sites (SNSs) have emerged as a common communication tool that enables individuals to present themselves in a public or semi-public profile, articulate a social network, and interact with others in their network (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The SNS this study will focus on is Facebook, a heavily populated social network site that remains understudied (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Created by Mark Zuckerberg from his Harvard dorm room in 2004, Facebook is currently cited as the largest social network site in the world (The New York Times, 2011). At its conception, Facebook targeted just the college student population, available only to students at Harvard, Yale, Stanford, and Columbia (Facebook, 2011). Since then, Facebook has opened its doors to anyone and has progressed into a widely popular SNS. According to Facebook’s official website, there are over 500 million active users who spend over 700 billion minutes per month on the site. Moreover, users spend an average of 20 minutes a day on Facebook, and many incorporate the site into their daily media practices (Ellison et al., 2007).

As with other social network sites, Facebook allows its members to create a personal profile. Users have the opportunity to provide a myriad of personal information on their profile page, including their name, gender, birthday, hometown, relationship status, and political and religious views. Facebook profiles can also display members’ work and school information; contact information such
as phone number, e-mail address, and local address; and personal interests such as favorite books, movies, and music. In addition, users are able to add a “profile picture,” which is located at the top of their profile page. Thus, rather than hiding behind the anonymity of the Internet, Facebook users are encouraged to present their “real” selves on their profiles (Ellis, 2010).

Once a profile has been created, Facebook members are able to amass “friends” with whom they can interact. For many users, Facebook provides an efficient way to maintain and strengthen offline relationships (Ellison et al., 2007). For example, Urista, Dong, and Day (2009) found that people use social network sites such as Facebook and MySpace because they can quickly message several friends at once, or leave a short comment on a friend’s page rather than engaging in a long phone conversation. They also found that people enjoy using social network sites because they can respond to messages and comments from friends at their own convenience. In this sense, Facebook communication is more sporadic and less instantaneous than face-to-face communication or phone conversations.

However, Facebook has implemented various services to make communication between users more immediate. In 2007, Facebook developed a platform that enables users to access the site from their mobile device. Today, more than 200 million members use this service, and are twice as active on Facebook than non-mobile users (Facebook, 2011). In 2008, Facebook introduced Facebook Chat, a messaging system similar to instant messenger. Most recently in November 2010, Zuckerberg launched “Facebook Messages,” which channels users’ e-mails, text messages, and online chats into one inbox (The New York Times, 2011). These
services, if used by members, likely make communication with others on Facebook more convenient and more constant than before.

Facebook users can also interact with another through Facebook’s photo sharing feature, which lets users upload photographs, create albums, and “tag” friends who also in the photographs. This feature also enables Facebook friends to view and comment on one another’s photographs. Other common activities among friends include viewing one another’s profiles and learning about each other’s hobbies and interests (Ellison et al., 2007). This suggests that Facebook friends do not necessarily need to interact in order to keep up with one another’s activities. Rather, they can stay updated by simply viewing one another’s profiles, information, and pictures. Accordingly, Urista et al. (2009) found that some people enjoy using social network sites because they can see what people are up to without having to ask them or engage in a conversation.

As the discussion above suggests, Facebook is designed to bring people together through communication and the sharing of information and photographs. In fact, the tagline on Facebook’s homepage reads, “Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life.” However, given that Facebook is largely public, some users may wish to limit the amount of information they share. Thus, Facebook use highlights the tension between being public and being private, or revealing and concealing information. Facebook members can manage their individual privacy by controlling their privacy settings and deciding what information to disclose on their profile. However, this tension between being public and being private on Facebook extends beyond individual privacy management. As mentioned earlier, relational
partners must manage the tensions between how they want to be perceived publically, and how they negotiate their relationship privately. Therefore, Facebook relationships are especially likely to involve this negotiation of public and private behavior.

There are many features on Facebook that encourage users to publicize their relationships on the site. First, Facebook allows individuals to make their social networks visible to others (Ellison et al., 2007). That is, unless certain privacy settings are in place, users can view one another’s list of friends. Moreover, if two Facebook members are in a romantic relationship, they have the option to link their profiles with the “relationship status” feature. Members can also use a “family tree” application, which allows them to list their family members on their profiles. For example, if they choose, siblings can announce their siblingship on Facebook. Facebook members can also reveal aspects of their relationships through photographs, status updates, and by commenting on one another’s pages.

Although Facebook favors openness, Facebook members can choose to conceal information about their relationships. For one, users who are romantically involved do not have to publicize their relationship using the “relationship status” feature. Likewise, users can choose not to identify their family members on their profile. Relational partners also have the option to communicate with one another either privately or publicly on Facebook. Users can send private messages through a system similar to e-mail, or write messages on each other’s “walls,” which can be viewed by other members (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). In this sense, relational partners must decide what aspects of their relationships they want to reveal to
others, and what aspects they want to keep to themselves. As such, it is likely that Facebook friends face the challenge of negotiating public and private behavior in their relationship.

Facebook has undoubtedly evolved since its creation in 2004. In 2005, the site expanded to include high school and international networks (Facebook, 2011). Today, Facebook has an impressive global reach, with approximately 70% of its users residing outside the United States (Facebook, 2011). In 2006, Facebook expanded to include work-related networks, allowing commercial organizations to establish directories and display information (Ellison, et al., 2007). Also in 2006, Facebook changed its registration guidelines so that anyone with a valid e-mail address could join. Since then, membership has steadily increased every year, reaching the aforementioned 500 million users in July 2010 (Facebook, 2011). Facebook users include teenagers, adults, and people of all ages (The New York Times, 2011). However, while anyone with a valid address can now join Facebook, many of their users are adolescents and emerging adults (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008).

The reasons adolescents and emerging adults use Facebook, and the benefits they receive from their use, has recently attracted research attention. However, much of the research focuses on how individuals use SNSs to maintain friendships and high school networks when they leave for college (Ellison et al., 2007; Valenzuela et al., 2009). In addition, scholars have emphasized how Facebook helps individuals create new social networks at college with the people in their classes and dorms (Ellison et al., 2007). Therefore, while scholars have explored how
Facebook helps emerging adults maintain existing friendships and create new ones, very little attention has been given to the impact Facebook has on the important and unique sibling relationship. For this reason, it is worthwhile to study how siblings during emerging adulthood, who have less access to daily face-to-face interactions, might use Facebook to communicate with one another. For example, Facebook may introduce tensions involving the public and private management of the sibling relationship. Furthermore, Facebook might influence how siblings negotiate competing desires to stay in contact with, yet maintain distance from, one another during emerging adulthood. Thus, a final research question is proposed:

RQ5: What role does Facebook play in the manifestation and management of dialectical tensions in the sibling relationship during emerging adulthood?
Chapter 3

Method

Using relational dialectics theory as a framework, this study employed the six-step process of thematic analysis presented by Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify discourses that emerge from the data. The six steps include: 1.) becoming familiar with the data set, 2.) generating initial codes, 3.) searching for themes, 4.) reviewing themes, 5.) defining and naming themes, and 6.) producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In her review of dialectical analyses, Baxter (2011) claims that this six-step process "is common to most qualitative/interpretive analyses and is fruitful in the identification of discourses" (p. 161). Upon completion of the thematic analysis, the identified discourses were analyzed to determine whether they were in competition with one another.

Participants

Because this study is interested in both siblings’ perspectives, sibling pairs were recruited. In order to participate, both siblings had to 1.) be between the ages of 18-27 years-old, 2.) be current members of Facebook and use Facebook to communicate with one another, and 3.) have been Facebook members for at least one year. Participants were recruited using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. The investigator sent a recruitment letter to Facebook friends who fit the criteria. In the recruitment letter, individuals were asked to forward the names and contact information of other potential participants to the author. Additional potential participants were identified by the author’s classmates. If interested in participating, individuals were given a link to the survey and a Login ID
and password. The Login ID numbers were used to protect the identity of the participants and to also keep the data from both siblings in a dyad together. Both siblings in a pair were given the same three-digit number, with one ending with “A” and one ending with “B” (i.e., 101A and 101B, 102A and 102B, etc.). After logging in, participants provided consent by checking a box indicating that they agreed to participate. Participants also indicated whether 1) they may be contacted for a follow-up interview and 2) the author may read and analyze their wall-to-wall Facebook postings with their sibling. Survey data was only used if both siblings in a pair completed the survey.

The sample for this study consisted of 24 sibling dyads for a total of 48 participants. The participants included 17 males and 31 females, comprising 11 female-female dyads, 9 male-female dyads, and 4 male-male dyads. Out of the male participants, 12 (70.6%) indicated feeling “very close” to their sibling. Further, 20 females (64.5%) reported feeling “very close” to their brother or sister. Overall, all 48 participants indicated feeling either “very close” (66.7%) or “somewhat close” (33.3%) to their sibling.

Forty-four participants (91.6%) reported that they did not live in the same residence as their sibling, and 36 (75%) felt that they put the same amount of effort into staying in contact as their sibling did. The majority of the participants (83.3%) expressed that it was “very important” to stay in contact with their sibling, including 14 males (82.4%) and 26 females (83.9%). More than half of the sample (54.2%) indicated that they communicated with their sibling several times a week, and all 48 participants expressed that they talked to their brother or sister at least once a
month. There were no significant sex differences in terms of how often participants felt that they communicated with their sibling.

Almost all of the participants (93.8%) reported that they used texting to communicate with their sibling, followed by Facebook (85.4%), phone conversations (85.4%), visits/face-to-face communication (56.3%), and e-mail (41.7%). When asked which method of communication they used most frequently to communicate with their sibling, 23 participants (48.9%) responded “texting,” 12 (25.2%) responded “Facebook,” and 11 (23.4%) responded “phone conversations.” Only 5 participants checked “visits/face-to-face communication” as the method of communication they used most frequently with their sibling. Based on these responses, it appears that many siblings during emerging adulthood rely on technology to stay in contact.

Two participants (a male-female dyad) indicated that they never used Facebook to communicate with their sibling, so their responses did not contribute to the Facebook section of the analysis. Out of the 46 participants who reported that they did use Facebook, 29 (63%) responded that they used the social network site at least once a week to communicate with their brother or sister. The main reasons participants in this study used Facebook to communicate with their sibling were to joke around or tease their sibling (93.5%), and to find out what is going on in their sibling’s life (67.4%). In addition, 24 participants (52.2%) indicated that they used Facebook to stay in contact with their sibling, and 21 (45.7%) expressed that they used Facebook to let their sibling know what was going on in their life.
Nine participants (19.5%) reported that they felt closer to their sibling because of Facebook, and 17 (37%) stated that Facebook made them feel “somewhat” closer to their brother or sister. From the male participants, six (37.5%) responded that they felt at least somewhat closer to their sibling because of Facebook, compared to 20 (67%) females. Thus, for participants in this study, Facebook appears to enhance relational closeness for females more than males.

Procedure

The study involved three possible parts: an online survey, follow-up interviews, and a content analysis of siblings' Facebook wall-to-wall postings.

Part I

For the first part, participants completed an online survey containing mostly open-ended questions inquiring about their relationship and communication with their sibling. All 48 participants (24 pairs) completed the survey. Individuals were instructed to base their responses on their sibling who was also participating in the study. After completing a short demographic section, participants were asked to indicate how often they communicated with their sibling, which methods they used to communicate, and which method they used most frequently. The next part of the survey consisted of questions about their Facebook communication with their sibling. In order to explore the role that Facebook plays in their sibling relationship, participants were asked what they liked about using Facebook to communicate with their sibling and why they used the social network site as a means to communicate with their sibling. In addition, to examine whether Facebook introduces and/or influences tensions associated with closeness and connection in the sibling
relationship, participants were asked how often they used Facebook to communicate with their sibling and whether they felt closer to their sibling because of Facebook.

The next section of the survey assessed how participants felt about their sibling relationship and their communication patterns with their sibling overall. Participants were asked how well they thought they knew their sibling, how close they felt to their sibling at this stage in their lives, and to discuss any conflicts they have had with their sibling. To assess how the change and uncertainty experienced during emerging adulthood influences the sibling relationship, participants were asked, ‘Is it important to stay in contact with your sibling?’, ‘Who do you think puts more effort into staying in contact with one another?’, and ‘If you and your sibling do not live in the same household, how has your relationship changed since you moved apart?’ Participants were also asked to explain and describe their relationship with their sibling.

**Part II**

Participants who indicated on the survey that they may be contacted for a follow-up interview were e-mailed to schedule a face-to-face interview. Four participants (2 pairs) from the original sample were interviewed, including one female-female dyad and one male-female dyad. Participants were interviewed separately from their siblings. Participants read and signed a consent form prior to the interview. The interviews were conducted in safe and public locations convenient to the participants, and lasted an average of 45 minutes. All participants provided consent for the interviews to be audio-recorded. The interviews were
conducted for elaboration and clarification of the survey responses, so most of the survey questions were asked during the interviews. To further examine the closeness and stability that siblings experience in their relationship, participants were also asked, ‘How well do you and your sibling get along?’, ‘How satisfied are you with the level of closeness you experience with your sibling?’, and ‘What do you find comforting about your sibling relationship?’ To assess whether Facebook introduces tensions between public and private in the sibling relationship, participants were also asked when and why they used the private email system rather than the public wall posts to communicate with their sibling, and what information they choose to not post publically and why.

Part III

The third part of the study involved a content analysis of the siblings’ wall-to-wall postings within the past year on Facebook. The wall-to-walls of 18 sibling pairs from the original sample were analyzed, including 10 sister-sister pairs, 5 brother-sister pairs, and 3 brother-brother pairs. The wall-to-wall feature on Facebook allows people who have access to view the wall-writing history between two Facebook friends. As such, the wall-to-wall between two users is essentially a written conversation that spans the duration of their Facebook friendship. The wall-to-walls between siblings were analyzed to obtain insight into how siblings use Facebook to communicate, what they communicate about, and how they express dialectical tensions in their communications. Facebook data was only used if both siblings in a pair provided consent for the investigator to read and analyze their wall-to-wall.
Data Analysis

The survey responses were printed, and sibling pairs were identified by their corresponding login ID numbers. The audiotaped interviews were selectively transcribed by the investigator. The interview transcripts were also indentified using the login ID numbers. The wall-to-wall postings of the sibling pairs were copied and pasted into a new document, and the participants’ names were replaced with their login ID number.

With relational dialectics theory as the theoretical lens, the survey, interview, and Facebook data were all coded and analyzed using the six-step process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the researcher became familiar with the data by reading the entire data set several times. During each reading, the researcher actively searched for meanings and patterns in the data and took notes about possible categories (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Second, initial coding categories were produced from the data. This study employed a “theory-driven” coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2006), meaning that the coding categories were developed based on what a particular textual segment implied about relational dialectics and the sibling relationship. The researcher carefully examined the data, assigning each textual segment to either a new coding category or to one that had already been identified (Baxter, 2011). Once the entire data set had been coded, the researcher compared and contrasted the categories for similarities and differences. As differences were found, new categories were generated. Coding categories were then combined and revised until no new categories emerged, which is called the point of saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).
The third step involved examining the list of initial coding categories to identify whether different categories could be combined to create broader themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In terms of dialectical analyses, Baxter (2011) refers to these themes as *discourses*. The researcher generated themes/discourses by compiling lists of relevant categories. For example, the relevant categories of “missing one’s sibling,” “valuing time together,” “communicating frequently,” and “making an effort to stay in touch” were all combined to create the overarching discourse of *connection*. As with the second step, the researcher continued examining the coding categories for discourses until saturation had taken place (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is important to note that some coding categories were relevant to more than one discourse (Baxter, 2011). For instance, the category identified as “communicating frequently” also applied to the *openness* discourse. As such, the textual segments included under the “communicating frequently” category had potential to contribute to either the *connection* or *openness* discourses.

During the fourth step, the researcher reviewed the themes/discourses to check whether they were valid (Baxter, 2011). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the data within a theme should create a meaningful, coherent pattern. Thus, the researcher re-read each textual segment within a theme to check whether they created a cohesive unit of data. Textual segments that seemed out of place were complied into a “miscellaneous” category. One discourse, labeled “overly connected,” was discarded because it was not well-supported with data. The textual segments from that theme were placed within relevant discourses or in the “miscellaneous” category. After all of the discourses were reviewed, the researcher
examined the data from the “miscellaneous” category to determine whether textual segments could be placed within existing discourses.

The fifth step involved finalizing and conceptually defining the discourses (Baxter, 2011). The researcher re-read and analyzed the data within each discourse to identify and fully comprehend the main idea of the theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Next, the researcher identified which discourses/themes were relevant to which research questions. In cases where a discourse contributed to more than one research question, the researcher created a sub-theme or sub-themes. For example, the *connection* discourse produced the following sub-theme: “sex differences dealing with connection.” This allowed the researcher to identify which “connection” textual segments were more relevant to RQ1 and which were more relevant to RQ3.

At this point, the researcher had identified and organized discourses/themes and determined which discourses were related to which research questions. However, a dialectical analysis goes beyond simply identifying the discourses that emerge in data. As previously discussed, relational dialectics theory is interested in the interplay of contrasting discourses. Therefore, the next phase in step five involved analyzing the data to determine whether discourses were in competition. Discourses were identified as competing based on the presence of the discourse markers of negating, countering, and entertaining (see Baxter, 2011). *Negating* is a type of disclaiming that involves communicating a competing discourse in order to reject it or present it as irrelevant. When a sibling says, “We don’t have to talk everyday of the week to stay close,” she is presenting the discourse of connection (talking everyday of the week) for the purpose of rejecting it (it is not necessary for
her and her sibling to talk everyday of the week). Countering occurs when a particular discourse replaces an alternative discourse that would typically have been expected instead. In the statement, “We talk all the time even though we live far away from each other,” the assertion that they talk all the time counters (i.e., replaces) the idea that people who live far from each other do not talk frequently.

Entertaining takes place when a discourse “is posited as but one of several alternative positions that could be taken; its perspective is not claimed as absolute or the only possibility” (Baxter, 2011, p. 168). When a brother says, “I might confide in my sister if it’s really important or something about our family,” he is stating that he might confide in her, which also implies that he might not. In this sense, he simultaneously presents two competing possibilities: confiding in his sister and not confiding in her.

During the sixth step, the researcher conducted the final analysis and completed the final write-up of the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved locating exemplars, which are textual segments that encapsulate the main idea, or the essence, of a particular theme (Baxter, 2011). Braun and Clarke (2006) describe the purpose of exemplars, which summarizes the approach taken by the researcher:

Extracts need to be embedded within an analytic narrative that compellingly illustrates the story you are telling about your data, and your analytic narrative needs to go beyond description of the data, and make an argument in relation to your research question (p. 93, emphasis original).

Thus, exemplars were used in the analysis to help the researcher make an important point and to give the reader a sense of the issue being discussed. Furthermore, justifying the importance and relevance of exemplars enhanced the validity of the analysis.
In qualitative analysis, validity is also strengthened through retention of the original data while categories are being generated (Haas, Irr, Jennings & Wagner, 2010). The participants’ original responses are presented and used as evidence for categories, which the reader analyzes to check validity. In this study, the researcher checked for validity by reviewing and refining the categories during the fourth stage of the thematic analysis. The researcher checked the data within the categories to determine whether they formed a meaningful and coherent unit that accurately represented the category (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, validity is largely determined by the researcher through confirmation of the data as evidence for the proposed categories (Haas, 2002).
Chapter 4

Results

Table 1: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS for RQ 1

RQ1: What dialectical tensions are evidenced in the communication between siblings during emerging adulthood?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tension 1: Connectedness vs. Separateness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Trying to stay close after moving apart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Getting along better after moving apart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Feeling obligated to stay connected because of the family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tension 2: Openness vs. Protection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Trying to stay open despite being apart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Expressing that they told their sibling “almost” everything</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tension 3: Novelty vs. Predictability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Emphasizing stability despite experiencing change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tension 4: Ideal vs. Real</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Siblings should have a close relationship that resembles a friendship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Siblings should engage in frequent contact and communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During emerging adulthood, many siblings experience significant changes as they move out of the family household and establish independence from one another. As a result, siblings are less likely to engage in daily face-to-face interactions and the relationship becomes more voluntary. To explore how siblings make meaning of their relationship and communication in light of these changes, RQ1 asked, “What dialectical tensions are evidenced in the communication between siblings during emerging adulthood?” The findings are discussed next in terms of four emergent dialectical tensions: connectedness vs. separateness, openness vs. protection, novelty vs. predictability, and ideal vs. real.
**Connectedness vs. Separateness**

Nearly all of the siblings in the present study emphasized the importance of maintaining a connection with their brother or sister during emerging adulthood. However, they also expressed a need to maintain their separate and autonomous selves outside of the relationship. Siblings expressed this tension in the form of three distinct themes: a.) trying to stay close after moving apart; b.) getting along better after moving apart; and c.) feeling obligated to stay connected because of the family.

*Living apart but trying to stay close.* Several siblings expressed a struggle to stay close after moving apart, as evidenced in this female sibling’s response about her sister:

I moved out of my parents’ house when I was 19. My sister was only in the 7th grade. This transition was very difficult for her, since we were so close. She chose to deal with it by creating a distance between us in affection and communication. It took 5 years for things to get back to normal with us. We are now able to share and communicate as we once did.

As this response suggests, the transition out of the family home can be a difficult time for siblings. In this sibling’s case, her sister responded to her move by creating more distance between them in “affection and communication.” As such, the two sisters struggled to regain the closeness they shared when they lived together.

The need to remain close despite being apart from one another is also illustrated by this Facebook exchange between a brother and sister:

Sister: Obviously I want you to stay in Australia as long as possible for yourself, but you need to get back here ‘cause I really miss you. At the VERY least, get on gchat or FBchat every now and then and talk to your sister. Jeez.

Brother: I can’t do Facebook chat for some reason with my internet connection. Message me your gmail account and we’ll catch up. Miss you too, sis.
In this exchange, the sister expresses a contradiction between wanting her brother to stay in Australia and wanting him to come back. She also lightly chides him for not getting on instant messenger enough to talk to her, which highlights their struggle to stay in contact. He responds similarly by telling her he misses her and indicating that he wants to catch up with her. In this sense, their messages to one another demonstrate their effort to stay close despite the distance between them. Another female sibling communicated the need for distance from her sister, while also wanting to stay close with her:

I moved out for college at the same time she moved out too. It was a major adjustment at first because it was my first time being out on my own and I kind of ran with it. At that time I did not talk or call her or go home a lot, but once I got settled in we just made a point to see and talk to each other on a consistent basis.

By stating that she “ran with it” when she moved out, this sibling emphasizes the importance of her independence. As noted earlier, establishing independence is a primary endeavor for emerging adults (Arnett, 2000), which can cause siblings to experience less closeness and connection with one another. As follows, this sibling notes that she did not call her sister often after she moved out of the family household. She then indicates that she and her sister have since “made a point” to stay in touch, which suggests that doing so has required effort from both of them. A male sibling made a similar statement when asked how his relationship with his brother has changed since they moved apart from one another:

We’re definitely not as close. Just recently I lived in the same place as him, about a year or so ago, and we got really close during that time. Since then we don’t see each other as much, but I feel like we stay up to date with what each other is doing.
Like the previous sibling, this brother highlights how moving apart has put a strain on the closeness he and his brother experience. He also reports that he *feels* like they stay up-to-date with one another, which is different than stating that they “for certain” keep in touch. As such, he implies that he and his brother have not been able to completely sustain the close connection they had when they lived together.

Overall, the responses above suggest that many siblings have difficulty staying in contact with one another during emerging adulthood once they move apart and begin to establish their autonomy beyond the relationship and the family. However, several siblings in this study indicated that having independence from their brother or sister has actually improved their relationship.

*Getting along better after moving apart.* A number of siblings reported that they get along better with their brother or sister now that they no longer live together. Reflecting on her relationship with her sister, a female sibling commented:

My sister and I have become much closer since we have gotten older and moved away from home. *We’re* not in each other’s faces all the time, and do more of our own thing. *We* have a very open relationship and we know a lot about each other’s lives, but we don’t feel a need to communicate with each other on a daily basis.

Although she and her sister have moved away from one another and are doing their “own thing,” this sibling states that the distance has made them closer. When asked how her relationship with her sister has changed since they moved apart, a female sibling responded similarly, “*We* argue less since we are not always around each other, but it is more difficult to find time to see each other.” As many siblings in this study indicated, she notes that it is harder to stay in contact with her sister now that
they no longer live together. However, she also asserts that they get along better now that they are not always around each other. This suggests that being apart can enhance the connection and closeness that siblings experience, as illustrated in this female sibling’s response:

It has actually gotten better, but that isn’t a surprise because we have lived in separate residences since I went to college in 2003, when he was still in high school. We did not get along very well at that point in his life, but our relationship got a lot better when he went off to college.

This sibling notes that, at the time she moved out, she and her brother did not get along. However, she acknowledges that time and distance apart from one another seems to have helped their relationship. Likewise, a female sibling reporting about her sister stated, “I think we are closer and get along better now that we no longer live together. We do better spending time with each other on our own terms!” Due to the involuntary nature of the sibling relationship, siblings generally have no choice but to interact with one another during childhood and adolescence. As such, young siblings may feel “forced” to get along with one another on a daily basis and spend more time together than they prefer. However, as noted earlier, the sibling relationship becomes more voluntary during adulthood (Lee et al., 1990). Thus, having the freedom to negotiate the connection and distance in their relationship on “their own terms” may improve how siblings feel about one another.

As these responses illustrate, the sibling relationship becomes more of a personal choice during adulthood. However, several siblings in this study also indicated that they stayed in contact with their brother or sister because of a perceived obligation to the family.
**Feeling obligated to stay connected.** Many siblings seemed to experience conflicting desires to maintain their distance for personal reasons, yet remain close for familial reasons. When asked if it is important to stay in contact with her sister, a female sibling responded:

> Definitely. I want to know what’s going on in her life. And our mom raised us with a sense of responsibility to your family. And although I think that I, personally, have deviated from that a little bit just because I have put my education first for the last few years, it’s still really important to me to show her that I love her and spend time with her, and just be there when she needs me.

This sibling states that her education has come before her family in recent years, signifying her independence from her sister and other family members. At the same time, she notes that she was raised with a “sense of responsibility” to her family and emphasizes that it is important for her to stay in contact with her sister. Similarly, a male sibling reporting on his brother stated, “Growing up, we were taught that family comes first. So staying in contact with him is very important to me.” These responses indicate that siblings may feel obligated to stay connected with one another because they were raised to make their family a priority. In this sense, even when siblings desire independence and go their separate ways, they feel the need to keep in touch and stay close because of the family. Likewise, a female sibling responded, “It is important for me to stay in contact with my brother because I am his liaison to everything that goes on in our family since he lives so far away.” This sibling implies that it is her responsibility to act as her brother’s liaison to their family. As such, she struggles to maintain a connection with her brother for familial reasons.
The struggle for siblings to remain close because of the family while pursuing individual goals and separate lives is also evidenced by this female sibling’s response: “It’s very important to stay in contact because she is my sister, I have to make sure she’s ok and doing well.” She asserts that the main reason it is important to stay in contact with her sibling is because they are sisters. Thus, above all else, it is their sibling status that motivates her to stay in touch with her sister. Furthermore, she states that she has to check on her sister, which implies that she feels obligated to do so. Along these lines, a female sibling also stated, “My family is very very closely knit and especially with my brother far away from myself and my family it makes me work even HARDER to stay close.” This sibling refers to the closeness of her family as a reason for making an effort to stay in touch with her brother. Moreover, she implies that the closeness of their family makes her work even harder to stay close. While it is possible that she also has her own reasons for wanting to keep in touch with her brother, her response suggests that she feels obligated to stay close despite the distance between them.

These findings are consistent with previous research that suggests siblings often feel obligated to stay in touch with one another during adulthood (Lee et al., 1990). As noted earlier, the sibling relationship is involuntary and relatively permanent (Mikkelson, 2006). Furthermore, even disengaged siblings often remain informed about one another through mutual ties (Allen, 1977). Thus, some siblings may not stay in contact entirely by choice. It is possible that siblings want to establish more independence from one another, but feel obligated to stay in touch
because of the family. Accordingly, several siblings in this study cited familial obligation as a reason for maintaining contact with their brother or sister.

Overall, siblings during emerging adulthood seem to value their distance from one another, but also desire to stay connected for various reasons. The competing desires for both connectedness and separateness are often tied to the openness vs. protection dialectic, which will be explored next.

**Openness vs. Protection**

In this study, siblings experienced the contradiction between openness and protection in two ways: a.) striving to stay open despite the separateness they experience in their relationship; and b.) expressing that they told their sibling “pretty much” or “almost” everything.

*Striving to stay open despite being independent.* Many people expressed the difficulty of being open with their sibling while also being independent from them. For example, a female sibling reporting about her sister stated, “We don’t share every detail of our lives, but that may be because we don’t live close to each other.” This sibling suggests that she and her sister do not confide in one another because they live too far apart. Thus, siblings may not intentionally keep details from one another, but do so because it is hard to confide from a distance. Likewise, a male sibling reporting on his relationship with his brother responded, “I don’t confide in him all that much. The distance kind of makes it hard.” When asked if he confides in his sister, a male sibling also expressed the struggle to be open despite living apart:

Yes, in some cases. Yes because I am going through things she has been through. No because we just don’t see each other enough to have terribly deep conversations.
By stating that “yes” he does confide in his sister and “no” he does not, he expresses a contradiction between being both open and closed in his communication with his sister. Furthermore, he asserts that the separateness in his sibling relationship (not seeing each other enough) decreases the openness he and sister experience (not having deep conversations). Another male responded similarly when asked if he confided in his sister:

Yes, while we are close, I think we still have our private individual lives. We will, however, share what we want to share when we feel the need to share it. We have that sense of openness.

On one hand, he indicates that he and his sibling are close and have a “sense of openness.” On the other hand, he states that they have their own “private individual lives” and confide in one another when they “feel the need.” This suggests that siblings strive to be open with one another while also preserving their independence. However, the desire for autonomy and separateness can make it difficult for siblings to confide in one another. As follows, siblings in this study also expressed a contradiction between wanting to be completely open with their brother or sister, and wanting to keep certain information to themselves.

_Telling sibling “pretty much” everything._ Many siblings in this study stated that they told their brother or sister everything, but then implied that they were not completely open with him or her. For example, a female sibling describing her relationship with her sister stated, “She’s one of my best friends. I might keep some things from her, but for the most part, we share everything.” Likewise, a male sibling reporting on his brother responded, “I can confide in her about everything for the most part, but there are some little things I don’t tell her because she is my
older sister.” Both siblings assert that they tell their sisters everything “for the most part.” This represents a form of entertaining, in which the possibility of competing discourses is presented. In this case, the phrase “for the most part” indicates the presence of two competing discourses: telling their sibling absolutely everything, and telling them almost everything.

The competing desires to be both open and closed in communication is also evidenced in this female sibling’s interview response: “I tell her secrets, not like personal secrets, but yea, we tell each other everything pretty much.” This sibling stresses openness in her relationship with her sister by stating that she tells her secrets. However, she instantly contradicts herself by saying that she does not tell her “personal” secrets. Moreover, by asserting that she and her sibling tell each other “pretty much” everything, she is implying that they do not always confide in one another.

A female sibling reflecting on her relationship with her sister made a similar statement:

There aren’t many things I keep from my sister, but there are some things I don’t want her to know about, because I don’t think she would care, or that she would not be impressed by it. While she emphasizes openness in her relationship with her sister, she also indicates that she keeps certain information to herself when she feels it is necessary. Likewise, another female sibling reported, “There isn’t much I don’t tell her because we are good friends. But she’s a little younger than me so some things aren’t really discussed because of the age difference.” She also stresses that she is open with her sister, but then states that she does not always confide in her because of their age
difference. Thus, both siblings suggest that they tell their sisters everything, except for certain details or in certain situations.

These contradictory responses demonstrate the siblings’ conflict between wanting to be completely open with their brother or sister and also wanting to be protective and strategic in their disclosures. Many siblings in this study seemed to immediately stress that they confided in their sibling, but then mentioned specific information that they did not tell their brother or sister. There is one possible explanation for this apparent tension between openness and protection in the sibling relationship. As previously noted, there is an expectation that siblings should be emotionally close (Lee et al., 1990). Thus, it is possible that siblings are aware of this expectation and emphasize more openness and closeness in their relationship than they actually experience.

The expectation that siblings should be close likely stems from the fact that siblings typically spend a significant amount of their childhood and adolescence together. However, as mentioned throughout this paper, siblings experience many changes and transitions during emerging adulthood that make it difficult to maintain the closeness they experienced when they were younger. As these transitions occur, it is possible that siblings may focus on the comfort and stability of their sibling relationship and try to keep the relationship from changing. As follows, many people in this study expressed a desire for predictability in their sibling relationship.

Novelty vs. Predictability
In the present study, several siblings seemed to experience a tension between novelty and predictability in their relationship with their brother or sister. They primarily expressed this tension by emphasizing stability and making light of any changes in their relationship.

*Emphasizing stability.* Many siblings in this study described how moving out and establishing independence changed the relationship they have with their brother or sister. However, they also seemed to emphasize that the relationship has ultimately stayed the same. This tension between stability and change is highlighted in this female sibling's response:

> We try not to let our relationship change. We try our best to keep up-to-date with each other's lives. But yes, some things are difficult to keep up with now that she lives in Boston.

This sibling indicates that it is difficult for her and her sister to keep their relationship the same given that they live so far apart. At the same time, she stresses that she and her sister try their best to avoid change in their relationship. When asked how his relationship with his sister has changed since they moved apart, a male sibling also stated, “We used to talk a lot more, but it hasn’t changed much.” While he recognizes that he and his sister talk less than they used to, he states that their relationship “hasn’t changed much.” In this sense, he highlights the stability in their relationship and downplays the change.

Another male sibling reporting on his relationship with his sister stated, “It was weird when I moved at first, but now we are actually closer due to our mutual effort to stay in touch.” This sibling acknowledges that it was “weird” moving away from his sister at first, which emphasizes the novelty and change that they
experienced in their relationship. However, he then asserts that they have become
closer after the move because of their “mutual effort” to maintain a connection. This
suggests that he and his sister favor predictability by trying to keep their
relationship from changing too much.

A female sibling reflecting on her relationship with her sister also expressed
a desire for stability and predictability:

She’s one of my best friends. We’ve shared a room together since we were
little, we’ve almost always gone to the same school (up until college), extra
curricular activities were also more often than not together (dance), and
we’ve worked together for years. Even though I have been gone for the past
six months, we talk as much as we can and we are still very close.

By describing all the things that she and her sister have shared over the years, she
highlights the comfort and predictability of her sibling relationship. She then
mentions that she has been away for the past six months, which indicates a
significant change in her relationship with her sister. However, she asserts that she
and her sister are still very close despite the change they experienced. As such, her
response represents a contradiction between novelty (her moving away) and
predictability (they are still very close) in her sibling relationship.

These responses suggest that people may strive to maintain the comfort and
predictability of their sibling relationship as they experience other changes and
uncertainty during emerging adulthood. It is also possible that siblings may feel an
expectation to stay close and keep their relationship in tact regardless of the events
taking place in their lives. This struggle between expectations and reality, described
as the ideal vs. real dialectic, is discussed in the following section.

*Ideal vs. Real*
Many siblings seemed to experience a conflict between what they perceived as the “ideal” sibling relationship and the reality of the communication and experiences they share with their brother or sister. The two main ideals that sibling expressed were: a.) siblings should have a close relationship that resembles a friendship; and b.) siblings should engage in frequent contact and communication.

The friendship ideal. Some siblings in this study seemed to feel that the ideal sibling relationship should be close, much like a friendship. At the same time, they expressed that their own sibling relationship often conflicted with this ideal. For example, a female sibling stated, “We’re very close, and I consider her my best friend. We do fight often, but most of the time it’s just disagreements over small things.” While she emphasizes that she and her sister are close and that her sister is her best friend, she also mentions that they fight often. Since “best friends” are typically not expected to “fight often,” she downplays their arguments by stating that they are usually fighting over “small things.” Likewise, another female sibling stated, “My sister and I are very good friends. We have our sisterly squabbles here and there, mostly due to misunderstandings.” This sibling also asserts that she and her sister are “very good friends.” However, because fighting is typically not ideal in a relationship, she attempts to make light of the fights she has with her sister by referring to them as “sisterly squabbles.”

A male sibling also communicated a contradiction between the friendship ideal and what he really experiences in his relationship with his brother:

I consider him a best friend, as brothers should be. I do wish we were closer, but that’s not a possibility right now because we don’t live by each other and are busy.
By stating that brothers should be best friends, he implies that siblings are expected to be friends. He then states that he wishes that he and his brother were closer, which suggests that the relationship does not fit the ideal he has in mind. In an interview, a female sibling also clearly illustrated the tensions associated with the ideal vs. real dialectic:

One of my best friends has a sister who is a year older than (my sister), and I mean, I’m not jealous of their relationship, but if I could choose what our relationship could be like, it would be like that. They’re different, and they argue sometimes, but they just love each other so much and are best friends. If call my sister out on something, or we get in a fight, she gets angry and won’t talk to me. So, I would like to see hopefully in the future that (my sister) will grow up a little bit more, and we can become better friends.

In this statement, she refers to her friend’s sibling relationship as the ideal, or the relationship she would choose to have if she could. She states that her friend and her friend’s sister are different from one another and argue, but “they just love each other so much and are best friends.” She then explains how her own relationship with her sister fails to meet these ideal qualities. Finally, she mentions that she hopes that she and her sister will “become better friends” and have more of an ideal relationship in the future. In this sense, she implies that an ideal sibling relationship resembles a friendship, and describes how her own sibling experiences conflict with this ideal.

The frequent contact/communication ideal. Several people in this study also expressed the idea that siblings are expected to stay in contact and communicate with one another frequently. When asked why it is important to stay in contact with her sister, a female sibling responded, “Both of our parents are divorced and remarried so we have A LOT of half and step siblings. But we are each other’s only
full blood siblings.” She implies that it is more important for her to stay in touch with her “full blood sibling” than her half and step siblings. This suggests that there are expectations that blood relatives, such as siblings, should stay in contact. The following Facebook exchange between two sisters highlights this expectation:

Sister #1: I feel like I haven’t talked to you in 3 years. What’s up with that?
Sister #2: It’s been less than 3 years, dearest sister.
Sister #1: We’re sisters? Sisters are supposed to talk more than once a decade.

By stating that sisters are supposed to talk more than once a decade, the first sister perceives that there are expectations regarding how often siblings should talk. Furthermore, she makes it clear that she does not feel as if her relationship with her sister is living up to those expectations. Another sibling pair communicated similar tensions on Facebook:

Brother: Ummm, you fail at being my sister.
Sister: Ummm, why?
Brother: Because you have not returned my last three calls.

The brother’s statement, “you fail at being my sister,” implies that she is not meeting the expectations he has for her as his sibling. As follows, this exchange indicates a struggle between the ideal (sisters should return calls) and the real (his sister has not returned his last three calls).

A female sibling also expressed a contradiction between the expectation that siblings should stay in contact and what she really experiences in her sibling relationship:

It is important for me to know that my brother is happy in his life and making good choices for him. I don’t have to talk to him everyday to do that, but I think the fact that we are a brother-sister sibling pair, we talk a decent amount.
By stating that she does not have to talk to her brother everyday to keep up with his life, she is countering a possible implicit expectation that siblings should talk daily. Further, she states that she and her sibling talk “a decent amount” for a brother-sister pair, implying that mixed-sex pairs are not expected to talk as much as same-sex pairs. This suggests that her sibling relationship does not conflict as much with the “ideal” as it may seem.

As evidenced by the discussion above, the sibling relationship is influenced by various dialectical tensions during emerging adulthood. To explore which tensions influence siblings the most, the second research question asked, “Which are the most common dialectical tensions communicated between siblings during emerging adulthood?” The findings related to RQ2 are discussed below.

RQ2: The Most Common Tensions

Earlier in this study, three primary (connectedness vs. separateness, openness vs. protection, and novelty vs. predictability) and two secondary (public vs. private and ideal vs. real) dialectical tensions were reviewed. Of these five contradictions, the most prevalent for siblings in this study was connectedness vs. separateness, followed by openness vs. protection and ideal vs. real. To a lesser extent, siblings also expressed a tension between novelty and predictability. The public vs. private dialectical tension was not as significant as the other contradictions for siblings in this study. The prevalence of the connectedness vs. separateness dialectical tension and the implications for the sibling relationship are discussed below.
**Connectedness vs. Separateness.** The most common dialectical tension communicated by siblings in this study was connectedness vs. separateness. In other words, nearly all of the siblings expressed a contradiction between maintaining a connection with their brother or sister and establishing autonomy beyond the relationship. In this study, 22 out of 24 participants (91.6%) reported that they did not live in the same residence as their sibling, which highlights the separateness that siblings may experience during emerging adulthood. At the same time, 40 participants (83.3%) indicated that it was “very important” to stay in contact with their brother or sister. As follows, the struggle between separateness and connectedness was the most pronounced and the most frequently communicated tension for siblings in this study. This suggests that the transitions that siblings experience during emerging adulthood may give emphasis to the struggle between being together and being apart.

For many siblings in this study, the connectedness vs. separateness dialectical tension seemed to encompass the other tensions they experienced. In other words, the struggle between being together and being apart often intersected with the openness vs. protection, ideal vs. real, and novelty vs. predictability dialectical tensions. To begin with, many siblings in this study expressed the interrelatedness of the connectedness vs. separateness and openness vs. protection dialectical tensions. This is perhaps not surprising, given that openness is generally associated with relational closeness and closedness typically signifies a lack of connection. For example, a female sibling stated, “For me, I feel that my relationship with my sister is very close. We don’t share as much as we used to, but we still get
along and chat about everything.” This sibling emphasizes her connection with her sister by claiming that they are “very close.” She then states that they do not share as much as they used to, which suggests that they are not as close as they once were. However, she stresses their closeness again by asserting that they “still get along and chat about everything.” In this sense, her response suggests that openness (chatting about everything) is a sign of connectedness (being ‘very close’).

The contradiction between connectedness vs. separateness also influenced the ideal vs. real dialectical tension for siblings in this study. As discussed earlier, many siblings indicated that frequent communication and a friendship-like bond are ideal qualities, or expectations, of the sibling relationship. Given that these qualities also signify relational closeness, it is likely that siblings would express the connectedness vs. separateness and ideal vs. real dialectical tensions simultaneously. A male sibling reflecting on his relationship with his sister demonstrated the interplay of these two tensions:

Our relationship is quite strong, but we don’t see each other very often so we have grown apart in recent years. Our ongoing relationship is great though, and we usually pick up right where we left off and never fight.

This sibling states that he and his sister do not see one another often and have drifted apart. These experiences, which are a sign of separateness, conflict with the expectation that siblings should interact frequently and have a close relationship. On the other hand, he strives to portray his sibling relationship as more “ideal” by emphasizing the connection he and his sister share: they have a strong relationship, can always pick up where they left off, and never fight. As such, he expresses a
struggle between the ideal of connectedness and his real experiences with separateness in his relationship with his sister.

Many siblings in this study also expressed a relationship between the novelty vs. predictability and connectedness vs. separateness dialectical tensions. As mentioned earlier, emerging adulthood is often a time of change and uncertainty for individuals. Thus, as siblings move out of the family home, take new risks, and attempt to establish their independence, they may strive to maintain a connection with one another for comfort and security reasons. For example, a male sibling reporting on his brother stated:

It’s so important for me to stay in contact with my brother no matter what. He’s someone that I have shared almost every success, failure, hardship, and comfort of life with and couldn’t imagine it being any different.

By stating that it is important to stay in contact “no matter what,” this sibling expresses a desire for connectedness with his brother. He also emphasizes their closeness by describing everything that they have shared. Furthermore, by asserting that he “couldn’t imagine it being any different,” he implies that he favors the predictability of the connectedness he and his brother share. In other words, maintaining a connection with his brother reinforces the stability and comfort he experiences in their relationship.

The discussion above suggests that the sibling relationship is significantly influenced by the connectedness vs. separateness dialectical tension during emerging adulthood. Most people in this study indicated that moving apart from their sibling introduced a contradiction between maintaining a connection and pursing their independence. Furthermore, this tension seemed to animate their
expression of the openness vs. protection, ideal vs. real, and novelty vs.
predictability dialectical tensions. Thus, this finding provides a possible explanation
for the prevalence of the connectedness vs. separateness tension for siblings in this study.

RQ3: Sex Differences

The third research question asked, "How does sex influence which dialectical
tensions are communicated between siblings during emerging adulthood?" As
previously mentioned, it has been found that sister-sister dyads place more value on
self-disclosure and interaction than other sibling dyads (Hagestad, 1986; Fowler,
2009). Moreover, there is evidence that female siblings use more relational
maintenance behaviors than male siblings (Myers et al., 2001), and work harder to
improve their sibling relationships in adulthood (White, 2001). Thus, it was
proposed that female siblings might express the connectedness vs. separateness and
openness vs. protection dialectical tensions more frequently than male siblings.
However, the results indicated that males and females in this study communicated
similar experiences with dialectical contradictions in their sibling relationship.

Both sexes seemed to express the connectedness vs. separateness dialectical
tension the most frequently and the most intensely. For instance, a female sibling
reporting on her sister stated, “I don’t think I would be able to live with myself if my
sister and I ever lost contact with each other. I don’t think it would ever be
possible.” Likewise, a male sibling reflecting on his relationship with his brother
responded, “My siblings are my life. Without either of them, my life would be
empty.” Both siblings indicate that maintaining a connection with their brother or
sister is of the upmost importance, to the point that they deny the presence of separateness in their sibling relationship. These responses represent the general finding that male and female siblings equally emphasized a desire to remain connected to their sibling despite being apart during emerging adulthood.

As mentioned in the discussion of RQ2, the connectedness vs. separateness tension that siblings experienced seemed to influence the other contradictions in their relationship: openness vs. protection, ideal vs., real, and novelty vs. predictability. Thus, given that the contradiction between trying to remain connected while being apart was equally prominent for both males and females, there were few sex differences overall regarding which dialectical tensions were expressed. In terms of the openness vs. protection tension, both sexes emphasized a desire to stay open with one another while being apart. A female sibling stated:

> It’s important to me that I remain open and honest with all of my siblings—sharing new life events and thoughts. Staying in contact with my little brother, or any of my siblings, enables us to stay in one another’s lives (despite living in different states).

This sibling notes that staying open with her siblings allows her to remain connected with them, despite being separated. When asked why he confided in his brother, a male sibling made a similar comment:

> It is very important because he is my brother and I want to stay very close to him. It’s very important to have this interaction with your sibling because it helps further your relationship together.

He states that it is important for him to confide in his brother because he wants to stay “very close” to him. This suggests that the openness in his sibling relationship enhances the connectedness he experiences. In this sense, he highlights the interrelatedness of the openness vs. protection and the connectedness vs.
separateness dialectical tensions, which was commonly expressed by both males and females in this study.

Both sexes also expressed a desire to keep their sibling relationship from changing despite being apart from their brother or sister. Thus, for both males and females, the separateness vs. connectedness tension seemed to influence the contradiction between novelty and predictability. In an interview, a female sibling stated, “Moving apart had its pros and cons, but we are definitely still as close as we’ve always been.” Although moving apart changed her relationship with her sister, she emphasizes that they have maintained their closeness with one another. In other words, she associates their connectedness with stability, and disregards the possibility of separateness or change. Likewise, when asked how his relationship with his sister has changed since they moved apart, a male sibling responded, “We don’t talk as much, but I don’t think it has affected our relationship in a negative way.” While he highlights the change he has experienced in his relationship with his sister (less connection with one another), he emphasizes the stability of their bond (their separateness has not affected their relationship in a negative way). These responses demonstrate how males and females expressed similar experiences with the novelty vs. predictability dialectical tension.

Finally, the ideal vs. real dialectical tension was commonly communicated by both sexes. In general, they indicated that connectedness was at the heart of the ideal sibling relationship. For example, when asked in an interview how her relationship with her brother has changed now that they are older, a female sibling responded:
I mean, I think it’s more distant, like actually distant, because we have so much stuff going on. And my boyfriend lives with me so it’s a little awkward just because, you know, he’s my boyfriend and my brother’s my brother. They get along, it’s just a little difficult now for us to just hang out just us two. But you know, we still catch other and just hang out. I guess would say the main difference is just that we’re busy, but we still keep in touch and see each other often.

This sibling states that it is difficult to maintain a connection with her brother because they are both busy, and because her boyfriend lives with her. As such, she describes her relationship with her brother as “more distant” than it used to be. However, given that it is not ideal for siblings to be distant from one another, she downplays the separateness they experience and emphasizes that they are still able to “keep in touch and see each other often.” In this sense, she attempts to demonstrate how her sibling relationship meets the expectation that siblings should be close. A male sibling reflecting on his relationship with his brother communicated similar tensions between the ideal and real:

I think the distance between us now (I moved away for a job, which has increased the Facebook convos A LOT) has hindered our friendship a little. We would probably be closer if I lived near him, but it’s not bad. I can’t even remember the last time we got into a real argument, so I would say that we have a pretty good relationship.

While he acknowledges that the distance between him and his brother has hindered the closeness that they experience, he makes light of it by claiming that “it’s not that bad.” He further notes that he can’t remember the last time they got into a “real argument” and that they have a “pretty good relationship,” which suggests that he and his brother are close and get along with one another. Thus, despite the separateness he and his brother experience, he strives to present their relationship as relatively ideal.
As evidenced by the discussion above, both males and females seemed to express similar experiences with dialectical tensions in their sibling relationship. Therefore, there were no substantial sex differences in terms of which dialectical tensions were commonly communicated in this study. However, the frequency of Facebook postings exchanged between sister-sister pairs implies that females may use the social network site to manage the contradiction between being together and being apart more than males. This finding is discussed in more detail when RQ5 is addressed later in the study.

Table 2: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS for RQ4

RQ4: What management patterns are used by siblings during emerging adulthood to manage the dialectical tensions in their sibling relationship, and what are the implications?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Pattern 1: Neutralization (Connectedness vs. Separateness)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Attempting to find a balance between the two poles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Using technology to partially attend to both poles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Pattern 2: Separation (Openness vs. Protection)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Stressing openness except when it came to personal/difficult issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Stressing openness except when it came to marital and relationship issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Pattern 3: Selection (Novelty vs. Predictability)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Pursuing predictability while denying novelty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Pattern 4: Reformulation (Ideal vs. Real)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. Reframing the contradiction so the two poles are perceived as “one”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A distinct management pattern was expressed for each of the four emergent dialectical tensions. First, most siblings seemed to use the neutralization management pattern to manage the contradiction between connectedness and separateness in their relationship. Second, for the openness vs. protection
dialectical tension, siblings in this study mostly responded with the separation management strategy. Third, siblings generally used the selection management pattern to negotiate the tension between novelty and predictability. Finally, in terms of the ideal vs. real dialectical tension, most siblings seemed to respond with the reformulation management pattern. These management patterns are explored next.

Management of Connectedness vs. Separateness

To manage the contradiction between connectedness and separateness in their sibling relationship, most siblings in this study seemed to use the neutralization management pattern. Their use of this strategy manifested in two ways. First, siblings accepted the contradiction and attempted to reach a balance between connectedness and separateness in their relationship. Second, siblings expressed that they relied on technology to partially attend to both dialectical poles.

Finding a balance. For many siblings in this study, managing the connectedness vs. separateness tension involved meeting in the middle of the two extremes. For example, a male sibling reporting on his relationship with his sister stated:

I think we have negotiated the rules of our relationship to where we don’t have to be in each other’s business all the time. I think she has her life and I have mine, but we like to cross paths and share laughter, and just things that are unique to our relationship.

This sibling asserts that he and his sister have “negotiated the rules” of their relationship so that they can lead their separate lives while also crossing one another’s path occasionally. In this sense, he emphasizes neither connectedness nor separateness in their relationship, but describes how he and his sister attempt to
find a balance between being together and being apart. Likewise, his sister commented, “We don’t need to see each other everyday, because my mom kind of likes to push that. She always likes to try to have us talk all the time and everything, and we just kind of have it worked out to where we’ll talk when we talk.” She states that she and her brother do not need to consistently pursue a connection, as their mother would like them to do. Rather, as her brother also indicated, she asserts that they strive to honor both togetherness and separateness equally.

The use of neutralization to manage the connectedness vs. separateness dialectical tension is also evidenced in this female sibling’s interview response:

Sometimes we’ll call and we’ll talk and we’ll realize that so much has happened in the past week or two, and we didn’t know the other person was going through that, so I’ll always feel bad, like should I be making more time? But I’m busy working a couple different jobs, and I know she’s busy working and going to school, so it can be overwhelming trying to maintain a relationship like that. But we try to send each other text messages as often as possible, and talk on the phone at least once a week, so it’s just a matter of finding time to talk.

She declares that it is “overwhelming” to maintain a connection with her sister due to their separate, busy lives. Furthermore, she asserts that she feels bad for not talking to her sister enough and making more time to keep in touch with her. In this sense, she recognizes that a consistent connection with her sister is difficult at this time in their lives. However, she then states that they make an effort to talk as often as possible, and that it’s “just a matter of finding time to talk.” This represents their efforts to maintain their independence while also finding time to stay in touch.

A female sibling also explained how she and her brother attempt to reach a middle ground between connectedness and separateness in their relationship:
We are close to each other, but we don't have to see or talk to each other all the time to stay close. I have friends in Cincinnati that I come and see and I tend to see my brother while I am down there and he comes home to Columbus (where I live) and I see him when he does that.

This sibling asserts that she and her brother do not have to talk all the time to remain close to one another. Thus, she acknowledges the contradiction between connectedness and separateness in their relationship, but indicates that they do not pursue one dialectical pole more consistently than the other. Rather, by visiting one another when they can, they attempt to find a balance between their time together and their time apart.

**Using technology to find a balance.** Several people indicated that technology was a key factor in managing the connectedness vs. separateness dialectical tension in their sibling relationship. Using technology to keep up with one another allowed siblings to establish a compromise between staying in touch and living separate lives. In an interview, a female sibling reflecting on her relationship with her sister stated:

We talk pretty much everyday. I mean, things have changed, obviously, because we don't live anywhere near each other, but we talk almost everyday of the week, whether it’s texting, Facebook, or a phone call. Even though she lives in Boston, we still find ways to be each other’s best friends and share everything.

This sibling recognizes that the distance between her and her sister has changed their relationship. However, she implies that technology allows them to remain friends and share everything, despite living in different states. Thus, technology helps them negotiate a balance between being together and being apart.

A male sibling also described how he and his sister use technology to manage the tension between connectedness and separateness in their relationship:
Facebook is a quick and easy way for us to stay in touch, especially now that I moved. We actually never really used Facebook to communicate until I moved, but now we use it all the time because we don’t get to see each other in person.

Although he and his sister live far apart and do not see one another in person often, Facebook provides a “quick and easy” way for them to stay in touch. This suggests that the connection they experience through their Facebook interactions minimizes the strain of being separated. In this sense, their use of Facebook to communicate serves as a way to manage the contradiction between connectedness and separateness in their relationship.

When asked how her relationship with her sister has changed since they moved apart, a female sibling responded, “I think it’s caused us to use texting and Facebook more often in order to keep in contact.” Likewise, another female reporting on her sister stated, “We talk more since we’ve moved apart, we text more and make an effort to skype and spend time together when we are home.” These responses suggest that many siblings rely on technology to stay in contact with one another once they move out of the family home. While moving apart brings issues of separateness to the forefront, technology allows siblings to maintain a connection. As follows, many people in this study indicated that they used technology to establish a middle ground between being separated from and staying connected to their sibling.

*Management of Openness vs. Protection*

In terms of managing the openness vs. connection tension, siblings in this study seemed to use the separation management pattern. This strategy was predominantly expressed as *topical* separation. In other words, siblings recognized
the contradiction between openness and protection in their relationship, but attempted to separate the polarities depending on the topic. Overall, siblings seemed to emphasize protection and avoid openness when it came to: a.) personal issues; and b.) marital and relationship issues.

*Personal/Difficult Issues.* Many siblings reported that they were open with their brother or sister about some topics and not open about difficult or personal issues. For example, when asked if there is any information she kept from her sister, a female sibling stated:

I’ve formed a really good relationship with my dad, and I’m trying to get my sister to the point where she can talk to him, because he’s really interested in having a relationship with her. But she just totally shuts down as soon as I mention his name. So I just avoid touchy issues like that, and talk with her about things that won’t upset her.

This sibling states that she avoids talking with her sister about their dad and other “touchy issues.” However, she asserts that she talks with her sister about less upsetting topics. Thus, she emphasizes protection and avoids openness when it comes to “touchy issues.” On the other hand, she expresses openness and disregards protection when it comes to topics that are not as difficult for them to discuss. This illustrates her use of topical separation, or what Baxter and Montgomery (1996) describe as a “back-and-forth spiral over time” (p. 63) between the two poles.

A female sibling also reported, “Having a shared childhood makes it easy for us to confide in each other, especially if there is something we want to discuss about our family.” However, she then stated:
I tend to shy away from sharing details about my sex life, money, politics, and other topics. Because of our different opinions on these subjects, we tend not to discuss them.

In her first response, she asserts that confiding in her sister is “easy” because of their shared childhood. Yet, in the following statement, she mentions a list of topics that she avoids sharing details about with her sister because of their differing opinions. This suggests that it is not always “easy” to confide in her sister. In this sense, she indicates that she strives to be open with her sister about some topics and protective in her disclosures about topics that might cause disagreements.

A female sibling reflecting on her relationship with her sister also stated, “There are some parts of my life that I would just feel uncomfortable telling her. I am her ‘baby sister’ and while I am all grown up, I just think some things don’t need to be shared.” This sibling indicates that there are “parts of her life” that she does not share with her sister. Thus, she emphasizes protection and disregards openness when it comes to these personal issues. When asked if she confided in her brother, a female sibling responded similarly:

Somewhat. He comes to me with questions and complaints about his girlfriend on occasion, and I’ll talk to him about problems with my boyfriend. However, there are some things an older brother just doesn’t need to know.

While she confides in her brother about her relationship problems, she states that there are “some things” that she does not discuss with him. This implies that there are certain details about her life or her relationship that are too personal to share with her brother. As such, she uses topical separation to designate which topics she confides in her brother about and which ones she does not.
When asked if he confided in his brother, a male sibling also stated, “Absolutely. There are things I tell him that no one else knows and vice-versa.” However, when asked if there is anything he did not tell his brother, he responded, “Finances. Only for the fact that it’s personal and I don’t feel the need for him to know my exact financial situation.” He first stresses the openness he experiences in his sibling relationship by stating that he tells his brother information that no one else knows. However, he then claims that his financial situation is too personal to discuss with him. Thus, while he strives to be open with his brother about most topics, he assigns prominence to protection when it comes to information about his finances.

Marital and Relationship Issues. Several siblings in this study also seemed to emphasize openness in their relationship with their brother or sister, but then indicated that they preferred protection when it came to the topic of their marriage or romantic relationships. For instance, a female reporting about her relationship with her brother stated:

Yes, we confide in each other. My brother and I are very close and we trust each other with sensitive information. I also tell my brother some things that I wouldn’t tell other family members.

However, when asked if there was any information she did not tell her brother, she responded, “I guess the only information I keep from my sibling is if my husband and I are fighting.” While she stressed that she was open with her bother about “sensitive information,” she reported that she prefers protection regarding information about her marital issues.
A female sibling describing her relationship with her sister also stated, “Yes, we do share some confidential topics. It is important to have trust in your sibling. I feel I can tell her important issues.” In response to whether she kept things from her sister, she reported, “Now that I am married, I do tend to keep some things to myself (she doesn’t need to know EVERYTHING).” First, she states that she confides in her sister and emphasizes the importance of trusting her sibling with confidential information. Yet, in her next response, she makes it clear that she does share information about her marriage with her sister. This suggests that she goes back-and-forth between openness and protection in her sibling relationship, depending on the topic.

A female sibling also described her use of topical separation to manage the openness vs. protection dialectical tension in her relationship with her sister:

We trust each other, and because we have separate groups of friends, we can vent when needed. We do not talk about dating or hook-ups very often, but I think that is mostly because both of us are fairly private about that information with everyone, not just each other.

While she asserts that she can vent to her sister about certain topics, she strives to be protective in her disclosures about her dating life. Another female sibling indicated that she could easily confide in her sister, but then stated, “Occasionally, it can be embarrassing to share details about my romantic relationships with my sister.” Like many siblings in this study, she emphasizes openness in her sibling relationship. However, when it comes to details about her romantic relationships, she indicates that she prefers to be strategic and protective in her disclosures. This demonstrates her use of topical separation to manage the contradiction between openness and protection in her sibling relationship.
Management of Novelty vs. Predictability.

Overall, siblings in this study communicated very little uncertainty about their sibling or the relationship. Rather, they stressed that they knew their sibling very well and that they could always count on their brother or sister. This suggests that siblings may use the selection management strategy to negotiate the tension between novelty and predictability in their relationship during emerging adulthood. In other words, siblings in this study attempted to consistently pursue predictability in their relationships and deny any traces of novelty.

Denying Novelty. In this study, several siblings seemed to avoid novelty and change in their relationship with their brother or sister. As a female sibling stated, “There’s no point keeping things from each other because we would find out eventually. We know everything about each other because we are alike.” This sibling asserts that there is “no point” in attempting to maintain any uncertainty in her relationship with her sister. In this sense, she centers her sibling relationship exclusively on certainty and predictability.

Many siblings also emphasized that they could count on their brother or sister, which reflects a sense of stability. For example, a female sibling commented, “My sister is my best friend. She is always there for me when I need her and she knows she can also count on me.” Likewise, a male sibling reported, “I love my brother, and I know he’ll always be there for me.” By stating that their brother or sister will always be there for them, these siblings rule out the possibility of being let down. This indicates that they perceive their sibling relationship as predictable, or something they can count on.
In an interview, a male sibling clearly described the stability he finds in his relationship with his sister:

There’s a comfort in knowing that we can go to each other if we need each other. I think there’s, for me at least, a comfort in knowing that she’s one of the few people that will, well she’s the only one, who will understand certain things, especially regarding our family, our immediate, nuclear family and our relationship with our parents. You know, growing up together and going through our parent’s divorce, she was there, I was there, we’re the only ones who can really understand that and so it’s one of those things that I can always count on, that she shares a similar perspective that no one else can really be in on because it was just us.

This sibling expresses that he finds comfort in the fact that he can always count on his sister to understand certain things about their family and their shared childhood. Furthermore, he asserts that she is the “only one” who he can share these experiences with and who has a similar perspective as him. In this sense, he communicates strong feelings of comfort and stability regarding his relationship with his sister, and avoids discussing any uncertainty he may experience.

Management of Ideal vs. Real

In this study, most siblings seemed to use the reformulation management pattern to manage the ideal vs. real dialectical tension in their sibling relationship. Thus, siblings attempted to reframe the contradiction between the closeness ideal and the reality of their experiences so that the competing poles were perceived as “one,” rather than as opposites.

Reframing the contradiction. Many siblings seemed to redefine the tension between the ideal and real so that the two dialectical poles were not viewed as competing against one another. In other words, siblings expressed the communication and closeness they experienced in their relationship as the ideal
situation. For instance, a female sibling describing her relationship with her brother stated:

My brother and I are very close. The only thing I would change about him is the fact that he lives 16 hours away. He doesn't think he can live his life close to home, and I disagree. In a way, though, the distance has made us appreciate each other more and value our relationship to the fullest.

She indicates that she does not like the fact that her brother lives 16 hours away, and implies that he should “live his life close to home.” This suggests that it is not ideal for siblings to live so far apart from one another. However, she then states that the distance has made them value one another and their relationship “to the fullest.” In this sense, she expresses the separateness they experience as extreme closeness and connection.

In an interview, a female sibling reflecting on her relationship with her sister also demonstrated her negotiation of the ideal vs. real dialectical tension:

We have our fights when we need to fight, but we tell each other pretty much everything, but not everything to where it’s weird. And even though she lives in a different city, she’s one of my best friends and the first person I call when something is on my mind.

This sibling indicates that she and her sister fight sometimes, are not completely open with one another, and live in different cities, which may be perceived as conflicting with the expectation that siblings should be close. However, she attempts to reframe these experiences with her sister so that appear to be ideal. She implies that their fights are necessary, that it would be “weird” if they shared everything with one another, and that they are still best friends despite the distance between them. In this sense, she describes her experiences with her sister in a way
that does not conflict with the ideal. As follows, she reframes the contradiction so that the ideal and real are perceived as one and the same.

The use of the reformulation management pattern to negotiate the ideal vs. real dialectical tension is also evidenced in this male sibling's response:

We are extremely close, yet have different outlooks and expectations of life. Our differences give us the dialogue to debate and grow in our understanding of each other and ourselves.

Although it seems that two siblings who have “different outlooks and expectations of life” would not share a strong connection, this sibling asserts that he and his sister are “extremely close.” Furthermore, he claims that their differences allow them to grow in their understanding of one another. This suggests that, ultimately, their differences are what make them closer. In other words, he perceives the ideal (closeness with his sister) and real (differences that strengthen their connection) as a unified whole. This illustrates his use of reformulation to redefine the contradiction between the closeness ideal and the reality of his relationship with his sister.

Table 3: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS for RQ5

RQ5: What role does Facebook play in the manifestation and management of dialectical tensions in the sibling relationship during emerging adulthood?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding 1: Using Facebook to Manage Connectedness vs. Separateness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Attempting to stay connected despite the distance between them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Communicating affection on Facebook while being apart</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding 2: Sex Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Females were more likely than males to use Facebook to stay connected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Females were more likely to report feeling closer to their sibling because of Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Females were more likely to communicate with their sibling via Facebook to arrange a time to talk; males were more likely to use Facebook to plan a time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finding 3: Using Facebook to Stay Connected without Immediate Interaction

A. Staying in touch with sibling through photos and status updates
B. Communicating with sibling via Facebook when it is convenient

Finding 4: Facebook at least introduces tensions of public vs. private

A. Publicizing aspects of the relationship for the benefit of others
B. Keeping aspects of the relationship private because mom is on Facebook

Overwhelmingly, siblings in this study seemed to use Facebook to manage the tension between connectedness and separateness in their relationship, and a few sex differences were found in how males and females communicate with their sibling via Facebook. Many participants also reported that they liked using Facebook because it allowed them to maintain a connection with their siblings without engaging in a conversation or an immediate interaction with them. Finally, although not as pronounced as the primary dialectics in this study, the results suggest that Facebook at least introduces tensions associated with the contextual dialectics of public vs. private and, to an even lesser extent, ideal vs. real. These findings and their implications are discussed next.

Management of Connectedness vs. Separateness

As the results for RQ4 demonstrated, several siblings expressed that they used technology to find a balance between connectedness and separateness in their sibling relationship. For many siblings in this study, Facebook played a particularly important role in the management of this tension. Overall, siblings indicated that Facebook enabled them to establish their independence from their brother or sister and still remain connected. This contradiction was expressed in two ways: a.)
attempting to stay connected despite the distance between them; and b.)
communicating affection while being apart.

*Staying Connected Despite Distance.* As noted earlier, all but two sibling pairs
in this study did not live in the same residence. Furthermore, 41 participants
(85.4%) reported that they used Facebook to stay in contact with their brother or
sister, and 12 (25.5%) indicated that it was their most frequent method of
communicating with their sibling. This suggests that siblings may use Facebook to
communicate during emerging adulthood to maintain a connection despite the
separateness they experience in their relationship. For instance, a female sibling
stated, “My brother no longer lives at home, so (Facebook) is just a fast and simple
way to stay in touch.” Another female sibling also indicated that Facebook allows
her to connect with her brother:

> He is always on (Facebook), so it’s the easiest way to get a hold of him. He
doesn’t answer his phone calls or texts most of the time but since he’s a
student he is always on his computer so he always answers FB messages.

This sibling states that her brother does not answer her phone calls or texts most of
the time, which highlights the separateness she experiences in their relationship.
However, she then asserts that “he always answers his FB messages,” which
suggests that Facebook enables her to stay in contact with her brother more easily
than other methods of communication. As such, she relies on the social network site
to manage the tensions associated with connectedness and separateness in her
sibling relationship. Her effort to negotiate this tension is illustrated in the
following Facebook exchange between her and her brother:

Sister: Hey when are u coming up here, seriously love u and miss u.
Brother: Hey, I am thinking about maybe coming up this weekend, sooo?
Sister: Sooooooo...let’s dance! For real, u coming? Or is this an empty threat? b/c we would love to have u!!!!

First, she asks her brother when he is going to visit her, which indicates her desire for a connection with him. She also communicates closeness and affection by telling him that she loves him and misses him. When he replies that he is “thinking about maybe coming up,” she responds excitedly at the thought of him visiting her. Thus, this exchange illustrates her use of Facebook to foster a connection with her brother despite the distance between them.

Likewise, a female sibling also reported that Facebook allowed her to remain close with her sister:

My sister is not the type of person who likes to talk on the phone, and has a hard time opening up. She has an easier time communicating through Facebook. Also, since I live far away it is easier to keep the closeness of our relationship in tact.

This sibling emphasizes both the emotional (her sister has a hard time opening up) and physical (they live far away from one another) distance that separates her from her sister. However, she indicates that Facebook makes it easier for them to communicate and maintain the closeness of their relationship despite the distance between them. In this sense, Facebook provides a way for them to manage the tension between connectedness and separateness in their relationship. Her sister responded similarly:

(Facebook) is easier and more convenient than other ways of communicating. You can always keep in touch throughout daily lives even if you live apart. We live far away and Facebook makes me feel like a part of her life.

Like her sister, she indicates that communicating with one another via Facebook makes it easier for them to stay in touch and remain close. She further emphasizes
that Facebook makes her feel as if she is still a part of her sister’s life even though they live far away from one another. This suggests that she uses Facebook to negotiate a balance between closeness and distance in her relationship with her sister.

In the following Facebook exchange, a brother-sister sibling pair also demonstrated how they strive for closeness and connection with one another despite being apart:

Brother: So the hawk’s gone, and I’m recovering from a good weekend at Beta. How’s everything at the house? Hellstriken I’m sure. When will you find out about that internship at the art museum?
Sister: Oh, didn’t you hear? I found out via mom who found out from a letter to the house, that I did not get the internship. I’m loving the pf chang’s job, and you are right the house is a mess. Mom will get to see it/clean it today so I’m pumped. Glad you had a great time at beta, and what a coincidence, I’m also recovering from quite a weekend with the off campus betas up here. How’s the lifeguarding?

Although they are attending separate colleges and leading independent lives, they make an effort to remain close by catching up after a weekend, asking questions about one another’s life, and letting the other know what is happening in his/her life. The female sibling also expresses a connection with her brother by pointing out they spent their weekend engaging in similar activities at separate locations. In this sense, the two siblings communicate closeness, but at the same acknowledge their autonomous lives apart from one another. Thus, as their messages indicate, Facebook provides a medium for them to manage the tension between being together and being apart.

A brother-brother pair also expressed the struggle to stay close despite being apart in this Facebook exchange:
Brother #1: Yo, Bra, miss me??? Slam a dunkel for me in Deutschland, and a huge pretzel with beer cheese, and a bratwurst. And I’ll slam some BL’s for you at the lake this weekend. And why don’t you post some pics already? See you in 4 days.
Brother #2: No silly I don’t come home for like 26 days, not 4. Hahah hope things are well with ya.

In the first message, the brother communicates a desire for a connection with his sibling although the sibling is out of the country. He asks his brother if he misses him, requests that his brother posts pictures so he can see what he is up to, and then adds that they will see each other in 4 days. At the same time, he acknowledges his independence by letting his brother know that he has his own, separate plans to go to the lake over the weekend. However, by telling his brother that he will drink a beer for him, and asking his brother do the same, he is again expressing a desire for connection. The second brother responds by also communicating both separateness (he will not be home for another 26 days) and closeness (he wishes his brother well). As such, both brothers attempt to negotiate the contradiction between connectedness and separateness that they experience in their relationship.

As the discussion above suggests, siblings may rely on Facebook to stay in touch with one another during emerging adulthood. Furthermore, the results also indicate that Facebook provides a quick and easy way for siblings to communicate affection for one another.

*Communicate Affection While Being Apart.* The analysis of the wall-to-wall postings found that many siblings seem to use Facebook to communicate affection for their brother or sister while being apart. In this study, participants primarily expressed affection by writing on their siblings’ Facebook walls to say that they loved them, were thinking about them, or that they missed them. For example, a
male-female sibling pair demonstrated their affection for one another in the following Facebook exchange:

   Sister: Dear biggest of the little brothers. I miss you too! When you are you coming home??

By writing on his sister’s wall to tell her he misses her, he indicates that he cares about her and is thinking about her. She echoes his sentiments, and asks when he is coming home to visit. This illustrates their efforts to express affection for one another while living apart. A female-female sibling pair also communicated similar feelings on Facebook:

   Sister #1: I miss you! Come visit. Or better yet...move here. :{
   Sister #2: You move here! Love you sister...so much.
   Sister #1: Love you too

These sisters express affection by stating that they miss and love one another. They also indicate that they do not like living far away from one another, which highlights their desire for connection despite the distance between them. As such, Facebook allows them to communicate their care for one another and maintain a connection although they do not live close to one another.

   The use of affection to manage the tension between connectedness and separateness is also illustrated in these Facebook messages exchanged between two sisters:

   Sister #1: Hi sissssssstter. I miss your faceeeee. Feel better asap. I love you.
   Sister #2: Thanks sissy. Miss and love you too!

The first sister communicates her affection and her desire for a connection by telling her sister that she loves and misses her. She also tells her sister to “feel better asap,” which communicates her care and concern for her. Her sister returns the affection
in her message by calling her “sissy” and telling her that she also loves and misses her. This demonstrates their use of affection to stay close while being apart.

A brother-sister pair also expressed affection for one another in the following Facebook exchange:

Sister: I miss you, how are you doing?
Brother: poopy. :(
Sister: why are you poopy?
Brother: I miss you. :(  
Sister: Aww pooky, I miss you too! I can’t wait to see you—hopefully soon!

First, the sister demonstrates her care for her brother by writing on his Facebook wall to let him know that she misses him and to see how he is doing. He responds by saying that he is not doing well because he misses her. She then communicates her affection for him again by calling him “pooky,” and stating that she cannot wait to see him. This illustrates how siblings might use affection to emphasize connectedness in their relationship despite living apart.

As these responses indicate, Facebook provides a way for siblings to negotiate the contradiction between connectedness and separateness in their relationship during emerging adulthood. Furthermore, both males and females seem to use Facebook to stay in contact with their sibling. However, females indicated that they used Facebook to communicate with their sibling more often than males. Moreover, females were more likely than males to use Facebook to express affection and a desire for closeness with their sibling. As such, there are differences regarding how males and females use Facebook to maintain a connection with their sibling during emerging adulthood.

_Sex Differences_
In this study, females seemed to rely on Facebook to stay close with their brother or sister more than males. As follows, female-female sibling pairs were more likely than other sibling pairs to use Facebook to manage the tension between connectedness and separateness in their sibling relationship. The results indicated that females are more likely than males to: a.) use Facebook to maintain a connection with their sibling despite being apart and b.) report feeling closer to their sibling because of Facebook. Furthermore, females were more likely to communicate with their sibling via Facebook to arrange a time to talk, while males were more likely to write on their sibling’s walls to discuss upcoming activities. As such, the results provided support for the gendered closeness perspective (Floyd, 1996). These findings are reviewed below.

*Staying connected despite distance.* As noted earlier, the wall-to-walls of 20 sibling pairs were analyzed, including 11 sister-sister pairs, 6 brother-sister pairs, and 3 brother-brother pairs. Compared to males, females wrote on their sibling’s Facebook wall more frequently in the past year and expressed more affection in their messages. As might be expected, female-female sibling pairs communicated via Facebook more than female-male and male-male sibling pairs. Furthermore, male-male sibling pairs used Facebook the least often to communicate with one another. In terms of the mixed-sex sibling pairs, female siblings almost always initiated the Facebook exchanges with their brothers, and wrote more messages than their brothers overall.

Based on these findings, it seems that females are more likely than males to use Facebook to stay close to their sibling despite being apart. For example, two
sisters communicated their desire for a connection in this following Facebook exchange:

Sister #1: So...Halloween was not the same without you. :(  
Sister #2: I know! Halloween was kinda weird this year for me too. :(

These messages suggest that the sisters usually celebrate Halloween together, and did not like celebrating the holiday separately. Thus, the experience of not spending a holiday together emphasizes the separateness in their relationship. However, they attempt to maintain a connection despite being apart by writing on one another’s Facebook wall. Similarly, a female sister wrote on her sister’s wall: “Another Christmas without you. I’m sad. We are coming as soon as we can, hopefully the beginning of January.” Despite being apart from her sister at Christmas, this sibling communicates her desire for a connection by writing on her sister’s Facebook wall and stating that she is going to try to visit soon. In this sense, she communicates with her sister on Facebook in order to negotiate the contradiction between staying close while living apart.

The following sisters also communicated via Facebook to remain close while being separated:

Sister #1: Listen, I don’t know what you were thinking accepting a job which will keep you away from me for six months, but the least you could’ve done was gotten February off. I have no idea what I’m going to do for my birthday without you!!!!!!!!!! :(
Sister #2: I know, I know!! It’s crazy! But I’ll make it up for it when you come see me! I promise!

The first sibling emphasizes the separateness she and her sister experience in their relationship by indicating that they will be apart for six months. She then implies that she wishes her sister would be with her for her birthday, which demonstrates
her need to be close with her sister. Her sister replies, stating that it is “crazy” that she is going to miss her birthday. This suggests that they use Facebook to communicate their affection for one another and stay in touch while being apart for six months.

Another female-female sibling pair demonstrated how they use Facebook to manage the contradiction between connectedness and separateness in their relationship:

Sister #1: I miss you sissy.
Sister #2: I miss you too. When do you come back? :( 

The first sister tells her sibling she misses her, which indicates her desire to remain close with her sister. Her sister expresses the same feelings, and asks her sister when she will be back. This illustrates their attempt to use Facebook to communicate affection and remain close with their one another while being apart. Like these sisters, many females wrote on their sibling’s Facebook wall to tell him or her “I miss you.” For example, another female-female sibling pair exchanged similar messages on Facebook:

Sister #1: I missssssssssssssssssssss you.
Sister #2: Ah! I miss you too! Why don’t you just move back home? K. thx.

Although they are separated and miss one another, Facebook allows them to communicate affection and stay in touch. This demonstrates how they strive to negotiate the contradiction of connectedness and separateness in their relationship.

Another female sibling wrote on her sister’s Facebook wall: “Hi. Remember me? I miss your face. It seems like it’s been years since we’ve talked. I loooove your new profile picture. So cute!” In this message, she highlights a lack of
connection with her sister by saying, “remember me?” and saying it has “been years” since they talked. At the same time, she communicates her desire for closeness by telling her sister she misses her and telling her she likes her new picture. This illustrates her attempt to connect with her sister despite the apparent distance between them.

In this study, female-female sibling pairs communicated more often via wall posts than other sibling pairs. As noted earlier, in mixed-sex sibling pairs, sisters were more likely to initiate a Facebook exchange and posted more messages than their brothers in total. As follows, females were more likely than males to communicate with their brother or sister on Facebook to stay in touch. This provides further evidence for the “kin-keeper” perspective, which proposes that female siblings are more likely to facilitate contact and communication between family members (Hagestad, 1986). Moreover, it supports White's (2001) finding that women focus more on maintaining and nurturing their sibling relationships in adulthood than men. Possibly as a result of their efforts to maintain their sibling relationships, females in this study were also more likely to report that Facebook enhanced the closeness they experienced with their brother or sister.

_Closer Because of Facebook._ More than half of the females in this study (65.5%) reported that they felt at least somewhat closer to sibling because of Facebook. In contrast, a smaller number of males (35.5%) indicated that using Facebook to communicate with their sibling strengthened the closeness they experienced. For example, a male sibling stated, ”My closeness with my sibling has to do with the actual interaction, not the virtual.” Likewise, another male sibling

89
reporting on his relationship with his sister responded, “We do not use Facebook too often. And when we do, it doesn’t really bring us closer. We use phone and in-person communication to bring us closer.” Both of these males emphasize that they are close to their sibling because of face-to-face communication or phone conversations, not because of their communications on Facebook. As such, they indicate communicating with their sibling via Facebook does not strengthen their connection or make them feel closer despite being apart.

Another male sibling reporting on his relationship with his brother responded:

I wouldn’t say that if Facebook weren’t a “Thing” we wouldn’t be as close, I would probably just use other forms of communication to speak to him. Probably call more often, maybe even use e-mail.

This sibling states that if he and his brother did not have Facebook accounts, they would just use other methods of communication to stay in touch. In other words, Facebook is just another way for them to communicate and they would talk just as much (if not more) without it. As such, he asserts that communicating with his brother on Facebook does not make them closer.

Female siblings, on the other hand, were more likely to report that they felt closer to their sibling because of Facebook. For example, a female sibling reporting on her relationship with her sister responded:

My sister is on Facebook ALL the time. Both of us are really busy with school and work and social activities. If it wasn't for Facebook we may never find the time to talk.

This sibling describes how busy she and her sister are with “school and work and social activities.” This emphasizes their independence from one another and the
relationship, and suggests that it might be hard for them to stay in contact. She then asserts that “if it wasn’t for Facebook” she and her sister may never have a chance to catch up, which implies that Facebook is the primary way she and her sister communicate and remain connected at this stage in their lives.

Another female sibling reflecting on her relationship with her sister indicated that she and her sister talked more because of Facebook:

Facebook makes it easy for us to communicate, even if it’s about her French homework. I feel like we might not have the excuse to talk so frequently (because we live in different states) if we didn’t have a tool like Facebook.

This sibling reports that Facebook makes it easy for her to communicate with her sister, despite living far away from her. She further implies that they might not talk as often as they would if they did not have “a tool like Facebook.” Thus, because Facebook allows them to talk more often, it enhances the connectedness they experience in their relationship. Her sister responded similarly:

My sister and I are definitely in contact more because of Facebook. We usually talk on the phone about once a week and we will text each other a few times a week with a short little message, but with Facebook we communicate more than we would without it.

Although she and her sister also communicate via phone calls and text, she indicates that Facebook enables them to communicate more than they would otherwise. This suggests that, while they are close, Facebook makes them even closer.

Another female sibling described how Facebook has made her feel closer to her sister despite living in different cities:

Living far away from each other, Facebook allows (my sister) to see photos of my life and vice-versa. I like that we can still feel as though we’re sharing our social life even though we live in different cities.
Even though she and her sister live far away from one another, this sibling asserts that Facebook allows them to feel as if they are sharing their social lives. In addition to providing siblings with a convenient way to communicate with one another, Facebook also allows them to keep updated about the other by viewing the photos they post. Thus, without Facebook, she and her sister might not be as close because they would not be able to view photos of one another’s life as easily. In this sense, Facebook’s photo sharing feature may add to the closeness that siblings feel during emerging adulthood. Likewise, a female sibling responded, “My brother lives in Orlando, Fla now so I often get to see him tagged in pictures and get to see what’s going on through him and mutual friends.” Like the previous sibling, she notes how being able to view her brother’s pictures allows her to see what is going on in his life. This demonstrates how Facebook helps her maintain a connection with her brother even though he lives in Florida.

Most females in this study reported that they felt closer to their brother or sister because of Facebook. In particular, they indicated that being able to communicate via Facebook and view their sibling’s photos strengthened their connection despite being apart. This suggests that female siblings may use Facebook to negotiate a balance between connectedness and separateness in their sibling relationship. In this study, female siblings also seem to manage this tension by using Facebook to plan times to talk with their brother or sister.

_Females: Plan Times to Talk._ A number of females in this study wrote on their sibling’s wall to coordinate a time to talk on the phone or Skype. The struggle to
find time to talk while being apart is illustrated in this Facebook exchange between two sisters:

Sister #1: Sorry I didn’t get back to you today. I wasn’t off the ship as long as I thought I’d be. But I’m going to try to give you a call tomorrow if possible, if you have time. I’ll be in Puerto Rico, so I'll have my phone all day. So maybe text me when you wake up, and we can chat. I missss you!

Sister #2: I’m sorry I only just looked at Facebook. :( I worked until midnight last night, came home and went to bed and woke up and went back to work. I have a story for you though. I am free all day tomorrow! Holla if that works! I missss you too.

Sister #1: Ok!!! I am in St. Thomas tomorrow!! Another US port! So yay! I’ll get to talk to you! And I NEEEEEEEEED to talk to you! Tomorrow it is!

Although these sisters are far apart from one another and very busy, they are able to write on one another’s Facebook walls to schedule a time to talk on the phone. They also communicate their affection for one another and a desire for closeness by saying “I miss you” and expressing excitement at the thought of talking on the phone. As such, Facebook helps these sisters remain close and plan a time to connect while they are separated.

Another sister-sister pair illustrated how they used Facebook to schedule a time to talk:

Sister #1: I haven’t talked to you in 50 years. Makes me sad. :(
Sister #2: Me too, we should talk tonight.
Sister #1: Sounds like a plan.

The first sister draws attention to the separateness she experiences in her relationship with her sister by stating that they have not talked in a long time. She also expresses her desire for a connection by indicating that their lack of communication makes her sad. Her sister responds by emphasizing connectedness, suggesting that they talk later that night. By communicating via Facebook, the two sisters attempt to manage the contradiction between connectedness (‘we should talk
tonight’) and separateness (‘I haven’t talked to you in 50 years’) in their relationship.

The attempt to schedule a time to connect while being independent from one another is also evidenced in this Facebook exchange between two sisters:

Sister #1: sisterrrr mass compliments on the hair and makeup, thank you loveee youuu. Call me when you get off today!
Sister #2: Oh sister you know I love doing that for you. Call you after the amazing race.

Although they are busy with their own activities, these two sisters use Facebook to plan a time to talk on the phone. Likewise, a female sibling wrote on her sister’s Facebook wall: “Skype at 2pm my time? Or 3pm my time?” This sibling only writes on her sister’s Facebook wall in order to set up a time to Skype with her. As previously discussed, emerging adulthood can be a confusing and busy time for individuals as they experiment with work, love, and worldviews, and strive to establish their independence. For this reason, it may be difficult for siblings to align their schedules and find time to talk on the phone during emerging adulthood. However, Facebook allows them to touch base with one another and figure out the best time to talk.

In general, male siblings were less likely than females to rely on Facebook to negotiate the connectedness vs. separateness dialectical tensions in their sibling relationship. However, when males in this study did use Facebook to connect with their sibling, it was often to make plans to hang out.

Males: Plan Times to Hang Out. One of the primary reasons males in this study seemed to communicate with their sibling on Facebook was to talk about
activities they planned to do together. For example, a male-male sibling pair exchanged Facebook messages about their upcoming plans:

Brother #1: Brew-haha Friday night...bring your drinkin boots.
Brother #2: Haha I beg your what sir? And for your information, I never take my drinkin boots off.

They express their affection for one another with light-hearted banter, and also discuss the next time they plan to hang out. In this sense, the two brothers demonstrate how they strive for connectedness in their relationship. Another brother-brother pair made similar comments on Facebook:

Brother #1: Can’t wait till Friday dude.
Brother #2: Ya, brotha, it’s been awhile since we chilled.

Like the previous siblings, these brothers use Facebook to communicate about their plans to hang out. Further, the first brother states that he “can’t wait” until they get together, and the brother agrees. This suggests that they strive for closeness in their relationship, and use Facebook to express their desire for connectedness while being apart.

A brother also wrote on his sister’s Facebook wall to talk about their upcoming plans:

Brother: Hey, so beach trip is full steam ahead. I got one more friend coming down with us, since (friend’s name) can’t come, and we’re still ? for (friend’s name). Anyways, the braves game was amazing! Tell Carl he missed a great day. Hope everything’s cool at home. See you Friday a little before dinner.

This brother first discusses details about a beach trip he and his sister are planning together with friends, and concludes his message by stating that they will see one another on Friday. As such, he emphasizes shared activities as an important factor in the closeness he experiences with his sister.
Gendered Closeness Perspective. As evidenced by the discussion above, females were more likely to use Facebook to plan a time to talk with their sibling and males were more likely to use Facebook to communicate with their sibling about upcoming events. These results support the gendered closeness perspective (Floyd, 1996), which suggests that women express closeness with others through shared dialogue, while men express closeness through shared activities. For example, a female sibling wrote on her brother’s Facebook wall: “I am going to drive to Auburn and shoot you in the face if you don’t start calling me back. Love you.” This sibling gives her brother a hard time for not calling her back, which indicates that talking to him on the phone is important to her. However, it is possible that he expresses closeness differently than her. For example, he demonstrates the importance he places on shared activities in the following Facebook exchange:

Brother: So when will you be home for break sis?
Sister: I have a final on the 19th and hopefully I’ll be home on the 21st at the latest. I have to move everything out of the room so it will take awhile. When do you head back?
Brother: Well, I found out today that I’ll be helping mom move you out, so I’ll see you then. I’m done on Tuesday.

By asking when she will be home from break, he implies that he would like to know when they will see one another and hang out again. Next, he lets her know that he will be helping her move, and states that he will see her then. This illustrates how he uses Facebook to discuss upcoming plans with his sister. Thus, he may perceive sharing activities as more significant to their relational closeness than sharing dialogue. As follows, he may not make it a priority to call his sister back, which likely frustrates her.
Another female sibling communicated her desire to talk to her brother on the phone with this Facebook message:

**Sister:** HELLO REMEMBER ME? THE ONE WHO CALLED YOU? I WANTED TO TALK TO YOU? REMEMBER? YOUR SISTER? HELLO? You are a punk.

This sibling expresses annoyance with her brother for not calling her back. She also uses all capital letters and sarcasm to make her point, which indicates that she really wants to talk to him. This demonstrates the value she places on connecting with her brother through sharing dialogue. Her brother, on the other hand, indicates that he likes to connect with her through shared activities:

**Brother:** So will you seriously go to Chicago with me?
**Sister:** Yea, if you want, like if you need someone to go with you, yea. Just tell me the dates again.

(*A few days later*)
**Brother:** We are in Chicago...you are eating pizza to my left. Thanks for coming with me. :)

Like many males in this study, he writes on sister's Facebook wall to ask about an upcoming activity. He then writes on her wall while they are in Chicago together, sitting next to one another at a restaurant eating pizza. He also thanks her for coming with him and uses a smile emoticon to indicate that he is glad she accompanied him on the trip. This suggests that he experiences closeness with his sister through shared activities, such as having lunch together in Chicago.

*It is important to note that females in this study also used Facebook to communicate with their sibling about upcoming plans and shared activities. However, that was just one of many ways that females seemed to express a desire for connectedness in their sibling relationship. Furthermore, they wrote on their sibling's walls more to communicate affection and arrange times to talk than they*
did to make plans to hang out. In comparison, most males in this study wrote on their sibling’s wall to talk about plans and very few relied on Facebook to arrange a time to talk on the phone. This suggests that, in terms of relational closeness, women placed more emphasis than men on shared dialogue, and men valued shared activities more than women did. Given these differences in how men and women expressed closeness with their sibling on Facebook, the *gendered closeness perspective* (Floyd, 1996) was partially supported.

*Staying Connected Without Immediate Interaction.*

As the above discussion suggests, Facebook provides a quick and easy way for siblings to stay in touch and communicate their affection for one another once they no longer live together. Siblings in this study also seemed to negotiate the tension between connectedness and separateness by viewing one another’s profiles and status updates. Furthermore, siblings indicated that they liked being able to send their brother or sister a quick message without having to call or engage in a conversation. This suggests that siblings may use Facebook to stay connected with one another without direct or immediate interaction.

*Staying in touch through photos and updates.* A number of siblings reported that they used Facebook to keep up with their brother or sister by viewing their status updates, photos, and wall posts. As such, Facebook allowed them to stay connected to their sibling without interacting with him or her in an immediate sense. For instance, a female sibling stated, “Because my sister lives in Boston, Facebook makes is easy to stay close to her by looking at her pictures and updates.” Although she and her sister live in different cities, she is able to stay close to her by
viewing the pictures and updates on her sister’s Facebook page. This suggests that she does not have to interact or converse with her sister to maintain a connection. Rather, she remains close with her sister by viewing the information and pictures that she posts on Facebook.

A female sibling reporting on her relationship with her brother also responded:

I like that I can see what is going on in his life by what he posts on his Facebook status or by what his friends post on his wall. Instead of having to call and check on my brother, I can usually check up on him by using Facebook. Even if I don’t comment on his status, I can still see what he’s up to. By seeing what he is doing via Facebook, I feel closer to my sibling because on an average day I wouldn’t call my brother every day. I feel closer to him knowing what is going on in his life.

This sibling states that she uses Facebook to keep up with her brother’s life without even interacting with him or commenting on his Facebook page. Rather, she can check on her brother and see what is going on in his life simply by viewing his activity on Facebook. She further notes that she feels closer to her brother because of Facebook because she would not call him on an “average day.” As such, Facebook adds to the connection she feels with her brother regardless of whether she actually interacts with him while she is viewing his Facebook page.

When asked why she likes using Facebook to communicate with her sister, a female sibling responded similarly:

It is easy and convenient for me. It is nice for me because she has been in college these past four years and she dances, so we don’t get to see each other as often as I’d like. Getting on Facebook and seeing her status updates and pictures is a way for me to catch up with her and I enjoy that.

By stating that she does not get to see her sister as often as she would like, this sibling communicates a desire for more connectedness with her sister. However,
she then states that she can keep up with her sister by viewing her status updates and pictures on Facebook. Thus, although she may not get to see her sister in person often, Facebook provides her with a visual representation of her sister’s life. This suggests that viewing her sister’s Facebook profile helps her maintain a connection with her sister despite being apart from her.

Likewise, another female sibling stated, “My sister doesn't always tell me everything that is going on in her life. Facebook is a more detailed way to keep me posted on what’s going on with her.” This sibling asserts that her sister does not always tell her everything, which implies that connecting with her can be difficult. However, she then states that Facebook is a “more detailed way” to keep up with her sister's life. This suggests that it is sometimes easier to stay connected to her sister by viewing the details on her Facebook page than by communicating with her. As follows, Facebook may minimize the need for siblings to interact with one another directly in order to stay connected. Rather, they can negotiate the tension between connectedness and separateness simply by viewing one another’s Facebook profiles.

*Communicating when it is convenient.* Several siblings in this study also indicated that using Facebook is more convenient than other methods of communication because they can leave their brother or sister a quick message without having to call or engage in an interaction. For example, when asked why he used Facebook to communicate with his sister, a male sibling responded:

It is convenient. Whenever I have something to say to her I can just put it on her wall and I know she will eventually see it. For little things like jokes or low-importance information it is the best way to communicate because I don’t want to interrupt or bother her.
This sibling states that he writes on his sister’s wall because he knows that she will *eventually* see it. This suggests that he desires a connection with her, but also likes the convenience of being able to leave a message without having to call her or interact with her immediately. Thus, some siblings may use Facebook to communicate so they can stay connected without interrupting one another’s daily lives. Another male sibling reporting on his relationship with his sister also stated, “We can share little details anytime they occur without disturbing each other via phone calls.” Like the previous sibling, he indicates how Facebook allows him to remain close with his sister without “disturbing” her with a phone call. This illustrates how he negotiates both connectedness (sharing details on Facebook) and separateness (not calling one another) in his relationship with his sister.

In an interview, a female sibling reflecting on her Facebook communication with her sister also responded:

> We’re both busy, so having Facebook is an easy way for us to touch base without having to spend hours on the phone. Usually on Facebook, we’ll just put like goofy comments, like inside jokes, and things like that. But if it’s serious or needs to be addressed right away we’ll usually call or text.

By stating that Facebook allows her to communicate with her sister “without having to spend hours on the phone,” she implies that it is a convenient way for them to stay connected. Rather than taking time out of their busy lives to talk on the phone, they can touch base by leaving comments for one another on Facebook. Likewise, a brother reporting on his relationship with his sister noted, “(Facebook) gives us the ability to give detailed communication that can be seen at each other’s convenience.” This sibling states that she and his sister can write one another messages that can be viewed at their own convenience. Thus, he implies that Facebook allows him to
maintain a connection with his sister without engaging in an immediate interaction with her.

When asked what she likes about using Facebook to communicate with her sister, a female sibling also stated, “I can just leave her a message whenever I am available, I don’t have to wait to talk to her on the phone when she’s free.” During emerging adulthood, siblings are likely to live in separate residences and be preoccupied with school, work, and their individual goals. Thus, it may be difficult for some siblings to find the time to talk and stay informed about one another’s lives. However, with Facebook, siblings can view one another’s profile and write a quick message without taking too much time from their busy schedules. In this sense, Facebook allows siblings to stay connected while being apart with no direct or immediate interaction with one another.

*Public vs. Private*

As mentioned earlier, siblings in this study did not commonly communicate the public vs. private dialectical tension. However, there is evidence that Facebook introduces siblings to the challenge of managing their relationship in public. In this study, some siblings expressed that they chose to publicize aspects of their relationship for the benefit of others. Furthermore, a few siblings indicated that they made an effort to keep some parts of their relationship private because their mom was also on Facebook. These findings are discussed next.

*Public: Benefit of others.* When asked why they enjoyed using Facebook to communicate with their brother or sister, some siblings reported that they liked the idea of other people reading their comments and seeing their pictures. A female
A sibling reflecting on her Facebook interactions with her sister stated, “Everyone can see me making fun of her.” With this comment, she states that she enjoys that fact that other people on can see how she communicates with her sister on Facebook. This suggests that she makes fun of her sister on Facebook so that the public perceives their relationship as she wants it to be perceived. When asked what she enjoys about using Facebook to communicate with her sister, another female sibling responded, “It’s funny to joke around and our friends think it’s entertaining.” This sibling indicates that she likes joking with her sister on Facebook because their friends find it entertaining. As such, she strives to publicize aspects of her sibling relationship for the benefit of others. This implies that she may choose to keep certain information about her relationship with her sister private if she thinks others might not find it entertaining. In other words, she manages her interactions with her sibling on Facebook so that others see what she wants them to see.

A female sibling describing why she used Facebook to communicate with her brother responded similarly: “With Facebook, I can joke around, post funny pics of him, things that I want him or others to see or read that don’t have any urgency to them.” This sibling states that she likes posting funny pictures or comments that she wants “him or others to see or read.” This demonstrates her effort to post things on her brother’s Facebook wall that will not only benefit him, but will benefit others as well. Furthermore, this suggests that she is able to decide which aspects of her sibling relationship to publicize and which aspects to keep private.

All 46 siblings who participated in the Facebook portion of the survey checked “to joke around or tease my sibling” as a reason they used Facebook to
communicate with their brother or sister. Based on the responses above, it is possible that may siblings choose to tease their brother or sister on Facebook because others can view their comments. Teasing is often viewed as a sign of affection, and signifies that people are close enough to poke fun at one another without hurting the relationship. Given that siblings are expected to be close, siblings may like the idea of having an audience while they express their affection for one another. Thus, instead of making fun of one another in private at home or on the telephone, Facebook allows siblings to publicize this fun and humorous side of their relationship. This also suggests that siblings may also manage their interactions on Facebook in order to display their relationship as an ideal sibling relationship. To the extent that Facebook allows individuals to manage both their identities and relationships, it is possible that siblings may strive to present their relationship to the public as ideal. While there is no specific evidence in this study to support this claim, it provides direction for future research.

_Private: Mom Is on Facebook._ A few participants indicated that they sometimes refrained from posting on their sibling’s wall because their mom is a Facebook member and would see the post. As such, some siblings experienced a tension between wanting to communicate with their brother or sister on Facebook and wanting to keep certain information private. For instance, a female sibling stated, “Sometimes I don’t like posting stuff on my sister’s wall because I know my mom reads it, and it just makes me feel weird.” She states that she knows her mom will read anything she posts, which highlights the public nature of Facebook. In this sense, she must decide which parts of her relationship with her sister she can post
on Facebook, and which information she wants to keep to herself so her mom does not see it.

In an interview, another female sibling described her attempt to manage the contradiction between public and private on Facebook:

“It’s not so much my mom, but my mother-in-law. I mean, she likes me, but she obviously has only known me a short time so if she sees something on Facebook I feel as if she might get the wrong impression. I don’t know, (my sister) and I like to joke around and sometimes call each other a bitch or a (***). And she’s friends with (my sister) too so it’s not even like she won’t see what I post on her page. I mean, it’s not that we post anything way wrong or immoral, but some people might find our word choices or humor offensive or immature.

This response indicates that she and her sister share a sense of humor that others might find offensive. As such, this represents an aspect of her sibling relationship that she feels she needs to keep private from her mother-in-law. However, given the openness of Facebook, she faces the challenge of managing the public and private aspects of her sibling relationship.

These responses suggest that having a parent on Facebook introduces or intensifies the public vs. private dialectical tension that siblings experience in their relationship during emerging adulthood. As discussed earlier, individuals during emerging adulthood are likely to engage in risky behaviors, experiment with love and relationships, and focus on establishing their independence (Arnett, 2000). Therefore, if parents are on Facebook, emerging adults may not want to expose certain aspects of their lives and relationships on their profiles. As follows, siblings may experience a tension between wanting to be open with one another on Facebook and wanting to keep things about their relationship private for the sake of their parents.
The results in this study have merely scratched the surface of this interesting dynamic between parents and siblings on Facebook. This is likely because siblings were not asked questions regarding their parents’ presence on Facebook, and how it influences the way they negotiate their relationship on the site. However, the few responses highlighting this struggle indicate that there is a need for further exploration in this area.

This study examined the communication patterns and relational experiences of adult sibling pairs. Five research questions were posed to investigate how siblings express and negotiate dialectical tensions in their relationship during emerging adulthood. A review of the specific findings and implications for each research question is presented in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how siblings communicate and make meaning of their relationship during emerging adulthood. As discussed earlier, the emerging adulthood stage is typically characterized by change and uncertainty. This life stage may be a particularly confusing time for siblings, as they manage the pressures associated with moving out of the family home and establishing independence (Myers et al., 2008). As follows, Bevan et al. (2006) suggest that relational and partner uncertainty may be more prominent in the sibling relationship than is presently acknowledged in the literature. To further an understanding of how adult siblings negotiate complex issues, such as change and uncertainty, scholars have proposed that future research should apply relational dialectics theory to the sibling relationship (Bevan et al., 2006; Fowler, 2009). With this in mind, the present study sought to explore the manifestation and management of relational dialectics in the sibling relationship during emerging adulthood, with an emphasis on how they use Facebook to communicate. Facebook was chosen as an area of emphasis because there is evidence that adult siblings often rely on technology to stay in contact (Mikkelson, 2004). Thus, given the popularity of Facebook, it was proposed that many adult siblings are now using the social network site to communicate with one another.

Five research questions were proposed to guide this research. The first research question asked, “What dialectical tensions are evidenced in the communication between siblings during emerging adulthood?” Of the three primary
and two secondary dialectical tensions reviewed earlier, siblings in this study expressed the following dialectical tensions: connectedness vs. separateness, openness vs. protection, novelty vs. predictability, and ideal vs. real. The public vs. private dialectical tension was not as pronounced as the other tensions for siblings in this study.

The finding that the sibling relationship is influenced by particular dialectical tensions during emerging adulthood is important for several reasons. First, at the onset of this project, there were no known studies exploring the dialectical tensions communicated between siblings (Fowler, 2009). As such, the results of this study are likely the first of their kind and contribute new knowledge to our understanding of both sibling communication and relational dialectics theory. Thus, while this study does not aim to make generalizations, it points to a new and possibly fruitful area of exploration for family communication scholars.

The results for RQ1 also provide evidence of how siblings manage and make meaning of their relationship during emerging adulthood. As discussed by Baxter (2011), relational dialectics theory posits that relationships are constructed and defined in the communication between relational partners. From this view, we cannot know or understand a relationship until relational partners communicate it into being. This study allowed siblings to give voice to their experiences and make meaning of their relationship. Thus, the dialectical tensions expressed between siblings demonstrate how they communicatively construct their relationship in light of their experiences during emerging adulthood. In particular, the manifestation of certain dialectical tensions, such as connectedness vs. separateness, illustrate Bevan
et al.’s (2006) claim that uncertainty may play an important role in the sibling relationship during early adulthood.

The second research question asked, "Which are the most common dialectical tensions communicated between siblings during emerging adulthood?" The most commonly expressed dialectical tension by siblings in this study was connectedness vs. separateness, followed by openness vs. protection and ideal vs. real. As highlighted in Chapter 4, connectedness vs. separateness was a root tension for siblings in this study that seemed to influence the other dialectical tensions they experienced. In other words, the tensions associated with openness vs. protection, ideal vs. real, and novelty vs. predictability all seemed to be related to the struggle between maintaining a connection and being apart. Many siblings in this study expressed openness and predictability as signs of connectedness. On the other hand, siblings seemed to associate protection and novelty with separateness. As such, connectedness vs. separateness was the most pronounced and most common dialectical tension for siblings in this study.

The prevalence of the connectedness vs. separateness dialectical contradiction speaks clearly to the changes that siblings experience in their relationship during emerging adulthood. As the literature has shown, siblings typically engage in daily interactions in the home during childhood and adolescence (Cicirelli, 1995). However, it becomes more difficult for siblings to stay in contact once they move out of the family household and become immersed in their own lives (Myers & Knox, 1998; Mikkelson, 2006). Also during emerging adulthood, individuals are likely to experiment with work, love, and new relationships and
focus on establishing their independence (Arnett, 2000). This suggests that issues of separateness become prominent for siblings at this time, compared to the frequent contact and closeness that they experienced during childhood and adolescence. Thus, it is not surprising that tensions associated with being together vs. being apart were the most prevalent for siblings in this study.

The third research question asked, “How does sex influence which dialectical tensions are communicated between siblings during emerging adulthood?” Based on previous research that suggests that women often take on the responsibility of keeping family members in contact (Hagestad, 1986), it was proposed that female siblings might place greater emphasis on closeness and connection than male siblings. However, there were no prominent sex differences in terms of which dialectical tensions were commonly expressed by siblings in this study. Including both males and females, the majority of the participants in this study (83.3%) reported that it was “very important” for them to stay in contact with their sibling. In their survey and interview responses, both sexes also seemed to equally emphasize the importance of maintaining a connection with their brother or sister despite no longer living together.

The results for RQ3 suggest that, regardless of sex, the sibling relationship is an important and influential bond for most people. As discussed earlier, there is evidence that siblings greatly influence one another’s development during childhood (Sanders, 2004). Furthermore, siblings typically share a common history with similar personal, social, and cultural experiences (Goetting, 1986). Due to these common experiences and the longevity of the sibling bond, Bank and Kahn
(1997) assert that siblings are often reminders of how we have aged and how we have developed into the person we have become. As such, sibling relationships are often described as more influential, meaningful, and emotionally close than other interpersonal relationships (Lee at al., 1990). For these reasons, it is likely that the sibling relationship is a special and influential bond for both males and females. To that end, it is not necessarily surprising that both sexes in this study expressed that they value their sibling relationship and strive to maintain a connection with their brother or sister despite being apart.

Although there were no pronounced sex differences regarding which dialectical tensions were expressed by siblings overall, the results for RQ5 indicated that females seem to use Facebook more frequently than males to stay in touch with their sibling. Furthermore, females were more likely than males to use Facebook to communicate affection for their brother or sister. Therefore, substantial sex differences only emerged when the siblings’ use of Facebook was examined in the fifth research question. These sex differences and their implications will be discussed when RQ5 is addressed later in this study.

The fourth research question asked, “What management patterns are used by siblings during emerging adulthood to manage the dialectical tensions in their sibling relationship, and what are the implications?” Siblings in this study expressed distinct strategies for negotiating the dialectical tensions they experienced in their relationship. To manage the contradiction between connectedness and separateness, most siblings indicated that they used the neutralization management pattern. In other words, siblings attempted to minimize the force of the
separateness they experienced in their relationship and find a balance between being together and being apart. As Sabourin (2003) notes, relational partners using the neutralization management pattern accept the simultaneous nature of the dialectical poles, but strive to reach a middle ground between the two forces. Likewise, many siblings in this study indicated that technology served as a means of balancing the tension between connectedness and separateness in their relationship. They expressed that they were able to focus on their independent goals while simultaneously keeping in touch with their sibling through texting, Facebook, Skype, and other forms of technology. This finding has important implications in terms of how siblings manage their relationship during emerging adulthood. Although siblings face significant changes in their relationship during emerging adulthood, their use of new technology to stay in touch may help them minimize the change and uncertainty they experience.

In terms of the openness vs. protection dialectical tension, siblings in this study seemed to favor the separation management strategy. Thus, they recognized their concurrent needs for both openness and protection, but attempted to separate the poles based on the topic. This illustrated their desire to connect and share with their brother or sister but also maintain a sense of secrecy about certain issues in their life. As discussed by Cicirelli and Nussbaum (1989), siblings often create intimate patterns of communication as they reflect on common family experiences together during childhood. Likewise, many siblings emphasized that they could confide in their brother or sister, suggesting that their shared histories and similar experiences fostered a sense of closeness and trust in their relationship. However,
at the same time, a number of siblings indicated that they attempted to remain protective in their disclosures about their romantic relationships. This suggests that, as individuals engage in activities and relationships during emerging adulthood that are not in common with their sibling's experiences, they might not feel as comfortable confiding in their him or her.

To manage the tension between novelty and predictability, siblings in this study seemed to use the selection management pattern. As discussed earlier, relational partners using the selection strategy deny that both dialectical poles require attention (Sabourin, 2003). In this case, siblings seemed to emphasize stability and deny the presence of novelty and change in their relationship with their brother or sister. They expressed the predictability of their relationship by highlighting the connection, closeness, and openness they experienced with their brother or sister. On the other hand, they disregarded novelty by denying the ways that moving apart had changed their sibling relationship.

These findings suggest that emerging adulthood might be a time when novelty is avoided in the sibling relationship. As already mentioned, siblings experience various changes in their lives and their relationship during emerging adulthood. Specifically, siblings may experience uncertainty in their relationship as they leave home and interact with one another less (Bevan et al., 2006). Therefore, they might focus on the predictability in their relationship to help them manage their uncertainty. It is possible that siblings in this study generally did not express issues of novelty because it would increase their uncertainty about their sibling relationship. As follows, siblings during emerging adulthood may use the selection
strategy to stress the predictability of their relationship and deny the presence of novelty.

There may be other reasons why siblings in this study attempted to deny novelty and change in their relationship. First, there may be less of a need for novelty in the sibling relationship than in romantic relationships. In romantic relationships, predictability can cause boredom and possibly lead to dissolution. However, because the sibling relationship is involuntary, there is little to no threat of dissolution. Thus, siblings may not desire or rely on excitement and change to “keep the relationship alive” the way romantic partners do.

Second, it may be possible that predictability is valued more in sibling relationships than in other relationships. As noted earlier, several people in this study stated that they rely on their sibling and know that they will always there for one another. This suggests that family members are often a source of comfort and support for one another. For example, a female sibling stated, “When all is said and done, your siblings will always be there for you.” She asserts that siblings will always be there, which implies that the sibling relationship is perhaps more reliable and more enduring than other relationships. Accordingly, as previously mentioned, sibling relationships are typically the longest-lasting relationships that people have in their lives (Cicirelli, 1995). Thus, siblings may desire predictability in their relationships for comfort and security reasons.

Finally, it is possible that siblings in this study do experience the dialectical tension of novelty vs. predictability in their sibling relationship but were not encouraged to discuss it in their responses. Different phrasing of the survey
questions, or different questions altogether, may have evoked responses about this
tension. Thus, the survey questions used in this study may not have effectively
elicted responses about the issues of novelty and predictability in the sibling
relationship.

To negotiate the tensions associated with the ideal vs. real contradiction,
siblings’ responses in this study reflected characteristics of the reformulation
management pattern. Relational partners using this strategy do not view the
dialectical poles as competing against one another, but attempt to reframe them so
that they are perceived as a unified whole (Sabourin, 2003). Thus, siblings in this
study attempted to express their relationship with their brother or sister as the
ideal sibling relationship. In this sense, the reality of their experiences and what
they perceived as ideal were one and the same.

This finding suggests that how siblings make meaning of their relationship is
influenced by the cultural expectations of the sibling relationship. As mentioned
several times in this study, sibling relationships are generally expected to be more
influential, meaningful, and emotionally close than other interpersonal relationships
(Lee et al., 1990). However, there is evidence that siblings continue to experience
conflict (Bank & Kahn, 1997) and rivalry (Ross & Milgram, 1982) during adulthood.
Likewise, many siblings in this study indicated that they often fought with their
brother or sister, and some reported that they did not communicate with their
sibling regularly. This suggests that their sibling experiences conflicted with the
cultural expectations that siblings should be emotionally close and share a
meaningful bond. As such, many siblings in this study attempted to illustrate how
the reality of their communication and experiences with their brother or sister reflected the ideal sibling relationship.

Overall, the results for RQ4 are important because they demonstrate the effort that siblings put into managing their relationship and maintaining a connection during emerging adulthood. Most siblings in this study seemed to emphasize the connection, openness, and predictability they experienced in their sibling relationship. They also attempted to convey their relationship with their brother or sister as an ideal bond. This is provides further evidence that siblings during emerging adulthood seem to value their sibling relationship and desire a connection with their brother or sister. However, the management patterns reviewed above are not permanent solutions to the contradictions they experience in their sibling relationship. As already noted, dialectical tensions are ongoing and are never completely resolved (Sabourin, 2003). With this in mind, family communication scholars should continue to explore how siblings negotiate the dialectical tensions in their relationship during emerging adulthood to determine which management strategies are the most effective or useful.

Finally, the fifth research question asked, "What role does Facebook play in the manifestation and management of dialectical tensions in the sibling relationship during emerging adulthood?" Overall, siblings in this study indicated that Facebook allowed them to remain connected with their brother or sister while being apart. In other words, the social network site allowed them to manage the tension between connectedness and separateness in their relationship. Thus, given that it becomes more difficult for siblings to stay in contact with one another during adulthood
(Myers & Knox, 1998), many siblings in this study seemed to rely on technology to maintain a connection.

The ease and convenience of using technology to stay in touch has important implications for siblings during emerging adulthood. For instance, siblings may desire more independence from their brother or sister, but technology keeps them close and connected. On the other hand, siblings’ reliance on technology to stay in touch may reduce the quality of their connection. Due to the constant and interactive communication afforded by Facebook, texting, and Skype, siblings may not feel compelled to arrange regular visits. As many siblings in this study reported, they enjoyed using Facebook because it allowed them to stay in touch with their brother or sister without engaging in an immediate interaction with him or her. This supports the previous finding that some people use social network sites because they like being able to see what people are up to without having to ask them or engage in a conversation (Urista et al., 2009). These findings suggest that Facebook and other social network sites may change the way relational partners experience closeness. Thus, additional research is needed to investigate the influence that new technology and mediated communication has on sibling relationships (as well as other interpersonal relationships).

As noted earlier, there were sex differences regarding how males and females in this study used Facebook to communicate with their sibling. Compared to males, females wrote on their sibling’s Facebook wall more frequently, which demonstrates their desire to maintain a connection while being apart. Females often wrote on their sibling's wall to communicate affection or arrange a time to
connect with their sibling on the phone or Facebook chat. This provides further evidence for the argument that women serve as the family “kin-keepers” by maintaining and facilitating communication between family members (Hagestad, 1986). It also provides support for the finding that female siblings use more relational maintenance behaviors than male siblings (Myers et al., 2001). However, it is possible that males simply do not use Facebook as often as females, and maintain a connection with their sibling more through other methods of communication. Of the three brother-brother pairs who granted permission for their wall-to-wall postings to be analyzed, one pair had not exchanged any wall posts within the past year. Another male-male sibling pair had only exchanged one message each, and the other brother-brother dyad had only written on one another’s Facebook walls a handful of times. This is significantly less than the frequent exchange of messages between most sister-sister dyads (as well as some of the brother-sister dyads). Therefore, future research should continue to explore the differences between how males and females use technology to communicate with their sibling during emerging adulthood.

It is also important to note that both males and females in this study communicated a desire for closeness, but expressed this desire differently. As discussed earlier, the results for RQ5 provide support for the gendered closeness perspective (Floyd, 1996), which proposes that women experience closeness through shared dialogue and men express closeness through shared activities. Likewise, many females in this study communicated with their brother or sister on Facebook to arrange a time to talk, while males seemed to mostly use Facebook to
plan a time to hang out with their sibling. This suggests that both males and females may use Facebook to maintain a connection and closeness with their sibling, but do so in different ways.

The findings for RQ5 also contribute to previous research that has examined sex differences and technology use. Brunner and Bennet (1997) described these differences as the “masculine” and “feminine” attitudes toward technology. They found that females typically view technology as a social tool that allows them to express themselves and converse with others. On the other hand, males were more likely to view technology as a one-way communication tool that is used for gaining information. Likewise, Bond (2009) found that females engage in more frequent and more in-depth self-disclosures than males on their social network profiles. Moreover, females were more likely than males to post images and information on their profiles that was related to their friends and family. Similarly, females in this study seemed to use Facebook more than males to maintain a connection with their brother or sister. In comparison, males in this study were less likely to use Facebook to communicate with their sibling, and were less likely to report feeling closer to their sibling because of the social network site. This suggests that females may be more likely than males to use social network sites to facilitate and maintain their interpersonal relationships.

Taken together, the findings for the five research questions reinforce the significance of the sibling bond. Although most siblings lived in separate residences, all of the siblings in this study indicated that they felt “close” (33.3%) or “very close” (66.7%) to their sibling. Along these lines, the majority of siblings communicated a
desire to maintain a connection and a sense of openness with their brother or sister despite living apart. While it was proposed that siblings would express a tension between connectedness vs. separateness, the extent to which they valued relational closeness was quite notable. Given that individuals during emerging adulthood are experimenting with new relationships, striving to establish independence, and generally focusing on their own endeavors, it was expected that the sibling relationship might not be as important or influential for some people. However, despite the life changes that emerging adulthood brings, almost all of the siblings in this study emphasized that it was important to stay in contact with their brother or sister and maintain a close bond.

Limitations

There are a few limitations of this study worth noting. First, the online survey may not have been the most effective instrument to yield the best possible results. As an online survey, participants had the opportunity to complete the questions at their own convenience and as quickly and concisely as they would like. Therefore, there was little motivation for siblings to provide thoughtful and detailed responses to the survey questions. Many participants answered the questions in short sentences that gave little to no insight into their sibling experiences. On the other hand, the elaboration participants offered in person suggests that more interviews would have enhanced the results and made up for the lack of depth in the survey responses. However, due to time limitations and recruitment difficulties, only four follow-up interviews were conducted.
Along these lines, the survey questions may not have encouraged siblings to discuss the desired issues. As noted in earlier, it is possible that siblings were not asked questions that evoked responses about the novelty vs. predictability dialectical tension in their relationship. For example, a survey question asked, “Do you have any traditions, routines, or patterns that play a role in your relationship with your sibling?” The majority of siblings answered “No,” and moved to the next question. Rephrasing the question to say, “What traditions, routines, or patterns play a role in your relationship with your sibling?” may have encouraged siblings to reflect more on the predictability of their relationship. Furthermore, a different question altogether might have inspired more in-depth responses about the contradiction between novelty and predictability. Siblings were also not inspired to describe tensions associated with the public vs. private dialectic in their relationship. Given that the only the wall-to-wall postings of siblings were analyzed, this study did not address how often and for what reasons siblings communicate with one another privately (i.e., via private inbox or Facebook chat) on Facebook. A question like, “When do you choose to communicate with you sibling via private methods of communication over the public wall postings?” might have led siblings to discuss their experiences with the public vs. private dialectical tension.

Another limitation of this study is the lack of male participants, specifically male-male sibling pairs. The difficulty of recruiting sibling pairs overall, coupled with fact that there are more females than males on Facebook, created a barrier to recruiting a balanced sample of male-male, male-female, and female-female sibling pairs. Given the underrepresentation of males in this study, the results provide us
with limited information about the communication between brother-brother dyads during emerging adulthood. However, despite the few number of male participants, the results still suggest that female siblings are more likely than male siblings to use Facebook to communicate.

A final limitation is that this study may not have completely captured the siblings’ experiences on Facebook. For one, Facebook allows its users to delete wall posts that either they have written on a friend’s wall or a friend has written on their own wall. Thus, it is possible that participants deleted messages that they originally posted on their sibling’s wall. Reasons for deleting a message are obviously unique to the individual, but could be out of embarrassment, to attempt to take a comment back or do damage control, or to manage one’s image on Facebook. Thus, if siblings deleted any messages in the past year for any of these or other reasons, their wall-to-wall postings would not provide a complete picture of their Facebook interactions. In addition, it is possible that some siblings communicate more through the private methods on Facebook, such as by sending private inbox messages or using Facebook chat. By analyzing only wall-to-wall postings, this study did not take into account all the ways siblings can interact and communicate with one another on Facebook. As such, the findings are limited in their ability to describe the role that Facebook plays in the communication and management of dialectical tensions between siblings.

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, researchers have not previously explored the role that dialectical tensions play in the sibling relationship. While this study found that
siblings do experience dialectical tensions in their relationship during emerging adulthood, there is much more to be discovered about this area of study. For example, how does age influence the dialectical tensions experienced by siblings? Emerging adulthood spans over several years and the dialectical tensions commonly experienced by siblings who are closer in age may be different than those commonly experienced by siblings who are farther apart in age. Future studies should also explore the dialectical tensions communicated between siblings during middle age and beyond as their lives continue to change and staying in contact becomes more difficult. Furthermore, researchers should strive to obtain a balanced sample of males and females to more accurately investigate whether sex influences which dialectical tensions are communicated between siblings.

Future research is also needed to further examine how siblings use Facebook and new technology to communicate and manage their relationship during emerging adulthood. As discussed earlier, only 5 participants in this study (10.4%) checked “visits/face-to-face communication” as the method of communication they used most frequently with their sibling. This suggests that siblings are relying extensively on technology to stay in contact with one another during emerging adulthood. Texting, Facebook, and Skype are among the newest methods of communication that siblings in this study reported using to communicate with one another. However, at this point, research on siblings’ use of Facebook and other new technology is relatively nonexistent. As such, there is very little known about the influence that new technology has on sibling communication.
As a whole, the results of this study provide insight into how siblings communicate and make meaning of their relationship during emerging adulthood. In particular, this study supports the finding that siblings experience relational and partner uncertainty during their late teens and early twenties (Bevan et al., 2006). Although most siblings in this study emphasized connectedness, openness, and stability in their relationship, they reported conflicting experiences separateness, protection, and change. Thus, the presence of these particular dialectical patterns in the communication between siblings in this study may highlight the uncertainty that permeates their relationship during emerging adulthood. This study also adds to our understanding of the sibling relationship by exploring the perspectives of both siblings in a dyad, an approach that is fairly absent in current sibling communication research (Mikkelson, 2006). Furthermore, these results provide support for the case of emerging adulthood, suggesting that it is indeed a distinct life stage with unique struggles and experiences.

Finally, the results of this study contribute to the relatively limited research on adult sibling communication. As previously discussed, there is plenty that is unknown about the communication patterns and relational experiences between adult siblings (Mikkelson, 2006). Scholars have attributed this lack of research to the assumption that siblings communicate infrequently and have little influence upon one another in adulthood (Cicirelli, 1995). This present study challenges this assumption, and suggests that siblings continue to value one another and their relationship as they age. As follows, this study serves as a springboard for future
research and enriches our understanding of the unique and understudied sibling relationship.
Appendix A
Online Survey

Part I. Please indicate your response accordingly.

1. Your Sex:
   ____ Male  ____ Female

2. Your Age:
   ____

Part II. Please base your responses below on the sibling who is also participating in this study.

1. Your sibling’s sex:
   ____ Male  ____ Female

2. Your sibling’s age:
   ____

3. How often do you communicate with your sibling?
   ____ Never
   ____ Once every 6 months
   ____ Once a month
   ____ Twice a month
   ____ Once a week
   ____ Several times a week
   ____ Daily
   ____ Several times a day

4. Which methods do you and your sibling use to communicate? Please check all that apply.
   ____ Phone conversations
   ____ Texting
   ____ E-mail
   ____ Facebook
   ____ Other social networking sites
   ____ Visits/ Face-to-face communication
   ____ Other: _____________________
5. Which method of communication do you and your sibling use most frequently?

- Phone conversations
- Texting
- E-mail
- Facebook
- Other social networking sites
- Visits/ Face-to-face communication
- Other: _______________________

Part III. Please answer the following questions regarding your Facebook use with your sibling. For the open-ended questions, please be as specific and provide as much detail as you can.

1. How often do you and your sibling communicate using Facebook?

- Never
- Once every 6 months or more
- Once a month
- Twice a month
- Once a week
- Several times a week
- Daily
- Several times a day

2. For what purposes do you use Facebook to communicate with your sibling (using wall posts and/or private inbox messages)? Check all that apply.

- To communicate what is going on in your life and find out what is going on in your sibling’s life
- To make plans
- To discuss family issues
- To joke around with or tease your sibling
- To stay in contact
- To communicate affection
- To give your sibling advice or tell him/her what to do
- Other__________________________

3. For what purposes do you feel your sibling uses Facebook to communicate with you (using wall posts and/or private inbox messages)? Check all that apply.
To communicate what is going on in his/her life and find out what is going on in your life
To make plans
To discuss family issues
To joke around with or tease you
To stay in contact
To communicate affection
To give you advice or tell you what to do
Other_____________________

4. Do you feel as if you are closer to your sibling than if you were not able to communicate with him/her through Facebook?

Yes, I feel closer to my sibling because of Facebook.
I feel somewhat closer to my sibling because of Facebook.
No, I do not feel closer to my sibling because of Facebook.

Please explain your answer.

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Part IV. Please answer the following questions about your relationship with your sibling. For the open-ended questions, be as specific and provide as much detail as you can.

1. Please describe your relationship with your sibling.

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

128
2. How important is it for you to stay in contact with your sibling?

   _____ Very Important
   _____ Important
   _____ Somewhat Important
   _____ Slightly Important
   _____ Not at all Important

Please explain your answer.

_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. Do you and your sibling confide in one another? Why or why not?

_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

129
4. Is there information about you and your life that you keep from your sibling? Why?

_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

5. How well do you feel you know your sibling at this stage in your lives?

_____ I know my sibling very well
_____ I know my sibling somewhat well
_____ I do not know my sibling well at all

6. Are there topics that you and your sibling disagree about, or you have had conflicts over?

_____ Yes    _____ No

If yes, can you describe a few?
7. How similar are you to your sibling in terms of your beliefs, attitudes, and values?

_____ Very similar  
_____ Somewhat similar  
_____ Not similar at all

8. Do you have any traditions, routines, or patterns that play a role in your relationship with your sibling?

_____ Yes   _____ No

7. If yes, what happens when you or your sibling break from routine or violate the expectations of the relationship?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

8. Do you and your sibling live in separate residences?

_____ Yes   _____ No

9. If yes, how has your relationship changed since you moved apart?

________________________________________________________________________
10. How close do you feel you and your sibling are at this stage in your lives?

_____ My sibling and I are very close
_____ My sibling and I are somewhat close
_____ My sibling and I are not close at all
Appendix B
Interview Protocol

1. What is your age?

2. What is your sibling's age?

Questions concerning overall relationship/communication with sibling

3. Do you live in separate residences?

4. If yes, how has your relationship changed since you moved apart?

5. Can you describe your relationship with your sibling during your childhood and adolescence?

6. Would you say that you and your sibling get along well?

7. What topics do you tend to argue about or have conflicts over?

8. Do you confide in your sibling? Why or why not?

9. How often do you communicate with your sibling?

10. How close do you feel to your sibling at this stage in your lives?

11. Do you wish you were closer to your sibling? Why or why not?

12. Is it important for you to stay in contact with your sibling? Why or why not?

13. Are there any traditions or expectations that play a role in your sibling relationship?

14. If so, what happens when you or your sibling violates expectations of the relationship?

15. How well do you feel you know your sibling at this stage in your lives?

Questions concerning Facebook communication with sibling

16. How often do you communicate with your sibling using Facebook?
17. For what purposes do you use Facebook to communicate with your sibling?

18. For what purposes do you feel your sibling uses Facebook to communicate with you?

19. Do you feel as if you are closer to your sibling than if you were not able to communicate with him/her using Facebook? Why or why not?

20. Has there ever been anything on your sibling’s Facebook page that has surprised you? If so, what was it?

21. Do you confide in your sibling using Facebook? Why or why not?

22. What do you like most about using Facebook to communicate with your sibling? Please explain your answer.

23. Do you communicate with your sibling more through wall posts or more through private inbox messages?

24. When do you prefer to use private inbox messages over wall posts?
References


Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, New Orleans, LA.


In K. Floyd & M. T. Morman (Eds.), *Widening the family circle: New research on family communication* (pp. 21-56). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.


Available from the GSS 1998 Codebook Website,


