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A case study on sibling rivalry and the use of a social skills training model

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A CASE STUDY ON SIBLING RIVALRY AND THE USE OF A SOCIAL SKILLS
TRAINING MODEL

by
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A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

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A CASE STUDY ON SIBLING RIVARLY AND THE USE OF SOCIAL SKILLS
TRAINING MODEL
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The purpose of this study was to use social skills training on an individual child to enhance the relationship with her siblings. The social skills sessions focused on factors such warmth, rivalry, conflict and status/power between the two siblings. These were measured by the Sibling Rivalry Questionnaire which the mother filled out before the sessions began and after they were completed. The results did not find a major difference between the pre and post tests. Warmth increased slightly, rivalry decreased slightly, there was no difference in the amount of conflict, and there was a slight decrease in relative status/power from pre to post test. These factors did not seem to be affected by the social skills sessions and therefore did not improve the sibling relationship.

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Need

Family relationships may be one of the most important factors to focus on because people are surrounded by members of their family from the day they are born and many years following their birth. The dynamics of a family are difficult to understand because every family is different in how they relate to one another. Also, family relations have an influence of later ones in life and one of the most crucial relationships to look at are the ones between siblings. A sibling relationship can ultimately benefit or destroy the family as a whole so it is crucial find ways to facilitate the relationship between siblings.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to use social skills training on an individual child to enhance the relationship with her siblings. Past research on aiding the sibling relationship has mainly focused on the child rearing practices of the parent, but less research has looked upon teaching the child new social skills. By increasing the positive interactions between siblings, it could ultimately benefit children's relationships in the future and create a healthier family life.

Hypotheses

The child who completes the social skills training will have increased warmth, decreased sibling rivalry, less sibling conflict, and reduced status/power differential between siblings.

History

The foundation of this paper was based upon past research that used social skills training as a technique to improve sibling relationships. This study replicated a previous experimental study by Kramer and Radey entitled 'Improving Sibling Relationships Among Young Children: A Social Skills Training Model.' This study looked at new approach to improving sibling relationships by using social skills training model. The researchers hypothesized that children who received social skills training would have more positive interactions with their siblings in comparison to children in the control group. Twenty-one families were randomly assigned to the experimental group and twenty-one were assigned to the control group. A videotape was used to record the interactions of the sibling before experiment took place. During four sessions the experimental group was taught 6 social skills: how to initiate play appropriately, how to accept play, how to refuse play, perspective taking, how to deal with angry feelings, and how to manage conflict. A model by McGinnis and Goldstein (1990) was use to teach these skills. Post measure tests were used after the treatment, such as videotaping the sibling behavior and questionnaires distributed to parents which assessed the sibling relationship. The Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (Furman and Buhrmester, 1985) was administered to fathers and mothers one week before and after the training sessions. The results indicated suggested that the social skills training may be associated with the parents' reports of increased warmth, decreased sibling rivalry, stable levels of competitive and agonistic behavior, lower levels of problematic behaviors and lower status/power differential. This research laid the framework for the present study except

that this study will use the social skill training for an intervention on one child rather than a group.

Definitions

Sibling rivalry- competition, animosity, and negative behavior among brothers and sisters.

Assumptions

It was assumed in the present study that the parents were honest in their assessments of the child's behavior so that the training could be accurately tested. Also it was assumed that the parents were not biased toward any individual sibling.

Limitations:

There are several limitations to this study. One limitation is that since this is a case study, it lacked external validity and therefore was difficult to generalize through the population. Also, the social skills program only consisted of 40 minute long sessions one a week, and it may be more beneficial to include more training sessions. Another limitation was that there were a limited amount of social skills evaluated.

Summary

The need for the present study is to build a more positive relationship between siblings at a young age in order to foster healthy relationships in the future. Past research has focused very much on what parents can do to reduce the conflict between siblings but not many studies have looked at the use of social skills. The foundation of this study was based upon an experimental study by Kramer and Radey (1997) entitled "Improving Sibling Relationships Among Young Children: A Social Skills Training Mode." The affect of the social skills was rated using the Sibling Rivalry Questionnaire which the

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mother filled out. It was assumed for this study that the mother was honest in her assessment of the child's behavior. Some limitations of the study included lack of external validity, limited amount of social skills evaluated, and lack of time when teaching the social skills.

Chapter II

Family dynamics has been studied for years because of the importance it has over the individual. One of the most influential relationships for a person is the one with his or her sibling. The sibling relationship is one of the longest lasting relationships in most people's lives. In childhood, siblings often spend more time together than they do with their parents (Crouter, McHale 1989). This may be the reason for why arguments between siblings were the most common type of conflict found in families (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Research consists of many possible factors that contribute to sibling rivalry as well as the effects later on in life. Resolving sibling conflict have been designed primarily around teaching parents the skills to intervene but little research has focused on teaching children the skills to form a more healthy relationship. Therefore, this section is separated into 5 main topics; the causes of sibling rivalry the effects of sibling rivalry, parental responses, social skills training in general, and social skills training in sibling relationships.

Causes of Sibling Conflict

Research on sibling rivalry is quite diverse. For example Moser, Jones, Zaorski, and Mirsalimi (2005) studied jealousy, envy, guilt, and resentment between siblings and found that rivalry stems chiefly from competition over attention from the caretaker. Once there was another child added to a family, the mother's love had to be shared between multiple offspring which caused conflict. The only child becomes the older child and

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moves from the central position of interest to one which requires sharing (Neubauer, 1983). Some view the competitive nature of siblings to be a negative outcome of sibling rivalry. However, sibling rivalry could have positive consequences because children often learn skills from siblings such as sharing and compromising.

Parental attention and affection was not the only reason for sibling conflict. The most common issue for sibling was sharing personal possessions for both older and younger siblings (McGuire, Manke, Eftekhari, & Dunn, 2000). Parent behaviors were rarely cited as sources of conflict. This could suggest that sibling rivalry is not primarily influenced by parental love but that siblings have their own issues that are separate from those involving their parents.

Some other factors that might be expected to affect sibling conflict are age, gender, and biological kinship. For example, Erel, Margolin, and John (1998) studied 73 pairs of siblings between 3 and 6 years of age to assess the importance of age differences in sibling conflict. The siblings were videotaped in a laboratory setting while the mother filled out questionnaires concerning her marital relationship and their relationship with her children. The results indicated that there was more negative behavior from older siblings directed at younger siblings than reverse and negative sibling interactions were linked with negative family interactions. Despite the relatively small age range, the greater the space between siblings, the greater the warmth the young sibling gave to the older siblings.

Sex differences also play an important role in sibling relations. Martin and Ross (2005) hypothesized that male siblings would engage in more physical aggression than

female siblings. The results found that brothers engaged in more physical and verbal aggression than girls but the most severe forms of aggression were only found when the children were 2 ½ years of age. However, some forms of physical and verbal aggression continued to be used by boys as they got older. It was also reported that older siblings, regardless of gender, engaged in less intense physical aggression directed at a sister, while younger siblings aggressed more often when conflict was with older brothers.

One might infer that kinship should play a role in the relationships between siblings. Jankowiak and Diderich (2000) tested the hypothesis that there would be a closer bond between biological siblings than half siblings. They examined factors such as family cohesion, solidarity, and sibling rivalry. They hypothesized that sibling closeness would vary by gender, age and personality but not genetic relatedness. The participants consisted of 32 polygamous families where biological and non-biological siblings were numerous and the data was collected over seven years. The results revealed a difference in emotional attachment and affection between full and half siblings. There was greater solidarity among full siblings than half siblings.

Sibling conflict is also related to family functioning and well being in general. Stewart (1990) focused on how the family system can affect individuals in the family and also the family subsystems, such as the sibling relationship. All families who welcome a new child face stressors that change the organization of the family in order to accommodate the new relationship. Even the mere presence of a parent in the room can have an effect on sibling conflict. Corter, Abramovitch, and Pepler (1983) found that conflict was higher when the mother was present than when children were alone. Children also interacted less when their parents were in the room yet had higher rates of

conflict. Brody, Stoneman, McCoy, and Forehand (1992) focused on the effects of family functioning and hypothesized that sibling conflict would be associated with specific parenting styles, the unequal treatment of siblings and the amount of conflict within the family. Researchers interviewed 152 children and their parents about the problems they encountered in the family, how problems were typically resolved and sibling interactions. The results indicated that when siblings were treated equally during family discussions about problems, generally there was less sibling conflict.

Pike, Coldwell, and Dunn (2005) also examined how the parents' relationship with their children affected the siblings' relationship. It was hypothesized that if parent-child relationships were positive, then sibling relationships would be warmer with less conflict. Also, it was predicted that positive sibling relationships would result in higher levels of prosocial behavior. The results found showed that the quality of the sibling relationship was linked to the older child's family adjustment but not the younger siblings' adjustment.

The relationship between parents and siblings was also studied by Feinberg, McHale, Crouter and Cumsille (2003). They predicted that if siblings were treated differently by their parents than it would result in more positivity in the sibling relationship over time. The theory behind this prediction was that individual differentiation between siblings results in less competition and therefore less rivalry. Participants were families studied over a two year period. The siblings were first and second born adolescents. The parents and the siblings were interviewed at separate times and conflict with parents was measured as well as parents' warmth, conflict in the sibling relationship, and warmth in the sibling relationship. Siblings who had discrete,

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individualistic and different relationships with their parents had less sibling rivalry and more sibling warmth. Siblings with little or no difference in their relationships with their parents showed lower levels of warmth and higher levels of conflict with one another.

But evidence has also supported the opposite between differentiation and conflict. Stocker, Dunn and Plomin (1989) found that maternal differential behavior was associated with more conflict between siblings. There tended to be more competition and less friendliness among the siblings when the mother's control, affection, attention and responsiveness were different for each child.

The affect of families does not only have an impact on the individual but plays a role in different elements across the family relationships. Maternal negativity was found to be a factor that predicted sibling conflict (Jenkins, O'Connor, Dunn, Rasbash, & Behnke 2005). A mother's negative emotions towards a child did not influence that particular relationship, but caused that child to have a negative relationship with their siblings.

The association between parent-child relationships and sibling relationships has a number of theories surrounding it. Modeling and social learning theory suggest that children model the behavior with their siblings that they have learned in their relationships with their parents. Also, the attachment theory suggests that children form schemas based on their relationships with their parents that they later on shape the relationships that develop with their siblings (Stocker 2000).

In addition to parent-child relationships having an influence on sibling relationships, martial relations between the parents can also cause sibling conflict.

Stocker and Youngblade (1999) focused on the relationship between marital conflict and children's conflict with one another. It was found that marital conflict resulted in less warmth towards the children and more sibling rivalry. Martial conflict also resulted in greater hostility by the children towards both parents. This could be because children model the behavior that they observed between their parents or it could be that parents are so preoccupied with the conflict in their marriage that they are unavailable to manage their children's sibling relationships (Stocker 2000).

Effects of Sibling Conflict

In 1932 Piaget suggested that children's social and moral understanding was influenced by their interactions with other children. This theory has also been continued in research on sibling relationships. Past research found that preschoolers demonstrate sociocognitive abilities earlier through their relationships with siblings. They were capable of interpreting feelings and intentions of their younger siblings (Dunn, 1988). Another investigation found that children's affection and cooperation towards their siblings when they were three years of age predicted their ability to take the perspective of another seven months later (Dunn, Brown, Slomkowski, Tesla, & Youngblade, 1995). Futhermore, Teti, Bond, and Gibbs (1986) founds that preschool aged children with siblings more than three years younger than them were more likely to create intellectually and socially stimulating environments for their younger sibling and further their opportunities to develop language, reasoning, and problem solving techniques.

Research has also focused on the course of sibling rivalry over time. Stocker, Burwell, and Briggs (2002) looked at sibling conflict in middle childhood and its

relationship to psychological adjustment in early adolescence. The authors proposed that conflict between children at the age of 10 would lead to increased depression, anxiety, and bad behavior two years later. It was also expected that sibling conflict earlier in childhood would lead to hostility with the mother and adjustment problems later. The results supported the predictions, suggesting that sibling rivalry either resulted in poor family adjustment over time, or that anxious, depressed ten year olds were more likely to be in conflict with their siblings.

Sibling relationships do not end in childhood. They are a constant factor in the lives of adults as well. In early adulthood, it was found that sibling relationships have three different components; warmth, conflict and rivalry (Stocker, Lanthier, & Furman, 1997). Also, research found that young adults who rated their sibling relationships as close had higher scores on measures of emotions and cognitive empathy than those who had distant relationships with siblings (Shortt & Gottman, 1997). Siblings tend to drift apart during this time and communicate with each other through their parents until older adulthood where they renew their relationship and become closer once again (Cicirelli, 1980).

Research on sibling rivalry has also found a connection between sibling relationships and individual well-being. Children who had negative sibling relationships were found to have high levels of anxiety, depression, poor self-esteem and school adjustment (Dunn, Slomkowski, Beardsall, & Rende, 1994). Also conflict within the sibling relationship in early adulthood was associated with poor psychological adjustment, whereas supportive relationships were linked with decreased anxiety and greater maturity (Stocker, Lanthier, & Furman, 1997). So, forming a healthy positive

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sibling relationship early in childhood may help to form a beneficial relationship in later adulthood, even if there is a period of time with little interaction.

Parental Responses to Sibling Rivalry

From past research it is obvious that parents play an important role in the causes of sibling relationships. But parents' responses to sibling conflict can also be an influential predictor of future sibling behavior. When the time comes to resolve a sibling conflict, majority of previous research focused on parental interventions and strategies. Even before a second child is welcomed into the family, parents are given advice on how to prepare their firstborn for the arrival of new sibling. Preparation is for a new sibling was considered to be essential for enhancing the child's adjustment and to avoid negative reactions towards the sibling that include direct aggression toward the baby, attention seeking behavior, and regression (Legg, Sherick, & Wadland, 1974). Therefore authors have agreed that children should be told about the new siblings' arrival well before the due date because it was found that children responded more negatively when they were unaware of the new addition to the family. Previous investigations also suggest that parents can reduce feelings of resentment by reassuring the child that he or she is still holds a special role in the family, spending time alone with older child, deemphasizing the significance of the new baby, upholding children's individual rights, and pointing out similarities between the siblings (Kramer & Ramsburg, 2002). Early experiences with caring for the new sibling was suggested to give the older child the opportunity to become more aware of the needs and concerns of others and contribute to perspective taking abilities (Howe & Ross, 1990).

Parents are confronted with a dilemma when their children fight because they are unsure of whether and how to intervene. There has been some research that suggested parents should not interfere with their children's fights. It was found that children fight to gain parental attention and if they are left on their own they will settle their conflict equitably. Interference only worsens the conflict because the children achieve their aim of gaining attention from their parents and so the behavior continued. The parents' judgment also leaves one of the children feeling like the loser and so he seeks out revenge on the other sibling (Levi, Buskila, & Gerzi, 1977). Also, interference from parents prevented children from working out their own problems and prevented them from obtaining conflict resolution skills (Brody & Stoneman, 1987). A balance of power can form if the children are left to work through their own issues.

Other theories have supported the opposing view, which is that a parent can be a constructive role in their children's arguments. Ihinger (1975) found that when parents are consistent and logical in the way they enforce rules, the children's conflict will decrease. The children learn the family values about fairness and equality and therefore have disputes less often.

Parental responses to sibling conflict can also have an effect on sibling relationships. Kramer, Perozynski, and Chung (1999) used a microphone system in the homes of 88 intact families with two children to identify sibling conflict and parental management strategies. When parents did not intervene there was a higher occurrence of subsequent sibling conflict. Younger siblings reacted more strongly to this laissez- faire technique, whereas conflict among older siblings was greatest when their mothers intervened at any time.

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Ross, Filyer, Lollis, Perlman, and Martin (1994) focused on parents' interventions in conflicts with their two and four year olds. Their findings indicated that parents participated in many of the conflicts between their children. Parents intervened on children's disputes, addressed the children's issues, held position on these issues, and enforced certain rules. Overall, parents were unbiased in supporting either the younger or older children. When parents did not intervene, rules were often violated and older children tended to dominate younger siblings.

Brody, Stoneman, McCoy and Forehand (1992) also found that intervening can be beneficial to the children especially when discussions are open about the disputes and focus on problem solving strategies. When the children were in an atmosphere of where the children's views were considered equally and the parents used moderate levels of control, it was associated with less conflicted sibling relationships. But, in other research, it was found that parents beliefs on intervention strategies were not consistent with their behavior. Perozynski and Kramer (1999) found that parents believed the most effective way to intervene in their children's disputes was through child centered strategies, for example, working with the children to resolve the conflict. But they found that the strategy the parents used most often was passive nonintervention. This was the strategy they had thought to be least effective and had the least confidence in but yet they used it most often.

Research has proposed a few strategies for mothers to use to promote prosocial sibling interactions between preschool aged children and infant siblings (Kramer and Washo, 1990). The behaviors included high lighting the activities and abilities of one child to the other, encouraging the older child to help perform care giving tasks for the

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infant, including the children in activities together, praising positive interactions. It was found that by mothers using these behaviors there were higher levels of prosoical behavior but siblings were not able to sustain the positive interaction when the mothers were absent.

Social Skills Training

Although majority of past research on solutions to sibling conflict has concentrated on parental intervention, there is still not a clear answer as to whether or not a parent should interfere with their children's disputes. But previous studies have suggested that it is possible for children to solve their own disputes without the help of a parent. Ross, Ross, Stein and Trabasso (2006) asked 64 sibling dyads to reexamine an ongoing conflict and attempt to resolve it through discussion. It was found that almost two thirds of the dyads were able to resolve the conflict. This suggests that once children were given time to calm down after the initial argument and were given the chance to resolve the differences later, many did so. It appeared that older siblings took the lead in proposing, promoting and gaining agreement to their plans for resolving the conflict whereas the younger siblings' roles was to make suggestions or modifications to the plan. Howe and Ross (1990) also found that first borns' references to second-borns' about feelings and skills were positively linked with perspective taking and friendly sibling relations across all settings. So, it appears that children do have the capacity to solve their disputes without the help of a parent and the role of the eldest child is key in the problem solving process. Conflict resolution within the sibling relationship and its link to other relationships was examined and found that children's conflict with their friends at 6 years

of age was related to the conflict strategies of their siblings three years earlier (Dunn & Herrera, 1997).

If siblings are capable of solving their own problems, without the intervention of parents, then social skills training could play a very beneficial role in their relationship. The strategies they learn through the training could last for future disputes, whereas the intervention from a parent may only work when the parent is present. Some previous studies have looked at how relationships can benefit from the teaching social skills to better manage that conflict. Oden and Asher (1977) investigated whether social skills training would benefit children in friendships. Third and fourth grade children were coached in social skills and the results indicated that the coaching procedure was effective in children peer acceptance. These children had even greater inclusion by peers one year later. Mize and Ladd (1990) also focused on peer acceptance and social skills training. Children were taught 4 skills: leading peers, asking questions to peers, making comments to peers and supporting peers. The researchers found that increases in skills with peers correlated with improvements in children's knowledge friendly social strategies. The link between peer relations and sibling relations is apparent in other studies. Past research found that social cognitive skills were related to successful communication with both siblings and friends (Cutting & Dunn, 2006). Also, peer relationships were found to be significant predictors of the quality of children's interactions with younger siblings (Kramer & Gottman, 1992). Not only can social skills training have a positive influence on a sibling relationship but it could also help in future relationships with peers.

Social Skills Training and Sibling Relationships

The foundation of the present study was based upon past research that used social skills training as a technique to improve sibling relationships. This study replicated a previous experimental study by Kramer and Radey entitled 'Improving Sibling Relationships Among Young Children: A Social Skills Training Model.' This study looked at new approach to improving sibling relationships by using social skills training model. The researchers hypothesized that children who received social skills training would have more positive interactions with their siblings in comparison to children in the control group. A videotape was used to record the interactions of the sibling before experiment took place. During four sessions the experimental group was taught 6 social skills: how to initiate play appropriately, how to accept play, how to refuse play, perspective taking, how to deal with angry feelings, and how to manage conflict. A model by McGinnis and Goldstein (1990) was use to teach these skills. Post measure tests were used after the treatment, such as videotaping the sibling behavior and questionnaires distributed to parents which assessed the sibling relationship. The Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (Furman and Buhrmester, 1985) was administered to fathers and mothers one week before and after the training sessions. The results indicated suggested that the social skills training may be associated with the parents' reports of increased warmth, decreased sibling rivalry, stable levels of competitive and agonistic behavior, lower levels of problematic behaviors and lower status/power differential. This research laid the framework for the present study except that this study will use the social skill training for an intervention on one four year old child rather than a group.

Chapter III

Sibling rivalry and the use of social skills training was the topic of interest and not much past research has looked at the two together. The present study greatly replicates that by Kramer and Radey (1997) but differs in that this is a case study. Throughout chapter three the methodology of the current study will be discussed including the participants, design, procedures, and analysis.

Participants

The participant in this study was a four year old female child. She was from a white middle class family that consisted of a father, mother, two year old female sibling, and six month old female sibling.

Design

The independent variable in this study was the sibling relationship, which was measured using the Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (Furman and Buhrmester, 1985) and consisted of variables such as rivalry, affection, companionship, intimacy, competition and quarrelling. The dependent variable was the social skills training.

Procedure

The researcher met with the parent one week before the social skills training sessions began and administered the SRQ to the mother. The child was then visited in the

home for four weekly 40-minute sessions on social skills training. During these four sessions, 6 relevant social skills were taught. These consisted of (1) how to initiate play appropriately, (2) how to accept play, (3) how to refuse invitations to play, (4) perspective taking, (5) how to deal with angry feelings and (6) manage conflict. These skills were taught following the model by McGinnis and Goldstein (1990). For example, during the first session on initiating play the researcher explained how to appropriately start play and then used dolls to model the behavior. The child was then asked to use the dolls to model behavior. Different scenarios were used to demonstrate the skill and the instructor provided feedback for the child. Each of the follow sessions progressed in the same manner as this except teaching different skills. The mother was given a handout at the end of each session explaining the purpose of that session and specific suggestion for the mother to use on the child when performing that specific skill. At the end of the four weeks the researcher administered the SRQ to the mother to see if the child's progress in her interaction with her siblings.

Measures

The Sibling Rivalry Questionnaire (SRQ) from Furman and Buhrmester (1985) was administered to the mother one week before and one week after the training sessions. She rated her child's behavior on 48 items using a 5-point Likert scale that assessed the how typical each behavior is of her child's interactions with the siblings (1 = hardly at all, 5 = extremely much). The responses on the SRQ are separated into four categories; Warmth and Closeness, Rivalry, Conflict, and Relative Status/Power. Example items from these scales include: "How much do both____and this sibling do nice things for each other?" (Warmth and Closeness), 'Who usually gets better by mother, _____ or

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this sibling?' (Rivalry), "How much do_____and this sibling disagree and quarrel with each other?" (Conflict), and " How much does_____show this sibling how to do things he or she doesn't know how to do?" (Relative Status/Power).

Analysis

The hypotheses for this study were the child that completed the social skills training will have increased warmth, decreased sibling rivalry, stable levels of competition, few problematic sibling behaviors and reduced status/power between siblings. The researcher compared the results from the first SRQ to the last SRQ to see if there were any improvements by running a correlation analysis and graphing the results.

Summary

Chapter 3 consisted of the participants, design, procedure, measures, and analysis of this study. This is a case study of a four year old girl examining the use of social skills training on her sibling relationship. The social skills lessons lasted four weeks (40 minute sessions) and results were determined by the Sibling Relationship Questionnaire that was distributed to the mother before and after the sessions.
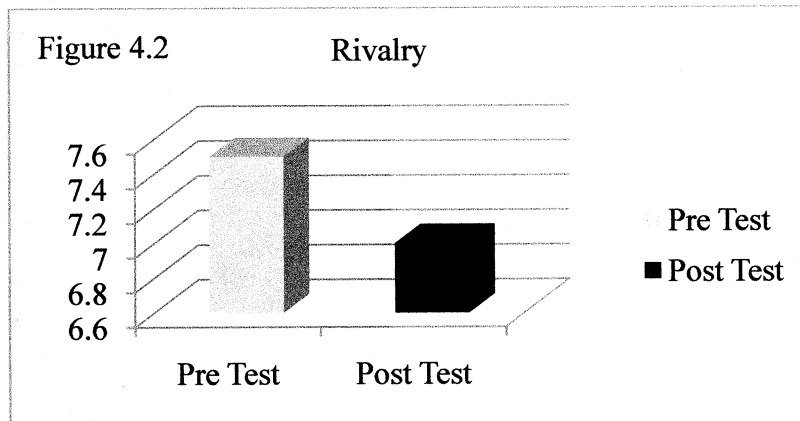
Chapter IV

Findings

The pre and post tests using the Sibling Rivalry Questionnaire were compared using a correlation analysis. The hypotheses for this study were the child that completed the social skills training will have increased warmth, decreased sibling rivalry, stable levels of conflict, and reduced status/power between siblings.

The mean score for warmth was measured by using the means from the scale scores of intimacy, prosocial behavior, companionship, similarity, admiration by sibling, admiration of sibling, and affection. The pre test mean was 8.6 and the post test mean was 10 (Figure 4.1). There was a slight increase in the amount of warmth after the social skills training.
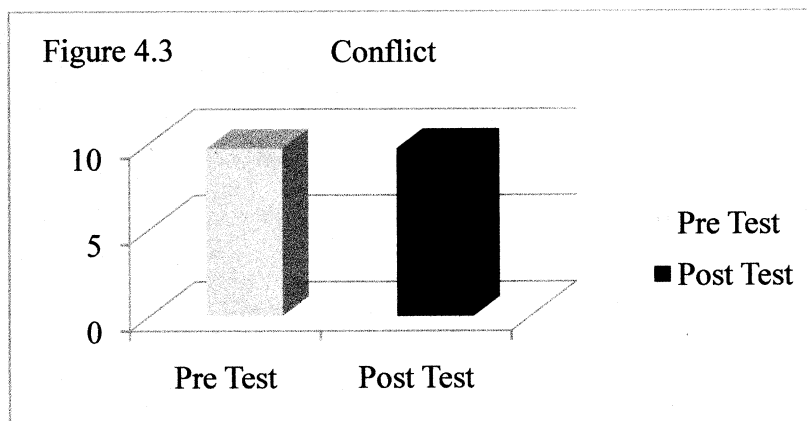

Figure 4.1   Warmth
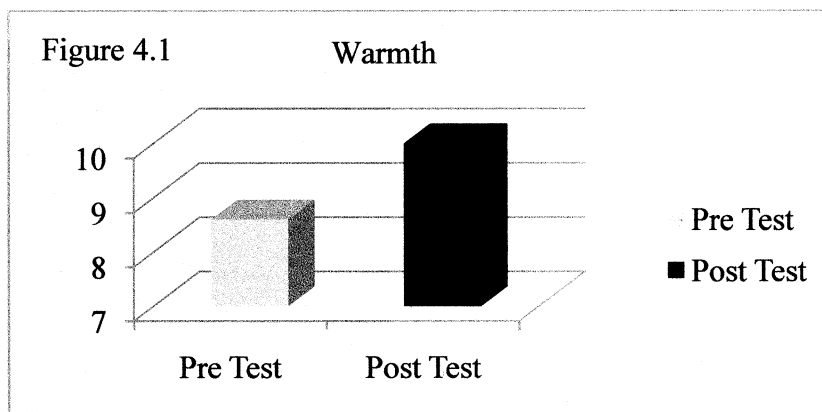
The rivalry score consisted of the average scale scores of maternal and paternal partiality. The pre test score was 7.5 and the post test score was 7 (Figure 4.2). There was

a minimal decrease in the amount of rivalry that existed between the siblings after the

social skills training.

Figure 4.2 — Rivalry

Chart showing Rivalry Pre Test and Post Test scores, y-axis from 6.6 to 7.6 (Pre Test, Post Test).

The conflict score consisted of the average of the quarrelling, antagonism and

competition. The pre test score was 9.7 and the post test score was 9.7 (Figure 4.3). There

was no difference in the amount of conflict before and after the social skills training.

Figure 4.3 — Conflict

Chart showing Conflict Pre Test and Post Test scores, y-axis from 0 to 10 (Pre Test, Post Test).

The relative/status power score consist of nurturance of sibling, dominance of

sibling, minus the scale scores of nurturance by sibling and dominance of sibling. The pre

test score was 12 and the post test score was 11 (Figure 4.4). There was a slight decrease

in the relative status/power after the social skills training.

Figure 4.4

Status/Power

Pre Test
Post Test
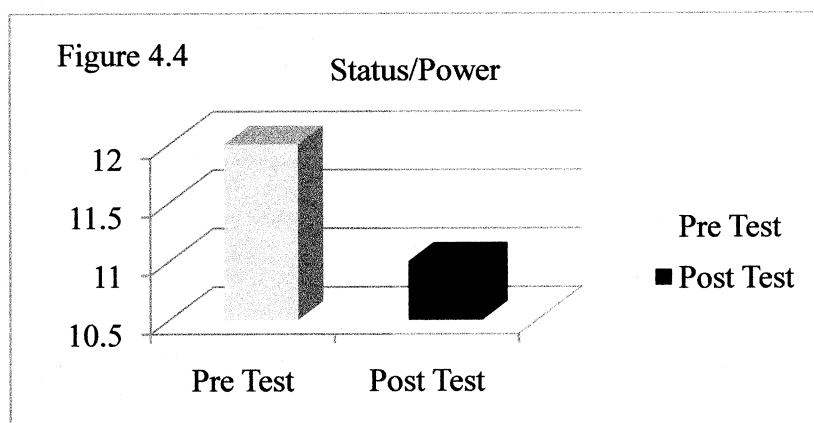
Chapter V

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to use social skills training on an individual child to enhance the relationship with her siblings. Past research on aiding the sibling relationship has mainly focused on the child rearing practices of the parent or social skills training in different areas, but less research has looked upon teaching the child new social skills. The issues specifically addressed in this study were warmth between the siblings, rivalry, conflict, and relative status/power. The results found that social skills training did not have much impact on the child's relationship with her sibling. There was a slight increase in the amount of warmth after the training, minimal decrease in the amount of rivalry, no difference in the amount of conflict, and slight decrease in the relative status/power after the training sessions.

Interpretation of Findings

The present study was not consistent with past research on social skills training and sibling rivalry. Kramer and Radey (1997) found that by using social skills with the children there was reports of increased warmth, decreased sibling rivalry, stable levels of competitive and agonistic behavior, lower levels of problematic behaviors and lower status/power differential. This present study found that the social skills training did not produce the same positive effects on the sibling relationship. Other previous research on

social skills training found that children had the capacity to solve their disputes without the help of a parent and the role of the eldest child is key in the problem solving process (Howe & Ross, 1990). But this was also inconsistent with the findings in the present study which found that teaching the oldest child social skills did not improve problem solving between the siblings.

Limitations

There were some limitations to the present study. Using one child as a case study hindered the process because a small sample size was not enough to generalize to the population. Also having more participants, which different sibling relationships, would have made the study more reliable. Another limitation was the small time span used for the social skills training. The current study took place for four weeks with one 40 minute training session each week. This may not have been enough time for the child to completely absorb the social skills being taught. More time each week could have reinforced the material taught to the child. The mother's lack of participation in the social skills training also affected the study. If the mother was more willing to support the social skills and reinforce the material being taught, even when the researcher was not present, than the child may have started to behave differently.

Conclusions

Family relationships play an important role to an individual's life and one aspect is the sibling interaction. Future relationships with peers and partners are often affected by earlier sibling relationships. Because of this it was important to research how to improve upon sibling relations at an early age. The present study gained background

knowledge from previous studies which explained that social skills training can have a positive influence on siblings. Even though the present study did not yield the same results it did have strengths. The strengths of this study consisted of valid measurements, a cooperative participant, and planned training sessions based on previous research. The weaknesses were a small sample size that did not allow for generalization, the time span which was too short, and the mother's lack of commitment to the study. These findings do not represent the entire population, but from the results it was suggested that social skills training, by itself, does not produce positive sibling relationships. The relationship between the participant and younger sibling did not change much from pre to post test so future research must be done in order to find the most beneficial use of social skills training when dealing with sibling rivalry.

Future Study

Future studies in this area could build upon the present study by having more participants involved and create an experiment. This could create the opportunity to generalize throughout the population. Also, studies should increase the amount of social skills sessions taught to the child so that the child can have more time to practice these skills. The role of the parent should also be used more often in future research. The mother or father should be aware of the skills taught to their child and be consistently reinforcing these skills. By making these changes to the present study, social skills training may have the opportunity to create a more positive environment for siblings and promote healthier family and peer relationships.

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