

That Woman Who Married my Brother: The Problematic Sibling-in-Law's Influence on Adult Sibling Closeness

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The spouses of adult siblings can have a strong influence—for better or worse—on the adult sibling bond. Qualitative data from a 16-member subset of a qualitative study of 50 adults demonstrate the positive and negative aspects of sibling-in-law/spousal intersections. Thematic analysis of these interviews revealed that these 16 participants mentioned a problematic sibling-in-law relationship. In each case, participants noted that the sibling's spouse had, in some ways, diminished their closeness with their sibling, which is how "problematic" was operationalized. Sometimes the sibling-in-law preferred interacting with his or her own family or had poor communication behaviors. Other participants reported that the sibling-in-law created tension by preventing contact between the spouse and his or her sibling. In some cases the reduced closeness reflected the participant's perception that the sibling-in-law did not treat the sibling well or that the marriage was unhealthy for the sibling. These communication outcomes illustrate dynamics of adult sibling relationships which have as of yet been understudied by family communication scholars, and they expand our understanding of how adult siblings negotiate closeness throughout their lives.

Sibling relationships are considered to be perhaps the most enduring relationship that humans experience (Mikkelson, 2005; Mikkelson, Floyd, & Pauley, 2011). Siblings may retain geographically and emotionally close relationships in adulthood, even into old age (Fowler, 2009) and even though these relationships may be neglected or diminished at certain stages of life (Connidis, 2007; Descartes, 2007; Fowler, 2009). A number of studies have focused on adult sibling relationships, exploring relational maintenance strategies and other communication issues (DeCartes, 2007; Mikkelson, Myers, & Hannawa, 2011; Van Volkom, 2006; Yoshimura, 2006).

A major factor on adult sibling relationships is the impact of siblings-in-law. Siblings usually marry, bringing a new person into the family, the sibling-in-law; and thus, even if they do not get married themselves, most people with a sibling will have a sibling-in-law relationship sometime in their lives (Yoshimura, 2006). Sometimes the new partner is someone who the family has met and

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has grown fond of over the years, and so the assimilation into the family may be fairly seamless (Prentice, 2008). However, particularly when the sibling does not meet a partner until after college, sometimes the in-law is basically unknown to the family, and in some cases, may not even meet the family until the marriage is planned—or until the wedding day itself—or even later. Accordingly, the sibling-in-law relationship often begins as a nonvoluntary relationship with a stranger, with few social prescriptions of how the siblings-in-law should act toward each other (Yoshimura, 2006; 2014).

Whether the sibling-in-law relationship evolves into one of close, mutual affection is unpredictable. Floyd and Morr (2003) suggested that in the United States “involvement with kin [is] voluntary, as a consequence of structural factors such as ... geographical mobility and emphasis on individualistic values” (p. 248). They also indicate that the sibling-in-law relationship is a peer-like relationship, which means that the relational partners may feel less obliged to please their siblings-in-law than their parents-in-law or children-in-law (p. 249). In surveying sibling-spouse-sibling-in-law relationships, Floyd and Morr discovered, as expected, that the participants communicated the least affection within their sibling-in-law relationships, as compared to their sibling or marriage relationships. Nevertheless, a frosty relationship between siblings-in-law could result in a strained marriage or strained sibling relationship, and thus, the sibling-in-law relationship, although secondary, is an important adjunct to a primary relationship. Further, affectionate communication between siblings-in-law could correlate positively with relational satisfaction and closeness.

Morr Serewicz (2006, 2008) considered the triadic nature of in-law relationships, which links two otherwise-unrelated people through their primary, more valued relationship with the same person, whom Morr Serewicz calls the “linchpin” of this triadic relationship. These non-voluntary, secondary relationships (of in-laws) cannot be easily dissolved because doing so will affect the primary relationship with their relative. For example, a woman is usually more interested in the relationship with her sister than with her sister’s husband. And, if the sister and her husband divorce, the woman may not feel any pressure or desire to maintain a relationship with her former brother-in-law.

Yoshimura (2006) also explored the secondary nature of sibling-in-law relationships, specifically looking at privacy management among siblings-in-law by exploring the kinds of private information between siblings that would also be appropriate to be shared and discussed with their spouses. Given the intimate sharing assumed between spouses, Yoshimura questioned whether it was appropriate, for example, for a sibling to ask his or her sister if she

had shared my private information with her husband—or should the sibling just assume that she had. Another consideration is affectionate exchanges between siblings-in-law—will a sibling's sister appreciate the affectionate behavior between that sibling and her husband as a symbol of my accepting him into the family—or will such behavior evoke jealousy? Yoshimura (2010) discovered that siblings were more likely to be envious of each other than were the siblings-in-law.

Prentice (2008, 2009) found that among younger participants whose siblings had recently married, the new sibling-in-law was often a welcomed agent of change who helped the family adjust to the needs of the maturing younger siblings by creating new routines. However, Morr Serewicz (2008) suggested that because of their dependency on other primary relationships, in-law relationships are always in flux. Therefore, even though the younger siblings may welcome their older siblings' spouses, these relationships might change over the course of their adulthood. Rittenour and Soliz (2009) theorized that intergroup identity was at play among in-laws, and the willingness of in-laws to accommodate the communication styles of the newcomer could influence the relationships between siblings-in-law.

These studies on sibling-in-law relationships speak to the need for more study on how siblings-in-law can influence the closeness between siblings, which is the focus of this piece.

Method

The data for this study is a subset consisting of 16 interviews from a qualitative study of 50 adults regarding their communication with their siblings. The larger study was designed to reveal the dynamics of adult sibling relationships, focusing on how life events effected the experience of closeness with siblings and the ongoing pattern of communication between them. For inclusion in this study, participants had to be over the age of 30, which is considered past the stage of *emerging adulthood*, as theorized by Arnett (2000) and Arnett, Ramos, and Jensen (2001). Between the ages of 18 and 30, Americans may be legally considered adults, but often they themselves do not experience feeling like adults. Emerging adults are often more focused on their friends, careers, and romantic relationships rather than their relationships with their siblings. After the age of 30, adults usually begin to experience feeling like adults and therefore transition to their adult relationship with their siblings (Arnett, 2000). Thus, we limited our interviews to adults who were over the age of 30. The 50 participants ranged in age from 30 to 72, with an average age of 46.7. Most of the participants had more than one sibling, with one having nine siblings.

We interviewed participants in a setting which was convenient and comfortable to them. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed by the interviewer. After explaining the nature of the study and their voluntary participation, we obtained verbal consent and started the voice recorder. Our first question was just to ask participants to tell us about their siblings in general, such as the number of siblings, their ages, and any interesting facts about them. After a few moments, we asked them to identify which sibling they communicated with the most and which they communicated with the least. For the two identified siblings, we asked them to draw a graph that charted the change in their closeness over the years of their relationship. This technique is similar to the one used to elicit turning points through the Retrospective Interview Technique (Huston, Surra, Fitzgerald, & Cate, 1981), but we were not focusing on turning points. Instead, we used these graphs as a way to stimulate memory and conversation about their relationships with their siblings.

Some participants were able to construct detailed graphs, while others were a little frustrated because remembering dates or ages did not come easily, and therefore, they did not complete the graph, but did begin talking about their sibling relationships. We viewed this prop only as a way to open the conversation and maintain the focus on the whole relationship, rather than focusing on the present (or the past). Therefore, we did not retain the graphs of any participants for later comparison. We allowed the participants to freely tell us the story of their sibling relationships, and we asked them probing questions from a suggested list, as needed to keep the conversation going or to clarify a point.

The verbatim transcriptions of the 50 interviews comprised 381 pages of single-spaced text, averaging 8 pages and ranging between 3 and 19 pages. Interviewers included two faculty members, ten graduate students, and six undergraduate students.

The qualitative interviews used in this study contained no specific questions about siblings-in-law, but interviewers were instructed to be alert for any mention of siblings-in-law (positive or negative) and to probe for more details if possible. In responding to the interview prompts, almost all participants briefly mentioned the spouses of their siblings and how they influenced their adult relationships with their siblings. Siblings-in-law can come in two forms: (1) the spouse of one's sibling or (2) the sibling of one's spouse. Since the interviews focused on the relationships with participants' siblings, the first condition (i.e., the spouse of one's sibling) was more salient to the interview and therefore was mentioned more often in the interview. Thus, the first condition (the spouse of one's sibling) is the focus of this study.

A thematic analysis of these 50 original interviews revealed that 16 of the participants (32%) mentioned a problematic sibling-in-law relationship. We acknowledge that no participant described their sibling-in-law as “problematic”—and thus our use of the term could be considered, well, problematic. But, from the participants’ own descriptions and characterization, these relationships clearly diminished the closeness between the participant and his or her sibling, which is how we operationalize *problematic sibling-in-law*. With this operationalized definition, we do not intend to demonize the siblings-in-law as “naughty or nice,” but to indicate that they do have the power to influence the primary sibling relationship. The participants commented on these siblings-in-law in their interviews in various ways, such as “he’s very opinionated ... a ‘strong’ family member” (Becky; all participants are referred to by pseudonyms); “it was almost a little bit weary, worrisome” (Clint); and “she could never go because her husband didn’t want her to go, so she didn’t go” (Hannah). These participants clearly indicated that these siblings-in-law effected their relationships with their siblings.

The 16 interviews were then separated and examined more closely for commonalities in experiences with problematic siblings-in-law. It is interesting to note that only one of the interviewees reported tensions in the relationship between her husband and her sibling. Instead, the problematic sibling-in-law relationship almost always involved the person their sibling had married. Nevertheless, in one case, the participant did reveal that her spouse was in fact a problematic sibling-in-law for her brother.

Using the constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), four categories emerged, which were then verified by the second author who coded the salient passages independently and sorted them into similar categories, which were then discussed and named.

Because of the multiple interviewers, the multiple-years duration of the data collection, and the fact that, in keeping with IRB guidelines, we did not retain any identifiers to be able to contact the participants, we could not conduct member checks. Instead, as suggested by Braithwaite, Moore and Abetz (2014) we conducted *member validation*, “asking participants or other members of that particular community [in this case, other people who have siblings-in-law] to reflect on the results of the study and recognize them as representative of their own experience” (p. 494). The findings of the study were thus validated by describing the categories and examples to the other acquaintances, who acknowledged that they had experienced similar difficulties in their sibling-in-law relationships.

Findings and Discussion

Since the focus of the interviews was the relationship between the participant and his or her siblings over time, it should be no surprise that comments about the spouses of their siblings would appear, especially when they reduced the feelings of closeness in the adult relationship between the siblings. Analysis of these interview segments suggests four dimensions of this diminished closeness. First, the sibling-in-law preferred to interact with his or her own family-of-origin, circle of friends, or spouse in private time as a couple. Second, the sibling-in-law had some communication habits that kept him or her from entering into a close relationship with the participant. Third, the sibling-in-law actively created tension in the sibling relationship by refusing to interact with his or her spouse's siblings or by preventing contact between the spouse and his or her sibling. Finally, the reduced closeness reflected the participant's perception that the sibling-in-law did not treat the sibling well or that the marriage was unhealthy for the sibling. These four dimensions are discussed in detail below.

Sibling-in-law Prefers Other Company

First, the sibling-in-law may simply prefer interacting with his or her own family-of-origin, circle of friends, or spouse in private time as a couple. Therefore, the siblings see less of each other because of one's greater commitment to and involvement with another group which the in-law prefers. On the surface, the participant may have felt happy that their sibling married into a welcoming family or social group. Nevertheless, participants often mourned the diminished closeness which resulted. For example, Clint recounted when he and his older sister left home and married, they both became busy with their own personal family lives: "[My sister] married into a very large family of ten kids ... her husband has a very large extended family. And they just kind of got busy with the lot of them." Within a few years, his sister's parents-in-law both died, leaving his sister and her husband to raise the other nine children still at home. The result was that Clint rarely interacted with his sister alone or even in a family get-together because she needed to care for her younger siblings-in-law. Clint admired his sister's dedication and accomplishment but nevertheless felt the loss for his own circle of siblings, which included another brother.

Other participants noted that when their sisters got married, they became so involved with their spouses and their families that they forgot about their siblings. Bettie described one of her sisters as someone "who only worries about her own family, doesn't care what's going on." Marla reported that her older sister was no longer

willing to share her feelings and the details of her married life with her. “She just didn’t talk about stuff. Anything that would bother her within their relationship ... They were a universe of two.” Marla indicated that her sister chose closeness with her husband over closeness with her sister without considering the consequences to their sibling relationship.

Brothers were equally found guilty of neglecting their sibling relationships in favor of their spouse’s families. Jane described how her sisters-in-law had weakened the family ties for her brothers. When Jane’s brother married his high school sweetheart, Jane described them as “very much in love, in kind of, a sickening kind of way”—a behavior that apparently isolated the brother from interacting with his siblings. The other brother simply became more involved with his wife’s family. He did not attend the brother’s second wedding, even though he lived nearby. In addition, his wife stopped coming to family gatherings, and thus when the brother did attend, he never stayed very long with his siblings because he needed to return to his wife.

Ashley described a similar relationship trajectory when her sister married a man from another country. Ashley’s sister began spending a large amount of her time in helping her husband get the rest of his family to the United States, even putting them up in their home for months while they got settled. Because the sibling-in-law’s culture believed that the woman was responsible for all the childcare and housekeeping, Ashley’s sister was too busy to visit with anyone. These exemplars clearly indicate that married siblings can lose contact with their sibling by becoming more involved with their in-law families. Thus, one major reason for diminished closeness between adult siblings is their preference for their spouse or their spouse’s family.

This finding of the sibling being more connected with his or her in-law family may reflect an issue of intergroup identity, as conceptualized by Rittenour and Soliz (2009). Family members may choose to not identify with their sibling’s spouse, because they perceive the spouse as an outsider who does not belong in the family—an attitude that the in-law may reciprocate by preferring his or her own family or origin (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). Therefore, the siblings-in-law do not enact accommodating behavior or communication to form a harmonious relationship as in-laws. Conversely, it may be that the adult sibling feels more at home with the in-laws than the family of origin because the in-laws are more accommodating to the newcomer, and therefore spend more time with the family that person married into. In this current study, the participants seemed to place blame on the sibling-in-law rather than their own sibling for this withdrawal.

Sibling-in-law's Behavior or Values Interfere with Sibling Closeness

Even if the sibling-in-law is willing to spend time with the spouse's family, some siblings-in-law have communication behaviors or values that keep him or her from entering into a close relationship. When this happens, participants noted that the relationship between the two siblings is strained, because the siblings are hindered from interacting comfortably when the sibling's problematic spouse is present. In addition, participants also felt they could not talk to their siblings about the discomfort with the problematic spouse.

Clint spoke of an occasion when he and his wife visited his brother and sister-in-law for a week in their home. He was surprised by his sister-in-law's strange reactions:

I don't think [sister-in-law] is very comfortable with company so to speak ... And, it was not a comfortable situation ... If my wife and I ever go back together, maybe I should say when ... our plan is that we will stay in a hotel.

Clint recounted how his sister-in-law seemed stressed at their visit and got upset about Clint turning up the heat in the bedroom and also eating snacks between meals. Clint and his wife had felt very uncomfortable, as if they were imposing. He seemed to think it would be okay if he went without his wife and could just hang out with his brother: "And I would just ignore the rest of that stuff ... Still, it was very strange being criticized for trying to stay warm or eating crackers when it wasn't authorized." Nevertheless, Clint did not seem to think his sister-in-law's behavior was an issue that he could or should address with his brother; instead, he would just have to accept it. As a result, Clint's adult relationship with his brother was constrained in some ways by his sister-in-law's behavior.

Another participant, Sara, blamed her sister-in-law for unattractive changes in her brother's lifestyle. First, Sara recounted how she was not emotionally close to her brother's wife because the wife had a minor learning disability that made it difficult to communicate freely with her. More importantly, after marriage, her brother had developed an unwillingness to spend money or to visit his parents or sister. He was just "cheap"—and Sara and her parents blamed the wife, whom no one felt particularly close to. According to Sara:

We always thought it was [the wife], it wasn't [my brother]. Because when you would go there, she would do things like ... the kids would be playing outside and they would come in all muddy and dirty from playing on a mound of dirt ... and [the wife] would like give them all a bath, one at a time, all in the same bath water. And then she actually came out to my mother and said, "The bathwater's in there, if you

want to take a bath.' ... So you just kind of always assumed that she was the cheap one.

Sara found this behavior not only odd, but also offensive. However, in a strange twist, when the daughter-in-law visited Sara's parents without her husband, the parents discovered that their daughter-in-law was very kind and considerate, and it was their son who was obsessive about spending money. In her study of in-law relationships, Prentice (2009) discovered that family members often scapegoated the new spouse (i.e., the new in-law) for changes in their family member, without considering that perhaps their family member had changed before getting married or had always been different from their families of origin. Sara's experience with her sister-in-law seems to reflect this blaming of the in-law instead of recognizing that the adult sibling is someone different from the child a sibling grew up with.

Two participants noted that a difference in religious beliefs and values, which arose in adulthood, had weakened the adult sibling bond. Daniel described how his sister had married a very religious man, who did not understand Daniel's rejection of the church and his decision to not have children. Although both Daniel and his sister had been raised in a religious tradition, Daniel clearly expressed that his sister's increased religiosity had been influenced by her husband. Daniel mentioned several times in the interview that his relationship with his sister might change if she were widowed. He hinted that perhaps the brother-in-law had a powerful influence on his sister that might dissolve after his death. This example demonstrates that a sibling-in-law's religious values can reduce the closeness between siblings—or that the participant can blame the sibling-in-law for the change in the sibling.

Nevertheless, some participants accepted that they might not like the communication habits of their siblings-in-law, but that they just had to bear with it as an inevitable part of a changing family relationship. Becky reflected on how she had learned to tolerate her overbearing brother-in-law:

Once you get married you are together and that is your thing. If anything [my sister's husband] has had minor conflicts with other family members because he is strong opinionated, but my family, we are fine now with him. We have our moments of course. [My sister] and I can easily discuss that we both have strong family members, so that's good. That is all mostly been resolved over the years—just little things. But, hmm, so you have to deal with it. That's part of marrying into a family.

All of the participants who commented on the odd behavior or communication habits of their siblings-in-law seemed to have come to accept them as family members and to accept the diminished

closeness that came with them. Because these were non-voluntary relationships, few of the participants felt that they could address the situation with their siblings, since in the end, it was the sibling's choice to marry and stay with this person.

Sibling-in-law Actively Prevents Contact between Siblings

A sibling-in-law may actively create tension in the sibling relationship by refusing to interact with the siblings of his or her spouse or by preventing the spouse from contact. Most of the participants who reported this behavior did not offer an account for the rift. For example, Amy explained that her relationship with her sister had fluctuated because of her sibling-in-law: "In 2005, [our closeness] was at its lowest because her husband at the time, now her ex-husband, did not allow us to communicate." The conflict between the siblings was described as

her husband forbid us to have a relationship ... It was a couple years ... And then when she ended up getting divorced, that's when we started talking again ... so we would talk then because we had been through the same thing.

Thus, closeness was restored because both sisters got divorced and then they reconnected by sharing what Amy described as "common bitching" about their former husbands. This situation represents an interesting dimension to adult sibling relationships: If problematic siblings-in-law diminish closeness between siblings while they remain married, the siblings can patch up their relationship when they commiserate after divorcing the problematic spouses.

Other participants reported similar interference from their sisters' spouses. For instance, according to Hannah:

[My sister] didn't invite [us] because her husband didn't want her to ... You know, I see them on Sunday morning for coffee but as far as doing things with them ... [one of my sisters] could never go ... If we girls would get together to go to [city], she could never go because her husband didn't want her to go. So she didn't.

In Ashley's case (mentioned earlier), her sister preferred interacting with her in-law family rather than interacting with Ashley. In addition, her brother-in-law also effected the relationship between the two sisters because the brother-in-law did not like to travel away from home, and he did not like his wife to travel either, so often Ashley's sister would come home for only very short amounts of time for holidays like Christmas. So clearly the spouse of one's sister could effectively make it difficult for sisters to maintain closeness in adulthood.

Tallie explained how when she graduated from high school, her brother offered to let her stay with him and his new wife while Tallie looked for a job. Although Tallie felt that she had minded her “own business and stayed out of stuff for the most part,” the sister-in-law wanted Tallie to leave, but made her husband deliver the news. As Tallie remembered the conversation: “That was probably the most emotion he’s ever showed, because he started crying. He’s like, ‘Don’t hate me; don’t hate me.’ Y’know. That was probably the, the most I’ve ever seen him, as far as emotion between [us].” Tallie said that she understood that the sister-in-law wanted privacy because the couple was expecting a new baby: “That was probably just a matter of wanting to have the family experience ... wanting to experience being, being a parent without that extra influence.” Nevertheless, Tallie had “always felt uncomfortable” around her brother’s wife and had never re-established a close relationship with her brother or his wife after this exchange. Apparently, the sister-in-law had not made an effort to re-establish the relationship either. As Tallie described it, “It’s not that I didn’t want to see them. It didn’t feel like I had the energy to make the effort, I guess ... there’s just a lot of TV watching and not a lot of communication.” As a result, Tallie seldom visited them or talked with them.

These cases demonstrate that the spouse of one’s sibling can diminish the closeness between siblings by actively limiting contact between them. In all of the cases reported in this study, none of the participants indicated that they had addressed this interference with their siblings. They seemed to accept that their siblings chose loyalty to their spouses over loyalty to their sibling as a basic premise of marriage.

Sibling-in-law Creates an Unhealthy Situation for the Sibling.

Finally, the reduced closeness may reflect the participant’s perception that the in-law does not treat the sibling well or that the marriage is unhealthy for the sibling. In these cases, the participant chose to reduce contact with the sibling as long as that marriage endured. It was a way of objecting to the relationship without continually addressing the problem. According to Peder:

No one in our family is particularly fond of [my sister’s fiancé]. And I just think, I don’t agree with how he treats her, and how she acts with him, and so. It’s, uh, kind of a conflict amongst everyone, and so, it becomes an elephant in the room, that she’s pretty defensive about. So if you ever confront her, then anything else that you talk about gets shut down. So you kind of tip-toe around the subject.

Although the person referred to was not yet legally married to Peder's sister, he was already in the family as a co-habiting partner, and his poor treatment of the sister had already reduced the closeness between the siblings.

Another participant, Brenda, indicated that it was her husband who was the problematic sibling-in-law because her brother thought she should not stay in her marriage with a depressed husband:

[My relationship with my brother improved] probably about in my forties when my husband and I separated, ... but once I went back to my husband then um, [my brother] kind of distanced himself and wasn't too happy about my decision ... When, when my husband's depression kind of flared ... [My brother] kind of stayed away ... And [before that], um, we used to do everything together, and when the depression got worse, they kind of found other people to spend more time with, and, and that still isn't the same.

Although perhaps this situation could be read that it was Brenda's brother who was the problematic in-law, Brenda did not seem to place blame on her brother. Instead, she noted that it was her husband's behavior that caused the rift with her brother, not the brother's rejection of her husband. Therefore, her husband was a problematic sibling-in-law in her relationship with her brother because the brother thought the situation was unhealthy for his sister.

These examples demonstrate the role of what Morr Serewicz (2006, 2008) calls the "linchpin" of this triadic relationship, as noted earlier. The siblings-in-law are related through the person they primarily care about (their sibling or their spouse), and this linchpin is caught in the middle between these two relationships. Again we see that the in-law is often scapegoated as problematic, while expressing affection and respect for the linchpin, which is the primary relationship between the siblings.

Conclusion

This typology of problematic sibling-in-law relationships emerged unexpectedly from a qualitative study that focused on the changes in closeness in adult sibling relationships after the stage of emerging adulthood. Although these initial findings about siblings-in-law are exploratory and limited, they illustrate dynamics of adult sibling relationships which have been understudied by family communication scholars, and they expand our understanding of how adult siblings negotiate closeness throughout their lives. The fact that participants volunteered this information when no questions were asked specifically about sibling-in-law relationships underscores its importance in adult sibling relationships.

Most in-law issues in the early years of marriage seem to be associated with parents-in-law (Morr Serewicz 2006, 2008; Rittenour & Koenig Kellas, 2015; Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). However, in later years, when the parents pass on or become less important, the siblings-in-law may have more influence on marriages and adult sibling relationships.

As Yoshimura (2014) has suggested, sibling-in-law relationships are understudied because they are not considered to fulfill any primary function for adults due to their assumed low emotional intensity. The research presented here demonstrates that sibling-in-law relationships do trigger significant emotional intensity and communication behaviors that can affect family well-being throughout adulthood.

Although their negative influence was highlighted in the study presented here, sibling-in-law relationships could also have significant positive influences in adult family life. The sibling-in-law relationship is a reservoir of common human relationships ripe for exploration.

Qualitative researchers often find that participants have not considered the influence of some components of their lives until they are invited to explore them within the privacy of a confidential interview (Tracy, 2013). Having ignored these sibling-in-law relationships too long, family communication researchers should start asking those questions.

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