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Negotiating Inequality Among Adult Siblings: Two Case Studies

Qualitative instrumental case study analysis of adult siblings from 2 families explores how socioeconomic inequality among them affects their relationships to one another. Eight middle-aged siblings' observations of childhood, parental expectations, work and family history, lifestyle, and current sibling ties indicate that childhood interdependence, parallel parental treatment, similar intergenerational mobility, greater success of the younger rather than older siblings, and economic success due to other than individual effort facilitate smoother negotiations of material inequality and enhance the negotiation of sibling relationships as important sources of support. These new insights on negotiating sibling ties over time are related to various forms of capital, a life course perspective, and ambivalence, and point to fresh avenues for future research and theory.

Although families are idealized as protective havens for their members (Gillis, 1996), they also serve to reproduce the social relations that maintain established patterns of inequality. Typically, this reproduction is explored between generations at the intergenerational level; it also occurs within a generation, however, that is, at the *intra*generational level. Within families, some members of the same generation may reproduce the circumstances of their parents and others

may not. A particular omission in family research concerns the effect of different material resources and lifestyles among siblings on their relationships with one another over time. Despite growing up in a shared class position, variations in resource accumulation may create inequality among adult siblings (Matthews, 2002), potentially heightening ambivalence in their relationships with one another. This article explores the negotiation of material inequality among siblings in their adult relations with one another and the factors that may help to foster close, supportive ties despite differences in socioeconomic status.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RELATED LITERATURE

Adult siblings are rarely the focus of research or policy attention (Mauthner, 2005). Instead, they are typically studied in the context of other ties, such as social network studies, or of specific situations, such as providing care for parents. Some research that takes the latter perspective contributes significantly to our understanding of sibling ties (see e.g., Matthews, 2002; Ingersoll-Dayton, Neal, Ha, & Hammer, 2003), but the context of caring for parents usually takes the spotlight away from sibling relationships themselves. Yet, research on adult sibling ties characterizes them as relatively egalitarian and voluntary when compared with other family ties (Cicirelli, 1995; Crenner, Dechaux, & Herpin, 2002), as potentially supportive (Connidis, 1994), as variable across time with an ebb and flow that reflects changes in commitments to other familial ties over the life course (Connidis, 2001; Crenner et al. 2002;

Doherty & Feeney, 2004), and as important attachment figures in their own right, especially among those without a romantic partner or children, and later in life (Doherty & Feeney, 2004).

Perhaps because sibling ties are assumed to be egalitarian, material inequality among adult siblings has generally escaped research attention. To date, two main concerns characterize studies of inequality in families. The first is group differences in family experience that are based on such factors as gender, race, and class. Examples include the gendered or "his and hers" experience of marriage (Bernard, 1972) and comparisons of Black versus White families (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004). Such studies tend to focus on comparisons across families or on gender dynamics among couples, paying little attention to the potential differences within adult sibling networks. The second concern is intergenerational social mobility: Is there evidence of upward social mobility from one generation to the next? The current crisis rhetoric that equates population aging with the failure of present and future generations to outdo their parents (Guillemette, 2003; Jackson & Howe, 2003) has fixed attention on intergenerational social mobility, masking the large variations that occur within one generation or age cohort, as well as within families.

One series of studies on intergenerational social mobility, however, does explore adult sibling resemblance, that is, the degree to which siblings share the same socioeconomic status, often in an effort to assess the effect of family background on future success (Hauser, 1988). Three general findings from such studies are relevant to this article: Substantial inequality occurs among adult siblings in their social standing, as measured by education, occupation, and income (Conley, 2004; Hauser, Sheridan, & Warren, 1999); this dissimilarity is greater in larger families than in smaller ones (Conley, 2004); and although family size has declined, disparity between siblings has grown over time (Hauser & Wong, 1989; Kuo & Hauser, 1995), reflecting a decline in the transmission of social position from parents to children (Biblarz, Bengtson, & Bucur, 1996). Thus, despite assumptions of egalitarianism, variations in socioeconomic resources among siblings can be substantial and widespread.

Work on the pecking order of siblings (Conley, 2004) underscores power dynamics in sibling networks and is suggestive about their effect on sibling ties. The focus of such research is typically the implications of inequality for individual outcomes rather than for sibling relationships. For example, those with more education typically live farther from their siblings and see them less often than do those with less education (Conley, 2004; Kalmijn, 2006). What these various studies do not address is the internal family dynamics that ensue as siblings negotiate unequal resources.

Studying relationships beyond those that dominate family research improves our understanding of all family life, in part by helping to reveal how family ties are embedded in the macro-meso-micro interconnections of social life. Analysis of inequality (O'Rand, 2001) and the life course (Heinz, 2001) involves multiple levels. Macrolevel structured social relations include class, gender, age, race, sexual orientation, and ethnicity (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; McMullin, 2004). They and the cultural values that support them are made real at the mesolevel in institutional arrangements, including those concerning family relations. The microlevel of individual lives and relationships occurs in these meso- and macrolevel contexts. Thus, inequality and responses to it among siblings cannot be explained solely by individual differences. Instead, macrolevel structured social relations such as those of gender and age, and mesolevel factors such as the institutional arrangements and composition of families, shape inequality among siblings and its consequences for their relationships. This orientation has coalesced in work on ambivalence in family ties, including those of adult siblings (Connidis, 2005a; Connidis & McMullin, 2002a, 2002b; Walker, Allen, & Connidis, 2005).

A sociological treatment of ambivalence (Connidis & McMullin, 2002a, 2002b) conceptualizes the ambivalence of family relationships as the outcome of contradictions that are created by social arrangements. Ambivalence and attempts to deal with it vary by one's position in the multiple sets of structured social relations (Connidis & McMullin, 2002b). Viewing ambivalence as an ongoing feature of family ties that is never permanently resolved encourages a life course view of relationships as regularly renegotiated in response to changing circumstances and conditions (see Elder, 1994). A life course perspective helps to correct the tendency to make adult sibling ties invisible "as they are rarely theorized as fluid *social* relations of care *and* power" (Mauthner, 2005, p. 637). The concept of ambivalence also helps to link sociological and

psychological orientations to family ties (Fingerman, Hay, & Birditt, 2004; Luscher & Pillemer, 1998; Spitze & Gallant, 2004; Willson, Shuey, & Elder, 2003). Inequality in education, income, and occupation is a socially structured source of ambivalence in adult sibling relationships, partly because sibling relations are assumed to be egalitarian in Western society (Connidis, 2005a; Walker et al., 2005). This ambivalent situation may also engender mixed emotions about siblings that characterize psychological ambivalence.

Individual efforts to contend with socially created contradictory situations involve exercising agency in a variety of ways as family members try to negotiate or work out (Finch, 1989) the contradictions and paradoxes of their ties to one another. At any particular point in time, a relationship may be marked by apparent harmony, conflict, tension, uncertainty, or distance, but this may change as parties in the relationship renegotiate their ties to one another in response to situations that are both within and outside their control. Similarly, efforts to negotiate ambivalence may involve action to change the situation through diplomacy, persuasion, appeals to collective problem solving, and confrontation, or relative inaction by accepting the status quo, distancing oneself from a situation or relationship, or acquiescing to another sibling's perspective.

Several studies illustrate the link of macrolevel forces to family relations and the relevance of ambivalence to understanding how siblings negotiate consequent contradictions. Research on care for parents shows that gendered social relations implicate sisters and brothers to different degrees and in different ways (Matthews, 2002). Differences in resources also affect who does what for parents (Finch, 1989; Matthews, 2002). Inequity in the amount and type of care given to parents is not translated as unfair *if* the reasons for it are constructed as legitimate (Finch, 1989; Matthews, 2002). Emotionally close siblings are predisposed to favor maintaining good relations over strict equations of fairness with equal contribution (Matthews, 2002). Similarly, an unequal inheritance is likely to be considered fair when it is based on the relative need of siblings or on their relative support to parents (Matthews, 2002), and when siblings place a higher priority on good sibling relations than on receiving an equal share (Stum, 1999). Such responses may also apply to negotiating material inequality and variations in lifestyles

among siblings; if their relationships are important to them, then siblings may consciously construct and maintain strong and supportive sibling ties and limit ambivalence by minimizing the significance of unequal resources.

These studies also suggest the important context of the life course, including family history (Finch, 1989), to current negotiations among siblings. What has gone before shapes how structured ambivalence is both perceived and managed in the present. Individual experiences of siblings across the life course combine to create dynamic trajectories of sibling ties over time. When studying socioeconomic differences and their implications for sibling relationships, a key facet of the life course perspective is work history. Do similarities and variations in paid work trajectories influence the negotiation of material inequality among adult siblings, beyond their effect on income?

In sum, structurally based ambivalence created by unequal socioeconomic resources among siblings may emerge at various points across the life course and may represent an additional challenge to negotiating sibling ties over time. Siblings may be motivated to minimize these variations in an effort to sustain close relations with one another in mid- and later life. This study explores key themes regarding socioeconomic and lifestyle differences among adult siblings and factors that may be relevant to negotiating the ambivalent situations that such differences create.

METHOD

This article analyses the observations of eight middle-aged siblings from two families selected from the Multigenerational Families Study. Families for the study were located by contacting participants from a previous community study of persons aged 55 and over (see Connidis, 1994) who were likely to be in families that included three generations of adults. The letter of request to participate described the aim of the project ("to gain a better understanding of family and paid work in different generations and at different stages in life") and detailed the nature of involvement, including the possibility that participants would be asked for contact information for other family members. All participants were assured that their interviews were confidential and that nothing said during an interview would be revealed to other family members. Thus, although information gained from one family member

was often helpful in identifying areas to pursue in subsequent interviews, information from interviews was never shared with other family members by the interviewer. Subjects' comments, however, made it clear that they often discussed their interviews with one another.

In the field from 1998 to 2001, the study has 86 informants aged 23 – 90 years from 10 three-generation families. This study includes multiple voices from three generations rather than relying on the reports of a single person or dyad to represent either a generation or a set of relationships (Matthews, 2005b). Intensive analysis of multiple perspectives is a desirable method for looking at the complexities of family life in the broader context of the social world (Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995). The number of participants ranged from 4 to 12 per family with a mode of 10 (Connidis, 2003). Participants first completed a mailed, self-administered questionnaire that provided background information on individual characteristics, family relations, and work history. Having this information enhanced the conversational approach of the subsequent interview. Interviews were carried out in person or by phone for an average of 100 minutes, tape-recorded, and transcribed.

The analysis began by selecting two families with critical similarities and differences regarding family structure and the siblings' experiences. This method is a version of an instrumental case study (Stake, 1994) in which an intensive analysis of two cases is used to provide insight into the dynamics of sibling relationships characterized by inequality. Choosing two cases with significant similarities and differences between them flags some possible explanations for variations in sibling relationships while ruling out others. On the basis of information provided in the questionnaires (income, education, marital history) and interviews, the Elkin's and the Moore's were selected.

Focusing on two cases makes intensive analysis of multiple voices possible. Interviews with eight siblings from two families, each with a total of five siblings in the middle generation, result in observations about 32 sibling relationships (16 per family). Methodological considerations for selecting these cases include a similar level of information provided by each set of siblings and the fact that, within each family, all the siblings were interviewed in person by the same interviewer. The author conducted all the interviews with one of the families and a research associate of the same age, race, and gender (middle-aged, White woman) interviewed everyone in the other family. The total number of participants in the two families, 8 and 10 respectively, reflect the modal number of participants across the 10 families, and the age range of the middle-generation siblings was typical of the study families.

To make it easier to keep track of family members, the pseudonyms for the two case studies, the Elkin's and the Moore's, reflect ethnic differences between them, and the first names of those in each family begin with the same letter as their surname.

Regarding similarities (see Table 1 for details), the mothers of the two families are both 76 years old. Among the eight Elkin family participants are the mother, Eila, and four of her five children, Eva, Erik, Elsa, and Emmi. The 10 Moore family participants include the mother, Margaret, and her four (of five) surviving children, Martha, Megan, Marilyn, and Matt. The two sibling groups share substantial variations in socioeconomic status as indicated by educational attainment, occupational status, and financial resources. Among the Elkin's, Eva and Erik are the most educated, but Elsa and Emmi have substantially higher incomes. Among the Moore's, Martha and Megan have notably higher incomes, and Megan has the most education, followed by Marilyn.

Both families are quite large and are White. Respecting the effect of gender composition on sibling ties (Connidis, 2001; Matthews, 2002) and variations by life stage in the significance of siblings (Doherty & Feeney, 2004), the gender composition (three sisters, one brother) and age range (early 40s to early 50s) of the participating siblings are parallel. Both sibling groups experienced the divorce of their parents and the later death of their father, and both families include siblings who have divorced or have been widowed.

The two families also vary in important ways. Although both mothers experienced divorce, the material consequences of that divorce were quite different. Both Eila Elkin and Margaret Moore divorced in their 50s but, reflecting class differences, Eila Elkin received very little financial support after her husband's departure and had to enter the labor force to support her young, large family. In contrast, Margaret Moore was well supported financially after her husband left, able to stay out of the labor force and in her large home, and to hire help. Eila Elkin immigrated to Canada from Sweden as a young married

Table 1. *Case Studies: Sibling Participants*

	Elkin Family				Moore Family			
	Eva	Erik	Elsa	Emmi	Martha	Megan	Marilyn	Matt
Age (years)	52	46	44	41	51	49	47	43
Marital status	Common law (previously married)	Married (previously married)	Common law	Married	Married	LAT[a] (previously married)	Married	Widowed
Parent status	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Childless
Education (years)	16	16	13	12	14	21	15	14
Job description	Weaver	Technical services	Homemaker	Homemaker	Manager of family business	Financial services	Dry cleaner manager	Supplier
Household income ($)	60,000	50,000	80,000	>100,000	>100,000	>100,000	60,000	25,000
Personal income ($)	15,000	25,000	2,500	2,500	>100,000	>100,000	20,000	25,000

[a]LAT stands for living apart together relationships.

mother to make her future with her husband; Margaret Moore was from a well-established family that had been in Canada for generations.

The sibling groups describe different degrees of support and attachment in their relationships. Most of the siblings have a partner and children, but Matt Moore is childless and unattached. Finally, the variations in material resources in the two sibling groups are not consistently related to birth order, gender, age, marital, or parent status. Thus, studying these two case studies may unveil family dynamics that cannot be reduced to either unique, shared circumstances or to substantial variations in family structure.

The analysis exemplifies Matthews's (2005a, p. 804) description of qualitative data analysis as "a creative process that requires a great deal of time with the data, reading and rereading, coding and recoding, writing memos and rewriting memos and then making connections among them, until an argument emerges that is grounded in the data." I began with intensive readings of the transcribed interviews of all participants in the two selected families. Then, the entire transcripts of the middle-aged siblings became the focus. This approach respects the interconnections of relationships in families (Matthews, 2005b; Milevsky, 2004) while focusing on the multiple perspectives of siblings. Excerpts most directly related to sibling ties were analyzed intensively.

Interview questions addressed the negotiation of sibling ties over time, placing current relationships in the context of family and personal history (Finch, 1989). Most of the data analyzed were produced by the informants in response to asking them about their family when they were growing up, the most important people to them then and now, what their parents encouraged them and their siblings to do when they grew up, what they and their siblings were expected to do as children, their relationships with their sibling(s) now and over time, how their lives compare with those of their siblings (lifestyle, priorities, favorite pastimes, work history), whether family members seek their advice or the reverse, and their arrangements for meeting the demands of work and family and how these compare with those of their siblings.

The analysis involved identifying themes from each individual's observations and then connecting these themes for the entire network of siblings for each family. Because collecting and reporting data from multiple family members presents

unique challenges to protecting anonymity and, particularly, confidentiality (Mauthner, 2000), both names and facts that might make identification possible have been changed.

<div align="center">FINDINGS</div>

Findings are presented according to the topics that were explored during the interviews. These topics were pursued in order to establish a life course perspective on family and work, and the negotiation of relationships over time, as critical contexts for understanding current sibling ties. Themes that emerged from analyzing the qualitative data produced by the subjects on each of these topics suggest factors that affect negotiating material inequality among adult siblings.

Before exploring the presence and negotiation of material inequality among adult siblings, I first present the current situation of the two sibling groups. Establishing the type of sibling relationships that characterize the two families demonstrates different outcomes of their negotiations to this point in time. I also consider some circumstances that could account for differences in current sibling relationships but do not. The subsequent analysis explores material inequality and lifestyle comparisons and then seeks to understand reasons for different negotiated outcomes of sibling inequality between the two families in the life course context of work and family history.

<div align="center">*Current Sibling Relationships*</div>

None of the Elkin siblings lives in the same city. Eva and Erik live within a 2-hour drive of each other, and Elsa and Emmi live in different countries overseas. Three of the Moore siblings, Martha, Megan, and Matt, live in the same city, and Marilyn lives a 4-hour drive away. Thus, opportunity for contact is greater among the Moore siblings, but it is the Elkin's who have more active and involved sibling ties.

All of the Elkin siblings report being supported by one another through key life transitions. As well, all three sisters seek advice from some of their siblings. Elsa says:

> Whenever I'm having a problem I phone Eva. She's just always there. The boys—no. I don't tell them my problems or my intimacies or my details. And Emmi. She knows everything. Like we can talk about sex together and all great things and we just laugh and we have a great time. (Elsa)

Eva talks over things with Erik and, recently, her sisters, and Emmi sometimes seeks advice from Eva and Elsa. Two of the sisters report that their advice is also sought. Eva reports that all her siblings approach her for advice, depending upon what is happening in their lives, and Elsa says that Emmi and, now, Eva talk over things with her.

As for the Moore's, when asked whether their siblings supported key decisions or changes in their lives, Martha replied, "I never asked them." Megan answered, "I wouldn't say they weren't supportive," but she does not recall any of her siblings being very supportive when she separated and returned to university as a single parent. Only Marilyn reports seeking advice from her siblings "but not on a personal basis. On probably business or financial, but not personal." Yet, all four siblings say that a sibling seeks advice from them. Megan reports that Matt seeks advice from her, and all three of her siblings say that she is the one who approaches them for feedback. Matt is amazed that Megan seeks his advice about her sons and partner and refers to gender as an explanation: "it's not because I'm brilliant. It's because I'm a man." Marilyn and Martha are also "flabbergasted" that Megan seeks their advice because, says Martha, "She always seems to be the one that's got it together."

Descriptions of sibling relationships reveal closer ties among the Elkin than the Moore siblings. Eva Elkin, the oldest, gives this account of her sibling relationships:

> Well in the beginning, I …. was like their mother because my mother was gone … They would always call me … and Eva would fix it all up … My brother Erik, he's the middle one, he's very close to me … and if anything ever happened, it would be the two of us … And my brother Ed is … kind and gentle and calm and he does his part in the family but … he's just different. (Eva)

Eva refers to evolution in her ties with her sisters: "I need a life now, I'm not always the one that can fix it now … And I wanted to become closer to them as women do with mothers, or partners … So that's taking a while." More generally, she describes her siblings as "always constant … I like to hear from them, I like to be near them, I like to spend time with them."

Erik emphasizes the shared love and support that unites all the siblings but also notes variations in his ties to them, and changes over time.

I love them all … Of my three sisters, the strongest bond would be with Eva. I think that will always be. However, as my other sisters and myself are getting older, we're getting closer … and we talk about everything. Emmi is probably the one I know the least … Over … the last 20 years with her living in Europe, we've had contact maybe five times … But I do know if there was trouble … she'd be here and I'd be there. Elsa … same thing … I don't see Eva that often any more … I used to see her a lot. She moved … and … she has Ken [her partner] … She just found a new life … and she enjoys it. (Erik)

Elsa notes particular attachments, but she also highlights the significance of all her siblings to her:

My brother Erik was close to me in age and … we connected … Emmi and I have just always been there together. We're best buds … They're [all] very important to me. They're my best buds … I just love them so much and they know it … I know we're all getting older and I think, "God, I hope nothing happens." Because it's so warm … and I don't even see them very often, but I always make an effort. (Elsa)

Geographic distance and her ongoing affection for her family make Emmi miss family gatherings for holidays and being "together at the same table … [T]hey still do it … and I'll phone and I'll be hearing the cheering in the background. It's … really hard." She believes that the only difference that living far away makes to her sibling relationships is "just the fact that I'm not around a lot." She distinguishes between her current ties with her siblings and confirms a transition in her relationship with Erik:

I have a … good relationship with my brothers … Before, when I left home, they weren't very important … But every time I come [home], they are very warm and loving, and I stayed with my brother [Erik] for a week this [visit] … [How about your sisters?] Sisters is another story. Sisters are best friends. Sisters is like forever. When I have a problem, I phone my sisters. When I'm feeling down, I phone my sisters. And they always pick me up. (Emmi)

Emmi particularly admires her oldest sister, Eva, and selects her as a female role model:

I've always tried to be like Eva. I think she is the best. The way she brought up her kids, the way she works, the way she speaks, the way she is.

The Moore siblings describe relationships that are less uniformly close, both in the present and across time. Martha is closer to Megan than to Marilyn and emphasizes being different from both of them:

Megan and I are good friends. Megan's completely different than I am … unbelievable … Sometimes [it's] volatile and certainly when we talk about raising children … but … I went [away] … for my birthday and I asked Megan to come … and it was wonderful … Marilyn's far away so she feels a little bit cut off and she feels less close to us than we'd like to be and she's completely different again … Very independent, very stubborn, very my mother. (Martha)

Megan's account differs from Martha's regarding the nature of their relationship but confirms a shift over time:

I'm probably the closest with my brother. But I used to be the closest with my sister Marilyn and then she and I sort of drifted our separate ways. And our sister Martha and I used to be very close … (*Any particular events that have changed these things or just the course of time do you think?*) Well, my sister [Marilyn] moved. She and I used to live in the same house … so we became very close because of proximity. And then when I first moved … my sister Martha and I did a lot of things together. And then her life has changed and my life has changed … I've got a very demanding job and I just don't spend as much time with her as I used to. And that I've been with the same partner now for 6 years and that takes more of my time … and … just around my father's death I think we kind of drifted apart a little bit. (Megan)

Despite living much nearer to one another than the Elkin siblings, both Martha and Megan Moore use geographic distance to explain emotional distance. The Moore's sibling ties are also more vulnerable to parallel life transitions such as acquiring a partner and losing a father.

In the Moore family, oblique reference to tensions among the siblings made in earlier interviews led to further probes for details in later interviews. In the end, none of the siblings was very forthcoming on this topic, and comments on problematic relations were usually blurted out and then dropped. Marilyn is the most open about trouble among the siblings, but even she does not choose to elaborate:

There's a huge history there but I would say … we are now coming back together again. There was a long period of time when nobody was speaking to anybody at all. That's something that I would really not like to talk about … But now we are getting back on track a bit. (Marilyn)

When asked about his current relationships with his sisters, Matt replied, "Well, the fact that I don't see them that often makes that kind of hard to answer. But the love is still there." He also notes family conflict but believes that he avoids it because he is younger and male: "I see them having disagreements and differences of opinion … Maybe because of the five-year gap in our age … or maybe because I'm a guy and they're all girls … I've always sort of remained detached, … to just sort of stay out of the fray."

Comments by both Martha and Marilyn suggest that the Moore siblings may be on the cusp of renegotiating their ties with one another. Martha claims that her siblings and mother have: "become more important. Certainly as a … teenager it was less so and even as a young mother, I could do it my way thank you very much. I don't need anybody." Marilyn also reports recent efforts to improve sibling relations:

> [We] spent some time together … We hadn't done that in 3 or 4 years … It was … getting to the point where … we could just continue to stick our head in the sand or we could … try this again. Because this is the only family … So … my daughter and I … went to the cottage, which is a very volatile place. We spent the night and it was very nice … It's sort of inching along like that. A little better, a little better. (Marilyn)

On balance, the Elkin siblings form quite an involved network that assumes mutual support when it is needed. In this family, sibling ties remain active and important. The oldest, Eva, and the youngest, Emmi, include their siblings as among the most important people to them now. In contrast, the Moore siblings have more mixed attachments, and their ties are more vulnerable to changes and differences in their lives. Yet, both Martha and Matt include their siblings as among the most important people in their current lives. Matt says of his mother and sisters: "If I didn't have them I'd be lost … I guess Mum and Megan have the most special roles because I see more of those two."

Comments from both families show that pivotal events and reaching parallel life stages are catalysts for renegotiating relationships, but the Elkin siblings are primarily strengthening already close bonds; the Moore siblings seem to be resolving old wounds.

Sibling Inequality and Lifestyle Comparisons

Although inequality in income and education characterizes both sibling groups, the distribution of inequality differs between them. Among the Elkin's, it is the younger two, Elsa and Emmi, who have the highest income. Their relative wealth began with their own paid labor but has been sustained by their partners. The older two siblings, Eva and Erik, have more education. Among the Moore's, the older two siblings, Martha and Megan, have the highest income, and the second sister, Megan, also has the highest level of schooling. For both sisters, their paid work has been a major contributor to financial success. Martha took substantial time out of the labor force while her husband ran their family business, whereas Megan has secured her economic success on her own. In effect, the younger Elkin sisters have bypassed their older siblings; meanwhile, the younger Moore siblings have yet to equal the success of their older sisters.

Unequal material resources spell different lifestyles among the siblings of both families. According to all the Elkin siblings, their brother Ed (the nonparticipant) has always had very little and has periodically received much needed financial support from their mother, a situation they view positively. More generally, Elsa describes financial support within the family favorably:

> I think it's great that we can help each other. My brother Ed last weekend lost his [wallet] so we put a … fund together. He doesn't want to take the money … and I just say, "Hey, it's okay … This is perfectly normal and maybe one day Duncan [her son] will be standing in front of you … and you'll have to help him out." … I think it's good. It's just money." (Elsa)

For the Elkin's, intergenerational transfers from mother to child produce the usual outcome: minimizing monetary inequality among the siblings (Kunemund, Motel-Klingebiel, & Kohli, 2005). Things are different in the Moore family. Margaret does not compensate for capital discrepancies among her children. Instead, despite her earlier affluence, she currently receives financial help from Megan. None of the siblings comments on this transfer.

Regarding lifestyles, Eva Elkin lives comfortably but simply. As a divorced, single mother she did not accrue savings, and her limited resources earlier in life precluded attending university. She philosophically observes: "Being poor doesn't

really make a difference in the long run. [You can] listen to music and opera on Sunday afternoon … You don't need money to go and walk in the park."

Erik enjoys a middle-class lifestyle because of a history of steady employment and his current wife's paid work. Comparing his life with his siblings', he says:

> I can't say my lifestyle is very similar to Elsa's, who is four months in every corner of the world at a time, or Emmi, who is living in Europe. I couldn't imagine doing that. Ed and I are similar. We're both working every day, coming home, watching TV. (Erik)

Neither of the younger two sisters, Elsa and Emmi, is in the labor force, but their partners are well-off, and they both lead lives beyond the means of their siblings. When asked to compare the life she leads now with the lives of her siblings, Emmi replies:

> Completely different, except for my sister Elsa … I see a lot more of Elsa because of the fact that she travels … When she's in [the same country] … we'll get together for a long weekend with the kids or we'll go to my … house in Italy … And we have a lot of fun … I started doing weaving … three years ago … So then I had to phone Eva, "Eva, okay, what do I use? How do I do this?" … With Ed and Erik, I don't think we have anything in common. (Emmi)

The Elkin siblings negotiate the substantial inequality among them by minimizing material and lifestyle differences through a focus on common ground. When comparing their lives, Elsa says: "I think that in the morning when they wake up they're the same as I am. They feel the same things." Erik also stresses the parallels in their lives:

> I think we all have what we wanted … I mean emotionally, having people around. Not so much the lifestyle, or things, or fancy cars … but having people that you care about nearby sharing what we're sharing. (Erik)

Generally, when claims of similarity among the Moore siblings are noted, they are countered by observations of difference or criticism. Martha, well-off because of the successful family business that she runs with her husband, observes:

> Megan and I are very similar. Very. We do all the same things, except she's [built] … herself a man-

sion in the country. So … she goes away every week. And she always did. She always went to our cottage every week … She's got a hell of a high-pressure job … Very stressful. So every Friday night she leaves … So that's a huge difference because my life is in [the city] … Marilyn's not quite as active as Megan and I … Matt also. Matt not at all. (Martha)

While suggesting a common thread among the sisters, Martha manages to include a critical comment about her sister, Megan:

> … [W]e're all struggling for the same things basically, you know, happy and independent kids. And just how you get there is a little different. And no one will agree with how Megan did it, but she did it … She had to do it and she's got two great kids coming out of the end of it. (Martha)

Hard working and financially successful because of her own efforts while a single mother, Megan also highlights differences in the siblings' lives:

> I'm in the same stage as my sister Martha in terms of children being grown … but I work 12-hour days and I have a place up north and I really have a different lifestyle than she does. And she's got a lot more freedom or flexibility … I'm sort of chained to the desk. And my brother, he's single and … working very hard. But again … he's got a completely different lifestyle than I do. And my sister Marilyn has got a younger [child] and she's got different responsibilities and … they're in different economic circumstances as well. And she lives in a small town so I would imagine her life is very different from mine. (Megan)

Marilyn, struggling to balance her full-time job and tight financial situation with taking care of her daughter, also draws contrasts among the siblings' lifestyles:

> Ours is totally different from my sisters' and my brother's is totally different from anybody else's … [M]y two sisters are very high profile, high power, … huge companies … My brother lives in his own little apartment and works at a little job … So everything's different. (Marilyn)

When compared with his sisters, Matt says that his life is "radically different because they all have children. … I think my priorities are making sure the rent is paid and just keeping my head above water whereas theirs are obviously centered on their children." His modest income also distinguishes his lifestyle from that of his oldest siblings.

The family cottage, currently owned by their mother, is a contentious issue for the Moore siblings because views about the cottage, the amount of free time to spend there, and the ability to contribute financially differ among them. Marilyn observes: "We still have the cottage, but … everybody has a vested interest so some people don't agree with how things should be. So we haven't visited that one for quite some time." Megan's option, her own country "mansion," is not possible for Marilyn.

Lifestyle differences that result from socioeconomic inequality have variable consequences for these two groups of siblings. On balance, differences in work, material resources, and lifestyle take their toll on the Moore siblings' relationships. Time spent with each other rests heavily on whether there are common interests, and common interests and concerns are subject to material resources. In the Elkin family, the real difference that money makes to the way life is lived is minimized in a focus on what the siblings share: the pleasures of life that money cannot buy. Do life course factors in the two families aid our understanding of the different effect of material inequality on current sibling relationships?

Work History

Paid work across the life course provides an important backdrop to appreciating current variations in labor force experience and socioeconomic status, and the effect of past and present work situations on negotiating material inequality among siblings. Although both groups of siblings share the fact of different work and family histories, the implications of this difference vary. Eva, the oldest Elkin sibling, views her work history as one of choice, the exercise of agency, and continues to find the creativity of her work very satisfying.

> After I finished my high school—and I just fell in love with weaving at that point—I … got a job, and … I got pregnant and got married … [S]o I did [weaving] … in my house when the children were little at home, and when they were … at school, … and it turned into a business … It's been full time work since my children [grew up] … [When they were young] I went to work a few times … to increase my income for a while … [but] I still worked [at home] being a housekeeper, a mistress, a cook, a cleaner, a taxi, organizing … That's what I wanted to do. I wanted to be there … And I could do both things at the same time. (Eva)

In Elsa's case, "I did the hospitality management thing for … about 10 years [during her 20s] … And just working and sleeping and working … It was hard." This experience of hard work when younger may be one reason that her relative affluence now has not adversely affected Elsa's relationship with her siblings. Then Elsa "got pregnant … And that was the last job and then Phil [her partner] said, 'Never mind about that. Let's just go [to Europe].'" Since then, Elsa has been a homemaker and "I really love it. I've always said to everybody, 'I just want to get married and have lots and lots of kids and look after them all and stay home.'"

When comparing her work to that of her siblings, Emmi emphasizes a critical difference between them: "I think my brothers and sisters and my mother worked to live … to be able to live. I worked to have fun. Money really wasn't important to me. And I was making a lot. Maybe that's why it wasn't so important." Emmi has been out of the workforce since having children, and she is happy with the choice that she has made, as are her sisters. Erik shares his sisters' preference to spend time with his children:

> I guess I'm mellowing out. I'm just happy where I am. I'm happy that I'm working. Work isn't a priority for me … I think that for me being at home has always been the priority. I think that is reflective of … when I was growing up because my Mum and Dad weren't home. I found that missing and I need that [to be home with his children]. (Erik)

The Moore siblings claim a key shared value regarding work, but this does not tend to provide a bond among them. Martha says:

> I think we all have the premise of work ethic. We all … are proud. Maybe some [of us] have different ends in sight, but I think we're very similar in that way. We all do completely different things mind you but it's there. The premise of work ethic is alive and well with us in the second generation. (Martha)

The other Moore siblings confirm quite disparate work experiences. Matt describes the paid work of his siblings: "Marilyn's [work] … is physically grueling … Megan's is no less grueling but it's not as physical. Martha's … is pretty good. She applies herself, but … she makes it look like she's not working at all."

Megan also observes variations among the sisters, but her focus is on flexibility and job security:

My sister, Martha, she's worked for her husband all the years … Because it's their own business, she's had a lot more flexibility in terms of time off and doing other things. And my sister, Marilyn, … she would have liked to have had more work than what she had, but … she's got a permanent job now, a full-time job. She hasn't very often had that kind of a job … I work for a big company. It's pretty different. (Megan)

Marilyn notes that her sisters "work longer hours but not in shifts." Shift work makes balancing paid work and child care particularly challenging for Marilyn. Her older sisters have that problem behind them by virtue of being at a different stage in the life course. The fact that Megan managed to build a successful and lucrative career while she was a single mother leaves Marilyn in awe but also distanced from her older sister. The difference in work histories among the sisters has produced variations in current circumstances that are perceived as barriers to close bonds at this point in their lives.

In sum, the Elkin siblings share two important factors regarding their work history: a commitment to making their children a priority while they are/were growing up and the view of their quite varied work histories as chosen. The Moore siblings emphasize differences in the kind of work they have performed, in work trajectories, and in job flexibility regarding holidays and the balance of paid work with family. The sisters, all mothers, vary substantially in their assessment of their work; Martha is quite content, Megan is successful but stressed, and Marilyn struggles to find and keep a full-time job while raising her daughter. They do not express common ground regarding their priorities or their view of work, and the differences in their ability to make time for children creates some envy among them. Thus, the challenges of variations in work history for negotiating sibling ties extend beyond the effect of income differences alone.

I now consider family history by analyzing the siblings' observations about childhood and parental expectations. Do their reflections suggest factors that either facilitate or impede successfully negotiating material inequality?

Childhood Reflections

A striking contrast between the two families is the focus of their observations. The Elkin siblings talk more about the emotional content of their family relationships; the Moore siblings talk more about one another's personal traits and how these influenced what they were encouraged to do by their parents.

The Elkin siblings agree that they were close and they all include siblings as among the most important people to them when they were young. Eva's brothers came first to her during childhood and adolescence. Emmi, the youngest, says, "I was always with Eva. I loved being with Eva" and includes her as one of the most important people to her while growing up. Erik also puts Eva in this category, "especially in my … later teen years and early 20s … I always would end up going to Eva first … because I felt I would be better understood"

The Elkin's describe a childhood of mutual dependence, with particular reliance on the oldest sibling, Eva, but also the next two oldest, brothers Ed and Erik. Meeting the challenges wrought by their father's departure created interdependence among the siblings, strengthening their ties to one another. Eva observes:

I didn't have a chance to be a teenager. Cooking, cleaning, day care, all the time … while my mother went to work. And she did shift work … I was just the oldest, big sister and that was my responsibility … [M]y brothers … had a part-time job. … We were a unit, and … everybody had to give a third of your earnings to be there … It probably made us pretty strong together … Because we were a lot of the time alone together. (Eva)

Erik recalls being close to Eva because she was always there, "and that's still the same … [Elsa and Emmi] were quite a bit younger … We always seemed to be getting along when we had to." The difference in responsibility separated the older three from the younger two siblings. Says Eva: "by … the time my two youngest sisters were grown up, it was an easier time … [When] they were teenagers, they didn't have responsibilities like we had … So, they had a different sense of themselves, sense of the world maybe."

Leaving home typically enhanced relationships among the Elkin siblings. After Eva left, married, and had her baby, Emmi visited constantly. For Elsa, having a sister serve as "mother" created an ambivalent situation that was resolved after Eva left home:

I just absolutely hated my older sister Eva. She made our lives really miserable because she was miserable … Then … she became the rock

because she was having her own family … And … ours wasn't there any more so every time we needed … anything, we could go there and she … would take care of us. (Elsa)

In turn, Emmi recalls that she and Elsa "fought all the time … until she left" for Europe at 18. Emmi joined her a few months later and "we became really good friends."

The responsibilities of the older siblings affected their own economic future. In Elsa's view, big brother Ed's support exacted a high long-term price:

My brother Ed … nobody could have been better and greater and bigger… [helping financially] hurt him the most because … my mother made us all feel that we had to contribute … So Ed, my brother, he worked in the summer months and he made big money for kids back then but gave most of it to my mother. Ultimately he dropped out of school and … it sort of fell apart for him. (Elsa)

In sum, the Elkin siblings experienced a high degree of interdependence and closeness as children, but this did not always mean smooth sailing; Eva felt she did not have a chance to be a teenager, Elsa "hated" her for being too controlling, Emmi thought Erik was mean. Leaving home heightened their appreciation of one another. Interdependent sibling relationships in which Eva served as a key supporter may have set the stage for her positive response to her younger sisters' future economic success.

As with the Elkin's, the number and age spread of the Moore siblings created unique situations when they were growing up. Martha recalls, "We were like a team. My dad always treated us like a team." She also observes that "I was on my own most of the time," and the other siblings' perceptions of team membership tend to follow coalitions based on age. Megan remembers:

Well, there was 11 years between the oldest and the youngest … There was a bit of the older pack and the younger pack … My youngest sister and I were part of the younger pack and then my two older sisters were the older pack. There were always sometimes these little wars going on between us. And then my brother, he was always the baby. (Megan)

Matt notes that this isolation had its advantages:

There's this five-year gap … so, … I was excluded a lot. I had to learn to play on my own

and try to be good company for myself … Looking back on it, I was pretty privileged … When I got old enough, my father started taking me on hunting and fishing trips so that's something they really never had with him that I did have. (Matt)

Marilyn's description of her childhood reveals individuals with different characteristics but says little of their relationships with one another:

My oldest sister was … 6 years older than me so I didn't know her very well. But she was a very … very fun loving, very caring, sensitive individual. My sister [Martha] … my second oldest sister was very withdrawn … My sister Megan, the one that I knew, that I know the most, is 2 years older than I am. She was very popular in school. Very athletic minded. Very much a bookworm. Just seemed to be able to do everything. My brother, he was not sports minded … He just seemed … full of thought. (Marilyn)

Although three of the four Moore siblings include their siblings among the important people to them when growing up, none of them dwells on the meaning or nature of their sibling ties. Martha says, "We've had good-bad, good-bad all through the years." The one topic that all three sisters speak about very warmly is summers and Christmas holidays spent at the family cottage, but again, the focus is not their relationships with one another. Marilyn remembers: "We had a summer cottage which was purchased probably two to three years before I was born, and we spent our entire summers there … It was fabulous." Ironically, this shared love of the cottage now threatens their ties with each other.

The Moore siblings spoke very little about the departure of their father and the effect of their parents' divorce on their ties to one another. Without elaborating, Martha claims that their mother's response to her husband leaving was to turn her children against each other and "we didn't see through that; we just listened to her." Thus, a key contrast between the two families is the extent to which parental divorce prompted the siblings to work together. In the Elkin family, economic necessity prompted everyone, the older siblings more so, to engage in supportive relationships with one another. In the Moore family, there was no financial impetus to work together. Although both sibling groups describe divides among the siblings based on age group, interdependence brought the younger and older Elkin siblings together; in the Moore family, there was not a parallel catalyst.

Parental Expectations and Encouragement

The Elkin's share the view that their mother did not encourage any particular pursuits in any of her children. Although their father was mostly absent, Eva remembers:

> My father encouraged me to be an artist and that was the last thing I wanted to do … My mother never encouraged us at all. She didn't have time … [S]he just wanted us to get a job and to work, so we could be ok. But there was no focus on education or career or anything like that … [S]he thought probably once you were married … you would be fine … . (Eva)

Thus, there was little differentiation among the siblings by their mother; the focus was on work as a means to financial security, regardless of individual characteristics or gender. For the girls, marriage was an additional route.

In the Moore family, Martha describes her father's generally old-school but inconsistent view of women and work:

> My Dad was very contradictory … He encouraged us to get married and to have boyfriends and go out and see the world; and on the other hand, he didn't encourage us to go on in school … I loved him dearly, but he was a terrible male chauvinist. And women, what are they good for but to stay home? … And then … he wouldn't let us take secretarial at high school … That was too low. (Martha)

Marilyn confirms her father's sexist views of ability and their negative effect on her:

> I don't know what it was they expected us to do, except I do know that my Dad … was really very restricting … I honestly believe that my father didn't think that girls had brains … He always made me feel that I was second best … I was never given any encouragement to … do what I was best at doing. (Marilyn)

The difference made of gender by their father was offset for Megan by his assessment of her personal ability. Martha notes that Megan was encouraged to go further because she was "so smart." Meanwhile, Megan recollects "no aspirations for university or postsecondary education at all. Never mentioned, not encouraged," for any of the siblings. Marilyn and Matt recall that, as a boy, Matt was pressured to play sports even though he was not very good at them, and Martha believes that their father had "huge" expectations of Matt "because he

was a boy and my father was old-fashioned that way."

In sum, the Elkin siblings recall little about parental encouragement or expectations and, consequently, little distinction among them by their parents on this basis. In the Moore family, some siblings believe that both gender and personal attributes played into different expectations. Having had a parent make such distinctions among them as children may help account for the Moore siblings' greater emphasis on individual differences and its negative effect on their relationships.

DISCUSSION

Clearly, two case studies cannot establish general trends in sibling ties. Listening to multiple voices, however, increases the range of revelations and unveils the *dynamics* of relationships by showing both similar and different points of view. The experiences of the Elkin and Moore families show that the relatively egalitarian and voluntary nature of sibling ties does not relieve them of either inequality or structural ambivalence. In both cases, there is substantial socioeconomic inequality that is evident in variable work histories and lifestyles. In both families, those with more in common tend to spend more time together, but the Elkin sibling ties are closer and more involved despite similar variations in economic resources and living farther apart. For the Moore siblings, relative resources and the different lifestyles they afford create barriers to closeness. Important parallels between the two families make some possible explanations for this difference unlikely: family size, number of participants, gender and age composition of the sibling networks, and the prior divorce of the parents and subsequent death of their father.

Conceptual distinctions among various forms of capital are useful for exploring this study's observations about negotiating inequality among siblings. In her discussion of stratification across the life course, O'Rand (2001) delineates six major forms of capital: personal, psychophysical, social, human, economic, and institutional. This study has highlighted variations in human and economic capital in its focus on socioeconomic inequality among siblings, but the analysis reveals their connection to social capital and, to a lesser extent, personal capital. Human capital refers to an individual's capacity to produce

resources on the basis of years of schooling, paid work, skills, and knowledge; economic capital refers to the transformation of human capital into tangible resources such as income (O'Rand, 2001). The cases of the Elkin and Moore families show that adult siblings can experience marked disparities in both human and economic capital. The analysis of their relationships over time demonstrates that the influence of these disparities on the quality of sibling ties can vary.

Social capital refers to social ties that individuals can utilize (O'Rand, 2001). Retrospective and current reflections suggest that sibling ties are more likely to be a source of social capital, despite material inequality, when childhood sibling ties are interdependent; when there is limited differentiation among siblings by parents based on gender or personal characteristics; and when upward social mobility relative to one's parents is shared, even if siblings do not share the same socioeconomic status once adults. The findings also suggest the merits of exploring whether inequality that favors the younger rather than the older siblings is less likely to threaten sibling ties, and whether the sources of economic success—individual effort, a spouse's income, the serendipity of life—make a difference to how siblings respond to and negotiate unequal human and economic capital.

In the Elkin family, the financial repercussions of divorce required the mother to work and all the children to help out. This interdependence brought the Elkin siblings close to one another as adults and formed the foundation for transforming their ties into long-term and significant social capital. Variations in personal capital, the psychosocial dimension that includes resiliency, positive affect, self-confidence, and competence (O'Rand, 2001), have not interfered with building social capital for these siblings, in part because very little was made of them by their parents. Their continuing commitment to one another is reflected in efforts to forge stronger ties among those who are less close, to be there when needed, and to minimize differences in human and economic capital by focusing on fundamental similarities among them. The ongoing sense of caring and concern that is the outcome of converting sibling ties into social capital prompts sharing material resources, thus redistributing human and economic capital. For these siblings, the social capital of their relationships transcends the negative effect that inequalities in human and economic capital might have on their ties with

one another, much as siblings with strong emotional bonds are able to find fairness in the unequal sharing of support to parents (Matthews, 2002) or an unequal inheritance (Stum, 1999).

For the Moore's, parental divorce did not require a major change in the mother's daily life in terms of work and financial situation. Instead, the mother's tendency to play the children off against each other and the father's attention to variations in personal capital encouraged a sense of individualism among the siblings. Thus, divorce did not have the effect of drawing the siblings together or enhancing their relationships with one another as a source of social capital. Their relatively independent lives as children continue into adulthood; their relationships with one another are far more subject to the lifestyles that their relative economic capital allows and the siblings offer limited support to one another when compared with the Elkin's.

In their study of sibling inequity in parent care, Ingersoll-Dayton et al. (2003) argue that siblings will try to forge either actual equity, by requesting additional aid from siblings who give less, or psychological equity, by changing how inequity is perceived. In their emphasis on sharing the same basic values and concerns, the Elkin siblings appear to forge psychological equity, minimizing their focus on material differences and maximizing their focus on those criteria that make them equals. In contrast, the Moore siblings appear not to have found bases for forging either actual or psychological equity; instead, material differences undermine their ties to one another.

The call to consider macro-meso-micro links in familial relationships is answered by the observations of the siblings studied here. Structured social relations and social welfare or institutional capital at the macrolevel are connected to the degree and negotiation of inequality in human and economic capital between families at the mesolevel, and within families at the micro- or individual level. In the case of the Elkin's and Moore's, the intersection of gender and class created quite different circumstances in the families of origin. Typical of their time, the mothers of both families were not in the labor force when their husbands left, a result of gendered social relations. The father's sexist views in the Moore family reproduced a system of unequal gender relations that took its toll at the individual level through its effect on personal capital. In Marilyn Moore's case, her father's failure to offer

encouragement to the girls in the family undermined her sense of her own ability.

Their different class positions led Eila Elkin into the labor force and allowed Margaret Moore to remain at home. These different individual outcomes in turn created quite varied family experiences for the two sibling groups, influencing their relationships with each other. Research suggests that siblings raised in working-class families, like the Elkin's, are encouraged to identify with each other; middle-class families, like the Moore's, are more likely to promote competition among siblings (Matthews, 2005b). The experiences of the Elkin and Moore families suggest that social class in the family of origin has a persistent effect on sibling relationships, despite variations among the siblings in their material resources as adults.

Structured gender relations also affect the internal dynamics of family relations in the two families. In the Elkin family, the sisters enjoy uniquely intimate ties with one another, and this intimacy helps to offset the potential threats of material inequality to their relationships. Meanwhile, Matt Moore attributes outsider status as a sibling, greater access to his father as a child, and fewer current hassles with his mother to being the only male in his generation. At the same time, when compared with his sisters, he expresses the strongest attachment to his siblings, in part because of their support during his transition to being a widower. The need to attend to cross-cutting structured social relations is once again evident in the combined influence of gender and age in the Elkin family. The oldest sister, Eva, is much more inclined to turn to her brother than are her younger sisters because he has shared a position of responsibility in their family as a function of age.

Variation in the economic capital of their childhood is the basis for a difference between the two families that brings us back to the opening discussion of intergenerational social mobility. All members of the Elkin family (except possibly, Ed, who did not participate) have exceeded the comparatively low levels of human and economic capital of their childhood, resulting in upward social mobility. Despite unequal resources, they have the shared experience of being better off than they were as children and of being able to sustain a desired lifestyle as adults. In the Moore family, the older two sisters have either matched or surpassed the good economic circumstances of their youth, but their younger sister and brother have not. The counterexperien-

ces of upward and downward social mobility may inhibit close sibling relationships.

The combination of intra- and intergenerational inequality in economic capital may further undermine the building of sibling ties as a form of social capital. For the Moore siblings, the shared financial comforts of their childhood and the successful efforts of the older two sisters combine to set a higher standard that the younger two siblings, Marilyn and Matt, have failed to reach. Matt's relationships with his mother and siblings do not appear to suffer from this difference, perhaps in part because he attributes variations between his experience and that of his sisters to gender and being childless. Meanwhile, Marilyn is very aware of the negative effect that her poorer economic circumstances have had on her life, particularly regarding the greater difficulty she faces in balancing work and family when compared with either her sisters or mother (see Connidis, 2005b).

Negotiating structural ambivalence that is created by the clash between assumed egalitarianism and substantial material inequality among siblings appears to be affected by two additional mesolevel factors: the position of the siblings in the family who have more human and economic capital and the source of economic capital. In the Elkin family, the younger sisters have more economic capital and its primary source is their partner's wealth; thus, lower income is not a function of less personal success on behalf of the older siblings. The older Elkin siblings' parent-like relationship to the younger ones during their childhood may also be the basis for a sense of pride in their accomplishment and relief in their independence. In the Moore family, the greater economic success of the older sisters is due in part or whole to the sisters' efforts in paid work. Failure to reach the high benchmark that they have set cannot be reduced to their good luck, creating an ambivalent situation for the younger siblings.

The Elkin siblings' general supportiveness does not mean escaping ambivalence. Eva's struggle to be less of a mother to her younger sisters illustrates the connection between sociological and psychological ambivalence; her mixed emotions of love and frustration stem from the structurally ambivalent situation of simultaneously serving as peer and parent in her family of origin. Although mixed sentiments toward siblings are highest among adolescents (Fingerman & Hay, 2004), such ambivalence is generally most likely in very close and involved relationships

(Fingerman et al., 2004). The intensely close mother-like relationship of Eva to her siblings heightens the potential for ambivalent feelings. As persons age, sentiments toward siblings appear to move from being ambivalent to being solely positive (Fingerman & Hay, 2004). The fact that two of Eva's siblings discuss and respect her need for change illustrates the efforts of these siblings to negotiate ambivalence in their relationships as they age.

Although the unique situations of the Elkin and Moore families provide an analytical advantage, they also place limits on generalizing the results. More research is needed to see whether the findings stemming from their experiences apply to other types of families. In particular, future research should consider families that have fewer siblings, parents with long-term intact relationships, stepparents, step- and half-siblings, and different backgrounds. Further exploration of variations in all forms of capital, including personal and psychophysical, would also broaden our understanding of the effect of inequality on sibling ties and of the link between the sociological and psychological dimensions of sibling ties.

Even for the baby boom, the two families that have been the focus of this study are unusually large, heightening the potential for inequality among them. What happens when many families have only two or three children? The observed increase in dissimilarity in education, occupation, and income among siblings over time, despite declines in family size, suggests that factors beyond family size create socioeconomic differences among siblings. Divorce and the subsequent repartnering of parents add other types of sibling relationships to families and create less uniformity in experience among siblings while they are growing up. These changes may simultaneously threaten equality and the social capital potential of sibling ties and heighten the significance of sibling ties as long-term relationships of mutual support. Thus, understanding the effect of inequality among siblings on their relationships with one another is an important topic for further study.

More multiple unions of various forms instill a more fluid sense of what constitutes family and may reenergize family relations as a self-conscious community effort; less is taken for granted, more is consciously constructed. With parents encouraging full, half-, and step-siblings to think and act "like family," there is a renewed possibility of living family life with a shared interest in building social capital. Such apparent affinity, of course, could be born of the inequality that comes from different types of relatedness to parents and the attempt to protect future economic capital through inheritance (Bornat, Dimmock, Jones, & Peace, 1999; Crosbie-Burnett & McClintic, 2000).

The qualitative analysis of this study suggests that interdependence, parallel treatment by parents, a shared experience of matching or surpassing the class background of one's childhood, and having relative advantage in the hands of younger rather than older siblings enhance the negotiation of sibling ties as social capital, despite variations in human and economic capital. A challenge for future research is to use varied and larger samples to explore these findings in order to better understand the circumstances that alter the effect of unequal human and economic capital on sibling relationships. Future research should also consider how these factors relate to institutional capital. The negotiation of adult sibling relations as social capital may be the silver-lining by-product of a nonsupportive state that forces reliance on informal ties, or the positive outcome of a state that encourages investing in informal bonds by offering collective support to its citizens (see Woolcock, 2001). This significant difference is at the heart of encouragements to consider how our personal and family lives relate to the larger institutional and structural arrangements in which they are embedded.

NOTE

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