Coping with Siblings and Peers: How College Students Deal with Stress on Interpersonal and Individual Bases

Deborah J. Kennerson

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

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COPING WITH SIBLINGS AND PEERS:
HOW COLLEGE STUDENTS DEAL WITH STRESS ON
INTERPERSONAL AND INDIVIDUAL BASES

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Psychology
The College of William and Mary

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Deborah J. Kennerson
1991
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

[Signature]
Author

Approved, May 1991

[Signature]
Deborah G. Ventis, Ph.D.

[Signature]
Joseph Galano, Ph.D.

[Signature]
Neill Watson, Ph.D.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHOD</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISCUSSION</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Distribution by birth order and mean number of siblings for the participants with siblings</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Partial Correlations between SRQ Dimensions and Coping Strategy</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Partial Correlations of Peer Relationship Qualities to Coping Strategy</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>MANOVA for Target Situation by Coping Strategy Chosen for Subjects with Siblings</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>MANOVA Target Situation by Coping Strategy for Only Children</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The Number of Participants per Degree of Resolution</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Multiple Regression Coefficients for Prediction of Degree of Resolution of the Sibling Situation from Coping Strategy</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Multiple Regression Coefficients for the Prediction of the Degree of Resolution for the Peer Situation from the Coping Strategy for participants with Siblings</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Multiple Regression Coefficients for the Prediction of the Degree of Resolution for the Peer Situation from the Coping Strategy for Only Children</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Mean Relative Ways of Coping Scores for Participants with Siblings</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Means for the Relative Ways of Coping Scores for Only Children</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Mean Relative Ways of Coping Scores for Interpersonal Situations</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Mean Relative Ways of Coping Scores for the Individual Situation</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the hypothesis that coping strategies chosen in stressful interpersonal situations may be related to the relationship qualities between the people involved in the situation. It was expected that due to the uniqueness of sibling relationships, the degree of association between relationship qualities and coping strategies chosen in stressful interpersonal situations may be different depending upon whether or not one had siblings. In addition it was expected that there would be differences in coping strategy choice between interpersonal and individual situations.

The participants were 172 undergraduate students, 81 only children and 91 sibling children, who received course credit for participation. The participants completed the Ways of Coping Questionnaire (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988), the Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (SRQ, Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) and/or a modified version of the SRQ for a close friend and the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960).

The results showed moderate support for an association between relationship qualities and coping strategy for participants with siblings. No support was found for the only children. While individual situations were dealt with in similar ways by both types of participants, there were differences in the way they dealt with interpersonal situations. Hypotheses pertaining to specific coping patterns are discussed as well as possible limitations of presently employed measures.
COPING WITH SIBLINGS AND PEERS: HOW COLLEGE STUDENTS COPE ON INTERPERSONAL AND INDIVIDUAL BASES
Examination of the influence of the various agents of socialization reveals a relatively recent shift in emphasis from parental effects to the evaluation of sibling effects on later behaviors and personality characteristics (Kreppner, Paulsen & Schultze, 1982; Lamb, 1982; Rosenberg, 1982). An abundance of research accompanied the recent emphasis on the developmental significance of the sibling. Many personality characteristics have been studied with respect to sibling status: achievement motivation, social awareness and responsibility (Sutton-Smith, 1982; Perlin & Grater, 1984; Pulakos, 1987). These personality characteristics have been correlated with several sibling-associated variables, including the age range between siblings and gender.

The effects of sibling status are often described as resulting from interactions between siblings (Abramovitch, Pepler & Corter, 1982). Although some well conceived sibling status research finds effects on personality variables, much of the research is methodologically flawed and findings are inconsistent (Pulakos, 1987; Bedford, 1989). There are, however, some relatively consistent and agreed upon
relationships worthy of note.

Birth order researchers have shown relationships among first and later born children. There is an unquestionable relationship between first born children and eminence, or academic achievement. First borns are over-represented in college and other scholarly populations. Second borns, on the other hand, are significantly more socially adept than their older siblings. Miller and Maruyama (1976) speculate that the cause of this higher level of social functioning can be traced back to interactions with the first born child. They argue that first borns hold an inherent power over the later born siblings. This power necessitates the development of social skills in later born children that allow for the accommodation and toleration of older siblings. In addition, there is a consistent, negative relationship between the perceived balance of status and power in a sibling relationship and birth order. Younger children typically ascribe less power to themselves and more power to their older siblings, and vice versa (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985).

Researchers using Adler’s theory of birth order effects emphasize the psychological position of the
siblings, not the ordinal position (Pulakos, 1987; Lohman, Lohman & Christensen, 1985). Unfortunately, those who subscribe to this formulation have difficulty supporting their ideas with empirical results (Steelman & Powell, 1985; Prochaska & Prochaska, 1985). There are, however, consistent findings, parallelling research using social functioning and status/power relationship dimensions, concerning the interpersonal dimensions of dominance-submission. Perlin and Grater (1984) confirmed that oldest children are significantly more dominant and aggressive interpersonally than other siblings (includes parameters of competitive, exploitative, managerial and autocratic behavior, as indexed by the Interpersonal Behavior Checklist, Laforge & Suczek, 1955). They also found that oldest children score significantly lower on parameters related to submission, specifically modest, self-effacing, docile and dependent behaviors. In support of Abramovitch et al.’s (1982) findings, Perlin and Grater (1984) suspect that the larger social repertoire of the oldest child augments the finding that the oldest are more assertive (by their willingness to endorse several types of behaviors). This conclusion,
however, may be false. Both studies fail to consider developmental maturity as a possible reason for the larger social repertoire. The larger repertoire, however, is not equated with social adeptness. The younger children are still found to be more socially skilled than their older siblings, despite the fact that their older siblings have access to a larger number of behaviors.

Although Rosenberg (1982) advocates supplementing ordinal birth position with other structural variables, other relationships are not found as reliably. Cicirelli (1975) and Dunn and Kendrick (1979) found that same gender siblings engaged in more extensive and positive interactions than mixed gender siblings, although two studies by Lamb (1978a, 1978b) and one by Ross and Milgram (1982) found no such effect. In addition, although White (1975) found that the more closely spaced siblings exhibited more negativity in their relationship, Abramovitch et al. (1982) did not. One moderate correlation that has been found reliably is a relative increase in closeness of a sibling relationship when the siblings are of the same sex. Overall, Abramovitch et al. (1982) hypothesize that
gender and age may be irrelevant to the sibling relationship; the most salient aspect of the sibling relationship is the fact that they are siblings.

In his framework, Adler (1969) made the assumption that the parent-child relationship, specifically siblings vying for parental attention, is the most influential factor in a child’s emotional and social development. This assumption is seen in descriptions of early relationships in terms of jealousy and rivalry for parental attention (Dunn & Kendrick, 1982). In fact, Ross and Milgram (1982) found that competition for recognition, approval, acceptance or love from a parent are rarely mentioned as causes of sibling rivalry. Most often rivalry seems to be based on personal dimensions such as traits, competencies, preferences and behaviors. Although many of Alder’s specific ideas about sibling rivalry have been largely discounted, the specific influence of the sibling on development has not.

Sibling relationships have been described as unique (Bedford, 1989; Pulakos, 1987; Cicirelli, 1980). They are considered qualitatively different from other relationships with respect to the enduring nature and
duration of the sibling relationship (Allan, 1977; Cicirelli, 1982), the ascribed rather than earned role, common genetic history and early experiences (Cicirelli, 1982). In addition, as Lamb (1982) points out, excluding marital relationships, an opposite-sex sibling relationship is one of the few heterosexual relationships in which affection and closeness can be openly expressed without any social repercussions. During unstructured interactions, siblings play the roles of friend, confidante, rival and parent (Cicirelli, 1980, 1982; Bryant, 1982; Ross & Milgram, 1982).

In addition to the emphasis on sibling roles during childhood, there is emerging concern with sibling effects throughout the lifespan (Cicirelli, 1982; Lamb, 1982). The lasting effects of the early "formative" years on adult functioning and personality character formation is unquestioned (Cicirelli, 1982). Adler (1969) believed that individuals acquire a certain style of relating to others in childhood, which they carry into their adult interactions. During this time children learn much about social interaction from their parents (Papalia & Olds, 1986). However,
children learn a great deal about relationships, especially about their peer relationships, and on a daily basis if they have a sibling (Watanabe-Hammond, 1982; Bowerman & Dobash, 1974).

Many researchers find (Bowerman & Dobash, 1974; Cicirelli, 1982; Lamb, 1982) that most individuals, despite the recent changes in family size trends, spend the first quarter of their lives as children in a family with one or more brothers and sisters. In the early years, siblings are the most readily available playmates a child has. With regard to socialization, siblings have been found to take on many different roles including models to imitate by setting and maintaining social standards, giving advice and aiding in the development and practice of social and interactional skills (Cicirelli, 1980, 1982; Lamb, 1982). It seems logical that siblings, with whom social interaction takes place daily, would have primary effects on both cognitive and social development, and later interpersonal functioning (Cicirelli, 1980b; Lamb, 1982, Buhrmester & Furman, 1990). Abramovitch et al. (1982) conclude that, due to the high level of sibling involvement, it is highly
likely that the pattern of interpersonal interactions established in that relationship will affect all other social interactions as well as the general course of their socialization. It has yet to be established, however, to what degree the sibling relationship may be mirrored in other interpersonal relationships.

Polit and Falbo (1987) discuss four theoretical mechanisms that would result in fundamental differences between only children and sibling children. These include, (a) the "unique" mechanism that states only children experience the world in a unique way, (b) the "deprivation" mechanism that states only children are deprived of experiences that sibling children receive, (c) the socioeconomic status of the parents of only children and (d) the differences in the parent-child relationship.

Popular culture holds that only children are often more egocentric, less cooperative and affiliative and more maladjusted than sibling children (Jiao, Ji & Jing, 1986). Abramovitch et al., (1982) believes that individuals without siblings may develop social skills quite differently than those with siblings. Taking into account the great influence siblings appear to
exert on one another, an only child may need to find substitute relationships to make up for the lack of sibship. Falbo (1982) has proposed that because of a lack of sibling rivalry, only children may acquire a more trusting style of interaction than individuals with siblings.

One aspect of interpersonal function involves the ability to resolve conflicts and stressful situations successfully and appropriately. Pearlin and Schooler (1978) define coping as a response to external life strains that serve to prevent, avoid, or control emotional and psychological distress. Folkman and Lazarus (1984) along with Compas (1987) believe that coping is not limited to successful efforts, but includes all purposeful attempts to manage stress, regardless of effectiveness. Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Shetter, DeLongis and Gruen (1986) partition coping behavior into the two major functions it serves for an individual: the first is to regulate stressful emotions (emotion-focused coping) and the second is to alter the troubled person-environment relations (problem-focused coping). They believe that both are necessary for effective coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1982). Pearlin
and Schooler (1978) state that the effectiveness of a coping strategy rest on its ability to reduce stress or minimize psychosocial outcomes of a situation.

Shure and Spivak (1988) are also in agreement that it is the process of problem solving, not the content of the solution, that contributes most to behavioral adjustment of an individual. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) have a similar opinion regarding coping: They believe that it is the process and function of the coping strategy, not the strategy in itself that is important. They believe that appraisal of the specific situation is an essential part of this process. In their model, appraisal of a situation takes place in two steps: Primary appraisal, occurs when the individual decides "what is at stake" in the present situation, while secondary appraisal is the process of making their coping choice from known strategies.

Howes and Markman (1989) have a slightly different point of view. They state that a repertoire of coping responses may be more predictive of effective coping than one particular coping style. The extent to which people use an assessable pattern of coping responses across situations may be related to other stable
behavioral traits of individuals and their relationships or to characteristics of the situation.

Many responses to a situation may be effective, but appropriateness is a major consideration in interpersonal relationships (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Shure and Spivak (1988) believe that the interpersonal relationships of people who do not have effective problem solving skills suffer. Good problem solvers are able to deal effectively with stress, they are flexible and adaptive in different social circumstances and develop suitable and appropriate methods to attain goals and satisfy needs (Durlak, 1983). In terms of Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) model of appraisal, both types of appraisal should be related to effectiveness.

Wortman and Dunkel-Shetter (1979) report consistent, positive relationships between the quality of medical patients’ interpersonal relationships and their ability to cope with an illness. In addition, they found that the employment of poor (negative) coping strategies correlates with less support from close friends over time. It seems logical that the qualities of a relationship when the individual is not under any atypical stress should be related to coping
ability. Coping research involving the comparison of siblings focuses almost exclusively on how siblings cope with another’s illness or mental disabilities (Bryant, 1978; Kagen-Goodheart, 1977; Lewis & Armstrong, 1977). There is a dearth of research exploring the coping strategies employed by siblings in more common stressful situations, and how these strategies compare with those used in non-sibling relationships.

Work, Levinson and Hightower (1990) classify self-reliance and seeking social support as positive coping strategies while wishful thinking, distancing, and immobilization were classified as negative coping strategies. They define effective coping as a high positive and low negative combination. Elias, Gara, Ubriaco, Rothbaum, Clabby and Schuyler (1986) found that effective social problem solving skills led to a reduced risk of coping difficulties. They defined problem solving skills as involving the process of deciding what behavior will be most effective, not choosing the specific strategy.

Toman (1976) states that people tend to generalize experiences from familiar to new social contexts. It
is common knowledge that situations that have occurred more frequently, more regularly and earlier in life are likely to exert a greater influence on an individual’s choice of attitudes and behaviors. During the stages of socialization, family models, especially those of the parents and siblings, facilitate an individuals’ acquisition of basic coping styles (Rim, 1986). Social interaction with one’s family may provide the reinforcing effects Elias et al., (1986) believe are essential to the generalization of coping strategies to new social situations. With the influence siblings have over one another and the reinforcement obtained from these interactions, it could be expected that within the context of sibling relations, the "teaching" of problem solving skills would be fairly effective, and likely to generalize to other situations.

It has been suggested that in some aspects of socialization, the influence of parents and siblings should be given equal weight (Landy, Rosenberg & Sutton-Smith, 1969; Sutton-Smith, Rosenberg & Landy, 1968). A comparison can be made between the vertical influence of parents on their children’s coping abilities versus the influence of a child’s siblings
(Bedford, 1989). In general, sibling and peer relationships provide more latitude for children’s use of coping responses. These "horizontal" relationships allow for more compromise and negotiation in resolving interpersonal conflicts than does the inherent power structure of vertical parent-child relationship. Therefore, when taking into consideration the influence of early experiences, the more equitable relationship of the siblings may be of more importance when examining later coping behaviors.

In 1986, Folkman et al., concluded that a context-oriented approach is critical in determining coping preferences. This supported their earlier finding that there is a significant increase in problem-focused coping with the emotional involvement of one’s self-esteem or a person’s family (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Based on these findings, it may be expected that problem-focused coping strategies would be used more often when a stressful situation involves a sibling than a friend.

Overall, the purpose of the present study is to evaluate the association between a person’s interpersonal coping style and the qualities of his or
her relationships with siblings and peers. It is believed that the more positive the relationship characteristics one has with peers and siblings, the more the "effective" styles of interpersonal coping, such as problem solving, will be utilized. It is also expected that the types of coping strategies chosen will be related to the perceived effectiveness of coping.

Based on the research involving the possible difference in interpersonal interactions of individuals with and without siblings, it is hypothesized that interpersonal coping strategies may be related to the presence or absence of siblings. The relationship between individual and interpersonal coping will be explored: Specifically, whether or not similar coping strategies are employed in both interpersonal and individual situations.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 172 undergraduates enrolled in Introduction to Psychology classes, who participated for course credit. There were 94 females and 76 males with a mean age of 18.9, s.d. = 1.2. Eighty-one
subjects were only children (42 females and 37 males) and 91 had siblings (52 females and 39 males). For the distribution by birth order and the mean number of additional siblings in the family, see Table 1.

The request for subjects was restricted to those having a same gender sibling whose age is within 4 years of their own or those having no siblings. The four year division in age was chosen to keep the siblings and peers within a similar age range and has been used by other researchers (Pulakos, 1987; Buhrmester & Furman, 1990). Six subjects were dropped from the analyses due to not following directions, for example, using their mother as their close friend, or using an opposite-sex sibling instead of a same-sex sibling.

Materials

Demographic Questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire was designed by the researcher and inquired about family structural variables such as the number of siblings in the family, their gender and age. In addition, participants were asked to indicate the length of time they had lived away from home and which sibling they felt closest to (See Appendix A.).
### Table 1

**Distribution by Birth Order and the Mean Number of Additional Siblings of the Participants with Siblings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth Order</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Mean Number of Siblings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Born</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Born</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Born</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The percentages do not add up to 100% due to the fact that some subjects did not provide the information.*
Ways of Coping Questionnaire. The Ways of Coping Questionnaire by Folkman and Lazarus (1988) was used to assess both the individual and interpersonal coping styles for each individual. The scale was designed for use with situations specific to the research employing it. According to Folkman and Lazarus (1988) the Ways of Coping Questionnaire differentiates among eight types of coping behaviors. Confrontive coping is characterized by active, sometimes aggressive efforts to alter a situation. Distancing involves ones efforts to detach from a situation and/or to try to create a positive outlook towards the situation. Self-Control includes efforts to keep one’s feelings and actions regulated. Seeking Social Support includes the solicitation of informational, tangible or emotional support. By Accepting Responsibility, a person acknowledges his or her own role in the situation and tries to correct it. Escape-Avoidance can be described as wishful thinking and behavioral efforts to escape or avoid the situation. Planful Problem Solving involves an analytic approach to deciding how to alter a situation. Finally, the Ways of Coping Questionnaire includes Positive Reappraisal. This style is
identified by efforts to create positive meaning out of a situation by focusing on positive growth.

The relative score method developed by Vitaliano, Maiuro, Russo and Becker (1987) was used to score the data. This procedure avoids false results induced by individual differences in the number and degree of use of the coping strategies endorsed by each participant.

Sibling/Peer Relationship Questionnaire. The relationship qualities were measured by Furman and Buhrmester's (1985) Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (SRQ). The scale contains 48 questions measuring 16 relationship qualities, these include intimacy, prosocial behavior, companionship, similarity, nurturance, admiration, affection, dominance, quarreling, antagonism, competition and parental partiality. Those qualities represent 4 factors labeled: Warmth/Closeness, Relative Power/Status, Conflict and Rivalry. Participants respond to the questionnaire on a 5-point scale. The scores are obtained by simply summing the items for that particular scale. The factor scores were used in the data analysis.

For use with ratings of a close friend, the
questions regarding parental partiality were reworded to imply partiality by other peers instead of mother and father, and the word friend was substituted for sibling throughout the entire questionnaire. Although originally designed to be used with 11 and 12-year-old children, the questionnaire has been successfully used with adolescents in the twelfth grade in High School (Furman & Buhrmester, 1990).

Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale. The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960) is a commonly used, easily scoreable measure of participants sensitivity to socially desirable norms. A higher score represents higher sensitivity to socially desirable norms. Evans (1982) reported, in his review of 38 studies that used the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability scale with college students, the mean scores for males were 14, and 14.5 for females both with a standard deviation of 2. The scores for the students in this study ranged from $M = 13.8, s.d. = 5.7$ for females to $M = 11.5$ and $s.d. = 4.6$ for males. This measure was used as a partialling out variable for a set of correlations.
Design and Procedure

For the purposes of this multivariate study, the Ways of Coping Questionnaire was counterbalanced with respect to the target interaction (friend, sibling or individual situation). The SRQ was completed for the sibling and friend immediately after the Ways of Coping Questionnaire was completed for that person.

The researcher told the participants she was interested in how people interact with their siblings and peers. They were first asked to sign a consent form guaranteeing the confidentiality of their data. These consent forms were collected and kept separate from the rest of the data. Next, the participants were asked to complete the demographic questionnaire.

The exact procedure was dependent upon whether or not the group did or did not have siblings and the counterbalanced order of presentation. If the participants had siblings, they were asked to pick the same-gender sibling closest in age to themselves. They were asked to think of a stressful situation that involved their relationship to their sibling. A situation was defined as stressful if it was difficult or troubling, if the participants felt distressed, or
if they used considerable effort to deal with the situation. Examples of a discussion or confrontation were given. They would then be asked to write 1 or 2 sentences briefly describing the confrontation. Upon completing the brief description, the subjects completed the Ways of Coping Questionnaire, keeping in mind the situation they just described. When the questionnaire was completed they were asked to rate on a 6-point scale the degree to which the situation was "resolved." The degree of resolution scale was used to assess the perceived effectiveness of the participants coping efforts.

The remainder of the procedure applied to all participants, regardless of whether or not they had a sibling. All participants were asked to identify their closest friend of the same gender. They repeated the same steps were just described, only now using their close friend: They identified a situation, briefly described it, then complete the Ways of Coping Questionnaire keeping that situation in mind. Again, they were asked to rate the degree of resolution of their situation on a 6-point scale.

The Ways of Coping Questionnaire was also used to
assess their individual coping pattern. The directions changed in order to emphasize the difference in situation. The participants were asked to think of the most stressful situation they experienced within the last week that did not directly involve a close friend or family member. The examples of problems at work, a medical problem and car problems were given. Again, they were asked to write down one or two sentences about the situation then complete the Ways of Coping Questionnaire keeping this situation in mind.

The Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (SRQ) by Furman and Buhrmester (1985) was completed after the Ways of Coping Questionnaires. The simplicity in wording was explained by the fact that the questionnaire was meant to be used with people of all ages, including children. Participants were told that this questionnaire describes different aspects of relationships. The participants with siblings were asked to answer the SRQ regarding their sibling, while all participants answered it regarding the close friend. The final questionnaire for each participant was the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale.
Results

The first hypothesis, that coping strategies employed in stressful, interpersonal situations would be associated with relationship qualities, was assessed by a set of partial correlations between the eight subscales of the Ways of Coping Questionnaire (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988) and the four factor scores from the Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) partialling out the scores from the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). When the partial correlations were compared with nonpartialed Pearson correlation coefficients, it was found that there was a small, effect of the social desirability scores on the strength of the correlations.

Overall, the strength of the correlations ranged from little or no correlation to moderately correlated, as shown in Table 2. The Warmth/Closeness dimension of the SRQ had moderate, positive correlations with two of the coping scales: Accepting Responsibility and Planful Problem Solving. The Status/Power dimension had moderate, positive correlations with Confrontive Coping and Planful Problem Solving. Confrontive Coping
Table 2

Partial Correlations between SRQ dimensions and Coping Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Dimensions</th>
<th>Warmth/Cl</th>
<th>Status/Power</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Rivalry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coping Subscale</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confontive Coping</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.35***</td>
<td>-.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting Responsibility</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan. Prob. Solving</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>-.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distancing</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Control</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Soc. Support</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>-.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape-Avoidance</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.44***</td>
<td>-.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reappraisal</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05  **p<.01  ***p<.001

N=84
and Planful Problem Solving also had moderate, positive correlations with the Conflict SRQ factor, as did Seeking Social Support and Escape-Avoidance.

For the partial correlations of the relationship questionnaire, reworded for use with peers, and the Ways of Coping subscales, only one was statistically significant, a mild, positive correlation between Confrontive Coping and the Conflict dimension of the Relationship questionnaire: $r = .18, p < .05$. When the same correlations are calculated separately for subjects with siblings and those without, an interesting pattern emerged, as shown in Table 3. For the subjects with siblings, the correlation between Confrontive coping and the Conflict dimension increases from $r = .18$, to $r = .25, p < .05$. In addition, the correlations between Accepting Responsibility, Positive Reappraisal and the Warmth/Closeness dimension of the SRQ become significant, moderate, positive correlations. For the Only children, the only significant correlation is found in a negative relationship between Seeking Social Support and Warmth/Closeness, $r = -.25, p < .001$.

Two MANOVAs were performed to assess any
Table 3
Partial Correlations of Peer Relationship Qualities to Coping Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Dimension</th>
<th>Warmth/CL</th>
<th>Status/Power</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Rivalry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coping Subscale</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confrontive Coping</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptng Responsib.</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan. Prob. Solving</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distancing</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Control</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Soc. Support</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape-Avoidance</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reappraisal</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Only Children (n=80)   |           |              |          |         |
| Confrontive Coping     | .12       | .15          | .14      | .01     |
| Acceptng Responsib.    | .04       | .03          | .13      | -.04    |
| Plan. Prob. Solving    | -.05      | .08          | -.03     | -.11    |
| Distancing             | .10       | -.08         | -.05     | .09     |
| Self Control           | -.07      | -.17         | -.04     | -.10    |
| Seeking Soc. Support   | -.25*     | -.05         | -.04     | -.12    |
| Escape-Avoidance       | .04       | -.02         | .05      | -.10    |
| Positive Reappraisal   | .03       | -.18         | -.08     | -.14    |

* p<.05  ** p<.01  *** p<.001
differences in the pattern of coping for subjects with and without siblings, for each of the target situations. Due to the fact that the relative scores led to singular matrices, each MANOVA was performed twice, dropping one coping strategy each time. The F values and probability levels for both MANOVA calculations were exactly the same.

The first was a one way MANOVA comparing the eight coping strategies across the peer, sibling and the individual situations for the subjects with siblings (see Figure 1 for graphed mean comparisons). The overall Wilks’ Lambda was significant at a less than .001 level of probability ($F = 6.66$, $df = 7, 154$). The comparisons of Confrontive Coping, Accepting Responsibility, Planful Problem Solving, Self Control and Escape-Avoidance between the two situations were all found to be significant with univariate F tests. See Table 4 for the specific $F$ and probability values. Post hoc paired comparisons using Tukey’s HSD, found that for Confrontive coping each target situation was significantly different from each other situation, with the largest probability value equalling .002. A second Tukey’s HSD for Planful Problem Solving found that the
Figure 1

Mean Relative Ways of Coping Scores for Participants with siblings

Relative Coping Scores vs Ways of Coping Subscales

- ■ Individual
- • Close Friend
- ◦ Sibling
Table 4

MANOVA by Target Situation on Coping Strategy Chosen for Subjects with Siblings

MULTIVARIATE TEST STATISTICS

WILKS' LAMBDA = 0.704
F-STATISTIC = 7.126  DF = 14, 520  p < .001

UNIVARIATE F TESTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confrontive</td>
<td>0.358</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.179</td>
<td>25.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting Responsibility</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>2.180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planful Problem Solving</td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>3.150*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distancing</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Control</td>
<td>0.054</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>6.380**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Social Support</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>1.274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape-Avoidance</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>11.79***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reappraisal</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>1.391</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<.05  **p<.005  ***p<.001

N = 269
individual situation was significantly different from the peer situation with $p < .04$, but not for any other comparison.

Similar overall differences were found with the only children. The overall Wilks' Lambda for the 2 target situations on the eight Ways of Coping subscales was also significant ($F = 6.67, p < .001$) with Confrontive Coping, Planful Problem Solving, Self Control and Escape-Avoidance coping strategies all giving rise to significant Univariate F tests. See Figure 2 for graphed mean comparisons and Table 5 for individual univariate F-tests.

To evaluate the relationship of coping strategies to self-perceived effectiveness, measured by the resolution of each situation, three multiple regressions were performed. See Table 6 for the number of subjects who projected themselves into each category. The overall prediction of the resolution of the sibling situation was significant with the $p = .001$, and the multiple $R^2 = .26$. See Table 7 for the standardized (Beta) coefficients and probabilities for each coping strategy. Four out of the eight predicting strategies were significant, including:
Figure 2

Means for the Relative Ways of Coping Scores for Only Children
Table 5

MANOVA by Target Situation on Coping Strategies for Only Children

MULTIVARIATE TEST STATISTIC

\[
\text{WILKS' LAMBDA } = 0.768 \\
\text{F-STATISTIC } = 6.662 \\
\text{DF } = 7, 154 \\
\text{p } < .001
\]

UNIVARIATE F TESTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confrontive</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>9.816**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting Responsibility</td>
<td>0.050</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.050</td>
<td>8.708**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planful Problem Solving</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>7.085**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distancing</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Control</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>11.073***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Social Support</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape-Avoidance</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>5.916*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reappraisal</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>2.689</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05  **p < .005  ***p = .001

N = 162
Table 6

**Number of participants per degree of resolution**

Participants with siblings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Degree of Resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Degree of Resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals     | 22 | 24 | 37 | 39 | 64 | 60 |
Table 7

Multiple Regression Coefficients for the Prediction of Degree of Resolution of the Sibling Situation from Coping Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>COEFFICIENT</th>
<th>STD COEF</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confrontive</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>0.149</td>
<td>1.268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting Res</td>
<td>0.080</td>
<td>0.150</td>
<td>1.281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planful Prob Sol</td>
<td>0.119</td>
<td>0.308</td>
<td>2.480*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distancing</td>
<td>0.145</td>
<td>0.344</td>
<td>3.183**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Control</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.084</td>
<td>0.706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek Soc Support</td>
<td>-0.075</td>
<td>-0.240</td>
<td>-2.132*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape-Avoidance</td>
<td>-0.143</td>
<td>-0.405</td>
<td>-3.316**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reapprais</td>
<td>-0.013</td>
<td>-0.044</td>
<td>-0.371</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R < .05  **R < .005

R² = .26, p = .001
Escape-Avoidance, Distancing, Planful Problem Solving and Seeking Social Support. The standard (Beta) coefficients for Seeking Social Support and Escape-Avoidance were both negative.

Separate multiple regressions predicted the resolution of the peer situation for participants with siblings and only children. For participants with siblings, the multiple $R^2 = .24$, with the overall prediction significant with $p = .004$. Significant predictors included Escape-Avoidance and Accepting Responsibility. For the only children, the multiple $R^2$ was equal to .22, with the overall prediction significant at the $p < .03$ level of probability. Again, the significant predictors were Escape-Avoidance and Accepting Responsibility. As with the sibling situation, the standard coefficients for Escape-Avoidance were also negative for peer situation. See Table 8 and Table 9 for the standard (Beta) coefficients and probability levels for each predictor for the participants with siblings and the only children, respectively.

Possible effects of sibling order were also investigated. Four MANOVAs ascertained any effects of
### Table 8

**Multiple Regression Coefficients for the Prediction of the Degree of Resolution for the Peer Situation from Coping Strategy for Participants with Siblings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>COEFFICIENT</th>
<th>STD COEF</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confrontive</td>
<td>-0.032</td>
<td>-0.074</td>
<td>-0.617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting Resp</td>
<td>0.167</td>
<td>0.283</td>
<td>2.384*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planful Prob Sol</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distancing</td>
<td>-0.081</td>
<td>-0.193</td>
<td>-1.679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Control</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>-0.017</td>
<td>-0.140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek Soc Support</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>-0.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape-Avoidance</td>
<td>-0.139</td>
<td>-0.426</td>
<td>-3.407**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reapprais</td>
<td>0.076</td>
<td>0.227</td>
<td>1.772</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05  **p < .005

$R^2 = .24$, $p < .005$
Table 9

Multiple Regression Coefficients for the Prediction of the Degree of Resolution for the Peer Situation from Coping Strategy for Only Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>COEFFICIENT</th>
<th>STD COEF</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confrontive</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>0.103</td>
<td>0.905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting Resp</td>
<td>0.135</td>
<td>0.255</td>
<td>2.173*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planful Prob Sol</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>0.643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distancing</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>-0.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Control</td>
<td>-0.033</td>
<td>-0.073</td>
<td>-0.520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek Soc Support</td>
<td>-0.100</td>
<td>-0.252</td>
<td>-1.764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape-Avoidance</td>
<td>-0.111</td>
<td>-0.301</td>
<td>-2.586*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reapprais</td>
<td>0.077</td>
<td>0.243</td>
<td>1.862</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R < .05

$R^2 = .22$, p < .03
birth order on the coping styles utilized with siblings and peers, and on relationship qualities with both peers and siblings. The only significant effect for any of these last four analyses was a significant birth order by Status/Power interaction such that last born subjects ascribed more power to their older siblings, while older and middle children ascribed more power to themselves ($F = 7.87$, $df = 2,79$, $p = .001$).

In addition, a $2 \times 4$ (type of participant) * (relationship subscale) found no significant differences for the peer relationship qualities between participants with siblings and those without.

Discussion

In response to the question of whether or not having siblings affects the socialization process, specifically coping, the first hypothesis stated that the strategies employed in stressful, interpersonal situations may be related to the relationship qualities of the people involved. Results indicate that there does appear to be a difference between sibling children and only children in the link between relationship qualities and the coping strategies chosen. Although the participants with siblings seem to show
significant, consistent connections between the qualities of a relationship and their chosen coping style, this is only true of the stressful situation involving their sibling. The peer situation for sibling children reveals a moderate degree of association, while only children show only a negative relationship between Warmth/Closeness and Seeking Social Support. It should be reiterated that these differences cannot be attributed to differences in the proportion or magnitude of relationship qualities between those with and without siblings. This conclusion is based on the MANOVA that found no significant differences in the relationship qualities between the only children and the participants with siblings.

For participants with siblings, Planful Problem Solving had significant, positive correlations with Warmth/Closeness, Status/Power and Conflict sibling relationship qualities. Although all correlations between Planful Problem Solving and the peer relationship qualities were positive, only one was significant.

Shure and Spivak (1986) stated that the
relationships of poor problem solvers suffer. It would be reasonable to assume, that the opposite might also be true: Good problem solvers have more positive relationships. The correlation of Planful Problem Solving and the Warmth/Closeness dimension of the relationship questionnaire seems to support this hypothesis. However, the fact that it is also correlated with the Conflict dimension argues against the hypothesis. It appears that these correlations are actually more supportive of Folkman and Lazarus' (1980) finding that there is a general increase of problem focused coping if one's family or self-esteem are involved in a situation.

These two hypotheses, however, are not mutually exclusive. The hypothesis that good problem solvers may have more positive relationship qualities is not negated. Although it appears that the greater the degree of Warmth/Closeness in a relationship the more Planful Problem Solving is utilized, this correlation says nothing about effectiveness. Planful Problem Solving may be utilized a great deal in stressful situations involving one's silbing, this does not imply effective use of the strategy.
The strongest association was between Escape-Avoidance coping and Conflict in a sibling relationship. It appears that the more conflictual a sibling relationship is, the more an individual avoids open confrontation. However, there are also significant, positive correlations between Confrontive Coping, Planful Problem Solving and the Conflict scale. One possible explanation for this may be related to the fact that sibling relationships are non-conditional relationships which cannot be dissolved by choice (Allan, 1977; Cicirelli, 1982). If one has a highly confrontational relationship with one’s sibling, an individual may believe that the best way to cope with the continual conflict would be to avoid the situation in the first place, or to avoid its continuation when it occurs.

However, Elias et al. (1986) classified active strategies such as problem solving as an effective coping strategy while Work et al. (1990) and Pearlin and Schooler (1978) classified wishful thinking, distancing and immobilization, more passive types of strategies, as negative and ineffective. Although a person’s first instinct may be to avoid the conflictual
sibling situation, that strategy would probably not be successful in resolving the situation. Catz (1991) recently found that Escape-Avoidance coping was highly correlated with general mood disturbances and depression, which may be indicative of an ineffective coping strategy. If the Escape-Avoidance does not resolve the situation, it seems logical that the person would attempt another coping strategy, perhaps something completely opposite of the strategy already attempted, such as Confrontive Coping or Planful Problem Solving. So although the Escape-Avoidance may be an individual’s first choice of strategy, its ineffectiveness may lead him or her to attempt something completely different such as confronting the problem at hand.

It must be kept in mind, however, that the relationship qualities scale was originally designed for use with sibling relationships. The fact that it correlates more strongly with the strategies of the participants with siblings may be due to the fact that the questionnaire was sensitive to relationship qualities more salient to individuals with siblings. Although there were no differences in the levels of
each relationship dimension endorsed by participants with or without siblings, there may be other aspects of friendships, not utilized in this study, that become more significant in one’s current relationships when a sibling relationship is not available for comparison. Furman (personal communication, October 11, 1990) is working on a second relationship questionnaire directed specifically at friendship qualities. His current research may lead to an explanation of the different number and magnitudes of the correlations between coping and the peer relationship qualities individuals who have siblings, and for individuals who are only children.

The central issue of the study revolves around the comparison of the coping strategies employed by subjects with siblings to those without, in stressful interpersonal and individual situations. For both groups similar patterns are found when comparing the interpersonal to the individual situations, as shown in Figures 3 and 4. The inherent nature of interpersonal interactions, the fact that they involve two or more people, could account for the greater variation in pattern for the interpersonal situations as compared to
Figure 3

Mean Relative Ways of Coping Scores for Interpersonal Situations

Relative Ways of Coping Scores

Ways of Coping Subscales

- ■ Only-Peer
- ▲ Sibling-Peer
- ◆ Sibling-Sibling
Figure 4

Mean Relative Ways of Coping Scores for the Individual Situation

- Only Children
- Sibling Children
the individual situations. Despite the variance in the interpersonal situations, it appears that there are definite differences in the preferred coping strategies for situations directly involving another person versus a situation that does not. Folkman and Lazarus (1985) stated that coping traits are often poor predictors of the way people actually cope in specific situations. It appears from these results, however, that the relationship may work in reverse: The context may be used to predict strategies chosen.

The pattern appears to be fairly logical. When dealing with situations that do not directly involve a close friend or sibling, there is less Confrontive Coping, Distancing and Positive Reappraisal, and more Accepting Responsibility, Planful Problem Solving, and Escape-Avoidance. The significant increase in the amount of Planful Problem Solving may fit into Folkman and Lazarus’ (1980) finding that problem focused coping increases with the involvement of one’s self esteem. When dealing with a situation on an individual basis, the effectiveness of coping choices must be related in some sense to one’s feelings of self-efficacy and esteem; there is no one else directly involved in the
situation and no one else to whom to attribute resolution. Therefore, more planning and thought would presumably increase one’s chances of effectively dealing with the situation, and concurrently protect one’s self-esteem.

One may conclude, due to the similar pattern across strategies for both types of participants, that the sibling relationship does not influence interpersonal coping in a unique way. If this result receives further support, it would extend Polit and Falbo’s (1987) findings that, contrary to popular myth, only children are not substantially different from sibling children with respect to personality differences. These results also support Polit & Falbo’s (1987) conclusion that the "unique" mechanism and "deprivation" mechanism of the development of only children may be incorrect.

Abramovitch et al., (1982), however, posited that individuals without siblings may develop differently than individuals with siblings. While there may be differences in development, it appears from this study that the end result may be the same. According to these findings, if there is any differential influence
of sibling relationships, it may be evident in the association of relationship qualities to the coping style chosen.

Although the overall patterns, as shown in Figures 3 and 4, are similar, there are differences in the relative quantity of each coping strategy chosen. This may be due to two things: One, the time span between the sibling situations and the time the study was done, and two, the uniqueness of the sibling relationship. Due to the fact that the participants in this study are presently attending college, a majority of them were not living with or close to their sibling. The instructions for this part of the study had participants pick the most recent stressful situation that involved their sibling. The general time range for sibling situations was between a couple of weeks and approximately nine months. The fact that the situation was longer ago not only gave those subjects the opportunity to apply more strategies to the situation, but it also brings into question the accuracy of the subject’s memory for the situation. The instructions for the peer and individual situation suggested the situation be within the past week.
Two parts of the procedure, however, should have corrected for this problem. The fact that relative scores were used should have eliminated any differences in the absolute amounts of coping used, although it would not if the specific strategy usage changes over time. What these relative coping scores may in fact reflect is the memory of what the participants remembered as the most effective strategies they used. The second procedural control was the brief written description of the target situation. It was included as an aid to improve the focus and memory of the specific situation.

When participants with siblings deal with their siblings, the amount of Confrontive coping is higher and the amount of Escape-Avoidance and Self Control is lower than for any other type of situation. As posited earlier, the fact that the sibling relationship is a unique relationship may account for these differences as individuals are more comfortable dealing in a more extreme way with their sibling. This is further supported by finding that both types of participants show increases in Self-Control when dealing with their close friends. The fact that peer relationships may
not be as enduring as sibling relationships may precipitate this increase in Self-Controlling behavior. When dealing with less permanent relationships, one would be more inclined to inhibit more aggressive and confrontive instincts.

While Lazarus and Folkman (1984) have stated that it is the process and function of coping, not the strategy itself that is important to effective coping, Howes and Markman (1989) maintain that it is a repertoire of coping responses that is most predictive of effectiveness. It may, in reality, be a combination of the specific strategy and its function within an individual’s repertoire of available strategies across situations. As individuals mature, they become involved in more complex situations. As they apply different coping strategies to a situation they learn which strategies are most effective in that specific situation. The fact that the participants of this study show surprisingly similar patterns for general types of situations, interpersonal versus individual, supports this general learning type of hypothesis.

Unfortunately, one of the weaknesses of the Ways of Coping Questionnaire is that it does not evaluate
the process or function of coping that Lazarus and Folkman (1984) see as important in evaluating coping effectiveness. To evaluate the process or function, an additional step, such as a follow-up interview or additional questionnaire, should be included when the Ways of Coping Questionnaire is used. Useful information would include the specification of the function of each coping strategy in leading to the resolution of the stressful situation for the specific individual.

One aspect of stressful situations that was not taken into consideration was the severity of the stressor. Although the majority of the participants did follow directions and described individual and interpersonal situations within the limitations given by the researcher, the situations did vary with respect to severity of the stressor. For example, some participants were dealing with a roommate who was not doing their share of the house work, while others were dealing with a friend who they considered to have a serious drinking problem. Stone (in press, as cited by Alder, 1991) suggests that the degree of familiarity may also affect the way people deal with stressful
situations. Future research needs to address this issue and attempt to control for the type of situation, for example individual or interpersonal, as well as the severity and the familiarity of the stressor.

It appears that in this population, individuals have acquired what Work et al., (1990) considered effective coping styles, a combination of high positive strategies and low negative strategies. The style that appears to be used the least is Escape-Avoidance, while two of the most heavily used are Planful Problem Solving and Confrontive Coping. As has been stated several times previously, the more active styles emerge as generally the most effective while the passive, avoidance and withdrawal styles the least effective.

One problem with the Ways of Coping Questionnaire appears to be that some of the subscales are poorly defined with respect to their actual function. For example, Seeking Social Support can mean two entirely different behaviors: One, that the individual is actively seeking information from the environment in order to resolve the situation, or two, that the person is not actively trying to resolve the situation, but rather is attempting to gain emotional support.
The question remains, however, as pointed out by Stone (in press, as cited by Adler, 1991): "Do people who indicate on the Ways of Coping Questionnaire that they do a lot of coping strategy X actually do a lot of coping strategy X?" (p. 13). The observed degree of effectiveness may, in fact, be due to what is perceived to be effective coping strategies instead of what the participants were actually doing. Unfortunately, whenever psychologists study phenomena with pencil and paper type measures, there will always be a degree of uncertainty that what they are measuring is actually what they believe they are measuring.

It was also hypothesized that the self-perceived effectiveness of a situation may be predicted from the type of coping strategy chosen. The specific pattern of coping used, especially with the higher relative use of Planful Problem Solving, seems to support this hypothesis. By comparing the number of participants who projected themselves into each group, it is more than obvious that most people believed that they were successful in their coping efforts (see Table 6). If self-perceived effectiveness is an accurate portrayal of the situation, then one may assume that these
patterns do to some degree represent fairly effective coping choices.

Overall, Escape-Avoidance was the only predictor that generalized significantly across all types of participants and situations. Escape-Avoidance, along with Seeking Social Support in the sibling situation, were the only two significant negative predictors. In addition, the Distancing style was a significant predictor in the sibling situation yet no other situation. The only significant predictors of the peer situation, for either type of participant, were Escape-Avoidance and Accepting Responsibility. It appears from these findings that the use of Escape-Avoidance coping is negatively related to self-perceived effectiveness in the resolution of a situation. Due to the close relationship of Escape-Avoidance to Seeking Social Support, one could surmise that in this situation, the use of Seeking Social Support refers to a more passive seeking of emotional support. If, however, the coefficient was more closely related to Planful Problem Solving, one would hypothesize that it referred more to active information seeking.

The effectiveness of the chosen coping strategy
was measured on a 'degree of resolution' scale. It was decided by the researcher that other wordings of this measure may have confounded the measurement. For example, one alternative statement "Rate on the 1 - 6 scale how effective you were in resolving the situation," may have brought into play self-esteem or other socially desirable characteristics which would have been hard to filter out. It should be noted, that although a majority of participants did believe they had successfully resolved the situation, there were substantial numbers that believed they were not as successful. If the wording used had elicited a strong social desirability response, one would expect that very few if any of the participants would have admitted to an unsuccessful coping effort.

Future researchers should attempt to discern the relationship between perceived and actual effectiveness of an individual's coping efforts. It may also be valuable to know what types of coping strategies are perceived as effective when used by others. This information may aid in the distinction between what people actually do and what they believe they should do in stressful situations. In addition, information
concerning what types of situational characteristics are important for one to feel as if they have effectively dealt with a situation would be useful.

The analyses showed negligible differences for the relationship questionnaires and the Ways of Coping scale based on birth order. Because of the unequal numbers of participants in the birth order groups, these results may be suspect. However, two previous birth order findings were supported. As found by Perlin and Grater (1984) and Furman and Buhrmester (1985) last born siblings ascribed more power to their older siblings, while first and middle born children ascribed more power to themselves. This study also supports the common finding that first born children are overrepresented in academic populations. Fifty-five percent of the participants with siblings were first born children.

In summary, it appears that, overall, there are no disadvantages to growing up without siblings, at least with respect to coping strategies employed in individual and interpersonal situations. It is suggested, however, that there may be differences in the pivotal relationship qualities that may lead to the
determination of how one reacts in interpersonal situations. The biggest difference between dealing with siblings and other peers seems to be found in the extremes to which individuals are willing to go when dealing with one’s sibling. It is hypothesized that it is the permanence of the sibling relationship that allows for more extreme usage of coping strategies. It is assumed that in the more transient peer relationship, individuals are much more likely to inhibit more extreme reactions.

In addition, several shortcomings of the typical methodology employed with the Ways of Coping Questionnaire are pointed out. Several of the issues brought up by this researcher were also pointed out by Stone (in press, as cited by Adler, 1991) including: the lack of specificity of subscales, the lack of process and function assessment for each strategy and the lack of behavioral checks to confirm that subjects actually use the strategies that they endorse.

Continuing research could progress in several different directions. To begin with, it would be useful to know how effective individuals perceive certain types of strategies as third-party observers of
other situations. This information could help clarify the speculation that the patterns found for individual and interpersonal situations may be prevalent held beliefs of what would be effective rather than the coping strategies actually used. In addition, it would be worthwhile to explore the differential salience of interpersonal relationship qualities for sibling and peer relationships.

In conclusion, as with all types of developmental research, longitudinal research is imperative. Longitudinal research would allow the assessment of developmental trends of relationship qualities, in both sibling and peer relationships, and add insight to the development of coping choices. In addition to allowing future researchers to evaluate the development of coping choices, it would allow the evaluation of the current findings within a larger lifespan context.
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Appendix

Demographic Questionnaire

Background Information

1. Please make a complete list of all your family members, including their age and gender. Make sure to include yourself. For example:

   parent  57  f
   self    18  m
   sibling 14  m

If you are an only child, please indicate that in the space below.

   Parent/Sibling/Self  Age  Gender

2. If you have siblings, please indicate which sibling you consider yourself closest to (please circle the name or put a * next to it).

3. How long have you lived away from home?
VITA

Deborah J. Kennerson

The author was born on January 27, 1966 in Rochester, New York. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Experimental Psychology from Alfred University in May, 1989. In August 1989 she entered the Master of Arts program in psychology at the College of William and Mary.