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Pawlowski, D. R., Myers, S. A., & Rocca, K. A. (2000). Relational messages in conflict situations among siblings. *Communication Research Reports*, 17(3), 271-277. doi:10.1080/08824090009388774

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Summary

Literature Review: This article examines the relationship between siblings, and how these individuals engage in conflict with one another. The research was conducted by three individuals: Donna R. Pawlowski from Creighton University, Kelly A. Rocca from St. John's University, and Scott A. Meyers from Creighton University. The three strategies used to identify how these siblings interact with one another in conflict are called integrative, distributive, and avoidant strategies. When a person uses an integrative strategy, they are collaborative and with the other participant involved. If a person is using the distributive strategy, the person is more concerned with their own personal goals rather than both parties best interest. Lastly, the avoidant strategy is self explanatory: a person who attempts to avoid the conflict by refraining from discussing the issue. Previous research shows that those who use integrative strategies are said to have better, more effective outcomes for the relationship rather than the other two strategies examined. Within these strategies, there are relational messages that demonstrate how the participants in the conflict feel about one another. The themes of the messages include immediacy: the amount of interest in the discussion, similarity: how much the participants agree with each other, receptivity: the willingness to listen and communicate, composure: how calm the person remains within the interaction, formality: the minimal amount of self-disclosure within the conversation, dominance: the aggressive and competitive aspect of the communication, equality: how cooperative the participant is, and then task orientation: the logical aspect, not interested in being social. Additionally, this research follows the process of the explanatory process model, and how individuals engage in conflict with one another. The explanatory process model discusses how in the distal context, proximal context, conflict interaction, proximal outcomes, and distal outcomes each person engages with each other. For this specific study, this research examines how siblings in conflict interact with each other in both verbal and nonverbal manners, and how that ultimately affects the resolution of the conflict.

This research takes a closer look on how these conflict strategies integrate with these relational communication themes, with the research question stating "Among siblings, which relational communication messages are associated with use of (a) the integrative conflict style, (b) the distributive conflict style, and (c) the avoidant conflict style?" This investigation is incredibly important since sibling relationships can be the most prominent relationships within an individual's life, and knowing how a person engages with them in challenging interactions can be beneficial for future communicative purposes.

Method: For this research, a quantitative study was used to gather data from a variety of participants. The participants were 186 undergraduate students at a Mid-Atlantic university, with ages 17-45 years old to include a wide variety of ages for a difference in results. The gender of these participants included 91 men and 95 women, to gather an almost equal amount of both genders. These participants were required to fill out two scales to help identify their conflict styles. Both scales were a seven point scale that asked them to either strongly agree (7) or strongly disagree (1) about a recent conflict episode they had with a sibling. One scale measured the conflict strategies (integrative, distributive, and avoidant) while the other examined the use of the eight relational themes (immediacy, similarity, composure, etc). The questions included in the scale discussed the association between relational communication messages and conflict styles to create a correlation analysis between these variables.

Discussion: Through the data collected, researchers were able to gather a correlation between the conflict strategies as well as the relational communication themes. Those who had relational

communication themes of immediacy, similarity, composure, equality, and receptivity - the relational messages that showcased a positive engagement in wanting to discuss the interaction with the other individual involved in the conflict – would most likely to use the integrative strategy. Ultimately, those who would be more collaborative and productive would be involved with the integrative strategy, meaning it would be unlikely for them to be using avoidant or distributive strategies. Additionally, those who engaged in the avoidance strategy demonstrated the notion of wanting to switch the topic and avoid communication about the issue, and immediacy and task orientated relational messages were not correlated to the avoidant strategy as well. In connection to the avoidant strategy, participants also stated that when they are not engaging in the avoidant strategy, they still are not using the relational themes of similarity and equality – so they are refraining from attempting to collaborate in all aspects.

These findings demonstrate that siblings who are wanting to communicate and discuss the conflict, are showcasing themes of being collaborative, supportive, composed, and interested in interacting with their family member. Those who avoid the conflict (use the avoidant strategy) are not demonstrating behaviors that showcase wanting to come to an equal resolution – so it raises the question of how each sibling want to resolve issues if they are not using the cooperative relational themes.

Evaluation: Overall, I found this research article to be quite interesting. As a person who has a sibling myself, it was interesting to investigate how certain behaviors (relational communication themes) correlate to conflict strategies. I was able to self identify myself with the different relational communication themes, and integrate it with a conflict strategy I find to be most useful. The introduction to these new concepts such as relational communication themes and conflict strategies were thoroughly explained in a way that would be very comprehensible to someone with no knowledge of communicative behaviors. Additionally, this article is useful to those examining the concept of conflict communication patterns as well as how siblings interact with one another. Although this information was interesting, I wish it further explained the results of those who participated in the distributive and avoidant strategies. It was made evident in the results that the integrative strategy was the most cooperative and successful communication strategy (which could've been predicted) – but what about those who engaged in relational communication themes correlating to the distributive strategies. There are many individuals (such as myself) who can get a bit competitive when engaging in conflict with siblings, and it's a very probable instance to occur. The research should've further discussed how those with the distributive strategy engage with their sibling to give a broader view on how this impacts siblings.