


MARTIN-LUTHER-UNIVERSITÄT  
HALLE-WITTENBERG




# CHILDREN NEED BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO FEEL GOOD? SIBSHIP ENSURES ENRICHMENT OF RELATIONSHIP

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Sociology of Children and Childhood

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9/8/2009

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## First: Regional Geography

- Stendal
- Magdeburg  
(Capital of  
Saxony-Anhalt)
- Halle(Saale) -  
largest town  
with 230 000  
inhabitants

University of Applied Science  
Magdeburg-Stendal - Applied  
Childhood Studies - first of its  
kind in Germany  
Martin-Luther-University Halle-  
Wittenberg first European  
Masters in Childhood Education  
and Care

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## INTRODUCTION

The sibling relationship is the most long-lasting kinship relationship and it provides the most intensive experience of closeness and intimacy during childhood.

Children, who grow up in families with siblings, experience manifold bonding and communication thus relieving the strain on parents in many respects. Especially in large families we can observe the variety of relationships and the diversity of characters and temperaments, which can enrich the quality of parent-child relations. The strengthening of social resources, solidarity and resilience will be explored.

## QUESTIONS



Main Focus is the impact of siblings' relationships on family dynamics.

Can we construct new categories which are essential when looking at siblings - beside structural topics?

What kind of inner notions between the siblings and between the children and towards the parents are observable?

If there is a significant mutual interference between siblings on the one hand and the parents and children on the other hand in a family, how do the members of the family reproduce this in interaction dynamic in their attachment of each other?

## DESIGN

- ◉ Case Study with qualitative approach
- ◉ Triangulation of four diagnostic Methods
  - Genogram with interview sequences
  - Children's drawings ("Family in animals"-  
*Imagine, I could conjure a magic spell on your family, which transforms everyone into a special animal, what do you think your younger brother would be? What could he do best?*)
  - Semi-structured interview with the parents/mother
  - Family board (project the inner notions of family relations in a simple order at a 50x50cm board of wood with simple wooden stones/figures)

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

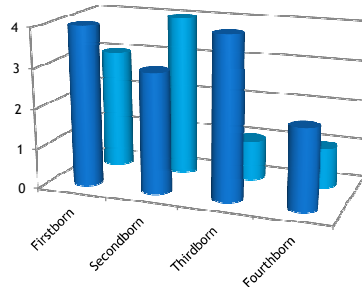
- ◉ **Grounded Theory** - systematic research methodology in the social sciences developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss† emphasizing generation of theory from data
- ◉ **System Theory of Families** according to Helm Stierlin, Fritz Simon, Kurt Ludewig
- ◉ **Family Psychology** according to Klaus Schneewind, Manfred Cierpka, Heidi Keller

## SAMPLE - 7 FAMILY-STUDIES - N= 31

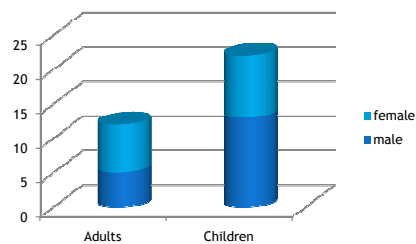
### Generativity



■ Family two children  
■ Family three children  
■ Family four children



■ Boys  
■ Girls



### Theoretical Sampling

- Beginning with the first family
- Searching for the next family dependent on the issue
- Finish when there is no more new information in regard to the question

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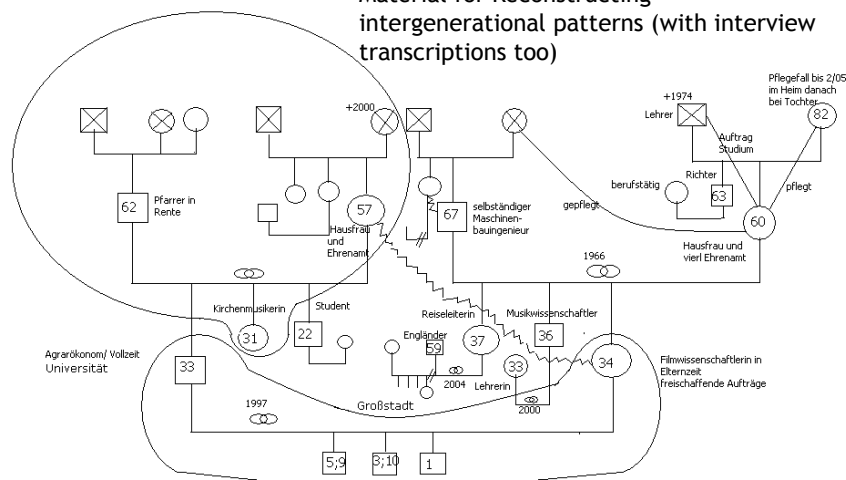
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## EXAMPLE FOR GENOGRAM

### Familie V. Genogramm

Material for Reconstructing intergenerational patterns (with interview transcriptions too)



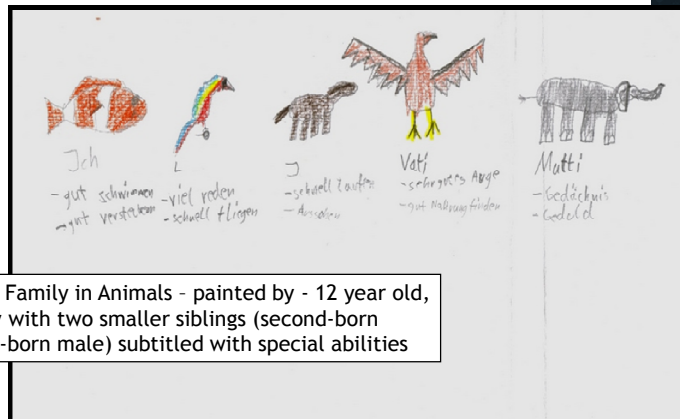
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## EXAMPLE FOR THE DRAWINGS

**Research Method:** Qualitative approach with nonverbal projective psychological method for younger children (to represent their inner notion of the family)



Picture of his Family in Animals - painted by - 12 year old, first born boy with two smaller siblings (second-born female, third-born male) subtitled with special abilities

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### SUB-CODE: SOLIDARITY AND CARE (LUKAS SCHLOSSER 10;7 FIRSTBORN OF FOUR)

"The eagle brings worms for the peewees."

In his drawing the other siblings also take food, bananas or money .  
The mum is breastfeeding and dad practice weight lifting.

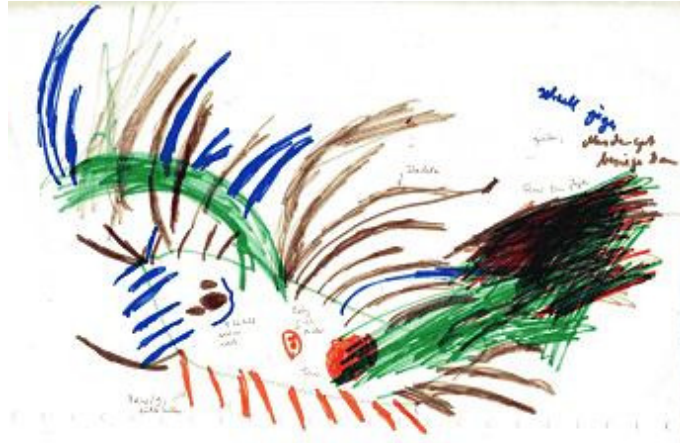


Lukas Schlosser (7;10) Selbst

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### CATEGORY: CO-CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY (VINCENT VICTOR 3;10 SECONDBORN OF THREE)

Vincent's painting is an expressive self-disclosure and during the design-process his older brother takes the dino-subject into his own drawing. Both of them create a dino-family with their own ideas.



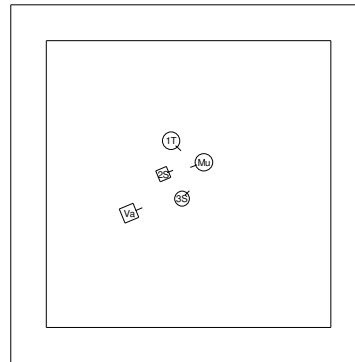
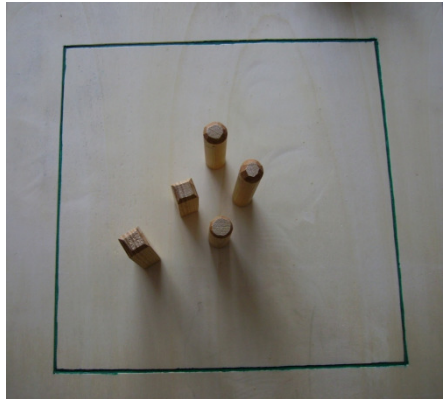
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### EXAMPLE INTERVIEW-SEQUENCES

“She was torn, she was very ambivalent. She has even so..., this little sister she found amazing, she was so happy about, even as she wasn't born. Then she was there and she had recognized she took away some of her space. Then she was abrasive to her.” (Mother of two girls)

“Well, you have the feeling, they feed each other lines. And they need each other. I believe that Frank also needs Vincent the little one. In terms of ‘when you come with me then I also come. I'll do that thing too’. Because, he is quite ingenuous.”  
(Mother of three sons)

## EXAMPLE FOR THE FAMILY BOARD



“Familienbrett” = Family Board as a structural projection to visualize relations inside the family, Family work together in the process of positioning.

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## RESULTS

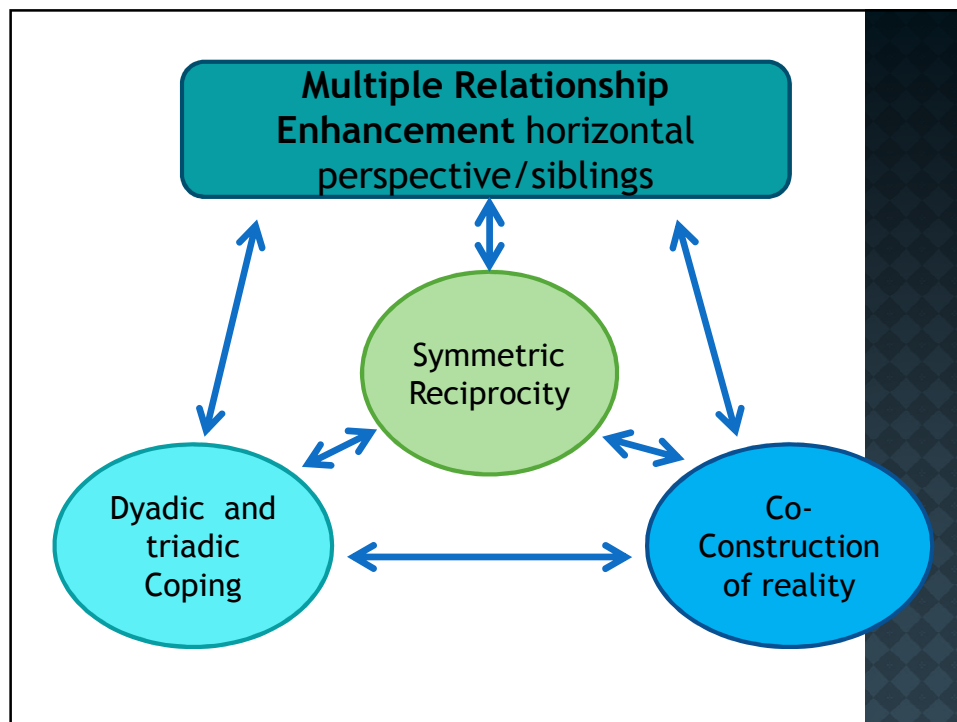
- Growing up with siblings provides many special advantages which I call **Multiple Relationship Enhancement** (means Enrichment of interpersonal Relationships).
  - The strengthening of emotional capital happens in a horizontal level between siblings as well as in the vertical connection between children and parents.
- Siblings have got many benefits such as the development of empathy, social competence and strategies of conflict resolution
- Handling in the subsystem empowers the sibs in their development of self-assertion and self-confidence
  - Further understanding of equivalence, reciprocity and justice within the family is promoted
  - Mental health promotion starts immediately after birth - and is an enormous resilience factor

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## THEORY OF MULTIPLE RELATIONSHIP ENHANCEMENT

- ◉ Siblings receive many benefits in the development of empathy, social competence and strategies of conflict resolution
- ◉ Siblings' coexisting competition intensified creativity and openness to experience
- ◉ Intimacy and love create affective closeness and manifold internal representation of attachment pattern (especially in the sib subsystem)
- ◉ Children demand justice in the family, gain frustration tolerance and knowledge of dependencies, show solidarity and behave with respect

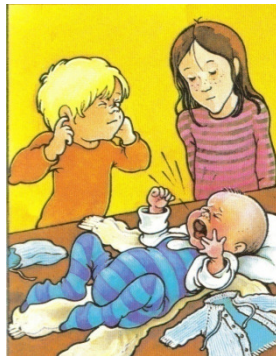
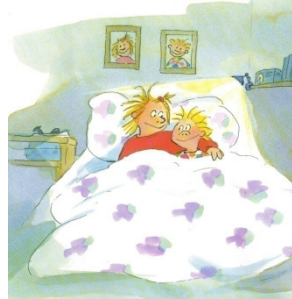


## CONCLUSION

- ◉ Does children need brothers and sisters to feel good?
  - Siblings generate empathy and strategies to solve conflicts
  - Siblings become acquainted with the ability of affection and love in an intimate setting
  - Peer relations can substitute - in an other manner and framework
- ◉ Does Sibship ensures enrichment of relationship?
  - Children learn how to manage living together

## IMPLICATIONS

- ◉ When we realize that relationship enhancement develops in larger families we then have to recognize the prospect, that some of this cannot emerge without siblings.
- ◉ The enormous impact that siblings have can be useful for professional interventions in the field of family support.
- ◉ Further research should focus on siblings' resilience and mental health in comparison with only children.



May many children  
can live under such  
conditions making  
several nice  
experiences!



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