Helping Or Hindering? Sibling Interaction in Child Influence Strategies

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In this paper we explore the process of child influence, explicitly focussing on how sibling relationships ('sibship'), as one component of the family environment, shape the influence strategies which children direct towards their parents. Our findings point towards the ambivalent nature of sibling relationships, and suggest that sibling behaviours work to both help and hinder fellow siblings utilize influence strategies on their parents' consumption choices.

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ABSTRACT

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding the influence that children exert in family consumption decisions remains a prominent area of concern for consumer researchers. Children influence up to $1.88 trillion of family expenditure globally (Lindstrom and Seybold, 2003), and yet we still lack a complete understanding of child influence processes (Cotte and Wood, 2004; Flurry, 2007). Whilst we do have a comprehensive account of the repertoire of strategies which children utilize in their attempts to get their own way from their parents, we know little about the motivations that lie behind strategy usage (Palan and Wilkes, 1997) or how contextual factors, such as the family setting and intra-family relationships, shape the influence strategies which children utilize (Cotte and Wood, 2004).

In this paper we specifically explore sibling relationships within the family setting. Sibling relationships have tended to be overlooked within existing consumer research (Cotte and Wood, 2004) which has usually focused on dyadic parent-child interaction. Our contribution is thus twofold. First we seek to better understand sibling relationships, which remain largely under explored in consumer research; and second, to investigate how sibling relationships shape the influence strategies which children employ within the family setting. Our study responds to Cotte and Wood's (2004) and Flurry's (2007) call for further research into the purchase influence of children in families, specifically by exploring how one aspect of the family environment (sibling interaction and relationships) affects the influence strategies that children employ.

Child influence strategies: The research context

Research over the past forty years has established that *"purchase decisions within the family are not always the outcome of individual choice, but rather, family members influence each other"* (Hamilton and Catterall 2006, p.1032). The examination of children's influence strategies began with a study of cereal choices which identified that both the child's assertiveness and the mother's child-centeredness were central to a mother's susceptibility to her child's requests (Berey and Pollay 1968). In another study of cereal choice within a supermarket setting, children were more successful if they told their mothers to buy their preferred cereal, or if they demanded their choice, rather than if they simply asked their mother for it, or requested the item (Atkin 1978).

Another study specifically asked adolescents to write a series of essays entitled "How I get my way with my mother … father … best friend". Fifteen influence strategies were identified, sub divided by whether the strategies used were direct or indirect (Cowan, Drinkard and MacGavin 1984). Direct strategies included the use of more overt behaviours (asking, begging and pleading, telling or asserting, reasoning, demanding or arguing, stating importance, bargaining and persistence), whereas indirect strategies are believed to occur when *"the influencer acts as if the person on the receiving end is not aware of the influence"* (Johnson 1976, p. 100). Indirect influence strategies included the use of negative affect (such as the use of crying, sadness and anger), positive affect (including the use of sweetness and innocence), verbal manipulation (often involving telling lies), eliciting reciprocity, using an advocate, evasion and laissez-faire (taking independent action, regardless) (Cowan *et al*. 1984). Adolescents directed more influence strategies towards their mothers than their fathers, and of those strategies directed towards mothers most involved the use of negative affect.

Examining explicitly the mother-child dyad, twelve child influence strategies were identified by Cowan and Avants (1988). These included: ask, bargain, show positive feelings, do as I please, show negative affect, persistence, beg and plead, perform good deeds, reason, cry and get angry. What is significant from this study is that strategies were related to the level of parental resistance that the children expected to encounter: high (anticipating non-compliance strategies e.g. beg and plead, cry) or low (autonomous strategies e.g. tell), and whether or not an equal power relationship existed between the parent and child (egalitarian strategies e.g. bargain and reason).

A study of the power strategies of popular and rejected black South African children identified four dimensions of influence strategies: direct and indirect influence strategies (as identified by Cowan *et al*. 1984), and bilateral and unilateral strategies (Bonn 1995). Falbo and Peplau (1980) had earlier identified the concept of bilateral and unilateral dimensions within influence strategies in their study of intimate relationships. Whereas bilateral strategies require the cooperation and responsiveness of the target (e.g. bargaining), unilateral strategies do not. Bonn (1995), through interviews with children involving hypothetical situations, identified a range of strategies, including persuasion, bargaining and compromise (bilateral, direct strategies); suggesting, ingratiating, and deception (bilateral, indirect strategies); sadness, crying and anger (unilateral, indirect strategies); and asking, threatening and coercion (unilateral, direct influence strategies). Rejected children often used unilateral influence strategies, frequently involving the use of aggression (Bonn 1995).

More recent work on adolescents and their parents identified four classes of influence strategies[1]: bargaining, persuasion, emotional, and request strategies (Palan and Wilkes 1997). In a diary study which applied Palan and Wilkes' (1997) influence strategy framework focussing on children's impact on innovative decision-making, children were subsequently found to employ persuasion strategies most often, followed by request and bargaining strategies (Götze, Prange and Uhrovska 2009). In only a few cases were children found to utilise emotion based strategies (Götze et al. 2009).

Lee and Collins (2000) and Lee and Beatty (2002), through videotaped recordings of family interactions during a simulated decision-making situation, recognised the potential for coalitions to form within families. Five main influence strategy types were identified: experience strategies (using experience and knowledge as a source of information to influence the outcome of a decision), legitimate strategies (which emphasise positional power and ste-

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1 It should be noted that Palan and Wilkes (1997) identified seven influence strategies, although the latter three (expert, legitimate and directive) were strategies solely utilised by parents in response to their adolescent's use of an influence strategy.

reotypes), emotion strategies, bargaining strategies and coalition strategies (Lee and Collins 2000). Seven dimensions of children's direct influence strategies, ask nicely, bargain, show affection, just ask, beg and plead, show anger and con, have also been identified (Williams and Burns 2000). More recently the child influence strategies of justifying and highlighting the benefits of purchases, forming coalitions, compromising and remaining persistent, have also been documented (Thompson, Laing and McKee 2007).

In addition to the types of child influence strategies, a number of studies have also assessed children's influence on family decision processes in terms of the amount of influence children exert. Factors such as product classification and usage patterns (Belch *et al.* 1985; Shoham and Dalakas, 2003); the stage in the decision-making process (Szybillo and Sosanie 1977; Belch *et al.* 1985; Lee and Beatty 2002; Götze *et al.* 2009; Wang *et al.*, 2007); child demographics, such as age (John, 1999) and gender (Flurry 2007; Wang *et al.*, 2007); and family variables, such as family size (Jenkins 1979; Ahuja and Stinson 1993; Beatty and Talpade, 1994; Geuens, Mast and De Pelsmacker, 2002), income and social class (Ekström 2007; Jenkins 1979; Hamilton and Catterall, 2006; Moschis and Mitchell 1986; Lee and Beatty, 2002), and family type (Bates and Gentry 1994; Hall *et al.* 1995; Mangleburg and Grewal, 1999) are suggested to affect the amount of influence children exert.

Children appear to make informed choices about which influence strategy they will employ (Williams and Burns 2000). Their decisions are informed by the historical success or failure of utilizing such strategies in previous decision-making situations (Bao *et al.* 2007; Götze *et al.* 2009; Thompson *et al.* 2007). Ultimately, however, whilst we do know a great deal about the types of influence strategies which children utilize, and the amount of influence children have, we do not know how environmental variables (such as the family setting) shape the influence strategies which children direct towards their parents (Cotte and Wood, 2004). In this paper

we explicitly focus on how sibling relationships, as one component of the family environment, shape the influence strategies which children utilize.

METHODOLOGY

Phenomenological interviews (Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1989) were conducted with six families living in the North West of England, capturing the stories of twenty-nine family respondents. Following calls for family research which captures the dynamics of family purchase decision-making (Hamilton and Catterall 2006; Tinson and Nancarrow 2005) interviews were conducted with both children and their parents. In line with other interpretivist studies (see for instance Thompson and Troester 2002) purposive sampling (Miles and Huberman 1984) was used to identify and recruit a range of family types and not just nuclear family forms. Detailed profiles of the six families recruited are presented in Table 1. An emphasis on studying consumers in-depth necessitated a smaller sample size to be used to allow thick descriptions to emerge (Carrigan and Szmigin 2006) which is common for interpretivist consumer research.

The families were recruited partly through personal contacts; partly through placing online appeals for participants in family newspapers and publications; and partly by contacting relevant family organisations in the North West region. The interviews were conducted in the family home, usually in the kitchen at the dining table. Each family was visited between three and five times and interviews were conducted over a period ranging from four to twelve months. Respondents were first asked for their consent to participate in the research process, assured of anonymity, told about the purpose of the research and then asked for permission to record the conversations.

Consent was sought from parents and guardians to approach their children in order to then seek the children's consent to be involved in the data collection process (Mandell 1991). Methods by

Table 1: Respondents' details

Family Pseudonym	Family Type/Comments	Parents/ Guardians	Working status of Parents/ Guardians	Children/ Ages	Number of interviews	Time period of interviews
Jones Family	**Cohabiting couple headed family; Debbie and Paul are not married and have four children together**	**Debbie Paul**	**Childminder Plumber**	**Michael (14) Anna (12) Adam (9) Tina (7)**	**5**	**11 months**
Baldwin Family	**Blended; Carole and Ray have one biological child together (Nina), and Jessica (Ray's step-daughter, Carole's biological child) also lives in the family home. Carole and Ray also have non-resident children from previous relationships**	**Carole Ray**	**Sales Assistant Plumber**	**Jessica (14) Nina (5)**	**4**	**12 months**
Harrison Family	Single parent family	Natalie	Unemployed	Mark Peters (21) David Peters (18) Luke Harrison (13)	3	6 months
Francis/ Akua Family	Lesbian headed family	Fante Francis Barbara Akua	Office Manager Senior Civil Servant	Kwame Akua (19) Helen Akua (17) Ashanti Francis (5) Kaya Francis (3)	3	4 months
White Family	Nuclear	Claire Brian	Administrator Sales Rep	Robert (12) Lee and Kevin (10)	4	6 months
Bright Family	Blended	Pat Tom	Housewife Company Director	Zara (11) Jack (9)	3	6 months

which valid consent can be obtained from children were adhered to (Mason 2004). Recognising that children are potentially vulnerable research participants (Morrow and Richards 1996) the children were interviewed within the family home where an adult was always present, although not necessarily within earshot.

Interviews were tape recorded in full, lasted between 60 and 130 minutes, and were transcribed verbatim. The interviews with family members were conducted over three stages and explored themes such as family history, intra-family relationships and how family members got their own way. In stage one an interview was conducted with the parents/guardians. Following this initial interview, stage two involved interviews with the children. Given that children, particularly younger children, may feel uncomfortable in a one-on-one interview situation (Mayall 2001) the children were given the option to have another sibling present during their interview. Indeed in the second stage of the interviewing process the membership of the interviews was very fluid. Some children preferred to be interviewed individually, whereas in other families the children freely left and returned to the interview as other siblings joined and departed. Accordingly with some of the families one longer style visit was conducted with the children (comprising several shorter interviews with single and multiple children, often with overlapping attendance), whereas in other families the children preferred to have a much more contained interview. A semi participatory researcher role was adopted with the children (Mandell, 1991). Following this stage of interviewing, a final family group interview was conducted at stage three.

The interpretation of the interview texts was undertaken using a hermeneutical process (Thompson 1991; Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1990) which involved moving iteratively, back and forth between interview texts (within and across family cases) and the literature. Emerging themes in the data drove subsequent reading in the literature (Thompson 1996). Following hermeneutical principles (at the methodological level) a constant shift when reading between individual transcripts and the entire data set enabled a greater emergent understanding to develop in which elements of the part gave further meaning to the whole. Each family case was analysed on an idiographic basis which allowed for categorization of data from which larger conceptual classes emerged. These concepts were then compared across family cases, following Spiggle's (1994) initial steps for qualitative data analysis.

FINDINGS

We have chosen to present, in a similar vein to Thompson (2005), two family cases which illuminate the global themes found across all the families in this study. Two family stories are used to emphasize the depth of the data which was collected and to show the complex and ambivalent nature of sibling relationships within the family setting. Our exploratory study highlights the ways in which children tried to help their siblings when they attempted to get their own way from their parents (*helping behaviours*, for example, expressing to parents the unfairness of not buying a product for a sibling; or voluntarily, or unwittingly, offering support to a sibling through coalition formation), and also the behaviours of siblings when they decided to counter the influence strategies of their brother(s)/sister(s) (*hindering behaviours*, such as using threats and violence to stop a child employing an influence strategy; or sabotaging their influence attempt). Primacy is placed on child accounts of sibling relationships.

Across each family story the children were aware that certain siblings within families were favoured by parents. Unequal parent-child relations, and parental favouritism of specific children, are suggested to be common characteristics of family life (McIntosh

and Punch 2009; Suitor et al. 2008) and this strongly emerged within our data. The siblings and parents alike highlighted within each family the children who were favoured by parents, which was particularly acute in the blended Baldwin family. Here Jessica Baldwin highlights her step-father, Ray's, favouritism of his biological child, Nina, supporting earlier research that step-parents often favour their biological children (Suitor *et al*., 2008):

Jessica: Nina. Yeah (..) she's their angel, she like, like gets all the time, she doesn't even have to ask for things, she just gets them from Ray, he buys her things all the time … It doesn't work like that for me (.) I have to put money to the things I want, or just go without, but I do try and work on them.

A sense of the unfairness of parental favouritism emerged from the family stories which highlighted the relative ease with which certain siblings could influence their parents. Such ease antagonised the other siblings, particularly those siblings who felt that they had to work much harder in order to get their own way, as Anna Jones comments:

Anna: It's so unfair. Michael gets everything, computer stuff, guitars, money to go out with his mates, Mum won't give me any extra money because I get my spends, and that's it.

Michael Jones' preferential parental treatment results in volatile relationships between him and his fellow siblings, with parental differential treatment (PDT) giving rise to sibling rivalry and competitiveness amongst siblings (Tucker, McHale and Crouter 2005). Whilst PDT worked to help certain children influence their parents in attempts to get their own way (facing minimal parental resistance), it could also work to the disadvantage of the favoured children in relation to sibling interaction because PDT often represented an obstacle for certain children to overcome. Parental favouritism affected sibling relationships, as Michael Jones, described as his mother's "golden boy" by his father, explains:

Michael: I suppose Mum does buy me more things (..) I can tell Anna's not happy about that, but what can I do? It's kind of a good thing, but a bad thing as well … yes I can get what I want from Mum, but I've got to watch my back a bit with Anna. She doesn't like it.

Ultimately what emerges from the family stories is that parent-child relationships can affect sibling-sibling relationships, resulting in a spill-over of behaviours (i.e. that differing parent-child relations are manifest in, and shape, sibling-sibling relationships). Moreover, sibling-sibling relationships can also help or hinder a child's success in influencing parental decisions. Helping behaviours and hindering behaviours were evident amongst siblings in terms of facilitating or impeding another sibling's utilization of influence strategies on their parents.

Sibling relationships and helping behaviours

Just as parent-child coalitions exist (Lee and Collins, 2000), sibling-sibling coalitions were also apparent (Thompson *et al*., 2007) within each family story. Nina Baldwin, for example, frequently recognises the unfairness of her parent's resistance to her half sister's influence strategies. Fairness has been reported as a characteristic of sibling interaction and exchanges (McIntosh and

Punch, 2009), and Nina explains how she offers her help to Jessica in an effort to get her half-sister what she wants:

Nina: Mummy and Daddy just get me what I want (..) Jess doesn't get many things, so I help her … I'll say to Mummy that I want something when really I don't, but it's for Jess.

Nina likes spending time with her older half-sister, but frequently this is not reciprocated by Jessica. Although Jessica is often annoyed by Nina, with older siblings keen to distance themselves from younger siblings (Punch, 2008), Jessica does attempt to recruit Nina when utilizing an influence strategy directed towards her parents:

Jessica: I try just to ask them for things, but they're having none of it, they keep, they just say that I've had too much, and that they can't afford it. That's what they always say to me, we've got no money (..) but they get stuff for Nina, they buy her loads of stuff … so I'll get Nina to ask them for things for me. They don't say no to her.

Although Jessica is often annoyed by her half sister's actions and Nina's desires to spend time with her, Jessica also manipulates this relationship for her own gain – and recruits Nina to employ influence strategies on Jessica's behalf. Through promises to play with Nina and to spend time with her, which often do not materialise, Jessica recruits an ally who is skilled and successful in influencing her parents. Ultimately Nina's influence success and power is exploited by Jessica, and younger siblings are reportedly easily manipulated by older siblings in deal making situations (McIntosh and Punch, 2009). Such manipulation was also evident within the Jones family, with Michael's siblings often forming temporary coalitions with him to strengthen their chances of success when employing an influence strategy. Whilst his siblings report that they do not have a favourable opinion of Michael, largely because of PDT, they too recognise the minimal parental resistance that he faces when influencing their parents:

Anna: Michael's the good one, the favourite (.) the one that gets everything. He's dull, a swot, good at school. I don't hang out with him, I wouldn't (.) but then he's good to have on side if you want something from Mum and Dad.

We feel that the above quotation is significant as it highlights the ambivalence and fluidity within sibling relationships (Edwards, Mauthner and Hadfield, 2005; Punch, 2008). Sibling relationships are far from static and fluctuate across contexts and influence strategy attempts, and are often manipulated and exploited by children to assist them in achieving their own ends. However, such manipulation is recognised by older siblings – and it does not always appear that they are totally duped by their fellow siblings into offering help – as Michael Jones comments:

Michael: I know what they're doing, I know that they want to use me so they can get something from Mum. But then I don't know when I might need them to help me get something (..) so I just go along with it, sort of bank it in case I need their help later.

Tag-team sibling influence was also apparent. The Jones siblings discussed how they each took turns to help influence their parents buy products which they all wanted. Parents are more responsive to the influence of their children when multiple children argue for

the purchase (Tinson and Nancarrow, 2007). Here Adam and Tina Jones discuss their actions when they approached their parents to get cable television:

Adam: We all wanted to get cable, so we just went on and on and on at them. We took it in turns to mither them
Tina: We all helped to get that, everyone had a go (.) Michael helped, too, so we knew we would break them and get it because he wanted it

Across the family stories, as Thompson *et al.* (2007) similarly report, the siblings did not formally or explicitly discuss the types of influence strategy that they would utilize. Rather the siblings used the influence strategy which they knew had proved to be most effective for them to use in the past. This lends support to the notion that children engage in a trial and error process to understand which strategy is most effective for them to utilize (Bao *et al.*, 2007):

Michael: I don't have to try too hard to get what I want (..) usually I just put my arms around Mum and tell her what I want. That usually does it.

Ultimately siblings can work to help fellow siblings to get what they want from their parents. At times, however, younger children appeared to be easily manipulated by older children. Sibling relationships are often ambivalent, as Nina Baldwin comments. Here Nina highlights that although she does like her half-sister, and often freely offers her help to Jessica to influence their parents, at times the relationship between Nina and Jessica sours. It is at this point, as experienced by other siblings across the families, that violence is used to gain the 'help' of other siblings:

Nina: Sometimes I don't like Jessica, and Jessica doesn't like me. If she doesn't play with me I won't help her (.) she doesn't like that, and sometimes she says she'll hurt me if I don't help her, or she'll say she'll (..) she'll say she'll kick me if I don't help.

Conflict is a common feature of sibship (Edwards et al., 2006). Violence was also a way in which siblings could hinder another child's utilization of an influence strategy, as the follow section describes.

Sibling relationships and hindering behaviours

Threats of violence were also identified by the child respondents as ways in which siblings tried to block and hinder the use of influence strategies by their brother(s)/sister(s). Often siblings would tell one another what they were going to approach their parents for, before employing a given influence strategy. The siblings, however, were often very aware that their parents' resources were limited and that, because of this, there was a rush to be bought something first. Parents were also reported to justify non-compliance to their children's earlier influence strategies on the grounds of limited financial resources, as Palan and Wilkes (1997) also found, and so the children felt a heightened sense of urgency to get what they wanted before their siblings:

Jessica: The thing with Nina is that she gets all the time, she gets bought loads of things from Mum and Ray. I don't think that's fair, and when she comes to me saying that she's going to ask them for a new mobile or coat or whatever I try and stop her … I might threaten her or something just to get her not to ask them. If she doesn't ask them for things then they can't use the excuse of having no money to me.

Another related way in which children attempted to counter the influence strategies of their siblings was to directly emphasize to parents how often they [the parents] yielded to their sibling's influence strategies. This frequently concerned the children who the siblings felt were favoured the most by their parents due to PDT. As Anna Jones explains, Michael's success in influencing his mother and father antagonises her and her siblings, and as a result Anna stresses to her parents the unfairness and frequency with which they yield to Michael:

Anna: Michael gets what he wants, he asks and he just gets, so that's when I say to Mum you bought him something last week (.) last time. I don't think she realizes how often she buys him things, so I let her know to stop him getting more stuff (..) I point it out to her, he shouldn't get anything else, it's not fair.

Often multiple siblings would unite in larger families to highlight such unfairness to their parents, as Tina further explains:

Tina: I think (..) I think if I just said it wasn't fair, that Michael gets things all the time Mum wouldn't believe me, not just me. But then if Adam and Anna says it too, then (.) then they believe us more.

Siblings, either individually or in coalition with other siblings, would also attempt to sabotage the chances of their brother's or sister's influence success through suggesting to parents that buying him or her a given product would be a waste of their money. Such behaviour was obviously dependent on inter-sibling relationships and the quality of such relationships at a given point in time. Often siblings approached parents to cast a seed of doubt in their mind as to whether a child would use the requested product to block sibling influence attempts:

Adam: I say to Mum and Dad that they won't use it, or they already have it (..) or that I know someone at school that has it, and they say it's no good (.) so don't get them it. I might not even know, but I say it to stop them getting things.

A similar technique was also used by children to block and hinder the influence strategies employed by their siblings. Rather than deceive their parents, as the above extract illustrates, in some instances elder children would use the internet to research what their siblings were asking their parents for. Through the internet the children found negative information about the products that their siblings wanted, and used this information as a basis to inform their parents and sway their decisions. Here Jessica discusses using this technique when her younger half-sister asked her parents for a Nintendo DS™:

Jessica: Nina wanted a pink DS (.) but I didn't want her to get one 'cos she gets too much. So I went online and found a bad review and showed it to Mum, I showed it to her, and told her that she'd get headaches using it, and she didn't buy it in the end.

Rather than this being a selfless and supporting sibling act, we feel that Jessica acted in this way to stop her half-sister being bought an expensive item. Alongside Jessica feeling that Nina is bought too many things by her mother and step-father, Jessica is also aware that her parents have limited financial resources. Whilst children using the internet to gather information to support influence strategies is

documented elsewhere (Belch, Krentler and Willis-Flurry, 2005; Thomson and Laing, 2003), with parents responding favourably to children who are well informed, here siblings actively use the internet to gather information to hinder the influence strategies of their brother(s)/sister(s).

Again, the ambivalent nature of sibling relationships was also apparent in terms of hindering behaviours. Siblings who had once worked together to influence their parents would often work against each other in union with other siblings. Here Adam discusses a family decision of deciding where to eat out in which he united with his older brother, Michael, to get his own way. Adam often works in coalition with Tina and Anna to stop Michael getting his own way, but here Adam joined forces with Michael:

Adam: Anna was on about us going to Nando's[2], but I didn't want to, I wanted a Chinese. Michael wasn't bothered where we went, so I got him to say he wanted a Chinese as well (.) I said he could lend my [computer] games, so in the end Mum said we should go for a Chinese.

The above quotation from Adam again works to underline the ambivalent nature of sibling relationships, and also the power that certain children have within the family. In this decision making scenario Adam persuaded Michael to agree with his restaurant choice, with siblings often using products and monetary exchanges as currency to sway the decisions of other siblings (McIntosh and Punch, 2009), despite a volatile relationship existing between the brothers.

DISCUSSION

Whilst we know a great deal about the types of influence strategies which children direct towards their parents, and the variables which affect the amount of influence that children exert in family consumption decision making, we do not have a thorough understanding of the *processes* of child influence itself. Our paper has attempted to fill an element of this gap by focussing attention on how one component of the family environment, sibling interaction and relationships, shapes the child influence process. Sibling relationships have largely been ignored by consumer researchers (Cotte and Wood, 2004) and sociologists alike (McIntosh and Punch, 2009), and our paper offers some insight into the ambivalent nature of sibship.

As our family stories suggest, sibling relationships are far from static, with sibling alliances and coalitions contested and negotiated by children, largely for their own gain. Within the Jones family, for example, Michael's strong relationship with his parents and the resulting parental differential treatment that he receives antagonizes his siblings, Anna, Tina and Adam. However, the siblings recognise Michael's strong position within this family, and the minimal parental resistance which Michael faces when utilizing influence strategies, and they will often work with Michael to bolster their own chances of influence success. Although Michael does not always lend his support to his siblings to strengthen their chances of influence success, he often does, largely because of the use of bribes (e.g. Adam's offer to Michael of lending Michael his computer games if Michael agreed with his choice of restaurant for the family meal) or because Michael feels he may need to recoup this help from his siblings at a later time.

Jessica Baldwin also recognises the ease in which her half-sister influences the decisions of her mother and step-father.

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2 Nando's is a restaurant in the United Kingdom which specializes in chicken dishes

Despite Jessica being annoyed by her half-sister, with Nina enjoying spending time with Jessica and playing with her, Jessica will often attempt to recruit Nina to employ influence strategies on her behalf towards their parents. At times Nina will do this voluntarily, with Nina recognising the unfair parental resistance which Jessica faces when utilizing influence strategies. However, often Jessica will manipulate Nina into offering her help through threatening to hurt her if she doesn't, or making deals with her to encourage her to help (and these deals often do not materialize) when this relationship sours.

Children can help their siblings to get what they want from their parents through helping behaviours i.e. emphasizing to parents the unfairness of not yielding to a sibling's influence strategy; utilizing an influence strategy on parents on behalf of another sibling; or through working in coalition with siblings, either through their own free will or because they have been coerced into lending their support due to threats of violence. Largely we feel that these children chose to help a sibling because they expected to gain something back from doing so. The children reported that their parents responded well to displays of supposedly altruistic behaviour, and that selfless acts often resulted in material gain for the children (with parents rewarding such behaviour).

Children also displayed hindering behaviours, and would use violence; highlight to parents the unfairness of yielding to a child's influence strategy; form coalitions; and sabotage a child's chances of influence success (e.g. by informing parents that the item a child wants is not a good product, or that they wouldn't use it) to stop siblings getting their own way from their parents. The children were aware that their parents had limited financial resources, a feeling very much heightened given the current economic climate, and as such there was stiff competition amongst the siblings to get what they wanted first from their parents.

Siblings, therefore, can play an important role in helping or hindering the influence strategies which children utilize, offering insight into the process of child influence. Equally our study lends support to the notion that children utilize complex and sophisticated influence strategies in attempts to get what they want from their parents (Götze *et al*., 2009; Thompson *et al*., 2007). Whilst coalition formation has been documented elsewhere within family decision making (Lee and Collins, 2000), and in relation to sibling coalitions (see, for instance Thompson *et al*., 2007), our study extends this body of literature by highlighting the fluidity of sibling coalition formation. Sibling coalitions appear ambivalent, and future research should further explore how such different coalition patterns form and re-form, coalescing around different family members and various combinations of influence strategies.

Our study was limited to examining the influence strategies children utilize on their parents, however scope also exists to explore the different ways in which children attempt to influence the behaviours of their siblings (intra-generational influence). The main focus of our paper was to explore how sibship affects child influence strategies, however we already have early findings that suggest that family type also affects the process (cf. Jessica's relationship with her step-father) which could be usefully explored further. Our paper has also, because of space constraints, focussed on the voice of siblings alone, although the stories and themes presented here through the voices of the children recruited are very much rooted in the accounts of family life from both children *and* parents. It is also recognised that the setting for the interviews was largely dictated by parents who initially granted access to their home. We also acknowledge that the family group interview could have produced socially acceptable results i.e. children may have felt constrained in this setting, and presented their family in a harmonious light, for

example. However, an individual interview format was also offered to the children in an attempt to take account of such potential bias.

Opportunities exist to explore the influence strategies of children across a greater range of family types, and also to explore in further depth whether children direct different types of influence strategies towards different family members (e.g. siblings, grandparents, step-parents). Similarly opportunities exist to explore firstly, multiple family consumption sites (e.g. do children switch their use of influence strategy in different family settings, or homes); and secondly families of different cultures, in order to investigate whether such factors (as sibling relationships) also influence the choice processes involved in selecting which influence strategy to employ in families from different cultural settings.

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