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Parentification

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Table of Contents

1.) Abstract.....	3
2.) Introduction.....	4
3.) Literature Review.....	4
4.) Purpose/Background.....	7
5.) Recruitment.....	9
6.) Informed Consent Process.....	11
7.) Research Procedures.....	12
8.) Methodology.....	12
9.) Dissemination.....	13
10.) Risks and cost to and the protection of subjects...	13
11.) Confidentiality of data.....	13
12.) Limitations.....	14
13.) Analysis.....	15
14.) Conclusion.....	24
15.) Future Research.....	25
16.) References.....	26
17.) Appendix.....	30

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ABSTRACT

The phenomena of Parentification. Parentification is best outlined by Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark (1973), as a family process in which children or adolescents assume adult responsibilities and/or parental roles that may be developmentally inappropriate. There has been much research done on the topic of Parentification and the effects of the psychopathology on the individual. (e.g. substance abuse, depression, self-esteem, recidivism, anxiety, etc.) Although some research has been done on birth order and/or family structure and how it correlates to parentification, no published research was found on parentification and its repercussions or ramifications for the youngest sibling(s) (i.e. those adolescent's that were not parentified, but their sibling was). The goal of this research was to gain some insight into the youngest siblings' awareness of their eldest sibling fulfilling the role of parent. My constructs are Parentification and Family Structure. The research question is, "What is the level of awareness that the youngest child has of their eldest sibling in the role of parent?" This qualitative research was exploratory in nature, using an ethnographic design. The expected outcome was that the youngest sibling would not be aware of the extent to which her eldest sibling was parentified. Results from the study include: that the younger sibling, (June) had total awareness of her older sister (May) in the role of parent. Through the process of analysis there were three factors that arose multiple times which can be concluded as to why June had total awareness of her sister in the role of parent, they are: severity of abuse, age and outside influences.

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examines the perceptions and awareness that one younger sibling has of her elder sibling in the role of parent.

There has been a lot of research done on parentification and the effects it has on the psychology of an individual. Recently much research has been done regarding ethnic disparities in parentification. Researcher Lisa Hooper from the University of Louisville has been paving the way in research, but there is still much research that needs to be done regarding the phenomenon of parentification. When looking through dozens of studies, in the hopes of finding an answer to the younger siblings awareness of parentification there was no research to be found investigating the siblings that were not parentified, and their awareness of the parentification that took place. The closest study to my question was a meta-analysis, done by Suzanne McKenna (1987) looking at the concepts of: family structure, birth order, familial satisfaction, parentification, depression, and self-esteem. "Only one study reported significant birth order differences (McKenna, 1987) which indicated that first-borns had more negative attitudes toward their families than later borns" (p.88). Within this same meta- analysis, "The other two studies found no effects on birth order. None of the three studies reported differences in ratings of self as a coinciding factor of birth order" (McKenna, p.83). This is important because it shows that birth order and familial structure are not related and were found to be independent variables within the study (McKenna, p.83). It is troubling that the closest one can get to finding out the perceptions or awareness that the other siblings have of their parentified sibling, is the familial satisfaction that the parentified sibling has with

the family structure itself. This makes the primary focus of the study the parentified child, not the siblings. The most helpful piece of information within this particular study, and possibly overall was this quote by (Mckenna, 1995),

It is probable that the amount one is parentified will affect one 's satisfaction with one's family, but the levels of self-esteem and depression one has due to parentification are influenced by the amount of satisfaction that the individual has with his or her family. (p.86)

This joins both familial satisfaction and severity of parentification together. This suggests the idea that if one is heavily affected by parentification and experiences adaptations to their levels of self-esteem and depression, then their amount of familial satisfaction, whether good or bad, may lead to the awareness by the younger sibling/s of the parentified child's role as a parent. Lisa Hooper did another study in 2007, on attachment and family systems theory. This study is important because it looks at the theories of how a parentified individual views himself or herself in the world, as they get older. The key to this research is how an individual loses or gains resilience to negative outcomes in life when looking specifically at how attachment theory and family systems theory interrelate during the phenomenon of parentification. Hooper (2007) says "The extent of one's resilience in the face of stressful life events is determined significantly by the attachment style developed during childhood" (p.3). This is extremely important in cases of severe abuse where the child cannot build a secure bond with their attachment figure or

parent. Many times this results later in life with the child thinking, "I am not worthy of comfort and support" (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994; Hooper, 2007,p.4). It is this type of reaction, or thinking that may prove to be a hint to the younger sibling/s that parentification has taken place because of their parentified sibling's way of addressing negative life events. The parentified child may also develop a defensive strategy (Hooper, 2007, p.4) in the hope of dealing with their parentification within the family system. An enmeshed family--that is, "a family in which one member becomes overly involved with or even exploitative of members of a system at different hierarchical levels"(Hooper, p.4) Many times exists where parentification occurs because there is a lack of individuation between members (Lewis, 2015). The parent's beliefs and sets of rules to navigate through life must become everyone's beliefs and rules as to not be ostracized from the family. When children conform to the role of parent, whether by choice or force, it is extremely difficult for these children to differentiate between the role of sibling and the role of parent. Through looking at the severity of the enmeshment within a family where parentification occurs one can theorize that the greater the severity of enmeshment, the greater the likelihood that the parentified child will self-identify with the role of parent. Therefore, the sibling/s of the parentified child may have more or less of a hint, depending on other outside factors, of their sibling being parentified.

When trying to examine possible "hints" that may allow awareness of parentification to occur in the siblings of the parentified, it is important to try and explore all possible outlets for those hints. Although there has been no research on

parentification and sibling awareness, there has been a handful of studies on parentification and the psychopathology of the parentified. These studies have looked at: resiliency and posttraumatic growth (Hooper, Marotta, Depuy, 2009), codependency, self-esteem, prevalence of guilt versus shame (Wells, Glickauf-Hughes & Jones 1999), attachment theory and family systems theory (Hooper, 2007), the correlation between parentification and psychological health (Hooper & Doehler, 2012), and depression (McKenna, 1995). The remaining studies on parentification all focused on finding the personal characteristics of the subjects, such as demographics and ethnic identity (Hooper, Wallace, Doehler, & Dantzler, 2012). The meta-analysis mentioned above (McKenna, 1995) looked extensively into demographics. There were also studies looking at specific groups like military families and parentification (Hooper, Moore & Smith, 2014).

Although much can be learned from these studies about the phenomenon of parentification, none of these studies try to explain the perceptions or awareness of the sibling/s of the parentified. This is the value of the current research.

PURPOSE/BACKGROUND

Rationale for the study: While there is a respectable amount of research on the topic, there is little to no research surrounding parentification in relation to birth order and family structure.

Research question: What is the level of awareness that the youngest child has of their eldest sibling in the role of parent?

There are primarily two types of parentification: the first type is instrumental parentification, which looks at the more tactical side of parentification.

In instrumental parentification, or as some researchers' describe it as "adultification"(Burton, 2007), the child takes on the more physical roles of the parent, such as household chores, taking care of younger siblings, providing income for the family, in an essence taking care of the physical maintenance of the family (Hooper, 2008).

Emotional parentification is taking care of the socio-emotional needs of the family members or the family as a whole. In this role the child may play the role of mediator for the parents, provide nurturance and support, and in some cases may act as a confidant or colleague to their parents (Hooper, 2008).

Ethnic differences have been found in the rates of children parentified (Kerig, 2005). Some of these ethnic differences may follow from cultural values and ecological challenges each group faces (Kerig, 2005). Negative outcomes have been found in European American groups while in the African American groups parentification has proven to have positive effects (Watson & Protinsky, 1988; see also Jacobvitz et al.,

2004) like resiliency or resistance/buffering (Doehler, Hooper, Jankowski & Tomek, 2012, p.12) We also know that, “the extent of one’s resilience in the face of stressful life events is determined significantly by the attachment style developed during childhood”(Hooper, 2007, p.3), and that, “the amount one is parentified will affect one’s satisfaction with one’s family, but the levels of self-esteem and depression one has due to parentification are influenced by the amount of satisfaction that an individual has with his or her family” (Mckenna, 1995, p.86). Additionally, there is a proven correlation between parentification and psychological well-being (Hooper, L & Doehler, K, 2012, p.10) My question is, “Does the amount of psychological impact on the parentified child have an impact on the youngest sibling/s awareness of the parentification occurring?” However, in the study mentioned above the “sample consisted of undergraduate students; and the results may not be generalizable to other populations”(Hooper, & Doehler, 2012). It is this author’s hope that the current research may shed light on why we should continue this type of research, but with different populations to see if a relationship truly exists.

RECRUITMENT

This proposal was submitted to the WMU HSIRB which determined HSIRB approval was not needed (September 30, 2015) This project did not meet the Federal definition of research because it is a single case study (two perceptions of the same role) and is not generalizable. The inclusion criteria for recruitment of these subjects was: average or above average IQ, possession of the ability to use Skype software; and be available for one hour a week for 6 weeks for interviews.

Participants must have a sibling willing to participate in the study that lived with the sibling that identifies as being parentified as a child during the time when parentification took place. Participants were also required to be able to recall when the parentification occurred, and their attitudes towards it, or unawareness of it. Gender, and age were not specified, however, women were preferred based on traditional gender roles and the “long- held assumption that females are at an increased risk for parentification” (Hooper, DeCoster, White & Voltz, 2011, p.11). The exclusionary criteria included any mental health issues, meaning any psychological diagnosis located in the DSM identified by a licensed health care provider that would create a disturbance for the subject throughout the interviewing process rendering the subject unfit to participate in the study. Referrals to the study came from the community of Kalamazoo from a person, a family member, or a friend self-identifying as being parentified. After subjects were identified they were told to contact the principal investigator on this project at this email address: alicia.j.wayne@wmich.edu. Possible subjects were also referred to Linda Petree who is the Director of the Human Research Protection Plan if they had any further questions about their rights as research participants. Linda Petree’s contact information is: email: pteel@unm.edu and telephone: 505-277-0472.

INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS

Before interviewing siblings were emailed an informed consent that followed the Western Michigan University informed consent guidelines for research (see Appendix 1a). In order to be a participant in this study participants were required to go through a series of 6 one-hour long interviews with the PI via Skype. The interviewing process took place between October 2015 and November 2015. A guided interviewing process was used. The interviews were recorded via camcorder, and later transcribed for analysis. After analysis is completed all video tape recordings will be destroyed no later than the end of December 2015. It did not cost the participant's any money to take part in the study, and they were informed that there was to be no compensation for their participation. Subjects were notified that their participation was voluntary. They could decide not to participate at all or they could start the study and withdraw at any time. Subjects were informed that their withdrawal or refusal to participate would not affect their relationship with Western Michigan University in anyway. Both subjects were informed that if they or their sibling refused to participate that there would be no penalty or loss of benefits to which they or their sibling were otherwise entitled. Both subjects were told they could withdraw their consent at any time, and at any time discontinue participation without penalty. If subjects wished to stop their participation in this research study for any reason, they were advised to contact Alicia Wayne (PI) at alicia.j.wayne@wmich.edu. Subjects were also informed that throughout the study, the PI or Faculty Advisor would notify them of new information that had become available and that might affect their decision to remain in the study. Both

participants were required to email the PI saying that they had read the informed consent, and understood all of its contents, and were then willing to continue their participation in the study; leaving their electronic signature on the bottom of the email. After both signatures were collected, the PI emailed both subjects to set up a weekly interviewing schedule.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The method of data collection was a series of guided interviews. Participants were required to be able to recall when the parentification occurred, and their attitudes towards it, or unawareness it. Participants had to be able to use the Skype software, and be available for one hour a week for 6 weeks for the interviews. The location of data collection was the Waldo Library in a study room that could be privately rented out on the campus of Western Michigan University, located at this address: 1903 West Michigan Avenue, Kalamazoo, MI 49008. The duration of the study was from October, 2015 through December 11, 2015.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative ethnographic design was used examining the constructs of Parentification and Family Structure

Construct #1: Parentification-- the severity to which she/he was parentified.
Instrumental/Emotional. Negative? Positive? This is subjective to the individual.

Construct #2: Family Structure--Is the little sibling aware of her sibling being parentified?

DISSEMINATION

This research project serves as an honors thesis, and all findings will be published in the WMU ScholarWorks.

RISKS AND COST TO AND PROTECTION FOR SUBJECTS

Possible risks involved with this study included experiencing emotional discomfort during interviewing. The guided interview questions required participants to recall memories that may be upsetting regarding their previous traumatic experiences.

Assistance was offered regarding any counseling or support the participants may have needed throughout any point of the study upon request. The cost to the subjects was one hour of their time a week, for six weeks. If subjects wished to discuss the information above or any other risks they may have experienced, they were advised to ask questions during the interviewing process or email the faculty advisor on this project Donna Weinreich, PhD, donna.weinreich@wmich.edu.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA

All data collected for this project remained confidential. First, besides Dr. Weinreich and the PI, no one had access to the tapes from the interviews on the video camera

or the transcripts. Each interview was transcribed and placed on a secure, external hard drive, and then the tapes were locked in a safe until they were needed for the next recording. Second, the interviews were held over Skype, however, none of the Skype interviews were recorded (a free-standing video recorder was used). Third, all transcribed files were kept on an external hard drive; no transcribed documents were stored on a personal computer. All transcribed files were locked in a safe when they were not being used for the project. Fourth, for the protection of the subjects, their personal names are not used in any documentation: transcriptions, analyses, or honors thesis. Lastly, all interview tapes will be destroyed upon the completion of the project. Subject 1's name is "May" to protect her confidentiality. Subject 2's name is "June" to protect her confidentiality. All names in the Genogram document were changed to protect the subjects.

LIMITATIONS

This is a single case study of 2 siblings making the research not generalizable to the general population. Another limitation was that the sibling pair lived in another state, so face-to-face interviews were conducted using modern technology. Skype was a necessary component to this project. Risks associated with using this technology, specifically Skype, included but were not limited to: computer glitches, such as losing service temporarily during the interview, resulting in dropped calls or frame freezing. Hardware technicalities, such as bad speakers on the computer itself, resulting in problems asking or receiving questions and answers. By using Skype software to conduct the interviews you lose the personability you can only get by interviewing in person. If either of the

siblings had requested some type of support or counseling assistance, finding how to administer that support and meet that request may have proved challenging across state lines.

ANALYSIS

All Skype interviews were recorded using a JVC GZ-MS120BU video camcorder, and were later transcribed using Microsoft Word. Then the data was analyzed through the coding up process, which develops and describes new constructs. The unit of analysis was the individual. The underlying theory was Phenomenology. Interviews took place until data saturation was reached. Interviews were discontinued at that time.

Three constructs emerged: Severity of Abuse, Age, and Outside factors or Hints that parentification took place. The original hypothesis was that the younger sibling would not have any awareness of her elder sibling in the role of parent. Due to the eldest sibling protecting the youngest sibling. As it turns out the younger sibling (June) had total awareness of her sister (May) in the role of parent. June was provided the definitions of instrumental and emotional parentification and then asked her if she thought she had experienced more of one than the other. June told me that her sister had experienced both. I then asked June to elaborate and she replied, "She was basically like the parent. My perception is, that my parents didn't have a whole lot to do with it, in raising me to be honest. It was mostly her." You can conclude that June formed a strong attachment to her sister when June states, "I

remember when I was younger and I would be upset, I would go to her.” In a normal parent-child transaction the child forms this attachment with a parent and not a sibling, which illuminates the severity of the parentification. It was this strong attachment that cemented May into her role of parent and helped to blur the roles of the individuals in the family. May and June’s mother grew to become very resentful of May, as June puts it, “my mom was like really resentful because, ya know, you have a kid and its crying and it wants its sister instead of its mom.” June continues to describe both of her parents and their engagement in raising her: “It shouldn’t have been too big of a thing for her because she really, like, wasn’t too much of a part of anything else. I don’t know. Her perception is that she was very much a part of it, but that’s not how I remember it.” June continues on as she describes her father, “I don’t think that my dad had any interest in raising kids in the first place. I think he was just happy that other people were willing to do it.” All of May’s statements about their parent’s involvement in raising June are congruent with June’s statements. During the interviews with the sisters it was made apparent to me that as the severity of the parentification grew, so did the enmeshment within the family structure. June reports about her sister’s responsibilities bestowed upon her from her parents, “she, like, would have all of the responsibility, umm, like, she worked like all the time since she was like 14, which I don’t even think was legal.” June continued:

“But umm, my parents kind of always expected her to like pay for stuff for me,” which she was willing to do because, ya know, she did think of me like,

her daughter basically. Umm, so she had all their responsibility taking care of me, taking me places, spending money on me and stuff, but, like, she didn't get to make any of the rules. She had to, like play by my parents' rules, which weren't always, like, fair or made sense."

When asked to describe some of the rules that her parents had, June explained that,

"they had, like, weird rules that, like, things just had to be a certain way. Even though they didn't need to be that way, like, there was no reason for it. But, it was mostly I think to just exert their authority. Like, mostly over her (May). Like I remember when, well I don't really remember, because I was little but I remember when they one time, like, my mom kicked her out of the house for, like, putting the dishes away wrong."

This statement from June in particular shows the high level of enmeshment in the family and the insurmountable amount of pressure placed on May to conform to her role. This is especially true when not conforming to her role, such as putting the dishes away wrong could cause her to be exiled from the family home. Another large indication of the severity of the parentification was when June was asked; if she were given the opportunity to go back to her childhood, knowing what she knows now, is there anything she would change. June replied,

“I think that when I was little I kind of didn’t understand fully, like that there was a little bit of tension especially between my mom and my sister. So sometimes if I was trying to get my way I’d do, like, the thing that little kids do, like, “Well May lets me do this.” So I think, like, I sometimes inadvertently caused conflict between them. Like, especially if I would do it to my mom.

“Oh well May says I’m allowed to watch TV past 5.”

May also recalls that when June was very young one of her first sentences was, “May fix it.” This suggests that there was really no separation between the mother role versus the sibling role for either May or June. In this description June does not refer to her sister May in any type of sisterly way. Children generally have to bargain and barter with their parents for things that they want, and in this scenario there is no separation for May from mother to sister. Both sisters report on the mental instability of their mother. Both sisters believe their mother to be non-diagnosed agoraphobic and suffering from OCD. June gives an example, “Like, my mom will freak-out if, like, I cut tomatoes in a different way then she thinks they are suppose to be cut. And I’m like woman, OCD. Like, this is not a normal thing to get angry about.” June continues,

“My mom she, definitely has, like, some depression and anxiety. Like, she... she... she... has so much anxiety, and, like, she can’t even see it, like, at all.

Without even realizing what she’s doing she will be all like” ‘oh I

wonder when they'll be home? I wonder when they'll be home?' It's like it's ok, they'll be home eventually. Like, there wasn't a fire. It's ok."

Both June and May express their concern for their mother in the area of agoraphobia, and June describes,

"She, like, definitely has depression too I think. And agoraphobia, I really think she's agoraphobic. She, like, has mini panic attacks that she cant even realize are panic attacks, when she has to leave the house. She'll just walk around being, like, 'wow its so hot. I'm having a really hard time breathing. There just must be no air circulation in here.' And I'm just, like, no, you're having a panic attack."

May describes her mother's panic attacks:

"She, whenever we are talking about something remotely stressful, she will flush red and say there is no air in the room. And, like, and I'll be, like, really, because we are outside. And she will start fanning herself and just be, like, oh my god there is just no air. And I'm like, really it's kind of funny how every time we talk about something stressful or you think about something stressful you all the sudden you are like, there is no air, and I'm hot, and, like, you know, like, you start feeling pains and, like, clawing at her chest. There's

like, basically how many times do we talk about something stressful a day a... a... a... couple. And she has them especially when she is out in public.”

May continues to describe a time in the allergist’s office:

“shes sort of agoraphobic,... if she’s in an elevator she particularly has, like, intense versions of those, umm if when she was at a doctors office. She was at an allergist’s office once, and she had one of those episodes, and she insisted that it was because she was having an allergic reaction, and it was because the allergist’s office must have a mold problem. And the allergist was like no you’re crazy and you need a therapist.”

Both sisters also agree that, as June puts it:

“I just think my dad was, like, spoiled rotten when he was a child, like, I just think he was the baby boy in his family, and his mom gave him, like, everything he ever wanted and, like, I think he is still very spoiled and, like, I think he expects everyone to, like, cater to that.”

Both sisters believe that their mother has a very unhealthy way of catering to his every need. May reports that her father was physically abusive. May recounts a time when June was very little and was suffering from night terrors,

“...she would have night terrors, and, like, he would get frustrated and, like, he wanting to deal with the situation, he would, like, hit her or like scream at her. Or any of those other things, and, like, I was not ok with that. So, like, there was a lot of like physically putting myself between him and her and basically being, like, ya know, which is like really hard, especially being someone like me. Especially when I was younger, he, like, did like hurt me, and like, so, like to have to do that was hard.”

May recounts a time when her sister, June, was very young and she stuck her finger in butter and had an allergic reaction to it. This is her account:

“June was sick when she was born. She, umm, she was super sick, like, she had, umm, a non existent immune system and she had a, like, umm, really.. really...really... bad allergies. Like, especially to like, umm, food allergies and stuff like that. And, like, so, like, trying to keep her alive was, like, really tough. And, like, sometimes, like, my dad would, like. There was one time June, like, put her finger in butter and ate it. And, like, umm, she had a really bad allergic reaction and my dad’s reaction to that was basically to, like, yell at her, and tell her it was her fault because, ya know, she would deserve to die and stuff, like, that, so, like, I was not cool with that.”

Aside from the sister’s diagnosis of their mother’s mental illness, and their father’s absence for the most part in raising June (whether it be physical abuse or just not being

around due to the affair he was having, [see family genogram, appendix 1b], this caused May to have to step into the parental role with some urgency, May also did many things to maintain her role as parent. June reports that she remembers small things her sister would do to be able to be a better parent to her. June explains, “When I was, like, really young she pretty much just, honestly, I just remember her babysitting, like, all the time. Like, she was always, like, nannying or babysitting. Like, she worked a lot.” May was constantly fighting to bring in an income for herself and her sister. In addition June also reports,

“I also don’t honestly remember ever seeing her studying. But I think she was probably smart enough to, like, not bring her schoolwork home, and, like, get it done at school because she knew I’d, like, distract her. I know one time when I was, like, little I threw her calculator in the toilet.”

Something as simple as studying may have given June possible insight into her sister being her sibling and not her parent.

Another important factor in explaining why June was not completely aware of her sister being her “mother” was that the sisters were born 13 years apart. May was 13 years old when June was born. When I asked June if she ever thought that the power structure within the home was out of balance with her age and the expectations that that her parents had of her sister she replied:

“Umm, honestly, no, because she’s, like, 13 years older than me, so, like, when I was younger I always viewed her as an adult. I never thought of her, like, wow, you’re kind of young to have all this responsibility. Like, I was, she was 13 when I was born, so, like, it wasn’t until I got older that I sort of realized, like, you were really young when you were doing all these sorts of stuff.”

Other components that helped to hint at the fact that May was June’s sister include when June was asked about when she first began to notice when her sisters age and the expectations her parents had of May being out of balance. She replied,

“...honestly I don’t think I realized it till, like, 6th grade or so. Like, when I was around 12. Like, pretty much how old she was when I was born. But ummm, I would ask her to, like, sign my permission slip to go on trips and stuff. And she would be, like, I actually can’t because I am technically not your parent. And that whole concept was, like, so weird to me. And I, like, was, like, what? But, why? You’re an adult.”

This was June’s first, and what seemed like possibly only, real insight into the fact that May was not her parent. June also admits that her closest friends never said anything about her sister acting as a mother because they all had elder siblings as well. May suffered abuse of varying sorts from almost every person within her family, (see family genogram, appendix 1b), and throughout interviewing she would say things like, “I’m a doormat.” or “I’m dead inside.” The extent to which May has

compartmentalized her life, could be a good indication of why June had less insight into the severity of the struggles that her sister May faced, if any at all.

CONCLUSION

June was always aware of her sister being in the role of parent, but what June was not aware of was why. This could be because of how successful her sister was in the role, June never felt the need to question why until much later on in her life. June is a senior in college now and when asked what her sister's general mood was throughout her childhood, she replied: "If I had to describe her as, like, a parental figure..." This statement suggests again just how deeply rooted in her mind her sister is as her parent and not as her sister. I asked June when she started seeing her sister in a more sisterly role and she gave a very enlightening response: "Umm, I don't think I'm there yet. I still don't think I view her as a sister. She's still basically my mom. Like, I pretty much tell people that, like yeah she's my sister, but yeah..." June continues to explain her response:

"Like, I live with my mom and stuff but, like, she honestly doesn't even still have that much to do with my life at all. It's just not the dynamic that we have and I think that even still I don't view her as like a sister. Like, I know a few of my friends go out, like, drinking with their sisters and partying, like, with their siblings, and they're like, 2 years apart, and, like, closer in age, and that's such a weird thought to me, like, I never, like, party with my sister because, like, she's literally my mom."

May has a similar mindset, she says,, “When she introduces, when she has someone important in her life, and she like, they want to meet her parents or something she introduces them to me.” I asked May how this made her feel and she responded, “Really good actually. But also sad like, ya know, like, I wish my parents were, like, and ya know, I still try to include them and they don’t seem to understand her or her life.” It could be theorized that as May got older and matured, her identity as June’s mother matured as well. It is for all 3 of these reasons: severity of abuse and parentification, age, and outside influences that June eventually had total awareness of her sister in the role of parent.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This research draws attention to the importance of parentification and its repercussions on the younger sibling. The differences in ages between the sisters in this study, may help explain why June had always known her sister as a parent. Even at the end of June’s interviews she makes the statement that, “Having 3 parents has it ups and downs.”

More research needs to be done on the topic of younger siblings and parentification to see if these results are supported when looking at different age groupings of siblings. This study provides a foundation for why this research is so important, and why the continuation of the study of siblings and parentification is pertinent to help address, the consequences of parentification.

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APPENDIX

1A: Informed Consent

1B: Family Genogram

1A: Informed Consent

**Western Michigan University
Department of Social Work**

Principal Investigator: Donna Weinreich

Student Investigator: Alicia Wayne

Title of Study: Parentification

You have been selected to participate in a research project titled "*Parentification.*" This project will serve as Alicia Wayne's thesis dissertation research project for the requirements of the Lee Honors College. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures use in this study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

Who can participate in this study?

2 female siblings with average or above average IQ. Participants must be able to use Skype software, and be available for one hour a week for 6 weeks. Participants must have a sibling willing to participate in the study that lived with the sibling that identify's as being parentified as a child during the time when the parentification took place. Participants are also required to be able to recall when the parentification occurred, and their attitudes towards it, or unawareness of it occurring. Gender, and age not specified, however, women were preferred based on gender roles and parentification being positively correlated.

Where will this study take place?

The study will take place in the Waldo Library in a study room that may be privately rented out on the campus of Western Michigan University, located at address: 1903 West Michigan Avenue, Kalamazoo, MI 49008. The interviews will be held via Skype.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study? One hour a week for four weeks.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?

Participants will go through a series of six, one hour-long interviews with the SI: Alicia Wayne via Skype. The interviewing process will take place during the months of October and November 2015. A guided interview will be used. The interviews will be recorded via camcorder, and all video tape recordings will be destroyed no later than May 2016.

What information is being measure during the study?

The information being measured in this study is the level of awareness that the youngest sibling has of their elder sibling being parentified, or taking on the role of parent.

What are the risks of participating in this study?

Possible risks involved with this study may include experiencing emotional discomfort during interviewing. The guided interview questions require participants to recall memories. Assistance will be available regarding counseling or support at any point in the study upon request. If subjects wish to discuss the information above or any other risks they may experience, they may ask questions now or email the principal investigator on this project Donna Weinreich, donna.weinreich@wmich.edu

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?

A cost to the subject will be one hour of their time per week, for six weeks.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?

There is no compensation offered for participation in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?

All data collected for this project will remain confidential. Besides Dr. Weinreich and myself, no one will have access to the tapes from the interviews. After each taping the SI will transcribe the contents on to a personal computer, and then the tape will be locked away in a safe until it is needed for the next recording. All transcribed files will be locked in a safe when they are not being used for the project. For the protection of the subjects, their personal names will not be used in any documentation: transcription, analysis, or in the published thesis. All interview tapes will be destroyed upon the completion of the project. Labels of “older sibling” and “younger sibling”, will be used to identify participants.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?

If you wish to stop your participation in this research study for any reason, you should contact: Alicia Wayne (SI) at alicia.j.wayne@wmich.edu. You are free to withdraw your consent and stop participation in this research study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you may be entitled. Throughout the study, the PI or Faculty Advisor will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

You can choose to stop participating in the study at anytime for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally you choose to withdraw from this study.

The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study, without your consent, if she feels it is in the subject's best interest to discontinue the study.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Donna Weinreich at 269 387-3193 or donna.weinreich@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right hand corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

Participant's Signature

Date

1B:Family Genogram

