

De-identifying from Siblings: Leading to the End of Cain Complex

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ABSTRACT

Siblings are the one who remains together throughout the lives and their relationship is a mixture of love, hate, jealousy, affection and every other emotion. An individual is usually like to imitate or idolize their elder siblings however too much similarities between them sometimes leads to societal comparisons of who done it better. This could create animosity between siblings which leads to estrangement in their adult lives or in some cases it can result in harmful and deadly doings as evident in the story of Cain and Abel. The former sibling murdered the latter one due to jealousy ascended between them, since then this feeling is known as Cain Complex. However with time, people started to not let this feeling of jealousy and rivalry prevail between them and their siblings by using a defensive technique termed as de-identification. This term was coined by Alfred Adler which suggests that an individual strive to be different from others and allow oneself to find their own niche ultimately leading to less rivalrous feeling with siblings. The present article throws light on the development of Cain complex and how the process of de-identification help an individual to develop a different personality.

1. Introduction

Siblings, often known as companions for life, are there before the life partner comes in life and remains after the parents are gone. They do everything together since their birth whether it's playing, studying or watching movies. A lot of people consider their siblings, especially older one, as a guide in difficult circumstances or a role model which they try to idolize. Although it is not a pertinent thing, there exist some who despise or have a deep repugnance for their siblings which could be a result of parental favoritism, stress, lower self-esteem or any other family dynamics that makes them feel unwanted or alienated. It sometimes leads to anger, frustration and an emotional instability in that individual's mind and one could take drastic steps in order to escape from it. Inflicting pain to or harming the person who caused it seems more approachable rather than handling or facing the situation and this emotion of hurting one's own siblings to avoid scolding and humiliation is sometimes referred as Cain Complex.

As the history goes, Abel and Cain were two brothers, famously known as off springs of Adam and Eve, first humans on Earth according to the creation myth of the Abrahamic Religions. They followed a tradition in which adult grownups had to present offerings to the God of whatever they had produced. For some reason, God accepted Abel's offering and rejected Cain's. This instance created surges of anger and resentment in Cain's heart towards Abel and augmented him enough to kill his brother. As a result he was punished by God and declared as "fugitive and wanderer". Since then, this lethal act of ending rivalry with a sibling known as Cain Complex.

2. Development of Cain complex

This complex could be understand as anger in its extremity and its roots lies deep within the heart. Besides like anything, it

grows and follows a specific pattern as described in the theory of the Cain complex given by **Szondi (cited in Hughes, 1979)**. The previously suppressed and accumulated anger is ignited and triggered by outer as well as internal drives. It starts controlling one's brain and actions derived from it which generally leads to the next phase. This entails the reaction or outburst of the accrued hatred and results in partial or complete destruction of the inimical object or person. Once this phase has passed another phase may takes place and the aftereffects can be seen in the forms of repenting or feeling guilty of the act that has been committed. If the perpetration caused is irreparable, it would eventually sabotage their relationship with siblings and leave them hanging there forever. In such circumstances, it is better to deal with the problem in spite of relying on the solution of a problem after it has happened. Averting these conditions require use of some defensive skill and de-identification is the technique ascribed for it (**Schachter, 1982**).

3. Meaning of De-identification

Usually siblings reflect similar appearances and intelligence but when it comes to personality they differ a lot from each other (**Spiegel, 2010**). However those who emulate with their siblings often try to dissociate and intend to find their own identity, therefore the process tailored for the same is called de-identification. This happens in the case of those children trying to differentiate from siblings to decrease the competition with other sibling and acquiring most of the resources from their parents (**Stewart, 1977 & Fritz, 2006**). The more similar and comparable siblings are to each other in terms of personality and nature, the more attempts of discerning oneself can be seen.

Schachter (1982) have done most of his researches endeavored to find out which of the siblings were most likely to

de-identify them. More than half of the subjects from his study reported themselves different from their siblings. The difference was found to be highest in first and second born siblings in comparison to other ordinal positions. About 62% siblings living in two-child families admitted to be different whereas those living in three-child families, 75% of first and second born told to be different from their siblings. While talking about second and third born, there were 52% subjects who said so and only 45% first and third born found themselves different from each other. The results further indicated that same sex siblings tried to de-identify significantly more often than the opposite sex siblings.

Surprisingly, similar results were reported when mothers of the children were asked to rate their children according to the differences in characters. In a study conducted by **Whiteman et al. (2007)** on 171 adolescent sibling pairs, it was found that half of them were in the category of modeling group means younger siblings were emulating their older siblings. Out of the remaining subjects, about 25% were the de-identifiers as they were no longer working in the same directions as the older ones and the other 25% fell into the "we just live together category" as no discernible pattern was found while identifying their preferences for sports, academics, art or behavior.

4. Causes of de-identification

The process of de-identifying from sibling could have happen in any of the developmental stage, however the developmental model of sibling relationships tend to contradict this. During the initial phases of life i.e. early and middle childhood, children are predisposed to model and emulate their elder siblings. This tendency seemed to change when they enter into adolescence stage and they start finding their identity and character. The projected alterations in one's personality are the result of increased rivalry and jealousies, their temperamental differences and the willingness to have an authentic persona which reflect their own skills and abilities. Other than this there could be some more reasons why an individual try to be perceived as different person than their siblings:

- **To reduce inferiority complex-**When an individual starts evaluating oneself according to the abilities of others, they generally end up having an inferiority complex. This is common among siblings as they are the most available person to compare with. Siblings usually try to display one's own skills in a way that make the other one feel bad of himself. When they grow up, they attempt to excel at those things their sibling cannot do hence it results in de-identification.
- **To avoid comparison-** One cannot compare two different things or skills. This is why siblings try not to be similar in nature and their capabilities. If two children of a family studies in a same school, one of them outdo at quizzes or literary competitions etc. the other one would attempt to excel at other co-curricular activities which does not require the same skills rather different one. It would help them to avoid comparisons

as both of them are good at different things therefore no judgement is required for who is better.

- **To minimize rivalry-** Rivalry is usually the end product of contesting for the same things and resources whether they are materialistic possessions or the physical comfort provided by parents. Similarity in siblings leads to competition which may threaten their sense of self and for the reason siblings actively strive to pursue different paths in life, it automatically reduces chances of being involved in further conflicts or becoming a rival.
- **To show one's abilities-** If siblings closely resemble with each other, it makes difficult for them to establish their own identities. Adler's theory of de-identification is upheld through the differences between oldest and youngest children. As suggested by him, most of the children usually express diverseness in their interests in order to be noticed as a unique natured person. Therefore, de-identification assist them to branch off to form their individual and distinctive personality.

5. Benefits of de-identification

As recommended in the writings of **Adler (1956)**, it is the tendency of siblings to consciously or unconsciously define themselves as different from their siblings (**Whiteman et al, 2007**). This process allows the children to acquire their own qualities, behaviors, and an exclusive personality within their families. It also assist children to be in better alignment with their siblings. As navigating relationships with siblings is likely to be easy when there is zero instances of hatred and resentment between them and such situations are possible when one de-identify from siblings. When they both choose different tracks in life, it doesn't allow them to compete for similar things which in turn cause less rifts among them and they ended up having a more stable and healthy relationship.

6. Conclusion

Looking from a positive perspective, there is nothing wrong in identifying with older siblings up until it came to the emulation of wrong things such as drug abuse, substance abuse or vandalism etc. De-identification from siblings in such situations help them to avoid those problems and would also work in their favour by not leading them into wrong directions. While talking about maintaining sibling bond, it is important that parents avoid judging their children on similar parameters as comparisons made between siblings resulted in lower level of self-esteem (**Milevsky, 2011**). It also erode honesty and reliability between them which sour their relationship. On the other hand if the children attempts to de-identify, it would be better if parents do not label it as a divergence between the virtuous sibling and the substandard sibling as the process will eventually fail its potential purpose.

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