

# Hide-and-seek with siblings: A theoretical exploration of siblings in psychoanalysis

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## **Abstract**

Conceptualisations of the developmental functions of siblings in psychoanalysis continue to be fraught with theoretical gaps and tensions. Psychoanalytic literature on siblings outlines the ways in which lateral figures can be traumatic in pre-oedipal development, as well as complicate Oedipus complex resolution. The case material that informs this literature is generally concerned with unresolved sibling dynamics as evidenced by the developmental history and transference manifestations in the psychoanalytic clinical treatment setting. These case studies provide a futile outlook on the resolution of pathological sibling dynamics due to the greater intensity of the affect and weaker motivations for relinquishing the oedipal struggle with siblings. As such, research and theory on healthy developmental pathways of the functions of siblings in development are lacking, representing a significant gap in the literature. This paper outlines the prevailing conceptualisations of the developmental functions of siblings in psychoanalysis and highlights the absence of case material on diverse sibling experiences and reflexivity by the theorists themselves that may contribute to biases and tensions in existing psychoanalytic perspectives on siblings. Further psychoanalytic inquiries could look beyond the clinical setting to determine under what conditions optimal developmental outcomes may be possible. The diverse and nuanced possibilities for the functions of sibling relationships in development require greater theoretical development and exploration.