The use of brief psychodynamic interventions when integrating sibling issues in therapy with adults can be applied in two primary situations. First is when the sibling issues are presented by the client during the intake process. In this situation, referred to as overt sibling issues, a client enters therapy with the explicit goal of repairing their sibling relationship. The focus of therapy in this situation is the exploration of underlying sibling tensions with the goal of repairing the negative sibling bond. An examination of this process is presented later in this chapter.

However, the powerful role played by past sibling dynamics in adult well-being calls for a broader use of sibling issues in therapy (Coles, 2003; Lewin & Sharp, 2009; Schulman, 1999). Even in situations where a client enters therapy for other difficulties which are seemingly unrelated to siblings, such as anxiety or depression, a sibling-sensitive therapist should allow for an exploration of sibling issues. This exploration can help uncover the core sibling issues underlying the broader tensions which in turn can help relieve the client of these other difficulties (Kivowitz, 1995; Schulman, 1999). In this situation, referred to as covert sibling issues, therapy begins with an examination of the presenting problem but soon evolves into an exploration of underlying sibling tensions and past family dynamics in order to shed light on the accurate nature of what is truly bothering the client.

This chapter begins with a review of the integration of psychodynamic interventions in covert sibling issues considering that in due course, even in this situation, therapy will ultimately
transition to exploring the sibling issues more overtly, a topic forthcoming in this chapter.

Covert sibling issues

Covert sibling issues entail sibling-related childhood introjections penetrating current functioning and well-being. As reviewed in Part I, childhood sibling interactions within the family context create powerful dynamics, models, and definitions which impact future adult relationships, personalities, and well-being (Bank, 1992; Bank & Kahn, 1982; Mitchell, 2003). Considering the importance of past sibling associations for current adult functioning, several early theoretical perspectives have highlighted the therapeutic value of integrating sibling histories in therapy.

For example, although much has been written about the psychoanalytic emphasis on early parent–child relationships, a careful examination of the writings of Freud reveals a vast literature on many aspects of sibling psychology. These writings emphasize the prominence of siblings in the development of the psyche and its impact on adolescence and adulthood. Beyond the many mentions in his papers, his *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900) has over 40 references to brothers and sisters. As Sherwin-White (2007) noted, “Freud had a wide and judicious grasp of the potential importance of sibling dynamics for therapeutic work, still relevant today” (p. 5).

As introduced in Part I, several sibling-related themes can be seen in Freud’s writing, all of which contain lifelong and therapeutic implications. Sexual development and the ability to form true love partners later in life has been suggested as linked with early childhood incestuous feelings toward brothers and sisters. Broader social dynamics have also been suggested by Freud as driven by childhood reactions to the birth of a sibling which may entail feelings of jealousy, rivalry, and competition over maternal affection (Freud, 1955).

Siblings continue to play a role in future socialization by serving as original “objects” which are later substituted by other social relationships. Even intellectual inquisitiveness has been linked theoretically to the arrival of a new sibling through the natural curiosity regarding conception, pregnancy, and the birth process triggered by the arrival of the new sibling (Colonna & Newman, 1983; Kivowitz, 1995; Sherwin-White, 2007).