The relationship between birth order status and personality traits

Michele D'Angelo

Rowan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd

Part of the Educational Psychology Commons

Recommended Citation

D'Angelo, Michele, "The relationship between birth order status and personality traits" (1999). Theses and Dissertations. 1788.
https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/1788

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact graduateresearch@rowan.edu.
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BIRTH ORDER STATUS AND PERSONALITY TRAITS

by
Michele D’Angelo

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May 4, 1999

Approved by ___________________________ Dr. Dihoff

Date Approved 5-4-99
ABSTRACT

Michele D’Angelo
The Relationship between Birth Order Status and Personality Traits
1999
Dr. Klanderman and Dr. Dihoff
Master of Arts - School Psychology

Alfred Adler pioneered birth order research having found that birth order had a great
deal to do with how adults interact in the world and the development of personality traits.
In an expansion of his theory, the relationship between birth order and personality was
examined in this study. One hundred thirty undergraduate and graduate students, with
ages ranging from eighteen to forty-six and different ethnic backgrounds were tested.
They were group administered the BASIS-A Personality Inventory as well as a
questionnaire which assessed their birth order. The BASIS-A is based on Alder’s
Individual Psychology and asked the participants to recollect childhood experiences and
rate them on a Likert Scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. There were
ninety-six females and thirty-four males and they were grouped into four categories:
oldest (fifty-eight), middle (twenty-three), youngest (forty), and only child (nine). A
Kendall’s tau was used to analyze the data and out of ten different personality themes
measured, one came out significant. Differences were found on the Liked by All scale
correlational to birth order. This scale measured how much one found their place in the
family by pleasing adults and winning their approval.
MINI-ABSTRACT

Michele D'Angelo
The Relationship between Birth Order Status and Personality Traits
1999
Dr. Klanderman and Dr. Dihoff
Master of Arts - School Psychology

One hundred thirty college students were group administered the BASIS-A Personality Inventory and a questionnaire to assess if birth order was correlated with personality. A Kendall’s tau was used to analyze the data and out of ten different personality themes measured, one came out significant – the Liked by All scale.
Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the Rowan University library as well as the Villanova University library for providing most of the journal articles cited in the literature review of this study. Much thanks also to Dr. Dihoff and Dr. Klanderman for their help and guidance in this important endeavor. The author would also like to thank the Rowan University Residence Life Staff, as this is where she got most of her participants.

On a personal note, the author would like to thank her family and friends for their continued support and encouragement. Thanks to Kevin Collins for just being there and listening.
# Table of Contents

**Chapter 1 - Introduction** ................................................................. 1-4

- Purpose .......................................................................................... 1
- Hypothesis ..................................................................................... 1
- Theory ........................................................................................... 1
- Definitions .................................................................................... 3
- Assumptions .................................................................................. 3
- Limitations .................................................................................... 3
- Overview ....................................................................................... 3

**Chapter 2 - Review of Literature** ............................................... 5-15

- Adler's First Born Profile ............................................................... 5
- Narcissism ..................................................................................... 6
- Interpersonal Power ....................................................................... 7
- Academic Achievement .................................................................. 7
- Fear of Success .............................................................................. 9
- Occupational Status ..................................................................... 9
- Psychological Birth Order ............................................................. 11
- Irrational Beliefs .......................................................................... 12
- Psychological Health ................................................................... 13
- Perceptions of Birth Order Position Characteristics ....................... 14
- Summary ..................................................................................... 15

**Chapter 3 - Design of Study** ......................................................... 16-20

- Sample .......................................................................................... 16
List of Graphs

Graph 3.1 – Frequency of Birth Orders ........................................................... 17

Graph 4.1 – Liked by All Scale Results v. Birth Order ....................................... 22
Chapter 1- Introduction

The researcher did this study to expand upon Adler’s theory of birth order and its influence on one’s personality. Many studies have been done correlating different traits with birth order (Claxton, McIntyre, & Wheatley, 1995; Eyring, & Sobelman, 1996) and the researcher was hoping to add to them.

The researcher had always been personally interested in how birth order affects the development of a person and she was a first born. The researcher also shared the results of the study with the participants so that they were able to learn something about themselves in the process.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of one’s birth order status in the development of one’s personality traits. The researcher was investigating whether one’s place in the family had anything to do with what kind of personality traits they possessed.

Hypothesis

There would be a difference on the BASIS-A Inventory personality scores correlational to one’s ordinal birth order status.

Theory

Alfred Adler thought that birth order had a great deal to do with how adults interact in the world and the development of personality traits (Corey, 1996). The psychological
position as perceived by the individual is of great importance. Adler said that people of particular birth order positions often reflect a special pattern of behavior consistent with lifestyle configurations. It is false to assume that children of the same family are formed in the same environment (Adler, 1956). It is not the child’s number in the order of successive births which influences his character, but the situation into which he is born and the way he interprets it. For example, the second child may develop a style of life that is similar to the eldest; or if two are born much later than the rest, and grow up together separated from the older children, the elder of these may develop like the first born. Sometimes this happens in the case of twins (Adler, 1956).

According to Adler (1956), each birth order position is prone to developing certain characteristics. The only child has feelings of competition directed against his father. He is pampered by his mother and develops a “mother complex”; which means he wishes to push his father out of the picture. He enjoys being the center of attention because he thinks it is his right and does not want siblings. He’ll have difficulties later in life when he is not always the center of attention.

The youngest child has no followers, but many peace-makers. He is probably the most pampered and because he has so many chances for competition, he is able to overcome them all. He is spoiled and dependent. He is unlimited in his aspirations and is unique. He may suffer from extreme inferiority feelings; everyone in the environment is older, stronger, and more experienced.

The second born is used to cooperating and is usually well situated. He may try to “keep up” with the pacemaker (the first born) and may behave like he is in a race. He is often more talented and successful than the first. The mood of the second born is
comparable to the envy of the dispossessed with the prevailing feeling of having been slighted. His goal may be placed so high that he will suffer for it for the rest of his life, and his inner harmony will be destroyed in consequence. In his later life, the second child is rarely able to endure the strict leadership of others or to accept the idea of eternal laws. He will be more inclined to believe, rightly or wrongly, that there is no power in the world which cannot be overthrown (Adler, 1927).

Definitions

Birth order: Ordinal place in the family; first, middle, last or only.

Assumptions

One assumption was that the participants would answer the self-report questionnaire and BASIS-A personality inventory honestly and would not be affected by social desirability.

Limitations

The participants in the study were all college students, therefore the results could not be generalized to other age groups. There were also not an equal number of participants in every birth order group. Another limitation was that the researcher measured one’s ordinal birth order position rather than the position that the individual perceived themselves in. One’s psychological birth order position was thought to be of more importance by Adler than one’s ordinal birth order position. Lastly, the researcher did not talk into account whether one’s siblings were half-siblings or step-siblings.

Overview

In the next few chapters, various topics will be discussed. In Chapter 2, an extensive
literature review has been done incorporating many relevant studies. Next in Chapter 3, the design of the study is explained. This includes the sample, measures, design, testable hypotheses, and analysis. Finally in Chapter 4, the results are analyzed. Various studies have been done related to Adler’s theory. In the next chapter, they are explored.
Chapter 2 - Review of Literature

Apparent links between birth order and various individual characteristics and tendencies have been investigated for well over a century. In a study reviewing trends in birth order research it was found that the first born child continues to be the single most investigated birth position (Stewart, & Stewart, 1995). Many of these studies have concluded that first borns are more perfectionistic, feel as if they need to please others, are more controlling (White, Campbell, & Stewart, 1995), less jealous but more egocentric (Buunk, 1997), score higher on Type A Inventories (Phillips, Long, & Bedian, 1990), have higher GPA’s (Suta, & Paulson, 1995; Nelson, & Harris, 1995; Phillips, & Phillips, 1994), and are more narcissistic than later borns (Joubert, 1989). Watkins (1992) reviewed 25 articles on birth order and concluded that first borns often manifest characteristics consistent with the “firstborn profile” described in Adlerian literature. Other researchers have also found results consistent with Adler’s and they are discussed in the following paper.

Adler’s First Born Profile

When the first born is also an only born, Adler expected a preoccupation with being the center of attention that persists into adulthood, producing interpersonal difficulty when the need is unmet. Adler (1956) also describes the first child as someone who is initially given much attention, only to be dethroned with the birth of subsequent siblings. When other children lose their position in the same way, they will probably not feel it so
strongly, since they have already had the experience of cooperating with another child. They have never been the sole object of consideration and care.

**Narcissism**

The concept narcissistic personality consists of a combination of several attributes such as, self absorption, lack of empathy, feelings of entitlement, having a grandiose sense of self importance, interpersonal exploitiveness, and a preoccupation with positive fantasies (success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love). Narcissism has been a characteristic which has been thought to be related to being a first born. According to Adler (1956), “The first born child is generally given a good deal of attention and spoiling. Too often it is quite suddenly and sharply that he finds himself ousted from his position. Another child is born and he is no longer unique. Now he must share the attention from his mother and father with a rival” (p. 377). Sole to the status of being the oldest, is the status of being first and foremost, a rank which may produce a sense of entitlement and even superiority (Byrd, DeRosa, & Craig, 1993). Joubert (1989) hypothesized that this may be because of their usual experience of age related dominance in abilities as compared to those of their siblings, their being more strongly a focus of parental aspirations, and their exclusive reception of parental attention for at least some time in their lives. The first factor should contribute to a person’s perception of her attributes as being unduly “special”, while the latter two might contribute to feelings of entitlement. To test this theory, Joubert administered 73 female and 42 male university students the Narcissistic Personality Inventory as well as a Birth Order Inventory. He found that being a first born child does correlate with narcissism. Curtis & Cowell (1993) administered the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory and the Narcissistic
Personality Inventory to fifty subjects and found a positive association for first and only borns versus all later born groups with respect to having higher narcissism scores on the two inventories.

**Interpersonal Power**

Byrd, et. al, (1993) hypothesized that the dethronement process is instrumental in fostering independence and power. First borns are pampered as they enjoy, without competition, the attention of parents and parental figures that will fill the role of firstborns’ principal information bearers and models. Having an experienced adult in this role facilitates the learning process for firstborns. In a study measuring one’s perception of interpersonal power it was found that older sisters of younger brothers rated themselves as very high in power. In Adlerian terms, the older sisters’ dethronement by the highly valued and structurally more powerful younger brothers leads to feelings of inferiority which are compensated for by direct strivings for power, a result perhaps encouraged by the age advantage they think they have. It was also found that African American men with younger sisters also rated themselves as high in power. Caucasian men rated themselves as high in power regardless of their birth order. African American men may have increased reactions to dethronement by their sisters because of their low structural power and their apparent gender equality in society with African American women. In a society that emphasizes dominance and inequality, such a dethronement may lead to strivings for compensation which are manifested in increased efforts to feel powerful (Todd, Friedman, & Steele, 1993).

**Academic Achievement**
According to Adler (1927), first borns are sensitized to the issues of authority and power, which they try to obtain through high levels of achievement. Parker (1998) measured 828 academically talented sixth graders and found that there was a tendency for the gifted to be first born (64.9% vs. 51.5%). He also found that first borns were more likely to be verbally talented and later borns more likely to have higher mathematical achievement. Sullivan & Schwebel (1996) stated that first born and only born children tend to acquire attitudes and behaviors that lead them to drive themselves harder and achieve more intellectually and vocationally than children in other birth order positions. And Hester, Osborne, & Nguyen (1992) found that in homes with cohabiting parents, oldest children were most likely to exert the most effort for oneself in obtaining goals.

In another study looking at birth order and academic achievement of children in Transkei, South Africa, Cherian (1990) found that the closer a child is to being first born, the greater they are in academic achievement ($F= 38.85, p= .01$). First born or only children occupy a unique position in the family for several reasons: parents have more time to devote to their first child and are apt to be more cautious, indulgent and protective; the first born does not have to compete with older siblings and, for a while, has only adult models to copy and adult standards to conduct to emulate, while later borns have siblings with whom to identify. Travis, & Kohli (1995) found that in middle-class families, the parents’ resources allocation decisions operated to favor first borns within multiple-child families, followed by last borns and then children in other sibling positions. Ironically, in a study conducted by Chalfant (1994) first borns were least likely to report that their parents favored them. Another study conducted by Pilkington, White, & Matheny (1997) also found that the psychologically oldest children appear to have
significantly higher total resources than all other positions. Thus, the traits of striving for perfection and control that are associated with psychologically first borns may be positive in their influence on coping resource differences. They also found that psychologically oldest children did score higher than all others did in both academic confidence and behavior control, but the differences were in neither case statistically significant.

**Fear of Success**

One study correlated birth order with fear of success and found that first borns are less worried about negative social consequences of success, but they worry about receiving positive social attention and becoming responsible for continuous success (Ishiyama, Munson, & Chabassol, 1990). It is possible that first borns have more rewarding experiences relating to success and they are hardened against concerns about others’ possible negative reactions. In a study looking at achievement attributions of others, first borns had a greater tendency than later borns to make internal attributions (sd=1.23 v. sd=.99) for past performances (Phillips, & Phillips, 1994). First borns may be more likely to underestimate the impact of environmental factors in assessing their own performance and may feel more personally responsible for their performance.

**Occupational Status**

Marjoribanks (1987) found that for females, there was an increase in educational attainment and occupational status of first borns. One study conducted in New York State found that male first borns were more likely to be town supervisors when the data from small families of four children or fewer was considered (Newman, Pettinger, & Evan, 1995). For female town supervisors, first borns were over represented whether
small, large or all families were considered. This study concluded overall that elected political leaders were more likely than chance to have been first borns in their families. This study showed that the association between birth order and political leadership demonstrated in previous studies, applies also to women – a group not included in other studies of political leadership. Nelson & Harris (1995) found that first borns were more often leaders when leader roles exemplified the consensus of the group. However, if leader roles were more characteristic of self-sufficient attitudes, it was found that fewer first borns were leaders.

Guy, Pelstra, & Tamura (1989) looked at the field of psychology and birth order and found that out of 318 psychologists, 39.4% of them were first borns. First borns were also most likely to report that financial reward associated with clinical practice was the most important reason for entering and remaining in the profession. Perhaps this was because they are preoccupied with security needs, independence, and notoriety, characteristics often attributed to first borns. It is also interesting to speculate why the largest portion of clinicians are first borns. It may be because they take the early role as the caretaker and have high affiliation needs. In fact, one study found that first born females (M=3.91) held membership in significantly more clubs and organizations than later borns (M=2.72) (Nelson, & Harris, 1995). These included academic, social, athletic, and community oriented clubs. Consistent with being a caretaker, Adler (1956) has stated that, “Among such oldest children we find individuals who develop a striving to protect others and help them” (p. 378).

Another study which looked at birth order and prominence in psychology found that there was an overrepresentation of first born individuals among a pool of prominent
psychologists such as, Hall, James, Cattell, Pavlov, Skinner, Guthrie, Freud, & Adler (Terry, 1989). It is interesting that so many achievement oriented individuals entered psychology instead of an already established field. It could be that these early psychologists, who could well have been successful in other fields, perceived that the new discipline of psychology would offer more opportunity.

**Psychological Birth Order**

In a study that looked at the psychological birth order of children, it was hypothesized that psychologically first borns who have achievement, control, and perfectionistic needs might prefer business operations and business contact areas. In this field, leadership skills and traditional views such as conscientiousness and ambition are valued (White, Campbell, Stewart, Davies, & Pilkington, 1997). It is interesting to note that they measured the child’s psychological birth order, that is, the degree to which one identifies with each birth order position in the family. A significant relationship between one’s actual birth order and psychological birth order has been found in past studies (Campbell, White, & Stewart, 1991). Congruous with the hypothesis, oldest child scores were significantly related to the social and business contact areas. Higher scores on oldest and only child scales appear to be related to increased orientation to data driven and conventional fields. This may be partially explained by the fact that only children often have similar experiences to oldest children, particularly in the need to please others.

In another study that measured the psychological birth order of children, White, Campbell, & Stewart (1995) measured characteristics that are historically related to the psychologically first child with the Kern Lifestyle Scale. The factors related to the psychologically first born are perfectionistic, need to please, and controlling. The need to
please may represent the psychologically first child’s motives for helping, emulating, and protecting others around her. The rule bound characteristics—need for precision, and desire to be right, associated with psychologically first children were also assessed as well as, the interest of the psychologically first born child in authority, rules, and power. Consistent with their hypothesized relationships for the psychologically first child, scores on the control, need to please, and perfection subscales were the aspects of the Kern Lifestyle Scale for which correlations were significant. The perfectionistic subscale correlated the highest with the psychologically first born and accounted for about 10% of variance in scores.

Irrational Beliefs

Sullivan & Schwebel (1996) found that first born men and women were expected to and did have significantly higher irrational beliefs about relationships than did last born men and women. According to Adler (1956), firstborns are spoiled and, as such, they expect others to cater to them. The cognitions underlying this role lead firstborns to have irrationally high expectations for what they well receive from and have to put into romantic relationships. These cognitions lead to illusions about how, in the future, their partners will relate to and pamper them. Adler also described firstborns as being conservative. “Sometimes a child who has lost his power, the small kingdom he ruled, understands better than others the importance of power and authority. When he grows up, he likes to take part in the exercise of authority and exaggerates the importance of rules and laws. Everything should be done by rule, and no rule should ever be changed; power should always be preserved in the hands of those entitled to it. Influences like these in childhood give a strong tendency towards conservatism” (Adler, 1956, p. 379).
Individuals who fill a conservative role in interpersonal interactions tend to hold cognitions that lead them to develop strict rules that they apply to their romantic relationships. These rules may be arbitrary and irrational and lead to problems in the relationship. Ironically, in a study that measured liberals and conservatives in relation with birth order it was found that all seven of first born females in the study were liberals (Eisenman, & Sirgo, 1991). The researchers believe that first born females receive more intensive socialization from their parents than any other birth order/sex combination. If this is correct, it could lead, in some currently unknown manner, to greater liberalism in first born females. Although, the results are questionable since there were only seven female participants.

**Psychological Health**

According to Adler (1927), during times of stress first borns would be more dependent, resulting in greater conformity to the expectation of others. They may feel hostile, pessimistic, insecure, and more likely to be maladjusted as an adult than later born children. Referring to the stress and trauma of the birth of a sibling Adler (1956) stated, “We can find in problem children, neurotics, criminals, drunkards, and perverts that their difficulties began in such circumstances” (p. 377). In fact, in one study it was found that 42.63% of substance abusers admitted into a Drug Rehabilitation Center were first born children. 48.78% of male substance abusers and 53% of male criminal offenders were firstborns. It seems as if male firstborns may be unable to cope with the parental pressures and environmental responsibilities thrust upon him (Stein, DeMiranda, & Stein, 1988). Skinner (1997) hypothesized that the reason for the overrepresentation of first borns as problem children was that the parents of first borns are inexperienced
which instills in some couples an unnecessarily strong concern about the development of their first born child. Rule (1991) found that first borns regarded both parents as significantly more strict than later borns, especially female first borns. Heuristically, this strictness and concern could also foster in a first born a morbid preoccupation with physical health. Skinner tested 64 women students and found that Hypochondriasis and Neuroticism scores for first born women were significantly higher than those for later born women. It may be argued that this could also apply to first born men, but gender role theory argues against such a possibility. As noted by Skinner, compared to men, the development of an exaggerated health concern would be more likely in women because females are socialized into thinking of themselves not only as “gentle” and “emotional”. And as individuals who may, because they are more in touch with their feelings, behave in more socially acceptable ways in declaring personal concerns about their state of health publicly. In relation to mental health, one study found that first born males and last born females were psychologically healthier (as measured by higher self esteem and fewer irrational beliefs) than last born males and first born females (Lester, Eleftheriou, & Peterson, 1992). Newman, Higgins, & Vokles (1992), found that first borns and only born children had smaller self-discrepancies than later borns, and this by itself would decrease their vulnerability to emotional distress.

Perceptions of Birth Order Position Characteristics

The first born position has also been found to be correlated with dominant aggressiveness, independence, intelligence, ambition, responsibility, caring, and friendliness (Nyman, 1995). Nyman correlated birth order with personality by asking 139 undergraduates to list three words that described the characteristics of each birth
position. They were then asked to rate each descriptive word in terms of positive or negative connotation on a Likert Scale. The first born was also the only birth position directly associated with leadership and the only position with few negative characteristics. The eldest male was seen as self-centered and spoiled, whereas the eldest female was seen only as spoiled. Nurturance and responsibility ranked high for first born females, dominance and independence for the males. Oldest children are very responsible out of a need for adult approval; being right and controlling events are often important.

Summary

In conclusion, a variety of personality traits have been found to correlate with first borns such as: powerful, achievement oriented, narcissistic, perfectionistic, rule bound, and conservative. The previous studies have also compared birth order with gender and race and have come up with reasonably consistent results. The present study measured different personality characteristics and correlated them with birth order statuses in an attempt to expand on Adler’s theory.
Chapter 3 - Design of Study

Sample

Participants included one hundred thirty students enrolled at a rural southern New Jersey university with a population of about six thousand. The participants came from two undergraduate psychology classes, one undergraduate education class, and the university’s residence life staff. The ages of the participants ranged from eighteen to forty six. The mean age was twenty-one. There were ninety-six females and thirty-four males. They were from a variety of ethnic backgrounds which included: Caucasian, African American, Philippine, Asian, and Puerto Rican. There were fifty-eight oldest children (44%), twenty-three middle children (18%), forty youngest children (31%), and nine only children (7%)(see 3.1). In addition to the one hundred thirty participants, thirty-nine participants had to be excluded because their birth order was unable to be ascertained.

Measures

The BASIS-A Inventory (Basic Adlerian Scales for Interpersonal Success-Adult form) (Wheeler, Kern, Curlette, 1993) was used to assess personality. The BASIS-A Inventory is based on Adler’s Individual Psychology, one of the first personality theories to recognize that individuals tend to organize their repertoire of personality characteristics around central themes or approaches, that Adler referred to as “lifestyle”. According to Curlette, Wheeler, Kern (1997) “The purpose of the BASIS-A Inventory is to help
3.1 Frequency of Birth Orders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BIRTH</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OLDEST</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIDDLE</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YOUNGEST</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONLY</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
understand how an individual’s lifestyle, based on beliefs developed in early childhood, contributes to one’s effectiveness in social, work, and intimate relationships” (p. 1). The inventory asks the individual to recollect childhood experiences rather than describe present functioning. Essentially, the BASIS-A Inventory further defines and expands on Adler’s conceptualization of the underlying dimensions of lifestyles (Kern, Wheeler, & Curlette, 1997). All sixty five items on the inventory begin with the phrase, “When I was a child, I...” Each item is responded to on a five point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Wheeler, et. al, 1993). The items have two characteristics in common: they go together to form an underlying dimension and the underlying dimension about childhood perceptions is related to current functioning (Kern, et. al, 1997). These items are grouped to assess an individual’s recall of early childhood on five primary lifestyle personality themes: Belonging-Social Interest, Going Along, Taking Charge, Wanting Recognition, and Being Cautious. Belonging-Social Interest measures how much one enjoyed being in groups of other children, felt accepted, and was self confident. Going Along measures how much one went along with the rules, looked up to adults and were polite and showed respect. Taking Charge measures how much one enjoyed telling others what to do and deciding for other children what they should do. Wanting Recognition measures how much one was concerned about the expectations of others and what others were thinking about them. Being Cautious measures how much one saw their family environment as unpredictable, unfair, or dangerous at times.

In addition to these items, the BASIS-A Inventory has five HELPS scales. These scales are Harshness, Entitlement, Liked by All, Striving for Perfection, and Softness. Harshness measures how harsh one is in describing their childhood experiences.
Entitlement measures how much one may have been in a family situation that was permissive and possibly overprotective. Liked by All measures how much one found their place in the family by pleasing adults and winning their approval. Striving for Perfection measures how confident one was that they could do many things well and doing things a certain way. Softness measures how much one may have seen their childhood in a very positive light and may have downplayed negative events.

The BASIS-A Inventory is a self-scoring booklet with sixty-five items, which most people complete in fifteen minutes, or less and it has a reading level of 5.2. It is administered individually to each participant. The BASIS-A mean and standard deviation for scale were based on 1083 participants from the southeastern United States (especially North Carolina, Georgia, and Texas) and included college students, graduate students, clinical patients, teachers, and others (Curlette, et. al, 1997). Three factor analysis’ were done to develop the scales (Curlette, et. al, 1997). Reliability was assessed both in terms of internal consistency (coefficient alpha) and stability (test-retest). For coefficient alpha, scores ranged from .82-.86 on the five primary scales and for test-retest, scores ranged from .66-.87 on the five primary scales. T-scores below 40 or above 60 are described as low and high scores (Kern, et. al, 1997). Coincidentally, all of the standard errors of measurement of the five BASIS-A scales have the same value, 2.3 (Curlette, et. al, 1997). For the HELPS scales, the reliability coefficient of agreement ranged from .92-1.00 and replicated coefficient alpha reliabilities ranged from .84-.86.

Construct validity was assessed through several methods. The clustering of items by the third factor analysis was generally consistent with what was expected based on Alderian theory (Curlette, et. al, 1997). Criterion validity is provided primarily by
Pearson correlations of themes from early childhood recollections with a variety of other psychological instruments measuring current functioning. All of the correlations were statistically significant (alpha=.05).

In order to assess birth order, the researcher administered a questionnaire. In the questionnaire, questions were asked such as, “How many brothers and sisters do you have?”, “What are their ages?”, “How old are you?”. The researcher also asked the participant’s grade level, ethnic background, gender, and field of study. Both the BASIS-A and the questionnaire were coded by number in order to maintain the participant’s anonymity.

**Design**

The design of the study was correlational in nature.

**Testable Hypothesis**

The null hypothesis was that there would be no difference in personality traits as measured by the BASIS-A among first borns, middle children, last borns, and only children. The alternate hypothesis was that there would be a difference in personality traits as measured by the BASIS-A among first borns, middle children, last borns, and only children.

**Analysis**

The data was analyzed with Kendall’s tau correlation.

**Summary**

Basically, the researcher was hypothesizing that there would be a statistically significant correlation between birth order and personality.
Chapter 4 - Analyses of Results

The researcher hypothesized that there would be a relationship on the BASIS-A personality inventory scales to one's ordinal birth order status. A Kendall's tau was used to analyze the data. Unfortunately, only one scale out of ten was significantly correlated with birth order. On the Liked by All scale, an approximate significance of .010 was found. On this scale, fourteen oldest children, two middle children, two youngest children, and one only child were found to have high Liked by All scores. This means that they found their place in the family by pleasing adults and winning their approval. They developed skills in perceiving the needs of adults so that they could have their approval and thus feel good about themselves. Forty-four oldest children, twenty-one middle children, thirty-eight youngest children and eight only children were found to have low Liked by All scores (see 4.1). If participants had a high Liked by All score they were given a score of one, if they had a low Liked by All score, they were given a score of two. The mean was 1.85 and the standard deviation was .35. Subsequently, one's birth order did have a relationship with how one answered on the Liked by All questions.

Although not significant, it is interesting to note the following results in comparison to high and low scores: a high number of oldest children were found to have high scores on the Going Along scale, a high number of oldest children were found to have high scores on the Taking Charge scale, a high number of oldest children were found to have high
4.1

Liked by All Scale Results v. Birth Order

Count

OLDEST MIDDLE YOUNGEST ONLY

Liked by All

BIRTH
scores on the Entitlement scale, and a high number of oldest children were found to have high scores on the Wanting Recognition scale.

Additionally, a high score is the upper 5% of scores for the Harshness and Softness scales. For all other scales, a high score is considered to be in the top 16% on the scale and a low score is the bottom 16% on the scale. Although only one scale came out significant, there were some interesting findings in regard to high and low scores for each birth order position on the personality scales.
Chapter 5 - Summary and Conclusions

In summary, this study focused on how birth order related to one's personality characteristics. Previous research has shown that people of different birth order positions possess different personality traits. By administering a self-report questionnaire to obtain birth order status, as well as the BASIS-A Inventory to assess personality traits, the researcher was hoping to find similar results. Out of ten different personality themes, one came out significant. Differences were found on the Liked by All scale correlational to birth order. Although not significant, some other interesting trends were noted.

One possible reason why more of the scales did not come out significant is that perhaps it was difficult for the participants to reflect on their childhood experiences as the BASIS-A Inventory asked them to do. Some may not have been able to remember how they were treated in certain situations. Another concern is that asking them about their childhood may not be an accurate estimation of their personality characteristics. Although the inventory then breaks down their answers to the questions into different personality themes, it may have been more beneficial to know about one's personality traits in the present for this particular study. Also, the average age of the participants was twenty-one and they were all from a college campus, so the findings may be representing more of an age-group result. Perhaps if the sample were more diverse, different results would have been obtained. Lastly, the researcher measured the participant's ordinal birth order status rather than their psychological position. According to Adler, what is more important is how the individual perceives themselves within the family (Adler, 1956).
In this study, it was found that oldest children came out high on the Liked by All scale. This means that they needed to win approval as a child to feel good about themselves. As an adult, it is especially important for them to have the approval of others and they want to please others and be liked (Kern, et. al, 1997). Once again, oldest children also scored high on the Wanting Recognition scale. This measures how much one wanted to succeed and wanted the praise and approval from adults during childhood. As an adult, success is important to them and they enjoy the respect they get from achieving it (Kern, et. al, 1997). This relates to previous research that first borns are more likely to be gifted, achieve more intellectually and vocationally, and exert the most effort to obtain goals (Parker, 1998; Sullivan & Schwebel, 1996; Hester, et. al, 1992). Perhaps their passion to succeed is related to the fact that this may be their path towards gaining approval from others, especially their parents. Similarly, it was found that first borns worry more about receiving positive social attention and becoming responsible for continuous success (Ishiyama, et. al, 1990). Adler (1927) has stated that oldest children try to obtain power through their high levels of achievement.

When looking at other trends that emerged from the study, it was found that a high number of oldest children in comparison to high and low scores, had high scores on the Entitlement scale. This means that they were probably treated as very special and given much attention as a child. As an adult, they expect to get their way and expect that their needs will be met (Kern, et. al, 1997). This goes along with previous research about narcissism. It was found that the rank of the firstborn may produce a sense of entitlement and superiority (Byrd, et. al, 1993). First borns had a high degree of attention from their
parents for at least some time in their lives, which contributed to their perception of being “special”.

Another finding was that a high number of oldest children were found to have high scores on the Taking Charge scale. As a child, these individuals enjoyed telling others what to do. They were seen as strong-willed and wanting to be a leader. As an adult, individuals that score high of this scale are responsible and don’t mind assuming leadership positions (Kern, et. al, 1997). Todd et. al, (1993) hypothesized that when firstborns are dethroned by a sibling, it may lead to strivings for compensation which are manifested in an effort to feel powerful. By taking on leadership positions, this may be their way of achieving power.

In a study that looked at the psychological birth order position, it was found that the need for precision and going along with authority and rules were associated with first borns (White, et. al, 1995). Adler (1956) also describes firstborns as being conservative and exaggerates the importance of rules and laws. A similar trend was noted in this study. Many first borns scored high on the Going Along scale which measures how much the individual goes along with the rules and tries to do the right thing (Kern, et. al, 1997).

Some implications for further research are to replicate this study only use one’s psychological birth order position rather than ordinal birth order position. Also, a more diverse sample size should be used.
References


