

**A Literature Review: A Closer Look at
Ordinal Positioning Within the Family System**

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ABSTRACT

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For over a century psychologists have been exploring and modifying birth order research. This phenomenon attempts to explain how a person's adult patterns of behavior are related to learned behavior from childhood. Many researchers connect birth order theory to how a person develops personality characteristics and developmental patterns. Connecting individuals with ordinal positioning within the family has been popular but controversial research. Although numerous explanations have been offered to explain these findings, no theory has gained general acceptance. This literature review summarizes birth order research, and offers therapeutic implications.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Birth order refers to the ordinal positioning within a family. Many researchers believe that where we are in relationship to our siblings, or being the only child in a family, will influence how we develop. Birth order is not a simplistic system because there are many different theories and opinions about the concept of birth order.

Throughout this paper I will go into more depth about the studies of birth order, several scholars and their theories, specific birth order positions within the family, brief descriptions of how positioning influences marriage, and therapeutic applications.

Thinking about birth order is one way to get some good ideas about personality. Certainly, there is not one precise theory that accurately predicts how a person may turn out. We are all different, complex, and unique. Therefore, birth order is about tendencies and general characteristics that may often apply (Leman, 1985). There may be several factors that influence birth order such as: spacing of siblings, sex of siblings, twins or multiple births, physical makeup of children, sibling deaths, adoptions, the birth order of each parent, the relationship between the parents, and the blending of two or more families (Leman, 1985). All of these factors can make birth order complex and they each have important characteristics of their own. However, the purpose of this study is to examine the research and literature on ordinal positioning within the family.

Definition of Terms:

Birth Order/ Ordinal Position: The position a family member holds within the family such as: an only child, first-born, second born, third born, and fourth-born

Birth Order Traits: Characteristics learned from childhood according to the child's position in the family, sex, number of siblings, and sex of siblings

Birth Order Theory: The child has a specific position in the family and exhibits certain traits that are associated with their ordinal position

*Note: each researcher has a different theory and perceptions of birth order traits

(Forer, 1976; Hoopes & Harper, 1987; Leman, 1998)

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Over the years, the concept of birth order has intrigued and been studied by many researchers. This chapter will incorporate:

- A) Adlerian Theory
- B) Jungian Perspective
- C) Studies by Cecile Ernst and Jules Agnst
- D) Concepts of Dr. Frank Sulloway

Alfred Adler

In the 1920's, Adler was one of the first modern psychologists to research birth order and associate how birth order is influential on personality (Birth Order Dynamics and Response to Stress, 2002). Many researchers have based their theories around Adler's research but they have added modern opinions and new findings. Since his is one of the most respected and oldest theories, I will briefly describe the Adlerian perspective of ordinal positions. In the rest of chapter two, I will illustrate several different researcher's studies and theories.

Adler identified several different variables that became a part of his birth order theory. First of all, Adler (1956) thought if the environment allowed it, a child could take control of another child's birth order position. For example, if one child had a physical disability, another child could take on some of his or her birth order characteristics.

Secondly, he considered other influences, such as: parental attitudes, social and economic position, and gender roles (Adler, 1956). Lastly, Adler (1956) believed that a child may obtain characteristics from other positions along with his or her own, and the spacing of siblings could influence the child's personality. Also, he thought that if more than three years separated any two children, then subgroups would form and have a significant impact on the ordinal positioning (Birth Order Dynamics and Response to Stress, 2002).

Adler (1956) believed that the only child receives 200% of the parents' attention and the child likes being the center of adult attention. The only child often uses adult vocabulary and prefers adult company (Adler, 1956). The parents may be over-protective and may spoil their only child (Adler, 1956).

Adler (1956) came up with the concept of the first child feeling "dethroned." When the second child is born, the first child may feel insecure, protective of self, conservative, and strive to be a helper (Adler, 1956). The first child may become strict, have authoritarian characteristics, and feel loyalty towards the father of the family (Adler, 1956).

The second child is more inclined to be cooperative than the first child, and shares the attention with another child from the very beginning (Adler, 1956). However, the second child feels competitive and may want to overtake the older child (Adler, 1956). Adler (1956) viewed the second-born as always having to compare their abilities to the older child and using the oldest sibling as a "pacemaker."

The middle child may have an even-temper and a take it or leave it attitude (Adler, 1956). Adler (1956) believed the middle child feels squeezed out of a position of privilege and significance. The child is internally compelled to find peace within the family and may have trouble finding a place or become a fighter of injustice (Adler, 1956).

The youngest child will have many role models and all of the siblings may have an influential “parental role”(Adler, 1956). Adler (1956) was convinced that all of the other siblings were “dethroned” except the youngest child. The child may have massive plans but may not have the skills to carry them out (Adler, 1956). Adler (1956) believed that the older siblings took so much responsibility for the youngest child that some skills did not have the chance to develop.

Jungian Perspective

Adler and Jung were both interested in the family constellation but from different perspectives. Jung showed that “children often tend to be identified with the family atmosphere created by their parents” (Stewart, 1977, p. 78). Adler focused on the child’s sibling position, to show characteristic differences in personality between children in the same family (Adler, 1956). Adler covered sibling position and Jung focused on the family atmosphere and between the two they covered two important aspects of the ordinal positioning theory.

Louis Stewart is one of many dedicated scholars that follow the footsteps of C.G. Jung. Stewart is a clinical professor who has developed his own research style that

conforms to the Jungian perspective. According to Stewart (1992) the individual's personality is shaped around the family, but the family is not considered the only influential factor. The infant is contained within the family, which becomes their world and society (Stewart, 1976). The formative years are held within the walls of the family system and the rest of the child's life is spent searching for internal harmony about the family's governing rules (Stewart, 1976). Stewart suggests that the child absorbs myths about the family that becomes internalized within the "body, memories, complexes and fantasies"(Stewart, 1992, p. 34).

Stewart (1992) focuses on how the family mediates between the "innate archetypal affects of the self and the multiplicity of demands of the world" (Stewart, 1992, p. 11). He views the family as an intricate network with interweaving kinship bonds, and a language that includes a combination of inexpressible rules (Stewart, 1992). Jung believed that individuals experience the need to withdraw from the family of origin and this task is considered successful only through a "whole-hearted dedication to life"(Stewart, 1992, p. 11).

Jung believed the personality of the child conforms to the parent's attitudes about the family system and society (Stewart, 1992). "For an example, one parent may say a child behaves just like its mother or father or grandparent, with the intent of casting aspersions on the child. No matter what the attitudes expressed parents do indulge in comparisons with relatives"(Stewart, 1992, p. 11). Comparisons can create positive or

negative meanings. Nevertheless, the connotations are deeply imprinted into the child's personality (Stewart, 1992). Over time the child develops a sense of the family that is constructed from a combination of his or her own "impressions," the "attitudes" of family members, and the stories that are told of the "ancestors" (Stewart, 1992, p. 16).

Sibling position and the family atmosphere are intertwined with each other and yet they have distinct characteristics (Rogers, 2000; Stewart, 1992). "The child's sibling position is determined by the fated accident of birth. The family atmosphere is in large part determined by the parents' behavior, attitudes, values and particularly their unconscious complexes, which carry the unanswered questions of the ancestors" (Stewart, 1992, p. 17). Stewart refers to ordinal positioning and ancestral complexes as the two dimensions of the family tree. He suggests that the "horizontal" positioning relates to "extended family and society" and the "vertical" positioning is in unison with the "ancestral spirit" (Stewart, 1992, p. 17).

In this regard it is fruitful to think of the family as a living organism. The marriage of a man and a woman is the marriage of two families. Their children are the fruits of the two family trees. It is easy to see why a tree, the family tree—the tree of life itself, symbolizes the family. As a living organism, the family grows as children arrive. Each child is born into a different family. For the first child the family is mother, father and me! For the second child the family is mother, father, brother or sister and me!, and so on. The family constellation is the basic structure of the family. It is the tree itself. The two parents are the older generation; the children are the younger generation. The parents are the connection with the ancients, the ancestors. The children are the new generation.
(Stewart, 1992, p.17)

Finally, Stewart (1992) suggests that birth order is partially influenced by the complexity of sibling position. On the surface it may appear to be clear-cut but in reality

it is extremely complex. In the 1920's researchers did numerous studies comparing only children with first-born children (Stewart, 1992). Their assumption was that only children endured more psychological symptoms and handicaps than other children (Stewart, 1992). The results were non-conclusive, and contradictory studies are steadily increasing (Stewart, 1992). Furthermore, the "academic establishment" declared the subject matter was nonexistent in the field of research (Stewart, 1992). The establishment considered birth order research a waste of time and irrelevant (Stewart, 1992). The quantity of birth order studies rapidly but temporarily deteriorated (Stewart, 1992). However, history shows that there were several dedicated scholars, such as Cecile Ernst and Jules Angst, who pursued the research with a broader lens (Stewart, 1992).

Studies by Cecile Ernst and Jules Angst

During the post-Second World War years, there were a couple different studies done on sibling positioning (Stewart, 1976). Research on birth order came alive again and most studies revolved around "achievement" (Stewart, 1992). The subjects were mostly college students because researchers could easily measure their academic achievement (Stewart, 1992).

There were two diligent researchers who embraced birth order studies as their focus of interest. Cecile Ernst and Jules Angst attempted to review all of the research on birth order between 1946 and 1980 (Stewart, 1992). They also conducted a study in 1971 of a representative sample of 6,315 19-year-old Swiss males and 1,381

20 year-old Swiss females (Ernst & Angst, 1983). Throughout their studies they found negative results for the influence of birth order on behavior and personality (Stewart 1992). Ernst and Angst (1983) concluded that birth order doesn't have an influential effect on developing personality.

However, when Stewart (1992) surveyed the world literature based on ordinal positioning within the family, including his own study on Swiss subjects, he reported that Ernst and Angst "have done a service and a disservice to our understanding of the family constellation and its influences on the destiny of the individual" (Stewart, 1992, p. 60). One of the more constructive results from their study is that birth order does not have an influence on higher achievement or psychopathology (Stewart, 1992). "The negative aspect of their study is failure to understand the effects of the family constellation and sibling position per se on style of life and worldview"(Stewart, 1992, p. 60).

Concepts of Dr. Frank Sulloway

Definitions:

Niches: The concept of niches derives from the field of ecology, where it exemplifies how different species use available resources within their environments.

Ideology: The principal ideas or beliefs that characterize a particular class, group, or movement; ideas that form the basis of an economic or political theory.

Definitions continued:

Ecology: The scientific study of living things in relation to each other and to their environment (Sulloway, 1996)

Dr. Frank Sulloway is a historian of science and his theories have developed from his belief that birth order is an essential component to “comprehending ideological variations” (Sulloway, 1996, p. 22). Sulloway created a quantitative study that focused on birth order and he diligently devoted nineteen years to this study (Stewart, 1992). Sulloway (1996) found that birth order is a better predictor of social attitudes than gender, class or race. Also, his findings suggest that birth order has five to ten times more of an influence on personality traits than academic achievement and IQ (Sulloway, 1996).

Sulloway (1996) dedicated twenty-six years to look at one hundred and twenty-one different revolutions in science, politics, religion, and socialization. Sulloway demonstrates that birth order predicts, “intellectual flexibility, attitudes toward innovation and new ideas, and whether you can alter your views about what you think” (Sulloway, 1996, p. 25). Sulloway (1996) bases his theory on learning, self-determinism, and adaptability, instead of the determination of genes. Sulloway describes this as “Darwinian theory about human behavior with a completely environmental twist”(Sulloway, 1996, p. 71).

According to Sulloway (1996), siblings may experience the world in two different ways. “The first source is chance experiences, many of which occur outside the

family--at school, for example. The second source is systematic influences, most of which occur within the family”(Sulloway, 1996, p. 20). Sulloway (1996) incorporates the term “niches” into his research and finds this helpful to illustrate the distinctive roles each family member has in the family system. His belief is that family niches can be used in the same manner as this term is used in the field of ecology (Sulloway, 1996). Siblings within the “niche” will have conflicts in order to establish security in the family system (Sulloway, 1996).

Sulloway (1996) insists that siblings will develop different roles within the family “niche.” These roles are reliant on several factors: “birth order, gender, physical traits, and aspects of temperament” (Sulloway, 1996, p. 61). While the family system operates, each child is growing more in tune with what the parental dyad wants and they create behaviors to captivate their parents’ attention (Sulloway, 1996). “Eldest children, for example, are likely to seek parental favor by acting as surrogate parents toward their younger siblings. Younger siblings are not in a position to ingratiate themselves with parents in the same manner. Their niche is typically less parent identified, less driven by conscientious behavior, and more inclined toward sociability”(Sulloway, 1996, p. 21). Siblings may be acknowledged for certain activities as they demonstrate abilities and “become increasingly diversified in their niches”(Sulloway, 1996, p. 21).

Sulloway (1996) suggests ordinal positioning takes an active role in differentiating the family environment into niches. “To the extent that personality can be traced to systematic differences in family niches, rather than to idiosyncratic experiences,

the task of explaining personality is made considerably more manageable” (Sulloway, 1996, p. 25). Sulloway (1996) believes the birth order theory provides a foundation for deciphering some of the basic principles that govern family niches.

Chapter 3

Ordinal positioning within the family

Throughout this chapter I will go into more detail about ordinal positions of an only child, first-born, second-born, third-born, and fourth-born. During my research, I found limited information on only children, and noticed that during the past forty years psychologists have taken more of an interest in this position. The following information on only children is based on Dr. Leman's theory of birth order. In looking at the other positions, there are many knowledgeable researchers. For the purpose of this paper I decided to select only a few known scholars, and to draw primarily on research from Margaret Hoopes and James Harper (1987).

Only Children

Only children have a unique advantage and disadvantage: the child has never had to compete with siblings for parental attention, favor, or resources (Leman, 1998). This allows the child to become extremely confident, coherent, articulate, structured, and simply on top of things (Leman, 1998). Leman (1998) believes that because only children do not have the experience of sharing/dealing with siblings, this leaves them self-centered by default. However, Leman (1998) challenges and disagrees with one of Alder's quotes from the 1920's: "The only child has difficulties with every independent

activity and sooner or later they become useless in life.” Leman (1998) points out many successful people who were only children, including Gerald Ford, Franklin Roosevelt, Leonardo da Vinci, and Isaac Newton.

Leman (1998) suggests that the key to understanding only children is knowing why he or she is an only child. He refers to one category as the “special jewel,” meaning the parents wanted more children but under certain circumstances were not able to have more children (Leman, 1998). Therefore, the child becomes the sole focus of the family and has their entire devotion (Havighurst, 1960; Leman, 1998). This can leave the child feeling overly important and may be a hard pattern to break as the child enters adulthood (Leman, 1998). “Special jewels often arrive when parents are older, usually in their thirties, and they make their only child the center of their universe”(Leman, 1998, p. 135). Leman (1998) believes that is important for adult only children to find a balance between believing that they are overly important and contemplating that they are simply being treated unfairly when situations do not favor them.

The second reason for an only child is that the parents planned for one child. During Leman’s research in the 1960’s, he found that “ the planned only child was often the victim of very structured, tightly disciplined parents and were treated as an adult, pressured to be mature, responsible, and dependable”(Leman, 1998, p. 136).

Leman (1998) reports that only children are exceptional candidates for inheriting the traits of an ultra-perfectionist. This leads the child to set extremely high standards for themselves (Leman, 1998).

He also believes that one of the most common characteristics is being a rescuer, a trait which Leman labels as “nurse mentality” (Leman, 1998). The only child may be concerned about other people’s problems and will have the urge to move in and fix the problem (Isaacson, 1991; Leman, 1998). He trusts that it is no coincidence that often nurses are only children or first-borns (Leman, 1998).

Leman’s detailed perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of only children:

Figure 1.1

<u>Typical Traits</u>	<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>
Confident & Self-assured	Trust own opinion, not afraid to make decisions	May be self-centered from being treated by parents as “center of universe”; also fearful, ambivalent about trying new things
Perfectionist	Always do things right and leave no stone unturned to do a through job	Tend to criticize themselves and/or others too much; never satisfied; may procrastinate because they fear they cannot do a “good enough job”
Organized	Have everything under control; always on top things, tend to be on time and on schedule	May worry too much about order, process, and rules and not be flexible when it’s needed; may show real impatience with anyone who is “disorganized” or not as meticulous; can be upset by surprises
Driver	Ambitious, enterprising energetic, willing to sacrifice to be a success	Put themselves or those they work with under too much stress and pressure

Figure 1.1 continued

Typical Traits	Strengths	Weaknesses
List Maker	Set goals and reach them tend to get more done in a day than others; planning the day is a must	May become boxed in, too busy with the to-do list to see the big picture and what needs to be done right now
Logical	Known as straight thinkers; Can be counted on not to be compulsive or to go off half-cocked	May believe they're always right and fail to pay attention to the more intuitive opinions of the others
Scholarly	Tend to be voracious readers and accumulators of information and facts; good problem solvers who think things through	May spend too much time gathering facts when there are other things that need done; may be so serious they fail to see humor in situations when humor is desperately needed

Leman 1998, p.147

The rest of this chapter on ordinal positioning I will describe first-born, second-born, third-born, and fourth-born children. For each birth order position I will focus on three categories: job assignments, interpersonal responsibilities, and identity and sense of well-being. These three concepts originate from the studies of Hoopes and Harper (1987) For the purpose of this study I have labeled the birth order positions in numerical order.

Definitions:

Job Assignments: the roles that the child develops within the family and then could be carried outside of the family

Interpersonal Responsibilities: how the child relates to other people and social interactions

Identity and Sense of Well Being: the child's self esteem, how the child relates to threats of their well-being, and the response to the needs of others (Hoopes & Harper, 1976)

First–Born Children

Job Assignments

When the first child is born, parents tend to use them as a guide to determine what their family is going to be like and how their future children will be (Hoopes & Harper, 1976). Parents observe that the outside world formulates an opinion about their family based on the first child (Hoopes & Harper, 1976). The message the child receives is the need to present themselves as if they were on display and the understanding that the focus is on the audience that is viewing the “perfect and well put together” exhibit (Hoopes &

Harper, 1976). This causes children to feel like they are the primary focal point, and have many people reviewing and evaluating their performance (Hoopes & Harper, 1976). The first child senses that their behaviors, words, mannerism, and actions have consequences that are associated with the outside world beyond themselves (Hoopes & Harper, 1976). Since external validation is cued by their parents, it transforms into a way that first-borns evaluate themselves (Hoopes & Harper, 1976). “First children learn that their job assignment is to produce outcomes that meet with the family’s approval and will do their best to meet the demand” (Hoopes & Harper, 1976, p. 36).

Interpersonal Responsibilities

Hoopes and Harper (1987) report first children work hard at carrying out the family rules and parental values. Rather than concentrating on the subsystems of the family, they focus on each family member individually (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). “They are responsible to their parents for such things as siblings, rules, jobs, loyalty, and efforts to meet family expectations” (Hoopes & Harper, 1987, p. 37).

When the first child steps outside of the family environment (school, work, and social activities) they will conform to the rules and become good team players (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The child likes to stick to the given rules rather than create new standards for themselves and others (Hoopes & Harper, 1987; Knight, 2000). This may derive from feeling the need to please authority figures and first children hold themselves accountable to get multiple tasks accomplished, even when the task is assigned to another person (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

In social situations the first-born child may feel anxious and fear that they may fail the expectations they put on themselves and the expectations of others (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The first child operates within the family by being responsible for family members and the productiveness of each member (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). When the child thinks productivity is not obtained (or not to the level of quality they wish for) they view this as failing because they are not doing their “job” (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). However, in social situations first children learn well by observing others (especially adults) and integrate their observations into social interactions (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). First children do not want to fail and they may mask their emotions (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The child will hide their emotions because they do not want others to view them as weak or as a failure (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

When the first-born child is involved in a relationship there is a need to gather information and they may ask many questions to collect all of the details (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). “If, however, they become overwhelmed by the amount of detail, they close their minds and refuse to consider additional information” (Hoopes & Harper, 1987, p. 38). This may become frustrating to others but the first child needs clarification of the goals in the relationship and may need to gather the parts before they can look at the whole (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

Identity and Sense of Well-Being

As mentioned earlier, the first-born child feels validation from other people, especially authority figures (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). However, when validation is based on opinions from others the validating process may only last for a short time and can be inconsistent (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). “First children must achieve other outcomes in order to continue to feel worthwhile. Their self-esteem is often based more on what they can do than on who they are” (Hoopes & Harper, 1987, p. 42). Therefore, when the child does not receive messages from others they can feel incompetent, which causes a “threat to their sense of well being”(Hoopes & Harper, 1987, p. 43). When the external validation disappears the child may feel extremely hurt and neglected (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

A detailed table on First-Born Children:

Figure 2:1 Table of Patterns for First-Born Children

Job Assignment	Interpersonal Responsibilities	Social Interactions
a) Responsible for supporting family rules, values, and expectations	a) Responsible for each family member to one parent, often father, but may be mother	a) Interact with individuals
b) Responsible for a central place in the family in order to be productive	b) Responsible for that same parent	b) Some performance anxiety in most relationships and social situations

Figure 2:1 Table of Patterns for First-Born Children Continued

Job Assignment	Interpersonal Responsibilities	Social Interactions
c) Responsible for a central place in the family in order to be productive	c) Responsible for all family members' productivity	c) Feel impelled to respond to others' expectations d) Will encourage others to express ideas and feelings if seen relevant

Focus/ Awareness	Cognitive Patterns	Affective Patterns
a) Focused on rule governed aspects of reality	a) Use ideas and facts in a logical and analytical manner to understand	a) Identify and label own and others' feelings easily if relevant
b) Focused on details and parts	b) Perceptually limited, lack of linkages between parts, compartmentalize	b) Integrates and shares own feelings if the purpose and outcome is made explicit
c) Aware of some of the implicit environment	c) Go from parts to whole	c) Can be lost, confused, and overwhelmed by detail

Figure 2:1 Table of Patterns for First-Born Children Continued

<u>Self Esteem</u>	<u>Threatened Psychologically</u>	<u>Responses to Threat</u>	<u>What They Need From Others</u>
Self-esteem based on doing well in the eyes of others	By being “off target” in the eyes of others	Experience life as hopeless	Recognition and acceptance as being central, “on target”, and productive
Need to feel productive	When ignored by others as central	Withdraw, ignore	Approval of products

(Hoopes & Harper, 1987, p. 206)

Second Children

Job Assignments

As I explained earlier the first-born child takes care of the overt rules within the family and “the primary function of the second child is to perceive and support the implicit elements in family rules and relationships” (Hoopes & Harper, 1987, p. 48). The second-born is a good detector of unexpressed emotions within the family (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). However, this may cause the second child to feel stress or pain and this child will do anything in their power to transform the unspoken feelings to clear emotions that are expressed (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

The second child may not realize that they respond readily to the family’s emotions and communication patterns but they will gravitate to the members that are having trouble communicating (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The second-born shares some of the duty with the first child in regulating the productivity within the family (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). However, the second child will concentrate more on the process of the task instead of the product (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

Interpersonal Responsibilities

The second child may feel like they are doing their job in the family when they help other members express their true and/or unspoken emotions (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). This pattern reinforces their need to make a connection with individual family members (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). Generally, the first-born feels accountable for one

parent and the second child will observe the connection, which draws them to the opposite parent (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The first child is more likely to be drawn to the father and the second-born feels compelled towards the mother of the family (Bach, 1974; Hoopes & Harper, 1987). “One result of this phenomenon is that the relationship between first and second siblings mirrors the marriage of their parents (Hoopes & Harper, 1987, p. 50).

Second children have tendencies to switch from being very compassionate to being inaccessible (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). In another words, the child tends to be a caring person who listens to people’s problems and the second child may have such strong intuition that it may become bothersome (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). Furthermore, this responsibility may become overwhelming, leading the child to withdraw from interacting with others (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

Identity and Sense of Well-Being

According to Hoopes and Harper (1987), the second child learns how to express their feelings openly by observing the communication style of their mother. The child associates their identity with the family’s underlying emotions and miscommunication gaps that are within the family (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). Consequently, the child frequently struggles with finding a place in the family and in social situations (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The second child associates their “job” or identity with the emotional needs of others and this can be linked to the feeling of ambiguity (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

Furthermore, the second-born may feel threatened when they are unable to distinguish their own feelings from others, and they may consistently battle with wanting a specific place in relationships and within the family (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The child is continually dealing with implicit emotions, which may lead to confusion and exhaustion (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). Given that the child deals with emotion on a intuitive and implicit level, they may become perplexed and withdraw from the situation (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). However, when the child is feeling secure they deal with interpersonal responsibilities on a clear and compassionate level (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

Figure 3:1 Table of Patterns for Second-Born Children

Job Assignment	Interpersonal Responsibilities	Social Interactions
a) To be perceptive and supportive to the implicit elements in family rules and relationships	a) To have unique relationship with everyone in the family	a) Tender, sensitive, caring to individuals, or rational, distant, and goal-oriented
b) To open clogged channels of communication by making the implicit explicit	b) To be responsible for mother and mother to father	b) Can be unaware of personal and others' boundaries
c) To monitor the quality of performance	c) Responsible for the affective state of each family member by supporting their emotional needs	

Figure 3:1 Table of Patterns for Second-Born Children Continued

Focus/ Awareness	Cognitive Patterns	Affective Patterns
a) Focused more on affect, implicit messages, and process than content	a) Perceive issues in terms of polarities with difficulty of integrating to supply the middle part	a) Feel other peoples' tensions and feelings absorbs them as if their own
b) Aware of symbolic and imaginative meaning	b) Restrict perception sometimes because of missing middle pieces	b) Sometimes cannot sort out and label own feelings
c) Can be focused on the literal meaning of a phenomenon, logical and analytical, with form and structure the outcome	c) Need to know implicit and explicit to make sense of the whole	c) Can become blocked and burdened with details, parts, and emotions
d) Aware of underlying structure, often implicitly	d) Create images to understand e) Use underlying structure to complete whole	d) Feel as well as thinks in polarities (mood swings)

Figure 3:1 Table of Patterns for Second-Born Children Continued

Self Esteem	Threatened Psychologically	Responses to Threat	What They Need From Others
a) Identity derived from filling emotional gaps or being in touch with underlying structure in a situation	a) Loss of unique acknowledged place	a) Feel wiped out	a) Acceptance as a person with a place and clear boundaries
b) Based on having well defined boundaries in a unique place	b) Incongruencies between implicit and explicit rules, feelings, values, expectations	b) Polarize to emotional and act irrationally and irresponsibly	b) To have people own their own feelings and expectations by making them explicit
c) Clearing discrepancies between implicit and explicit rules, values, feelings and expectations	c) Other people's emotional overloads	c) Polarize to intellect and tasks	c) To receive feedback from others if they are taking on others' feelings with reminders to let go
d) Self-sufficient and purposeful		d) Appear remote, uninvolved, overly involved, helpless, aimless	
		e) Look stubborn	

(Hoopes & Harper, 1987, p. 208)

Third-Born Children

Job Assignments

The first child typically resumes responsibility for the father in the family, the second child is accountable for the mother, and the third child takes responsibility for the “dyads” within the family system (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The third child desires stability in the family and tries to balance the relationship between the mother and father (Claxton, 1995; Hoopes & Harper, 1987). “Being observers of dyadic dynamics from their birth, third children discover the rules about the appropriate degree of closeness, conflict, dependency, intrusiveness, and loyalty in the marriage” (Hoopes & Harper, 1987, p. 60). The child’s ultimate goal is restoring harmony among family members and they feel responsible for the multiple dyads in the family system (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

Interpersonal Responsibilities

The third child may have trouble negotiating in social situations because they have a difficult time taking sides in a debate (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The child will be involved in the debate but will help support the notion of balance or harmony (Claxton, 1995; Hoopes & Harper, 1987). When the situation is non-negotiable, the child will create a covert diversion to help bring both of the parties together (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

When developing interpersonal relationships the child will proceed slowly and with caution (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The third child fights for independence within the family system, and may fear losing this when they enter a relationship (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The child has an internal struggle of wanting to be involved with many relationships and the desperate need for independence (Green, 1978; Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The interaction with different people makes the child feel they are doing their job and may help them feel complete (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). On the other hand, when they feel to confined in a relationship the third-born child will distant themselves (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The child incorporates two conflicting aspects into their personality and “others often see third children as contradictory, inconsistent, and incongruent” (Hoopes & Harper, 1987, p. 62).

Identity and Sense of Well-Being

The third child associates their self-esteem with the strength of the marital relationship and with the family system (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The child feels more confident when the parents express their love and approval (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). It is important to the child to know where they stand in their relationships because they feel more secure and established (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). Hoopes and Harper (1987) report third-born children do not like to limit their choices and feel safe in a relationship where choices are allowed. Furthermore, the child may become angry when forced to make a choice and will choose to fight or flight (Green, 1978; Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

“Everyone finds it difficult or awkward to make choices in some situations, but the pressure for third children is connected to their identity and sense of well being” (Hoopes & Harper, 1987, p. 65).

When there is conflict or stress in the family system the third child feels they are to blame and will try to restore balance (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). Often, a family will come into therapy and identify the third child as the problem because they are acting out the family’s problems (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The third-born may be confused by their actions because the connections with other family members are so important and they do not want to jeopardize the relationships (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The constant need for recognition and appreciation reinforces the child’s “job assignment” of restoring balance within the family system (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). When the child feels they are connected with each member and receives messages of appreciation, the third child feels balance and harmony (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

A detailed table on Third-Born Children:

Figure 4:1 Table of Patterns for Third-Born Children

Job Assignment	Interpersonal Responsibilities	Social Interactions
a) Responsible for the dynamics and quality of marital relationships	a) To be connected to both mom and dad	a) Negotiate, balance
b) Responsible for the balance in all dyadic relationships	b) To restore balance in the marital relationship by connecting with each parent	b) Want to remain detached, but connected, so can appear “tentative”

Figure 4:1 Table of Patterns for Third-Born Children Continued

Job Assignment	Interpersonal Responsibilities	Social Interactions
<p>c) To discover and enforce rules about the degree and nature of relationship rules such as closeness, conflict, dependency, intrusiveness, and</p> <p>d) To identify family issues</p>	<p>c) Responsible for connecting to all dyadic relationships in the family</p>	<p>c) Difficulty making a commitment to a relationship, but once committed, very difficult to get out</p> <p>d) "In and out" Fully there one moment, but gone the next- psychologically or physically</p>
Focus/ Awareness	Cognitive Patterns	Affective Patterns
<p>a) Aware of connections and correlations, but not always consciously</p> <p>b) Focused on issues and relationships in the context</p> <p>c) Focused on feelings and ideas of people as connections to parts and relationships</p>	<p>a) To derive meanings, looks at connections, correlations, issues and context</p> <p>b) Uses connections to get bigger parts to get to the whole</p> <p>c) Because of lack of information about details and facts may limit the context prematurely</p> <p>d) Rearrange and synthesize existing ideas into new forms rather than seeking meaning to separate parts</p>	<p>a) Feel deeply and can identify and share feelings if they are connected to the context</p> <p>b) To be relevant, feelings have to be clearly part of a context</p>

Figure 4:1 Table of Patterns for Third-Born Children Continued

Self Esteem	Threatened Psychologically	Responses to Threat	What They Need From Others
a) Self - esteem is connected to the stability of the marital relationship	a) Lack of choices b) Discrepant ideas, feelings	a) Feel confined and trapped if they do not perceive choices	a) Appreciation for what they do b) Recognition that they care
b) Self-esteem is tied to their ability to discover dyadic relationship rules and apply them in maintaining balance	c) Interpersonal conflict, self and others d) When they perceive they have to make decisions affecting the welfare of others	b) Uncaring, apathetic, ambivalent, carefree c) Disappear into introspection d) Turn off feelings and withdraw e) Inundated and chaotic f) Stuck, stubborn	c) Help in creating choices when stuck d) Recognition of their need for choices e) Acceptance of their in-and-out behavior f) Confirmation that they can come back, that they have an enduring connection

(Hoopes & Harper, 1987, p. 210)

Fourth-Born Children

Job Assignments

When this child enters the family they feel responsible for the balance of the entire system (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). This is a tremendous amount of responsibility and when the family system is not in harmony the child feels like they are not doing their job (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). Hoopes and Harper (1987) believe the main function of the fourth-born is “trouble-shooting.” When there is a failure in the family system the child will go directly to the source and try to trouble-shoot to help fix the problem (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). Furthermore, the child is uncomfortable with pain because this feeling disrupts the family’s harmony (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). Consequently, the child may end up avoiding pain and may make light of intense pain or discomfort.

Interpersonal Responsibilities

In social situations the fourth child can make people feel at ease and they like to make the conversation as light hearted as possible (Hoopes & Harper, 1987; Leman, 1998). “The fact that they usually mix easily with groups and are comfortable with them makes sense, as they were born into a “crowd” and live with interpersonal interactions all around them (Hoopes & Harper, 1987, p. 71). The fourth-born may have over dramatic characteristics and be able to draw people in by their charisma (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

Family members are often surprised by how much information the fourth-born has knowledge of and the child may use this to their advantage (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The child quickly observes that they are the smallest member and may use their gathered information as a way to gain some power within the family (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

Identity and Sense of Well-Being

Fourth-born children associate their identity with the stability of the family system (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). They may feel responsibility to relieve people from pain because this will help the relationship move towards the goal of stability (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The child develops a good sense of boundaries because they are constantly conforming to the consistency of relationship (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). Typically, fourth-born children have good self-esteem and this carries into their relationships (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). However, the child may feel anxious when given too much power in a relationship (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The child's anxiety may stem from the feeling of being responsible for the whole system and too much power can be overwhelming (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

As I mentioned earlier, the fourth-born tends to absorb the family's pain and when the child acts out the pain, people may view this as being impulsive (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The fourth-born may absorb so much pain that they feel the need to release their implicit emotions (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). People also may find it frustrating when the fourth-born does not take responsibility for their own actions (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The four-born child may never take responsibility for their actions when it is related to the pain of the family system (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The child feels entitled to express their frustrations but may not be able to name where the feelings are coming from (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

The fourth child may end relationships prematurely because the pain may be too intense and the child will become distant instead of confronting the issue (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The child may want to confront the pain in the relationship but is used to absorbing implicit pain and may be confused about how to express emotions explicitly (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The fourth-born child associates recognition with a healthy sense of well-being because recognition becomes a substitute for the painful emotions (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

A detailed table on Fourth-Born Children:

Figure 5:1 Table of Patterns for Fourth-Born Children

Job Assignment	Interpersonal Responsibilities	Social Interactions
a) Responsible for family unity and harmony	a) Connects to each family member to assure unity and harmony	a) Develop pleasant relationships in functional families
b) Responsible for family purposes and goals	b) Responsible for all “garbage” in the family because it disrupts unity and harmony	b) Feel blamed and burdened by anything “wrong” in relationships of family
	c) Act out the tensions in relationships; can be quite dramatic	c) Make relationships easily, although sometimes superficially
		d) Impulsive and highly demonstrated with warmth and closeness expressed openly

Figure 5:1 Table of Patterns for Fourth-Born Children Continued

Focus/ Awareness	Cognitive Patterns	Affective Patterns	
a) Focused on the whole	a) Thinks in terms of total systems, conclusions, and outcomes	a) Can be overwhelmed by the size of the "whole"	
b) Focused on purposes and goals of the system	b) Look first at the whole and then the parts	b) In touch with feelings of selves and others	
c) Aware of power and responsibility	c) Leave out or does not see details, and summarize superficially, prematurely, and dramatically	c) Impulsive and demonstrative	
	d) New information accepted only if it can be integrated into the whole	d) Collect negative feelings of others as burdens, but do not confuse them with their own	
Self Esteem	Threatened Psychologically	Responses to Threat	What They Need From Others
a) Tied to being part of the family and goals clear and moving	a) Perception of the size of the whole	a) Overwhelmed by size of the whole so will cut out parts and people until they can manage it (unconsciously)	a) To be told that they are not blamed for pain and tension in the family or relationships
b) Well-being high when unity and harmony in the family	b) Disruptive pain in family or relationships	b) Irresponsible and helpless, random ineffective behaviors	b) Help in assuming their part in conflict so that they do not assume the whole burden
c) Can have secure sense of self and see themselves as limited in their ability to change things	c) Too much pain in the family	c) "Cute," "babyish" in acting out	c) Lots of approval
	d) Sense of being blamed by family for pain	(Hoopes & Harper, 1987, p. 211)	

Figure 6:1 Summarization of Hoopes and Harper's theory of birth order:

Sibling Variables	1st-Born	2nd-Born	3rd-Born	4th-Born
Role Demands	Results	Quality of Performance	Maintenance of balance	Maintenance of harmony
Serve the System	Overt Demands For Productivity	Affective status of individuals	Quality of relationships between family Members	Relationships as selected in the entire system
Appearance to Others	Responsible distant	Polarized close or Distant	Ambivalent close or distant	Purposeful close
Interpersonal Responsibilities	To one Person at A time	To one person at a time	To dyads	To the family system
Perceptual Orientation	Analytical, rational, Parts and Details	Analytical, affective, parts and details	Syndetic, how parts fit together	Syndetic, beginning, middle and end
Identity Issues	To be on Target	To have a place	To have choices	To have harmony
Intimacy Variables				
Development of Intimacy	Slow, cautiously	Quickly	Slow cautiously	Impulsively
Obstacles in Intimacy	Fear of being Controlled, Being Vulnerable	Blurred boundaries, fear of being engulfed	Fear of loss of freedom, being abandoned	Fear of being overwhelmed by guilt and pain

Figure 6:1 continued

Intimacy Variables	1st-Born	2nd-Born	3rd-Born	4th-Born
Source of Knowledge about Intimacy	Father's relationship to mother	Mother's relationship to father	Intimacy rules of parents Relationship	Intimacy in the family
Intimacy Issues	Can I be Vulnerable & adequate?	Can I be separate?	Can I be Intimate and Have my choices?	Will there be too much pain or guilt?
Causes of Escalation in Intimacy Issues	Sense of others' disapproval	Confusion, lost sense of place	Loss of choices	Sense of duty unacknowledged feelings
Evidence of Escalated Intimacy	Withdrawal & stoney look	Confusion and hurt	Flight or fight	Flight or heavily burdened
Resolution of Intimacy Issues	Other's expression Of approval	Actual closeness without melding	Validation of right to have choices	Others' acceptance of part of blame
Therapy Issues	Sharing of Feelings Acceptance Of feedback Surrender Of control	Inappropriate care-giving establishment of boundaries	Need to understand their going away & be explicit about Coming back	Inappropriate care-giving and being responsible in a more direct way

Chapter 4

Marriage and Parenthood

Dr. Lucille Forer (1976) states that marriages are shaped and influenced by many factors and birth order is just one aspect that has an impact on personality and marriage. Marriages are impacted not only by partners' birth positions, but also by their unique personality characteristics (Forer, 1976). "In marriage, consider yourself and your partner as unique people, partially molded and trained in special ways of relating to others by the accident of your birth position"(Forer, 1976, p. 205).

Forer (1976) has incorporated two questions into her research: 1) Are men and women drawn to each other in terms of birth order? 2) Does success or failure of a relationship relate to ordinal position of the couple? The research on birth order remains inconsistent, and yet there are studies that reveal correlations that are connected to birth order (Forer, 1976).

Toman (1976) supports Forer's first research question by stating that we carry out the same roles in our marriages that we had in our families (Forer, 1976). We develop according to the ages and sex of the siblings we grew up with and many people are not aware that this has an impact on our daily lives (Forer, 1976). Based on this theory, "men with younger sisters are more likely to marry women with older brothers, while women with younger brothers are apt to marry men with older sisters" (Forer, 1976, p.185). One study at Brandy University showed that "oldest brothers of brothers tend to

choose youngest sisters, and youngest brothers of brothers tend to choose oldest sisters” (Forer, 1976, p. 185). Another study from the University of South Carolina focused on the marriages of 93 men and women and found that first-born men marry earlier than later-borns and first-born women marry earlier than later-borns (Forer, 1976). Lastly, a study conducted at the University of California in Santa Barbara, discloses that among 452 parents of undergraduate students there were tendencies for first children to marry first children and later-born children to marry later-borns (Forer, 1976).

Several studies have focused on the relationship between birth order and the success and/or failure of a couple’s relationship, and these studies provide data for Forer’s second research question. Dr. Kemper at the University of Wisconsin surveyed 256 men and women “searching for the best marital combinations” (Forer, 1976, p.187). The results stated that men were the most satisfied when their marriages mirrored the power structure from their childhood (Forer, 1976). First-born men married to first-born women reported the constant feeling of fighting over the power within the relationship (Forer, 1976). An additional study of 593 men and women the researcher found satisfaction in the roles that did not involve constant power struggles (Forer, 1976). In relationships where the male was considered head of the household the wives were the youngest or only children, while in couples that considered the female the head of the household woman were the oldest or middle children (Forer, 1976).

An extensive study of 742 marriages showed interesting results that help answer the question of whether birth order position is related to the success or failure of a marriage (Forer, 1976). First, the highest rate of divorce existed

in the marriages of men who were only children and women who were the youngest in their family (Forer, 1976). The youngest males and first-born females had the next highest divorce rate (Forer, 1976). The lowest divorce rate was among the male first-borns and the female middle and only children (Forer, 1976). Additionally, the study showed that sex of the older sibling is an important factor (Forer, 1976). “If you have an older sister, you are almost twice as likely to be divorced than if you have an older brother” (Forer, 1976, p. 190). However, the results did show that the divorce rate was low for the male and female middle children because they are less likely to seek a spouse who took on the parental role (Forer, 1976). Lastly, the study indicates the bigger the family is the “less likely the oldest male is to be divorced, but the more likely the oldest woman eventually will seek separation” (Forer, 1976, p. 191).

In the remainder of this chapter, I specifically label different birth order marital dyads and briefly give descriptions of the birth order combinations.

Female Only and Male Only

Female only children usually allow the male to dominate their relationship and generally the male only children desire the privilege of power. In a sense they both want their spouse to carry out the roles of their parents. The wife wants the husband to provide security and the husband wants his wife to carry out the nurturing/feminine role. Only children learn to be self-indulgent and this may interfere with their intimacy (Forer, 1976).

Female Only and Male Oldest

The wife may confuse the affection she received from her parents with the role of a good provider and the frequent reassurance of love from her spouse. The wife may long for an affectionate and gentle man. The oldest male may not be able to see the relevance in “pampering” his wife because he was the role model of strength in his family. However, if the couple can work through the conflicts the relationship will balance out by the husband’s unlimited devotion to his wife and family (Forer, 1976).

Female Only and Male Second

The wife does not desire the role of power and the second-child male may be uneasy with the amount of power he possesses. This combination could easily become egalitarian. Tension can be created when the husband expects his wife to have motivation and goal setting abilities. The female only-child could expect endless indulgence from her husband and may compare it with the affection she received from her parents (Forer, 1976).

Female Only and Male Middle

The role of the middle child depends on the impacts of their childhood. The male middle-child usually has the ability to create balance in his marriage unless there was an excessive amount of aggression and competition in his childhood and then he will feel insecure about adult relationships. The success of this combination may depend heavily on her ability to compromise (Forer, 1976).

Female Only and Male Youngest

In this marriage arrangement there is a small amount of power struggle or tension. The youngest male may compliment his wife on her femininity and this satisfies her craving for appreciation. When conflicts do occur they may both be reluctant to claim responsibility for their actions or words (Forer, 1976).

Female Oldest and Male Only

Forer (1976) believes that theoretically this combination could work rather efficiently. The woman may supply care, affection, and somewhat of a mother role. He enjoys the attention and gathers energy from her constant motivation. His constant gratitude may give her the self-esteem and confidence that she gets from others' approval. Also, his optimism may be a relief to her and counteract all of her anxieties. On the other hand, he may seek gratification from others because of her role of extreme dominance (Forer, 1976).

Female Oldest and Male Oldest

Forer (1976) points out that female first-borns have a high divorce rate and male first born have a high success rate. This combination may play out the constant "power struggle" game and compete for attention. Since oldest children tend to absorb a tremendous amount of their parents values, conflict can occur when one tries to impose their values onto the other. However, they will appreciate their motivation and

willingness to take responsibility. His strong personality and self esteem will balance out her anxieties and insecurities (Forer, 1976).

Female Oldest and Male Second

The male second-child's personality will depend upon if he had a brother or a sister. If he has an older brother, he may appreciate his wife's motivation and responsibility. However, if there is an older-sister, he may "harbor resentment and anger towards women"(Forer, 1976, p. 199).

Female Oldest and Male Middle

This combination may work well because middle children do not crave the need to be in power and control. The husband's lack of motivation and disinterest in achievement may aggravate the wife. As indicated in the study, later-middle males have a high success rate in marriage (Forer, 1976).

Female Oldest and Male Youngest

The male youngest-child will be able to compliment her domineering ways and help support her low self-esteem. The male youngest will either inherit a high self-esteem from a family in which he was a male minority or will admire his older brothers' ambitions and goal setting. Tension will surface if the husband fails to own responsibility or acts passively. "The male youngest may be more content with a female oldest than with a woman from another birth position" (Forer, 1976, p. 199).

Female Second and Male Only

The role of the second child will depend on the sex of the oldest child. If the oldest was a boy the female second-child may feel unsure about her femininity. On the other hand, if she has an older sister the feminine role may be more comprehensible. She desires a partner who can improve her status and she will not fight him for the power in the relationship. The conflicts may occur around dependency and self-indulgence. “Her drive and initiative will meet his need for help from a strong female as a substitute for his mother” (Forer, 1976, p.200).

Female Second and Male Oldest

Forer (1976) reports that success of marriages that involve second children depends heavily on the relationship they had with their siblings. Tension may occur around competition and self-confidence. The husband may become annoyed with his wife’s representation of low self-esteem (Forer, 1976).

Female Second and Male Middle

This combination has a good record of marital happiness. The wife may step into the domineering role and her husband may be used to others taking that role. Depending on her oldest sibling, she may desire subtle ambition from her partner and may become frustrated if he does not comply (Forer, 1976).

Female Second and Male Youngest

Both of these positions will depend on the number of siblings and their sexes. The wife may find herself being pulled between nurturing and pushing responsibilities

onto her husband. Tension could revolve around her struggles of dependency and dissatisfaction with her role. This becomes stressful for the husband because he seeks peace within relationships (Forer, 1976).

Female Middle and Male Only

Generally the middle children have the ability to adapt well to their surroundings. This combination does not fight for the power in the relationship because generally the wife will let him be in the power position. However, they are more likely to share the decision-making. She tends to admire his strength and power that he learned from his parents (Forer, 1976).

Female Middle and Male Oldest

The wife tends to take on a submissive role in the relationship and generally he will be the assertive one in the relationship. This combination does not have conflicts over dominance, unless he is too overbearing. The female middle-child tends to be a very good marital partner (Forer, 1976).

Female Middle and Male Second

The male will take on more responsibility in the relationship and she is willing to adjust to the changes in the relationship. This combination is willing to change so the relationship is comfortable. There is little conflict but this couple may have difficulties when there is conflict in the relationship (Forer, 1976).

Female Middle and Male Middle

This relationship can be referred to as equal opportunity because they both want to include the other on any decision-making. They both have the tendency to be flexible and can quickly adjust to new circumstances (Forer, 1976).

Female Middle and Male Youngest

This combination also has low divorce rates and high martial happiness. The wife will take on the domineering role and the husband will not mind. Conflict may occur around the role of responsibility (Forer, 1976).

Female Youngest and Male Only

“If the power struggle is desired, marriage with a female youngest promises the greatest happiness for a man from any family position other than youngest”(Forer 1976, p.204). This combination can be happy together because they both can have high self-esteem. Conflict may occur around child rearing because their views are from opposite ends of the spectrum (Forer, 1976).

Female Youngest and Male Oldest

Problems may be centered around the husband’s parental role with his wife. She may not realize her tendencies of relying on him for nurturing and endless care. She may feel like she is constantly fighting for an adult role in the relationship (Forer, 1976).

Female Youngest and Male Second

The husband increases his self-esteem through the needs of his wife. He feels important and she feels taken care of and secure. Again, she is accepting of her husband being in the power role (Forer, 1976).

Female Youngest and Male Middle

This combination can be tension free because they seek balance and harmony. This feels comfortable to them but may mask unresolved issues that are in the relationship. The wife may not have an interest in responsibility and this may frustrate the husband (Forer, 1976).

Female Youngest and Male Youngest

This combination likes to have fun and may require many financial resources. They both want many material things and the freedom to go “play” when desired. Conflict may be centered around trying to get the other spouse to take responsibility (Forer, 1976).

Chapter 5

Implications in Therapy

The therapeutic relationship that is between the therapist and client is complex and delicate. Hopefully, the knowledge of birth order research will enhance our therapeutic understanding of personality, communication patterns, and how people regulate emotions. This research can be used as one more tool to help guide clients in comprehending their thought patterns and actions.

Familiarity with family dynamics and the effects of birth order may become progressively more important as this research is incorporated with other modifications in society (Wilson & Edington, 1981). It has the potential to improve the quality of how people install values and rules within their family system (Watkins, 1987). Moreover, simply knowing how birth order may affect a situation sometimes helps to shortcut the therapeutic process (Toman, 1961). A therapist must be sensitive to the danger of jumping to conclusions that are not valid in a specific case, or even making suggestions to a patient (Sampson & Hancock, 1998). Often, just the mentioning of the different possibilities of the birth order theory is enough to clarify personal relationships for a patient (Rosenberg & Sutton-Smith, 1970).

Therapists need to be conscious of sibling patterns within the family system to help clients become aware of their “family roles, perceptual orientation and identity issues” (Hoopes & Harper, 1987, p. 172). Often patterns in adults can be traced back to

their family of origin and people may not be conscious of how certain characteristics developed (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). I will briefly go over some guidelines that focus on four sibling positions, first-born, second-born, third-born, and fourth born.

When working with a first-born it will be helpful to validate their opinions and support their differentiation from the family (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The first-born may feel guilty when trying to develop autonomy and this may lead to confusion when trying to still be a part of the family system (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The therapist needs to be aware that the client may show resistance because of the fear of failing or saying an answer incorrectly (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). Giving concrete statements and/or questions will help the client be able to respond with a direct answer (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). Lastly, the therapist will need to learn when to be gentle with a first-born client and when to push them in working towards the goals of therapy (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

When the therapist is working with a second-born client it will be helpful to validate that they have an important place in the family and in the therapy session (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). Second-born clients may have trouble with separating their own emotions from their family's pain and emotions (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). Therefore, the client will need to learn about boundaries and that it is o.k. for them to experience their own emotions (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). Introducing breathing exercises may be helpful because second siblings actually hold their breath when

experiencing pain (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). It may be difficult for the client to give concrete explanations of their emotions and they may become overwhelmed when trying to do so (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). Furthermore, asking the client what they are observing, thinking, and sensing may come easier for the client to explain their situation (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

Third-born clients may need to concentrate on their “in-and-out” (connecting and disconnecting with people in a way that may be inappropriate) behavior and what they like about it and what they would like to change (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). This may take some time in helping the client reframe their pattern because they may not be aware of the behavior (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). This will help the client in relationships in and outside of the family (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The therapist should offer the client choices and help them to see what choices are available to them (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). This will help the client feel validated and feel that they have the right to make their own decisions (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). After the therapist joins with the client it may be helpful to point out the client’s strong desire in wanting to have available choices (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The client may feel comfortable and safe when choices are given but the client needs to learn ways of coping when those opportunities do not exist (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

Fourth-born clients may need help breaking down the whole picture into parts when they are feeling vulnerable and overwhelmed (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). When the client feels overwhelmed they may ignore some of the parts because the situation does not feel manageable (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). When the therapist can help break down

the whole picture into parts the client will be able to focus on one part at a time and this will help them feel comfortable instead of overwhelmed (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The client may have a tendency to feel overwhelmed because they tend to collect the family system's pain (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). Therefore, they need to learn how to separate themselves from the family's pain or hurt (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). This process may leave the client feeling helpless or vulnerable and the therapist needs to be sensitive to this delicate process (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

When the therapist incorporates the birth order theory into therapy it can be a delicate dance of following the theory, personalizing the theory to the client, and being aware of their own biases (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The therapist must be aware of their own perceptions of ordinal positions and be cautious about applying them to the client (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). However, having the knowledge of birth order may help build a quicker rapport with the client (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The client may refer to typical birth order patterns and if the therapist is unaware of the traits, this can be a disadvantage to the therapeutic relationship (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). "Above all, therapists must remember that the systems approach to sibling positions cannot stand alone as a model or a theory for therapy" (Hoopes & Harper, 1987, p. 168). Furthermore, it is essential for therapists to keep in mind that birth order positions are "descriptive rather than predictive" (Hoopes & Harper, 1987, p. 168). There may be certain situations in therapy when birth order theory should assist other theories instead of being the primary theory that the therapist operates from (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

When the therapist is working with a client on an individual basis, the therapist will determine what therapeutic goals need to be emphasized (Forer, 1976). In the beginning phase of therapy, the therapist needs to gather information and build a trusting therapeutic relationship (Forer, 1976; Hoopes & Harper, 1987). Also, in this phase the therapist can use the ordinal positioning theory to help the client feel more at ease and to help build trust (Forer, 1976; Watkins, 1987). During the middle phase of therapy, the therapist can develop strategies based on the client's understanding of his or her own birth order position (Forer, 1976; Hoopes & Harper, 1987). This phase may be the most crucial and beneficial time for the client (Forer, 1967; Watkins 1987). There can be approximately eight techniques to help develop this phase: 1) connect the client's behaviors, feelings, and attitudes to the themes in their extended family 2) explore intimacy in more depth 3) explore feelings and behaviors about sexuality and how the client may link it back to childhood 4) explore the client's parent's relationship and how it plays out into their adult relationships 5) link feelings of inadequacies to self-esteem and the sense of well-being 6) help the client understand/separate their needs and others expectations 7) connect how the client's birth order position is related to approval from others 8) encourage the client to figure out what relationships are successful and what relationships he or she would like restored (Forer, 1976; Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

When the therapist is working with a couple or a family it can be useful to discuss specific rules for in the therapy session (Forer, 1976; Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

Typically the rules focus on being honest, disclosure, and confidentiality (Forer, 1976; Hoopes & Harper, 1987). When a family or a couple discloses opinions and feelings that may mean they are breaking some rules within the system (Forer, 1976; Hoopes & Harper, 1987). This becomes a delicate dance for the therapist and must who must validate uncomfortable feelings and any uncertainties the family may have (Forer, 1967; Watkins 1987). Along with validation the therapist needs to emphasize the importance of being open and honest or the issue may not get resolved (Forer, 1967; Watkins 1987). All in all, the therapist will need to take into account each family member's ordinal position including the positions of the parents (Forer, 1967; Watkins 1987). Each family member needs to feel his or her position is important and contributes unique assets to the family system (Forer, 1967; Watkins 1987). The family will be able to communicate more effectively when they become more aware of explicit and implicit rules and roles within the system (Forer, 1976; Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

See Appendix A & B for specific therapeutic questions in reference to birth order.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Birth order is one of many factors that may be used in discovering the source of complex emotional problems that we endure in life (White, Kaban, & Attanucci, 1979). The theory of birth order effects is not an instant recipe to cure emotional problems or the pain a person may have endured from their childhood. When looking at birth order there are environmental variables that contribute to the development of personality.

Birth order research is still far from complete. It simply suggests different ways a person may apply the information into their lives. This study incorporated different theories of birth order, to help you get a better understanding of yourself and how everyone is affected by ordinal positioning. Also, this knowledge can help practicing clinicians establish theories about specific clients. This information may help clients become aware of how their roles in childhood have carried over into their adult life. “Since many parts of the learned life are constructive, knowledge of birth order effects may help a person understand, accept, and use the constructive aspects more effectively” (Watkins, 1987, p. 98).

People in the human services field may consider the possibility that learned behavior during childhood influences interpersonal skills and shapes a person’s identity and sense of well-being (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). The birth order perspective may contribute to understanding human responses and productivity, which could help our society as a whole (Richardson & Richardson, 1990).

Appendix A: Therapeutic questions

The Basic Question

Is it okay for you to feel okay even though things are the way they are?

Only Child Questions

Is it okay for you to do what you want to do, even if you do not feel like it?

Is it okay for you to do what you feel like doing when you want?

Is it okay for you to put others first?

Is it okay for you to put yourself first?

Is it okay for you to feel okay when things are not right?

Is it okay for you to feel okay when you do not do something right?

Is it okay for you to take the chance of making a mistake?

Is it okay for you to put logic ahead of feelings?

Is it okay for you to ignore your feelings?

Is it okay for you to ask for help?

Is it okay for you to enjoy being corrected?

Is it okay for you to enjoy being interrupted?

First Born Questions

Is it okay for you to care about yourself?

Is it okay for you to feel okay when someone does not care about you?

Is it okay for you to put love ahead of respect?

Is it okay for you to put love ahead of admiration?

Is it okay for you to put love ahead of approval?

Is it okay for you to have what you want?

Is it okay for you to ask for what you want?

Is it okay for you to enjoy your accomplishments?

Is it okay for you to feel okay when you are treated unfairly?

Is it okay for you to be happy?

Is it okay for you to enjoy being rejected?

Is it okay for you to take the chance of offending someone?

Is it okay for you to care about others instead of worrying about what they think of you?

Second-Born Questions

Is it okay for you to care about how you feel?

Is it okay for you to feel okay when others do not care about how you feel?

Is it okay for you to put feelings ahead of logic?

Is it okay for you to put yourself first?

Is it okay for you to feel okay when you cannot do something perfectly?

Is it okay for you to feel okay when things are not perfect?

Is it okay for you to enjoy being inadequate?

Is it okay for you to do what you want, even if it is not necessary?

Is it okay for you to enjoy being criticized?

Third-Born Questions

Is it okay for you to stand up for yourself, any way you want, even if you are angry?

Is it okay for you to flight?

Is it okay for you to enjoy fear?

Is it okay for you to take your chances?

Is it okay for you to take risks in your relationships?

Is it okay for you to feel okay when your idea is rejected?

Is it okay for you to depend on someone else?

Is it okay for you to depend on yourself?

Is it okay for you to be human rather than strong?

Is it okay for you to enjoy being weak?

Is it okay for you to enjoy being put down?

Fourth-Born Questions

Is it okay for you to listen to yourself?

Is it okay for you to feel okay when someone does not listen to you?

Is it okay for you to be grown up?

Is it okay for you to do things the easy way?

Is it okay for you to have fun?

Is it okay for you to feel okay when you get blamed?

Is it okay for you to care?

Is it okay for you to take responsibility for how others feel toward you?

Is it okay for you to enjoy being used?

Isaacson, 1991, p.173

Appendix B: Therapeutic Questions/ Worksheet

The following worksheet of questions is meant to help you think about your experience as a sibling. When reading through the questions focus on yourself and your part in any interactions. Look at how you might change, not how others should change.

1. a) What ways did you find to feel special in your family?

b) How did your family members (parents, siblings, and grandparents) help with this?

c) Do you think that today you rely upon the same ways of feelings special, or have you changed these?
2. Did you enjoy your siblings? In what particular ways?
3. Were there any ways at all that you could provide support for each other?
4. a) Did you enjoy and find support from all your siblings equally?

b) Who was the easiest and who was the most problematic for you?
5. a) Which of your siblings did you react to with the most distress?

b) What was it that you reacted to most strongly?

c) What in you made you susceptible to this?

d) Were your other siblings as upset by this behavior as you were?

e) Can this sibling still get to you with the same behavior?

f) What has changed in you?
6. a) Is there anyone in your life today who can get you stirred up in the same way as your most difficult sibling?

b) Do you find yourself behaving the same way with that person as you did with your sibling?
7. a) What did you gain from your strife with a sibling at the time?

- b) Do you cash in on this with that sibling or with someone else in that role now?
8. Did your relationship with your siblings, whether problematic or easy, help you develop some positive characteristics for living your life today? What are they?
 9. a) How did your parents handle your relationship with your siblings?
b) How did they handle it when things got tense?
c) How did you experience their intervention?
 10. a) Did you ever feel protective of, or protected by, one of your siblings?
b) What particular behaviors did you engage in that elicited this protective behavior from your sibling?
c) What behavior did your sibling engage in that stimulated you to be protective?
d) Are these behaviors or dynamics at work in your current relationships?
 11. a) What did you learn about sharing or cooperation with your siblings?
b) Did your parents help you learn these lessons? If so, how?
c) To what extent do you take attitudes learned then into your current life situations and relationships?
 12. a) What was the best thing that your parents did that helped you with your relationship with your siblings?
b) What was the least helpful?
c) To what extent do you, as a parent (or as an employer), repeat any of those actions?
 13. a) What kind of growth have you experienced in your sibling relationship over the years- especially as adults?
b) What has helped that to happen?
c) If there hasn't been growth, what do you think is keeping you stuck?

Richardson, 1990, p.250

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