

The Impact of Birth Order on Romantic Relationships

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Presented to

The Faculty of the Adler Graduate School

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of Masters of Arts in

Adlerian Counseling and Psychotherapy

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2012

### Abstract

Have you ever thought of the impact your birth order position can have on your personality and relationships? Birth order can shape us in ways we did not realize. It can form our personalities and behavior. When it forms our personalities and behaviors it can affect the romantic relationships one may have in their lifetime. When looking at romantic relationships, it may be beneficial to look at birth order because it can pinpoint how each person's needs in a relationship can differ. It is important to consider what factors can impact a relationship. Knowing about a person's personality, family history, and birth order position can help strengthen a relationship and prevent conflict. Birth order may impact the way individuals behave and think in romantic relationships. Keeping in mind, a person's birth order may not be a strong factor, it should be taken into consideration to help develop and maintain a fulfilling romantic relationship (McGuirk & Pettijohn II, 2008).

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## The Impact of Birth Order on Romantic Relationships

### Overview of Birth Order

The study of birth order was started over a century ago by Sir Francis Galton. Sir Francis Galton was a 19<sup>th</sup> century British anthropologist, geographer, and statistician. He believed that the human species was ultimately perfectible or improvable. In his research, he concluded that first born and only born children become well known English scientists (Kluger, 2011). This is because most of the nations, including England, still followed the custom of primogeniture. Primogeniture is when the first born son inherits the family fortune. Many families in today's world will put their first born son on a pedestal compared to their other children like families did in the past. Many other researchers went on to find the same thing as Sir Francis Galton about first born sons. Alfred Adler came along and decided to take a deeper look into the relationship between a child's birth order and their personality (Forer & Still, 1976).

Alfred Adler was the founder of Individual Psychology and is known as a great influence to modern psychology. Adler wrote, "Whenever I have studied adults, I have found impressions left on them from their early childhood lasting forever. The position in the family leaves an indelible stamp upon the style of life. Every difficulty of development is caused by rivalry and lack of cooperation in the family" (Forer & Still, 1976, 6). Adler believed that a child's personality is shaped largely by his or her chronological place in the family because parents tend to treat children differently according to their order of their birth (Isaacson, 2004).

Birth order is looked at as the science of understanding a person's place in their family. The order in which a person lands in their family can affect their life (Leman, 2009). Birth order is the location in which a child is born in a family system. It refers to four basic positions of a child: oldest, middle, youngest, and only. Each position has personality traits and other

dynamics that reflect how their position is carried out in a person's childhood (Kalkan, 2008). Birth order begins with the order in which a person enters their family. It is further shaped by the way a child's parents and siblings have an effect on them (Leman, 2001).

Birth order can give people important clues about their personalities, their relationships with friends, co-workers, and their loved ones. It can give clues about the kind of job a person may be good at and how they may handle different problems that they come across in their lifetime (Leman, 2009). A person's personality is cemented by the choices they make in responding to their family, siblings, and environment that surrounds them (Leman, 2001). Birth order is a good tool that can help provide an environmental context to a client's understanding of the world.

There is known to be two different kinds of birth order: actual and psychological. Actual birth order is defined as the order in which a person comes into the world such as: first child born, only child born, second child born, or last child born. Actual birth order, also known as ordinal birth order, is related to the child's personality traits, behavior, attitude and interest (Kalkan, 2008).

### **Actual Birth Order**

The actual birth order position can become complex when dealing with blended families. In blended families, it is hard to come up with a number where the child is born. When looking at blended families, a person can assume that when other children are involved the birth order can get mixed up. Blended families are unique. The birth order may change if the family has younger kids under the age of five. It may depend on the amount of time the children spend in the home. As the children grow older, their actual birth order will more than likely stay the same

because they have already shaped their personalities before the two families blended (Eckstein & Aycock et al., 2010).

### **Psychological Birth Order**

Psychological birth order can also be called perceived birth order. Psychological birth order is defined as the way a person sees or perceives his or her position in his or her family of origin. Alfred Adler believed that birth order was the way a child interpreted his or her perceived positions in the family, which is the most important to him or her (Kalkan, 2008). Adler stated, “It is not, of course, the child’s number in the order of successive births which influence his character, but the situation into which he is born and the way in which he interprets it is the role a child adopts as his or her interactions with others” (Eckstein & Aycock et al., 2010, 409). Research has shown that there is a stronger relationship of personality traits to the psychological birth order rather than the actual birth order. The psychological birth order has a greater influence on how the children’s personalities will be formed in their world (Kalkan, 2008).

### **Family of Origin**

A person may wonder about another person’s family and if the experiences he or she has with them has an effect on him or her. It is not in question that there is no greater influence out there than what a person’s family has on him or her when he or she is growing up. The most intimate relationships a person has in their life are with those of his or her family. A person spends a great deal of time with their family members throughout their lifetime. In the time spent with his or her family, a person experiences many different life adventures and milestones that may be shared with his or her family members (Leman, 2009).

The family of origin can affect how siblings develop their primary personalities so that they will be known as a significant member in their family. The family atmosphere forms the context in which children begin to make a place for themselves. Each child in their relationships to other members of their family establishes their own approach to others to gain their place within the group. Each child wants to achieve the feelings of security and belonging among that group (Stewart, Stewart, & Campbell, 2001).

The family atmosphere can be affected by the quality of the parents' relationship. While the children are growing up, their parents implement their own value system onto their children. The interests and values that happen in a family atmosphere can influence the activities that the children pursue in their lives. Adler stated, "It is not, of course, 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 in which he interprets it" (Stewart, Stewart, & Campbell, 2001, 365).

Different human beings can react differently to the same situations. The family dynamics change with the birth of each child (Leman, 2001). Hanushek suggests that differences arrive in children of different birth order within the same family. This is because each child is born into different intellectual environments. Each time a child enters a family, the environment that surrounds the child becomes altered. Youngest born children enter into a less stimulating environment than the first born children do (Gugl & Welling, 2010).

When a new couple decides to have their first born baby, they get excited about it. They tell all their family and friends as soon as possible. They spend multiple hours deciding on names and reading books to be better parents. Some parents may try different techniques with the child while the child is still in his or her mother's womb. As each child is born after the first

born child, parents tend to become more skilled at tasks such as, changing diapers and feeding. They have less time to give the next born child.

Children's parents and siblings can teach each child different ways to interact with others. The children pick up on the ways to interact with others by observing the people in their environment, as well as, being taught values from their parents (McGuirk & Pettijohn II, 2008). When thinking about all the different families in a neighborhood, a person must consider the culture of the family as well. All families will have different cultures and norms that can cause the child's birth order perceptions to be different. Each family has their own beliefs that help shape the children into who they are as they grow older (Eckstein & Aycock et al., 2010).

The quality of the relationship an individual has with their family of origin will be higher in couples who are satisfied with each other compared to dissatisfied couples. The quality of the relationship with a person's partners family of origin was higher when couples were satisfied in their relationships. The better the relationships with the family the more support the couple will have. The more support the couple has from their families of origin the more satisfied that couple will be. It is like a never ending circle. A couple must be satisfied with themselves individually as well to be satisfied in a romantic relationship (Bertoni & Bodenmann, 2010).

### **Sibling Relationships**

Alfred Adler believed that a person's siblings have just as much influence on his or her experiences and worldviews as the person's parents. Every brother and sister has some unpleasant and some pleasant feelings about each other. Siblings can either be best friends or enemies. A person will never be as close to someone as he or she is to their siblings if they are raised with them. A person must take into consideration that in today's world there are some siblings that are not raised with each other due to a family giving up a child. Being raised

without their blood siblings can have an impact on children. The children may not notice the impact it has on them until later on in their lifetime when they can better understand that they have a sibling that does not live with them. Siblings can experience many different adventures together that become everlasting memories for them (Van Volkom, Machiz & Reich, 2011).

Sibling relationships are the first relationships in a person's life that develops the emotions of love and hate. Love and hate are strong emotions that can lead to other emotions such as, anger or excitement (Forer & Still, 1976). Siblings grow and learn from each other. The sibling relationships in which humans are born in are crucial social environments with opportunities, costs and niches. No two siblings are identical in personality, not even identical twins. Each sibling is born into a different environment (Van Volkom, Machiz & Reich, 2011). Adler believed that birth order is a great contributor to way children of the same family with similar genes end up with very different personalities (Badger & Reddy, 2009).

While living with their siblings, children may learn to understand the opposite sex if they have siblings of the opposite sex. The male siblings can learn things from the female siblings and vice versa. Children can develop attitudes about themselves as a love object. This can happen by their sibling making fun of them. Female children living with male siblings may try and find a substitute for her male sibling later in her adulthood. This is because of the emotional bond she formed with her brother while growing up (Forer & Still, 1976).

A person does not grow up automatically liking their siblings. Sibling relationships are encouraged by their family members and society, which causes them to have many different dynamics involved in their relationships. Some people may feel jealousy and anger towards their siblings and other people are proud of their siblings. There are many different emotions that surround sibling relationships (Van Volkom, Machiz & Reich, 2011).

Siblings may receive different amounts of their parent's affection and attentions. Each child may have different needs than their siblings. When parents realize the needs of each of their children, they may treat each of their children differently. When favoritism is displayed by the parents, the quality of the relationship between the siblings starts to deteriorate. They get jealous of each other (Van Volkom, Machiz & Reich, 2011).

While growing up, the older siblings have more power and authority over the younger ones. As siblings age they tend to become more equal and closer with each other. They tend to take their own paths and not worry as much about how much attention they are getting from their parents (Van Volkom, Machiz & Reich, 2011). They become more equal in the balance of power as the first born children begin to give up some of their control and the second born children acquire more control (Tucker & Updegraff, 2010). They become closer with each other because they have gone through many different life changing events with their siblings that are the same. They can relate to each other's experiences in many ways. Female siblings play an important role to their male siblings because women are often nurturing and emotional. The female siblings can teach their male siblings how to be nurturing and emotional (Van Volkom, Machiz & Reich, 2011).

As the siblings get older, they generally have a positive attitude and rely on each other for both instrumental and emotional support. Siblings tend to maintain an emotional bond with each throughout their lifetimes. This bond is there even when two sibling do not keep in close contact with each other. As children get older, their siblings can be a good resource for support, love, and friendship (Van Volkom, Machiz & Reich, 2011).

When a person looks at sibling's relationships after their parents have died, it is obvious in some families that their relationships with their families are what keeps them going. Many

humans tend to turn towards their siblings during times of need and stress. When siblings go through traumatic life experiences together they tend to grow closer with each other. It gives them a supportive outlet to go to when in need. Research shows that women are more open to turning to their siblings than males (Van Volkom, Machiz & Reich, 2011).

Not all siblings get along all the time and of course, siblings fight. Sibling rivalry can be described as jealousy, competition and fighting. Every child sees themselves as more important than their siblings and they need to be taught how to share and be kind to each other. Sometimes it is hard for the children to be kind and share with their siblings. The children will see their siblings as a rivalry instead. The way in which each sibling conducts their rivalry with each other depends on their immediate and proximate environmental, social, and situational factors. Parental conflict and favoritism can increase the rivalry siblings have between each other.

Adult initiated rivalry and sibling generated rivalry are the two different types of sibling rivalry. Adult initiated rivalry includes parents comparing things between the two siblings, while the parents make subtle statements about the two children. Sibling generated rivalry happens when children attempt to gain parental attention and increase their status within the sibling relationship. When siblings are close in age with each other, there is more likely to be more competition with each other because they are expected by their parents and other family members to like the same things, act the same way, and achieve the same things.

Research shows that most of the sibling rivalry happens between the ages of 10-15 years. Most of the sibling rivalry has occurred within an academic setting. This may be due to the fact that while growing up, parents push academics on their children. Research shows that female siblings tend to be more supportive rather than competitive when compared to males (Badger & Reddy, 2009).

Siblings' relationships can impact each child throughout their lives. Sibling relationships are thought of as being one of the most consistent and supportive relationships that a human has throughout their lifetime. When siblings do not have a good relationship, their parents tend to overcompensate by having a supportive relationship with one another. When thinking about siblings in this way, a person must keep in mind that this is not true for all siblings. Some siblings have a falling out and do not tend to have a good relationship as they get older. Some may have a worse relationship than they did when they were younger. Even if siblings do not get along with each other they can still form an emotional bond. Instead of the emotional bond being positive, it may be negative (Van Volkom, Machiz & Reich, 2011).

The relationships people form with their siblings can impact them throughout their lives. Research shows that adults used the same commitment behaviors growing up in sibling relationships as in romantic relationships (Van Volkom, Machiz & Reich, 2011). Sibling conflict is typically characterized by destructive strategies and outcomes. Positive relationship experiences relate to more problem solving and less contention (Recchia & Howe, 2009).

### **Parental Relationships**

A child's place in his or her family strongly influences how he or she copes with other people and the world around them. All members of a family force each other into certain behavior patterns as they interact with each other to meet their needs of belonging and significance. They learn ways of coping with situations and other people from the members of their environment and family (Forer & Still, 1976).

Parents or other caregivers are responsible for the initial shaping of attachment representations in a child. Attachment patterns are shaped by the family of origin in early childhood. These patterns continue to have an influence over the years. Research shows that

looking at a person's attachment orientation in infancy predicts the emotional quality of romantic relationships a person will have in early adulthood. Research shows a significant association between the parent and child relationships and adult romantic relationships functioning.

Observations of a child's interactions with their parents can predict important features of the interactions the child will have with a romantic relationship partner during their early adulthood years (Dinero, Conger, Shaver, Widaman & Larsen-Rife, 2011).

### **The Way Parents Treat Each Child**

Parental inputs are thought to be an important determinate for a child's outcomes in life. Parents spend less and less time with each child as the child ages. As each child is born into the family, the parents may become more efficient at certain tasks so it takes them less time to do the tasks. If it takes the parents less time to do the certain tasks, the parents may not be spending as much time with their later born children as they did the first born child. The later born children get less attention during these tasks such as: bathing or diaper changing (Price, 2008).

Research shows that fathers spend more time with their sons. This may be because fathers want their sons to be like them and be involved in the same activities they were involved in when they were younger. The same goes for mothers and their daughters. Research shows that children with involved fathers are less likely to have behavioral problems. The same goes for parents who are involved with their children by interacting with them such as reading and playing with them. Research shows that interactions with a child are important for the child to learn different tasks and grow physically and mentally as they age (Price, 2008).

A parent may over identify with the child of the same birth order as themselves. This may be because they see much of their selves in that child. The parents feel that they can relate to their child of the same birth order on a different level because they are so much alike each

other. This may lead the parent to put too much pressure on their child or spoiling the child over their other children (Leman, 2009).

The only thing that tends to override birth order is parental values. Parents impose their values and beliefs on their children as the children age (Leman, 2009). Adler believed that parents and the members of a society can impose on children's beliefs about birth order characteristics which can affect expectations, rearing practices, and children's outcomes in life (Eckstein & Aycock et al., 2010). The values a parent imposes on their children can help shape the child's personalities and beliefs. Children are expected by society and their environment to follow what their parents taught them and not to go against what their parents believe in and value (Gugl & Welling, 2010).

Most parents want to treat their children equally, which will lead to inequities of total resources that a child receives at some point in the child's lifetime. Parents may struggle to give each child equal attention. Children require immediate and continuous attention. Parents need to try and spread out the attention they give each child. Spreading out the attention they give each child will help eliminate sibling rivalry and jealousy. A child's dominate need is to have time spent with them (Gugl & Welling, 2010).

Research shows that a mother's interactions with her children are of primary importance in the children's first three years of their life. The second half of the child's preschool years important factors are added in such as: good nutritional habits and socialization with peers. If parents do not restrict themselves to even time spent with each child there will always be a gap with the amount of attention each child gets. Differences in sibling's personalities arise because parents differentially decide where their limited resources go. Each child may receive different resources at different points in their lives (Gugl & Welling, 2010).

Children watch their parents every move. The children learn from their parents as they grow older. Hostile parent/child interactions may be repeated by the children later in romantic relationships. The hostile relationship is formed because that is what the children learned and formed as an interaction pattern when they were younger. Parental discord with each other also relates to a person's discord with another when they reach adulthood. Family conflict interaction patterns during a child's upbringing predict what the child's marital conflict interaction patterns will be. Children learn from watching and being involved with what is going on in their lives and environments. The things they learn while growing up is brought into the child's adulthood with them (Whitton & Schulz, et al., 2008).

Children who grow up in homes with inconsistent child rearing practices tend to reach puberty early. When the children reach puberty early, they will then engage in intercourse earlier and have more sexual partners than children who grow up in a loving and stable home. Children from unstable homes seem to be more likely to have short term mating strategies. They do not have stable relationships in their family to model healthy relationships for them (Salmon, 2003).

### **Birth Order Traits**

#### **Oldest Child/ First Born**

Couples get excited when their first born child enters the world. The first born children are not only favored by their parents but by their extended family as well. The grandparents are excited to be first time grandparents. The siblings of the couple get excited to be aunts and uncles. The extended family pours much of their attention and time into the couple's first born child (Kluger, 2011). The first born child is the child whom gets celebrated with baby showers and new gifts. The first born child's parents record their every move they do such as: their first

haircut or when they start to talk. They fill out their baby book completely. The parents of the first born children tend to take more photos of their first born child than they do of the children born after the first born (Leman, 2009).

The literature describes first born children as powerful and influential. They can be over-pressured and influenced easily by authority. They are usually well organized. It is common in first born children to feel that they must be perfect in everything they do. They tend to stick to the rules and respect authority (Kalkan, 2008).

The research states that first born children are conscientious and have a general sense of responsibility and a tendency to follow through with whatever they may have started. First born children tend to be more academic than their other siblings. First born children will help mentor and tutor their younger siblings as they come along. Not only do the younger siblings learn things from their older siblings, but the older siblings learn how to become caretakers (Kluger, 2011). First born children are highly motivated and most likely to take charge. The first born child gets at least a year alone with their parents with no distractions from other children. The flood of parental attention they received as being a first born child makes them more confident which in return causes the parents to invest more time with them leaving the other children with scraps (Kluger, 2011).

The literature describes first born children as perfectionist. They learn from Adults, whom they see as big perfect people who do everything correctly. They walk and talk earlier than their later born siblings. Anything the first born child does such as: walking and talking, is a big deal and the attention the first born gets from their family members encourages them to achieve more at a faster pace (Leman, 2009).

When the second born child comes along, the first born child can be dethroned.

Dethronement is defined as being moved from a powerful position. Dethronement is more likely to occur in families that are more competitive (Eckstein & Aycock et al., 2010). Dethronement may cause the first born child to feel angry and frustrated (Tucker & Updegraff, 2010). Dethronement may also cause the first born child to have inappropriate behaviors to get the attention back on themselves (Eckstein & Aycock et al., 2010).

First born children usually assume the dominate role and the younger born siblings hold the lower and less powerful roles in the family (Tucker & Updegraff, 2010). The first born child will become the solider and protect their younger siblings. They seek their parent's approval by taking on the role of the surrogate parent to their younger siblings. Often times when looking at families a person can see how the older sibling tries to protect their younger siblings from other people. They take on the caretaker role as they learned growing up (Badger & Reddy, 2009).

Research states that first born children are highly motivated and are known to achieve more than their later born siblings. They often fill profession positions of high authority and achievement. Many of the United States presidents were first born children. First born children usually end up with professions in science, medicine, pastor, law, accountants, secretaries, engineers, computer specialists, astronauts, newscasters, or talk show hosts. Theses professions require precision, a strong power of concentration, and mental discipline (Leman, 2009).

Parents tend to expect the first born child to carry out the dreams they have had for themselves. First born children are prepared, organized and ready to get things done. They are people pleasers. They are strong willed and aggressive. First born children set high goals for themselves and are very goal driven. They want to be the king or queen pin. They often develop badger like qualities and will scratch, claw, and bite to get what they want (Leman, 2009).

First born children can be intimidating and push other people too hard. They may refuse to take no for an answer and they feel that they are always right (Leman, 2001). First born children often pay a high price for their personalities. This is because the traits and abilities that enable them to succeed as at work or in other organizations tend to work against them in their close personal relationships (Leman, 2009).

### **Middle Child/ Second Born**

Middle born children are the most difficult to define. They come into the world with a sibling already ahead of them. The child born before them is on their way in life. Middle children usually look at their older sibling and feel like they are in a race with the first born to take the first born child's privileged position away (Kalkan, 2008). Middle children feel that they are born too late to get the privileges and special treatment that their older siblings may receive. Middle born children are born too early to get spoiled and the goodies that the youngest born child may get (Leman, 2009). Middle children tend to be both the teacher and the student and the babysitter and babysat (Kluger, 2011). Middle born children often feel squeezed between their siblings (Leman, 2009).

Middle born children usually develop their own style of life. Middle born children may feel out of place in their family and it may take them longer to find their role within their family system (McGuirk & Pettijohn II, 2008). They have the first born child to look up to as the role model. The older sibling is usually stronger and smarter than the middle child. The middle child will then go off in a different direction than the first born child unless they feel that they are able to compete with their older sibling. If the middle born child decides to compete with their older born sibling, it may cause sibling rivalry to be higher in the relationship between the two children (Leman, 2009).

Middle born children's personality traits are determined by their perception of their placement in the family system. Research shows that middle born children can go either way. Middle born children are known to be pleasers and antagonizes. They may become manipulative or controlling. When they grow up, they never feel special to their family. Middle children can often go either way when it comes to personality traits. They are known to be very flexible in their lifestyles. They can be either really quiet and shy or outgoing and sociable. They can be impatient or laid back, rebel or not competitive, and aggressive or avoids conflict. Middle children are usually seen as the mediator or negotiator. They are even tempered and have a "take it or leave it" attitude. Middle children often tend to turn towards their peer group over their families. They find their friends are more important to them (Leman, 2009).

When middle children are at home, they often feel like the fifth wheel in their family. They may feel left out and misunderstood. They often get upstaged by their older and younger siblings leaving them feeling like leftovers getting bypassed (Leman, 2009). Middle born children find their parents to be less supportive of them. Having their parents be less supportive of them causes the middle born child to feel distant from their parents. They are less likely to be interested in their family's history or make kin ties as part of their self-identity. They are less likely to be influenced by family solidarity. They are more influenced by the relationships they form with friends (Salmon, 2003).

Middle children often want to avoid pain and danger so they tend to leave their parents' home quickly. They become more of a free spirit. They tend to have three natural motivations. They want to obtain rewards and recognition, avoid pain and danger, and get even (Leman, 2009).

The literature describes middle born children as mentally tough and independent. They become this way from learning to cope with their feelings of rejection they have and being the fifth wheel in their families, while growing up. They are not very open with others and do not choose to confide in other people. They are known as the secretive sibling. They usually are the last people to seek help if needed. They do not identify with problems that their older and younger siblings have (Leman, 2009).

Research shows that middle children scored positive when it comes to irrational beliefs. Irrational beliefs are defined as a self-defeating ways of acting. This may be due to their feelings of being less important than their siblings and having a lower self-esteem. When middle born children become adults, they may feel anxious about losing their partners love, which may cause some of their irrational beliefs to come out such as being unlovable. Middle born children perceive their self-worth in terms of interpersonal acceptance and evaluation (Kalkan, 2008).

Middle born children may use their negotiation and mediating skills to become successful as an entrepreneur. They excel best in business types of professions. A middle child may also be successful in other professions since they can be so flexible (Leman, 2009).

Middle children are most likely to be faithful to their partners that they choose to be in a romantic relationship with (Leman, 2009). Middle Born children interact with romantic partners in the same way as they interact with their friends. Since they build close relationships with their friends while growing up, the relationships bonds they form impact how they form relationship bond with romantic partners in their adulthood. They are careful to maintain high quality relationships in both areas. They do have communication problems in their relationships because the middle born child can be secretive (Salmon, 2003).

**Youngest Child/ Last Born**

Last born Children are looked at as the babies of the family. They tend to be pampered and spoiled by their parents. The last born child likes to be the center of attention. In order for them to be the center of attention they need to come up with ways to stand apart from their older siblings (Kalkan, 2008). The last born child is adventurous, easygoing, empathetic, open to experiences, popular, and sociable. They like to act like the clown of their peer group. They are the comedian. They tend to get their way by being funny or outrageous (Kluger, 2011).

The literature describes last born children as agreeable. They get along with many different kinds people (Kluger, 2011). They are known and loved by millions of people. The last born children tend to be very outgoing. Last born children can also be described as charmers, manipulators, carefree and vivacious, rebellious, affectionate, temperamental, spoiled, impatient and persistent. They are laughed at and teased by their older siblings and their siblings friends. They tend to be independent to cover up their self-doubts and confusion they may have. They are more and likely to be risk takers in the family. Being the risk taker, a last born child can be found wanting to go skydiving or ride roller coasters at a fair (Leman, 2009).

The last born child's sociable and outgoing personality may help them become successful in professions where they talk to people. They are more likely to work in middle management, technology, or sales. The last born children are good at these positions because they can manage up and manage down (Leman, 2009).

At one point in a last born child's life they have an advantage of being with the parents for some alone time as their older siblings are off in school or have grown up and moved out of the house (Salmon, 2003). Last born children look up to their elder siblings as the pacesetters in the family. They get most of their instructions from their older brother and sister. They carry the

curse of not being taken seriously by their families and then the world. They get used to being put down and written off (Leman, 2009). First born children take the role of the surrogate parents to the last born children. The last born children are unable to take that role of the surrogate parent and develop new talents and see new interest and activities within the family in order to prove to their families that they are worthy of attention (Badger & Reddy, 2009).

Last born children have a burning desire to make an important contribution to the world. They have an “I will show them” attitude. They love to be encouraged and praised by other people. They can feel on top of the world one day and at the bottom of the hole the next day. Last born children are treated by others by getting cuddled and spoiled one min and put down and made fun of the next minute (Leman, 2009). They seem to compare themselves with their closest aged sibling (Van Volkom, Machiz & Reich, 2011).

### **Only Child**

The only born child role is known to be much like the first born child but, the only child takes their personality to a greater extreme. The only child tends to be critical and self-centered. They are cooperative, trusting, likable, selfish, and achievement orientated (Eckstein & Aycock et al., 2010). Only born children are thought to be children without social skills, self-esteem or friends because they grow up without any siblings. The fact that they are not bound by their sibling’s views makes only children to be more social sophisticated and get a better sense of how the world works socially (Carrasquillo & Rivera, 1997).

The literature describes the only born children’s thinking as super perfectionist. They have very black and white thinking. They thrive on logic. They hate to admit when they are wrong and do not accept criticism well. They tend to follow the patterns established by their parents (Leman, 2001).

Society deems only children as spoiled, conceited, and assertive eggheads. Only children are at an advantage because they never have to compete with siblings in their lifetime for parental attention, favor, or resources (Carrasquillo & Rivera 1997). Because only children never have to compete with any siblings, they receive more frequent reinforcement from their parents and extended family. Only children become more confident, articulate, and are more on top of things. They construct a close relationship with their parents. The confident outer shield that only children put on may hide someone who feels inferior, someone who is rebellious, and is always trying to prove the he or she is good enough. Adler stated, “The only child has difficulties with every independent activity and sooner or later they become useless in life” (Leman, 2009, 132).

The literature shows that only born children never lack companionships. From an early age, only children learn how to play alone without feeling lonely. They develop vivid imaginations and fantasies. Only children may tend to prefer being with objects rather than with people. Only children pick objects because that is what they grew up with and they are more comfortable around them. Only children feel that people are not organized as some of their possessions may be and this may be one of the reasons only children choose objects over humans. Only children will project their feelings or thoughts on other people and possessions because that is what they did growing up. Only children feel that their possessions have feelings too. They are more likely to give their toys a name when they are younger and their vehicles a name when they are older (Isaacson, 2004).

When something goes wrong in an only child’s day, they feel their whole day is bad and they have to start over the next day. They have a tendency to get tied up in what other people are feeling. Only children want people around them to feel good, so they can feel good themselves.

They often interrupt others because they think they already know what the other person is going to say. Only children do not say exactly what they mean, but they say something close to it and expect others to know what they mean when they are saying something. When the other person does not understand what the only child is trying to say, the only child will act frustrated (Isaacson, 2004).

Parents treat their only child as special. They shelter their only child from reality. The parents make their child overly important (Leman, 2009). Studies show that mothers of only children play, talk, notice and comment to their children more when the only child is active (Carrasquillo & Rivera 1997).

The only child role may have negative experiences stemming from their parents overprotection and over involvement in their lives. They are under scrutiny and control of their families. They tend to experience their family relationships as too close or smothering. This closeness of their families causes the only child to desire greater independence and autonomy. The only child may appreciate the attention that they receive from the parents who may cause them to feel dependent or entitled when outside of their family atmosphere (Stewart, Stewart, & Campbell, 2001). Only Children have two speeds. They do fun things fast so their parents do not interrupt them and they do the boring things slow so they hope that their parents will help them out (Isaacson, 2004)

An only child has a tendency to choose a career in technology, health, or protective services. They are known to make good money in their careers but are usually unsatisfied in their jobs. Their job satisfaction depends on their urge for perfection. An only child will work better in a setting where they can work independently rather than on a team (Leman, 2009).

## Twins

What happens to birth order when multiple births happen in a family? Twins share their environment in their mother's womb before they actually enter into the environment everyone else is involved in. They can vary from being extremely close with each other to having an extreme amount of conflict with each other. The co-twin serves a role as playing the comforting, soothing factor that helps the other twin become excessively dependent.

Children who are born in multiples are well aware of who is born first. If a person is to ask a set of twins who is older, they will be able to tell that person who is older by the minute. Twins usually take on first and second born personality traits combination as their own personality (Leman, 2009).

Twins usually have good communication with each other. They have their own way of communicating with one another (Kluger, 2011). They are usually competitive, as well as, a companion. The first born twin will often become the assertive leader. The second born twin will follow along with the first born twin. This is not true for all twins in the sense that some of them tend to go different directions just like the second born children do. Some twins turn into rivalries with each other, these usually are the same sex twins that have a lot in common (Leman, 2009).

Twins are used to not getting their parents full attention because they have always had someone in their life that they have had to share their parent's attention with. Sharing attention from their parents at birth may cause the twin to not have a rivalry with other siblings in their family who are not twins. Twins still have to deal with their other siblings, which may alter their perceived birth order. It is hard to predict what birth order twins will perceive themselves as.

The birth of twins may also throw off all the family dynamics that have already been formed (Fortuna, Goldner & Knafo, 2010).

### **Confounding Factors**

When it comes to looking at a person's birth order, there are many different confounding factors that can affect the psychological birth order. Human behavior is complex and there are many different things that can affect people in different ways (Kluger, 2011).

First off, it is important to look at how a person interprets his or her birth order. Where do they see themselves fitting into their family? Just because they were a second born child does not mean that they relate to being a second born child. It is important to try and see how a person perceives themselves because the characteristics of a child determines how they react to things and people in their environments in which they are born into and it can determine the kind of adult he or she may become (Hartshorne, Salem-Hartshorne & Hartshorne, 2009).

It is important to look at the age differences between the siblings. Research says that a five year age gap can change the birth order and the next child may take on a different role. For example, if a first born child has a sibling five years younger than them, then the second born sibling may have first born personality traits, instead of second born personality traits. Research uses the five year gap because when a child goes off to school they will not see much of their younger or older siblings. The younger child may receive more one on one attention from their parents at this time (Eckstein & Aycock et al., 2010). Greater space between siblings can help reduce the rivalry between each other because the siblings do not feel that need for competition when the age gap is big.

Another reason a child's psychological birth order may be different is if one of their siblings has a mental or physical disability. This may change the way the parents expect things

from their child. A special needs child would need more attention from their parents leaving the other children in the family with less attention. If a child is severely disabled or otherwise unable to take an active part in family activities, the next sibling in line is likely to assume the role of that child instead of his own. A child may also be expected to help their parents out more with a sibling who has a disability thus taking on more responsibility than a child in a family without a disabled sibling (Eckstein & Aycock et al., 2010).

Along with mental and physical disabilities a death in the family of a child may confound a child's psychological role in the family (Eckstein & Aycock et al., 2010). The death of an older sibling may cause the younger sibling to step up and take over the caretaker position of the oldest child. When a death occurs early on in a family, it may cause the child below to take on the next birth order position. A death in the family may also cause parents to experience grief and loss. During the period of grief and loss, parents may not be as active as they normally would be. The parents may spend less time with their surviving children. Parents may have a feeling of guilt or shame for not taking care of that child (Leman, 2009).

When looking at a person's birth order, it is important to bring in genetics. Genetic inheritance can influence a child of any gender, race, size, or intelligence. Genetic influences are important in determining a person's intelligence, temperament, and physiology. A person's intelligence and temperament can help form a person's personality. If a person has a high intelligence quotient then their personality may be different from someone who has a lower intelligence quotient (Eckstein & Aycock et al., 2010).

Gender can be influential when parents model strong sex role differences in their family. For example, a third born son who is the first born male may be treated more like a first born rather than a last born because of his gender. This may also cause displacement among his older

two female siblings who have already started to shape their role causing them to change the role. Gender plays a role in the attention a child may get from the people in their environment, which can affect their psychological birth order. Being a male among all female siblings may get him more attention than his female siblings because of his gender (Eckstein & Aycock et al., 2010).

Research shows that combining families together can cause birth order to be different. Blended families are becoming more popular in today's world. Blended families do not create a new birth order for older children. The children's birth orders do not change when combining two different families after the age of five. If the children are young they may perceive their birth order to fit into their blended family. A child's birth order role may be challenged if other children in their family are only around every other weekend. Having siblings around every other weekend, a person may see similarities in two of the children's personality traits. If two children in the same family have similar birth order, they may have conflict with each other (Eckstein & Aycock et al., 2010).

Adoption of a child can cause sibling rivalry and jealousy for attention from the parents. When a family decides to adopt a child into their family, the children already in it may change birth order roles. The role change depends on how young the child is when adopted and how the parents treat that child. Adoption will also affect the child being adopted to change roles in a different family setting. If the adopted child is not an infant, the earlier surroundings of that child will determine their reaction to their new home (Leman, 2009).

A person must also consider the birth order position of each of their parents. Each parent has shaped their own personality while growing up. The parent's birth order may have an effect on their children because it has shaped their children's personalities by imposing their values and beliefs on their children. Children grow up watching their parents and learning things from

them. The children may catch onto some of their parents' personality traits. They watch the relationship between their parents play out and they tend to have some of the same habits of their parents in their future relationships (Leman, 2009).

### **What is a Romantic Relationship**

Each individual person differs in what they feel is important to them in an ideal relationship (Eastwick, Finkel & Eagly, 2011). Love has different meanings to people across different relationships of all different cultures. Romantic love is generally associated with the reward centers of the brain and encompasses concepts like intimacy, commitment, compassion, and passionate love (Lin & Graham, 2011).

Research has shown that there are physiological and psychological benefits from having intimate relationships. Romantic relationships give people benefits such as social support, companionship, love and sexual intimacy. As two individual's lives become intertwined more memories are made, intimate knowledge is exchanged, and activities and friends are shared (Rhoades & Atkins, et al., 2011).

Many people have an idea of what they want in an ideal romantic relationship. Research shows that when their current partner matched their idea of their ideal relationship the participants tended to report having a satisfying relationship and were less likely to end it. People evaluate their relationship partners depending on different traits they perceive in those partners (Eastwick, Finkel & Eagly, 2011).

Each individual can be motivated by different things. One may be motivated by the promise of growth and advancement related to their goal in life. Another partner may be motivated by emotional security and protection. The interpersonal motivations will channel an individual's behavior in unique ways. Individuals will often look towards their partners in their

close relationships for fulfillment in their security and growth needs (Winterheld & Simpson, 2011).

Each individual has different needs and they will find different ways to express their love for their partner. Men tend to find backrubs as an expressive way of love more than women do. This may cause a woman to need something more from her man to satisfy their need for love (Gulledge, Gulledge & Stahman, 2003). When women adapt less traditional gender role attitudes their quality of their relationships declines. When men adapt less traditional gender role attitudes their quality of their relationship increases. Research shows that when men have more masculinity norms within a relationship, the couple will have a lower romantic quality. Masculinity norms include: heroism, humanitarian service, courage, the provider, and fatherhood (Wade & Coughlin, 2011).

When a couple seems satisfied in their relationship, they will show positive qualities such as: communication, openness, emotional self-disclosure, and empathetic understanding. Satisfied couples maintain a balance which their positivity exceeds their negativity (Bertoni & Bodenmann, 2010).

Research shows that individuals who have recently ended relationships have lower levels of well-being than those who are in relationship. Research on rejections has shown that individuals who are highly sensitive when it comes to feelings of rejection are not satisfied in romantic relationships (Rhoades & Atkins, et al., 2011). Individuals who get together for event driven reasons such as pregnancy or finance, experience more conflict and ambivalence than those who get together due to positive characteristics in the relationships. These event driven reasons do not keep the couple positive and happy with their romantic partners (Vennum & Fincham, 2011).

### **The Impact of Birth Order on Romantic Relationships**

The concept of a relationship is to pull together, share, and meld into the unity of one (Leman, 2009). When it comes to relationships, people differ to which characteristic are important to them. Birth order may impact the way individuals behave and think in romantic relationships (McGuirk & Pettijohn II, 2008).

If two people are too similar in many areas they may have more difficulty handling disagreements with each other (Leman, 2001). Most people who enter into a romantic relationship will choose partners of similar birth order. When this happens, the partners are too much alike and do not get along well because they are always tiptoeing on each other's territory. Couples whom are different from each other tend to work, understand, and appreciate the differences in each other tend to get along the best. These couples will have a higher success rate of staying with each other than couples who do not work, understand, and appreciate each other (Leman, 2009).

The best combination of two birth orders getting involved romantically is a first born daughter with brothers with a youngest born boy with sisters. The oldest female takes on the mothering role in her romantic relationship that she learned in her family growing up. This is beneficial in the combination because the male wants to be mothered. The male grew up being mothered by his older sisters as well as his mother. Receiving the mother is considered normal to him. The oldest born child and youngest born child make the best match because the youngest born child can teach the oldest born child to have fun and let go.

The first born child in return teaches the youngest born child to be more serious and organized. The first born child will find the faults of the last born. The first born children are usually bothered by the little things that happen such as their partner leaving the clothes in a heap

on the floor. The last born child needs to learn to share their spotlight with the first born partner. The two must work together on being considerate of each other, caring for one another and being mutually supportive of each other (Leman, 2001).

If a first born child gets involved with a middle born child, the middle born child may be intimidated by the first born. The middle born child may modify their behavior to please the first born child (Leman, 2001). First born children only let their emotions out every now and then which can be a problem when entering a relationship. The downfall of the two getting together is that middle children can be secretive and play with their emotions. Middle born children like the problem solving role. When the first born child and middle born child get together they grow up learning to negotiate, mediate, and compromise. (Leman, 2009).

If a middle born child and a last born child get involved with each other, the middle born child may get pulled into the last born child's irresponsible ways (Leman, 2001). The middle born children are good at negotiating and compromising which pairs well with the outgoing youngest born child. If the middle born child blends their love of social interest together with the youngest born child's desire to have fun, the blending of the two may lead to a satisfying relationship for them. Once again like in an earlier combination the last born still needs to learn to share their spotlight with their romantic partners (Leman, 2009).

When only born children and first born children get involved, they run into difficulty communicating with each other. The only born children imagine what others think and feel and first born children are vague of their feelings and thoughts. These two birth order personalities can be compatible when the only born child is a woman and the first born child is male. This combination works because the male will appreciate the way the female can express herself and be clear on what she wants. She will allow him to do what he wants because she enjoys more

independence herself (Isaacson, 2004). The female also permits her partner to assume a dominance role in the relationships, which is natural for the male. The female enjoys the parent surrogate that the male provides for her. The oldest male is a good provider who is conscientious and desirous of holding his relationship together. The only female may feel like she is in competition with her first born partners work. She wants to be provided for but also wants some attention from her partner (Forer & Still, 1976).

### **Similar Birth Orders in a Romantic Relationship**

The literature describes similar birth orders in a romantic relationship as problematic. If two first born children get together in a romantic relationship, there will be high friction with each other. They will focus on perfection in their lives. They will be critical of their partners and themselves which causes more tension in their relationships. First born children like to fight for control. The fight for control will cause tension in between the two first born children (Leman, 2009). They usually butt heads and fall into a controlling and pleaser relationship. When a first born child enters an argument, they enter it to win (Leman, 2001). The two first born children will seek good feelings from other people rather than each other. This lack of connection can lead to boredom with each other. They try to impress each other, which causes the other one to be annoyed by their partner (Isaacson, 2004).

Middle born children are seen as one size fits all. If two middle born children decided to get together the problems in their relationship tend to be ignored, which will cause these problems to build up and get worse (Leman, 2001). They feel that it is not worth the hassle to confront each other and cause a ruckus (Leman, 2009).

Middle children are known to have less infidelity. They are honest with their partner (Leman, 2001). They do not know how to communicate effectively. They will discount the

value of their own opinion. They desire peace in their environments and will do anything it takes to get that peace. They become avoiders by avoiding their problems and eventually each other. They provide each other with plenty of space for their outside friendships since they have a strong belief in them (Leman, 2009). If two middle born children get involved they want to be understood by their partner. They need to learn to do things for each other and not just for themselves or their friends (Leman, 2001).

The combination of a middle born child and a last born child ranks high as a potentially successful relationship. This couple has a high probability for good communication with each other. The sociable personality of the last born child brings out the middle born child communication skills. Middle born children are not threatened by the youngest born children, which makes them more able to share their feelings and go with the flow in the relationship. (Leman, 2009).

If two last born children get involved with each other their lives get out of control. They are careless with their money and will have financial issues because they spend it carelessly. They will max out their credit cards, have overdue bills, and have their objects repossessed if one of them does not take responsibility (Leman, 2009). They lack responsibility, which will cause many different strains in their relationship (Leman, 2001).

The last born children may wind up playing games with each other because they are both manipulators. In order to have a successful relationship with each other, they need to learn to listen to each other and be aware of when they have their selective hearing turned on. They need to hold each other accountable for the situations they get in. They need to decide who is going to make decisions. Two last born children could spend all day on trying to decide where they should go out to eat because neither of them likes making the decisions.

When two only children get involved with each other, their personalities match up together well. Only born children tend to marry early on in their lives. They seek a close relationship like the one that their parents have. They do not require bonding for happiness because of their personalities (Forer & Still, 1976).

They do not require time from each other and they do not argue with each other. They do not corner each other, they do not use ultimatums with each other, and they do not force each other to do things. Each one of the only born children understands the need for alone time, being organized and being on a schedule. This allows both of the only children to not be threatened by each other (Isaacson, 2004).

Only children who are male tend to be disinterested in having children. Only children who are female look forward to child bearing years. This leads to an inconsistency in the combination of two only children and it must be something that they communicate about. Only children who are females will usually let their partners dominate, but they expect their partners to provide them with good things in her life just as her parents did. Only children who are males prefer to hold a position of strength in their relationships. Both only children male and female will indulge in themselves. A problem that two only born children may come across is the emotional connection between them. They have a tendency to think they know what the other person is feeling (Forer & Still, 1976).

### **Clinical Implications**

Alfred Adler used birth order in therapy to win the client's confidence, in developing understanding and interpreting the client's dreams and early behavior. Adler believed that a client needs "to see with his eyes and to hear with his ears." A Therapist knowing the experiences of an individual growing up in a specific order within their family can help the therapist utilize the client's frame of reference and help the client see their childhood experiences

in a different way. Knowing the birth order of the client can also help the therapist understand the client's symptoms (Carlson & Slavik, 1997).

Birth order gives therapist an outline of behavior for the therapist to hypothesize with. Having an understanding of the client can help the therapist build rapport with them. When a client hears information about their birth order, they can easily accept it and may be motivated to change their behavior (Carlson & Slavik, 1997).

A therapist may map out a client's family constellation by using a genogram, which is like a family tree of that client that represents family relationships and medical history (Carlson & Slavik, 1997). The genogram maps out the clients birth order, parents, marriages, divorces, remarriages, cultural considerations, mental illness, addictions, and adoptions throughout their family. This can help see where the client has formed their behaviors they may have and see hereditary issues that may fall in their family. The genogram can also help a therapist get a feel for the client's personality by looking at the client's birth order. By mapping out the client's genogram the therapist can get an idea of how the client's parent's relationships as well as the client's sibling relationships have had an impact on the client's life.

Not only can birth order help a therapist in individual therapy, but it can have an impact in marriage counseling. The therapist can get the outline of a client's behavior through birth order and may be able to see what the client's may feel they need from their partners. Pointing out and helping the client's see what they feel they need can help a couple overcome their difference and possibly improve their relationship.

### **Limitations**

Most of the research that is done on the topic of birth order measures only the ordinal position. The research does this because it is hard to examine where a client sits psychologically

(Eckstein & Aycok, et al., 2010). Because the research is mostly done on the ordinal position much of the research done on birth order may not be pliable to use because the way in which a person's perceive their birth order has more of an effect on their personalities then the actual ordinal birth order.

Another issue that comes up when looking at the research of birth order is that there is not much research out there that has been done in recent years. Most of the research that explains birth order in depth was done many years back. The recent research is more on the effects of birth order on a family system.

There was not much research out there on birth order and how it can affect a person's relationships in their lives, their romantic relationships specifically. There is research that states how a person's parents affect them and how a person's siblings affect them but not how it plays into a person's relationship with a romantic partner. More research on the effects of birth order on romantic relationships could be beneficial to people who are having relationships issues.

### **Conclusion**

Birth order started to develop over a century ago with Sir Francis Galton. Alfred Adler came along to define birth order in a more definitive way to determine a child's personality characteristics. Adler found that a person's childhood can leave an imprint on them into their adulthood and for the rest of their lives. Birth order is more effectively used when it is looked at by a child's perceived birth order rather than their actual birth order.

When looking at the effect birth order can have on an individual, it begins by looking at that individual's family of origin. When looking at the research, it shows that a child's family of origin can have a big impact on their personalities. The family atmosphere changes as each child enters into it. The children's personalities develop from the relationships they have with their parents and their siblings. A child goes through many different life experience and memories

with their siblings. For that reasons, no one has a greater impact on a person than their siblings. People do not automatically get along with their siblings. People have to learned to like their siblings and on that path to liking them they go through fights for attention and resources from their parents.

Parents or caregivers of a child are responsible for the initial shaping of attachment representations the child possesses. The children learn attachment patterns for their future relationships by their relationships they have while growing up. They watch have their parents act around each other and other people. These attachment patterns that they learn get carried through with them into their adulthood. The values and beliefs that parents teach their children are imposed on the children throughout their lifetimes.

The first born child is usually academic and organized. They get more attention from their parents because of the excitement their parents have of being their first born child. The middle born child dethrones the first born and tends to go in the opposite direction the first born is going in. The middle born children are good negotiators and mediators. The last born children are never taken seriously and are known as the comedian of the family. They are looked at as being spoiled and pampered. The only born children take the first born children's characteristics to an extreme. They would rather be with objects than people and tend to think they know how are others are feeling.

Twins are close with each other before exiting their mother's womb. Twins usually take on a firstborn or second born child's personality traits combined. They may also take on other personality traits depending on if they have siblings or not.

There are many different confounding factors that can influence a person's perception of their birth order. It could be the age difference between siblings. It could be a disability or death amongst siblings. Other factors include: gender and the blending of families.

Looking into a person's birth order and seeing what their personality traits are can help find a good romantic partner for them. The research shows that the best match is an oldest female with a youngest male. This match is followed by any order of the oldest and youngest children getting pair up. This match is the most compatible. Next up is a middle child with a youngest child.

Many people tend to marry their own birth orders instead because they have so much in common. This can cause the couple to have different conflicts with each other. When looking into which match of birth orders is best for a couple to partner with one must take in the all the factors that have been presented.

A therapist can use a client's birth order to build rapport with them and find patterns of behavior that was formed within their families. The therapist can get an outline of the client's personality to help them see what behaviors they have. A therapist can use birth order in individual counseling, as well as, marriage counseling.

When looking to use birth order, there are many limitations to the research done on birth order. Most of the research is done on actual birth order rather than a person's psychological birth order. Much of the solid research was done many years ago and it has not been updated.

Many people in this world go many years in a relationship with someone they are not compatible with according to their birth order. A person should keep in mind that birth order personalities may not be true to each person. A person must take into fact all of the different confounding factors that can impact their perceived birth order. This paper is written to heighten

awareness of the ways in which birth order and personality can impact relationship. It is a way to work out issues in a relationship realizing that no two people need the same thing out of a relationship.

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