

BIRTH ORDER AND SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE

BY

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BIRTH ORDER AND SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Janice Williams Whitmire entitled "Birth Order and Social Acceptance". I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

Elizabeth H. Loker
Major Professor

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

It is evident that at any age an acceptable social status is an important factor for satisfactory personal and social adjustment. Social relations are especially important in the classroom. Teachers have always been aware of their importance in maintaining a classroom free from interpersonal conflicts and tensions. Social relations influence the personal and social development of individuals, the effectiveness of group work, and classroom learning of individual pupils (Gronlund, 1959). It is generally held that lack of acceptance will cause unhappiness, while having it will increase the person's feeling of well being. Most psychologists agree social acceptance is important, but find it hard to measure.

Sociometry is the study of social relationships and the social structure of the group. Sociometric scales or instruments have been developed for measuring the social relationship within a group. These instruments attempt to measure the relationship within a group. These instruments attempt to measure the relationship which exists among these individuals and discloses the structure of the group itself. Generally they are accurate, simple

to use, and easy to administer. The scales are most satisfactorily used for groups with defined boundaries, in which the individuals know each other at least by name and continue with some cohesion over a reasonable period of time. Sociometric scales are less satisfactory for very large groups and ill-defined groups such as audiences, and not at all satisfactory for groups which meet only on one or two occasions (Northway, 1967).

Even though sociometric tests are widely used and have mainly favorable points, they are not without weaknesses. Bronfenbrenner (1944) stresses that a sociometric scale measures isolated aspects and attributes at a fixed time and space and can sometimes be insufficient and misleading. They measure to what extent individuals are accepted by other group members, but do not indicate why. Likewise, the sociometric status of individuals or the social structure of the group can be improved (Gronlund, 1959).

One common use of results from sociometric instruments is to aid in the improvement of pupils' social relations in the classroom. A study of the pupils' sociometric choices aids the teacher in identifying problems, in locating pupils who are isolated or rejected by their peers, and in discovering other detrimental elements in

the classroom social structure. When this data is combined with other knowledge the teacher has, she has a firmer base for classroom planning to improve social relations (Gronlund, 1959).

There has been considerable research and theorizing on the effect of birth order on the individual. Zajonc (1976) contends that family configuration is a strong determinant of intelligence. After conducting several studies of his own and reviewing the findings of others, Zajonc presented the following findings:

- (1) Intellectual performance increases with decreasing family size.
- (2) Children born early in the family perform better on intelligence tests than later born children when intervals between births is short.
- (3) Long intersibling spacing seems to cancel out the negative effect on later borns.
- (4) Last and only children suffer from the handicap of having no opportunity to serve as a teacher to younger children.

If birth order is seen as one of the determiners of intelligence of children, could the order of birth also affect the social status or acceptance of children? This would seem to be an area worthy of investigation.

One of the leading advocates of the importance of birth order was Alfred Adler. Adler emphasizes the importance of both the family constellation and family atmosphere on the personality of the individual. Family constellation refers to the sociological facts of the

family as they affect each member, including the ordinal position of the child. Family atmosphere refers more to the quality of emotional relationships among family members. The family constellation affects the child's development by giving him a particular set of problems with which to cope (Maddi, 1972).

Birth order research is characterized by an absence of theoretical foci, contradictory findings, and methodological weaknesses. The results are generally inconsistent (Bayer & Folger, 1967). Kammeyer (1967) found that researchers often discover the significance of birth order accidentally while engaged in other research. As a result their theorizing tends to be post hoc and to have a disconnected character.

Even though there are many inconsistencies in birth order research, Bert Adams (1971) found two factors to be fairly consistent. They are that there is greater educational attainment, including college attendance, among the first borns and that first borns are more affiliative and dependent than later borns.

It is agreed by experts in child development that children do develop differently. The real question is why. Adler (1930) contends that the child develops according to his particular position in the family.

As a child grows he develops a certain set of rules which regulate his conduct and determine his reactions to various situations. As he grows older this behavior pattern becomes fixed and he reacts unconsciously according to his past experience.

It is a common fallacy to imagine that children of the same family are formed in the same environment. There is much which is the same for all children in the same home, but the psychological situation of each child is individual and differs from that of others (Ansbacher, 1964). The child's development depends to a large degree on his function within the family. In his early relationship to other members of the family, each child establishes his own approach to others in an effort to gain a place in the group. The sequence of birth provides each child with a different point of view within the family constellation. His position as the only, oldest, youngest, or middle child gives him different opportunities for exerting his influence and presents him with particular challenges (Dreikurs, 1968).

The first born child is generally given a good deal of attention and spoiling. Often he is quite suddenly "dethroned" from his position. Another child is born and he is no longer unique. He must share his mother

and father. When the first born child grows up, he likes to take part in the exercise of authority and exaggerates the importance of laws and rules. They are often ultra-conservative and many were considered "problems" as children (Ansbacher, 1964).

The second child is in a quite different position. He has always shared attention with another child and is generally more cooperative, but always appears to be in a race. He works hard all the time to surpass the accomplishments of his older brothers and sisters. As an adult the middle child is rarely able to endure strict leadership or accept the idea of eternal law. He feels any power can be overthrown (Ansbacher, 1964).

The youngest child has no followers, but many leaders. He is stimulated more than the others and has more chances for competition. Very often he surpasses all the others in accomplishments, but this does not always happen. Sometimes he is spoiled and pampered and turns out to be unambitious and having feelings of inferiority (Ansbacher, 1964).

The only child has problems different from the others. His rival is not brothers and sisters, but his parents. He feels in competition with his father and almost smothered by his mother. He wants to always be the center of atten-

tion and may have problems in adult life if he is not able to keep this position (Ansbacher, 1964).

In each family some members will be alike in character traits and some will be different. There will be competition and alliances in the struggle for power within the family. The responses of the child to this power struggle will be the major contributor to the formation of his personality traits (Dreikurs, 1968).

A great deal of research has been done correlating ordinal position and its relationship to some aspects of personality. Grossman (1973) predicted that first born children are more aggressive, but the results of his studies showed there was no difference. McCormick and Baer (1975) found that first born males and second born females are more extroverted. Many researchers have correlated ordinal position and self esteem but the results are conflicting. Stotland and Dunn (1962), Curry, Manning, and Monroe (1971), and Bartelt (1972) did not find birth order to have a significant effect on self esteem, but Coopersmith (1967), Eisenman (1970), Platt, Moskalski, and Eisenman (1968), Rosenberg (1965), and Sears (1970) indicated that birth order does have a significant effect on self esteem and self concept with first born and only children having significantly higher

self esteem and self concept than later born children. Koenig (1969) does not completely agree and reports that first borns have a greater need for affiliation than later born individuals. Roberts (1938) supports this idea and explains the lack of self confidence in the first born as being a result of protectiveness and overindulgence by the parents.

If the personality is affected by birth order, then would the personality of the individual affect his social acceptance? Kuhlen and Lee (1943) found that adolescents accepted socially those classmates they judged as popular, cheerful, happy, enthusiastic, friendly, enjoyed jokes, and initiators of games and activities. Seagoe (1933) found that adolescents choose their friends on the basis of home location, physical maturity, mental level and capacity, and personal characteristics such as cleanliness, courtesy, athletic ability, and other socially desirable traits. Tryon's (1939) findings support Kuhlen, Lee, and Seagoe to a certain degree, but point out that there is a discrepancy between the traits approved by early and late adolescents. At age 12 Tryon finds that boys generally approve "unkeptness", but disapprove it at age 15. Being talkative is judged by Tryon to be approved by 12 year olds, but to be less approved at

age 15. Tryon contends that the age of the adolescent has a great influence on factors he looks for in friends.

Gonzalez Tamayo (1973) did not find a significant difference in regard to age in the acceptance of others, but did find a significant difference between acceptance of others and self acceptance. If the subject accepted himself as a worthwhile person, he would be more likely to accept others socially.

Although there has been a great deal of research done on social acceptance with different groups, there has been very limited research on the relationship of birth order and social acceptance. In 1964, Schachter conducted a study using the members of fifteen fraternities and sororities at the University of Minnesota as subjects. He administered sociometric questionnaires to each fraternity and sorority group asking them to list in order of preference the names of three people with whom they would most like to room and three with whom they would most like to spend informal social time. The results indicate first borns chose more popular people and exhibit greater similarity of sociometric choice than do later borns. In addition the data shows first borns are less popular than later borns. Schachter explains that these results support his hypothesis that

first borns are more dependent. They chose popular people because they knew others would.

Warren (1963, 1964) became very interested in Schachter's studies and did extensive research of his own. In 1963 he conducted a study at the University of Nebraska using agriculture majors as subjects. Warren compared the proportion of first borns relative to later borns. In 1964 Warren again studied the proportion of first borns attending college relative to later borns at the University of Nebraska, but in this study used samples from all majors. In both cases he found more first borns were attending college than later borns. Warren explains that his findings indicate first borns are more susceptible to social pressure and are in agreement with Schachter. Alexander (1968) in a study of 1410 male seniors in 30 high schools also shows that first borns choose more "acceptable" people. In Alexander's study those planning to attend college were chosen more often than those not planning to attend. This study, along with Schachter (1964) and Warren (1963, 1964) strongly indicate that first borns have great sensitivity to others' expectations, opinions, and evaluations.

Purpose of the Study

The research does show some support for the theory that birth order affects the personality of the child. There is also support for the suggestion that the personality of adolescents has some effect on their social acceptance. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of birth order on social acceptance of two classes of tenth grade students at Clarksville High School

Hypothesis

In order to study the social acceptance of tenth grade students at Clarksville High School in the two selected classes, the following null hypothesis was postulated:

There is no significant difference in the socio-metric scores of students having different ordinal positions in the family, specifically as it relates to first born, middle born, last born, or only children.

Definition of Terms

1. Ordinal position: the sequence in which the children are born into the family.
2. Social acceptance: the degree to which a person

is accepted by others within the classroom in which he was tested.

3. Sociometric score: an algebraic summation of the choices received by each student from every other student on the sociometric instrument used.

Limitations of the Present Study

1. The subjects used in this study came from a restricted geographical area, specifically, Montgomery County, Tennessee.

2. The subjects represented only one grade level, specifically, tenth graders most of whom would be 15 or 16 years of age at the date of testing.

3. The sociometric technique itself is limited in the kinds of information the particular instrument can provide, which is a measurement of social acceptance by members of one's own classroom at a particular time.

4. An individual's sociometric status indicates his acceptance by other group members and does not provide supplementary evidence as a measurement of his leadership ability or of his personal adjustment.

Assumptions Basic to the Nature of this Investigation

There were three basic assumptions upon which this

research rested.

1. It was assumed that the instrument employed for estimating social acceptance is sufficiently valid for use in this study.

2. It was assumed that the students responded honestly on the sociometric scale completed.

3. It was assumed that the rapport between the students and administrator of the scale was sufficient for the students to take the task of rating seriously.

CHAPTER II

Methods

Selection and Description of the Sample

The sample included fifty subjects in two tenth grade English Classes at Clarksville High School in Montgomery County, Tennessee. The English classes are grouped homogeneously by achievement level and the classes used were in the average range in both instances.

Procedures for Securing School Cooperation

Initially, a proposal containing the purpose of the study and the procedures to be utilized was taken to the Director of Pupil Personnel Services for the Montgomery County School System. After discussion with and subsequent approval by the Superintendent of Schools and the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, the author contacted the principal of Clarksville High School. The purposes and procedures to be employed were explained in more detail. Dates and specific times were made after consultation with the teachers involved. An abstract of the findings of the study will be given to the Montgomery County Board of Education and the test results will be discussed with the appropriate teachers.

Description of the Measuring Instrument

The instrument used in the study was the How I Feel Toward Others (Bonney, 1954). Of the three basic types of sociometric instruments identified by Bonney (1960), this scale is classified as a measurement of reputation; that is, it obtains data on how individuals regard each other in reference to five sociometric criterion of friendship. The time required for administration of the scale is approximately twenty to thirty minutes.

The instrument contains choices which offer two levels of acceptance, one position of neutrality, and two levels of rejection. Each subject is given the opportunity to rate every other child in the classroom on one of five categories:

- (1) Best friend;
- (2) Other friend;
- (3) Person I don't know;
- (4) Not my friend;
- (5) Do not want as friends as long as they are like they are now.

A copy of the criterion upon which these choices were to be made and complete instructions for taking the test was given to each subject. A copy of the instrument is included in Appendix A.

Sociometric tests tend to be quite reliable. The one used in the present study, "How I Feel Toward Others" has a reliability coefficient of .78 for periods of several weeks and .73 for periods of several months.

The validity of the instrument is based on the assumption that feelings carry their own validity for the particular persons concerned. The assumption was made that the subjects were giving honest responses, which is a necessary assumption if the data are to be accepted as valid. The method of construction of the scale, as indicated by the author, also was given as evidence of validity (Bonney, 1962).

Collection and Classification of the Data

Each of the subjects was administered the Bonney How I Feel Toward Others sociometric scale. Upon entering the classroom, the author talked informally with the subjects in order to establish at least a moderate degree of rapport. After each subject was given a copy of the scale and its instructions, the information was read aloud by the author, while the subjects read silently. When all questions had been answered, the test began. There was no time limit and no overt pressure to complete the test quickly. Each subject then turned his test paper and set of instructions face down on his desk, raised his hand, and waited until the author collected them.

An individual's score was calculated by assigning

a weighted algebraic score in the following manner: Best friend, +2; Other friend, +1; Person I don't know, a zero was given; Not my friend, -1; and for Do not want as a friend as long as they are like they are now, a -2 was assigned. Consequently, each subject's score was converted to an algebraic total of positive and negative feeling from every other child in the classroom.

The figures used in the study as the sociometric score show the extent to which each child in the class was chosen in terms of maximum possible choosing. The maximum score a child could receive was determined by multiplying the number of children who ranked him by two, the score he would have received if every child had given him a choice of Best friend. This score was then divided into the actual score the child received to obtain the percentage of the possible score. Each score was then multiplied by 100. Since some children received a negative score, 100 was added to each score to provide a positive value. This procedure made it possible to compare scores from classes of different sizes.

CHAPTER III

Presentation and Interpretation of Data

This chapter is concerned with the presentation and interpretation of the sociometric test scores earned by the four different groups, first born, last born, middle and only children. The data will be analyzed and the implications of the findings will be discussed.

Table I shows the number in each of the groups, the mean sociometric scores, and the standard deviations for each group.

Table I

Mean Sociometric Scores and Standard Deviations
For First Born, Last Born, Middle and Only Children

Group	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
First Born	9	116.33	15.1493
Last Born	19	119.49	10.4207
Middle	17	118.35	14.2036
Only	5	113.8	14.4983

Table I shows that the first born group contained 9 students, the last born group contained 19, the middle group contained 17, and the only child group contained 5.

The mean sociometric score of the first born group was 116.33, with a standard deviation of 15.1493. The last born group had a mean score of 119.49 with a standard deviation of 10.4207. The middle born group had a mean of 118.35 and a standard deviation of 14.2036. The only child group had a mean score of 113.8 and a standard deviation of 14.4983.

The hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean sociometric scores among the four ordinal positions was tested by simple analysis of variance. This analysis is presented in Table II.

Table II

Analysis of Variance of Acceptance Scores
of First Born, Last Born, Middle, and Only Children

Source of Variation	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F	F .05
Between Groups	3	153.49	51.1633		
Within Groups	46	7859.33	170.855	.29945	2.84*

* .05 level of significance

The difference between the mean scores was not significant, F being .29945, while an F of 2.84 is significant at the .05 level. The null hypothesis of no significant difference in the sociometric scores of

students having different ordinal positions in the family
is accepted.

CHAPTER IV

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The primary purpose of this study was to determine if there was a significant difference in sociometric scores of students having different ordinal positions in the family. The students in the sample were from two tenth grade English classes at Clarksville High School. All students in these classes were given the Bonney How I Feel Toward Others sociometric questionnaire in order to compare the social acceptance of students who were first born, last born, middle, or only children. Comparisons of the mean acceptance scores received by the students were made in an effort to determine if there were significant differences in the sociometric scores of children with different ordinal positions within the family.

Any conclusions reached as a result of this investigation must be evaluated with the fact in mind that they can only apply to the two classes involved and attempts to generalize these conclusions without bearing this in mind would be hazardous at best. Based on a statistical analysis of the data gathered, it was concluded that the hypothesis of significant difference

in the sociometric scores of students having different ordinal positions in the family, specifically as it relates to first born, middle born, last born, or only children must be accepted on the basis of the data presented in Table II.

Recommendations for Further Research

On the basis of questions which became apparent in the progress of this study, the following topics are suggested for further study:

1. The replication of this study with a larger number of subjects.
2. The comparison of social acceptance and its relationship to ordinal position and spacing within the family unit.
3. The comparison of social acceptance and its relationship to ordinal position and the sex of the subjects involved.

Birth order research is very confusing and conflicting at the present time. The research does indicate the importance of ordinal position affecting personality and intelligence. However, the present study does not support the importance of ordinal position affecting social acceptance. No significant difference in the social acceptance scores of students having different ordinal positions of

birth was found. The present study only adds to the conflict and increases the need for further research in the area.

APPENDIX

How I Feel Toward Others

The teacher and the pupils should read this entire scale together.

To the pupils:

You have all taken a lot of tests in mathematics, reading, and other subjects. You have been asked to take those tests so your teachers would know better how to help you in your studies. Now you are asked to tell how you feel toward other students in your room. This is not a test like the others you have taken. There are no right or wrong answers. All you need to do is to tell how you feel toward other students in your room. By doing this you will help the teacher to know which other students you get along with best.

No student will be allowed to see another student's paper.

DIRECTIONS: On another sheet of paper you have the names of all the people in your room. As soon as we finish reading the directions you will be asked to place a number to the left of each of these names, including your own. The numbers which you will use are the numbers of the paragraphs listed below.

Do not put any numbers now. Please put your pencils down until you are told by your teacher to begin.

We must first read all the directions together, so you will be sure to know how to mark your list of names.

Number 1 is for: My Best Friends. How can we tell our best friends from just ordinary firends? Below you will find listed some things which are generally true of our best friends. Put a 1 to the left of the names of those students who are best friends.

- A. You are with your best friends a lot and have fun with them.
- B. You treat them nice, help them whenever you can, and share your things with them.
- C. You go places with them and talk with them a lot.

- D. You go to their homes and they come to your home quite often.

Number 2 is for: My Other Friends. Besides our best friends all of us have other friends whom we like fairly well. Put a 2 to the left of the names of those children you like fairly well.

- A. You are with them sometimes, but you do not always have fun with them.
- B. You are nice to them most of the time, but you seldom share your things with them.
- C. Sometimes you go places with them, and talk with them, but not very often.
- D. You seldom go to their homes, and they seldom come to your home.

Number 3 is for: Students I Don't Know. There may be some people on your list whom you don't know well enough to know whether you like them or not. It may be that you have not been with them enough to tell much about them. You don't know how you really feel about these students. Put a 3 to the left of the names of those people whom you don't know well enough to rate.

Number 4 is for: Students I know but who are not my friends. All of us know some persons quite well but we do not consider them to be our friends. Put a 4 to the left of the names of those people you do not consider as your friends.

- A. You are seldom with them.
- B. You do not get along very well with them when you are around them.
- C. You do not talk to them or go places with them unless it is necessary to be polite.
- D. You do not like some of the things they do, and the way they act at times.

Number 5 is for: Students I do not want to have as friends - as long as they are like they are now. Nearly all of us find there are a few persons we cannot get along with. These people may be all right in some ways, and may be regarded as good friends by others, but not by us.

- A. You avoid being with them, and you never choose them as partners for a game.
- B. Sometimes you fuss, quarrel, and fight with them when you are around them.

- C. You never go places with them and you never talk with them unless you have to.
- D. You dislike very much some of the things they do, and the way they act at times.

Now let us go over the main headings.

- What is number 1 for? (Student response)
- What is number 2 for? (Student response)
- What is number 3 for? (Student response)
- What is number 4 for? (Student response)
- What is number 5 for? (Student response)

You do not have to use all these numbers. You may use any of these as many times as you wish. All you need to do is to show how you feel about each person on your list by putting one of the above numbers to the left of his name.

Be sure to put a number to the left of every name.
Do not leave out anyone.

Has everyone found his own name? If your name is not on the list tell the teacher so she can have all the children add your name to their lists. As soon as you have found your name or have written it in, put a 6 to the left of it.

If you have any questions, please ask them now.

When you have finished marking your list, turn your paper face down on your desk and leave it there until the teacher takes it up.

Go ahead now and place the other numbers (1-2-3-4-5) to the left of the rest of the names on your list.

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