Birth Order and Personality

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The objective of this study is to determine the correlation between birth order and personality traits. Research has shown that oldest children are more likely to be natural leaders, perfectionists, and hard working. Middle children are more likely to be secretive about feelings, independent, and diplomatic. Youngest children are more likely to be rebellious, outgoing, and spoiled. Only children are more likely to be early maturing, perfectionists, and controlling. In this study 150 Burlington High School students filled out a survey about their personality and birth order. The data received was tallied and made into pie graphs. They show that there is a positive correlation between birth order and personality.

Many people believe that birth order affects personality. Supposedly, the oldest child is bossy, the middle child is misunderstood, and the youngest is spoiled rotten. But are these stereotypes really true? There are studies that have been done proving that birth order actually does affect personality.

Frank Sulloway, a professor at the University of California Berkeley states that birth order helps to shape personality. His study was done with a group of 5000 subjects from 5 different countries. His study shows that first-born children are less extroverted and less open to new experience as opposed to latter-born children. His study also shows that later-born children are more likely to be rebellious (Steve Connor, 2007).

A man named Alfred Adler was the first to study birth order, and how it can affect you. His studies show that the oldest-born children tend to suffer from excessive
responsibility. He also says that the last-born children are very likely to be overindulged, pampered, and spoiled (Connor, 2007).

Joy B. Wilson at Missouri Western State University conducted a study with a group of 50 random college students of all ages and genders. In her study she found oldest-born children more likely to be mature, independent, intelligent, and good leaders. She found middle-born children more likely to be carefree, humorous, easygoing, friendly, and sensitive. She found the last-born children more likely to be friendly and disobedient (Wilson, 2009).

Tiffany L. Frank, a doctoral candidate at Adelphi University did a study on how birth order affects personality. Her study shows that oldest-born children are perfectionists and nurturing, middle-born children are independent and secretive, and last-born children are outgoing and extroverted (CBS News, 2010).

Linda Blair, a psychologist, studies how birth order affects personality. She states that middle-born children are diplomatic because they are often the sibling that is forced to compromise. Blair says last-born children are more outgoing, charming people who enjoy being the center of attention. They are more likely to be rebellious because it is easier for them to get away with breaking the rules than it was for their older siblings. She states that only children are more likely to be perfectionists. They are also responsible because they are good at planning, and organizing (Blair, 2011).

Carl Pickhardt’s study shows that only children are said to be more controlling because they are anxious about making mistakes or not meeting the high standards that are put upon them. They are also early-maturing because they spend more time with adults (Pickhardt, 2009).
Method

Participants: The participants in our study include 147 randomly selected Burlington High School Students. Fifty four students said they were first-born children, 32 were middle-born children, 48 were last-born children, and 13 were only children.

Materials: The materials that were used in this study include a survey asking which birth order they are, and if they have the certain traits that correlate with their birth order (Appendix A). The traits that correlate with first-born children are hardworking, natural leader, perfectionist, and nurturing. The traits that correlate with middle-born children are diplomatic, independent, secretive about feelings, and laid-back. The traits that correlate with last-born children are spoiled, charming, outgoing, and rebellious. The traits that correlate with only children are perfectionist, mature, responsible, and controlling.

Procedure: In this study, the surveys were distributed to 20 random homerooms at Burlington High School. Once the surveys were completed, they were tallied. First they were put into four groups, according to birth order. Once they were grouped in to birth order, they were tallied if they did or did not attain their corresponding personality traits.

Results

After the surveys were tallied and counted the researchers found that birth order affecting personality was mostly true. Out of the 54 first-born children, when asked if they were hardworking, 49 answered yes, and five answered no (Appendix B). When asked if they were natural leaders, 31 answered yes, 21 answered no, and two chose not to answer (Appendix C). When asked if they were a perfectionist, 25 answered yes, and
29 answered no (Appendix D). Finally, when asked if they were nurturing, 36 answered yes, and 18 answered no (Appendix E). In our study, it shows that oldest-born children are more likely to be hardworking, natural leaders, and nurturing, rather than a perfectionist as opposed to other siblings.

Out of the 32 middle-born children, when asked if they were independent, 28 answered yes, and four answered no (Appendix F). When asked if they were diplomatic, 13 answered yes, 18 answered no, and one chose not to answer (Appendix G). When asked if they were secretive about their feelings, 14 answered yes, and 18 answered no (Appendix H). When asked if they were laid-back, 28 answered yes, and four answered no (Appendix I). Our study showed that middle-born children are more likely to be independent and laid-back, rather than secretive and diplomatic as opposed to other siblings.

Out of 48 last-born children, when asked if they were spoiled, 15 answered yes, and 33 answered no (Appendix J). When asked if they were charming, 30 answered yes, 17 answered no, and one chose not to answer (Appendix K). When asked if they were outgoing, 39 answered, eight answered no, and one chose not to answer (Appendix L). When asked if they were rebellious, 30 answered yes, 17 answered no and one chose not to answer (Appendix M). The study showed that last-born children are more likely to be charming, outgoing, and rebellious, rather than spoiled, as opposed to other siblings.

Out of 13 only-children, when asked if they were perfectionists, seven answered yes, five answered no, and one chose not to answer (Appendix N). When asked if they were early-maturing, ten answered yes, two answered no, and one chose not to answer (Appendix O). When asked if they were responsible, 12 answered yes, and one answered
no (Appendix P). When asked if they were controlling, three answered yes, and ten answered no (Appendix Q). The study showed that only-children are more likely to be perfectionists, early-maturing, and responsible, rather than controlling, as opposed to other children.

**Discussion**

There have been many studies that say that the order children are born affects how the characteristics they attain. The studies showed that firstborn children are more likely to be hard working, natural leaders, perfectionists, and nurturing than other children. The researchers found that that is mostly true at Burlington High School. All of those characteristics apply to most first-born children except for perfectionism. The studies also showed that middle children are most likely to be independent, diplomatic, secretive about feelings, and laid-back. The researchers found that half those characteristics apply to most middle children at Burlington High School. The two that don’t apply are secretive and diplomatic. Other research showed that youngest children are more likely to be spoiled, charming, outgoing, and rebellious. Our research showed that almost all those characteristics apply to most youngest children at Burlington High School except for spoiled. Finally, the research showed that only children are most likely to be perfectionists, early-maturing, responsible, and controlling. The researchers found that almost all those characteristics apply to most only children at Burlington High School except for controlling. Our research is very close to the research in the other studies.
References


Appendix A

The following survey is being done for Mr Dow's Psychology class. Please do not put your name on the survey. If for any reason you feel uncomfortable completing the survey, you do not need to complete it. Thank you.

Please circle one of the following:
I am the...

First-Born Child    Middle-Born Child    Last-Born Child    Only Child

Please circle yes to anything that applies to you, and no to anything that doesn't:

Are you...?

Hard-Working       yes no
Independent         yes no
A Natural Leader   yes no
Secretive About Feelings yes no
A Perfectionist    yes no
Nurturing           yes no
Laid-Back           yes no
Outgoing            yes no

Diplomatic       yes no
Spoiled          yes no
Early-Maturing   yes no
Responsible      yes no
Charming         yes no
Rebellious       yes no
Controlling      yes no
Appendix B

First Born- Hardworking

91%

YES

9%

NO
Appendix C

First Born- Natural Leaders

- YES: 57%
- NO: 39%
- No Answer: 4%
Appendix D

First Born- Perfectionist

54%

46%

YES

NO
Appendix E

First Born- Nurturing

- 67% YES
- 33% NO
Appendix F

Middle- Independent

- YES: 87%
- NO: 13%
Appendix G

**Middle- Diplomatic**

- YES: 3%
- NO: 56%
- No Answer: 41%
Appendix H

Middle- Secretive About Feelings

56% NO
44% YES
Appendix I

Middle- Laid Back

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>87%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>13%</td>
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Appendix J

Last Born - Spoiled

- 69% (NO)
- 31% (YES)
Appendix K

Last Born - Charming

- Yes: 63%
- No: 35%
- No Answer: 2%
Appendix L

Last Born - Outgoing

- YES: 81%
- NO: 17%
- No Answer: 2%
Appendix M

Last Born - Rebellious

- YES: 63%
- NO: 35%
- No Answer: 2%

[Pie chart showing the breakdown of responses to the question about being the last born and rebellious.]
Appendix N

Only- Perfectionist

- YES: 54%
- NO: 38%
- No Answer: 8%
Appendix O

Only- Early Maturing

- YES: 77%
- NO: 15%
- No Answer: 8%
Appendix Q

Only- Controlling

- 77% No
- 23% Yes