**Alfred Adler-Theory of Birth Order**

**Amanda Haytasingh**

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Birth order, or family constellation, is Adler’s theory that the order in which you are born has a major impact on how one’s personality develops. Adler believed that the order of birth combined with early social actions the subject would develop certain styles of life. Adler talked about 4 different types of birth orders: First Born, Second Born-which is every child born in between the first born and the youngest, Youngest Child, and the Only Child. (Feist, 85)

First born children, Adler believes are likely to have feelings of power and superiority, high anxiety, and overprotective tendencies. They feel that they are the “ruler of the roost” if you will and receive their parent’s undivided attention. (Feist, 85) The first born child feels dethroned if another child comes along and this is why it is important, according to Adler, that the first born help care for younger siblings. The first born is said to mature more intellectually to higher degree then their other siblings. If the first born is poorly adjusted then they will become insecure, hostile, neurotic, and perverts.

Second born children begin life in a better situation for developing social interest because they have an older sibling to look up to. In Adler’s view a second born child is anyone who is not the first born or youngest child. Adler believes that the second born’s personality is determined by how the first born treats them. For instance, if the first born is hostile towards them then the second born will become highly competitive and vengeful. However, Adler believes that this also makes the second born highly motivated and moderately competitive. (Feist, 87)

The youngest children, Adler believes, are the most pampered and run a high risk of being troubled children. However, they are usually highly motivated to exceed older siblings and want to excel in everything. (Feist, 86) Adler also believes that only children have an inflated feeling of self and are very dependent of others. He believes that that only children are in a unique position in which they don’t compete with another sibling, but against mother and father. (Feist, 86)

When I first decided to write about Adler I was going to agree with his theory, but now I don’t believe his theory to be true. I am the youngest of two children and I probably got more attention as a child, but I was also the child that was expected to succeed. My older brother didn’t graduate high school and is a recovering addict. This, in turn, put more pressure on me to do well in school and hang out with the “correct” people. I never competed with my brother as a kid because I didn’t want to be compared to him. This makes me disagree with his theory.

However, now that I am a mother of two girls I look at things quite differently. Jasmine is 7 years old and Jordan is 5 years old. Jasmine has definitely gotten more attention being the older child. I do expect more from her because she is the oldest. Jasmine has never felt like she was “dethroned” when Jordan was born because she did, in fact, help care for Jordan. Jordan, on the other hand, rules the roost and believes that world revolves around her. She did get a lot of attention when she was younger, but I think she feels that if all the attention is given to her then she will do whatever it takes to get it. She is very competitive with her sister and if she doesn’t win she will have a tantrum. Jordan is no more pampered then Jasmine if I buy Jasmine something I buy Jordan the same thing. This is why I believe that Adler’s theory is not true.

Adler’s theory of birth order does make sense, but it doesn’t take into account all families. There are stepsiblings, half-siblings and even adopted siblings. He doesn’t even take into account single parent families. Adler had a huge influence on psychology today, but with families today his theory just doesn’t work.

References:

Feist, J., & Feist, G. J. (2009). Adler: Indivdual Psychology. *Theories of personality* (7th ed., pp. 85-87). Boston: McGraw Hill Higher Education.