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THE EFFECT OF BIRTH ORDER UPON AFFILIATION WITH
FRATERNITIES AND SORORITIES

by

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B.A. University of Pennsylvania, 1962


Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of


Master of Arts

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

1964

Approved:


Chairman, Board of Examiners


Dean, Graduate School

JUL 1 1964
Date

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INTRODUCTION

Any discussion of birth-order immediately brings to mind the theoretical formulations of Alfred Adler who wrote, "Frequently we can catalogue human beings according to this viewpoint [birth-order] after we have gained sufficient expertness, and can recognize whether an individual is a first-born, an only child, the youngest child, or the like" (Adler, 1927, p. 149). Adler felt that the first-born child is in a uniquely vulnerable position; used to being pampered and the center of attention, the oldest child suddenly finds himself "dethroned" by the birth of a younger sibling. Thus, Adler said, the older child may develop an affection for the past and an attitude of pessimism toward the future, making him conservative. He has a high evaluation of power and authority, both personal and in terms of law and order. Children born in middle positions have the advantage of experiencing cooperation with siblings from the very start. These middle children, Adler said, are in a race with their older pacemakers; they are characterized by their strivings to catch up to and become superior to their older siblings. Such strivings may result in actual victory or neurotic defeat. Adler felt that the plight of the youngest child was almost as bad as that of the oldest. Although the youngest child has not suffered the experience of dethronement, he has many pacemakers. Because he is youngest, he is likely to be pampered. His strivings to gain

superiority over his siblings may meet with eminent success as with Joseph in the Bible, or he may suffer from extreme inferiority feelings since everyone in the environment is older, stronger, and more experienced. Regarding the only child, Adler stated that this child's feelings of competition are directed toward his father because his mother has pampered him. He develops a "mother complex." In later life, when he is no longer the center of attention, he has many difficulties. The only child is often born into a timid and pessimistic environment where the parents are afraid to have more than one child (Adler, 1927; Ansbacher, H. L. & Ansbacher, R. R., 1956, Ch. 15).

According to Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1956), Adler presented his views on the importance of birth-order for the first time in 1918. It is interesting to note, however, that Brill (1922) devoted a chapter to this subject in which he assigned the supposed characteristics of the only child and the last-born to the effects of parental solicitude and lack of competition. Hug-Hellmuth and Oberndorf each complicated the picture with his own psychoanalytical viewpoint about the effects of birth-order (Jones, H. E., 1931). The disagreement between Adler and other psychoanalytical theorists over this issue seems small, however, when placed alongside the discrepancies of a large body of experimental data.

Harold E. Jones (1931) reviewed experimental studies on the effects of birth-order from as early as 1867 up until 1931,

indicating that experimental recognition of birth-order as a possibly important independent variable preceded Adler. Indeed, as early as 1931 Jones stated that a complete review of experimentation on birth-order would have included over 250 titles, the majority of which concerned the effects of birth-order upon physical characteristics and the incidence of disease. Jones reviewed some 88 titles in addition to discussing methodological problems associated with birth-order studies. The experiments reviewed dealt with the effects of birth-order upon such diverse dependent variables as intelligence, language development, school achievement, and emotional traits. For each of these areas of investigation, the evidence was contradictory and filled with disagreement. Jones was forced to conclude his review with the observation that "A child's reactions to the circumstances of his birth order may vary in an extremely complex manner. The emotional or motivational 'average score' for a given birth rank has in itself no explanatory significance and may serve merely to obscure the operation of diverse and sometimes opposing factors" (p. 237).

Murphy, Murphy, and Newcomb (1937) presented an excellent tabular review of birth-order research up to 1937. They reviewed some fifty studies concerning the influence of birth-order upon individual characteristics such as emotional stability, political attitudes, happiness, intelligence, school performance, and a variety of personality traits. Again, for the most part, the evidence was inconclusive and contradictory. The authors stated:

Study of this summary will show why the objective fact of ordinal position in the family, without regard to its meaning to the child, to the siblings, and to the parents, is sure to yield meager psychological results. The question whether the child feels accepted and loved; his emotional relation with his parents; the competition or support which brothers and sisters bring to him; and the specific pressures or areas of freedom and stimulus that come along with one position in the family or another are probably more important than the objective fact of ordinal position (p. 363).

More recently, however, certain research findings on birth-order effects have formed a meaningful pattern. Schachter (1959), in a series of experiments concerned with the relationship of anxiety to affiliation, found that first-born subjects proved to be more anxious and frightened than later-born subjects when confronted with a standard anxiety-provoking situation. First-born college women preferred to be together rather than alone while waiting to be called for an experiment in which they were to be shocked. He further found that first-born subjects were considerably less willing or able to withstand the pain of electrical shock than were later-born subjects. In an attempt to seek out real-life situations to which these findings might be generalized, Schachter re-analyzed the data of several other investigators with an eye to the effects of birth-order. A re-analysis of Bakan's (1949, cited in Schachter, 1959) data revealed that later-borns were overrepresented among alcoholics. Schachter suggested that alcoholism might be considered a non-affiliative means of coping with anxiety. However, Schachter's analysis of Bakan's data has

been criticized by Smart (1963). Schachter cites evidence that first-borns are more likely to accept psychotherapy, an affiliative means of coping with anxiety. An analysis of birth-order data originally collected by Torrance (1954, cited in Schachter, 1959) revealed that first-born jet pilots were less effective than later-born pilots under the actual stress of Korean combat. Data collected by Ehrlich (1958, cited in Schachter, 1959) indicated that first-born males were more conforming than later-borns in a social-influencibility situation. Schachter concluded:

All in all, the rudiments of a supporting case can be made for the suggestion that dependence is one of the crucial variables to be mediated by ordinal position. Independent measures of dependence show systematic relationships with ordinal position. Influencibility, which can be plausibly linked to dependence, seems to be related to ordinal position. If this suggestion is correct, other behaviors which are linked to dependency should eventually prove to be systematically related to ordinal position (p. 88).

Schachter's findings and speculations have instigated a number of studies on birth-order in the last five years. Wrightsman (1960) found that, for first-born subjects, being with others is more effective in reducing anxiety than is being alone. Sarnoff & Zimbardo (1961) found that while the desire to affiliate increases as fear increases, the opposite is true for anxiety. Gerard & Rabbie (1961) found a similar relationship between birth-order and affiliation resulting from fear, but they also found that the effect was differential for the sexes.

Becker & Carrol (1962) found that first-born boys were more

conforming than later-born boys in the Asch (1956) situation. Sampson (1962) found that first-born females were less influential than later-born females while first-born males were more influential than later-born males, and that first-born persons have a higher need for achievement than later-born persons.

A series of studies has indicated that later-borns are more empathetic, sympathetic, and show a greater tendency to identify (Stotland & Dunn, 1962; Stotland & Cottrell, 1962; Stotland & Dunn, 1963; Stotland & Walsh, 1963).

Finally, Ditties (1961) and Capra & Ditties (1962) reported that first-born males were overrepresented among volunteers for an experiment which involved affiliating with small groups. And Suedfeld (1964) reported a preponderance of first-born individuals volunteering for a sensory-deprivation experiment.

The findings of Schachter (1959) and others reported above indicated the greater tendency of first-borns to affiliate, especially under conditions of fear or anxiety; first-borns have been described as being more dependent and more conforming. These considerations led to the hypothesis underlying the present research, that first-born college students will react with greater anxiety to the university situation and will be more likely than later-born students to conform, or more specifically, to affiliate themselves with a fraternity or sorority.

METHOD

Subjects.--The Ss were 100 male and 100 female students at Montana State University. The mean age of the male Ss was 21.6 years from the last birthday with an SD of 4.48 years. The mean age of the female Ss was 20.1 years from the last birthday with an SD of 2.74 years. Using a table of random numbers, the males were randomly selected from all those male students listed by the registrar as sophomores for the spring quarter of 1964. In the same manner, the female Ss were selected randomly from the registrar's list of sophomore women for the same quarter. Sophomore men and women were chosen as Ss for this study because it was felt that the sophomore year is the modal period of affiliation; many have not made their decision as freshmen and others decide to go inactive as juniors and seniors. It should be noted that when interviewed, some students (11%) reported themselves to be juniors rather than sophomores. This discrepancy between the students' reports and the registrar's records may be attributed to a slight lag in the registrar's bookkeeping or to a misunderstanding on the part of the student concerning his true status. This discrepancy was not considered sufficiently important to warrant a new sampling.

Procedure.--All Ss were interviewed in person. All of the males and about half of the females were interviewed by the author. The remaining females were interviewed by the author's wife because

she was able to gain admittance to the women's residence halls. Uniform interviewing procedures were aided by the use of a standard data sheet (see Appendix A) from which the experimenter read each question. In addition, both interviewers rehearsed the procedure together until it seemed satisfactorily uniform.

Information was obtained from each S as to his year and quarter in school, his age and his exact birth-order position, and the age and birth-order position of each of his siblings. Each S was asked whether or not he was affiliated with a fraternity (or sorority). Those who were affiliated were asked why they joined, whether or not they would join if they had it to do over again, and what advantages affiliation offered them. Those who were not affiliated were asked why they did not join, whether or not they would join if they had to do it over again, and what advantages being an independent offered them. Each subject was asked to enumerate the on-campus and the off-campus organizations of which he was a member. Finally, each subject was asked to choose from a five point rating-scale the expression which best described his level of anxiety upon entering college (see Appendix A).

RESULTS

One male and one female were excluded from all statistical analyses because in each case the S had an identical twin which made it impossible to classify the S as either first or later-born. First-born and first-and-only-born children were grouped together

throughout the analyses according to the convention of Schachter (1959) who found no significant differences between these two groups.

All quantitative data were analyzed by the chi-square method. In the case of 2 x 2 contingency tables for chi square, with one degree of freedom, a correction for continuity was employed as suggested by Siegel (1956, p. 107). See Appendix B for a summary presentation of the raw data.

The first analysis had to do with the central hypothesis of the study, that need for affiliation is to some extent dependent upon birth-order. Table 1 presents the distribution of first-

Insert Table 1 about here

born and later-born males as a function of their membership or non-membership in fraternities. In Table 1, it may be seen that about 50% were first-born whether affiliated with fraternities or not. Of the men interviewed, 19% were affiliated with fraternities, while 81% were not so affiliated. In Table 1, $\chi^2 = .002$, with 1 df, which was not significant at the 5% level. Table 2 presents the distribution of first-born and later-born

Insert Table 2 about here

females as a function of their membership or non-membership in sororities. In Table 2, it may be seen that, as with the males, about 50% were first-born whether they were affiliated with sororities

or not. Of the women interviewed, about 35% were affiliated with sororities, while 65% were not. In Table 2, $\chi^2 = .005$, with 1 df, which was not significant at the 5% level.

Many students may have wanted to affiliate but were not able to do so for some non-affiliative reason, such as grade-point deficiency, insufficient financial ability, and so on. Such individuals could indicate their desire to affiliate by stating that they would affiliate if they had it to do over again (see question 6 of Appendix A). For the purposes of this analysis, the "desire to affiliate" classification was defined in terms of those students who actually were in fraternities (or sororities), plus all those who indicated that they would join a fraternity (or sorority) if they had it to do over again. Table 3 presents the distribution

Insert Table 3 about here

of first-born and later-born males as a function of desire or no-desire for membership in a fraternity. It may be seen in Table 3 that about 53% were either in a fraternity or would join one if they had it to do over again, while 47% were not in a fraternity and expressed no desire to join one. In Table 3, $\chi^2 = .009$, with 1 df, which was not significant at the 5% level. Table 4 presents the distribution of first-born and later-born females as a function

Insert Table 4 about here

of desire or no-desire for membership in a sorority. It may be seen in Table 4 that about 55% of the females desired affiliation and 45% did not. In Table 4, $\chi^2=.512$, with 1 df, which was not significant at the 5% level.

Table 5 presents the distribution of first-born and later-born

Insert Table 5 about here

males as a function of high, medium, and low anxiety levels when entering college. The Low Anxiety category was formed by combining "a" and "b" of question 10 (see Appendix A), Medium Anxiety consisted of those who chose alternative "c", and the High Anxiety category was formed by combining "d" and "e". In Table 5, $\chi^2=.131$, with 2 df, which was not significant at the 5% level. Table 6 presents the distribution of first-born and later-born females as

Insert Table 6 about here

a function of high, medium, and low anxiety levels when entering college. In Table 6, $\chi^2=.550$, with 2 df, which was not significant at the 5% level.

It was hypothesized that there might be some relation between anxiety level upon entering college and affiliation with a "Greek" organization. Table 7 presents the distribution of fraternity

Insert Table 7 about here

members and independents as a function of high, medium, and low

anxiety levels when entering college. In Table 7, $\chi^2=.024$, with 2 df, which was not significant at the 5% level. Table 8 presents the same data for females, the distribution of sorority members and independents

Insert Table 8 about here

as a function of high, medium, and low anxiety levels when entering college. In Table 8, $\chi^2=.470$, with 2 df, which was not significant at the 5% level.

In Table 9, membership in some organization (including fraternity,

Insert Table 9 about here

on-campus, and off-campus) and membership in no organization is plotted against birth-order for males. In Table 9, $\chi^2=1.871$, with 1 df, which does not reach the 5% level of significance. Table 10 presents the same information for females, the distribution

Insert Table 10 about here

of first-born and later-born females as a function of membership or non-membership in some organization. In Table 10, $\chi^2=.021$, with 1 df, which was not significant at the 5% level.

It was thought that affiliation with a fraternity or sorority might depend upon the size of the family from which the student comes. The median family size for men was 3. Table 11 contains

Insert Table 11 about here

data used in a median test of the relation between family size and affiliation or non-affiliation with a fraternity. In Table 11, $\chi^2=.887$, with 1 df, which was not significant at the 5% level. The median family size for women was 3, also. Table 12 contains data used in a median test of the relation between family size and

Insert Table 12 about here

affiliation or non-affiliation with a sorority. In Table 12, $\chi^2=.147$, with 1 df, which was not significant at the 5% level.

An inspection of the qualitative data obtained in response to items 5 and 7 (see Appendix A) indicated that they could not be readily quantified in any meaningful way.

DISCUSSION

As the results have indicated, none of the hypotheses of this research was confirmed. Affiliation with a fraternity or sorority was found to be independent of birth-order. Beyond simple membership, even the desire to affiliate with a fraternity or sorority was found to be independent of birth-order. Moreover, anxiety upon entering college, as defined operationally by a five-point rating-scale, was independent of both birth-order and affiliation with a fraternity or sorority. Affiliation with fraternities and sororities was found to be independent of whether the student came from a small or large family. When membership in other organizations, in addition to fraternities and sororities, was taken into account, affiliation was

still found to be independent of birth-order.

How are such negative findings to be explained in the light of other studies, such as those of Schachter (1959) who found affiliation to be dependent upon birth-order? One possible answer lies in the fact that Schachter found that first-borns were more anxious and more likely to affiliate than later-borns in a situation where they were threatened with shock. This first condition of differences in anxiety was not met in the present study. First-born students were not found to be more anxious about their college experience than were later-borns. This lack of anxiety differences between the two groups might account for the fact that there was no difference in affiliative tendency.

A second, and more likely, explanation is that "affiliation," as defined by Schachter (1959), is not a major motive for joining a fraternity or sorority. A primary assumption, implicit in the present study, was that need for affiliation is an important motive in joining a fraternity or sorority. Schachter described this need for affiliation as related to dependency. However, these theoretical constructs may have no relation to the motives which induce a student to join a Greek organization. Indeed, many responses to items 5 and 7 (see Appendix A) indicated that a motive more powerful than "affiliation" in joining these organizations is a desire "to get ahead." Many male students indicated that they joined a fraternity in order to make contacts which might be valuable to them later in life. Similarly, many women indicated

that they joined sororities to develop poise and social graces which would be useful after college. Surprisingly, even a number of men indicated that a primary advantage of fraternity membership was the opportunity to learn "etiquette." In general, men felt the advantages of fraternity membership to be social, but by "social" they often meant not brotherhood, but the opportunity to meet more girls and to make valuable associations. The desire for prestige also seemed to be a major factor among both fraternity and sorority members.

Similarly, membership in a church may be motivated primarily by a belief in God, or by upbringing, rather than the need for "affiliation." And membership in the photography club may be motivated by a genuine interest in photography, rather than a simple desire to affiliate.

Before these findings could be considered to contradict those of Schachter (1959) and others, then, it would be necessary to demonstrate that affiliation was a primary motive for joining fraternities and sororities. The interview data suggest that, in such a situation, there may be many other motives operating which are more important than affiliation. However, if the need for affiliation is determined by birth-order as Schachter found, then it may be concluded from this research that the need for affiliation is not the most important motive in joining fraternities and sororities. Future research should be designed to eliminate the effects of motives other than the need to affiliate.

SUMMARY

The findings of Schachter (1959) and others indicated the greater tendency of first-borns to affiliate, especially under conditions of fear or anxiety; first-borns have been described as more dependent and more conforming. It was hypothesized that first-born students would react with greater anxiety to the college experience and would be more likely to affiliate with a fraternity or sorority than would later-born students. One-hundred male sophomores, 19% of whom were affiliated with fraternities, and 100 female sophomores, 35% of whom were affiliated with sororities, were interviewed. Membership in a fraternity or sorority, the desire for membership in a fraternity or sorority, the level of anxiety about the college experience, and membership in some organization as opposed to membership in no organization, were all found to be independent of birth-order. Moreover, membership in a fraternity or sorority was found to be independent of both family size and the level of anxiety felt upon entering college. Contrary to expectation, interview data suggest that affiliation may not be the chief motivation for joining a fraternity or sorority.

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Table 1
 The Distribution of First-Born and Later-Born Males
 as a Function of Membership or Non-Membership
 in Fraternities

	First-Born	Later-Born	Total
Member	10	9	19
Non-Member	40	40	80
Total	50	49	99

$\chi^2 = .002, df = 1, p > .95$

Table 2
 The Distribution of First-Born and Later-Born Females
 as a Function of Membership or Non-Membership
 in Sororities

	First-Born	Later-Born	Total
Member	17	18	35
Non-Member	32	32	64
Total	49	50	99

$\chi^2 = .005, df=1, p > .90$

Table 3

The Distribution of First-Born and Later-Born Males
as a Function of Desire or No-Desire for
Membership in a Fraternity

	First-Born	Later-Born	Total
Desire	26	26	52
No-Desire	24	23	47
Total	50	49	99

$\chi^2 = .009$, $df = 1$, $p > .90$

Table 4

The Distribution of First-Born and Later-Born Females
as a Function of Desire or No-Desire for
Membership in a Sorority

	First-Born	Later-Born	Total
Desire	29	25	54
No-Desire	20	25	45
Total	49	50	99

$\chi^2 = .512$, $df=1$, $p > .30$

Table 5
 The Distribution of First-Born and Later-Born Males
 as a Function of High, Medium, and Low Anxiety
 Levels when Entering College

	First-Born	Later-Born	Total
Hi-Anxiety	18	18	36
Med-Anxiety	12	13	25
Lo-Anxiety	20	18	38
Total	50	49	99

$\chi^2 = .131, df=2, p > .90$

Table 6

The Distribution of First-Born and Later-Born Females
as a Function of High, Medium, and Low Anxiety
Levels when Entering College

	First-Born	Later-Born	Total
Hi-Anxiety	21	23	44
Med-Anxiety	9	11	20
Lo-Anxiety	19	16	35
Total	49	50	99

$\chi^2 = .550$, $df = 2$, $p > .70$

Table 7
 The Distribution of Fraternity Members and
 Independents as a Function of High, Medium, and
 Low Anxiety Levels when Entering College

	Fraternity	Independent	Total
Hi-Anxiety	7	29	36
Med-Anxiety	5	20	25
Lo-Anxiety	7	31	38
Total	19	80	99

$\chi^2 = .024$, $df = 2$, $p > .98$

Table 8
 The Distribution of Sorority Members and
 Independents as a Function of High, Medium, and
 Low Anxiety Levels when Entering College

	Sorority	Independent	Total
Hi-Anxiety	27	17	44
Med-Anxiety	14	6	20
Lo-Anxiety	23	12	35
Total	64	35	99

$\chi^2 = .470$, $df = 2$, $p > .70$

Table 9

The Distribution of First-Born and Later-Born
Males as a Function of Membership or
Non-Membership in some Organization

	First-Born	Later-Born	Total
Member	38	30	68
Non-Member	12	19	31
Total	50	49	99

$\chi^2=1.871$, $df=1$, $p>.10$

Table 10
 The Distribution of First-Born and Later-Born
 Females as a Function of Membership or
 Non-Membership in some Organization

	First-Born	Later-Born	Total
Member	34	33	67
Non-Member	16	16	32
Total	50	49	99

$\chi^2 = .021, df=1, p > .80$

Table 11
 The Distribution of Fraternity Members and
 Independents as a Function of the Number
 of Children in the Family

	Fraternity	Independent	Total
More than 3	5	33	38
3 or fewer	14	47	61
Total	19	80	99

$\chi^2 = .887$, $df=1$, $p > .30$

Table 12
 The Distribution of Sorority Members and
 Independents as a Function of the Number
 of Children in the Family

	Sorority	Independent	Total
More than 3	11	24	35
3 or fewer	24	40	64
Total	35	64	99

$\chi^2 = .147$, $df=1$, $p > .70$

APPENDIX A

Affiliation Questionnaire

1. Name:
Address:
Telephone:
2. Are you a 1st, 2nd, or 3rd quarter sophomore?
3. Position, sex, and age of siblings and subject.
4. Are you affiliated with a fraternity (sorority)?
yes no
5. Why did you join (not join) a fraternity (sorority)?
6. If you had it to do over again, would you join a fraternity (sorority)?
yes no
7. What are the advantages of belonging (not belonging) to a fraternity (sorority)?
8. What on-campus organizations are you a member of? Total _____
9. What off-campus organizations are you a member of? Total _____
10. How anxious (worried) did you feel when you came to college?
(a) not anxious at all (b) only mildly anxious
(c) fairly anxious (d) quite anxious (e) extremely
anxious

A P P E N D I X B