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## EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY & COUNSELLING | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Is birth order really important in peer relationship? A grounded theory approach

Kerem Coşkun<sup>1\*</sup>, Özkan Çikrikci<sup>2</sup> and Yavuz Topkaya<sup>3</sup>

**Abstract:** This article seeks to develop a theory about the importance of peer relationship among the oldest of the youngest children who have finished pre-school education and already started primary school. In the study, observation was employed to collect data from 22 children. The data were analysed through the grounded theory approach, in which data are dealt with inductively. In the data analysis, written-up observations were processed with open coding, axial coding and selective coding. As a result of the data analysis, we argue that only children are inclined to get approval from their peers to extend their social interest and remain unresponsive; the youngest siblings compete for the teacher's interest and are inclined to attract attention and remain unresponsive due to acceptance difference; the oldest siblings conceive attracting attention as a way of compensating for loss of family interest.

**Subjects:** Behavioral Sciences; Development Studies; Development Theory; Education

**Keywords:** birth order; sibling relationships; Adlerian theory; grounded theory; peer relationships

### 1. Introduction

In the world, approximately 90% of the population has a sibling. The significance of this should not be underestimated in terms of child's individual development (Milevsky, 2011). However, we argue that researchers working in different areas of psychology have not conducted adequate studies as to the relationships among siblings and the impact of these in different parts of life (Buist, Deković, & Prinzie, 2013).

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

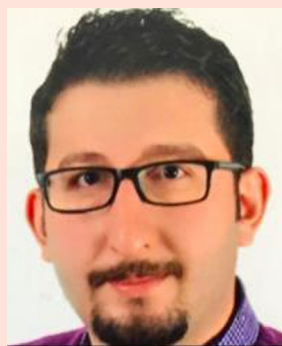
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### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

We sought out the impact of birth order among the first-grader Turkish Primary School Children. We conducted study in grounded theory and obtained data through participant observation. Field notes were written and data were analysed in three steps. Findings of the research were interpreted according to the birth order theory.



Özkan Çikrikci

As familial atmosphere is the first group experience for a child, it is one of the most crucial components in the development of a child's individual personality traits. The child learns innumerable things about life from familial life and it provides an introduction to relationships among other people such as parents and siblings (Stewart, Stewart, & Campbell, 2001). Children spend much of their time with sisters and brothers at home. As a consequence of this, brothers and sisters become their companions. This is why children can be influenced in their attitudes and thoughts (Dunn, 1988; Sanders, 2004). Relationships among siblings are the first sample of real life. There are many reasons to suggest that sibling relationships are unique and important for each sibling. Various and diverse interactions, permanence of relationships, lots of shared experiences and accessibility are the effective processes in the development of a child's social and emotional skills as well as relationships (Cicirelli, 1982). By means of the above-mentioned opportunities, the child can constitute interconnections between family and friendship experiences (Updegraff, McHale, & Crouter, 2002) and begin to develop the process of sibling socialization.

Kramer and Conger (2009) identified a set of categories which may be effective to account for the sibling socialization process. The content of these categories is as follows: "Observational learning and instruction; Sibling interactions that promote the development of social understanding and socio-emotional competencies; Setting aspirations, identity formation, and deidentification in response to perceived sibling characteristics; Shared sibling experiences that lead to unique forms of support and understanding; Nonshared experiences that lead to individual differences and, perhaps, resentment" (p. 3). As defined by their categories, it can be easily concluded that sibling interactions are more powerful for child socialization process than relations with parents.

One of the most important matters in the development of child psychological traits is birth order. Birth order can be considered as a key factor of the family environment affecting the children's behaviours (McLoyd, 1998). It can be concluded that there is a close relationship between birth order and family structure (Retherford & Sewell, 1991).

The concept of birth order was first dealt with by Galton (1869) and this received huge attention. The first person who further developed birth order is Alfred Adler. Alfred Adler handled it according to the psychoanalytical view (Freese, Powell, & Steelman, 1999). According to Adler, the sibling type can be divided into five sections. These are the first-born, the second child, the middle child, the youngest child and the only child. Each position has a different psychological characteristic (Adler & Brett, 2009). The first-born children differ from other siblings because they have experienced the trauma of the arrival of their brother or sister. Therefore, they feel themselves as if they were dethroned by the coming of the next brother or sister (Adler & Brett, 2009). In other words, the first-born children monopolize their parents during early years of his life but are dethroned by new-born brother or sister. This dethronement orients the first-born children to imitate their parents, identify and obey the rules. This obeying makes them more conservative, supportive of existing authorities and punitive. Also in the literature, the first-born children have been stated to be as pessimists, defeatists, jealous, conservative, curious, aggressive, dependant to their adults, more vulnerable to stress and social pressures (Bayer, 1966). The middle never has such a monopoly. The youngest is never dethroned (Adams, 1972).

One of the other sibling types is the only children. They don't confront with any sibling rivalry. The only children's position in his parents' eyes is similar to the oldest child's position in his early years of life in terms of parent attention and interest (Adler & Brett, 2009). There are two views about the only children. The first view claims that this kind of sibling is different from other types of siblings and the only children are oriented in the way of their adults. Therefore, it can be said that they reflect their parents' characteristics. There is another view of the only child suggesting that the only children are not adult-oriented, they are self-centred and ego-motivated. The only children receive such a considerable attention from their parents that they are more likely than the any children sharing their parents with siblings to see his social world as revolving around themselves (Adams, 1972).

Both sibling relationships and birth order have an influence on forming family structure (Hoffman, 1991; Howarth, 1980; McHale, Updegraff, & Whiteman, 2012). Due to the fact that existing siblings, which is an important issue for family atmosphere, can cause various impacts on each other's development, it can be easily discovered that birth order has close relationships with sibling relationships when investigating relations among siblings with regard to the theoretical background.

Since the present study was designed to account for diversities of peer relationships in the school environment, it has concentrated on linkages with the term of birth order based on the Adlerian Theory. Peer relationships need to be examined according to birth order, which we argue is an effective framework in determining behaviour and attitude styles (Manaster, 1977), and sibling relations rather than reflections of family atmosphere. Furthermore, we propose that birth order gives information about interpersonal relationships as well as family relations (Stewart & Campbell, 1998). Buhrmester (1990) indicated that there are various barriers to developing healthy peer relationships. Parent-child relationships and family atmosphere including sibling relationships particularly dependant on birth order have a great effect on peer relationships, especially in the process of school adjustment (Buhrmester, 1990).

In general, examining the relationships among peers in childhood, researchers run across the reality as to the influential concerns of these relations. In accordance with the reality, individual traits and interpersonal coactions are sine qua non elements on shaping the structure of peer relationships in social environment including some facts being related to child's characteristics (Song, 2006). Peer relations (also called peer ecologies) made up of vertical and horizontal structures identify children's microsystem involving children interacting with, influencing and socializing one another. The vertical structures refer to a dimension of social power. Social power indicates the acceptance of children in peer groups by the child or children who seems as a source of legitimate peer authority. There are two main subjects, namely social status and impact, affecting the forms of vertical structure. These subjects give rise to some differences on children's behaviour and interactions of peers. As a result of differences about the social status, the hierarchic structure appears to determine which child is valuable, powerful or invaluable (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003). In addition, another structure usually called social impact accounts for child's social visibility in peer groups. Becoming a socially visible child among peers requires acquiring the number of positive and negative nominations and to display those with high scores (Koşir & Pečjak, 2005).

In the literature, the two classification systems, which are the most frequently used, in relation to peer relationships in the school environment attract much more attention. Researchers (Coie & Dodge, 1988; Newcomb, Bukowski, & Pattee, 1993) make mention of their systems investigating relations among students into five groups as follows: *popular students*, who are attractive, liked, seldom disliked and prefer spending time with other groups; *rejected students*, who are not well liked and preferred in the group; *controversial students*, whose friends in peer group are hesitant to like or dislike them; *neglected students*, who are liked by very few of group members; *average students*, who capture an average attraction from others in group (Koşir & Pečjak, 2005).

According to Stocker and Dunn (1990), the question of which mechanism may link peer relationships needs to be investigated, though this is a very difficult process. We well know that there are many factors affecting and predicting peer relationships. The predictors of peer relationships have been investigated in several studies, the results of which have shown that parental management (Mounts, 2002), family dynamics (McHale, Johnson, & Sinclair, 1999), parent-child relationships (Clark & Ladd, 2000), family ecology (Dishion, 1990), parents' involvement (Updegraff, Kim, Killoren, & Thayer, 2010; Updegraff, McHale, Crouter, & Kupanoff, 2001), sibling relationships (Brody, 1998; McHale et al., 2012), gender roles (Fabes, Martin, & Hanish, 2004; Moran & Eckenrode, 1991) and self-esteem (Bolger, Patterson, & Kupersmidt, 1998) played a significant predicting role in relationships among peers. As a consequence of the studies above, there appears to be evidence that peer relationships might be related to birth order. Birth order can be accepted as one of the remarkable and unique concerns in peer relations. The present study was designed first to observe relationships of

children, who were accepted new at school, in natural settings with regard to birth order, to reveal the possible linkages between peer relationships and birth order and finally to share results with researchers so as to provide new viewpoints into the peer relationships.

## **2. Methodology**

There are many ways that reality can be discovered in the social sciences. Research in the social sciences seeks to predict and control variables (1), interpret phenomenon (2) and emancipate human beings (3) (Habermas, 1972). In the present study, we aimed to interpret peer relations among the first graders in terms of birth order theory. In the epistemological sense, interpretation assumes that reality doesn't stand independently from the mind and the mind constructs the realities through concepts. In addition to that, concepts are derived from single events. Grounded theory operates with concepts based on single events (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this present example of grounded theory, the researchers began with particular and specific events and then developed this into more general concepts by interacting with the data—flowing from bottom to up so that a theoretical construct was revealed that could explain the events in the data.

Grounded theory focuses on social process and interaction under definite contexts or environments rather than just on participants' meanings and experiences about the phenomena (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Moreover, grounded theory aims to discover in what context the social processes or the interactions occur so that the researchers can disclose the pupils' behaviours and relations in terms of the birth order theory. Therefore, the main rationale for using grounded theory in this study is to explain and understand the reflections of sibling types to children's relationships during the transition from preschool period to primary school period.

In this ethnographic study, qualitative methods were employed. In-depth observations were undertaken in the natural classroom context (Patton, 2005). Although there are no common ways of analysing qualitative data in the grounded theory approach, one of the most comprehensive and systematic paradigms in qualitative research (Denzin, 1997) offers intense understanding about what's going on in natural settings.

### **2.1. Setting**

The study was conducted in a school where the majority of the students come from middle-class families. The students in the classroom had already been taught skills in literacy and numeracy, therefore the walls in the classroom were covered by symbols of letters, basal reader texts and a poster of the four seasons. We would argue the classroom atmosphere was calm and conducive to learning.

### **2.2. Sample**

The sample was chosen to include peer relationships of children in terms of birth order during transition between preschool and primary school. After ethical consent and approval were taken from the participant children, their classroom teacher and parents, the research sample consisted of 22 children, whose age was 7 years, who participated in the study. Ten of them were the oldest children, 6 of them were the only children and 6 of them were the youngest children.

### **2.3. Ethical standards**

Before participant observation commenced, ethical consents and approvals from the participant children, their classroom teacher and their families were taken. Moreover, official research permission was taken from the Ministry of National Education. After participant observation ended, all field notes were read to the participant children, shared to the classroom teacher and sent to the parents.

### **2.4. Validity and reliability**

In qualitative research, validity and reliability terms refer to believability, honesty, expertise and integrity of the researchers (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Huberman & Miles, 2002). Because of the fact that three researchers of the present study observed and obtained data for four months, check-coding is necessary in order to supply reliability and validity.

### 2.5. Procedure of data analysis

Open coding is the process through which a researcher can reduce the bulk of data into more manageable number of units, investigate and identify single events, object, action or interaction. Data are unpacked and scattered into discrete units and each of them is labelled as a concept during open coding. This means that the inductive process starts by identifying different concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding depends on reading data line by line. Field notes on observations were read iteratively and line by line. Regularities from the field notes were found. As a result of open coding based on single events, “Management with Persuasion”, “Management with Force”, “Effort to Receive Approval”, “Failure in Receiving Approval”, “Unresponsiveness due to Difference between School and Family Settings”, “Unresponsiveness due to Lack of Social Skills”, “Unresponsiveness due to Lack of Stimulation to Act”, “Unresponsiveness to Struggling”, “Rivalry for the Interest”, “Drawing Attention due to Accustomed to Becoming Family Focus”, “Grabbing Attention to Compensate Family Focus” and “Coping” were revealed as concepts from the data obtained through the observation. The concepts discovered from the open coding vary along a continuum based on their properties or dimensions.

Axial coding is the second step of the grounded theory in which the concepts discovered in the open coding are related to categories, that is higher level concepts. Relating the concepts to categories offers broader explanation for the concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The concepts derived from the data vary based on their properties along a continuum. During axial coding, such variation between *Management with Force* and *Management with Persuasion* was observed that the category was named as *Management*. Because of the fact that a dimensional change was discovered between *Effort to Receive Approval* and *Failure in Receiving Approval*, this category was named as *Approval*. There appeared to be conceptual qualitative variation among *Unresponsiveness due to Difference between School and Family Settings*, *Unresponsiveness due to Lack of Social Skills*, *Unresponsiveness due to Lack of Stimulation to Act* and *Unresponsiveness to Struggling*. Therefore, the four concepts were connected to the Unresponsiveness category. Finally, conceptual variation among the concepts of *Rivalry for the Interest*, “Drawing Attention due to Accustomed to Becoming Family Focus” and “Grabbing Attention to Compensate Family Focus” was observed. Those concepts were related to the category of Drawing Attention. Finally, as a result of axial coding, *Management*, *Approval*, *Unresponsiveness* and *Drawing Attention* were discovered from the concepts based on their dimensional variations.

In the grounded theory research process, understanding broader social context enables us to make sense of macro-level interaction that may have an impact on participant children’s actions and interactions as a social group (Chamberlain-Salaun, Mills, & Usher, 2013). Therefore, in axial coding while the categories were being defined, the children’s familial backgrounds were being taken into consideration. Open coding and axial coding processes are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Concepts and their categories emerging from open coding and axial coding**

Categories	Concepts
1. Management	1a. Management with force
	1b. Management with persuasion
2. Approval	2a. Effort to receive approval
	2b. Failure in receiving approval
3. Unresponsiveness	3a. Unresponsiveness due to difference between school and family settings
	3b. Unresponsiveness due to lack of social skills
	3c. Unresponsiveness due to lack of stimulation to act
	3d. Unresponsiveness to struggling
4. Drawing attention	4a. Rivalry for the interest
	4b. Drawing attention due to being accustomed to gaining family focus
	4c. Grabbing attention to compensate family focus

## 2.6. Management

“The teacher asked the children to dramatize a play about altruism. Berk, the youngest sibling of two children, was explaining something furiously and putting pressure with intimidation on the children who were arguing with him. Eventually Berk managed to convince using force”. The example above was labelled as “Management with Force”. Berk is the youngest sibling. Therefore, he may be used to struggling with violence with his older sibling. When he is in classroom settings, he employs similar violence to solve problems.

“The teacher asked the children to read a poem with their desk mates. Ezgi who is an only child, held up her right hand and her friend’s left hand to get permission from the teacher in order to participate in an activity but her desk mate did not seem to be interested in participating in the activity. Ezgi coaxed and convinced her desk mate. After the teacher permitted them, they performed the poem.” This example was coded as “Management with Persuasion”. Ezgi is as such the sociable only child—she does not know how to struggle with peers due to a lack of rivalry in her family environment. As a result, she prefers to solve problems with persuasion rather than intimidation or violation. Therefore, the difference between the two examples indicates the only child’s preference and the youngest sibling’s preference when they encounter a discussion. As a result of axial coding, the example about Berk was subcategorized as “Management with Force” and the example about Ezgi was subcategorized as “Management with Persuasion”. Both subcategories were related to the Management category.

## 2.7. Approval

In spite of warnings from the teacher Ommar Can, who is an only sibling and isolated from many of the peers, stood up, came to Eren and Berk but they neglected him. Afterwards Ommar can stood up again, came to Metehan and Dilanur and told them something. They responded to him. He repeated this behaviour three times until the teacher warned him. Ommar disregarded his teacher’s warning. Eventually the teacher interrupted.

This example was dimensionalized as “Effort to Receive Approval”. Ommar Can is so alone in his family environment that he is inclined to be shown affection and love from his parents. However, he may feel the need to broaden the range of channels which provide him with love and affection. Therefore, he may aim to open up his social interest out of his family environment. Getting approval may be one of the ways of opening up his social interest. For this reason, he violated the classroom rules and did not obey warnings from his teacher to provide himself with social interest. His first attempt did not work but his second attempt seemed to. He went on shuttling to talk with Metehan and Dilanur in spite of serious warnings from the teacher.

It was a break, Ommar Can, the only child, took out a biscuit. He divided the biscuit into three pieces and shared Hassan who is his desk mate and Vural standing one desk back. Vural accepted and took the biscuit. They spent the break together

This example was dimensionalized as “Effort to Receive Approval”. Ommar, mentioned above, has a lack of acceptance from his peers. In addition, only siblings are expected to be selfish and tend not to share anything (Adler & Brett, 2009). However, in the case of a lack of acceptance from peers, the only sibling prefers to abandon his selfishness to be accepted by his peers. In other words, being accepted by his peers outweighs his selfishness. As an only child, Ommar Can may desire to seek out social interest. He may have found sharing his belongings as a way of extending social interest. Ommar Can could have felt a difference in level of acceptance and approval between school and family; therefore, he may have aimed to reduce the difference between the two environments. Both of dimensions can be considered *Approval As a Main Drive to Act*.

Ada, who is the older sibling of two children, dropped his pencil sharpener accidentally. As soon as Ommar Can, the only child, saw that Ada's pencil sharpener was on the ground, he leant and took the pencil sharpener. He gave the pencil sharpener to Ada but she retook it and disregarded Ommar Can. Ommar Can was disappointed and pretended as if he had not.

The example was coded as "Approval" and dimensionalized as "Fail in Receiving Approval". Ommar Can, who is the only child, may have felt to achieve his goal in expanding social interest out of his family. However, his trial was not successful.

Taylan held up his arm to read a poem. The teacher permitted him. He read the poem in his mind. The teacher was very impressed by his performance, praised him, and asked the whole class to clap him. On the other hand clapping from the class was not enough.

The example above was coded as "Approval" and dimensionalized as "Effort to Receive Approval". Taylan is an only child. Therefore, his parents might care about him too much and become over protective of him. Over protective parent attitudes and excessive family attention may have impaired his social skills. In order to compensate for his social deficiency, he might have chosen to become devoted to instructional tasks.

There was a dimensional variation in terms of the outcome between Failure in Receiving Approval and Effort to Receive Approval. Both of the concepts were clustered under the Approval category.

## **2.8. Unresponsiveness**

Alin, the youngest sibling, was insensitive from the beginning of the lesson. Her teacher reacted to her unwillingness and inventiveness. However she was still insensitive and unwilling. After that the teacher gave up criticizing and said that what you did and such a successful student should do basic tasks. The teacher aimed to motivate her through this approach but her unwillingness and insensitiveness did not disappear.

This example was dimensionalized as "Unresponsiveness Due to Difference Between School and Family Settings". Alin, the youngest sibling, is accustomed to being the centre of attention in the family context but in school she can't find the same level of importance as she receives in her family environment. Therefore, it is possible to state that there is a difference in terms of social attention between the classroom setting and the family setting so she becomes uninterested in the activity organized in the classroom in order to receive attention from her peers and teacher. As a result, she may have developed an unresponsive manner as a way of receiving attention.

Taylan had typical characteristics of an only child. Neither was he speaking with his desk mate, nor he was coming into interaction with other peers. He had isolated himself from the classroom. He accepted his situation in the classroom and seemed to give up the struggle.

The example above was coded as dimensionalized as "Unresponsiveness Due to Lack of Social Skills". Taylan, the only child, may not have expanded his social skills from the family setting to the classroom setting; therefore, this loneliness may have caused his social skills to be impaired. Insufficient social skills, in turn, may have hindered him from extending his social environment. As Taylan is an only child who does not have any rival in the family throne, it is possible that this may have impaired his development of social skills.

Ommar Salih, the only child whose parents are divorced and lives with his aunt and grandfather, dropped Emmir Hassan's pencil box unwittingly. Emmir Hassan, the oldest sibling of three children, stood up and hit Ommar Salih. However he did not react to the attack from Emmir Hassan.



This example was dimensionalized as “Unresponsiveness to Struggling”. Emmir Hassan can struggle with his other siblings, whereas Ommar Salih neither receives any approval and love nor does he receive any acceptance from his friends. This failure in receiving approval from parents and friends may make him weaker in his ability to respond and cope with the demands of his environment.

Berk was not listening to his teacher and Hassan did not seem to be interested in the activity given by his teacher. Although the teacher tried to make him motivated, he still did not become interested. Hassan was turning back, right, and left, and speaking with his friends, Berk, Andac, Efsa. He received positive feedback from them. No matter how hard the teacher made effort to make him motivated, she did not achieve this.

This example was dimensionalized as “Unresponsiveness Due to Lack of Stimulation to Act”. Because of the fact that Hassan is an only child, he may receive much acceptance and become the focus of the family. Moreover, he is an outgoing and sociable person in the classroom so his behaviours were responded to positively by his friends. Therefore, he may not have found any need or stimulation to actualize himself because of the higher acceptance from his friends and parents.

There was a dimensional variation among the concepts of *Unresponsiveness Due to Lack of Stimulation to Act*, *Unresponsiveness to Struggling*, *Unresponsiveness Due to Lack of Social Skills* and *Unresponsiveness Due to Difference Between School and Family Settings in terms of their actors, and outcomes*. Those dimensional concepts were related to the *Unresponsiveness* category.

## 2.9. Attracting Attention

The teacher was helping Ommar Salih in his reading, Berk, the youngest sibling, stood up his desk and said that he had finished reading the given text. Berk also asked the teacher whether his performance in the given task was good or poor. The teacher said that well-done! His performance was good enough but he had to go back to his desk and sit down.

This example was dimensionalized as “Rivalry for the Interest”. Berk who had experienced a shift in family focus from his older sibling to him tried to grab the teacher’s attention. He may have seen Ommar Salih as rival for the teacher’s interest. This stimulation could have been a stimulation to act.

Emir Hassan was late. The teacher asked him why he was late. While he was responding that he fell asleep. Ezgi who is an only child, interrupted the conversation between the teacher and Emir Hassan and said that she went to bed at 21:00 o’clock.

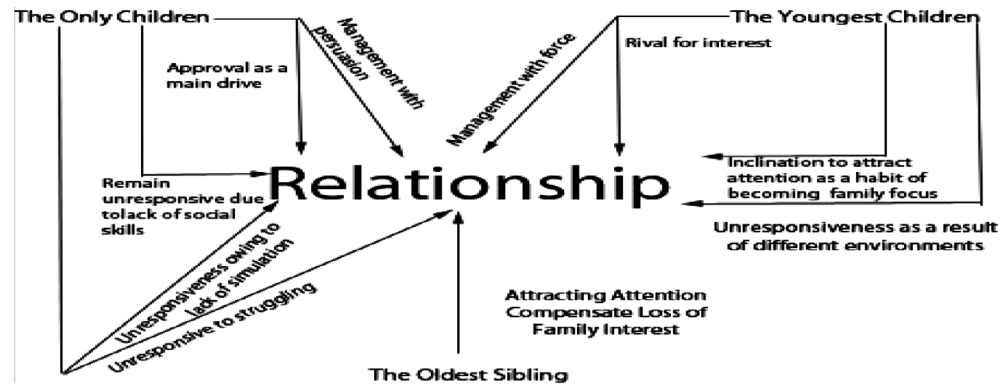
It was break and Eylul, the only children, came to me and said me that she had learnt to read when she was 3 years old. I asked her how she learnt. She responded that she had learnt by asking questions.

These two examples were dimensionalized as “Attracting Attention Due to to Becoming Accustomed to being the Family Focus”. Because of the fact that the only children are single, their parents mainly focus on them. Therefore, these children assume that family life revolves around them. Ezgi said that she went to bed at 21:00 o’clock in order to grab her teacher’s attention and reflect the same importance she is used to expect from her parents. Eylul has such a high level of acceptance and attention at home that she seeks to find equivalent acceptance and attention outside of the family setting.

It was a break. I asked Emir Hassan, the oldest member of two siblings, whether he loves his brother and sister or not. He told me that he loved his sister and brother but his youngest brother disturbed him too much wanted to play with him while he was trying to sleep.

This example was dimensionalized as “Grabbing Attention to Compensate Family Focus”. Emir Hassan may have felt a loss of his throne due to the birth of his siblings. He may have had to cope with the loss of this status and tried to receive parental attention by displaying himself as a good person without breaking the rules.

Figure 1. Theoretical framework.



There was a variation in their properties of the concepts of *Rivalry for the Interest*, *Attracting Attention Due to Accustomed to Becoming Family Focus* and *Grabbing Attention to Compensate Family Focus* with respect to their actors and results. Those concepts were related to the *Attracting Attraction* category.

There were so few events supporting the concepts of *Coping* that it was discarded from the rest of the grounded theory process. Selective coding is the third stage of the data analysis in grounded theory. This is the process of integrating and refining the theory. In selective coding, concepts and their dimensions are identified through open coding and axial coding is integrated to form a larger theoretical scheme in which research findings take the form of theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In order to develop the findings from the study into theory, a central category must be discovered. For this reason, “*Relationship*” was determined as the central category. Theoretical framework was displayed in Figure 1.

As for the theoretical sampling of the construct, a general rule of the grounded theory is to gather and analyse data until each category is saturated enough and no new data come out (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). All of the observational data were analysed and it was understood that there were no data leading to new categories. However, the concept of *Coping* was not supported enough by the data. For this reason, it was removed from the grounded theory process. Another criterion about theoretical sampling is that categories should include variation among the subcategories or concepts. As a result of open coding, axial coding and selective coding, the categories and the core category demonstrated dimensional variations among the concepts and were well constructed.

### 3. Discussion

In this section, how the propositions from the present study relate to the wider literature on birth order will be investigated. We have followed some implications for both theory and observations as to peer relationships in classroom settings. Our theoretical model based on the data analysis from observational data reveals that only children in the classroom needed to receive approval from peers in their relationships. This may stem from the social interest developed by Alfred Adler. Adler (2011) proposed that people seek out feelings of interconnectedness with other people by receiving acceptance. This interconnectedness denotes a shift from self to family, relatives, peers and other persons and develops social interest. Only children have no siblings and might as such have more limited family life than other types of siblings that they may have perceived their peers as presenting an opportunity to develop their social skills. Only children may find getting approval useful in extending their social interest. Therefore, receiving approval may have been the main drive to extend their social interest in their relationships. Also the findings about the only children can be interpreted as that the only children in the classroom found expanding social interest through getting approval more important than being selfish. Another disposition about the only children in our theoretical model is that unresponsiveness was a result of insufficient social skills. Besides, they were unresponsive to struggle. Sulloway (1996) claimed that the only child is deprived of opportunities to compete

and struggle with other siblings. This deprivation may have resulted in only children having a lack of social skills and avoiding any struggle with their peers. This insufficiency makes them potentially maladjusted in the classroom. In the theoretical model, another characteristic of only children is that they were unresponsive due to a lack of stimulation to act. It could be argued that they have a high acceptance from their parents because of the fact that as only children they are the centre of attention in the family (Falbo, 1982). When they find acceptance both from their parents, peers and the teacher, they may have felt an absence of stimulation. Results about the only children suggest that they are inclined to manage peers with persuasion in decision-making. This behaviour pattern can be explained as: when only children spend more time with their parents, they may develop parent-like behaviour (Falbo, 1982). Persuasion may be an example of parent-like behaviour. In this context, persuasion can be considered as parent-driven behaviour. This parent-driven behaviour, persuasion, can be explained through social learning theory (Abramovitch, Corter, & Lando, 1979; Brim, 1958; McHale et al., 2012).

In the theoretical model, the findings about the youngest sibling revealed that the youngest siblings were inclined to compete for the teachers' interest with their peers. The youngest siblings compete for family throne with their older siblings. The youngest siblings never come across dethronement and they have an inclination to surpass their older siblings. Rivalry of the youngest siblings for the teacher's interest in the classroom could have been a reflection of conflict with their older siblings. The second finding about the youngest siblings in the classroom is that they attracted the teacher's attention as they were accustomed to being the centre of family focus. Centrality of family focus is a way of overcoming inferiority complex in family settings (Whiteman, McHale, & Soli, 2011). The classroom environment may have led them to look for a way to overcome inferiority complex. The youngest sibling in the classroom may have preferred to attract the teacher's attention to cope with the inferiority complex. The third finding about the youngest siblings in the classroom is that they remained unresponsive due to the difference between the family settings and the classroom settings. The first-born children are favourite person and their parents are more emotionally close to them than their younger siblings are (Suitor & Pillemer, 2007). In the theoretical model, the youngest siblings in the classroom may have been unresponsive as a result of difference between the family settings and the classroom settings. The youngest sibling receiving high level acceptance from their parents may remain unresponsive when they have low acceptance from the teacher and their peers. This difference may have made them unresponsive in the classroom. The last finding about the youngest siblings is that they are keen to manage their peers with force and intimidation. Coercive and aggressive interaction styles are learnt through conflict with other siblings within the family (Bank, Burraston, & Snyder, 2004; Criss & Shaw, 2005; Patterson, 1984). The youngest siblings of management with intimidation and force may be the result of conflict with other siblings in the family. What makes the only children different from the youngest siblings in terms of management is that they use persuasion but the youngest siblings utilize bullying and antisocial behaviour.

The oldest sibling is another type of sibling that Adler gives importance to in his individual psychology. Findings about the oldest siblings in the classroom indicate that they attracted attention so as to compensate for loss of family interest. All the oldest siblings experience a feeling of dethronement and that their parents overindulge their younger siblings. They always seek and struggle to regain the throne in their family (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Moreover, one of the main characteristic of the oldest siblings is that they seem to be responsible and obeying (Sulloway, 1996). The fact that the oldest siblings attracted attention can be a sign of their trials to retake over their throne in the classroom environment.

#### **4. General conclusion**

Only children conceive getting approval from their peers and the teacher as way of extending their social interest and they remain unresponsive due to a lack of social skills for struggle with their peers. They also are unresponsive because of a lack of stimulus when acceptance from their families, the teacher and their peers is possible. The youngest sibling in becoming a rival for the teacher's

interest and perceives attracting attention as a way to overcome an inferiority complex and the different levels in the acceptance between family and the classroom settings make them unresponsive in their peer relationships. Finally, the oldest siblings also try to reduce the effect of dethronement by attracting attention.

#### 4.1. Limitations of study

As in every study, there are some limitations in our research. One of the limitations is related to ethical considerations. In the present research sample, there is no middle sibling. Therefore, any conclusion about middle sibling was not managed to be produced. Due to the nature of the qualitative study, generalizing the findings couldn't be performed.

Theories in social sciences serve as logical frameworks to comprehend the reality, and it is impossible that theories can explain every event. On the other hand, each event may not always confirm the theories. During our research process, we observed fewer incidents which are not related to the Birth Order Theory. Furthermore, we solely focused on such peer relations based on the Birth Order Theory. Naturally, it is logical to accept that the peer relations can be explained by other social sciences theories such as social learning theory, attachment theory, psychosocial development theory, moral development theory and behaviourism (Ellis, Abrams, & Abrams, 2009).

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