

BIRTH ORDER AND ARTISTIC CREATIVITY¹

RUSSELL EISENMAN

University of Georgia

Alfred Adler is believed to have first presented his views on birth order in 1918 (2, p. 382). With regard to the first born, Adler held that he is typically more conservative than his later-born siblings, due to the first born's being dethroned by the second child, from his position of the little king of the family.

Recent research in the field of specific personality patterns for the various birth-order positions tends to confirm Adler's view. In a session devoted to birth order at the 1963 American Psychological Association, Dember (3) reported that first-born subjects scored much higher on a projective measure of need affiliation—an indication of needing to be with others in conformity; Weiss, Wolf and Wiltsey (11) reported that first borns ranked participation in a *group* experiment as more favorable than did middle or only children; Hall and Barger (5) reported that the first born had tendencies toward seriousness, conservatism, and organizing activities; and Altus (1), taking a page out of Adler for his hypothesis, found that first borns scored higher on a scale derived from the MMPI that measured an orientation toward the status quo.

Previously, in 1959, Schachter (8) had hypothesized that first-born children receive more inconsistent nurturance than later-born, and therefore exhibit more dependency behavior in the form of affiliative responses. The researches following upon Schachter's, and indicating that first-born subjects display more conforming behavior, include that of Ehrlich (4) who found that first-born subjects would more readily change their opinions to conform to fictitious group norms, and the study by Staples and Walters (9) which showed first-born subjects to be more susceptible to social influence.

Regarding the interpretation of such results we should like to call attention to Adler's understanding of the operation of birth order as a factor. In the words of Ruth Munroe, "Adler's point was not that order of birth is in itself important but that the place of the child in the family introduces fairly definable problems which . . . tend to call forth certain characteristic kinds of solution" (7, p. 357).

¹Based on a paper read at Georgia Psychol. Ass., Atlanta, February 7, 1964.
The paper won the award as the best student paper presented.

The present study was designed to test the hypothesis that the first born, being more conservative and conforming than the later born, will also be less original and less artistically creative than the later born.

METHOD

Twenty art students, 16 females and 4 males, served as subjects. Eight were first born, while the remaining 12 were later born.

An art professor acquainted with the work of these subjects rated 12 as artistically creative, and eight as less creative. The professor reported that the artistically creative students showed originality and independence of thought in their art work, compared to repetition and unoriginality for the less creative group.

The Creativity Design Test, devised by Henrickson (6) was administered individually, with the standard instructions. This test has been shown by Taylor and Eisenman (10) to differentiate artistically creative subjects from their less creative peers. In the test the subjects are provided with paper in three different colors, scissors, and glue, and are allowed to construct up to five designs within thirty minutes. The test is scored by giving one point each for: (a) the use of all three colors; (b) overlapping of paper; (c) design covering 51 or more square inches as measured with a transparent grid; (d) three-dimensionality, i.e., any paper in the design sticking up; (e) the use of four to seven shapes in the design; (f) the use of eight or more different shapes. The maximum possible score on any one design is thus six points. Two scorers independently evaluated the designs of the present study; their scores were in complete agreement.

RESULTS

Among the 8 first-born subjects none averaged higher than 3 points per design, whereas among the 12 later-born subjects 5 achieved scores of 4 and above. A test of the difference between the two proportions yielded a z of 2.11 which is significant beyond the .02 level. Thus first-born subjects showed significantly less artistic creativity than those born later, as measured by the Creativity Design Test.

In the judgment of the art professor 4 of the 8 first borns were artistically creative, whereas 8 among the 12 later-born subjects were so judged. While this difference is statistically not significant, it lies in the same direction, in favor of those later born.

SUMMARY

Twenty art students of whom 8 were first born constructed designs on the Creative Design Test, and were rated for artistic creativity by an art professor. Scores on both measures were lower among the first-born than among the later-born subjects although only the design-test results were statistically significant. These results support

the hypothesis, derived from the theoretical pioneering of Adler and the work of others, especially Schachter, that the first born, being more conservative and conforming than the later born, will also be less original and artistically creative than the later born.

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