

# BIRTH ORDER AND COLLEGE MISCONDUCT

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Although social researchers have been giving increasing attention to the effect of sibling position on personality formation and on subsequent behavior, in the past thirty years birth order as a factor in antisocial and problem behavior has been ignored. Yet earlier findings (3, 10, 11, 13, 15) indicated that this relationship merited further study.

Adler (1, pp. 376-382) held that first-borns are typically more conservative than later-born siblings, and that second-borns are likely to be rebellious and not to recognize power or authority. Research, although not specifically directed at this problem, tends to confirm Adler's view. First-born female college students were found by Kammeyer (9) to have a more traditional orientation toward the feminine role than later-born girls. From this he concluded that first-born girls are "conservators of the traditional culture."

These findings are congruent with the results of several studies which have shown that first-born and only child persons are more dependent, more conforming, and more responsive to normative pressures than are later-borns (4, 5, 12, 14). On the other hand, Sletto (13) found the highest proportion of juvenile delinquents among second and third-born children.

All this gave rise to the hypothesis that first-borns should be under-represented among female college students referred for misconduct, while second-borns should be over-represented. It was the purpose of the present study to test this hypothesis.

## METHOD

The ordinal position in the family was obtained from university records for the 199 female college students on whom official disciplinary action was taken during the four-year period ending at the end of the 1967 spring term. This was, in effect, a highly selected population. They were Ss whom civil or campus police or other persons in authority on campus had decided to refer for violations to the university authorities, and whom these decided should be disciplined.

For a chi square test of significance, this distribution was compared with the birth order distribution of a 10% systematic sample, selected from all female students (N = 4335) enrolled during the fall term of 1966-67. The assumption must be made that the proportions of the frequencies would be similar for the four-year period.

The results of the sampling process are included in Table 1. The percentage of first-borns, including only children, is 54%, similar to that reported in the literature. Schachter (12a) summarizing data on students at the University of

Minnesota, on a national sample of college students, on a large sample of medical students, and on students at Columbia College, found in each sample that first-borns were over-represented and above 50%. In several other studies the percentage of first-born students enrolled was also found to be above 50% (2, 6, 7, 8, 16, 18).

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The observed and expected frequencies are shown in Table 1. A chi-square test showed that the observed distribution of sibling

TABLE 1. BIRTH ORDER DISTRIBUTION OF 10% SYSTEMATIC SAMPLE OF FEMALE STUDENTS, FEMALE COLLEGE DISCIPLINARY REFERRALS, AND CHI SQUARE TEST

Ordinal position	Student sample %	Disciplinary referrals observed N	Disciplinary referrals expected N	$\chi^2$
Only	10	22	19.9	.2216
First born	44	68	87.6	4.3853†
Second born	31	76	61.7	3.3142
Third born	11	21	21.9	.0369
Fourth plus	4	12	7.9	2.1278
Total N	432	199	199.0	10.0858*

† $p < .05$ ,  $df = 1$

\* $p < .05$ ,  $df = 4$

positions differed significantly from the expected distribution. The major source of this difference was the disproportionately low number of first-borns among the disciplinary referrals. The relatively high number of observed second-borns compared to the expected frequency approached significance. Thus the results support our research hypothesis.

These findings are in accordance with Adlerian theory according to which, as stated initially, one would expect first-borns to be more conservative and defenders of the status quo. Thus, one would expect them to identify more with existing college rules and be less inclined to break such rules, resulting in misconduct. On the other hand, one would expect second-borns, inclined as they are to be rebels and not to accept the idea of "eternal laws," more likely to be in violation of college rules. Warren (17) found that first-borns of both sexes are more susceptible to the social pressure and more dependent than later borns. The present under-representation of first-borns may be a reflection of this and of wanting to be in tune with others. This can easily be taken as another aspect of conservatism, as can perhaps the greater college-attendance rate of first-borns itself.

## SUMMARY

Among 199 female college students on whom disciplinary action had been taken, first-borns were under-represented, second-borns over-represented, compared to local expected frequencies. This is interpreted as supporting the Adlerian hypotheses of general conservatism among first-borns versus rebelliousness among second-borns.

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