

## BIRTH ORDER AND THE MILITARY: A REVIEW FROM AN ADLERIAN PERSPECTIVE

JAMES M. HERRELL<sup>1, 2</sup>

*Montgomery County Health Department, Rockville, Maryland*

Personal power in the military is comprised of the five types described by French and Raven (7). A first sergeant (SGT), for instance, has (a) *reward power* over an enlisted man (EM) insofar as he can give privilege, rest, relief from duty, and leave; (b) *coercive power* in that he can take these away and administer punishment; (c) *expert power*, to the degree that he is the expert on military matters.

Whether SGT has the two further powers depends on EM. (d) If EM identifies with the military, likes it and admires its leaders, he grants *referent power* to these leaders. (e) Similarly, *legitimate power*, which stems from EM's internalized values which give SGT the legitimate right to influence EM and obligate EM to accept this influence (7, p. 616), is granted by EM.

The first three powers, then, are built into the system, and should be relatively independent of individual differences in those who must suffer the power. In contrast, the last two powers are built into the individual, hence are subject to individual differences. Further, regardless of the source of power, individual differences will determine how effective power is, or, differently put, who does and who does not respond to power.

The present paper is a review of findings regarding the relationship of birth order to power orientation in the military, particularly with regard to Adlerian theory.

### HYPOTHESES DERIVED FROM ADLERIAN THEORY

Adler (a second child) has clearly stated, concerning the relationship between birth order and power: a firstborn "remembers his possession of power in the family when he was an only child and feels it an injustice to be dethroned by a weaker person" (1, p. 131). Firstborns "are believers in power, in rule, and in unbreakable laws. They

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<sup>2</sup>For reprints write to author, 11726 College View Drive, Wheaton, Maryland 20902.

have a tendency to accept despotism quite frankly and without apology. They have the right attitude for positions of power because they have once occupied such positions themselves" (1, pp. 131-132). Later-borns, in contrast, tend to be "more active and aggressive" (1, p. 128), or "indolent" (1, p. 129), less concerned with authority, nonconforming, and rebellious (6).

There is evidence aplenty that firstborns and later-borns differ in their responses to authority. The following examples may serve to illustrate the nature and scope of these differences. Firstborns were found to be more: likely to internalize moral injunctions of parents, with a resultant stronger sense of serious moral responsibility (8); susceptible to instructional set in a sensory deprivation study (24); susceptible to attitude change (9); faithful in keeping appointments for psychological experiments and trusting about the ostensible experimental purpose (14); likely to adhere to terms of probation (15); and conforming (4, 21, 23).

Granted then that firstborns give more allegiance to authority in various situations, what may be predicted for the military situation? The following hypotheses can be derived from Adler's writings.

1. Firstborns, through their "right attitude for positions of power," should be over-represented among military leaders.

2. Firstborns should grant more referent and legitimate power to the military, and therefore find it, with its well-defined power structure, more tolerable than would later borns. Hence, firstborns should be more likely to complete their military tours successfully and less likely to be discharged prematurely from the service. In general, they should be more successful in the service.

3. However, the firstborn has a greater tendency to identify with parents (*e.g.*, 16) and also "feels it an injustice to be dethroned by a weaker person." Of the large number of firstborn college graduates (2) many may resent playing a subordinate role to what they perceive to be semi-literate, high-school-dropout sergeants who would correspond to the "weaker person." This situation should be expected to lead to neurotic-like maladjustment, and would manifest itself in a high incidence of firstborns in mental hygiene clinics.

4. The later-borns should differ from the firstborns in important ways of reacting to the military. The second child especially is described by Adler as being rebellious and aggressive. Youngest

children, intensely competitive but potentially thwarted, may become indolent. Thus, from Adler's descriptions, the later-born should grant less power to the military, have more difficulty in the military, violate more rules, and become involved in more hostile and aggressive acts. Accordingly, we should see later-borns more often discharged early from the service, and more often in stockades, especially for reasons of aggressive or violent crimes.

#### OVER-REPRESENTATION OF FIRSTBORNS AMONG LEADERS

Hypothesis 1, that firstborns are over-represented among military leaders, does indeed find some support in recent data supplied by Campbell (3). He reports 56% firstborns among army officers including active duty generals, and among admirals, with population estimates for firstborns being around 33-38%. However, nearly all officers are college-educated, and there are 50+% firstborns among college students. Furthermore, there are 56% firstborns among those who achieve eminence in general (20). Hence, while firstborns are over-represented in the military, this is not necessarily for reasons of their orientation to the particular military power situation.

However, Campbell also found 42% firstborns among Army SGTs. Since SGTs tend *not* to be college-educated, and the percentage of firstborns in the noncollege population is lower than the 33-38% for the whole population, 42% can be considered quite high. This percentage then lends stronger support to Hypothesis 1 than that obtained for officers.

We may conclude tentatively that, as predicted from Adlerian theory, firstborns are over-represented in the military power structure, both among officers and SGTs.

#### GREATER SUCCESS OF FIRSTBORNS

Hypothesis 2 stipulated that firstborns are more successful in the military than those of other birth-order positions. The finding reported above that the percentage of firstborns among generals and admirals, 56%, is not higher than among other army officers, does not support this hypothesis. But other data do, and we have found none pointing in the opposite direction.

Perhaps the apogee of military attainment is being an astronaut, and firstborns are overwhelmingly over-represented in the astronaut program, as noted by Campbell (3). Fully 94% of astronauts are firstborns. It is difficult not to consider it symbolic that a firstborn

was first to set foot on the moon. According to Lyons (13), even those astronauts who were literally not firstborns were firstborns for practical purposes, in one case the older sibling having died and in the other, a gap of 13 years between older siblings.

Regarding pilots in general, Reinhardt (18), reviewing other works as well as his own, reported that 67% of superior Navy jet pilots were firstborns, compared to only 55% of random Navy jet pilots. In the Air Force 80% of "military achiever" pilots were firstborns, as compared to only 55% of Army helicopter pilot trainees.

Payne (17) reports that among 1023 Air Force Academy freshmen only children and firstborns were rated by peers significantly higher on such traits as leadership, personality, and compatibility, than were other birth-order categories.

Finally, Taintor (26) found in a Coast Guard boot camp that, once past the boot camp phase, later-borns are more likely than firstborn to be referred to a mental hygiene clinic pursuant to their being administratively separated from the service. This suggests that as a group they are less successful than firstborns in adapting to the military.

There is then some quite diverse evidence in support of Hypothesis 2, that firstborns are more successful in the military.

#### OVER-REPRESENTATION OF FIRSTBORNS AMONG NEUROTICS

The following is in reference to Hypothesis 3. Taintor's study (26) in a Coast Guard boot camp separated firstborns from only children. He found that only children were most likely to be discharged either psychiatrically or administratively, compared to any other ordinal position. He found firstborns over-represented among the patients in a psychiatric outpatient clinic. However, firstborns were more likely than later-borns to be diagnosed as neurotic, while later-borns were more likely to be diagnosed as character disorders. And firstborns were found to have the highest retention rate.

Herrell (10, 11) has reported data which complement Taintor's. Sampling soldiers in Vietnam, Herrell found firstborns apparently over-represented in the mental hygiene clinic; however, the source of referral for firstborns and later-borns differed in an important way. Firstborns were more likely to be self-referred, whereas later-borns were most likely to be ordered in by their commanding officers. The tendency of firstborns to seek help for their psychological distress has been noted previously by Schachter (19), which might account

for their over-representation rather than greater difficulties in adjusting to the military. Further, comparison of diagnoses revealed that later-borns are three times more likely to develop psychoses while in the military than are firstborns.

The hypothesis predicting a relatively high level of neurotic symptoms in firstborns in the military is supported by Taintor, but not directly by Herrell who found firstborns and later-borns to have essentially equal likelihoods of being diagnosed neurotic. However, the ethic of the clinic where Herrell's data were collected, and the politics of combat-zone diagnosis, actually precluded a neurotic diagnosis. In effect, persons with neurotic symptoms were usually diagnosed as "situational reactions," and, accordingly, Herrell found this diagnosis more frequently applied to firstborns than to later-borns.

Finally, in terms of disposition, firstborns were far more likely to be returned to duty, whereas later-borns were over twice as likely to be hospitalized or recommended for separation from the Army as unsuitable for military service. (All findings reported in Herrell's study were significant at the .001 level.)

In summary, comparisons of the psychological mode of maladapting to the military indicate that firstborns show less disruptive evidence of maladapting, and are far less likely to become so disabled as to require removal from duty, either through psychiatric hospitalization or separation from the service, than later-borns quite in accord with predictions from Adlerian theory. General support was found for Hypothesis 3.

#### OVER-REPRESENTATION OF LATER-BORNS IN VIOLENT CRIMES

Herrell (11) found among prisoners in a stockade in Vietnam that firstborns had committed far fewer violent crimes than later-borns. They were also more likely to have committed such nonviolent crimes as disobeying an order or going AWOL, two noncivilian "crimes," that is crimes which exist only in the military.

The distinction between civilian and noncivilian crimes yielded intriguing results. Regarding nonviolent crimes, there was a non-significant trend for later-borns to commit *civilian* crimes, such as theft, whereas there was an overwhelming tendency ( $p < .001$ ) for firstborns to commit *noncivilian* crimes, such as AWOL. Given the high number of noncivilian crimes by firstborns, it may appear on the surface as if they showed a greater tendency to maladapt to uniquely

military problems, hence refuting our hypothesis; however, analysis of violent crimes sheds light that is more supportive of Adlerian theory.

Regarding violent crimes, later-borns were significantly more likely than firstborns ( $p < .02$ ) to commit *noncivilian* crimes, such as assaulting on officer, or SGT. In such noncivilian violent crimes actually orientation to power does play a role. The later-born, presumably less respectful of power, is more likely than the firstborn to assault physically a superior, whereas the firstborn, more in awe of power, will resort to nonviolent acts of defiance such as AWOL. These data, then, provide support for Hypothesis 4.

#### SUMMARY

Following a brief statement of the types of military power, exerted and responded to, four hypotheses were suggested on the basis of Adler's theories about birth order and its relation to such power. These were that firstborns would be overrepresented among military leaders; that they would, in general, be more successful in military service; that they would be more prone to neurotic disturbances and less to character disorders than later-borns; and that firstborns would commit fewer violent crimes than later-borns in the military. General support for all of these hypotheses was found in published studies.

It should be noted, however, that similar birth-order differences are found in civilian life (5, 12, 22, 25). This may be an indication of the applicability of Adler's observations on birth order to a variety of situations. Accepting this possibility provides parsimonious and testable hypotheses.

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