

## FIRST BORN AND LAST BORN: A CRITIQUE

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In a recent article Cushna *et al.* (1) reported that when a sample of 327 first and 325 last born children brought to a child development clinic were examined, it was found that "among functional behavior disorders there were twice as many first borns as last borns," 64 versus 32. The authors argue that the data support the Adlerian hypothesis that birth rank influences the life style.

Although the statistical finding is quite significant, we feel that the interpretation, and consequently its theoretical relevance, is quite equivocal, on two counts.

1. From a logical point of view, there exist alternative hypotheses that would adequately explain the obtained relation between birth order and behavior disorder. (a) Given a first and a later born child with behavior disorders of equal magnitude, it is more likely that the parents of the first born child will overestimate the severity of the disorder and tend to seek outside help, e.g., a clinic. (b) When a later born child's behavior is somewhat more than normally deviant, the parents may have learned to cope with it successfully. Either case would lead to more first born children than later born children being brought to a clinic when the proportion of behavior disorders was actually the same for both groups.

2. We do not feel that the data support the Adlerian notion that Cushna *et al.* advance, namely, that the greater incidence of behavior disorders in the first born child is related to his dethronement. To confirm this hypothesis a curvilinear relation should be found between the difference in age of the first born and subsequent child and the incidence of behavior disorders. The dethronement effect should be at its maximum at a certain age difference and should diminish as this difference becomes less or greater. The rationale here is that at an earlier and at a later age a child would be less vulnerable to "dethronement." Differences due to the sex of the subsequent child should also be noted.

### REFERENCE

1. CUSHNA, B., GREENE, M., & SNIDER, B. C. F. First born and last born children in a child development clinic. *J. Indiv. Psychol.*, 1964, 20, 179-182.