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**SIBLING POSITION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL SKILLS AMONG
CHILDREN**

Dr. Anthony N. Molesy, Dr. Ijang B. Ngyah-Etchutambe and Dr. Koi Cecilia Fon

Sibling Position and the Development of Social Skills among Children

^{1*} Dr. Anthony N. Molesy, Assistant Lecturer, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Buea, Cameroon.

^{2*} Dr. Ijang B. Ngyah-Etchutambe, Lecturer, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Buea, Cameroon. Email: ijangetchu@gmail.com

^{3*} Dr. Koi Cecilia Fon, Instructor, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Buea, Cameroon.

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Abstract

Purpose: This article examines the role sibling position (birth order) plays in the development of social skills. Given that the family is the first social system a child gets exposed to, it is assumed that the child's birth position and the relationships that exist among family members plays a substantial role in their development of social skills. The paper focuses on three birth positions: first borns, last borns and only child. The study thus aims to examine whether the a fore mentioned birth positions influences a child's tendency to communicate and relate with others. Does one's birth position influence his or her tendency to communicate and relate with others?

Methodology: It is a conceptual paper that employs a meta-analytic approach to review, synthesize and draw conclusions from existing literature on sibling position specifically the first born, last born and only child and the effect such positions have on the development of social skills.

Findings: It was realized that first borns perceive themselves as being treated differently from later children, are accustomed to being the centre of attention and tend to be high achievers. Last borns are perceived to be creative, outgoing, extraverted, disobedient and tend to resist the authority of the bigger siblings. They exhibit interpersonal skills but have an abnormally strong feeling of inferiority as result of being over pampered by their seniors. Only children are not independent and have difficulty in delaying gratification. They demand much love from their partners with unwillingness to reciprocate. They are also most often self-centred, maladjusted, unlikable, anxious and dependent on others. The degree to which people tend to relate and communicate with others is influenced to some extent by their birth order.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: It is thus vital to minimize certain cultural attitudes exhibited by parents, siblings and other family members in the course of socialization at home that can deter the development of social skills in children. This is supported by Bandura's (1978) Theory of Observational Learning, as children learn or model behaviours from especially elderly siblings and other caregivers; Bowlby's (1969/1982) attachment theory which maintains that patterns of relating are built upon the early interactions between the primary caregiver and the child.

Keywords: *Sibling Position, Birth Order, Social Skills, Communication Skills, Interpersonal Skills*

INTRODUCTION

Relationship amongst siblings is one of the most lasting in human life as it begins from childhood and continues throughout life. Such relationship only ends with the death of one of the sibling. Siblings treat each other in a variety of ways including; love and hatred, concern and abuse, loyalty and betrayal (Doron, 2009). Such relationships may also involve power struggles, dependency, support, affection, experimental roles and more. Some or all of these components are likely to play a part in shaping an individual's development of social skills. The relationship people develop with their siblings from childhood to some extent determines their personality as adults. As such, sibling experience on numerous developmental and familial processes is noted for its relevance on personality development. Siblings provide feedback for positive and negative behaviours through reciprocal interactions, which enhances opportunity for the development of personality and social skills (Whiteman, McHale, & Soli, 2011). The sibling component is a subsystem within the family which includes mechanisms that exist between people who are related. The experiences and relationships we share with our significant others (parents, siblings, other caregivers) from birth significantly determine who we become in future (Erickson, 1968). The inherent social behavioural tendency of humans is necessary for survival thus developing social skills is essential in enhancing people's mental health, their socio-emotional development and relationship with others. Apart from culture, parenting style and home environment, sibling position has also been earmarked as a determinant of social skill development.

A lot (Conger & Little, 2010, Doughty, McHale, Feinberg 2013) has been written on the value of sibling position in building intimate relationships at adulthood. However, very little research has addressed the subject "sibling position and the development of social skills" though there is no doubt that siblings represent significant attachment figures who influence developmental processes. Birth order is the position a child occupies in the family among other children (known as siblings). Sibling position constitutes a significant part of the formation of a "life-style" and the type of social skills developed later on in life. Adler (1984) characterizes birth order of a family in to four positions: The Firstborn; the Middle Child; the Youngest Child and The Only Child. Added to Adler's (1984) four birth positions are: the oldest brother of brothers; the youngest brother of brothers; the oldest brother of sisters; the youngest brother of sisters; the oldest sister of sisters; the youngest sister of sisters; the oldest sister of brothers; the youngest sister of brothers; the middle children. Children of different birth orders tend to have different interaction patterns in the family and as a result, undergo different social learning experiences outside it (Fishler, 1982). Consequently, depending on the birth order, children tend to develop different social skills. For the purpose of this study, three sibling positions are considered: the first born, the last born and the only child. The study aims to examine the relationship that exist between these sibling positions and the development of social skills specifically communication and interpersonal skills.

The Firstborn Child

A firstborn (also known as an eldest child or sometimes firstling) is the first child born to in the birth order of a couple through childbirth. Historically, the role of the firstborn child has been socially significant, particularly for a firstborn son in patriarchal societies. In law, many systems have incorporated the concept of primogeniture, wherein the firstborn child inherits their parent's

property. In larger families the firstborn often perceives himself or herself to be treated differently from later children. Alfred Adler (1870–1937), an Austrian psychiatrist, and a contemporary of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, was one of the first theorists to suggest that sibling position influences personality in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. Adler (1984) argued that birth order can leave an indelible impression on an individual's style of life, which is one's habitual way of dealing with the tasks of friendship, love and work. Adler (1984) further postulated that, firstborns are "dethroned" when a second child comes along, and this may have a lasting influence on their development of social skills.

It has been observed that the first born is often raised with more attention than the following child or children, which causes the first born child to develop certain characteristics. This is because a couple, that decides to have their first child, is inexperienced and new to raising a child which causes them to be extra aware and concerned for the child. The firstborn is accustomed to being the centre of attention; they have Mom and Dad to themselves before siblings arrive. "Many parents spend more time reading and explaining things to firstborns. It's not as easy when other kids come into the picture. Frank Farley stipulates that undivided attention may have a lot to do with why firstborns tend to be overachievers. In addition to usually scoring higher on IQ tests and generally getting more education than their brothers and sisters, firstborns tend to out earn their siblings. The treatment a parent gives to a firstborn causes the child to become jealous or bitter towards the next child or children to come. The character or skills that emerge in the first born is influenced by the way other siblings behave towards them and the expectations from other caregivers around as well.

The Last Born Child

Herrera, et. al, (2003) argued that last-borns are the most creative, emotional, extraverted, disobedient, irresponsible and talkative children in a home. These children are depicted as constantly struggling to resist the higher status of the first born child, while also seeking alternative ways of distinguishing themselves in their parents' eyes. The adult character of a last-born child with regards to the familiar niche is noted by an empathetic interpersonal style and a striving for uniqueness (Paulhus, Trapnell, & Chen, 1999). Younger children usually have threatening anxiety-provoking persons in their immediate environment and therefore these children learn effective adaptive techniques such as a relaxed temperament in response to their early interactions with siblings (Snow, Jacklin, & Maceoby, 1981). In terms of profession, last-borns are expected to be musicians, and photographers (Herrera et al., 2003). They sometimes develop an abnormally strong feeling of inferiority as a result of being over pampered by the seniors (Brink & Matlock, 1982). Usually, upbringing of the last born is left in the hands and care of the older brothers and sisters while parents only step in momentarily when need be. Last borns tend to get so much attention and become the target of jokes. Such children are accused of being spoiled as they have been the ones who get everything the other siblings never had. This most at times results in a tendency to want things done immediately.

The last born is also known as the youngest child and is considered in a family to be the most outgoing and secure child, but least an academics (Herrera, et. al., 2003). The youngest role is perceived as the least capable or least experienced among the siblings, which may result in the

youngest child being provided for, indulged, or even spoiled. Sensitive to these possibilities, some youngest children may use this to their advantage and learn skills of manipulating others to do or provide things for them (Herrera, et. al., 2003). In the course of developing such strategies, most last borns develop good interpersonal skills as they tend to understand and relate with their elder siblings. Consequently, last borns tend to gain support and admiration from the elder siblings and in the course emerge as peace makers and mediators among other sibling.

Some last borns become discouraged by the pressure and expectations set by oldest siblings and find they are acknowledged in their families for their failures. However, it is possible for the youngest child to identify themselves as the “saviours” of the family, that exceed their siblings’ accomplishments which places them in a position of esteem and significance (Stewart et al., 2001). Due to the extra attention by parents, in particular by the maternal figure in the child’s life, the youngest child tends to lack in overall maturity. The youngest child is provided with an extra dose of motherly participation that feeds the extraverted ego and stimulates the intellect, which is probably the reason that the youngest child is considered most creative (Nakao, et al., 2000).

The Only Child

The only child refers to a child born to parents without any sibling. Here Adler (1984) believes that an only child is in the worst position as he/she is pampered, used to receiving attention and having parents fulfil his demands. He is not independent and has difficulty in delaying gratification. As adults, only children demand much love from their partners without being willing to give love in return (Adler, 1984). Siblings according to Sang & Nelson (2017), influence both perspective taking and social skills. Children with siblings have demonstrated significantly greater false-belief performance compared to only children, even after the significant effects of chronological and verbal mental age are statistically controlled (Jenkins & Astington, 1996; Perner et al., 1994). Since 1898, researchers have devoted their studies to understanding the characteristics of the only child (Rivera & Carrasquillo, 1997). The question at this point is: does being an only child influence one’s tendency to communicate and interact with others?

Only children can carry the characteristics of both first borns and last borns. They are referred to as “lonely onlies” because, while they receive substantial attention from their parents, they frequently find themselves with fewer social skills for dealing with their peers. Because they identify so closely with the values of their parents, they relate better as they grow up with people far older or younger. Historically, the only child has been viewed with a negative perception. This is typically exemplified in the words of psychologist G. Stanley Hall: "Being an only child is a disease in itself..." In the early 1920's, a professional in the field wrote: "It would be safer for the individual and the race that there should be no only children". Despite this and other warnings, the occurrence of the single child family rose from 20% to 30% during the period of the 1920's to the 1940's. From the mid 1960's to the mid 1970's, it decreased to 15%. In the 1980's, it increased again to 30%. The constant fluctuation of the number of single child families illustrates the conflicting views society has of the child without siblings (Rivera & Carrasquillo, 1997).

Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, Leonardo Da Vinci, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Hans Christian Andersen, Gloria Vanderbilt, Lisa Marie Presley, Julian Lennon. What do all of these famous people have in

common? They are all only children. With so many achievements represented within this group, why is it that society has such a negative perception of the only child? Thompson (1974) summarized the prevailing view of the only child as "generally maladjusted, self-centred, self-willed, attention-seeking, dependent on others, temperamental, anxious, generally unhappy and unlikeable, yet, somewhat more autonomous than a child with two siblings" (p95-96). This view has influenced many families to conceive a second time to avoid having their first child be unfairly stereotyped as spoiled or selfish (Rivera & Carrasquillo, 1997). However, only children easily become independent, strong, are resilient and can self-regulate their activities. Their exposure to mostly adult guidance develops very early their critical and logical thinking skills.

Social Skills

Social skills allow appropriate social interaction with others. They are skills based on a set of verbal and nonverbal behaviour standards, derived from one's specific society or culture. It is the ability of an individual to achieve his or her interpersonal goals in a manner that is reasonably efficient and appropriate (Segrin and Dillard, 1993). It is composed of behaviours that can be learned (Hargie, Saunders, and Dickson, 1994). A person who is socially skilled should be able to adapt his or her behaviours to meet the demands of particular individuals in specific social context. Social skills are concerned with abilities to accomplish goals be it as specific as talking without a trembling voice to as general as managing the greeting ritual in a variety of context. Social skill development begins at birth with the first parent-child interactions. As children grow, they learn to socialize through experiences with others in addition to their parents. The home being a primary unit of socialization plays an essential role in developing social skills in people. The relationship shared and interaction between parents, siblings and other caregivers in the home is guided by birth order. Last borns tend to exhibit good interpersonal skills perhaps as a result of their ability to accept and deal with the multiple caregivers at their disposal. Some social skills include the knowledge of appropriate behaviour in different situations, the formation of reciprocal relationships, the regulation of one's emotions and initiating and maintenance of play. This paper is focused on two social skills: communication and interpersonal relation. Social skills play a critical role in a child's development and continue throughout life, facilitating acceptance and successful personal relationships.

Communication Skills

Being able to communicate effectively is perhaps the most important of all life skills. It is what enables us to pass information to other people, and to understand what is said to us. You only have to watch a baby listening intently to its mother and trying to repeat the sounds that she makes to understand how fundamental the urge to communicate is. Communication, at its simplest, is the act of transferring information from one place to another. It may be vocally (using voice), written (using printed or digital media such as books, magazines, websites or emails), visually (using logos, maps, charts or graphs) or non-verbally (using body language, gestures and the tone and pitch of voice). In practice, it is often a combination of several of these.

Communication skills may take a lifetime to master—if indeed anyone can ever claim to have mastered them. It involves elements such as active listening, verbal and non-verbal messages,

attending, responding, asking questions and probing, etc. Communication skills are needed in almost all aspects of life. They are needed to speak appropriately with a wide variety of people whilst maintaining good eye contact, demonstrate a varied vocabulary and tailoring language to suit audience, listen effectively, present ideas appropriately, write clearly and concisely, and work well in a group. Communication skills can be influenced by so many factors such as stress, language, cultural differences, interest and lot more. Communication skills can be nurtured from childhood. Every child to Vygotsky (1962) is born with some elementary mental functions such as attention, sensation, perception and a memory that gives him or her the leverage to learn and communicate. The rules, skills and values of communication however can only be learned from socialization with competent others ready to scaffold the children. The quality of the interaction and relationship between siblings thus have an effect on their tendency to advance their elementary mental functions that forms the basis of their communication and interpersonal skill.

Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills are those essential skills involved in dealing with and relating to other people, largely on a one- to-one basis (McConnell, 2004). They are the skills we use every day when we communicate and interact with other people, both individually and in groups. People with strong interpersonal skills are often more successful in both their professional and personal lives. Interpersonal skills include a wide variety of skills, though many are centred on communication, such as listening, questioning and understanding body language. They also include the skills and attributes associated with emotional intelligence or being able to understand and manage your own and others' emotions. People with good interpersonal skills tend to be able to work well in a team or group, and with other people more generally. They are able to communicate effectively with others, whether family, friends, colleagues, customers or clients. Interpersonal skills are therefore vital in all areas of life be it work, education or socialisation.

Theoretical Background

Socialization is the process by which new members of a group learn attitudes, beliefs, and customs from older members. According to Grusec (2002), the socialization of new or younger group members is necessary to assist them in the acquisition of skills necessary to function successfully as members of their social group. The theories employed in this study to inform the examination of the socialization process within the family include attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) and social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). The theories describe mechanisms by which siblings learn from and emulate one another. The children model their siblings in order to establish their own unique identity, role, or niche within the family system; this identity is shaped, in part, by that individual's perceptions of their siblings' identities.

Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura (1977)

Social learning theory, introduced by psychologist Albert Bandura, proposed that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling and is influenced by factors such as attention, motivation, attitudes, and emotions. The theory accounts for the interaction of environmental and cognitive elements that affect how people learn. The theory suggests that learning occurs because

people observe the consequences of other people's behaviors. Bandura's theory moves beyond behavioral theories, which suggest that all behaviors are learned through conditioning, and cognitive theories, which consider psychological influences such as attention and memory. According to Bandura, people observe behavior either directly through social interactions with others or indirectly by observing behaviors through media. Actions that are rewarded are more likely to be imitated, while those that are punished are avoided. In social learning theory, Albert Bandura (1977) agrees with the behaviorist learning theories of classical conditioning and operant conditioning. However, he adds two important ideas:

- Mediating processes occur between stimuli & responses.
- Behaviour is learned from the environment through the process of observational learning.

Children observe the people around them behaving in various ways. This is illustrated during the famous Bobo doll experiment (Bandura, 1961).

Individuals that are observed are called models. In society, children are surrounded by many influential models, such as parents within the family, characters on children's TV, friends within their peer group and teachers at school. These models provide examples of behaviour to observe and imitate, e.g., masculine and feminine, pro and anti-social, etc. Children pay attention to some of these people (models) and encode their behaviour. At a later time, they may imitate (or copy) the behaviour they have observed. They may do this regardless of whether the behaviour is 'gender appropriate' or not, but there are a number of processes that make it more likely that a child will reproduce the behaviour that its society deems appropriate for its gender.

First, the child is more likely to attend to and imitate those people it perceives as similar to itself. Consequently, it is more likely to imitate behaviour modelled by people of the same gender. Second, the people around the child will respond to the behaviour it imitates with either reinforcement or punishment. If a child imitates a model's behaviour and the consequences are rewarding, the child is likely to continue performing the behaviour. Third, the child will also take into account of what happens to other people when deciding whether or not to copy someone's actions. A person learns by observing the consequences of another person's (i.e., models) behaviour, e.g., a younger sister observing an older sister being rewarded for a particular behaviour is more likely to repeat that behaviour herself. This is known as vicarious reinforcement (McLeod, 2017).

This relates to an attachment to specific models that possess qualities seen as rewarding. Children will have a number of models with whom they identify. These may be people in their immediate world, such as parents or older siblings, or could be fantasy characters or people in the media. The motivation to identify with a particular model is that they have a quality which the individual would like to possess. There are four mediational processes proposed by Bandura:

Attention

The individual needs to pay attention to the behaviour and its consequences and form a mental representation of the behaviour. For a behaviour to be imitated, it has to grab our attention. We

observe many behaviours on a daily basis, and many of these are not noteworthy. Attention is therefore extremely important in whether a behaviour influences others imitating it.

Retention

How well the behaviour is remembered. The behaviour may be noticed but is it not always remembered which obviously prevents imitation. It is important therefore that a memory of the behaviour is formed to be performed later by the observer. Much of social learning is not immediate, so this process is especially vital in those cases. Even if the behaviour is reproduced shortly after seeing it, there needs to be a memory to refer to.

Reproduction

This is the ability to perform the behaviour that the model has just demonstrated. We see much behaviour on a daily basis that we would like to be able to imitate but that this not always possible. We are limited by our physical ability and for that reason, even if we wish to reproduce the behaviour, we cannot. This influences our decisions whether to try and imitate it or not. Imagine the scenario of a 90-year-old-lady who struggles to walk watching Dancing on Ice. She may appreciate that the skill is a desirable one, but she will not attempt to imitate it because she physically cannot do it.

Motivation

The will to perform the behaviour. The rewards and punishment that follow a behaviour will be considered by the observer. If the perceived rewards outweigh the perceived costs (if there are any), then the behaviour will be more likely to be imitated by the observer. If the vicarious reinforcement is not seen to be important enough to the observer, then they will not imitate the behaviour (McLeod, 2017).

Attachment Theory by Bowlby (1969)

Attachment according to (Bowlby, 1969) is a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings, and may be considered interchangeable with concepts such as “affectional bond” and “emotional bond.” He proposed an attachment theory in 1969 where he expounded on this psychological connectedness. He maintained that a human being’s first attachment is often established during infancy with the primary caregiver; however, it must be noted that attachment is not unique to infant-caregiver relationships, but may also be present in other forms of social relationships.

Attachment theory in psychology originates with the work of Bowlby (1958). In the 1930s John Bowlby worked as a psychiatrist in a Child Guidance Clinic in London, where he treated many emotionally disturbed children. This experience led Bowlby to consider the importance of the child’s relationship with their mother in terms of their social, emotional and cognitive development. Specifically, it shaped his belief about the link between early infant separations with the mother and later maladjustment, and led Bowlby to formulate his attachment theory.

Bowlby (1958) proposed that attachment can be understood within an evolutionary context in that the caregiver provides safety and security for the infant. Attachment is adaptive as it enhances the infant’s chance of survival. Children come into the world biologically pre-programmed to form

attachments with others, because this will help them to survive. According to Bowlby infants have a universal need to seek close proximity with their caregiver when under stress or threatened (Prior & Glaser, 2006).

Bowlby broadened his theory of attachment by proposing that through an individual's early relationships an "internal working model" is constructed which provides a model for future social relationships and emotional bonding (McLeod, 2017). This suggests that the child will actually use these internal working models in creating their future experiences by recreating early patterns of interaction and communication in later interactions. If the child developed a secure attachment with the parents then they develop an internal working model of their parents as loving and responsive and also see themselves as worthy of love and support (Bowlby 1969). In contrast, if the child has an insecure parent-child attachment, they will hypothetically develop working models of the caregiver as unresponsive and unloving while they see themselves as unworthy of nurturance and support. Thus, the attitudes and behaviours that are acquired from these early attachment experiences shape subsequent relationships as the children re-enact social behaviours that the caregiver modelled. Some scholars believe that the attachment may be generalized to other members of the family, rather than just the primary caregiver, so that the siblings also may be a part of the child's internal working model (McLeod, 2017).

Although psychologists first began to study siblings and their relationships during the nineteenth century, it was not until the late twentieth century that they began to focus on the family-related features of sibling relationships. Early research was devoted to examining the effects of siblings' age spacing and birth order. Scientists found, however, that these had little to do with children's emotional and social development. During the 1980s and 1990s, psychologists became more interested in the family as a unit. This encouraged them to study the ways in which brothers and sisters (siblings) influence each other's development and their families' wellbeing, as well as the family's influence on sibling relationships. Sibling relationships are, in and of themselves, important as children relate to one another and influence the social world in which they grow and develop. The social and psychological skills that children gain through sibling interactions are also useful throughout their lives in a wide variety of other social relationships. Children's personalities can have positive or negative influences on the relationships they develop with their siblings.

Sibling Position and the Development of Social Skills

Development of Social Skills among First Borns

Popular culture assumes that first born children are the most likely to become leaders. These children are extremely adult orientated because they interact with adults the most. Children occupying the first child or oldest role are often described as possessing a strong tendency to imitate the parents and take responsibility for younger siblings (Brink & Matlock, 1982). Often the oldest child tends to "parent" their younger siblings as they assume a position of control. This facilitates their acquisition of social skills and give them an edge over the other (younger) children in the development of social skills.

Socially, first born children are also considerably less arguable and open to new experiences than later born children. The resulting adult personality for these children are very conservative and stiff (Paulhus et al, 1999). First born children are also considered to be shy and more likely to withdraw from peers, perhaps because their interactions at home have been mainly with adults and peer interaction is less familiar to them. However, this familial position does tend to be more assertive than younger siblings which can be a positive attribute that will help them in many social situations, especially as they grow older (Snow et al., 1981).

Development of Social Skills amongst Last Borns

Last born children tend to be perceived as acting more sociable in peer situations than first and only born children. These later born children have had invaluable experiences with their siblings and more opportunity to develop social skills from peer interaction both inside outside the home (Snow et al, 1981). Hoff-Ginsberg (1998) found that later-born children were more advanced in their conversational skills. This may be attributed to “differences in early language experience” ... that ... “may set the stage for later developmental differences” (p. 603). It could be that later born children have to work harder to be included in multi-party conversations between parents and older siblings, which may provide motivation to learn and use the necessary social skills to be included in family conversations. In addition, multi-party conversations may expose the child to more mature language models.

Development of Social Skills in Only Child

Do children without sibling(s) have poorer than average social skills? Research results appear to be mixed on this point. A study by Fussell, Macias and Saylor (2005) found that the presence or absence of a sibling showed no significant difference for either behaviour problems or social skills. Another recent study found that self-reported social competence, social leaderships and use of relational aggression were similar in children with and without siblings. Similarly, the number and quality of mutual friendships did not differ due to the presence or absence of a sibling (Kitzmann, Cohen & Lockwood, 2002). On the contrary, others suggest that only children exhibit negative social behaviours as a result of being an only child. Condron and Downey (2004) reported that children’s interpersonal skills show a statistically significant advantage for one or two siblings as compared to having no siblings. Additional findings by Kitzmann, Cohen & Lockwood (2002) found that only children were “less popular and less well accepted.” Results reported that aggression, victimization and passive-withdrawal behaviours were significantly worse with only children than those with siblings. Suggestions of this “social disadvantage” could be due to their lack of conflict management skills (Poole, 2009).

The Role of Siblings in the Development of Social Skills

Sibling position enhances and also retards the development of social skills. On a positive note, children’s social skills develop as a result of their interactions with others. These interactions allow children to learn about themselves and others, and furthermore aids in cognitive and emotional development (Brody, 1998). Several studies show that siblings play a positive role in this development. The presence of siblings gives room for that prepares children for more successful peer interactions (Schneyer, 1997). Other studies have found that siblings contribute

to children's development of social skills and their understanding of relationships because they are together all of the time (Parke & Buriel, 1998) and as a result carry over to peer relationships (MacKinnon, Starnes, Volling, & Johnson, 1997; McCoy, Brody, & Stoneman, 1994). In addition, it has been suggested that children become proficient in their use of social skills because of these frequent interactions between siblings (Condron & Downey, 2004).

Kitzman suggests that parents are the most important influence in relationship development but agrees that having siblings contributes to better (more satisfying) later relationships (Kitzman, 2002). Siblings also help in the development of social skills because the child can observe a variety of family interactions. For example, children with multiple siblings have the advantage of observing interactions among each other. Similarly, parent-sibling interactions provide the opportunity for children to learn to cope with relationships such as "differential treatment, rivalry and jealousy" (Dunn, Slomkowski, & Beardsall, 1994; Kitzzmann, Cohen & Lockwood, 2002). A child's social learning is mainly developed through play, so these social interactions also provide benefit by allowing them the opportunity to practice initiating and maintaining play with their siblings (Dunn & Dale, 1984; Kitzzmann, Cohen & Lockwood, 2002).

Does the number of siblings have any negative effect on social skills? Can having a large number of siblings be detrimental to one's development of social skills? Condron and Downey (2004) suggest this might be true. Through their found that sibling benefits decrease as the number of siblings increases. Also, those who had just one or two siblings to Condron and Downey (2004) displayed an increased benefit in the development of interpersonal skills while no increase was found in the social ability over "only" children. This implies that, sibling relationship has a positive influence on the development of social skills when the number of siblings are few and detrimental when the siblings are too many.

Conclusion

The major pre-occupation of this paper has been to examine sibling position as a correlate of social skill development in children. Childhood and the family are central to the story of human behaviour and the development of basic social skills because they provide the immediate causal context for developmental scenarios. There is a different psychological experience for every individual child based on the child's ordinal position in their family. First born children have a unique advantage over their siblings because they have first choice of finding their particular niche in the family. Overwhelmingly, the oldest child defines their role as attempting to please their parents in a traditional way by succeeding in school and responsible behaviour. By the time the last child is born, the parents often let the child's development proceed with more of a hands-off approach. Frequently the older brothers and sisters involve themselves in the child-rearing process which means that the last born gets an abundance of attention and is often the target of jokes. Only children are associated with being the most academically successful and diligent, spoiled, and least likable among peers. They are also generally more autonomous in terms of personal control, have higher levels of initiative or personal aspiration or motivation, are more industrious in terms of educational or occupational achievement, and have stronger identities. It can therefore be deduced from the above premises that birth order influences our personality and determines the degree to which we communicate and relate with others. Birth order can however not be limited

just to first, last and only child but involves only girl among boys, only boy among girls and even the spacing duration between siblings. It is thus necessary to find out how the later birth position and sibling relationship can influence the development of social skills.

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