



Relationship between Birth Order and Ego States in Adolescents: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Birth order refers to the order in which a child is born in their family; examples include first- born and second-born. Children's psychological development is thought to be influenced by their birth order. Nonetheless, the notion that birth order has a significant impact on personality persists in mainstream psychology and popular culture.

Alfred Adler (1870-1937) developed personality theories that highlighted the importance of a therapist's understanding of a client's social milieu. According to Adler, developmental issues, such as birth order, are the primary causes of personality features and behaviours. Eric Berne established Transactional Analysis (TA) as a psychoanalytic theory and therapeutic practise in the 1950s.

The terms "transactions" and "communication exchanges" are used to describe how people communicate with one another. TA identified three "ego states" in the human mind, each of which is a complete system of thought, feeling, and behaviour from which we interact. The core of Transactional Analysis theory is the Parent, Adult, and Child ego states, as well as their interactions. The study's goal was to look at the relationship between birth order (eldest, middle, and youngest kid) and ego states (parent, adult, and child) in adolescents. A total of 135 samples were used in this research's study group. The children are separated into three groups: 45 oldest children, 45 middle children, and 45 youngest children.

The sample was made up of 16–19-year-old. The oldest children had a dominant parent ego state, the middle children had a dominant adult ego state, and the youngest children had a dominant child ego state, according to the findings.

Keywords: *Transactional Analysis, Birth Order, Ego States, Adolescents.*

Introduction

The order in which a child is born in their family is referred to as birth order; examples include first-born and second-born. The psychological development of children is supposed to be influenced by their birth order. This claim has been debunked numerous times. Recent study has repeatedly demonstrated that children born earlier score slightly higher on average on IQ assessments, but there is no, or nearly no, substantial effect of birth order on personality. Nonetheless, the idea that birth order has a big influence on personality is still prevalent in mainstream psychology and popular culture.

A firstborn, simply by virtue of being a couple's first child, will be a type of experiment for the new parents, a mix of instinct and trial-and-error. Perhaps this will force the parents to become rigid, rule-following caregivers who obsess over the smallest details.

As a result, the child may develop into a perfectionist, always wanting to satisfy his parents. In contrast, if the couple decides to have a second kid, they may parent their second child with less zeal than their firstborn due to their previous experiences. They may also be less attentive to the second child because there is another child vying for their attention, and they are less likely to ring 911 impulsively every time the youngster breaks a sweat. Due to the lack of attention he receives in compared to his older sister, the second-born may become less of a perfectionist and more of a people-pleaser. In other words, just because a youngster came out of his mother's womb first doesn't mean he grew up to be a blue-streak leader. Rather, his attitude and demeanour were formed by his parents' treatment of him as their firstborn child.

Firstborn

Firstborns tend to be:

- Dependable
- Observant
- Organized
- Conservative
- Leading
- Intellectuals as the pack leader.

Firstborns enjoy being in their parents' presence, which could explain why they act like mini- adults at times. Firstborns are meticulous and want to excel in whatever they do. They have a knack for gaining their elders' hearts.

Middle Child

"The middle child frequently feels left out because he or she is not the oldest. I am not the youngest among them. Who am I?" "Meri Wallace, a therapist, agrees. Because parental attention is normally allocated to the family's cherished firstborn or infant, this type of hierarchical arrangement allows middle children to make their imprint among their social group.

The following features are common among middle child;

- People-pleasers
- A little rebellious
- Thrives on friendships
- Has a broad social circle

Last Born

The youngest children tend to be the most free-spirited due to their parents' growing laissez-faire attitude toward parenting the second (or third, or fifth, or as much...) time around. The infant in the family is most likely to be:

- Uncomplicated
- Manipulative
- Outgoing
- Attention-seeker
- Self-centred

Only Child

Being the only child in a household is a unique position. Without any siblings to compete with, the lone child has complete control over his parents' attention and resources, not only for a brief time like a firstborn, but for the rest of his life. In consequence, this makes an only child a "super-firstborn": only children have the honour (and the responsibility) of bearing all of their parents' love and expectations. As a result, only children are more likely to be:

- Mature for their age
- Perfectionists
- Conscientious

- Diligent
- Leaders

The Birth Order Theory of Alfred Adler

Alfred Adler (1870-1937) established personality theories that emphasized the need for a therapist to comprehend an individual in the context of their social environment. Personality characteristics and behaviours, according to Adler, emerge mostly from developmental difficulties, such as birth order.

First-Born Child

Adler felt that the moment a child is born would have an effect on their personality. According to his hypothesis, the oldest child, who is prone to perfectionism and a need for approval, grows up to be intellectual, conscientious, and dominant in social situations. According to Adler, this is due to the child losing his or her parents' undivided attention and compensating throughout life by attempting to reclaim it. This child may also be expected to lead by example and be responsible for younger siblings.

Second and Middle Children

The second-born infant, according to Adler, possesses a "pacemaker." Because someone is consistently first, this child will become much more competitive, rebellious, and consistent in their pursuit of excellence. Middle children may have difficulty determining their role in the family and, thereafter, in society. They crave parental approval and will often cultivate talents in the arts or academia to achieve this goal. They may also be the most flexible and diplomatic members of the family due to their "middle" status.

Youngest and Only Children

According to Adler, the youngest child may be reliant and selfish as a result of being constantly looked after by family members. This child, on the other hand, may exhibit positive characteristics such as confidence, capacity to have fun, and comfort entertaining people. Only children are spared from competing directly for their parents' attention. They may struggle when said no, and school may be a challenging transition because they are not the teacher's whole focus. On the other side, according to

Adler, only children are more mature, feel more at ease around adults, and perform better in intellectual and creative endeavours than their peers their age.

Other Family Situations

Adler also spoke about unique family situations, such as twins. When twins are present, the older twin is frequently perceived as the stronger and more active. Although both may have identity issues as a result of being treated as one unit rather than two people, this one frequently becomes the leader. An only male among girls is another example given by Adler. He speculates that this youngster will grow into an adult who is constantly seeking to establish his manhood, or that he will become effeminate. In an attempt to outdo the males, an only girl amid boys may become exceedingly feminine or a tomboy. She may put in extra effort to satisfy her father.

Transactional Analysis

In the 1950s, Eric Berne founded Transactional Analysis (TA) as a psychoanalytic theory and therapeutic practice. Transactions are the terms used to describe people's communication exchanges. The individual who begins the communication provides the 'transaction stimulus,' while the one who receives the stimulus provides the 'transaction response' (or communication message).

Transactional analysis is a method for analysing this process of transactions in communicating with others. It requires us to be aware of how we feel, think, and behave in social circumstances.

In the human mind. TA defined three "ego states," each of which is a complete system of thought, feeling, and behaviour from which we interact with one another. The Parent, Adult, and Child ego states, as well as their interactions, are the foundation of Transactional Analysis theory.

The Ego States

TA believes that humans have three different states or ways of being throughout interactions: the infant ego state, the parent ego state, and the adult ego state (Berne, 1957).

How we have been conditioned to respond or react since infancy, any past traumas that have now caused us to act in a certain manner during specific encounters or situations, and how the other person we are conversing with treats us/what ego state they are in when speaking to us are all factors that influence our state during an interaction.

The Child State

The child state is divided into two subsets: adapted child and free child. We revert to our childhood thinking and feelings when we connect and respond to someone based on our past programming of internal emotions felt as children.

The child ego state is built on whatever positive or negative reinforcements we obtained as children to behave or not act in a certain way, which continue to regulate and influence our interactions now.

When confronted with apparent conflict, the adapted child state submits and acts in accordance with others' preferences in order to please them and be loved, but it also has a rebellious side that causes resistance, antagonism, and emotional reactivity.

A free child's ego state may be inventive, spontaneous, playful, and pleasure-seeking.

The Parent State

The parent state is divided into two categories: critical/controlling parent state and nurturing parent state. This is a set of particular behavioural patterns we've learned through our experiences with our parents and other authority figures in the past (teachers, grandparents etc).

Berne considered that our experiences in our first five years of life influenced our parent ego. This state contains many judgments on how someone or something is, i.e., it is also the state in which we have many 'shoulds' and 'should nots' about something.

People are in this mindset when they respond to a situation and behave based on their conditioning, rather than analysing each topic in detail in the present time period.

It's when we use our power to communicate with someone. When communicating to other adults rather than children, the critical parent shows displeasure in a harsh and possibly aggressive style, whereas the nurturing parent strives to rescue a situation by comforting others, which might be extremely inappropriate.

The Adult State

Unlike the other two states, there are no subdivisions in the adult state. Adults interact with others and their environment in the current moment, rather than depending on previous training or what others have told them to be.

This state is more open, logical, and slow to make snap decisions about people or situations.

When we speak from an adult state, we are more likely to be respectful, make compromises, listen fully to others, and have more positive social interactions.

Our ego states influence how we express ourselves as people, interact with others, and mutual collaboration. The paradigm is particularly approachable due to the simplicity of the vocabulary used in TA therapy.

Unconscious scripts

TA practitioners understand that we all have the ability to live the life we want rather than the life we have been conditioned to live. However, recurrent patterns or 'unconscious scripts' that emerge from childhood decisions and beliefs can sometimes restrict this potential.

Script theory is used by TA therapists to identify these unconscious scripts. The ego-state model will be used to analyse these, and identifying them is critical in helping clients understand how specific permissions and prohibitions they acquired as children are affecting their lives and how they interact.

These unconscious scripts are frequently manifested as recurrent patterns of behaviour, thoughts, and feelings, all of which indicate that the infant ego-state is dominating and tainting other aspects of a person's personality.

Transactions

When people communicate, their ego states collide to form transactions. Transactions tend to be healthier when the ego-states mix and merge in a healthy way. However, ego-states can sometimes contaminate one another, resulting in a confused perception of the reality.

Straight forward, crossed-up, and ulterior transactions can all be characterised, and recognising these distinctions is crucial for conflict resolution.

Strokes

Compliments, acceptance, and acknowledgment are examples of strokes that have an impact on how people conduct their life. We are highly driven by the reinforcement we receive as children, and if this is dysfunctional, we are likely to develop dysfunctional habits of living as we grow older, according to TA therapy.

Intimacy

Intimacy is another motivator identified in transactional analysis. If a child's intimacy is dysfunctional, it can cause issues in the same way as strokes do. Children may learn that this level of intimacy is the best they can hope for in terms of meeting basic needs and communicating with others. This can lead to the formation of habitual patterns of behaviour that limit a person's potential.

Re-decision

This is the ability of an individual to 'redecide' and change some decisions made as a child, such as those based on unconscious scripts. Re-decision represents TA's belief that people have the ability to live their lives as they desire. This power is released after a client makes a new decision while still in their child-ego condition.

Therapists will eventually push clients to question their existing beliefs and the way they employ their life script. This will enable them to gain a greater understanding of their own life's direction and patterns, and this awareness will enable them to make the decision to change their behaviour.

Rational of the study

Today there is greater understanding of Transactional Analysis. More and more people are taking the four-to-five-year part-time training courses to qualify, and increasingly universities are accrediting these courses for master's degrees. Those taking training include psychiatrists, organizational and management consultants, teachers, social workers, designers, engineers and the clergy.

Transactional Analysis is used in psychotherapy, organisations, educational and religious settings. Books have been written for all ages, from children through to adults, by people all over the world. Transactional Analysis is truly an international theory relating to a diverse range of cultures.

This study is conducted to see the relationship between birth order and ego states in adolescents. As a student of Psychology, I had this opportunity to study if there is an impact of ego states on the birth order. There are various theories that explain the characteristics and traits in human being, therefore the birth order theory and the ego states are also one of them.

However, there haven't been many studies on this subject before. This is an unexplored field in which additional research is needed to comprehend all of the aspects and to investigate all of the interrelations among birth order and ego states.

Methodology

Purpose:

The study was conducted to explore the Relationship Between Birth Order (Eldest child, Middle child, youngest child) and Ego States (Parent, Adult, Child) in Adolescents.

Data Sample

The study group of this research consists of a total of 135 samples size. The sample is divided into 3 different groups i.e.; 45 oldest children, 45 middle children and, 45 samples of the youngest child. The age group of the sample was 16-19 years old. The sample was collected using Stratified random sampling method. It is a method for sampling from a population whereby the population is divided into subgroups and units are randomly selected from the subgroups. Stratification of target populations is extremely common in survey sampling.

Birth Order	Eldest Child	Middle Child	Youngest Child
No. of samples in each category	45	45	45

Data collection

Data was collected between January to February 2023. The data was collected with the Transactional Analysis questionnaire. A questionnaire is a list of questions or items used to gather data from respondents about their attitudes, experiences, or opinions. Questionnaires can be used to collect qualitative or/and quantitative information. The Transactional Analysis Questionnaire - Bradford VTS was used to collect data.

Result

The percentage analysis done to explore the relationship between the birth order and the different ego states.

Ego states	Parent	Adult	Child
Percentage	84%	80%	78%

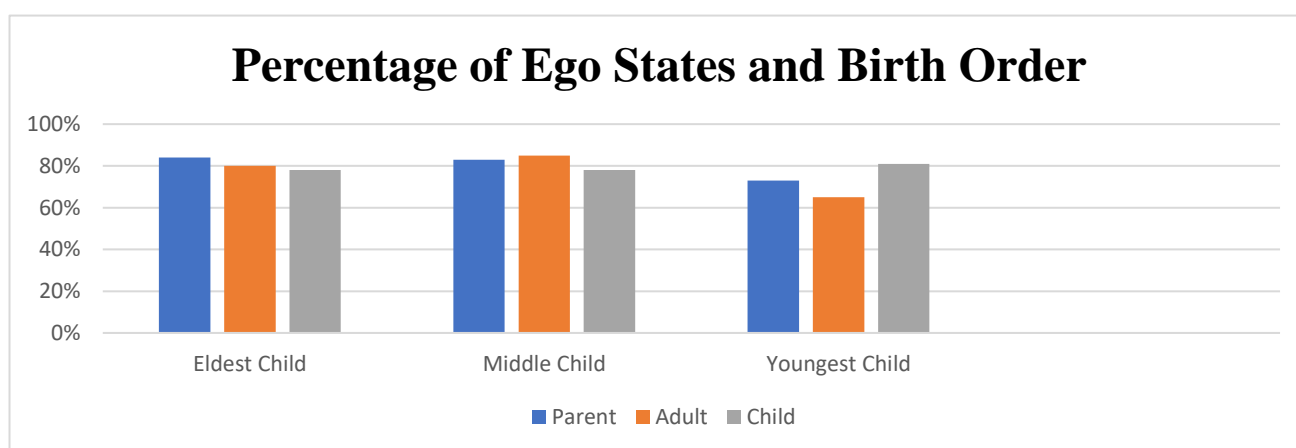
Table no. 1 shows the percentage of Eldest Child falling into different categories of ego states.

Ego states	Parent	Adult	Child
Percentage	83%	85%	78%

Table no. 2 shows the percentage of Middle Child falling into different categories of ego states.

Ego states	Parent	Adult	Child
Percentage	73%	65%	81%

Table no. 3 shows the percentage of Youngest Child falling into different categories of ego states.



The above table shows the overall percentage of the ego state according to their birth order

Discussion/ Data Interpretation

The data was collected using The Transactional Analysis Questionnaire - Bradford VTS. The study was done to explore the relationship between birth order and ego states in adolescents. The results of the study has been discussed further:

Oldest Child

According to the above data the oldest children category scored 84% of Parent Ego State, 80% of Adult Ego State and 78% OF Child Ego State. Hence, the results shows that the oldest child inherent more trait of Parent Ego. Such group of children most probably possesses the parental traits of being overprotective, dogmatic, distant, reliable, conscientious, structured, cautions, controlling, achievers indispensable and upright and behaves very judiciously at any time. The parent ego state contains the attitudes and behaviours that are observed and copied from the individual's caretakers and figures. In other words, the spoken and unspoken rules. The "should" and the "oughts" of life. Firstborns bask in their parents' presence, which may explain why they sometimes act like mini-adults. They're also diligent and want to excel at everything they do.

Middle Child

The above data analysis showed the middle children group scored 83% of parent ego state, 85% of adult ego state, 78% child ego state. The maximum percentage of ego state found was the adult ego state, although the percentage of the parent ego state was The Adult Ego State emerges around six months in the child and is concerned primarily with appraising facts, reasoning, thinking, evaluating and responding to available data. In general, middle children tend to possess the following birth order personality traits People-pleasers, somewhat rebellious, thrives on friendships, has large social circle, peacemaker. Middleborns are go-with- the-flow types; once a younger sibling arrives, they must learn how to constantly negotiate and compromise in order to "fit in" with everyone. Not surprisingly, Dr. Sulloway notes, middle kids score higher in agreeableness than both their older and younger siblings.

Youngest Child

According to the above data the youngest children group scored 79% of parent ego states, 65% of adult ego state, 81% of child ego state. The Child Ego State is primarily concerned with feelings though that does not mean that when in the here and now' experience the person does not have access to attitudes

and thinking, but it simply means that when activated feelings are usually the executive energy force. The child ego state is the part of the personality, which is preserved from actual childhood; it also contains all the impulses a person was born with. The child ego state is, as said above, primarily about spontaneous feelings, needs and wants of the child. It is also important to note that the child ego state contains 'recordings of childhood memories and experiences. Therefore, when the person feels and acts as they did when they were very young, they are experiencing their child ego state.

Youngest children tend to be the most free-spirited due to their parents' increasingly laissez- faire attitude towards parenting the second (or third, or fourth, or fifth...) time around. The baby of the family tends to have the following birth order traits: Fun-loving, Uncomplicated, Manipulative, Outgoing, Attention-seeker, Self-centred.

Conclusion

The objective of the study was to explore the Relationship Between Birth Order (Eldest child, Middle child, youngest child) and Ego States (Parent, Adult, Child) in Adolescents. The study group of this research consists of a total of 135 samples size. The sample is divided into 3 different groups i.e.; 45 oldest children, 45 middle children and, 45 samples of the youngest child. The age group of the sample was 16-19 years old.

According to the findings, the eldest children had a dominant parent ego state, the middle children had a dominant adult ego state, and the youngest children had a dominant child ego state. Although we discovered an association between birth order and ego states in our results, we were unable to establish a hypothesis or draw a conclusion for the study due to the limited sample size and lack of prior literature review.

More research and study should be done on this topic to investigate all of the potential relationship between birth order and ego states.

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