LET’S PEEK INTO THE EYES OF AN ONLY CHILD: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract—The only child has always been stigmatized. Popular depiction emerges that the only child is a loner, misfit and always selfish and are spoiled brats. A contemporary of Sigmund Freud, Austrian psychotherapist Alfred Adler believed that birth order greatly shaped children’s personalities. According to Adlerian theory, only children take on the characteristics of both the firstborn and the youngest. Showered with attention by their parents, only children often expect to be universally admired. Yet they learn to rely on themselves, going through childhood alone and developing a sense of comfort in being alone. Consequently, children who lack siblings have traditionally been expected to display stilted social skills. However, parents can take active steps to overcome the challenges faced by the only child. This paper throws light into the life of an only child through a psychological perspectives.

Keywords: Only Child, Characteristics

INTRODUCTION

“Life is not as bad as I had imagined it would be. I was always happy. I invented games for myself. I imagined characters. I was never lonely”.

(Arundhathy Lal, 21 years)

Modern medicine and birth control have facilitated humans to control the number of children they have. Most of them choose to have more than one child; and some choose to have none at all. Still, some others choose to have only one. The number and order of birth of human offspring seems to have an effect on the personality of the child.

Psychiatrist Alfred Adler proposed a theory on the effect of birth order on personality. He felt that each position in the order, whether first or last, had distinct characteristics. According to Adler, firstborns are “dethroned” when a second child comes along, and this may have a lasting influence on them. Younger and only children may be pampered and spoiled, which can also affect their later personalities. Additional birth order factors that should be considered are the spacing in years between siblings, the total number of children, and the changing circumstances of the parents over time.

Psichologist believed that First born children tend to be conscientious, ambitious, organized and dominant. Firstborns are likely to be in control.” Along with birth-order positions, gender also plays an important role in modeling our personality. In the case of firsts, oldest sons tend to be take-charge types, leaders. Oldest females, on the other hand, are more likely to be bossy, confident and aggressive than their younger sisters. Middle children tend to be good at compromise—a skill valuable to them as they negotiated between bossy older sibs and needy younger ones. However, some middle children can be secretive. The younger ones are beloved, treasured, and in many cases babied for much longer than their older and the stereotypical youngest of the brood tends to be less responsible and more devil-may-care, with less of a hankering to take charge (Denise Schipani, 2001).
Adler (1964) believed that because only children have no rivals for their parents' affection, they may be pampered and spoiled by their parents, this could cause later interpersonal difficulties if the person is not universally liked and admired. Only children learn to be children on their own, they learn to depend on themselves, and they have no problem being loners. Only child grows up surrounded by adults, and therefore are more verbal and often more mature. This allows for gains in intelligence that exceeds other birth order differences. Having spent so much time alone, they are resourceful, creative and confident in their independence. Only child actually has a lot in common with those who are first borns, as well as those who are the youngest in their families.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ONLY CHILD

The only child has always been stigmatized. Popular depiction emerges that the only child is a loner, misfit and always, always selfish and are spoiled brats. Children who have siblings must compete for parental attention and familial resources. Only children do not have to deal with this kind of competition. Not having siblings allows for greater variance of personality types among only children; however, lack of siblings has repercussions for the only child's later social interactions (Koontz, 1989).

Only children are being extremely sensitive to criticism and over confident and at times arrogant. Only children usually impress adults with their brilliance and intelligence and as a result of growing up with adults around them, they learn quickly and develop better life skills provided that they are not spoiled.

Three distinctive characteristics separate only child families from those with multiple children:

1. The only child is first and last child in one and so is the only chance at parenting the parents get. Thus they take this charge very seriously. Because they want to do right by their son or daughter, parenting an only child can be high-pressure parenting. They don't want to make mistakes at the child's expense and so are very conscientious and deliberate in their parenting. Usually, the child feels a comparable obligation to do right by the parents. This is not a laid back family because everyone is trying extremely hard to do their best by each other.

2. Second, the only child gets the entire social, emotional, and material resources those parents have to provide. He or she is their sole beneficiary. Because parents typically make a high investment in nurturing and providing for the child, they often have a high expectation of return. They expect the child to turn out well.

3. And third, the only child has unrivalled access to parents and everything they provide. Because the only child has no siblings with whom to connect, to be compared to, to compete against, or to do conflict with, the child becomes "adultized" from identifying with and interacting with these primary parental companions.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCHES

According to Susan Newman, author of ‘The Case study for the Only child’, only child often forms deeper friendships than those with siblings do. The only child’s friends become sibling substitutes and ties often last a lifetime. However, only child does not have the built-in social network that is provided by siblings. To ensure that child has
ample opportunities to make friends, sign him up for group activities. Expose only child to a wide range of people and experiences and allow him to choose those that feel the most comfortable.

In China, couples are encouraged to have only one child in order to help curb population growth. These children, or “little emperors,” as they have been called, are generally seen as spoiled monsters. Chinese only children fared no worse in personality or achievement than their counterparts with siblings. However, only children are also often seen as high-achieving, motivated, and successful (Brophy, 1989).

With regard to intellectual ability and success, only children are much like first-borns, since they receive the undivided attention of parents and grow up in a richer intellectual environment—“not degraded by the addition of other children in the family,” says Sulloway (2001).

Toni Falbo (1987) explored the question of whether only children are lonelier than those who have siblings. Their findings suggest that solitude is not synonymous with loneliness and often strengthens character. As one psychotherapist explained to me, only children tend to have stronger primary relationships with themselves. And nothing provides better armor against loneliness.

According to a study carried out by Robert Downey, a researcher at Ohio University, only children are just as popular with peers as children who have siblings.

REPORTS BY ONLY CHILDREN

- “Being an only child, I became Introvert, selfish. I am not able to share things. I prefer loneliness. Sometimes, I felt the need of a sibling and I became possessive” (Sonu, 29 years).

- "Possibly the best part was developing the ability to enjoy being alone and to entertain myself. I’ve always had plenty of friends, yet people are surprised by how much of a loner I can be” (Devu, 32 years).

- “My parents have always told me this phase energies me. You must be just one person for the world but for one person you are the world (Amritha. 14 years).

- “I always felt lonely. Its too boring. How long we can be with parents. When I get married I wil surely have more than one child”. (David, 18 years).

CONCLUSION

Only child is often viewed as spoiled, aggressive and selfish but this is simply a stereotype with no basis in reality. Spoiled children are the product of parental attitudes, not family size. Although only children benefit from not having to share parental attention or resources, there is no scientific evidence supporting the claims that they are more spoiled than children with one or more siblings.

Naturally introverted only children may show extroverted qualities if he or she wishes to make friends. On the other hand, naturally extroverted children may learn to show introverted qualities by being content to focus on their thoughts when playmates are unavailable. Only children may have characteristics of either the first born or the youngest child.
REFERENCES