

Self-esteem in middle-born children



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Commonly, differences in the personalities of siblings find explanation in the concept of self-esteem, which pertains to the personal appraisal of individual worth. Due to the differences in personality based on the underlying influence of self-esteem, psychological studies looked into the reason for the differences. A reason that emerged is birth order because of the differences that siblings of different birth orders take in the family.

The distinctiveness of the family experiences of the middle-born child, as the child in between each end of the birth positions, will be subject to in-depth discussion. Theoretic Background of Self-Esteem Social learning theory explains that the quality of learning in the growing up years, especially in relation to rewards and punishments influence the development of self-esteem (Nietzel, Berstein, & Milich, 1998). When applied to the context of parental favoritism, differences in the rewards and punishments experienced by children of different birth orders given similar circumstances influence the development of self-esteem in children. A sibling that receives attention from parents in the form of punishments rather than rewards, then the child has the tendency to duplicate negative behavior frequently. Concurrently, a child experiencing attention through rewards tends to exhibit frequently the rewarded behavior.

Differences in parental attention, through the reward and punishment system, received by siblings influence their relative self-esteem through the concept of self-efficacy. Personal perception of self-efficacy pertains to a person's beliefs of his abilities to achieve particular performance levels to influence other people, objects or situations. Self-efficacy then determines the way an individual feels, thinks, motivates himself and behaves (Bandura,

1994). Higher levels of self-efficacy derived from greater positive parental attentions leads to better self-esteem in young children. Symbolic interaction theory provides that the self-esteem of children result from parents' appraisal of their children's inherent worth, which occurs during the interaction of parents with their children (Gecas, Calonico, & Thomas, 1974).

In application, the level of supportiveness of parents, measured in the form of approval, nurturance, warmth and positive reinforcements, to their children becomes translated into the perception of children of their inherent worth. Parental supportiveness provides an influential affirmation of a child's personal perception of his inherent worth. When a sibling receives lesser parental support relative to the other siblings, the child has the tendency to doubt his inherent worth translating into lower self-esteem while a sibling who receives greater parental support relative to the other siblings reinforces perceptions of self-worth translating into higher self-esteem. Birth order theory adds that self-esteem levels among siblings depends upon differences in familial treatment due to birth order, which is defined as the sequence or position of a sibling in terms of birth succession (Adler, 1979). Moreover, this theory explains that order of birth relates to specific characteristics due to the position in the family environment.

These characteristics influence the future attitudes and behavior of the child. This means that there are certain characteristics manifested by individuals due to their order of birth. Kidwell (1982) provides that the first-born child tend to become leaders and take on parenting responsibilities such as babysitting the younger siblings; the middle-born child commonly becomes the negotiator of the older and younger siblings; and the last-born child often

exhibits greater dependence upon their parents. Empirical EvidenceResearches linking birth order and self-esteem provide that middle-born children develop self-esteem based on their distinct positional experiences in the family. According to Adler (1956), the middle-born child has to share parental attention from birth unlike the first-born child who gets to experience exclusive parental attention and experience lesser parental attention unlike the last-born child given more protection by parents.

In relation to the first-born child, this situation then draws the middle-born child to perceive the first-born child as experiencing a favored position especially when the older sibling is entrusted with parental responsibility and authority. With regard to the last-born child, the middle-born child develops the perception that the parents apply favoritism to the last-born child.

Relative to self-esteem, the middle-born child experience more situations that could result to lower self-esteem when compared to the first-born and last-born children. The middle-born child never gets to experience exclusive parental attention.

While this is also the case for the last-born child, he is give more nurturing and protection that makes-up for the impossibility of experiencing parental attention as the only child. Moreover, the middle-born child would likely perceive the greater attention given to the last-born child as favoritism working against his/her advantage. This situation could cause the middle-born child to develop lower self-esteem. Even if the first-born child may develop the same perception, the experience of the first-born child of receiving exclusive parental attention as well as being entrusted with parental responsibilities outweighs the possible cause of lower self-esteem.

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In a later study, Toman (1976) provides that birth order influence the self-esteem of middle-born children through the intervention of the concept of parental favoritism. The study showed that parents have the tendency to endow higher expectations to older siblings to become good examples to their younger siblings.

This means that parents extend lesser tolerance to the lack of discipline of the older sibling relative to greater tolerance extended to the younger sibling. In the case of the middle-born child, he or she is neither entrusted with as much responsibility as the first-born child nor granted greater favor as the last-born child. With regard to self-esteem, the middle-born child again is in the situation that could support the development of lower self-esteem. The lower level of trust and responsibility given to the middle child could develop a feeling of lesser importance in the family. This feeling prevents the middle-born child from reinforcing his or her perception of personal self-worth. Without this reinforcement from parents, who hold moral ascendancy over the beliefs, attitudes and behavior of their children, middle-born children tend to doubt their self-worth resulting to lower self-esteem observed through the lack of assertiveness of the middle-born child or a certain degree of insecurity.

Kidwell (1982) conducted a study on the distinctive attitudes of middle-born siblings that reinforce previous findings. The study showed that middle-born children hold distinctive perceptions of their personal and familial roles.

Middle-born children carry the feelings of having been cheated of parental attention because from the beginning they only get to share parental attention. They also report getting lesser levels of support from parents or

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the family. Due to this, they develop lower self-esteem and have unstable sense of identity. Conclusion Based on theoretical and empirical evidence, being a middle-born child has an influence on self-esteem because the different treatment of parents of middle-born children influences their formation and affirmation of self-worth.

Evidence shows that middle-born children tend to develop lower self-esteem because they experience lesser attention or entrusted with lesser trust. This means that parents play an important role in consciously building the self-worth of their children so that it is up to parents to minimize or do away with preventable or controllable unequal treatment for the well-being of their children regardless of birth order.