

Psychology

Unit 2: Developmental Psychology



Developmental Unit Guide rev 2016

Essential Questions:

- What is Piaget's theory of cognitive development?
- How does social development progress according to Ainsworth and Harlow?
- What are Kohlberg's theory of moral development?
- What are the stages of psychosocial development according to Erikson?
- What are the stages of psychosexual development according to Freud?
- How and why are defense mechanisms used?
- What influence does birth order have on your personality according to Adler?

11-3:

Developmental psychology, cognition, schemas, assimilation, accommodation, sensorimotor stage, object permanence, preoperational stage, conservation, egocentrism, theory of mind, concrete operational stage, formal operational stage

11-4:

Stranger anxiety, attachment, critical period, imprinting, securely attached, insecurely attached, deprivation of attachment, responsive environment, authoritarian parenting, permissive parenting, authoritative parenting

12-3:

Preconventional moral reasoning, conventional moral reasoning, postconventional moral reasoning

12-4:

Trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame and doubt, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation, integrity vs. despair

28-1:

Psychoanalysis, psychodynamic perspective, free association, preconscious, unconscious, conscious, id, pleasure principle, ego, reality principle, superego, defense mechanisms, repression, regression, denial, reaction formation, projection, rationalization, displacement, psychosexual stages, fixated, oral stage, anal stage, phallic stage, Oedipus complex, latency stage, genital stage

MISC:

Birth order

Names to know:

Piaget
Erikson
Ainsworth
Kohlberg
Harlow
Lorenz
Freud
Adler

Name _____

When Bad Children Aren't Bad

No matter how charming the child, eventually parents find themselves exasperated with their child's behavior. Sometimes it is easy for a parent to assume intentional misbehavior when other motives actually may be at work. By watching his own children, Piaget gave us some cognitive concepts to reexamine what bad kids may really be up to. **See if you can identify the cognitive concept from Piaget that explains each child's cognition.**

1. Although the parents spent \$300 on holiday toys for their 1-year-old daughter, she spent more time playing peek-a-boo by sticking her head in and out of a box that one of the toys came in. Why should the parents have kept their money?

2. A well-meaning aunt talked with her 9-month-old nephew about meeting her new boyfriend. However, when he saw the young man, the child shrieked inconsolably. "It must be his mustache!" the aunt exclaimed.

3. "Stop doing that!" screamed the exasperated mother in response to her infant's irritating habit of throwing his bottle from the high chair to the floor. She must have stooped over at least twenty times during this meal alone and her child just wasn't learning! Why should the child's behavior not be surprising?

4. An older brother and younger sister constantly fight when they are playing cards. No matter how many times the brother explains the rules to his sister, the sister spreads hers out in a long line instead of a pile and declares, "I win! I have more cards!" What principle is keeping the sister from learning the rules?

5. A 4-year-old girl walks into the kitchen and sees her mother pouring herself a glass of juice. The little girl asks for a glass too, so the mother reaches into a cabinet and pulls out a kid-sized cup. Her daughter screams and cries because she wants "a bigger amount of juice." She doesn't stop crying until her mother pours the juice out of the child's cup and into a larger container.

6. Two-year-old twins were forever arguing about whose toy belonged to whom. The young father decided to put a stop to the arguing once and for all. He sat them both down and gave them a lecture about understanding the way the other twin felt. Although the twins nodded their heads, they were fighting again almost before the father had left the room. Why should the father have saved his breath?

Parental Authority Questionnaire

For each of the following statements, choose the number on the 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) that best describes how that statement applies to you and your caregiver. There are no right or wrong answers, so don't spend a lot of time on any one item. We are looking for your overall impression regarding each statement. Be sure not to omit any items.

- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neither agree nor disagree
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

_____ 1. While I was growing up my caregiver felt that in a well-run home the children should have their way in the family as often as the parents do.

_____ 2. Even if their children didn't agree with them, my caregiver felt that it was for our own good if we were forced to conform to what they thought was right.

_____ 3. Whenever my caregiver told me to do something as I was growing up, they expected me to do it immediately without asking any questions.

_____ 4. As I was growing up, once family policy had been established, my caregiver discussed the reasoning behind the policy with the children in the family.

_____ 5. My caregiver has always encouraged verbal give-and-take whenever I have felt that family rules and restrictions were unreasonable.

_____ 6. My caregiver has always felt that what children need is to be free to make up their own minds and to do what they want to do, even if this does not agree with what their parents might want.

_____ 7. As I was growing up my caregiver did not allow me to question any decision they had made.

_____ 8. As I was growing up my caregiver directed the activities and decisions of the children in the family through reasoning and discipline.

_____ 9. My caregiver has always felt that more force should be used by parents to get their children to behave.

_____ 10. As I was growing up my caregiver did not feel that I needed to obey rules and regulations of behavior simply because someone in authority had established them.

_____ 11. As I was growing up I knew what my caregiver expected of me in my family, but I also felt free to discuss those expectations with my caregiver when I felt that they were unreasonable.

_____ 12. My caregiver felt that wise parents should teach their children at a young age who is boss in the family.

_____ 13. As I was growing up, my caregiver seldom gave me expectations and guidelines for my behavior.

_____ 14. Most of the time as I was growing up my caregiver did what the children in the family wanted when making family decisions.

- _____15. As the children in my family were growing up, my caregiver consistently gave us direction and guidance in rational and objective ways.
- _____16. As I was growing up my caregiver would get very upset if I tried to disagree with them.
- _____17. My caregiver feels that most problems in society would be solved if parents would not restrict their children's activities, decisions, and desires as they are growing up.
- _____18. As I was growing up my caregiver let me know what behavior they expected of me, and if I didn't meet those expectations, they punished me.
- _____19. As I was growing up my caregiver allowed me to decide most things for myself without a lot of direction from them.
- _____20. As I was growing up my caregiver took the children's opinions into consideration when making family decisions, but they would not decide for something simply because the children wanted it.
- _____21. My caregiver did not view themselves as responsible for directing and guiding my behavior as I was growing up.
- _____22. My caregiver had clear standards of behavior for the children in our home as I was growing up, but they were willing to adjust those standards to the needs of each of the individual children in the family.
- _____23. My caregiver gave me direction for my behavior and activities as I was growing up and they expected me to follow their directions, but they were willing to listen to my concerns and to discuss that direction with me.
- _____24. As I was growing up my caregiver allowed me to form my own point of view on family matters and they generally allowed me to decide for myself what I was going to do.
- _____25. My caregiver has always felt that most problems in society would be solved if we could get parents to strictly and forcibly deal with their children when they don't do what they are supposed to as they are growing up.
- _____26. As I was growing up my caregiver often told me exactly what they wanted me to do and how they expected me to do it.
- _____27. As I was growing up my caregiver gave me clear direction for my behaviors and activities, but they also understood when I disagreed with them.
- _____28. As I was growing up my caregiver did not direct the behaviors, activities, and desires of the children in the family.
- _____29. As I was growing up I knew what my caregiver expected of me in the family and they insisted that I conform to those expectations simply out of respect for their authority.
- _____30. As I was growing up if my caregiver made a decision in the family that hurt me, they were willing to discuss that decision with me and to admit it if they had made a mistake.

PARENTING STYLES

Authoritative parents are warm but firm. They encourage their adolescent to be independent while maintaining limits and controls on their actions. Authoritative parents do not invoke the “because I said” rule. Instead, they are willing to entertain, listen to, and take into account their teen’s viewpoint. Authoritative parents engage in discussions and debates with their adolescent, although ultimate responsibility resides with the parent. Research demonstrates that adolescents of authoritative parents learn how to negotiate and engage in discussions. They understand that their opinions are valued. As a result, they are more likely to be socially competent, responsible, and autonomous.

How responsive are authoritative parents?

How demanding are authoritative parents?

How responsive are authoritarian parents?

How demanding are authoritarian parents?

Authoritarian parents display little warmth and are highly controlling. They are strict disciplinarians, use a restrictive style, and insist that their adolescent follow parental directions. Authoritarian parents invoke phrases such as, “you will do this because I said,” and “because I’m the parent and you are not.” Authoritarian parents do not engage in discussions with their teen and family rules and standards are not debated. Authoritarian parents believe the adolescent should accept, without question, the rules and practices that they establish. Research reveals that adolescents of authoritarian parents learn that following parental rules and adherence to strict discipline is valued over independent behavior. As a result, adolescents may become rebellious or dependent. Those who become rebellious might display aggressive behaviors. Adolescents who are more submissive tend to remain dependent on their parents.

Permissive parents are very warm, but undemanding. They are indulgent and passive in their parenting, and believe that the way to demonstrate their love is to give in to their adolescent’s wishes. Permissive parents invoke such phrases as, “sure, you can stay up late if you want to,” and “you do not need to do any chores if you don’t feel like it.” Permissive parents do not like to say no or disappoint their children. As a result, teens are allowed to make many important decisions without parental input. Parents do not view themselves as active participants in shaping their teen’s actions; instead they view themselves as a resource, should the adolescent choose to seek their advice. Research findings show that adolescents of permissive parents learn that there are very few boundaries and that rules and consequences are not likely to be very serious. As a result, teens may have difficulty with self-control and demonstrate egocentric tendencies that can interfere with proper development of peer relationships.

How responsive are permissive parents?

How demanding are permissive parents?

How responsive are uninvolved parents?

How demanding are uninvolved parents?

Uninvolved parents are not warm and do not place any demands on their teen. They minimize their interaction time, and, in some cases, are uninvolved to the point of being neglectful. Uninvolved parents are indifferent to their adolescent’s needs, whereabouts, or experiences at school or with peers. Uninvolved parents invoke such phrases as, “I don’t care where you go,” or “why should I care what you do?” Uninvolved parents rarely consider their teen’s input in decisions and they generally do not want to be bothered by their teen. These parents may be overwhelmed by their circumstances or they may be self-centered. Parents might also engage in this style if they are tired, frustrated, or have simply “given up” in trying to maintain parental authority. Research supports that adolescents of uninvolved parents learn that parents tend to be interested in their own lives and less likely to invest much time in parenting. As a result, teens generally show similar patterns of behavior as adolescents raised in permissive homes and they may also demonstrate impulsive behaviors due to issues with self-regulation.

Which parenting style do you believe raises the most well-adjusted teenagers? Why?

Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development

Name of Stage	Ages	Description; key vocab + definitions	Visual Representation or RWE
Trust vs. Mistrust			
Autonomy vs. Shame + Doubt			
Initiative vs. Guilt			
Industry vs. Inferiority			
Identity vs. Role Confusion			
Intimacy vs. Isolation			
Generativity vs. Stagnation			
Integrity vs. Despair			

The Rock Star Nanny [Manny]

The Situation:

A family has hired you to care for their child for one weekend day. You were hired because of your vast knowledge of developmental psychology and exceptional creative nature. You will be planning the day's activities based on the child's age and level of social and cognitive development.

The Assignment:

You will work with a partner on this project. Determine a well-rounded, age-appropriate schedule of activities that are both physical and cognitive in nature. They should be enjoyable, creative and socially appropriate!

Be sure to use information from your readings and class to determine what would be truly best for your child.

You and your partner will create a colorful, creative and informative "presentation" that covers your plan for your child.

Requirements:

Your final product will include 3 of the following items for your child's enrichment plan.

1. *1 Book* – Provide the name of the book, a synopsis of the story and a picture of the book.
2. *1 Physical Activity* – A description of the activity, including any equipment that may be needed and a picture of the activity.
3. *1 Toy* – A description of what the toy is, what it does and a picture of the toy.
4. *1 Board Game* – Explain the object of the game, how you play it and a picture of the game.
5. *1 Television Show* – Name the show, provide a synopsis that includes information about characters, storyline, etc. and a picture of the tv show.
6. *1 Excursion* – Name the location that you will take the child to, what is done there and a picture of the location.

ALL of the above MUST be in your own words.
(You may NOT copy off of the back of the book, tv guide, board game...)

In addition to the requirements listed for each item on the front, you will need to provide:

- Theory Application: You MUST reference age, cognitive ability, and stage of social development! Highlight the appropriate vocabulary.

This must be in your words. Do NOT copy out of your textbook or any other source. Use your own knowledge of the material.

Your choices should be creative and unique, yet practical. The goal is to be **original** and to provide substantial support for your choice based on research and theory. You and your partner will be presenting to your classmates on _____.

MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Part A.

Describe each of Kohlberg's stages of moral development:

Preconventional

Conventional

Postconventional

Part B.

For each situation, decide in which stage of Kohlberg's theory the person is responding. Write down the name of the stage. Be prepared to explain your rationale for the stage you choose.

1. Tamara has five tests in one day. She is a good student but did not have time to study for her French test. She knows the person who sits next to her in French class is also a good student. This girl has copied from Tamara on occasion. Tamara decides to look at the other girl's test for the questions she does not know. Besides, she thinks Tamara, "I never should have five tests in one day."
2. Scott thought about leaving school early and going to a baseball game. He stayed in school because he was afraid of getting caught.
3. Juanita's friends were at the mall, and someone suggested they do a little shoplifting just to see if they could get away with it. Juanita wouldn't participate and said stealing is wrong.
4. Muhammed lives with his mother in a poor section of the city. His mother is quite ill and needs outpatient services daily at the hospital some miles away from their home. Muhammed steals a car to take his mother to the hospital.
5. Martina, a young woman living in a war-torn region of the world, distributes food to orphans living in the streets. This activity is actually against the law. She frequently has to deceive the authorities in order to keep these children alive.
6. Grant wants to spend time after school volunteering at the hospital. However, he is a good basketball player and practice interferes with this volunteer program. The coach and other teammates pressure him to play. Grant decides to play with the team.

HANDOUT 28-4

Issues in Personality

Directions: Indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements using the following response scale. Place the appropriate number in the blank before each item.

- 1 = strongly disagree
 2 = disagree
 3 = neutral
 4 = agree
 5 = strongly agree

- ___ 1. Events that occurred during childhood have no effect on one's personality in adulthood.
- ___ 2. Sexual adjustment is easy for most people.
- ___ 3. Culture and society have evolved as ways to curb human beings' natural aggressiveness.
- ___ 4. Little boys should not become too attached to their mothers.
- ___ 5. It is possible to deliberately "forget" something too painful to remember.
- ___ 6. People who chronically smoke, eat, or chew gum have some deep psychological problems.
- ___ 7. Competitive people are no more aggressive than noncompetitive people.
- ___ 8. Fathers should remain somewhat aloof to their daughters.
- ___ 9. Toilet training is natural and not traumatic for most children.
- ___ 10. The phallus is a symbol of power.
- ___ 11. A man who dates a woman old enough to be his mother has problems.
- ___ 12. There are some women who are more interested in demeaning men than loving them.
- ___ 13. Dreams merely replay events that occurred during the day and have no deep meaning.
- ___ 14. There is something wrong with a woman who dates a man who is old enough to be her father.
- ___ 15. A student who wants to postpone an exam by saying "My grandmother lied . . . er, I mean died," should probably be allowed the postponement.

Source: Miserandino, M. (1994). Freudian principles in everyday life. *Teaching of Psychology*, 21, 93-95. Reprinted by permission of Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., and the author.

HANDOUT 28-5

Defense Mechanisms

Directions: Next to each of the statements below, indicate with the appropriate letter the defense mechanism that is illustrated. Use the following code:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|
| A. Repression | E. Displacement |
| B. Regression | F. Sublimation |
| C. Reaction Formation | G. Projection |
| D. Rationalization | |

- ___ 1. Even a top baseball player will sometimes strike out on an easy pitch. When this happens, his next action may be to throw his bat or kick the water cooler with all his might.
- ___ 2. Soldiers exposed to traumatic experiences in concentration camps during wartime sometimes had amnesia and were unable to recall any part of their ordeal.
- ___ 3. The mother of an unwanted child may feel guilty about not welcoming her child. As a result, she may try to prove her love by becoming overindulgent and overprotective of the child.
- ___ 4. Mrs. Brown often accuses other women of talking too much and spreading rumors. It is rather obvious to those who know her that she is revealing her own inclinations in that area.
- ___ 5. Paul, an aggressive child, had problems in elementary school, as he would frequently fight with other children. Paul found when he entered high school that he could channel this hostility into sports such as football and soccer.
- ___ 6. The habitual drinker may insist that he really doesn't care much for the taste of alcohol but feels that he is obliged to drink with friends "just to be sociable."
- ___ 7. Mrs. James can't understand why her husband has been so grumpy and irritable for the past week. It certainly isn't her fault that he didn't receive the anticipated promotion at the factory.
- ___ 8. Parents might be reassured to know that children who pull wings off flies and jab pins in the dog may eventually find their niche in the areas of dentistry or surgery.
- ___ 9. Mike is always trying to impress his pals with how strong and independent he has become. However, when Mike has social or emotional problems, he still wants his dad to figure out the solution.
- ___ 10. A student forgot that his dreaded final exam in geometry was scheduled for Friday. This seemed unusual as the date of the exam had been marked on his calendar for several weeks.
- ___ 11. A boy will sometimes react against the strong sexual attraction that he feels toward girls by becoming a confirmed "woman hater."
- ___ 12. The majority group of a culture may blame all the various ills of society on a small minority group. This is a process termed "scapegoating" and is a factor in racial and religious prejudice.
- ___ 13. The individual who actually likes to have others do things for him may be quick to criticize other people for being dependent and lazy.

- ___ 14. James Riley has suffered heavy financial losses recently while playing the stock market. Upon trading his big luxury car for an old small car, Jim informed his associates that he bought the cheaper car to do his part in the battle against air pollution.
- ___ 15. David Walters recently lost his executive position in a large corporation. Rather than seek a new job, David finds comfort and escape through drinking, as alcohol helps him forget the details of being fired.
- ___ 16. Tory is apt to become annoyed when he recalls his earlier conviction as a Peeping Tom. Tory has left his sordid past behind and now is a busy photographer for Playboy magazine.
- ___ 17. Joan has discovered an amazing coincidence in relation to her attendance at school. Every time a test in Spanish is scheduled, she oversleeps and arrives at school too late for the class.
- ___ 18. Reformers may conduct campaigns against pornographic literature in order to fight their own erotic interest in such material. They campaign to convince others of their own purity and goodness.
- ___ 19. Margaret is convinced that she received a "C" in her chemistry class instead of an "A" because of widespread cheating by her fellow students. She is sure that she must be as capable in the chemistry course as in her other subjects.
- ___ 20. The young wife, after a bitter conflict with her husband, gives up her marriage as a failure and returns to the home of her parents. She again takes on the role of the dependent child who expects unlimited love and indulgence.
- ___ 21. The high school teacher was criticized by the principal for having a disruptive class. When the teacher got home that night, he argued with his wife and kicked the dog.
- ___ 22. Adults who were sexually molested during childhood often report that all the details of the painful episode have been forgotten.
- ___ 23. It is possible that smokers have graduated from earlier stages of thumb-sucking and pencil-chewing, neither of which would be acceptable behavior in adult society. Smoking is a socially acceptable outlet for the oral need.
- ___ 24. The woman with a strong sexual drive may feel that most other women exhibit flirtatious behavior or wear revealing clothes.
- ___ 25. After John was rejected by the admissions office at Yale, he claimed that he wouldn't enjoy attending such a large school anyway. Besides, he might receive higher grades at a smaller local college.
- ___ 26. Mary has secretly disliked her mother since she was a young child. As these feelings arouse anxiety, Mary usually tells friends that she loves her mother very much.
- ___ 27. Roger is a heavy drinker but has managed to keep this behavior a secret from his friends. He is sure that most people actually drink as much as he does.
- ___ 28. One psychological theory holds that the desire for sexual gratification, if frustrated or blocked, may eventually find expression in painting or the writing of poetry.
- ___ 29. A number of psychologists believe that social crusaders who advocate various forms of social control may in reality be struggling with their own unconscious desires.
- ___ 30. A 6-year-old child, who gave up bed-wetting at the age of 3, moves with his parents to a new neighborhood. During the stressful period of adjusting to his new home, he again wets the bed for several nights.

- 31. The girl who was not invited to the school dance told her friends that she would not have attended if asked. She said that her teachers had assigned more homework than usual and that she was simply too busy for any unimportant social functions.
- 32. It is typical for the person who is most difficult to convince in an argument to say that everyone else is stubborn.
- 33. When a new baby arrives in the family, the older child will sometimes cry more than usual and be more insistent about receiving caresses from the parents.
- 34. Billy always teases and annoys his younger brother after he himself is disciplined by his parents.
- 35. Mr. Martin carried around a letter in his coat pocket for weeks. The note which he somehow neglected mailing was an invitation to his mother-in-law to visit the family for several months.

Source: Kellogg, R. (1976, January). *Simulation/Gaming News*, pp. 13-16. Copyright © 1976 by Sage Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Sage Publications, Inc.

Frasier Episode

While viewing this episode of Frasier pay special attention to the Freudian concepts that are being presented. You will have to identify a **minimum of three concepts** including the specific examples from the show. After you identify the concept, define it in the middle column. In the last column, provide a **specific example** of the concept as you saw it in the show.

<u>Concept</u>	<u>Definition</u>	<u>Specific Example</u>



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FREUD



Birth Order: The Basics

by **Robert Needlman, M.D., F.A.A.P.**

reviewed by Robert Needlman, M.D., F.A.A.P.

Do you believe that firstborns generally are more responsible, smarter, and make better leaders? Are last-born children destined to be "babies," even when they're grown up? And what about those long-suffering middle children?

Birth order has fascinated people since the days of Cain and Abel. Modern experts and pundits have linked birth order to personality, intelligence, and career choice, not to mention sexual orientation and even cancer risk. Does knowing whether a person is first, last, middle, or "only" really tell you much? And if birth order *is* so important, what are the implications for parents?

A profound impact on personality

If you think about it, there is no way that birth order could not influence a child's developing personality. Where he stands in the family plays a large role in determining the relationships between a child and his parents and--perhaps even more important--between a child and his siblings. Later on in life, those family relationships set the pattern for the way that person will respond to friends, teachers, colleagues, and competitors--not to mention his own spouse and children. Just look at your own situation, and you'll probably agree that your relationships with your siblings (or your lack of siblings, if you were an only child) had a powerful influence on who you are now.

Different strokes

Sibling relationships help explain why children in one family tend to be so different from one another. [Siblings](#) differ from each other in terms of their personalities, talents, and even troubles almost as much as do children who aren't related at all. Some of these differences can be chalked up to temperament and genetics, but, to a large extent, the differences arise because children who grow up under the same roof actually experience very different families.

Take, for example, a family with three children. The oldest, a boy, experiences a family with a younger brother and sister. The second child has an older brother and a baby sister. And the third child has two big brothers to deal with. For each child, where he stands in the family's hierarchy influences what he needs to do to win parental attention and approval, and what the other family members' expectations of him are.

Not the only factor

"Wait a minute!" you say, "This is way oversimplified! There are plenty of people who don't fit this picture at all." And of course, you're right; birth order is only one factor determining personality and outlook. Also important are the spacing between children, their sexes, their temperaments and the temperaments of the parents, the parents' birth order and personalities, and a whole host of other influences. Family dynamics mold many firstborns into high-achieving conformists, but others may become angry rebels, particularly if their parents set such high expectations that they feel they can never hope to measure up. Later-born children often take on aspects of the firstborn if the actual firstborn abdicates his leadership role--if he has a serious disability or chronic illness, for example--or if there is a long gap (five years or more) between their older siblings and themselves. Finally, the dynamics in step, blended, single, and divorced families add a whole other layer of complexity.

Because of these reasons, personality development can't be distilled into a simple cookbook formula with birth order as the sole ingredient. But thinking about birth order *can* give you insight into how the forces within families shape children and the adults they grow up to become. It also may help you understand yourself as a parent and perhaps to avoid some of the pitfalls that can trap even the best-intentioned of parents as they deal with their assorted brood.

Is Birth Order a Myth?

A closer look at what the research actually tells us.

Post published by [Ronald E Riggio Ph.D.](#) on Apr 18, 2015 in [Cutting-Edge Leadership](#)

Many people believe that birth order shapes our personalities and has impact on the careers we choose, and the ways we behave. However, it is difficult to conduct good research on birth order, and extremely hard to determine if differences found in siblings are due to birth order or other effects.

What do we really know about birth order effects?

First, there is a common belief that first borns are high achievers. After all, a great many successful people are first born or only children. But consider this: There are simply far *more* first-born children than any other birth-order position. So it might just be an effect of the sheer numbers of first borns that causes this perception.

It is important also to note that when we rely on our own experience, we are subject to what is called *confirmation bias*. If we believe that first borns are more driven, and thus more successful, we will search for and remember instances in which a successful person was a first born, and not pay as much attention to, or forget, the fact that many successful people were later-born children. As a result, it appears to us that the hypothesis—first borns are more successful—is confirmed by our own experience and observations.

Maybe there are birth order effects, but they have little to do with birth order per se. Consider this: Smaller families are able to concentrate more “resources”—money for private schools or tutors, computers or educational games—on fewer children. So, again it’s a numbers game: First borns not only get more attention from parents initially, but if in a small family, they don’t have to share as much of that attention with siblings. And with the trend toward smaller families, there are more of these types of first borns. So birth order effects may just be family size effects.

A major problem with birth order studies is the difficulty of conducting them well. Today, with so many blended families made up of step-siblings and half-siblings, it is hard not only to determine the “true” birth order of siblings, but large spacing between siblings may disrupt birth order effects: Are children born 10 years apart really a first born and second born, or are they more like two first borns? Also, to determine reliably that birth order effects exist, it takes a very large sample of research participants, and many of the existing birth order studies are done on relatively small samples, making their results suspect.

What’s the bottom line?

The scientific community does not agree on the presence or absence of birth order effects. There has been some evidence that birth order might influence IQ—earlier borns score slightly higher—and some evidence that birth order affects mate selection—first borns tend to choose first borns, middle children are attracted to middle children, etc.—but these good studies are few and far between. Many studies show no birth order effects.

The important conclusion to draw from all of this is birth order may or may not matter, but regardless, the impact is likely very small. Clearly, the order in which you are born is not going to do too much to shape your personality and destiny compared to the wide range of other influences on personality development, such as family resources, parenting style, school and peer environment, etc.