

Van Volkom, M., & Beaudoin, E. (2016). The Effect of Birth Order and Sex on Perceptions of the Sibling Relationship Among College Students. *College Student Journal*, 50(3), 347–354

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Summary

Literature review: The main focus of this study is the relationship between siblings in adulthood. The bond between siblings is crucial because it is the relationship that people most likely have for the duration of their lives. One of the main factors that determines the strength of sibling relationships in adulthood is their parent-child relationship from childhood. It is shown that children who had more positive, strong relationships with their parents when they were younger, typically have stronger relationships with their siblings as adults. This idea about the connection between parent-child relationships and sibling relationships in adulthood connects to the life-span attachment theory. The life-span attachment theory assumes attachment patterns can be created over someone's lifetime. The pattern can be created with parents and be passed on to future relationships with siblings. This theory is relevant because each person creates an attachment or multiple attachment to people, places, things, etc. in their lifetime. This study aims to provide a thorough understanding of how sibling relationships in adulthood differ from sibling relationships in childhood and adolescence and what factors, such as birth order and sex, influence the perceptions of the relationship (Van Volkom & Beaudoin, 2016). Their anticipation is that birth order and sex would have an influence on how college students perceive their siblings as well as their frequency of communication, specifically in terms of rivalry, closeness, and sibling comparisons.

Method: One hundred sixty-seven people participated in this study. The two main forms of finding data for this study include a demographics form and a questionnaire, both of which are qualitative methods. The demographic form recorded the participant's age, gender, ethnicity, year in school, number of siblings, sibling birth order, residential status, and parental marital status. The questionnaire helped assess past, current, and future relationships with their siblings and influences on their relationships. These two methods helped assess participants' communication and closeness with their siblings as well as specific questions about their relationship. Topics such as sibling closeness, rivalry, communication, relationship maintenance, and parental interference were also taken into account in order to research sibling relationships (Van Volkom & Beaudoin, 2016). Results were analyzed using ANOVA and t-tests to examine the effect that birth order had on sibling perceptions.

Discussion: The results of this study show that there are no significant effects of sex or birth order on sibling relationship factors such as rivalry, sibling comparison, or feelings of parental inference on sibling relationships. While the authors of this study did not find significant information to fulfil their idea that birth order and sex affect sibling relationships in adulthood,

there were several other findings that did affect these relationships. A number of demographic findings returned interesting results relating to the study. For example, ethnicity had little to no effect on sibling relationships, but parental marital status did which may show that non-intact families typically have weaker sibling relationships in adulthood. Another example from the demographic findings is second year college students are typically more inclined to stay in contact with their families via email rather than first year students. It was also noted that middle children influenced closeness with siblings more than the year in college (Van Volkom & Beaudoin, 2016).

Evaluation

The idea of this study is rather interesting and something that isn't always considered. The concept of sibling relationships can be so broad, so tying communication and birth order factors into the study was very interesting. I agree with the findings that the authors reached regarding the factors that have an impact on sibling relationships. This article could be impactful to many, especially considering a good portion of the population has siblings. The usefulness of this article may be different for each person. While siblings are the main focus, the findings may be more useful for parents. The ideas discussed in this article cannot necessarily be changed by siblings, it is something that is either decided for them or picked in advance. Parents could use the findings of this article to help create better relationships between their children to help ensure their sibling relationships stay strong throughout adulthood.

Although this was an interesting article, there were a few things missing discussion points. This study gives no insights as to the gender of the participants, which may make a difference when considering sibling relationships as well as children parent relationships. Also, the questionnaire that each participant took made no reference to age gap between siblings, which may have a significant effect on the strength of a sibling relationship. However, the findings of this study were still useful and significant with the introduction of the life-span attachment theory. This theory can be applied to more relationships than siblings. It can be applied to friendships as well, since patterns may form like they do between parent and sibling relationships. It would be interesting to apply this theory and this study to friendships, to see if sibling relationships as well as birth order and other factors discussed in this study may have an effect on friendships (Van Volkom & Beaudoin, 2016).