

Middle Child Syndrome: Truth or Fiction?

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Today's guest post comes courtesy of an online writing acquaintance of mine, [Cathy Miller](#).

Cathy Miller is a freelance business writer with more than 30 years of professional writing experience.

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I wear the middle child of seven distinction as an honor badge. It creeps into my writing and even an email address.

I am fascinated by the theories that birth order determines your personality. Oh really? Let's examine this further.



Pecking Order

Scientists bantered about the notion that your birth order influences your personality for over a century. Alfred Adler, an Austrian psychiatrist and peer of Sigmund Freud, took the theory quite seriously.

Adler proposed that where you fall in the pecking order has a lasting effect on personality. Losing only child status burns as well. Adler called that event "dethronement." In the case of my sister, the oldest of the siblings, being only five feet tall added a whole other dimension to her relationship with my nearly six-foot tall oldest brother.

Science being science, the debate over birth order's effect raged on through countless studies. The following are a few of the characteristics assigned to birth order.

- First born – a leader, high achiever, conservative
- Only child – most likely to go to college, selfish, a perfectionist
- Middle child – a peacemaker, competitive, flexible
- Youngest child – rebellious, charming, persistent

I'll accept those middle child attributes.

Recent studies link IQ and birth orders. It seems the more brothers and sisters between you and the oldest, the lower your IQ. I don't think I'll tell my younger sister that. I guess her Master's degree was a fluke.

Birth Control

To quote a *Scientific American* article on the subject = size matters.

As the author explains, scientists dismissed early birth order studies that did not consider family size. After all, my middle child of seven rank means dealing with more siblings than a middle child of three does.

Have you ever wondered why children from the same family, raised with the same values, turn out so different? One reason may be family size. As the article points out – life happens. Changes in financial status or parenting practices

have an impact. Either that or we just wear out mom and dad.

There are also studies that suggest we form relationships with other people of the same birth order. That's a little too *Stepford Wives* for me.

Middle Child Syndrome

If I were to play this game, what personality traits would I admit to?

- An aversion to “following the crowd”
- A hatred of labels meant to define you (yet I accept middle child -?)
- Comfortable onstage, but lone wolf tendencies
- Pollyanna persona

My mother was also a middle child. However, she was that middle child of three.

In her, I see a much different experience, a sensitivity that she was not the oldest (and male) or the much younger, doted on little sister.

Two middle children – two very different personalities. Of course, that could be the view of a typical child who never thinks he or she takes after a parent.

Truth or Fiction?

So, is there something to this theory? Is the fact that the topic fascinates me so much a confirmation of my middle child status?

A part of me resists the idea that the luck of the draw defines who I am. Yet, I see so much of myself in certain descriptions of the middle child. Kind of like astrology signs. We dismiss them as amusing generalities, but we read our horoscope every day.

What do you think? How much did your birth order shape your personality? Do you see history repeating itself in your children?

When in doubt, we could always blame our parents.