

Marital Satisfaction among Couples with Complementary Birth Order.

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The present study aimed at comparing the difference between the marital adjustment of same and opposite birth order. 64 couples were taken in the sample, with the minimum of 3 years and maximum 15 years of marriage, without any diagnosis of infertility. Data collection was done using the consent form, a demographic information form, and The Spinier Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (1995). It was hypothesized that Couples of opposite birth order have high marital adjustability as compared to couples of same birth order. Results obtained were analysed using Minitab Statistical Software. The data revealed significant difference between the two groups ($t = 2.11$, $P = 0.019$) thus verifies the hypothesis. This indicates that there is a greater marital adjustability among opposite birth order couples as compare to same birth order couples.

Birth order has become a significant subject of study since the past few decades. Each child solves particular issues of life by utilizing a set of coping mechanisms which then become a part of birth order characteristics (Isaacson, 2002). "Each place in the birth order has a unique thinking pattern and how he or she processes information." Adler, (1930) was the one who gave theory on the significance of birth order. He coined the term "dethrones" for first born individuals, means that 'unseated or removed from their first place'. As a result of this fortune some become inhibited, some may be rebellious or others can be with the nurturer's emotional tendency. He said this birth order "can cause the first child to protect him/her against reversals, can cause first born child to be insecure or ultra conservative or can cause the first born to be a helper to the parents when the second child is brought into the picture". Middle born children are not pampered as their older siblings were, but they still get enough attention. Being a middle child, they have the luxury of trying to dethrone the oldest child and become more superior while at the same time knowing that they hold this same power over their younger siblings. Adler believed that middle children have a high need for superiority and are often able to seek it out such as through strong antagonism. The youngest children, like the first born ones, may be more likely to encounter personality problems later in their lives and the younger child is the one who grows up knowing that he/she has the least amount of power and autonomy in the whole family. He/she observes that his older siblings actually have more freedom and more dominance. Being the last, he/she also gets pampered and protected and this makes him feel more inferior to any other child.

Taman, (1976) and Leman, (1998) proposed the theory that the opposite birth order of the husband-wife leads to more marital adjustability than of the same birth order. Leman, (1998) suggests that the perfect and not so perfect birth order couples for long-term intimate that is romantic relationships. He has found that the absolute worst birth order pairs are those within the same birth order (e.g., two first-borns, only born, two middles, or two youngest). According to him two first-borns together equal a lifelong power struggle. Leman, (2000) also says that two middles are a bad match because communication will be missing due to avoidance conflict. The findings gave the idea of physiological signs of anxiety that a first born depicts when he or she experiences dethronement. Hence according to him, it is best to marry someone from other than your birth order. However it is best to marry the most converse birth order position.

The duplication theorem states that opposites attract. This means that if a person is firstborn, the best match will be a last born as given by Taman, (1976) after Having been tested in clinical studies.

Researchers have found, for example, that people with many younger siblings are often quite compatible with people who have numerous older siblings. One study found that a lack of rank conflict leads to the most harmonious relationships (Weller, et. al; 1974)

Rank conflict refers to the problems those individuals of similar rank experience in a relationship. Two firstborns, for example, have the same rank and would be expected to fight over who's the leader. Similarly two last-borns could be expected to experience conflict over who's to be considered the baby of the relationship. The notion of rank conflict was first formulated by Taman, (1976) in his book *Family Constellation*. The duplication theorem has validity, he found, although it needs to be modified by considering the potential for social revolution to cause interpersonal conflict between the first-born and the last-born. It is observed

that sometimes two first-born or two last-born individuals have an exceptionally pleasing bonding, which is called the narcissistic relationship: they love and care for each other for the reason that they are so similar. Such kind of relationships is considered to some extent less mature than relationships among partners with heterogeneous birth orders.

Two first-born or two last-born individuals may have a pleasing relationship. This, in relation to Frank Solway's (1996) theory, shows that 'similar birth orders bond together, especially during times of radical social revolution'. Since plentiful features come across in evaluating romantic compatibility; it certainly helps, to know about one's partner's birth order since it reflects a lot about the personality and how they will counter under diverse nerve-racking conditions.

First-born and later-born combination was characterized at high marital adjustment and first-born couples were at low marital adjustment (Hazi, 1974, Angira, 1990). On the other hand, study said that the birth order and family structure extensively impacted adjustment. Schilling, (2001) indicated that the ideal romantic partnership is of the oldest and a youngest birth order.

Theodore, (1966) found that mating is more frequent between heterogeneous types of sibling thus husbands in certain types of marital combinations; considering sibling variables, were found to be more satisfied than husbands in other combinations'.

Brubaker, (1998) found out that relationship between ordinal birth position and ratings of marital satisfaction for married women. They examined the conflicts and satisfaction among couples of same and opposite birth order and concluded that women married to the same ordinal position scored higher on the Marital Satisfaction Inventory.

Marini, (1980) suggests 'the number of children in the family has no direct effect on marital satisfaction but has a direct negative effect on parental satisfaction. Child spacing, as measured by the length of the average birth interval, is found to have no significant effect on either marital or parental satisfaction.' Hence the literature review explains significance of birth order on personality dimensions along with the theoretical evidence of the effect of opposite and same birth order couples on marital adjustability.

This construes the rationale of the research that an individual should be aware of the fact that marital bliss is not easy to encash until and unless all dimensions related to it are not sorted out properly. Frequently occurring facts are considered like income, job stability, physical attractiveness etc. however the psychological factors are missing in most of the cases in which the birth order effect on personality is ignored. Consequently the most significant dimension is the personality trait which has been affected by the individual's birth placement according to numerous theorists. This placing not only formulates one's temperament and attitudes but also makes entirely different adjustability patterns of behaviour. These patterns are significant in marital success that has to be considered in marital conflicts especially for those couples who come in for marital therapy.

Counsellors can benefit by keeping in consideration how birth order affects marital adjustability. This can also be considered in the psychotherapy of distressed marital couples. They should be educated about the rank conflict which they are experiencing, before they take a final decision of separation or divorce. Otherwise the whole structure of the family will be in trouble; child rearing will be a problem and children would remain confused between the two conflicting parents which affects the healthy ways of parenting. Therefore this study will put

forward the new thinking pattern with regard to family dynamics and the importance of marital bliss.

In the light of the literature review and researches, the following hypothesis can be formulated;

“Couples of the opposite birth order have high marital adjustability as compared to couples of same birth order.”

Method

Participants:

A sample of 64 couples was taken. Inclusion criteria was years of marriage that is 3 years minimum and 15 years maximum with middle class socio-economic status, without any diagnosis of infertility. However preferably parented couples were selected; the number of included participants then decreased to 32 per group that is for same (homogenous) birth order couples and opposite (heterogeneous) birth order couples.

Measures:

The demographic information sheet required them to fill out information about their age, gender, education, occupation, income group, number of siblings, type of marriage, years of marriage, and number of children.

Spanier Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale

Spanier Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (1995) is a 14 item questionnaire, self-inventory test used widely across the world to investigate the marital adjustment among the couples and to give this construct an operational definition. It takes 10 minutes in administration.

It has three subscales that are as follows:

- Consensus
- Satisfaction
- Cohesion

Where, “Consensus” includes decision making, values and affection. ”Satisfaction” includes stability and conflict, and “Cohesion” includes activities and discussion.

Procedure:

The participants were first informed about the study and that their participation is voluntary. The Spanier Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale has been used to verify the hypothesis after the consent form and demographic form was given to each participant, keeping their marital confidentiality considerably high by distributing couple questionnaires in envelopes and receiving back sealed as per instructions.

Minitab statistical software was used to analyse the data.

Results

Table 1

Marital adjustability between opposite and same birth order couples

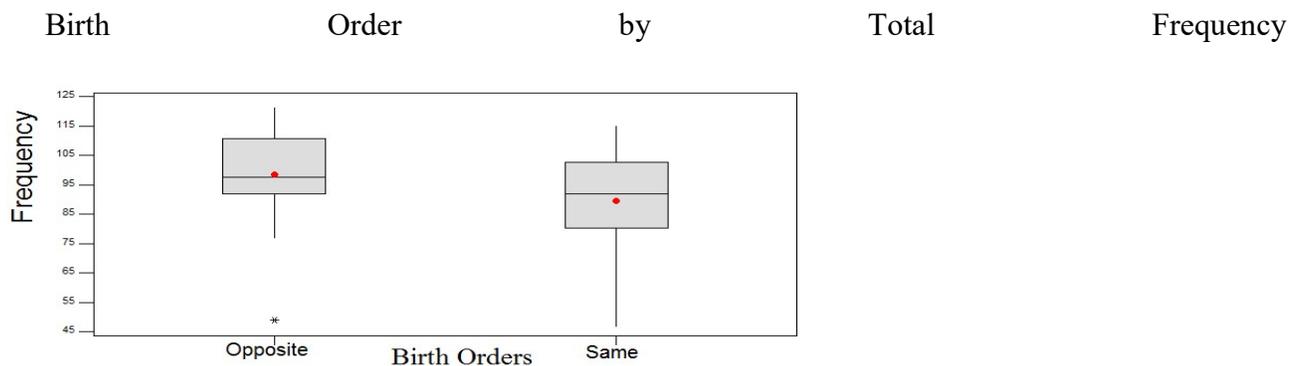
Birth Order	N	Mean	SD	df	t	value
Opposite	32	98.4	15.3	60	2.11	0.019
Same	32	89.6	18.1			

The table shows the significant difference in the two groups.

This indicates that there is a greater marital adjustability among opposite birth order couples as compare to same birth order.

Figure A

This Boxplot represents the effect of Birth order on marital adjustability. On x-axis are the two independent groups i.e. couples of opposite and same birth order. On y-axis is the frequency of marital adjustability. This indicates that there is significant difference between the medians of the two groups.



Discussion

As indicated by Table 1 and figure A; there is a better marital adjustability among opposite birth order couples then among the same birth order couples.

Results are supported by past researches conducted by different researchers and theories proposed by earlier theorists. Considering the life of an individual from the stage when he/she born and attains the parental role, up to the stage when he/she becomes parent himself/herself. At the time of the birth of a child, parents do experience differences in their marital life and sometimes are unable to organize their routine household as they previously used to do. They learn parenting by trial and error and eventually turn to experts. They become more sensitive in adopting the new role of their lives and give full attention to the first child's survival and further developmental needs. These child rearing patterns vary from first child to second and so on; and ultimately these parenting differences results in different personality makeup of the child which

pervades in every personality aspect of that individual and remain with him/her even after the marriage. A psychological difference therefore takes place where these differences are encountered in later stages of that individual. This creates different personality traits that are absolutely according to the person's birth order in family.

Therefore when an individual gets married; the one important factor that affects the marital adjustability is the "earned birth order" of husband and wife (i.e. the birth order which individual receives after marrying a person of same or opposite birth order). If a woman, who is youngest in a family, marries a man who is the oldest in a family then the earned birth order of that woman will eventually be older within a family. This change is easier to accept, because the youngest in a family struggles for the authority and become rivalry. In this way that individual will be having a stronger psychological support system for which he/she was struggling for years. On the other hand it may be difficult for first-born to earn a submissive earned role. In some cases compliance to the earned role is easier while in the other it is difficult. But it has been noticed from the literature review that in every birth order there is some positive attributes and some negative ones. If these earned roles are in consideration; couples would be more psychologically prepare for this natural change and would be more likely to embrace this alteration of their birth ranks.

This hypothesis was then formulated keeping the birth order theory along with the theory of Taman, (1976) and Leman, (1998). Both theorists believed that the opposite birth order of husband and wife leads to a healthier relationship in order to avoid rank conflict and to embrace the earned birth order in the family of in-laws. The opposite earned birth order is the one for which an individual strives throughout the sib-ship. This means that by observing the overly achieving first-born, last-born would more likely to be associated with his/her older sibling in order to encash the deprived trait of him/her. If he is unable to associate that trait with the older-born he/she constructs the trait of being a rival. Therefore, in couples of the opposite birth order, both partners will able to associate and share their weak and strong traits with each other that will result in the solution of rank conflict.

Application of the present study:

- This study provides the enduring pattern of opinion about the effect of ordinal personality traits and its effect on marital adjustability.
- When clinicians are dealing with the couple's emotional regulation and deregulation they are able to concern the effect of birth order efficiently.
- Individuals will able to understand that how role conflict can effect the marital adjustability.

Limitations of the present study:

- Perceived or psychological birth order of individual is not considered in this study.
- Sample size was limited in order to find out these variables of birth order and marital adjustability.
- Current life stressors may be one of the constraints in reporting the marital adjustability.

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