



## Adlerian characteristics of adult only children

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ADLERIAN CHARACTERISTICS OF  
ADULT ONLY CHILDREN

by

Danielle Leigh Breckenridge

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the  
SCHOOL OF FAMILY AND CONSUMER RESOURCES  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS  
WITH A MAJOR IN COUNSELING AND GUIDANCE

In the Graduate College  
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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## ABSTRACT

This study used a questionnaire designed to identify Adlerian characteristics of adult only children. It was hypothesized that not all of the characteristics mentioned in Adlerian theory will be found in each of the only children and certain characteristics will not be evident in any of the only children used in this study. Fourth adult only children volunteered to participate in this study. The study found that all 15 Adlerian characteristics that were measured for were identified in this sample. Only one characteristic was reported by 100% of the participants-reliability. This study also attempted to clarify whether or not only children grew up with friends significantly older than themselves, have high educational levels, and have high aspirations pertaining to occupations. And whether or not female only children tend to marry people significantly older than themselves, have children at a later age, and have small families.

## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

In today's society, a successful adult is sometimes defined by how well a person understands themselves and if they have successfully completed Erik Erikson's model of psychosocial development. This model focuses on the emergence of a sense of identity. In order to develop a complete, stable identity, the individual must move through and successfully resolve eight "crises" or "dilemmas" over the course of a lifetime (Bee, 1987). According to Bee (1987), adulthood has four dilemmas, starting with stage 5, identity vs. role confusion (13-18 years). This stage focuses on the young person developing some sort of personal values and goals. The next stage is intimacy vs. isolation (19-25 years). This stage is marred by the immersion of self in a sense of "we," creating one or more truly intimate relationships. Stage 7 is generative vs. stagnation (26-50 years). During this stage each adult must find some way to satisfy the need to be generative, helping in the development of the next generation or adding to society in some fashion. The last stage is ego integrity vs. despair (50+ years). Basically, if all stages are completed, the person has a sense of acceptance of one's true self.

There are special adult populations which do not move through Erickson's stages smoothly. For reasons sometimes

beyond their control, these adults have not successfully completed all of the stages. Some of these populations include adults molested as children, drug and alcohol abusers, rape victims, and even only children.

Only children encounter a special problem of their own. They grow up in a world surrounded by adults, constantly trying to please them, and fit in. At the same time they expect to be spoiled and to be the center of attention (Dreikurs, 1964). It has also been speculated that because only children have no siblings, they do not learn to share or to be sociable. Therefore, as adults they may be unsociable and have a hard time forming and carrying on interpersonal relationships (Leman, 1985). If these assumptions are true, this could be the reason that some only children can not successfully complete the stages into adulthood.

Adult only children can help shed some light on the true characteristics of only children. Some of the most common characteristics assigned to only children are: being the center of attention, spoiled, selfish, manipulating, unsociable, lonely, timid, helpless, perfectionistic, pleasing, reliable have high self-confidence, serious, well organized, and conservative (Adler, 1958; Dreikurs, 1964; Polit, Nuttall, & Nuttall, 1980). In addition, there are several lifestyle choices that only children have been characterized as making. These choices include: marrying

people significantly older than themselves, having children at a later age, having small families, growing up with friends significantly older than themselves, having high educational levels, and having high aspirations pertaining to occupations (Gee, 1992; Polit & Falbo, 1987; Polit, Nuttall, & Nuttall, 1980). This study intends to determine whether or not certain characteristics hold true for adult only children. A self-report questionnaire has been designed to measure how well the above characteristics truly represent only children.

#### Purpose of the Study

A considerable amount of literature is available on birth order and its effect on one's socialization and interpersonal relationships. However, there seems to be minimal literature confirming the personality characteristics of only children. The purpose of this study was to identify characteristics of only children, which in turn would either validate or invalidate the Adlerian theorists view of only children.

#### Statement of the Problem

Birth order research often focuses on the 'first born' sibling position. It examines the relationship between socialization, aptitude, personality, and achievement. Successive birth positions often receive less consideration and the only child is usually the last to be considered. The only child is given the lowest priority in a few

studies. In The Birth Order Book, Leman (1985) refers to the only child as ". . . interesting blends of oldest child and youngest child. They can be a mix of first-born characteristics and those of the last born--the baby in the family. They can act very much in charge and very adept at handling adult situations, but inside they are scared, rebellious, and angry because they have been so spoiled and pampered they are nowhere in control as they try to look" (p. 82). Many different studies have characterized only children as spoiled, selfish, manipulating, the center of attention, lonely, unsociable, helpless, and timid, but at the same time they are pleasing, perfectionistic, have high self-confidence, are reliable, serious, well organized, and conservative (Adler, 1958; Dreikurs, 1964; Polit, Nuttall, & Nuttall, 1980). It has also been said that female only children tend to marry people significantly older than themselves, have children at a later age, and have small families (Pokit & Falbo, 1987), and that only children in general grew up with friends significantly older than themselves, have high educational levels, and have high aspirations pertaining to occupations (Gee, 1992; Polit, Nuttall, & Nuttall, 1980).

This study used a researcher developed questionnaire and personal data form in an attempt to identify the characteristics and additional lifestyle choices of only children mentioned. It is hypothesized that not all of



these characteristics will be found in only children and certain characteristics will not be evident in any of the only children participating in this study.

#### Definition of Terms

The following terms used in this study are defined for clarification:

Adlerian Theory: The concepts posited by Alfred Adler that people are self-created with social urges as motivating forces; personality is united and all behavior is purposeful; life expresses goals (Hampton, 1991).

Adult: Male or female over 18 years of age.

Birth Order: The ordinal position which one holds in the family: first, second, middle, last, only.

Birth Order Characteristic: Personality traits which are characteristics of a particular birth order position.

Family Constellation: Family characteristics including personalities, gender, values, and family size.

Family of Origin: The family into which one is born.

Only Child: for the purposes of this study, the only child born in a family. Absolutely no other children raised in the household. Does not include people considered to be only children because of a large age difference.

#### Assumptions

In this study it is assumed that:

1. The questionnaires were completed objectively with reliable data.

2. The subjects could read and write the English language.

3. The instrument measured personality characteristics accurately.

#### Summary

Both positive and negative characteristics of only children have been discussed in research. But do these characteristics hold true for most only children? This study looked at 15 of the characteristics assigned to the only child, from the Adlerian viewpoint. A self-report survey was conducted to see if adult only children see themselves as Adlerian theorists do.

Dreikurs (1964) believes that the only child, "either develops adult viewpoints, is precocious in understanding, and always on tiptoe, hoping to reach the adult level; or is hopelessly an eternal baby, always inferior to others" (p. 30). The research on only children tends to show both positive and negative characteristics of only children, but negative stereotypes of the only child abound in empirical and anecdotal evidence. Being an only child is clearly a unique, yet confusing role. This study will attempt to clear up some of the stereotypes and confusing characteristics of only children.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to identify characteristics of only children, which in turn will either validate or invalidate the Adlerian theorists view of only children. This chapter will review the literature on Adlerian Theory, birth order, and the only child.

#### Adlerian Theory

Alfred Adler was a social psychologist who understood dysfunctional behavior in terms of discouragement rather than illness; he believed that most individual problems were social in nature. He rejected Freud's views, which described humans as "victimized by instincts and conflict and doomed by biological forces and childhood experiences" (Shultz, 1981, p. 76).

Adler's major focus was on the uniqueness of the individual rather than on biological motives and goals. He viewed man holistically. The Adlerian view is that infants establish a number-one priority very early and it is along this guiding line that they begin to construct their personality (Dinkmeyer, Pew, & Dinkmeyer, 1979).

Adlerians believe that many of our problems come from our failure to achieve belonging. Belonging involves not only acceptance but contributing to a significant part of the group. The willingness to cooperate and participate for

the benefit of the group is "Social Interest" (Sherman & Dinkmeyer, 1987).

Social interest is formed in the home and remains throughout life. A low level of social interest increases competition, feelings of alienation, and a sense of inferiority or insecurity. According to Crandall (1981), "There is an increasing possibility that Adler's propositions concerning social interest may at last turn out to be his most important contribution to later developments in the mainstream of psychology (p. 10).

#### Adlerian Birth Order Theory

According to Alfred Adler, differences in birth order of an individual "leaves their mark on all expressions of the personality. . . . Whenever I have studied adults I have found impressions left on them from their early childhood and lasting forever. The position in the family leaves an indelible stamp upon the style of life" (Ernst, 1983, p. 164).

The birth order position of a child in a family has a profound influence on personality development, which depends largely on childhood interaction with parents and siblings (Fere, 1976). The child's capacity for dealing successfully with life situations is determined by the knowledge, habits, skills, and attitudes learned in the home (Dinkmeyer, Dinkmeyer, & Sperry, 1987).

According to Adler, birth order alone does not influence personality development, but rather the child's psychological position, the manner in which the child responds and interprets the position in the family (Christensen & Shramski, 1983). It is the child's interpretation of their birth order that is significant (Dinkmeyer, Dinkmeyer, & Sperry, 1987). Birth order must be explained in relation to the relationships within the family, although there are some patterns associated with birth positions that are helpful in understanding characteristics of the individual.

The family constellation refers to the birth order of each child. Birth order position provides a context in which an individual's lifestyle will develop. Great emphasis is placed on the importance of the relationship(s) among siblings in the family which contributes to the development of a unique personality (Ostroff, 1993). This is also described as the "psychological position" within the family. The four positions most essential to Adler were the first born, the second born, the last born, and the only child.

#### First Born

The first born was an only child for a limited time, enjoying a warm, close relationship with the mother. Exclusive attention from adults provided the child with intellectual stimulation and emotional enrichment (Arnstein,

1979). When a second child is born the tragedy of "dethronement" occurs. The fear of being surpassed by the new sibling can result in a feeling of jealousy, anxiety, and discouragement. According to Adler (1931), the first born adult "likes to take part in the exercise of authority and he exaggerates the importance of rules and laws. Everything should be done by rule and no rule should ever be changed. Power should always be preserved in the hands of those who are entitled to it" (p. 147).

Firstborns are typically perfectionistic, conservative, reliable, conscientious, critical, serious, conforming, and scholarly, usually becoming leaders and achievers in life. Oldest children are inclined to be egotistical, domineering, and highly motivated adults, yet patient and protective (Arnstein, 1979).

Parents expect a higher level of achievement from first born children than from later children. Because of parental pressure, oldest children often develop feelings of inadequacy. Most problem children are oldest children (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956); the majority of people who seek counseling help are firstborns or only children (Leman, 1985).

### Second Born

The second child tends to be diplomatic and a good negotiator. Parents are more relaxed and less demanding, feeling more comfortable in their role as parents and not

pushing as hard for achievement. The second born usually strives continually to catch up, to surpass and conquer the older sibling (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). He or she often develops a personality that is opposite of the first born. Usually the second born cannot catch up in areas where the first born has chosen to succeed. Therefore, he or she is likely to develop skills in areas where the older sibling does not excel (Dreikurs, Grunwald, & Pepper, 1982).

The second born is usually rebellious, less serious, creative, cooperative, very social, competitive, and copes well under pressure. Overall, according to Adler, the second child is better adjusted than either the older or younger sibling (Thomas & Marchant, 1983).

#### Last Born

The youngest child, usually cheerful, charming, affectionate, playful, and lighthearted, is often more popular than older siblings. Often manipulative and precocious, the youngest child likes to be in the limelight, entertaining, or performing (Leman, 1985).

The last born never faces dethronement. They have the tendency either to try to surpass the others in compensating for his or her smallness or remains a baby while developing strong feelings of inferiority and inadequacy.

The youngest will always remain the baby in the eyes of the family (Fere, 1976). Seeing everyone in their environment as stronger, older, and more experienced, the

youngest may suffer from feelings of inferiority (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). The last born may become the most successful or the most dependent. If not destined to greatness, the last born may become an extreme failure and possibly incapable of coping with life. Adler (1931) stated that "the second largest proportion of problem children comes from among the youngest" (p. 151).

### The Only Child

The only child never had a rival and never faces the problem of dethronement. Being accustomed to being the center of attention, the only child may become pampered and spoiled. The absence of competition with other siblings seems to increase self-confidence, as they learn to do things by themselves, solving problems, and trying to develop skills that will gain adult approval. The only child may also show shyness, timidity, and helplessness, eliciting sympathy from authority figures. The only child may develop characteristics of both oldest and youngest children (Dreikurs, Grunwald, & Pepper, 1982).

According to Marchant (1981),

only children are likely to be relatively demanding, somewhat self-centered, somewhat controlling, and very subtly manipulative in their approach to other people. In adulthood, the only child tends to have ambivalent feelings about childhood. This ambivalence is relatively easy to



understand when one realizes that only children have always existed in an adult world. When they finally get to be adults, they become somewhat more comfortable with their situation. (p. 130)

Often articulate and mature, the only child is typically highly ambitious and achievement oriented. However, the family provides little preparation for interaction with peers, which may present some difficulty (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

A study by Polit, Nuttall, and Nuttall (1980) found that only children had higher educational levels, higher occupational status, and smaller families. Female only children were more apt to be working and to have planned their families before marriage. In this same study, the research did not support the concept of only children as emotionally or socially handicapped human beings.

Hawke and Know (1978) found that the advantages for the only child included more privacy and avoidance of sibling rivalry; they are generally self-confident, resourceful and are successful students. For parents, advantages include more time for personal development and greater marital happiness. Disadvantages for the child may include wanting a companion and feeling greater pressure to achieve.

#### Summary

This chapter reviewed related literature on Adlerian Theory, birth order, with descriptions of general patterns

associated with each ordinal position, and specifically the only child.

A review of the research literature indicates there is close to an equal number of positives and negatives to being an only child. But further research is needed in order to validate the characteristics of only children.

Chapter 3 will present the methodology and procedures utilized in this investigation. The population and sample are described and instrumentation is identified.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The general approach to this study was based on the assumption that only children possess the characteristics posited by Adlerian Theory. The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the methods and procedures used in this study. The topics covered include Research Design, Population Description, Instrumentation, and Procedures. A summary concludes the chapter.

#### Research Design

A qualitative approach to research was the most appropriate for the purpose of this study, specifically grounded theory. According to LoBiondo-Wood and Haber (1990), "Grounded theorists base their research on the assumption that each such group shares a specific social psychological problem that is not necessarily articulated. This fundamental problem is resolved by means of social psychological processes" (p. 191). In order to determine whether or not Adlerian characteristics of only children hold true, the researcher developed a self-report questionnaire which was administered to only children between the ages of 18 and 37.

The research hypothesis was as follows: Not all of the characteristics mentioned will be found in each of the only children and certain characteristics will not be evident in

any of the only children used in this study. It was the display of Adlerian characteristics of only children and other attributes of only children that was the focus of this study.

#### Population Description

The study population consisted of adult male and female only children. For purposes of this study, only children was defined as being the only child born in a family with absolutely no other children raised in the household. Participants volunteered after reading the consent form proceeding the questionnaire. The participants were obtained through the use of a convenient sample.

#### Instrumentation

A questionnaire (Appendix A) was designed for this study to collect the needed information. The questionnaire consisted of 30 questions, attempting to identify 15 characteristics of only children. These characteristics included: spoiled, selfish, manipulating, the center of attention, lonely, unsociable, helpless, timid, pleasing, perfectionistic, high self-confidence, reliable, serious, well organized, and conservative. There were two questions pertaining to each of these characteristics. These characteristics were obtained from the existing Adlerian literature on only children.

In addition to the questionnaire, a personal data form (Appendix B) was prepared to collect any additional

information that could be used to identify characteristics of only children. This information included age, sex, marital status, age of spouse, age when married, number of children, age at birth of first child, educational level, future educational plans, occupation, income, and the age of friends while growing up. The questionnaire and personal data form took approximately 15 minutes to complete.

### Procedures

#### Selection of Participants

The first step in selecting participants was to attain the approval from the Human Subjects Committee in order to proceed with the study (Appendix C). The population for this study was obtained through the use of a convenient sample. The researcher used word of mouth to contact the participants. The requirements for participating in this study were as follows: Participants must be at least 18 years of age and be an only child (absolutely no other children raised in the household). They must also be able to read and write in the English language.

#### Questionnaire

Questionnaire packets were given to adult only children who were identified through the convenient sample. The packets included a consent form, personal data form, questionnaire, and a self-addressed, stamped envelope for the return of completed surveys.

### Summary

Chapter 3 focused on an in-depth presentation of instrumentation, population and sample, and procedures of this study. The purpose of this investigation was to determine if Adlerian characteristics of only children would be evidenced in self-reports of adult only children. The population of the study consisted of adult only children who returned completed questionnaires developed for this survey.

Chapter 4 will present the results obtained in the course of this investigation. A review of the research design and procedures will be followed by a statistical and descriptive presentation of data.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results obtained in the course of this investigation. It begins with a population description and includes the results obtained from the questionnaire. The chapter concludes with a summary.

#### Population

The population of this study was obtained through a convenient sample. It consisted of 14 only children (5 males and 9 females), between the ages of 18 and 37. Demographic data can be found in Table 1. The average age of the participants was 28.7 years. The marital status was reported as follows: 35.7% were single, 57.1% were married, and 7.1% were divorced or separated. Of those that were married, 42.9% married for the first time between the ages of 18 and 24, and 21.4% married for the first time between the ages of 25 and 32. This study also found that 50% of the participants had either graduated from college, had some graduate study, or a graduate degree.

The educational levels were surprisingly sporadic: 28.6% graduated from high school, 14.3% had a college degree, 14.3% have attended some graduate school, and 21.4% had a graduate degree. It was reported by 78.6% of this sample, that they planned on continuing their education.

Table 1

Distribution and Percentage of Frequency of Only Children

	Number of Responses	Frequency (%)
<u>Age</u>		
18-24	2	14.4
25-30	6	42.8
31-37	6	42.8
Total	14	100.0
<u>Sex</u>		
Male	5	35.7
Female	9	64.3
Total	14	100.0
<u>Marital</u>		
Single	5	35.7
Married	8	57.1
Divorced/Separated	1	7.1
Total	14	100.0
<u>Age at First Marriage</u>		
Never Married	5	35.7
18-24	6	42.9
25-32	3	21.4
Total	14	100.0
<u>Education Level</u>		
High School	4	28.6
Some College	2	14.3
Tech/Associate Degree	1	7.1
Graduated College	2	14.3
Some Graduate Study	2	14.3
Graduate Degree	3	21.4
Total	14	100.0
<u>Furthering Education</u>		
Yes	11	78.6
No	3	21.4



Table 1--Continued

	Number of Responses	Frequency (%)
<u>Income</u>		
Under \$10,000	5	35.7
\$10,000-\$20,000	3	21.4
\$20,000-\$30,000	2	14.3
Over \$30,000	4	28.6
Total	14	100.0
<u>Age of Friends While Growing Up</u>		
Same age	8	57.1
2+ years older	6	42.9
2+ years younger	0	0
Total	14	100.0

The income levels also varied: 35.7% report making under \$10,000, 21.4% made between \$10,000 and \$20,000, 14.3% made between \$20,000 and \$30,000, and 28.6% made over \$30,000.

In 1987, Polit and Falbo found that only children have friends significantly older than themselves, have high educational levels and high aspirations pertaining to occupations. These results can be found in Table 1. Only 42.9% of the participants had friends 2+ years older than themselves, while 57.1% had friends the same age.

In 1980, Polit, Nuttall, and Nuttall found that female only children tend to marry people significantly older than themselves, have children at a later age and have small families. The results from the participants found that the average number of years between the female only child and their spouse was 2.6 years. The average age at birth of the first child was 21 years and the average number of children was 2 (see Table 2).

The questionnaire attempting to identify the 15 Adlerian characteristics consisted of 30 questions. Two questions for each of the 15 characteristics. The participants answered each question by circling either "Like Me" or "Unlike Me" (see Table 3). Each characteristic was identified in this sample, but only one characteristic was reported by 100.0% of the participants--reliability. The three most frequent characteristics reported by this sample

Table 2

Female Only Children Responses

---

Average Number of Years Between Females and Their Spouses

Married Females (N=5)

	Age	Age of Spouse	# of Years
1	31	34	3
2	28	30	2
3	35	38	3
4	32	35	3
5	25	28	3

Average - 2.6 Years

## Average Age At Birth of First Child

Females With Children (N=4)

## Age at Birth of First Child

1	17
2	21
3	20
4	26

Average - 21 years

## Average Number of Children

Females With Children (N=4)

## Number of Children

1	3
2	2
3	1
4	2

Average - 2 Children

---

Table 3

Responses to Adlerian Characteristics

	N	%	Std. Dev.
<u>Helpless</u>			
Like Me	2	14.3	
Unlike Me	10	71.4	
Split	2	14.3	
	14	100.0	.756
<u>Serious</u>			
Like Me	1	7.1	
Unlike Me	9	64.3	
Split	4	28.6	
	14	100.0	.646
<u>Unsociable</u>			
Like Me	3	21.4	
Unlike Me	9	64.3	
Split	2	14.3	
	14	100.0	.852
<u>Center of Attention</u>			
Like Me	4	28.6	
Unlike Me	8	57.1	
Split	2	14.3	
	14	100.0	.914
<u>Selfish</u>			
Like Me	5	35.7	
Unlike Me	7	50.0	
Split	2	14.3	
	14	100.0	.949

Table 3--Continued

	N	%	Std. Dev.
<u>Lonely</u>			
Like Me	3	21.4	
Unlike Me	6	42.9	
Split	5	35.7	
	14	100.0	.802
<u>Timid</u>			
Like Me	2	14.3	
Unlike Me	5	35.7	
Split	7	50.0	
	14	100.0	.699
<u>Spoiled</u>			
Like Me	2	14.3	
Unlike Me	5	35.7	
Split	7	50.0	
	14	100.0	.699
<u>Manipulative</u>			
Like Me	3	21.4	
Unlike Me	4	28.6	
Split	7	50.0	
	14	100.0	.730
<u>Conservative</u>			
Like Me	5	35.7	
Unlike Me	5	35.8	
Split	4	28.6	
	14	100.0	.877

Table 3--Continued

	N	%	Std. Dev.
<u>Perfectionist</u>			
Like Me	6	42.9	
Unlike Me	3	21.4	
Split	5	35.7	
	14	100.0	.802
<u>Self Confident</u>			
Like Me	7	50.0	
Unlike Me	1	7.1	
Split	6	42.9	
	14	100.0	.646
<u>Pleasing</u>			
Like Me	8	57.1	
Unlike Me	3	21.4	
Split	3	21.4	
	14	100.0	.842
<u>Well Organized</u>			
Like Me	9	64.3	
Unlike Me	2	14.3	
Split	3	21.4	
	14	100.0	.760
<u>Reliable</u>			
Like Me	14	100.0	
Unlike Me	0	0	
Split	0	0	
	14	100.0	.000

as "Like Me," were reliability, being well organized, and pleasing. The three most frequent characteristics reported by this sample as "Unlike Me," were helpless, serious, and unsociable.

#### Summary

This chapter has provided the results obtained in the course of this investigation. An overview of the study was followed by a restatement of the study's hypothesis and the population description. The results from the questionnaire were discussed and displayed in tables.

Chapter 5 will provide the study's conclusions, limitations, recommendations for further research, and will conclude with a summary.

CHAPTER 5  
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The final; chapter will summarize the findings of this study which examined the Adlerian birth order characteristics of only children. Conclusions will be drawn about this population based upon the gathered information. Limitations and recommendations in this area for further research will be made. The chapter will conclude with a summary.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to identify characteristics of only children, which in turn could assist in either validating or invalidating the Adlerian theorist's view of only children. Each of the 15 characteristics were: helpless, serious, unsociable, center of attention, selfish, lonely, timid, spoiled, manipulative, conservative, perfectionistic, self-confident, pleasing, well organized, and reliable. Only one characteristic, reliability, was identified by 100% of the participants. The top five characteristics were reliability, well organized, pleasing, self-confident, and perfectionistic. None of the participants possessed all 15 of the characteristics.

According to this study, female only children did not tend to marry people significantly older than themselves,



and did not have children at a later age. However, they do have small families. The average age between female only children and their older husbands was 2.6 years. The average age of females at the birth of their first child was 21 years. And the average number of children for the females in this study was two.

The results of this study indicated that the majority of only children did not grow up with friends significantly older than themselves. Fifty seven percent grew up with friends the same age, while 43% grew up with friends at least two years older than themselves.

According to this study, only children did tend to have high aspirations pertaining to educational levels. Although the educational levels varied greatly, 78.6% of the participants in this study plan on furthering their education.

#### Limitations

There are a few limitations to this study. The first limitation included the sample. It was not a true representation of only children. There were only 14 participants stemming from the same community. Because of the wide age range, it made it difficult to measure occupational status because the participants were at different points in their lives and subsequently, their careers. Questions were not asked specifically about what they saw themselves doing in the future. The sample of

married females with children was very small and cannot truly represent female only children.

The second limitation was the data form. More questions should have been asked about aspirations for occupation, instead of just what they are doing now. Another question that should have been asked, is whether or not the female only children planned on having any more children, in order to determine whether or not female only children tend to have small families.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

The findings in this study suggest a few possibilities for further research. First of all repeating this study with a larger sample would provide a more accurate representation of adult only children. This small sample was taken from a single community and was introduced by word of mouth. A larger sample from several different communities would provide a "true" representation. Also this study could be replicated, but look at the differences between male and female only children, to see if there are gender differences in only children. Further, a study looking at the differences between only children (with no other children born in the family) and people who are considered to be only children because of a large age difference between siblings, could be recommended. This would help to identify differences and similarities between

"true" only children, and those who actually have a sibling, but there is a large age difference between them.

#### Summary

Conclusions, limitations to the investigation and recommendations for further research were presented in this chapter. Specific findings were discussed and it was found that the data did not support the question about certain characteristics not being evident in any of the only children. All of the characteristics measured were identified in this sample. The data did support the question about not all of the characteristics measured for being found in each of the only children in this sample. None of the participants possessed all 15 of the characteristics.

The helping professionals who work with only children need to look past the stereotype portrayed in existing literature. Which is that only children are spoiled, selfish, unsociable people who always have to be the center of attention. Some only children may fit the stereotype, but the individual strengths and weaknesses is what needs to be focused on. Further research and hypotheses might be generated from this study's findings and information.

APPENDIX A  
QUESTIONNAIRE

We are asking for your help in a research project providing information on characteristics of only children. The information you and the other only children provide will be used for a Master's thesis. Enclosed is a questionnaire. Please complete and return it to us in the enclosed stamped envelope as soon as possible.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. The information gathered from the questionnaires is entirely confidential. And it will be used for this study only. There is nothing to identify you on the questionnaire or return envelope. Any information you choose to share will remain anonymous. The questionnaire should take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

It is assumed that by completing and returning the questionnaire, you are giving permission to use the information in this study.

We will be happy to answer any questions you may have concerning the questionnaire and/or study in general. Also, counseling services will be available should any issue arise while completing the questionnaire. You may contact Danielle Breckenridge at any of the following numbers: (602)293-6551 or (602)884-9893. Thank you for your time, attention, and contribution to this study.

Danielle Breckenridge  
Researcher

Circle the answer that best describes how you feel about yourself

- |  |         |           |
|--|---------|-----------|
| 1. I can make up my mind without too much trouble.   | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 2. As a child, I didn't have many friends.   | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 3. I have a hard time talking in front of groups.  | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 4. I feel left out if I am not the center of attention.  | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 5. As a child, I had a hard time sharing toys with other children.   | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 6. People can rely on me when they need to.  | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 7. I give up easily.   | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 8. I go out of my way to please others.  | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 9. When growing up, I could usually get my parents or others to do what I want, through any means necessary. | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 10. I don't have many friends.   | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 11. When I start a project, I don't finish it until it is done perfectly.                                    | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 12. When growing up, my parents gave me anything I wanted.   | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 13. I have a hard time laughing at myself and/or others.   | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 14. I don't like to take risks.  | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 15. I like to organize my things so only I can find them.  | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 16. I have a hard time giving up personal property for others use.   | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 17. My co-workers think I am dependable.   | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 18. People usually follow my ideas.  | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 19. I often wait for someone else's help when I encounter a problem.   | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 20. I sometimes find myself trying to please everyone except myself.   | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 21. I find myself playing games with people to get what I want.  | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 22. When growing up, I constantly tried to keep my parents attention through any means possible.             | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 23. I expect people to give me whatever I want.  | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 24. I often feel lonely.   | Like Me | Unlike Me |

- |  |         |           |
|--|---------|-----------|
| 25. I have a hard time carrying on conversations with people I don't know.           | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 26. I don't enjoy social gatherings.   | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 27. I keep my house very clean and constantly pick up after myself and others.       | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 28. People often tell me I don't smile enough.                                       | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 29. I think of myself as being conservative.   | Like Me | Unlike Me |
| 30. I find myself constantly thinking about how to organize my time and/or property. | Like Me | Unlike Me |

APPENDIX B  
PERSONAL DATA FORM



## PERSONAL DATA FORM

You will be asked to respond to a questionnaire dealing with a variety of characteristics about yourself. In order to acquire a better understanding of your responses to the questionnaire please supply the following additional information.

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female

Current Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_ Single \_\_\_\_\_ Married \_\_\_\_\_ Divorced/Seperated  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Widowed

If married, at what age did you get married? \_\_\_\_\_

Current Age of Spouse: \_\_\_\_\_

If children, at what age did you have your first child? \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Children: \_\_\_\_\_

Education Level (check highest level completed):

- \_\_\_\_\_ High School  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Some College  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Technical or Associate Degree  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Graduated College  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Some Graduate Study  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Graduate Degree Please Specify \_\_\_\_\_

Do you plan to further your education in the future? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Income:

- \_\_\_\_\_ under \$10,000  
 \_\_\_\_\_ \$10,000 - \$19,999  
 \_\_\_\_\_ \$20,000 - \$29,999  
 \_\_\_\_\_ over \$30,000

When you were growing up, were there any other children living in your house for a period of 1 year or more? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

When you were growing up, were your friends:

- \_\_\_\_\_ approximately the same age as you  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 2+ years older than you  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 2+ years younger than you

APPENDIX C  
HUMAN SUBJECTS LETTER

Human Subjects Committee

1690 N. Warren (Bldg. 5260)  
Tucson, Arizona 85724  
(602) 626-6721 or 626-7575

October 12, 1993

Danielle L. Breckenridge, Master's Candidate  
c/o Betty J. Newlon, Ed.D., Head  
FCR: Counseling & Guidance  
Esquire Apartments  
1230 N. Park Avenue, Suite 210  
Campus Mail

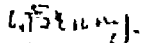
**RE: ADULT ONLY CHILDREN AND ADLERIAN CHARACTERISTICS**

Dear Ms. Breckenridge:

We received your above-cited research proposal. Regulations published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2)] exempt this type of research from review by our Committee.

Thank you for informing us of your work. If you have any questions concerning the above, please contact this office.

Sincerely yours,

  
William F. Denny, M.D.  
Chairman  
Human Subjects Committee

WFD:rs

cc: Departmental/College Review Committee

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