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Birth order : a social work examination of predicting resilience

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ABSTRACT

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BIRTH ORDER: A SOCIAL WORK EXAMINATION OF PREDICTING RESILIENCE

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Conceptual Paper dated May 2017

This study examines the order in which an individual is born and how, when examining birth order, does the psychological make- of the first, middle and last child born influence how the individual will be later in their life. This study was based on two premises: (1) In social work there is not a need to focus on birth order, classifying it solely as a matter of psychology; (2) When a child is born, they are given an order among their siblings that provides them with a set of experiences, roles, and responsibilities that attribute the child in the given birth order. A systematic review was used to analyze data gathered on the contributions of sibling relationships, and the psychological make-up of the first, middle and last born child, and how each can predict the resilience of the individual.

BIRTH ORDER: A SOCIAL WORK EXAMINATION OF PREDICTING
RESILIENCE

A CONCEPTUAL PAPER

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
WHITNEY M. YOUNG, JR., SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY

LUCINDA S. RAMSEUR

CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is necessary to know the historical factors that contribute to the psychological makeup of an individual, especially if it can function as a predictor for resiliency. Despite the differences that we all have, we cannot deny the historical fact that we were born into a family. Kristensen & Bjerkedal (2007) much of what is thought to contribute to the development of an individual is acquired in the earlier stages of life. From birth, we are assigned an ordinal position, whether it is the first, middle or the youngest child born. Research suggests that the order of which you were born makes a difference in development (Kristensen, et al, 2007).

This study will discuss how birth order can function as a predictor of resiliency through an examination of factors that impact the first, middle, and last child born, and their psychological makeup that predisposes them to different levels of resiliency. In Alfred Adler's (1937), birth order theory, it is indicated that birth order can be viewed in a social context. This Adlerian theory proposed that the development of the individual is the reference point to locate a child in relation to their siblings and how that interaction can account for how recognizable their social structure will be in their adult life. (Shulman & Mosak, 1977).

Ungar's (2011) study defined resilience as the following:

In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways. (p. 1)

Additionally, for the purpose of this paper, the psychological makeup of an individual and personality will be used interchangeably and will also be conceptualized as the common traits developed from factors impacting the first, middle, and last child born.

Statement of the Problem

Resiliency is contingent upon how an individual is able to perform in the face of adversity, with the use of past experiences. Research has shown that ordinal position can be a predictor of intellectual functioning, personality, and behavior (Risal & Tharoor, 2012).

Several studies have identified that birth order has an effect on career choices, study selection in school and personality. Those studies discredit that the common traits that are attributed to personality can also explain resilience. Further study on the correlation between birth order, personality and resilience as a form of intellectual functioning will be discussed to determine predictability among the social structure of the first, middle, and last child born that are five years apart or less. Children in this social structure will provide the best foundation needed to determine the predictability of resiliency, based on previous research found on the common traits of those individuals.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine birth order as a predictor of resilience in the social context of the first, middle, and last sibling social structure. Having another way to understand human development may lead an increase of knowledge on how to interact with diverse populations. Factors such as the number of siblings involved, the proximity of age, the gender, parenting, and the home environment were reviewed when conducting research to identify that different social structures yield an array of results. This conceptual paper will attempt to answer questions that identify factors impacting the first, middle, and last child born. The common traits developed from factors impacting the first, middle, and last child born that contributes to the psychological make-up of the individual. The researcher will also attempt to explain how the psychological make-up of the first, middle, and last child born can predict the individuals' level of resilience. Furthermore, this study will, by way of answering the aforementioned questions, attempt to answer the question of why some people are more resilient than others and how siblings can grow up in the same home environment but can have a high difference in psychological makeups.

Significance of Study

Knowing that birth order is a predictor of how resilient a person can be, gives practitioners an insight on how historical factors such as knowing that your client's ordinal position can affect their psychological make-up, which in return influences their level of resiliency. A range of studies have suggested that resilience can be seen as

synonymous with reduced vulnerability (Hofer, 2006; Schneiderman, Ironson, & Siegel, 2005), with ability to adapt to adversity (Stanton, Revenson, & Tennen, 2007; Kim-Cohen, 2007; Cameron et al., 2007) or cope (Taylor & Stanton, 2007; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). Such studies implicate various adaptive systems as explanations of resilience, focusing on processes acting at multiple levels from childhood to old age, which promote and protect human development across the lifespan (Masten & Obradovic, 2006; Lerner, 2006; Carrey & Ungar, 2007). There are many contributors that identify why we are the way we are, by exploring birth order as a means to be resilient in the social context; opens the door for a more in-depth understanding of how individuals can empower themselves to ensure that the best treatment and services are rendered. Unfortunately, this study is limited to the social structure of first, middle, and last child born, discounting only children, and other varied social structures.

Barriers exist in identifying factors such as the individuals desire to be competitive, the number of siblings involved, the proximity of age, the gender, parenting, and the home environment (Risal & Tharoor, 2012). This conceptual paper will briefly explore why; through research, these identified factors has shown a significant difference in yielding the common traits of the ordinal position holder (Risal, & Tharoor, 2012). This study can provide additional understanding of how human development is highly affected by the social structure a child is born into.

The order of which a child is born has a significant impact on how predictable their level of resilience will be in life (Saleebey, 1996). With introspection, the child will account for how they view social structure in their families' constellation in efforts to determine the individual's capability to gather resources from past events to withstand the

adversity of resilience (Saleebey, 1996). The common traits of the first, middle, and last child born will show that there is a predisposed psychological makeup of that individual that provides insight on how that individual is capable of responding (Risal, & Tharoor, 2012). Based on the responsibilities and other pertinent factors impacting the first born, in comparison to the middle and last child born results will show a substantial amount of evidence predicting a high level of resiliency.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this review of literature is to explore the factors contributing to the sibling relationship of the of the first, middle, and last child born, and the psychological make-up of the first, middle, and last child born and how those factors can predict the level at which they will show to be resilient. This chapter will consist of a historical perspective of birth order and its prediction of resilience, and review of literature on the subject matter. In this chapter, the Afrocentric Perspective will be discussed as it relates to the topic and Theoretical Framework for addressing this population.

Historical Perspective

An increased motivation to conduct research on the topic of birth order came after Alfred Adler identified that the psychological make-up and characteristics of the human can be a direct effect of birth order (Risal & Thoor, 2012). Following Adler's findings, researchers began to also focus their research in areas of birth order and the psychological make-up of the human, such as astuteness, successes, mental capacity, and sexual orientation (Risal & Thoor, 2012).

In the past 30 years' research have accrued substantially linking social relationships to cause a positive effect on the mental health, physical health and longevity

of the individual (Thoits, 2011). Family structure is considered to be the foundation for understanding development. When a child is born they are placed into a social structure that gives the child their first experience of social context, helping them to identify the role that he or she plays in their family, which in return influences the development of the child's psychological makeup (Collins, 2006). Research proves that the ordinal position of the child may predict their intellect, psychological make-up, and their behavior (Risal & Thoor, 2012).

Through constant interactions, whether positive or negative with siblings, provides the child of any given ranking in the ordinal position the ability to gather insight on both, their own and their sibling's way of interpreting cognitions, motivations, and emotions, all of which shows important influences of predicting behavior (Dirks, Persram, Recchia, & Howe, 2015). Rodgers and Thompson (1985) argues that the first research findings on the family structure date to 1874 when Francis Galton issued his findings on the data for birth order. His studies known as birth order research was subjugated by two categories, the birth order of the individual and the size of the family. In recent years, research on the development of the family has expanded through new modalities as the configuration of the family, the constellation of the family, and the structure of the family (Rodgers & Thompson, 1985).

Recently, research on birth order has said to be plagued by the need for researchers to clarify their research due to contradiction across the studies (Adams, 1972). Adams (1972) also included that research has expanded research on areas such as juvenile delinquency, psychiatric illness, conformity, dependence, affiliation, relationships, drug dependency, inspiration, and career choices.

Issue One: Birth Order- Contributions of the Sibling Relationship

Sibling relationship presents itself as a topic of discussion in literature when examining the relationships that the individual form earlier on in life and its impact. Research shows that the order in which the individual is born can provide an insight on how each sibling interacts with the other. Collins (2006) demonstrated that siblings can influence the level of success and/ or failure through (1) identifying that as the distance from the parent's increases, so does the sibling's influence on another in birth order and (2) the more that the family grows, the more likely sibling influence occurs, thus diminishing the role of the parent. A mere question of quality versus quantity is proposed to describe the trade-off of the family size-to-resources dedicated by parents to their children (Booth and Hiau Joo, 2009).

Research reflects on the notion of 'quantity' benefiting the children born later in the life cycle, due to the potential resources and added incomes that the now, older-educated siblings can provide to the family. It is significant to divulge that resources from the parent, and siblings offer inverse effects through the scope of the child of nuclear families, single parents, or extended families. Also, Booth and Hiau Joo (2009) includes that the effects of birth order are varied and yields an array of results when exploring the parent's experience, age proximities, education attained, and family type/ size, continuing to identify that the resources each child receive differ across the birth order. Thus, contributing to Adler's variances.

Alfred Adler, one of the first theorists to discover individual psychology, identified the common characteristic traits, and patterns that exist for the first, middle,

and last born. Adler (1928) argues that although birth order provides an empirical method of relating, it is not a determinant of the individual. Adding to the literature that everyone has the capacity to create their own lifestyle, despite those common traits of the first, middle, and the last sibling born. He also acknowledged that variables such as the number of siblings involved, the proximity of age, gender, parenting, and the home environment must be considered to augment the quality of research on the sibling relationship. These findings are supported by other research (Gfroerer, Gfroerer, Curlette, White & Kern, 2003).

The first sibling born commonly exhibits characteristics of a leader and are often adult-oriented. Siblings that occupy the first born ordinal position, take responsibility for the last sibling born, taking on the parenting approach in the sibling relationship (Collins, 2006). This assertive nature of the first sibling born is due to the constant interaction and resources allocated from the parent prior to the following sibling's conception.

The middle sibling born is characterized to be personable and has adapted exceptional interpersonal skills (Collins, 2006) Although, earlier on, the middle sibling placeholder tends to be in constant competition with the first sibling, matching their accomplishments. They tend to seek relationships outside of the familial social structure due to the lack of support from the first and last child focused parent (Freese, Powell, & Lala, 2009). Research suggests that the middle sibling role in the relationship is to act as the peacekeeper between the first and last sibling born.

The last sibling born possess the traits of a dependent, incapable or inexperienced person (Collins, 2016). The last-born sibling have the privilege of not experiencing the need to compete for resources, thus making them the most vulnerable among their

siblings (Salmon, 2003). Collins (2006) noted that with the included characteristics of the last sibling born they are known to typically manipulate the siblings in the relationship to provide for them.

Issue Two: Psychological Make-Up of the First, Middle and Last Child Born

The psychological makeup of a child regardless of being siblings can be very different due to the child's ordinal position (Collins, 2006). The first, middle, and last child born take on distinctive roles in the social structure when examining factors such as the amount of responsibility that each individual takes on. The first- born psychological makeup includes being the most disciplined, responsible, and intellectual (Collins, 2006). Unlike the first- born, the middle child is often known as the nonconformist, amid the perceived parental attention that is provided to the first and last child born (Collins, 2006). Almost, being the complete opposite of the first- born, the last- born child's psychological makeup includes, but is not limited to that individual being undisciplined, irresponsible and loquacious (Collins, 2006). Due to the nature of the last- born child, he or she is often in the company of anxious persons, therefore allowing the last child born to learn effective adaptive strategies, as he or she learned earlier on with siblings, such as remaining calm in circumstantial interactions (Collins, 2006).

It is suggested that conflict, opposition, and hostile encounters can predict how the individual ranked in the ordinal position internalized and externalized their psychological order earlier on in their adjustment to the familial social structure (Dirks, Persram, Recchia, & Howe, 2015). Capitalism, racism, sexism, and bigotry (Ketchum, 2006) noted the problems that hinder and hurt people in society are the same ills that

trickle unnoticed into the home environment, furthermore, accounting for factors such as the sibling's competitive nature. Through the lens of viewing how an individual is ranked in the ordinal position, it is possible to predict how social factors can change or influence decisions on certain aspects of life (Ketchum, 2006). The birth order of the child can then become a direct reflection on their psychological makeup and ultimately the way, in which they define their role in society (Collins, 2006). Hierarchies of the home environment amongst siblings, combined with parenting, the socioeconomic status of the family, racial identity, as well as other factors reveals how resilient an individual will be in society (Ketchum, 2006).

Afrocentric Perspective

The Afrocentric Perspective is derived from the early quandary of African Americans from Africa. Schiele (1996) noted that although the Afrocentric Perspective is a novel approach to serving people of color, it shows that in the past, as well as currently, Eurocentric perspectives are to be viewed as the only way to solve all problems, discounting oppressed and disadvantaged populations. The Afrocentric Perspective provides an internal and external perspective of the psychosocial stress factors encountered by African Americans through understanding their experience and how it has impacted this population's functioning (Manning, Cornelius, & Okundaye, 2004). African Americans have endured social injustices, inequality, slavery, and being labeled as being inferior, yet there is a sense of survival that emerges with this population.

Through combining the works of several scholars, Schiele (1990) identified six tenets of the Afrocentric Perspective that reflects the assumptions of human behavior: (1)

human beings are conceived collectively; (2) human beings are spiritual; (3) human beings are good; (4) the effective approach to knowledge is epistemologically valid; (5) much of human behavior is non-rational; (6) The axiology of highest value lies in interpersonal relations. All tenets aforementioned shows that unity is imperative in the lives of African Americans, whether internal or externally. When examining the ordinal position and how resilience can be predicted, a sense of unity must present itself for each child to identify the role that he/she plays in uniting within the familial social structure.

Research has developed a better understanding of how birth order can function as a predictor of resilience through applying the Afrocentric Perspective. Although the Afrocentric Perspective highlights the African American experience, it is not limited solely to people of color, but can offer a different perspective of problems that oppressed populations experience and how to understand those individuals. Social Workers should apply the strengths perspective and communalism concepts of the Afrocentric Perspective when identifying birth order as a predictor of resiliency. The strengths perspective is utilized to recognize that each individual has an strength that contributes to unifying the family. The birth order if an individual often plays a significant role in how that given child will use and apply their strengths to either unify or separate their familial social structure. When applied the social worker must identify a characteristic of the individual in the given ordinal position to increase their overall likeliness to be resilient, and even contribute to human advancement.

Communalism is defined as a sensitivity to the interdependence of people and the notion that group concerns transcend individual strivings (Bent-Goodley, 2005). It is the role of the community that is central to the development of the first, middle, and last child

born to identify strengths and abilities and build from where they are in order to contribute to their own human advancement. This perspective identifies that the interpersonal relationships that a child develops earlier on in life can be prevent negative relationships in the future if the child is individually viewed through their position in their family and how to utilize their strengths to function within their social structure to make the best strides towards resilience. Problems such as siblings being raised in the same household; one child being labeled as resilient and the other as showing no sign of resiliency has a lesser chance of surfacing when the Afrocentric Perspective is appropriately applied.

Theoretical Framework

Theories are used to provide a view of the world that we may not have considered before. The Systems theory attempts to explain the group as a system of interacting variables. Parsons (1951), identified groups as social systems with interdependent members attempting to function as a whole. Parsons, Bales & Shils (1953) identified four major functional tasks for systems theory: (1) integration; (2) adaptation; (3) pattern maintenance; (4) goal attainment. Individuals that are raised in the same family/household, but unlike their siblings, does not identify as being resilient, can be understood through Systems theory.

Systems theory can be explained in the familial structure in several ways. The role of a parent(s) in the family is to equally provide support, encouragement and guidance. Systems theory teaches that in order to operate at the most functional level possible, all interacting variables must be optimally working (Parsons, 1951). The role of the child is

to learn and apply skills acquired through learning from the parent. Although these roles are ideal, they often offer deviations. The four major functional tasks aforementioned describes the transition that the given child in the ordinal position experiences. The first, middle, and last child born collectively plays a role in equipping the best social system, but individually they must identify how to properly integrate into their ordinal position, adapt to the preceding environment, how to maintain their role as a function of their social environment, while attaining their goals (Parsons, Bales & Shils, 1953). Whether it is through the ranking order of the child, the first, middle or last child born psychological make-up, or the effects that will take place as a result of his or her transition into the familial social structure, systems theory offers the best theory for functionally relating.

In order to have an effective system on the individual level, there must be a need, expectation, or reward that poses as the interdependent variable (Parsons, Bales & Shils, 1953). Bandura's (1997), Social Learning theory is said to occur through observation and imitation. Rather than hearing and applying what was learned, efficiency comes when the new behavior is modeled. Behavior is said to be understood in psychological functioning through continuous interactions between behavior and its conditions.

First, middle and last children born have a system that they operate within, including, but not limited to; their family, siblings, friends, and society as a whole (Bandura & Walters, 1997). Social Learning theory also proposes that individuals learn when the social environment meets their needs, expectations, or provides rewards (Bandura & Walters, 1997). Concepts of the Social Learning theory, such as positive reinforcement, perceived positive parental attention, and/or the perceived maladjustment to the familial social structure serves as conditioning when examining birth order as a

predictor of resilience. Resilience is a major factor to consider when applying the social learning theory to the first, middle, and last child born, due to the level of which the child was expected to perform. Social learning theory suggests that if a child is able to see their parents model the behavior that is expected of them on different occasions, they will prove to be resilient. The child that is not resilient may have understood the expectations of them but was unable to apply due to the parent's inability to model what was needed to be learned. Based on the continuous interactions of the first, middle, or last child born, and their learning of how to operate within the social structure is contributed to the Social Learning theory.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the methodology is to explain the methods used to conduct research on the study. Chapter III is necessary to identify how the researcher gathered scholarly research to review the literature. This chapter will discuss the techniques of the researcher, as well as the limitations of the research.

Methods of the Study

The researcher applied a multitude of methods when conducting research on the topic of birth order as a predictor of resiliency. A systematic review of the literature is the method best used, due to the researcher's attempts to identify, critically appraise, synthesize, and present results of previous studies related to birth order as a predictor of resiliency. Wong (2008) research identified that the child that reported that he/she has a positive perception of the attention received from their parents are more likely to be resilient than a child that identifies as having a negative perception of the interaction with their parents. In this chapter, the methods used for collecting the literature and analyzing data will be divulged.

The first method of research was done through Google Scholar search engine to identify scholarly articles on; personality and birth order, ordinal position, common traits

of the first, middle and last child born, resilience and birth order, resilience, birth order theory, and predictors of resilience. There were several articles on both resilience, and birth order. The most useful article was from Providence College in Rhode Island in the Digital Commons.

Second, the researcher used the JSTOR, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost, ProQuest Central, PsychInfo, Pubmed, SAGE Research Methods, and ScienceDirect databases to search for terms similar to the topics above to further produce scholarly articles on my topic. Also, the researcher found through conducting a thorough research, articles such as birth order; *A Critical Review*, for example, did not permit access through Google Scholar, but did so through JSTOR.

Other resources including; government databases, and organizational statistics on the family size and birth order. Such websites included Alfred Adler institutes of San Francisco & Northwestern Washington and the Census Bureau (2014). The selected data was chosen on how effectively is information can be applied to explaining birth order as a predictor of resiliency.

Limitations

This conceptual paper is based on the review of literature on the topic of birth order as a predictor of resilience. There are many ways to measure resilience, each having a different way of truly defining resilience. Studies such as Ungar (2011) defined resilience as focus on the child's environment as either facilitating or inhibiting positive developmental paths. While studies such as (Yourtown, 2015) defines resilience as the capacity of an individual to adapt to events and changes by "bouncing back" thereby

continuing their healthy functioning, and building their capacity to cope with future life events and hardships.

There are also inconsistencies in what is considered a negative factor in the first, middle and last child born. One factor could be that the middle child is often neglected, but then that same neglected feeling can be used positively and force the child to seek outside systems, rendering him/her the more sociable child. On the contrary, studies did not go into detail in the retrospect of the child in the given ordinal position to account for how they viewed their place in the family structure. As of now data collected primarily focuses on the personality of the first, middle, and last child born, instead of a holistic approach of viewing the individual.

Also, limitations appeared when trying to label the first, middle, and last child born. It is noteworthy to mention that although there are high probabilities of a child in a given ordinal position to exhibit common traits of a first, middle and last child born, it is not a predetermining factor of the individual, due to an array of factors that yields different familial structures. The researcher also found that birth order is not discussed as a topic of social work, as it presented a multitude of psychology findings. Limitations such as these allow for further study to develop a better understanding of birth order as a predictor of resilience in an individual.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This conceptual paper maintained an emphasis on birth order and how the common characteristics of the individual can contribute to the resilience that he or she experiences later on in the life cycle. It also emphasizes that there are factors that affect each child in the ordinal position differently, resulting in the incongruence of the common traits placed on that given child. Through utilizing a systematic review the researcher reviewed the literature on the sibling relationship and the psychological make-up of the first, middle, and last child born. According to Collins (2006), the familial social structure is the first group experience individuals encounter and plays a significant role in the development of the individuals' individuality. While common traits of the child in birth order are not determinants of the individual, they provide a way of relating to establish an understanding of the individual's capacity to be resilient.

Findings on Birth Order: Contributions of Sibling Relationship

Findings regarding the contributions of the sibling relation have shown to be a major factor when determining how resilient the child in the given birth order will show

to be. Overall research suggests that the order, in which you are born plays a role in how resilient you will be in life.

Major findings revealed that the further away the child is from their parents, the closer the sibling relationship will be (Collins, 2006). As the family increased, there is a higher need to create a bond amongst the siblings. Collins (2006) also noted that the sibling relationship can influence the likelihood of the other sibling failing or succeeding later in the life cycle. In larger families, the role of the parent is no longer effective and the common characteristics of the ordinal placeholder will show (Adler, 1928). The first child taking on the first-born position will take on the parental role over the other siblings. The child taking on the middle child will assume the role of being the peacemaker in the relationship between the siblings. And the last-born child will assume the role of the manipulative dependent in the relationship (Gfroerer, Gfroerer, Curlette, White & Kern, 2003). Older children, in general, have shown to be the most resilient in life through their level of intelligence and dominance (Minnett, Vandell, & Santrock, 1983). This further suggests that the sibling relationship plays a significant role in the development of the child in the ordinal position through their way of identifying how to be resilient in the social context of their home environment.

Findings on Psychological Make-Up of the First, Middle and Last Child Born and Predictors of Resilience

Findings regarding the psychological make-up of the first, middle and last child born have shown to act as a predictor of the child's resilience. The major findings of identifying the psychological make-up of the child in the birth order identify that the

ordinal position shows the internalization of the common experiences of the place holding child (Dirks, Persram, Recchia, & Howe, 2015). Ketchum (2006) presented that the role that individuals assume in society as adults, such as being confronted with issues of discrimination, the impact of a high or low socioeconomic status can be traced back to the decisions that are made in the role we assume in the ordinal position.

Summary

In summary, both issues of the reviewed literature, the sibling relationship and the psychological make-up of the individual identify that the resilience of the individual in the birth order can be predicted through the common traits and roles that are assumed. The ordinal position provides a depiction of how each individual will make decisions when the ordinal position does not have many variances.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the discussion of how birth order can be viewed as a predictor of an individual's resiliency and examines the implication for social workers, through policy, practice, and research.

Discussion

Although the researcher found many articles identifying birth order to be a topic of psychology, the emphasis on how the environment affects the individual emerged constantly when reviewing the literature. Through identifying the Systems Theory, where concepts propose that for a system to be considered functional, all its parts must also be functioning, thus suggesting that there is a need to focus on the function of the system. The researcher found that the Social Learning Theory also plays a significant role in how the individual learns from their environment. The Afrocentric Perspective adds on the communalism factors of the siblings and connectedness. All theoretical frameworks place an emphasis on the need to have the understanding of the individual and all of the influences in the environment that cannot predict the outcome of how that individual will be, which carries out the argument of being able to predict how the individual will respond to adversity- resilience.

Implications for Social Work

To assess a family's resiliency, social workers must be able to identify two kinds of characteristics: protective traits and risk traits (Jordan Institute, 1998). Protective/resiliency traits are strengths that aids the individual or family to cope with stress or life's adversities, increasing the probability of rebound from problematic situations. Resiliency traits include a sense of humor, being first- born, having insight into situations, and independence (Jordan Institute, 1998). These traits are tools people can use in times of crisis; they give them the edge and help them make it through the situation. These traits do not prevent problems, but they do help solve them (Jordan Institute, 1998).

Risk traits are influences that may inhibit a person's and/or family's ability to cope during times of stress. Risk traits include: living in a home with domestic violence or substance abuse, low birth weight, and low self-esteem (Fraser & Galinsky, 1997). These traits can negatively influence the way people react to a crisis. For example, when a problem occurs, an individual may not know how to solve it, what the options are, or even how to ask for help (Jordan Institute, 1998).

After assessing resilient and risk traits in families and children, social workers can use these strengths to create a plan with the family to enhance their resilient traits (Jordan Institute, 1998). The plan should be strengths-based and focus on issues the family would like to address, as well as those areas workers feel the family needs to work on (Saleebey, 1996). By increasing resiliency in families and children, workers can help them to be more self-sufficient and empowered (Jordan Institute, 1998). It is recommended that social workers keep in mind the variety in caseload that will offer children that are in

care, that may not experience the same social structure as the children who are not. The child that is in care may lead to a reduction in social roles, drawing from a narrower social structure or even social isolation (Gilligan, 2004). Also, it is recommended that when examining the developing phenomena of utilizing birth order as a predictor of the individual's resiliency, it is not a cookie cutter approach to assessing clients. Although, the researcher did not find specific policies attached to the research, there is developing research that is attempting to explain the evolution of the individual through integrating social, legal and ecological systems. In recent studies, the researcher's topic has further expanded by reviewing the Fourth-Generation Environmental Law of attempting to incorporate the psychological, socio-structural, political, economic forces into sciences, supplementing the need for more research on the access to environmental resources and its impact on the sustainability of the individual's through meeting their unmet needs (Ungar, 2011; Arnold, 2011).

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