Research Proposal: The Responsible Eldest Daughter: Examining Perceptions of Self amongst Eldest Daughters in Academia

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Discourse surrounding birth order research is rooted within the ideology that first-born individuals are held to high standards of achievement and responsibility. Studies analyzing birth order theory consistently report that first-born females are most likely to perceive themselves as being responsible, organized, and independent (Phillips et al., 1990), juxtaposed with the consistent finding that first-born individuals are most likely to attain higher levels of educational achievement, (Bu, 2014; Helmreich et al., 1980; Steinberg, 2001), the proposed research seeks to analyze the relation of gender and the first born experience as it pertains to academia. Utilizing the semi-structed interview, the proposed study asks and seeks to analyze the research question, “How do eldest daughters perceive their sense of self in relation to academic achievement?”

Literature surrounding academic achievement, birth order, and gender is often conducted utilizing survey methodology, much of this research analyses the data through a quantitative, positivist paradigm. However, much of this literature does not explicitly discuss the influence of identifying gender as well as birth order on academic achievement. The literature is instead often centred around gender and academic aspiration, or birth order and academic aspiration. Thus, the proposed research represents an area in which little similar research has been conducted. The proceeding literature review will analyze the findings of literature surrounding birth order and gender, as well as literature surrounding birth order and educational aspiration.

Analyzing the effect of sibling configuration and academic achievement, Bu (2014) conducted a longitudinal study of data collected through the British Household Panel Survey and the British Youth Panel Survey. The data was analyzed through the multilevel modelling method, with a within-family analysis. The data analysis presented findings consistent with previous literature, suggesting that eldest siblings are approximately 7% more likely to continue to post-secondary education (Bu, 2014). As well as a higher level of academic achievement, Bu (2014) identified that there was a consistent positive correlation between first born individuals and higher educational aspirations.

In addition to the previous research conducted on birth order and academic aspirations, Phillips et al. (1990) sought to analyze Type A personality scores (as defined by the California Psychological Inventory scale) in relation to birth order and gender. Survey data was obtained and analyzed from participants responding to the National Survey of Accounting Professionals. Data analysis presented that first born/ only females were significantly more likely to self-perceive as having more Type A traits than later born females. In accordance with a consensus of higher Type A scores amongst eldest daughters exemplified by Phillips et al. (1990), findings presented by Harris & Morrow (1992) concluded that female siblings accounted for the highest responsibility scores in their study examining birth order and perceptions of responsibility. The proposed research presents a concise question which seeks to examine similar phenomenon to those presented in the literature from a qualitative lens of analysis.

The proposed research is rooted within the social constructionist research paradigm, as the nature of the research question seeks to explore meaning as it is constructed through the experiences of eldest daughters. Examining the experiences of eldest daughters in relation to academia through the social constructionist paradigm will facilitate a meaningful and nuanced analysis of the research question. The epistemic nature of the proposed research is to analyze the eldest daughter’s understanding of their sense of self, and how this understanding contributes to engagement with academia. The sample for the proposed research question will be comprised of eldest daughters attending Thompson Rivers University. The proposed research is limited to the exclusive participation of adult participants. The sampling strategy for the proposed research will follow the purposive sampling technique, seeking the participation of participants with the unique experience of being an eldest daughter. The proposed research question will be analyzed through the methodology of the qualitative semi-structured interview, which will be held on campus at Thompson Rivers University. The application of the semi-structured interview method allows for the building of rapport between the participant and the researcher, which is integral to the collection of nuanced data. Themes of responsibility, independence, self-expectations, and perfectionism will be addressed through the guidance of the semi-structured interview guide.

The ethical implications of the proposed research will be noted in the forthcoming section. It is most important to note the criteria by which the researcher has deemed the proposed research as minimal risk to the participant. The proposed research seeks to examine gender, birth order, and sense of self in relation to academics and has been deemed as having minimal risk based upon the following rationale; sense of self in relation to academic achievement is likely already thought about by participants and presents minimal risk for negative emotions; the framework of the question is positive, the research aims to investigate themes that represent largely favourable personality traits; in sum, engaging in the proposed research does not introduce any increased risk to the social, physical, or emotional well-being of the participant.

While the nature of the research question and the method of study does not inherently introduce risk to the participant, it is important to recognize that while minimal risk, no research is entirely free of potential risk. In accordance with the conduction of ethical research, the proposed research will adhere to the highest standard of participant confidentiality, will not utilize deception in any form, and will obtain written informed consent prior to the commencement of research. Consent and confidentiality will be on-going. Participants will be reminded of their ability to cease participation in the study both on the informed consent form and at any point in time during their interview, up to 10 days after their scheduled interview. Additionally, while the proposed research question is positive, I, the researcher, recognize that speaking about birth order has the potential to bring up thoughts surrounding challenging family dynamics. As a mitigation for the possible negative effects of speaking about family dynamics, participants will be provided with a list of free counselling hotlines at the end of their interview.

As the proposed research seeks to examine the experiences of eldest daughters, it is important to recognize that I, as the researcher, understand the limitations that this sample places upon the scope of the research. Eldest daughters have been selected as the focus of the proposed research as their positionality is one which is underrepresented in the literature. Although there have been numerous studies conducted on birth order and academic achievement, gender is rarely specifically analyzed in relation to its effect on academic achievement alongside birth order and is often rather utilized as a means of discretely categorizing participants. Additionally, the proposed research sample has been limited the study to the experiences of one sup-group within the sample due to limitations of feasibility and time constraint.

In sum, utilizing a purposive sampling strategy to recruit eldest daughters studying at Thompson Rivers University, the proposed research seeks to facilitate nuanced qualitative research. Considering discourse surrounding concepts of gender, birth order, and sense of self in relation to academics, while applying the research question, “How do eldest daughters perceive their sense of self in relation to academic achievement?”

**References**

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