

Do Psychological Birth Order Positions Predict Future Time Orientation in Romantic Relationships?

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Abstract

Psychological birth order was examined as predictor of future time orientation in romantic relationships among Turkish people using a Turkish version (Kalkan, 2005) of the White-Campbell Psychological Birth Order Inventory (Campbell, White & Stewart, 1991) and the Future Time Orientation in Romantic Relationships Scale (Öner, 2000). A total of 407 university students from Ondokuz Mayıs University participated in the study. The results of hierarchical multiple regression analyses indicated that psychologically first, middle and only positions predict future time orientation in romantic relationships. Gender, actual birth order, and psychologically young child position did not contribute significantly to the variation in future time orientation in romantic relationships. The results of the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient showed that psychological birth order positions were related to future time orientation in romantic relationships.

Keywords: psychological birth order; orientation; romantic relationships

The ability to foresee and anticipate is one of the most outstanding traits of human beings. This ability enables him/her to organize future possibilities and to bring effects of future time into the psychological present (Gjesme, 1983a). Future time orientation is defined by Gjesme (1983a) as general capacity to organize and anticipate future events. According to Zimbardo and Boyd (1999), future time perspective is represented by an attitude in which one strives for goals and rewards. Gjesme (1983b) clarified the difference between general future orientation and future orientation in specific situations.

Recently, Öner (2000a) suggested that future time orientation in romantic relationship might be different from general future time orientation. Future time orientation in romantic relationships is tendencies to seek temporary or permanent relationships with the opposite sex. According to Öner (2000b), although future oriented individuals may be expected to seek permanent relationships, individuals who are less future

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oriented may even enjoy temporary relationships. Previous studies have investigated the factors that are related to future time orientation in romantic relationships. Öner (2000b) suggested that self-esteem and attribution style might play an important role in explaining why some individuals are future oriented in their romantic relationships. The findings of studies showed that future time orientation in romantic relationships is associated with sex, choosing a partner, relationship satisfaction, and characteristics of individuals such as jealousy and self-monitoring (Öner, 2001; Öner, 2002; Sakallı-Uurlu, 2003). But these factors might be the limited predictor of future time orientation in romantic relationships. It is considered that familial factors might also predict future time orientation in romantic relationships.

Birth order is one of the important familial factors. It refers to the location in a family. The family environment into which a child is born is different for each birth; and each child has an essentially different position in the family (Dreikurs, 1999). These positions are named as the oldest, middle, youngest and only. The characteristics of four basic positions are as follows: The first-born child is depicted as powerful and influential (Campbell, White & Stewart, 1991). These children are the center of attention; but they are described as the “dethroned” children. They feel dethroned when the second child is born (Gfroerer, Gfroerer, Curlette, White & Kern, 2003). The middle child may feel squeezed between the first-born and younger siblings. They may be seen as being in a race with the first child in order to overtake the privileged position of the oldest (Asbhy, LoCicero & Kenny, 2003; Stewart, 2004). The youngest child is seen as babied, pampered, or spoiled (Sullivan & Schwebel, 1996; Stewart & Campbell, 1998). The only children are protected and scrutinized by parents. These children are always the center of attention, like the first-borns, and they are under pressure from their parents (Stewart & Campbell, 1998; Gfroerer et al., 2003).

Each position has tasks, and the adult traits, life style, personality, and other dynamics reflect how these tasks were answered in childhood (Shulman & Mosak, 1977; Campbell et al., 1991; Michalski & Shackelford, 2002; Healey & Ellis, 2007). Lohman,

Lohman and Christensen (1985) found that the actual birth order and psychological birth order are not always the same. Psychological birth order is generally defined as the role an individual perceives him or herself to be filling within the family (Heiblim, 2006). The interpreting of the exclusive experience by the child influences his or her personality (Kiedaisch, 2006). The psychological birth order may or may not be the person's chronological place in the ordinal birth order of the family. The psychological position of the person, rather than the actual position, is the important factor in the personality development (Campbell et al., 1991). Psychological birth order is a family dynamic that plays a significant role in the development of a child's lifestyle (Gfroerer et al., 2003), and this perceived parental support in the family influences the structure and affective quality of child's future orientation (Trommsdorf, 1983).

Most of the studies indicated that general future time orientation is related to familial factors (McCabe & Barnett, 2000; Kerpelman, Shoffner & Ross-Griffin, 2002; Seginer, Vermulst & Shoyer, 2004; Peterson, 2006; Brommfield, 2007; Nyhus & Webley, 2007). All these studies provide an indication of parental support being one important determinant of children's and adolescents' orientation towards the future. However, future time orientation in romantic relationships and psychological birth order relations are not expressed in a clear way. Within this framework, the first aim of this study is to determine the relationship between the psychological birth order and future time orientation in romantic relationships. The final aim of this study is to examine how far future time orientation in romantic relationships is affected by psychological birth order.

Method

Participants

The participants were 407 heterosexual students (186 men, 211 women) from Ondokuz Mayıs University in Turkey. The mean age of all of the participants was 22.6 years

(SD= 1.7), with a range from 17 to 24 years of age. By their report, 30.5% of the participants were first-born, 28.5% were middle-born, 33% were last-born, and 8.1% were only birth order.

Instruments

Two self-report instruments were used in the study; White-Campbell Psychological Birth Order Inventory was used to measure individuals' perceptions of his or her position in the family constellation. Future Time Orientation in Romantic Relationships Scale was used to assess tendencies to seek temporary or permanent relationships with the opposite sex.

White-Campbell Psychological Birth Order Inventory (PBOI) This instrument was developed by Campbell, White and Stewart (1991), and adapted to the Turkish population by Kalkan (2005). The adapted form was utilized for the present study. The PBOI consists of four factors representing the oldest, middle, youngest, and only psychological birth order categories. The construct validity of the PBOI was investigated through factor analysis. In the analysis of that investigation, it was observed that the four factors, accounted for 49.85% of the total variance for women, and accounted for 50.27% of the total variance for men. The test-retest reliabilities for the instrument for a 4-week test-retest interval for 52 individuals are as follows: First child, $r = .89$ (for women), $r = .77$ (for men); middle child, $r = .84$ (for women), $r = .79$ (for men), youngest child, $r = .78$ (for women), $r = .88$ (for men); and only child, $r = .83$ (for women), $r = .89$ (for men). The internal consistency reliabilities for women was .79 (first), .86 (middle), .82 (youngest), and .74 (only), and for men .65 (first), .75 (middle), .68 (youngest), and .82 (only). Some of the items of the PBOI are given in the Appendix A.

Future Time Orientation in Romantic Relationships Scale (FTORR) The FTORR was developed by Öner (2000b). A few examples from the scale are “I prefer to enjoy the present time without considering the future of my relationships with the opposite sex”, or “I usually think about and make plans about the future of my romantic relationships”. A 4-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1= *it is very true of me* to 4= *not at all true of me* was used. FTORR scores range from 11-44, with higher scores indicating higher future orientation.

The Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient was .81 of the scale. Some of the items of the FTORR are given in the Appendix B.

Participant demographics Participants provided demographic information including age, sex, birth order position, dating status and relationship time.

Procedure and Data Analysis

The participants were randomly selected from Ondokuz Mayıs University. The questionnaires were distributed to students in class period. It took approximately 20 minutes to complete the questionnaires.

In data analysis, Pearson correlation coefficients and stepwise regression analysis were applied by using the SPSS program and $p < 0.05$ was accepted as a reference point to be statistically significant.

Results

The data were initially analyzed by computing Pearson correlation coefficients. The results of this analysis show that the FTORR scores was significantly correlated with PBOI First scale ($r = .70, p < .01$), PBOI Middle scale ($r = -.69, p < .01$), PBOI Last Scale ($r = -.40, p < .01$), and PBOI Only Scale ($r = .52, p < .01$). According to this data, future time orientation in romantic relationships increases as psychologically first child and psychologically only child scores increases and also as psychologically middle child and psychologically last child scores decrease.

Next, variables were analyzed in three different groups in the hierarchical multiple regression analysis that was conducted to explore which variable of the study was the most important factor in future time orientation in romantic relationships. The influence of gender was tested in the first block. In the second block, actual birth order was added to the gender. Lastly, psychological birth order was included in the final block.

In the first step, gender ($\beta = .05$, $R^2 = 0.002$, $p > 0.05$) influenced future time orientation in romantic relationships positively. Gender accounted for 0.2% of the variance in future time orientation in romantic relationships [$F(1,395) = .862$, $p > .05$]. In the second step, the addition of actual birth order increased the R^2 from .002 to .003. In this step both gender ($\beta = .05$) and actual birth order ($\beta = .02$) influenced future time orientation in romantic relationships positively ($R^2 = 0.003$, $p > 0.05$). Gender and actual birth order accounted for 0.3% of the variance in future time orientation in romantic relationships [$F(2,394) = .525$, $p > .05$]. In the last step, the addition of psychological birth order increased the R^2 from .003 to .54. Gender ($\beta = .01$), actual birth order ($\beta = .03$), and psychological birth order accounted for 53.5% of the variance in future time orientation in romantic relationships [$F(6,390) = 77.03$, $p < .001$]. The results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis indicate that psychologically first ($\beta = .36$), middle ($\beta = -.34$), and only ($\beta = .14$) child scores contribute to future time orientation in romantic relationships at a significant level. The effects of psychologically first and only child scores were positive on future time orientation in romantic relationships while that of psychologically middle child was negative. Psychologically last child ($\beta = .05$) scores were not related significantly to future time orientation in romantic relationships.

Discussion

In this study, the relationship between future time orientation in romantic relationships and psychological birth order was examined. The results of correlation analysis clearly indicate that psychologically first, middle, last, and only child was significantly related to future time orientation in romantic relationships.

The results reveal that as the scores of psychologically first child increases, future time orientation in romantic relationships scores also increase. The first born child is depicted as a leader, powerful, influential and feeling important. They perceive their parents' support. According to Trommsdorf (1983), the children who perceive their parents as loving

and supporting should develop a trusting and positive attitude towards the future. Therefore, this finding contributes to the association between psychologically first child and future time orientation in romantic relationships.

The results indicate that psychologically middle child scores are negatively related to future time orientation in romantic relationships. The middle children are depicted as squeezed and feeling less important than siblings. Trommsdorf (1983) emphasized that the children who perceive little support are less optimistic about their future and less hopeful than children who perceive their parents as highly supportive. Therefore, the middle children who perceive little support may be expected to seek temporary relationships.

The results demonstrate that psychologically young child scores are negatively related to future time orientation in romantic relationships. The studies of the youngest children have shown that they tend to have a greater external locus of control compared with those in other birth positions (Stewart, 2004). As Brannigan, Shahon and Schaller (1992) noted externals are more past oriented than internals. Therefore, this finding contributes to the association between psychologically young child and future time orientation in romantic relationships.

The results reveal that as the scores of psychologically only child increases, future time orientation in romantic relationships scores also increase. Only children relish their parents' spotlight. They perceive parents' protectiveness and apprehensions (Stewart, 2004). As Trommsdorf (1983) noted these children develop a positive attitude towards the future like the firstborns.

Finally, the role of gender, actual birth order, and psychological birth order on future time orientation in romantic relationships was examined. The results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis revealed that psychological birth order is a predictor of future time orientation in romantic relationships. Yet, gender and actual birth order did not contribute significantly to the variance in future time orientation in romantic relationships. The results indicated that psychologically first, middle, and only child positions were important predictors of future time orientation in romantic relationships,

but that psychologically the last born position was not a predictor of future time orientation in romantic relationships. These results clarified that the knowledge of a person's position in the family may play a centrally role in their future time orientation in romantic relationships. The findings of this study regarding the gender and actual birth order are inconsistent with those of previous research. The impact of gender on future time orientation in romantic relationships has been substantiated by a number of researchers (Nurmi, 1991; Öner, 2001; Sakallı-Uurlu 2003). Similarly, the results concerning actual birth order in this study are also inconsistent with other findings (Trommsdorf, 1983; Brannigan, Shahon and Schaller, 1992) pointing out the relation between actual birth order and future time orientation. The inconsistency of findings demonstrates the need for more research.

From the results of this study, some suggestions can be given for clinical practice or therapeutic situations. It is important that the client's own perceptions about family and sibling interactions be clarified, to fully understand the individual (Gfroerer et al., 2003). Therefore clinicians or psychological counselors can use these findings to understand future time orientation in romantic relationships. This information can help the clinician or counselor to understand and identify the clients' feelings and perceptions.

This study has some limitations. First, the present study was conducted in Turkey which is a traditional country. Cultural practices show that birth order patterns varied in traditional societies (Keller & Zach, 2002). Thus, generalizations should be made with caution. Additional research is needed on the relationship between psychological birth order and future time orientation in romantic relationships, involving men and women from different cultures in which the values and manners regarding romantic relationships might differ. Second, the data were collected from university students. Further studies should be conducted in a different education level or different professions. The results of this study need to be replicated with various samples, in order to test these initial outcomes. If studies produce similar findings, then implications could be pursued to provide guides for therapists, counselors, parents, and the individuals themselves. Third, this study was

conducted in single individuals' sample. Further research might focus on similar issues with married couples.

Consequently, this research has shown the usefulness of psychological birth order positions. Despite its limitations, the study provides information into the variables that influence future time orientation in romantic relationships.

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Appendix A
Psychological Birth Order Inventory*

1. I believed my parents had high expectations of me.
2. I was babied by my family members.
3. My family was more involved in my life than I wanted.
7. I felt isolated from others.
11. It was important to me to advise my brothers and sisters about right and wrong.
13. It seemed like I never had my parent's full attention.
18. My parents tried to manage my life.
22. I often felt less loved than others in my family.
24. It was important to me to do things right.
30. I felt disconnected from others in my family.
32. It was important to me to be the best.
37. I was seen as the most adorable in the family.
40. I felt like I was less valuable than other members of my family.
42. I felt left out by my brothers and sisters.

*PBOI adapted to the Turkish population by Kalkan (2005).

Appendix B

Future Time Orientation for Romantic Relationships Scale*

1. I prefer to enjoy the present time without considering the future of my relationships with the opposite sex.
2. I can readily make sacrifices today in order to organize the future of my relationships with the opposite sex.
5. I do not search for temporary romantic relationships.
10. I never lose time in a relationship if I believe that it won't last.
11. For the sake of my future, I cannot make any sacrifices in my present relationship.

*FTORR was developed by Öner (2000b).

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