

Briley Brothers: The Influence of Birth Order, Sibling Relationship  
Quality and the Normalization of Violence on Adolescent Delinquency

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### Abstract

This literature review examines different factors that influence adolescent delinquency such as sibling relationship quality, birth order, and normalization of violence. The review uses a psychosocial approach to observe how these factors can affect an adolescent's behavior. This research will contribute to the field of Psychology by emphasizing that outcomes associated with adolescent delinquency can be traced to specific points. The main points of this research are further supported by the Briley brothers' case study, siblings involved in violence: homicide. A strength of this research is that, although the studies do not specifically focus on the Briley brothers' case, the main point of each article can be connected back to the case. An array of research has been conducted indicating the negative impacts birth order and sibling relationship can have in development and the Briley brothers illustrate the outcomes that can occur. The Briley brothers case demonstrated how parental influence may not have been a contributing factor to the murders; instead, the psychosocial issues within the brother's stem from the manipulation of the eldest-Briley brother. Adolescent delinquency is an important topic and must be researched further in order to reduce delinquent behavior among adolescents. Further research may be used to create preventive plans to reduce adolescent delinquency.

***Keywords:***

Pathological adaptation, Birth order, Adolescent delinquency, Desensitization

hypothesis, Sibling relationship, Siblings

### **Briley Brothers: The Influence of Birth Order, Sibling Relationship Quality and the Normalization of Violence on Adolescent Delinquency**

Adolescent delinquency is a topic that needs to be studied in order to reduce violence in adolescents. Adolescent delinquency is defined as children, ages 11-15, acting against the rules (Buist, 2010). Delinquency is a common issue that has not one but multiple causes. Knowledge of adolescent behavior is expanded through this research by examining and highlighting factors influencing delinquency. Examined in this research are sibling relationship quality, birth order, and the normalization of violence because they contribute to shape adolescents' behavior, and influence their futures. This literature review expands on current research on or related to adolescent delinquent.

Through the research, it is clear that sibling relationship quality is a component that stimulates adolescent delinquency, but it varies. Sibling relationship quality, accompanied by deviancy training, lead adolescents to delinquency. Deviancy training occurs when siblings talk to each other about norm-violating acts with a positive attitude (Buist, 2010). Birth order was also found to influence adolescent delinquency, but it was further

studied by examining different combinations of siblings. Instead of studying random sibling combinations (e.g. brother and sister, brother and brother, sister, sister), studies found the significance of different combination of genders between siblings. The Briley brothers' case involved three brothers in Richmond, Virginia who went on a seven-month killing spree, murdering 11 people and harming many more. Due to parental neglect, lack of support systems, and high exposure to violence at a young age, the brothers were forced to rely on one another for support. Articles used for this research were key in supporting the influence that different factors have on adolescent delinquency. Among sibling relationship quality and birth order, normalization of violence also had a major influence on adolescent delinquency. The more an individual was exposed to violence, the more normal they considered criminal activities to be. For instance, an individual who is exposed to violence on a regular basis may consider violence to be a normal act. Normalization of violence was also influenced by other factors such as family dynamics and

exposure to violence.

### **Review of Literature**

In this review of literature, concepts of psychological review and social impacts will be associated with the Briley brothers' development. Such impacts will also be associated with birth order, sibling relationship and adolescent delinquency through the examination of previous studies. This review connects the adaptation and desensitization of violence to the influence of the Briley brothers' environment and background history. Researchers have studied associations on psychological and social impacts with regards to adaptation, and

have found that high exposure to violence can contribute to the adaptation and normalization of violence within one's environment (Boxer et al., 2008; Buist, 2010; Eckstein & Kaufman, 2012; Gaylord-Harden, Cunningham & Zelencik, 2011; Marini & Kurtz, 2011; Recchia & Howe, 2009). Finally, this review will only examine the Briley brothers' case with regards to their development, exposure and background history. Research will expose how these brothers came to murder and committed criminal acts of violence.

### **Psychological and Social Impacts**

The following studies by Kristen Buist (2010), Eckstein & Kaufman (2012), Victoria A. Marini and John E. Kurtz (2011), Holly E. Recchia and Nina Howe (2009) all have contributed to research about how birth order affects sibling relationships due to delinquency, leadership, personality, and parental interventions on conflict strategies. Eckstein and Kaufman (2012) explain that older siblings serve many roles for younger siblings. These roles include the following: advisors, role-models,

and caregivers. These roles are important because they determine what type of person an individual becomes and what paths he or she will follow. The hypothesis regarding birth order differences in a five-factor model of personality traits stated that firstborn have higher neuroticism and conscientiousness, and laterborn have higher openness and agreeableness (Marini & Kurtz, 2011). The outcome of Recchia and Howes' study demonstrates one unmoderated association with birth order in

which siblings are motivated to express their point of view if they think the listener will understand and benefit from it (2009). Furthermore, quality of relationship between siblings is described as the time they spend together and how they feel about each other (Buist, 2010). The results of Buist's study state that when younger siblings are exposed to their older siblings'

delinquent behaviors, they start to express the same behaviors two years after their older siblings, but delinquency in younger siblings does not influence older siblings (2010). These findings clarified the links between age, relative birth order and sibling conflict strategies by examining a unique association between age and relative birth order (Recchia & Howe, 2009).

Birth order is the order in which a child is born into a family. It is often believed that the order in which one is born, within a family, affects psychological development (Marini & Kurtz, 2011). This theory is attributed to Alfred Adler, the behavioral scientist who introduced the relationship between birth order and personality (Eckstein & Kaufman, 2012). Marini and Kurtz's study entails that firstborn and laterborn demonstrate differences in four of the five personality domains (2011). The more similar siblings are, the more they lean towards de-

### **Birth order**

identification or wanting to de-identify from each other and have different personalities, but having the same desire to de-identify illustrates how similar they are (Eckstein & Kaufman, 2012). Further recent studies state that firstborn may experience dethronement when the next child is born; firstborn then attempts and becomes exhausted as they seek attention due to parental neglect (Marini & Kurtz, 2011). This can have a negative impact on the example the eldest child sets for their younger siblings as shown in the Briley brother's case.

Sibling relationship is the bond between two or more offspring within a family. A bond is not just a superficial relationship, it

### **Sibling relationship**

is the unity of siblings as more than just family, but as collaborators, co-conspirators, and as role models. Within the theory of family

systems, sibling relationship is influenced by family construct, if subsystems are independent, meaning, that if within a family structure the children are independent/ self- contained, it hinders the sibling bond/ relationship (Recchia & Howe, 2009). Sibling relationship quality varies due to conflict coping strategies, and primary caregiver socialization. This study also suggests the children's conflict coping strategies vary as a function of birth order, age and sibling relationship (Recchia & Howe, 2009). Therefore, the results demonstrate how older siblings

have the tendency to seek to control or to display negative and positive power imbalances, creating competition between and amongst siblings. Quality of sibling relationship is also due to each sibling's past orientation; past orientation depends on development, birth of newer siblings and interaction between siblings. However, by examining age, relative birth order, relationship quality and interventions by caregivers, one can understand how these variables contribute to sibling conflict coping strategies (Recchia & Howe, 2009).

#### **Adolescent delinquency**

As previously noted, adolescent delinquency, is defined as children, ages 11-15, acting against the rules (Buist, 2010). Adolescent delinquency is affected by siblings in more than one way. Negative behaviors or interactions with siblings, parents, and peers stimulate delinquent behaviors in adolescents. Deviancy training, as previously noted, occurs when siblings talk to each other about norm-violating acts with a positive attitude, which leads to adolescent delinquency (Buist, 2010). An example of deviancy training would be talking about ditching school without any sense

the act is wrong. Siblings and peers can both be responsible for deviancy training. Delinquent behavior is also connected to the quality of sibling relationship (Buist, 2010). Quality of the relationship is related to how much conflict or warmth is present between the siblings. For instance, if quality of the relationship is low, delinquency levels increase. Contributing factors for levels of delinquency in younger siblings include the levels of delinquency of the older siblings and the quality of the relationship between older and younger siblings (Buist, 2010).

#### **Briley Brothers' Psychological and Social Impacts**

Linwood Earl Briley, James Dyrall Briley and Anthony Rey Briley were brothers who committed homicide with Duncan Eric Meekins, their accomplice (MegaJlondon, 2013). Due to parental neglect and being the eldest of three siblings, Linwood was considered the leader and manipulated his younger brothers (MegaJlondon, 2009). As previously noted, Linwood's early start in a life of crime influenced his siblings to enter a life of crime as well, and committing crimes together both reinforced their familial bond and each other's delinquent behaviors. Both the Briley brothers' case and Buist's

study support the idea that sibling relationship quality may lead to delinquency (2010). Linwood Briley was the father figure to his younger brothers, which explains why the relationship quality between the brothers was strong. The order in which the siblings are born influences their personality, such as whether the individual is a "learner" or a "teacher" (Eckstein & Kaufman, 2012). Thus, older siblings, like Linwood Briley, tend to be "teachers". Marini and Kurtz (2011) state children who are neglected are more susceptible to reflect the behavior of those they interact with.

### **Adaptation and Desensitization Hypothesis**

Studies conducted by Paul Boxer, Amanda S. Morris, Andrew M. Terranova, et al. (2008), and Noni K. Gaylord-Harden, Jamila A. Cunningham, Brett Zelencik (2011), focused on the effect high exposure to violence had on the coping methods adolescents implemented and their emotional response. Results were consistent with the pathological adaptation model of coping, which determines whether a child will disengage from violence using the normalization pathway of coping, or implement

avoidant coping methods using the distress pathway of coping (Boxer et al, 2008). Youth in communities with moderate to high violence did not report feeling significant emotional responses from high exposure to violence, but lacking emotional responses did not necessarily mean that these youths were desensitized to violence. Researchers noted that adolescents will mask their emotions as a way to decrease the likelihood that they will be targeted for a violent encounter

(Gaylord-Harden, Cunningham & Zelencik, 2011). Participants still experienced emotional distress but did not outwardly express their emotions which caused previous researchers to believe that youth

were desensitized to violence after high exposure. The kind of violence adolescents were exposed to had a significant effect on the adaptation pathway the child chose.

### **Pathological adaptation**

Pathological adaptation is the model children use to cope with high exposure to violence. When exposed to high levels of violence, a child will either disengage from the violence, using the normalization pathway of coping, or implement avoidant coping methods, using the distress pathway (Boxer et al, 2008). In the normalization pathway of coping, children exposed to high levels of violence start to believe that violence is normal or morally

permissible, thus increasing the child's own risk of engaging in violent behavior (Boxer et al, 2008). In the distress pathway, children have little control over the emotional stressors in their life, which causes them to engage in avoidant coping ultimately leading to increased emotional stress (Boxer et al, 2008). Children are particularly susceptible to the pathological adaptation model because they are still developing their moral values (Boxer et al, 2008).

### **Desensitization hypothesis**

The desensitization hypothesis is the theory that children will become emotionally numb to violence after high levels of exposure (Gaylord-Harden, Cunningham & Zelencik, 2011). Although youth exposed to such levels of violence show symptoms of emotional numbing, results of the study did not support the desensitization hypothesis. After violent encounters, youth are more likely to experience symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and symptoms of somatic

symptom disorder, which is feeling emotional distress due to physical pain (Gaylord-Harden, Cunningham & Zelencik, 2011). Youth exposed to high amounts of violence may, therefore, mask their emotions because showing emotions can increase their vulnerability to being targeted for violence (Gaylord-Harden, Cunningham & Zelencik, 2011). Participants in the study felt that it was better to respond to violence by acting unemotional and directly engaging in violence rather than acting depressed or emotional and avoiding the

violence (Gaylord-Harden, Cunningham & Zelencik, 2011). Because youth felt that it was better to act unemotional, they were also less likely to report symptoms of emotional distress

when surveyed. Rather than desensitization of violence, youth suppress their emotions to better cope with high exposure to violence (Gaylord-Harden, Cunningham & Zelencik, 2011).

### **Briley Brothers' Adaptation and Desensitization Hypothesis**

In the Briley brothers' case, high exposure to violence influenced the brothers to implement the normalization model of coping. The brothers were exposed to high amounts of community violence living in Richmond, VA in the 1970s when crime, particularly homicide, was on the rise (MegaJlondon, 2013). They also enjoyed collecting deadly pets such as piranhas and boa constrictors, and fed these pets live animals as entertainment (Blanco, n.d.). Not only were the brothers exposed to high amounts

of violence, and practiced violence themselves, but they also acted on impulsive fits of aggression. For example, during their seven-month killing spree, Linwood Briley murdered a teenager after suspecting him of trying to break into his car (Williams & Mckelway, 2009). Because Linwood normalized violence for his younger brothers, all of the brothers normalized violence. The combination of these two factors made all of the brothers more likely to engage in violence while acting on impulsive fits of aggression.

### **Results**

Differences in birth order placement within the Briley brothers had strong correlations to personality type and leadership roles. Linwood Briley, leader of the family, had a strong influence on the actions of his two younger brothers, James Briley and Anthony Briley (MegaJlondon, 2013). Studies related to birth order differences showed that older siblings were more

independent and had a stronger influence on younger siblings than younger siblings did on older ones. Birth order determines whether a sibling is a teacher or a learner (Eckstein & Kaufman, 2012). Older siblings are teachers because they are accustomed to teaching their younger siblings and younger siblings are learners because they are accustomed to learning from their older siblings. By understanding this

relationship, future researchers can have a better approach towards treating the violent behavior of older siblings, which will have a trickledown effect on younger siblings. Sibling relationship quality was also an important factor that influenced the behavior of the Briley brothers. The brothers' deviant behavior caused their father to sleep with a padlock on the inside of his door and their mother to abandon the brothers in their teens (Blanco, n.d.; Chocolic, 2013). In the absence of their parents, Linwood acted as the primary caregiver for James and Anthony. Looking up to Linwood caused the brothers to form a strong bond, which according to Buist (2010), meant that delinquency in Linwood would translate to delinquency in James and Anthony within two years. This relationship was evident in the Briley brothers as Linwood committed his first crime at 16-years-old, and James, two years younger than Linwood, committed his first crime at the same age (Blanco, n.d.). If Linwood had decided to lower his levels of delinquency, however, the younger siblings would be expected to follow a similar decrease (Buist, 2010). Delinquency in younger siblings, however, did not influence older siblings (Buist, 2010). Exposure to

high amounts of violence caused the Briley brothers to normalize violence without becoming desensitized to it. The desensitization hypothesis states that adolescents exposed to high amounts of violence will become emotionally numb or desensitized (Gaylord-Harden, Cunningham & Zelencik, 2011). Results of the Gaylord-Harden, Cunningham, and Zelencik (2011) study contradict this hypothesis, however, by stating that youth participants were more likely to underrate their emotional symptoms because they believed that it was better to act unemotionally in violent settings to decrease the onset of violence (Gaylord-Harden, Cunningham & Zelencik, 2011). With high exposure to violence, the Briley brothers still used the normalization pathway of coping, but rather than becoming desensitized to violence, like previous researchers hypothesized, the brothers masked their emotions. Furthermore, normalizing violence made the brothers more likely to engage in violence, but rather than becoming desensitized, the brothers still experienced negative emotional responses from violence. Normalization while experiencing negative emotions from violence made the brothers even more likely to engage in violence while

acting on impulsive fits of

aggression.

## Conclusion

This literature review examined sibling relationship quality, birth order, and normalization of violence in relation to adolescent delinquency. All three factors proved to play a significant role in the delinquent behavior of adolescents. Although the factors this research focused on had an important influence, there are other factors that contribute to the overall delinquent behavior of an adolescent. There is more to be studied in order to better understand adolescent delinquency, such as family financial status, friend circles, parents' education levels, and parents' relationship status, all of which, may influence adolescent behavior. Looking at how different factors interact with one another will guide the research as influential elements may have different strengths when presented in combination, then when presented alone. Although it is now clear that sibling relationship quality, birth order, and normalizing violence are significant factors that influence adolescent delinquency, there are still various factors that are unclear within the research. When observing birth order effects, it is still unclear how siblings feel about each other over time. Although articles on adolescent behavior observed in this review state specific effects on their participants, sibling relationships are subject to change. The extent to which factors in the research influence behavior is also unclear. Research shows that factors such as family demographics and

relationships have a significant effect on adolescent behavior, but without additional data, the strength of the significance cannot be known. It is also unclear if a single influence significantly changes an adolescent's behavior, or if the influences needed to be presented in combination to effect change in adolescent behavior. Unknown data within family dynamics, developmental factors and environmental contributions left gaps in the research as to what causes siblings to come together in acts of violence. Further research on the topic can explain the extent to which these factors influence adolescent delinquency and the degree to which individual factors have an effect. This research could have also been limited by the bias of the researchers. Because research was related to the Briley brothers' case study, researchers were attempting to find factors that increased delinquency in adolescents. With the narrow scope of finding factors related to violence, other factors that could have had a mediating effect on adolescent delinquency might have been overlooked. Although factors such as birth order, sibling relationship quality, and normalization of violence were shown to have an enhancing effect on adolescent delinquency; in other situations, the same factors could also have a mediating effect. The factors of this research also focused on the effects older siblings had on younger siblings, but did not go into depth about the influences of

younger siblings on older ones. Future research should include mediating factors and the influences of younger siblings on older ones. Research predicted that psychosocial influences, adaptation and desensitization are primary factors that contribute to committing violent acts and escalating to murder. Evidence has yet to fully demonstrate the role each factor plays in the development and contribution of such actions. Research is focused on factors enhancing delinquency amongst individuals, not its mediating factors. Further research has yet to be conducted on the implication of mediating factors throughout development. In future

research, researchers can conduct a longitudinal study on siblings focusing on mediating factors; such as, parental influence, youth programs, extracurricular activities, and family dynamics to gather a full understanding on contributing factors influencing development. Research focused on the enhanced factors that caused an impact in development, but not the contributing elements to delinquent factors. Researchers can then correlate findings to the Briley brothers and how siblings in longitudinal studies may have similar backgrounds, yet distinct outcomes due to mediating factors.

### **Statement of Research Methods and Discussion: The Preparation and Presentation of this Literature Review**

#### **Methods**

The method of research was set to follow the hourglass research model. The hourglass research model consisted of constructing the paper based on the concept of an hourglass figure (Trochim, 2006). This composition begins with a broad question or idea, then narrows out into a research topic, focuses on research and data analyses, and concludes with the findings of the topic (Trochim, 2006). All of these methods come together to help the reader understand the hypothesis under investigation, findings, relationship to previous studies, decision on outcomes and

recommendations to future research. Readers are then able to replicate or reapply this study. This method was implemented within class structure through course assignments and activities to enhance our understanding and concept of research. Assignments that contributed to this research structure are case studies, facilitation presentation, library research session, annotated bibliography, and proposal. Within the course, researchers conducted a collaborative facilitation presentation based on family killings. A facilitation presentation is a presentation composed of

summary, analysis and synthesis. The summary consisted on gathering background information on specific family killers, using information from case studies to do so. Since a case study consists of biography, behavior, developmental history, diagnosis and treatment, researchers became experts in gathering relevant information and developing skills such as: finding relevant sources, conducting research, using proper APA style and using unbiased language. While analysis consisted of explaining what was the cause behind family killers, this review elaborates more on the developmental factors that caused them to become killers. Synthesis is the connection researchers have found between family killers and the novel by Adrian Raine, *The Anatomy of Violence*. Course assignments developed and enhanced researchers' skills; while the library research session, annotated bibliography, and proposal expanded researchers' knowledge and composition of the framework in creating a literature review.

In the process of writing the literature review, researchers faced obstacles such as understanding the topic, research availability and keyword

A library session consisted of a librarian demonstrating various techniques used while conducting research. These various techniques included Credo References, EBSCO, PsychInfo, and Snappy Words. Mrs. Elizabeth McMunn-Tetangco, the assisting librarian, helped understand how to navigate databases and how to select relevant articles to our own research, such as: narrowing research results, and using keyword phrases. Information obtained through the library session is then used in creating the annotative bibliography and proposal. An annotated bibliography is a list of article citations followed by a summary, analysis and synthesis, which informs the reader of the relevance each article has to the research. The annotated bibliography is then used to develop a cohesive research question and connects sources to the Briley brothers' case. Researchers then converted the annotated bibliography into a literature review where all the sources were related back to the research question.

## Discussion

misusage. Though, with the collaboration of other researchers the topic gained a new perspective. More than one mind expanded the meaning behind our work

increasing productivity results and research outcomes. Though, researchers all have their own individual work, we came together in composing research based on the Briley brothers' case. Researchers deciphered what causes a brotherhood to commit murder or acts of violence; with the speculation that birth order, sibling relationship and normalization of violence on adolescent delinquency played a pivotal role. Thus, connecting and finding data was prioritized and deadlines were placed to ensure productivity outcomes, as well as research quality based on APA standards. However, research quality and findings became an issue.

While conducting research one of the resources used was University of California, Merced's online library research databases. Although it provides peer reviewed credible sources, some of the sources were not accessible. Thus, researchers were not able to use certain articles that could have supported the research. Besides the lack of access to articles, another problem the researchers confronted was time. More time could have allowed for more thorough research and enhanced the quality of the articles used. For example, some articles were accessible through different UC libraries, so allowing two to three

weeks deliverance time would have benefitted the research. Some articles found were credible in information, but they were published more than ten years ago. Articles published over a period of ten years were not credible because the information had not been updated in that article. Finding recent and peer reviewed articles required extra time and limited time made it difficult. Sources found prior to 2006 were disregarded and replaced with more recent research. Choosing articles that were related to the research question was also a challenge that the team had to overcome. By searching with keywords such as sibling relationship, delinquency, and violence, the search was narrowed and more supportive of the research.

As abovementioned, the articles researchers used were limited to be within ten years of this research. Although researchers found some articles they believed to be more relevant to the current research, if they were outside the ten-year limitation, they would be replaced with a more recent article, even if the article was believed to be less relevant or reliable. While replacing one of the outdated articles, however, researchers found new information that contradicted findings from the outdated article,

thus demonstrating the value of setting a time limitation. Because the topic for this research was selected after completing multiple case studies, researchers were able to focus on characteristics that were unique to the Briley brothers' case. By narrowing the research to focusing on sibling relationship quality, birth order, and the normalization of

violence, researchers took a psychological approach to analyzing the possible influences that influenced the brothers to murder. Narrowing the research allowed researchers to focus on specific psychological factors, but it also excluded other possible factors that could have influenced the brothers' behavior.

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