

My siblings have always been the most important part of my life. I have been comparing myself to them for the past 17 years; they are my biggest role models. Although we are all different, I have a close relationship with all three of my siblings. As I get older, and with that more mature, I grow closer to my older siblings; and, as my little sister gets more and more mature, I get closer with her. This being said, I often feel like the odd one out in my family: the black sheep, the one person who doesn't fit in. I researched the social science of birth order for an explanation of why I am who I am and why I feel like I don't fit in. In my paintings, I looked towards abstract art to explain my siblings in a way that I can understand as a visual learner. Although my birth order research didn't necessarily explain to me why I often feel as if I don't belong in my family, I realize how lucky I am to have healthy and loving sibling relationships and how lucky I am that my siblings are all really interesting, intelligent, and genuinely kind people. This artwork is for my siblings. I hope to convey how appreciative I am and what amazing people they are.

Each panel in the acrylic abstract triptych represents one of my siblings. The green canvas embodies my older brother, Riley. Riley is the oldest and the wisest of the siblings. He is extremely emotionally, academically and socially intelligent and he knows how to talk to people in a way that they feel both listened to and respected, a quality I constantly strive to master. The blue canvas is representative of my older sister, Rowyn. She has always been the sibling I wanted to be like when I grow up and is one of the smartest people I know. For her, schoolwork has never been hard. She is passionate about everything she does and genuinely loves to learn and experience new things. The purple and red canvas personifies my little sister, Genevieve. Genevieve is the most mature twelve year old I have ever encountered. She worries a lot about the people whom she loves, sometimes to a point that is unnecessary, and she is good at showing that she cares.

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Birth Order: Personality, Place And Profession

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Growing up, my siblings have always been the most important part of my life. They are the people that I have been comparing myself to for 17 years and because of this most of my expectations for the kind of person that I should be stem from my siblings. My family is large and complicated, with many variables. I am the third of four siblings but my two older siblings are technically my half siblings. I have always felt a strange disconnect from my immediate family. My older siblings both have copper colored hair, pale skin, and freckles that couldn't differ more from my dark brown hair and tan(ish) skin. With similar sounding names, Rowyn and Riley, they get mistaken for twins all the time, especially when I am out with them because I provide the contrast that makes them look so similar. My little sister, Genevieve, gets along with my parents in a way that I have never been able to, or don't remember being able to. She never rolls her eyes at a question or feels like they're being condescending to her. She just takes it in stride and rolls with the punches of my family, something that I definitely couldn't do if I tried.

Riley is 25, the oldest and the wisest of the siblings. He's an extremely talented performer and can often be found singing around this house, usually with another family member trailing him attempting to harmonize (it never sounds good). Riley is an amazing public speaker and I think that he would make a great educator, I know that I've learned a lot from him. He is extremely emotionally, academically, and socially intelligent. He knows how to talk to people in a way that they feel both listened to and respected, a quality that I constantly strive to master.

My older sister is really different and because she was right above me and my closest role model in the family, Rowyn has always been the sibling that I wanted to be like when I grow up. When my little sister was born, I moved into Rowyn's room, and from that day on I have wanted to be her best friend. It didn't work in the beginning (what older sibling loves hanging out with their little sister), but I think we're definitely getting there. At 21, Rowyn is one of the smartest people I know. For her, school work has never been hard although sometimes the academic environment that she puts herself into can be really unhealthy. Because of this, Rowyn has learned to quell her anxiety and become a more relaxed person, something that I admire a lot. She is passionate about everything that she does and genuinely loves to learn and experience new things. She is also constantly aware of how the people around her are feeling and works hard to put her friends and family at ease.

My little sister Genevieve is extremely sassy in the way that all pre-teens are. Because of her position in our large family, she is used to being babied but doesn't need to be at all. Genevieve is the most mature twelve year old that I have ever encountered, including my friends and I at her age. She is extremely capable of handling herself and the trials and tribulations of middle school, even though it may suck. She is a genuinely kind person and hates it when the people around her feel angry or sad. She worries a lot about the people that she loves, sometimes to a point that is unnecessary, and she is good at showing that she cares--something that I have never been good at.

Although we are undoubtedly different, I have a really good, close relationship with all three of my siblings. As I become older, and more mature, I get closer with my older siblings, and as my little sister grows more mature, I get closer with her too. I am so thankful for my sibling relationships and I genuinely believe that they are a big part of who I am today. This being said, I often feel like the odd one out in my family, the black sheep, the one person who doesn't fit in. I turned to the social science of birth order for an explanation of why I am who I am and maybe a little help in regards to why I feel like I don't fit in.

Throughout our lifetime, we experience a plethora of different relationships, each special in its own way. Relationships with parents, spouses, friends, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, peers, rivals, colleagues, and strangers on the street. Each one of these relationships has its own

set of rules and rituals. None of them are as complex and special as a sibling relationship. From the moment that we are born, our siblings are our role models, our competitors, our best friends, and our playmates. Technically speaking, the sibling relationship should not run as deep as it does. Brothers and sisters are essentially random people with different interests, only connected by blood, genetics, and family values. They are not hard to come by as many families continue to have children as long as the parents are able to support them, and sometimes after. However, society has always understood that the sibling bond is something special in and of itself. There are countless examples of this in America: “twentieth-century women found strength not through solidarity or unity but through sisterhood. Soldiers march into battle not just as squad members or platoon mates but as bands of brothers. America’s good are crowned with brotherhood; its Civil War is cursed as an act of national fratricide.”¹ It is the near universality of the sibling bond that makes it so powerful, and its effects continue on later in life. My own life has been a striking example of the sibling experience, variables and all. I have full siblings and half siblings. My family has gone through complicated divorces, remarriages and family holidays. I have fought birth-order wars and struggled with my siblings for my parents attention for all of my life but the truth is, in the end, my siblings may be all that I have left. Parents and spouses pass away, grandparents can’t stay for long, children move out of state and all you’re left with are the people that you have lived with the longest and who know you the best, your siblings. This is why I believe that it is imperative to understand birth order and everything that comes with it. Although there are countless variables involved in the social science of birth order, it can be extremely impactful to a person when looking to understand their place in the family and in the world. Birth order can help determine why you are the way you are and where to look for your future.

Whether you like it or not, during childhood, parents and siblings make an indelible psychological imprint on you, affecting all aspects of personality and relationships.² The nature of these sibling relationships are created, in great part, by your order of birth. This being said, it is extremely important to understand that birth order is not a sure science. There are countless variables involved in birth order because the reality is, no family is the perfect family. Some examples of these variables are spacing (the number of years between children), the sex of each child, physical, mental and emotional differences, sibling deaths, parent deaths, adoptions, parent relationships (and the way that they pass their personal values to their children) and the blending of two families due to death, divorce or marriage.³ Gender is a huge variable when thinking about birth order. A later born child can be the firstborn girl or firstborn boy in a family. Oftentimes, the firstborn male or female child in a family will exhibit many natural first born traits as well as the traits of their natural position in the family. Sex differences can create someone “special” in a family and put pressure on the child immediately above or below said special person.⁴ All of these variables add to the fact that nothing, not even the “science” that is birth order, can determine what you are going to be like and what you will do with your life. That being said, birth order can be helpful (and fun) when thinking about strong, general personality traits and career paths.

Firstborn is a loosely defined general term. It can mean the physical firstborn child in the family, the first child of that gender born to the family (first son or daughter, even if there are other children before him or her) or a child whose closest same sex sibling is five or more years older

¹ Jeffrey Kluger, *The Sibling Effect: What the Bonds Among Brothers and Sisters Reveal About Us* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2011), 8-9

² Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 29

³ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 37

⁴ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 38

than them.⁵ Firstborns are known perfectionists. They're reliable conscientious people who are extremely well organized and usually driven, natural leaders. They are considered to be critical and serious scholars who focus mainly on the logical side of things, type A people.⁶ There are two distinct types of firstborn children, compliant firstborns and aggressive firstborns. Compliant firstborns are the model children who grew up trying to please everyone around them, their parents, their siblings and their peers. They tend to be great students and good workers because they started out with a strong need for their parents approval.⁷ They are well known for taking it and being walked on by a world that loves to take advantage of them and they often don't speak up for themselves because of this. Aggressive first borns have a strong need to be the most important person in every situation. They are high achievers and are often assertive and strong willed. They set high goals for themselves and often find that they let themselves down because of unrealistic expectations.⁸ Although many firstborns are outstanding leaders and conscious people they often pay the price for their hard driving nature. Sometimes, the traits that enable them to succeed at work and life will work against them in close personal relationships. For firstborns, separating business and family often results in family and relationships getting the short end of the stick.⁹ Firstborns are ambitious and are willing to sacrifice to be successful however, they often put themselves or those they work with under too much stress and pressure to function. They are logical and can be counted on to not be compulsory but often times they believe that they are always right and fail to pay attention to the opinions of others.¹⁰

Career wise, statistics show that firstborns often fill positions of high authority and achievement. They are well represented in science, medicine, law and education¹¹ due to their hard driving nature. They are also often found among accountants, bookkeepers, executive secretaries, engineers and computer specialists. They are well known to take the hardest and most important jobs. For example, 28 out of 44 United States presidents (64%) have been firstborns or functional firstborns (children who play the role of firstborn in their family).¹² 8 out of the 11 people who ran for president in the 2008 election were firstborn sons or daughters in their families.¹³ Of the first 23 American astronauts sent into outer space, 21 of them were firstborns and the other two were only children and all 7 of the astronauts in the original Mercury program were firstborns.¹⁴ First borns are statistically likelier to be CEOs, senators and astronauts- and to make more money than their younger siblings.¹⁵ Studies of CEOs have shown that those who are firstborns tend to run their companies relatively conservatively (unlike their siblings who will be discussed later). They improve things by streamlining product lines, simplifying distribution routes and generally making sure that things are running on time in an efficient way.¹⁶ Because of their ambitious need to please,

⁵ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 20

⁶ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 18

⁷ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 83

⁸ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 85

⁹ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 88

¹⁰ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 97

¹¹ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 20

¹² Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 20

¹³ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 20

¹⁴ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 20

¹⁵ Jeffrey Kluger, "How Your Birth Order Affects Your Odds of Success", April 8, 2016, <http://time.com/4286120/siblings-day-success-career/> (Accessed April 13th, 2019)

¹⁶ Jeffrey Kluger, "How Your Birth Order Affects Your Odds of Success", April 8, 2016, <http://time.com/4286120/siblings-day-success-career/> (Accessed April 13th, 2019)

firstborns often place themselves into challenging work situations to prove themselves to their families and coworkers.

Middle children are a mystery to most people and are extremely difficult to describe or generalize in any meaningful way. This is because the middle child is the product of so many pressures coming from different directions (including internal) so you often have to analyze an entire family to understand a particular middle child.¹⁷ Oftentimes, the middle child's lifestyle is determined by their perception of the older sibling or siblings. For example, middle children tend to be the opposite of the children above them in the family¹⁸ (if the firstborn is very conventional, the second will be deliberately unconventional). The middle children look to the siblings above them as role models but work hard to develop a life style of their own. Because the older brother or sister is usually stronger, smarter, and obviously older, the second born often goes in a completely different direction.¹⁹ However, if they feel that they can successfully compete with an older sibling, they may do so. Middle children are usually the mediators of the family, constantly compromising in order to avoid conflict. They also are independent and loyal but secretive with people that they don't trust. Out of all the siblings, the middle children tend to have the most friends and hang out with their peer group the most. This is due to the fact that middle children often have to go outside the family to get recognition and feel accepted, friends make the middle child feel important in a way that parents cannot.²⁰ Along these lines, middle children are also often the first to leave home. They become weary of hearing "you're too young" when seeking the same privileges as the oldest and annoyed of hearing "you're too old" when asking for a little TLC like the youngest child.²¹ The middle child's peer group may be the only place where they feel that they are the perfect age. Middle children are also usually the only children in the family who give themselves the rights to reject some of the family's dos and don'ts and some family values that they do not align themselves with. Oftentimes, this is shown through joining a team, club, relationship or friend group. The middle child experiences this group as *theirs*, something that the family cannot control.²² Studies show that middle children are the most private of all birth orders²³ due to the fact that they believe that the world pays less attention to them. However, middle children are extremely loyal to those that they let into their lives and are prone to stick to their commitments. Middle children are well known mediators, and at times can be manipulative, because growing up, they learned to negotiate and compromise with their siblings and parents.²⁴ Because of this, they often become develop a fear of confrontation and often choose not to share their real opinions and feelings which adds to their secretive aspect.

Middle children often take more time than their siblings to choose a career in which they feel that they can thrive.²⁵ However, they are also more likely to approach whatever they do agreeably, with an open mind and as a result, more successfully than their other siblings that do the same thing. They are social beings, skilled negotiators and good team players who purposefully think outside the box and resist conformity. Many middle children play up these attributes in their

¹⁷ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 150

¹⁸ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 20

¹⁹ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 150

²⁰ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 154

²¹ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 154

²² Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 154

²³ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 159

²⁴ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 164

²⁵ Jeffrey Kluger, "How Your Birth Order Affects Your Odds of Success", April 8, 2016, <http://time.com/4286120/siblings-day-success-career/> (Accessed April 13th, 2019)

profession, actively seeking out jobs that are relationship and negotiation focused.²⁶ In adulthood, middle children put their competitive drive and mediating skills, gained during childhood, to use and oftentimes become entrepreneurs.²⁷ Middle children enjoy playing the field in terms of careers and spend less time worrying about what they should have done differently and alternate outcomes. They are far more likely to only settle down when they have found a job that they love to do and can last them a lifetime. Many middle children also use their people skills as well as their negotiations skills to take up positions in foreign affairs and diplomacy. They often have jobs that center around relationship management, connecting, negotiating and brokering peace between two sides because as a middle child, that is what they have been doing their whole life.²⁸

Last born children are the most charming of the siblings. They are natural salespeople and are often engaging and manipulative. They are also often spontaneous, humorous and have impressive people skills²⁹ due to the fact that growing up, they were the most likely to get away with everything and least likely to be punished by parents. In a family, youngest children are often the family clown or entertainer and are usually popular carefree and vivacious. They thrive on praise and encouragement from their parents and their peers.³⁰ However, they can also be temperamental, manipulative, spoiled and impatient due to the fact that they were not taken seriously by their family, and then the world. Because of this, they have a burning desire to make a long lasting important contribution to the world.³¹ They are acutely aware that they are, and have always been, the youngest, smallest, weakest and technically least equipped to compete in life and they actively work to prove this wrong.³² A side effect of this need to make a lasting mark on the world is that last born children are often impetuous and brash, constantly seeking attention. They are also extremely persistent because, as children, they were treated with ambivalence: coddled and spoiled one minute and put down and made fun of the next. However, they still grew up with an independent cockiness that helps them cover all self-doubt and confusion which allows them to be persistent without being embarrassed.³³

In terms of their future, youngest children often become sales people due to their charismatic, engaging and manipulative ways. Last born children are known to be able to sell anything because growing up, they were forced to convince their older siblings to do things with and for them, but were confident because of their automatic parental acceptance.³⁴ When working in positions of authority for their career, last born children are more likely than their siblings to reinvent a company entirely, rather than simply reforming or improving it. They tend to take bigger risks with jobs and projects than middle and first born children. Along these lines, according to researchers at the University of California, Berkeley and Guilford College, the youngest sibling is more likely to participate in high risk sports as a career than their older siblings.³⁵ Studies also

²⁶ Chelsea Greenwood, "Firstborn Children are More Likely to be CEOs, and Other Things Your Birth Order Can Predict About Your Future", April 8th, 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/siblings-birth-order-2018-4> (Accessed April 13th, 2019)

²⁷ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 157

²⁸ Jeffrey Kluger, "How Your Birth Order Affects Your Odds of Success", April 8, 2016, <http://time.com/4286120/siblings-day-success-career/> (Accessed April 13th, 2019)

²⁹ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 18

³⁰ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 167

³¹ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 186

³² Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 167

³³ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 184

³⁴ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 183

³⁵ Chelsea Greenwood, "Firstborn Children are More Likely to be CEOs, and Other Things Your Birth Order Can Predict About Your Future", April 8th, 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/siblings-birth-order-2018-4> (Accessed April 13th, 2019)

show that the babies of the family are more likely than any other member to be a writer, artist or comedian. This speaks to the last borns ability to get into other people's heads to manipulate and empathize with them.³⁶ They are funnier and more charismatic than their older siblings, which is extremely useful in professions in entertainment. This is due to the fact that growing up, they couldn't use strength or size to prevent themselves from being pushed around so they learned to disarm with charm and pay attention to people's thoughts and motivations to stay one step ahead of them.³⁷

Only children are often thorough and self-motivated people. They can't bear to fail and set their expectations for themselves high.³⁸ Oftentimes, because of close contact and attention from family, their parents and their parents friends, they are more comfortable around adults and those older than them. There are two kinds of only children. The first kind come from parents who wanted more children, but for some reason could only have one. These only children are oftentimes sheltered from reality in their early years by their parents, which helps to develop the trait of feeling self-centered or overly important. Adult only children with these traits have to learn to balance the belief that they are more important than other people and thinking that they are being treated unfairly when things don't go their way.³⁹ The other kind of only children, are planned only children. They grew up being treated as little adults by their parents, with pressure to be mature, responsible and dependable throughout their childhood. This kind of only child is known for being confident and cool on the surface but wants to rebel just underneath the surface.⁴⁰ Their whole life they have been forced to be an adult and then, as an adult, they are ready to allow themselves to indulge. Most only children are ultra-perfectionists, not just with their work but with their life. They want things to be just so and when things don't go their way, they get frustrated and angry. They are known to be impatient and intolerant of people in their life who don't measure up to their standards.⁴¹ Within their careers, only children are similar to first borns. They are extremely confident in the workplace and trust their own opinion, they are not afraid to make decisions but they may be self-centered from being told that they are always right and the "center of the universe" by their parents.⁴² They often assume positions of leadership in the workplace because of their time management and organizational skills.

I often feel lost in my immediate family. Even now, after knowing so much about birth order I struggle to find where I belong. Looking at my family from an outside perspective, I am the second middle child (two older siblings and one younger sister) but there are so many variables at play. My older sister is five years older than me, my brother is eight years older than me, my older siblings are my half siblings and my little sister is five years younger than me. What do all of these variables mean and how do they affect who I am and where I belong? When I started this essay, I looked towards birth order as a formula that would help me figure out who I am and why my family functions in the way that it does. Towards the end of this process, I have started to realize that is not a single formula applicable to my family, and that's okay. I don't need my siblings or my parents or my middle child syndrome to tell me what I am capable of. All I need is

³⁶ Jeffrey Kluger, "How Your Birth Order Affects Your Odds of Success", April 8, 2016, <http://time.com/4286120/siblings-day-success-career/> (Accessed April 13th, 2019)

³⁷ Chelsea Greenwood, "Firstborn Children are More Likely to be CEOs, and Other Things Your Birth Order Can Predict About Your Future", April 8th, 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/siblings-birth-order-2018-4> (Accessed April 13th, 2019)

³⁸ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 18

³⁹ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 136

⁴⁰ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 136

⁴¹ Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 138

⁴² Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 147

continued familial support and understanding, something that my family has no shortage of. Although this research didn't necessarily explain to me why I often feel as if I don't belong in my family, I realized how lucky I am to have healthy and loving sibling relationships and how lucky I am that my siblings are all really interesting, intelligent and genuinely kind people. I know it may sound cheesy, but the truth is that I don't know where I would be without them.

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