

INTERPRETATION OF LIFE STYLE INVESTIGATION

I. FAMILY CONSTELLATION

One of the most influential factors to be considered in the development of a person's life style is family constellation, the order of birth of children living within a family and the dynamic relationship between siblings and other members of the family with its group. There is the imprint of his position in the family with its definite characteristics. It is upon this one fact—the child's subjective impression of his place in the family constellation—that much of his future attitude toward life depends.

It is important to remember that from the moment of birth the child acts in a way in which he or she hopes to achieve significance or superiority in the family. Actions that are not productive in achieving these goals will be discarded and replaced by new behaviors aimed at the same goals.

A. Age and Sex of Siblings: This is extremely important because unbalanced sibling sex distribution within a family may present special problems.

1. Sub-families: If the age difference is five or more years, the siblings are considered to be in two different "sub-families" (for example, Mary age 19, Robert age 17 and Fred age 15 would be in one sub-family whereas Susan age 8 would be in a second sub-family). If it is difficult to determine the sub-group in which a sibling belongs, ask the person which sibling was most different from him or her and who played with whom. The siblings mentioned will usually be in the individual's own sub-group.

a. Competition can be extremely keen between siblings that are close in age (less than 5 years). This is especially true with a younger female who developmentally may "surpass" a slightly older brother.

b. Siblings separated by several years may feel little if any competition.

c. Siblings close in age may experience the "teeter-totter" effect meaning when one sibling excels in an area, the other does poorly or vice versa.

d. Because of competition, usually the first and third siblings have more in common than the first and second.

e. When one sibling is physically or mentally handicapped, the other siblings are usually affected by being required to assume many of the responsibilities that would normally be done by the handicapped sibling.

f. The death of a sibling in childhood may cause parents to compare the remaining sibling with the deceased child.

g. Large families where there may be several sub-families, there is less competition among siblings especially middle siblings since parents have less time to spend with them.

h. When children outside the family (cousins, children from spouse's former marriage, etc.) live with the family for an extended period of time, they become a part of the family constellation. Usually the children will align themselves pretty much by age rather than blood relationship. This can be traumatic for a child who has become accustomed to a particular place in the family constellation and is suddenly replaced by another child.

B. General Characteristics of Various Ordinal Positions Within Family Constellation

1. Oldest Child: The oldest child has a unique situation in a family. Being born first entitles such a child to the parents; undivided attention, at least until another sibling is born. Usually an oldest child will conform to the parents' standards because he or she does not want to lose their favor. Such children tend to be very responsible because of their desire to meet the adult standards of their parents. When another sibling is born they initially feel "dethroned". Usually because they are bigger and more capable, the threat of the new arrival will diminish with the passing of time. However, if the second child is very close in age to the first, there is a chance that the second might be more capable than the older. The situation of the second sibling permanently dethroning the first is most frequent when the older child is a boy followed very closely by a girl. Her accelerated rate of human growth and development makes such a "dethronement" more possible. Other frequent characteristics include preference for authority, dislike for change, conservative viewpoint, being "pacemaker" for the other children, ambitious, achievement oriented and having a tendency to relate to adults better than peers.

2. Middle Child: The middle child will usually try to over-take the first as a result of what has become known as the "Avis Complex" (because I am second I will try harder). Usually the middle child will choose to compete in areas in which the oldest child is not proficient. If oldest children are good students, athletes, or models of good behavior, the middle children will probably be poor students, uninterested in athletics and discipline problems; however, they might be good musicians, artist or strong in an area where the oldest is not skilled. Whereas the oldest child is the "center of the iniverse" the second child must "slip in on the second act". Middle children tend to be more sociable than oldest children. They are also often sensitive to injustices, unfairness, feelings of being slighted or abused or of having no place in the group. When a younger sibling is born into the family, the middle child often feels dethroned, because of the new competition from the youngest child.

3. Youngest Child: Youngest children have something going for them that the oldest child does not.....they have never been dethroned. They are generally the most powerful persons in the family because of the many ways of getting the parents and other siblings to do things for them. Youngest children frequently are not taken seriously because they are the smallest and as a result they may be spoiled by others. Along with the oldest child, the youngest has a unique place in the family constellation. However, it should also be noted that the youngest children should have good sibling models from which to observe and learn.

4. Single Child: Single children usually develop in one of two basic directions: either they will try to meet the adult level of competence or they will remain helpless and irresponsible as long as possible. Usually single children will have a better relationship with people much older or much younger than they are, rather than with their peer group. Single children may refuse to cooperate when their every wish is not granted. They are similar to youngest children in that neither has ever been displaced. Single children are often loners, not much for sharing and may expect a "special place" without having earned it.

C. Parents: The family standards of values do not determine the child's behavior. However, children of the same family usually lean toward similar behavior and develop values and morals accepted by the parents. In many situations, children may adopt opposite values and morals. This is usually viewed as a form of rebellion.

The father and mother furnish the atmosphere in which children first experience social living. They are the first male and female models for the child; future expectations of marital roles can be anticipated from parents' behavior. Children's attitude toward social living develops from the attitudes that characterize their family. Community influences such as economics, race, religion are transmitted to them through the relationship existing between their parents and their attitude toward others. Parents not only set standards of social living but also provide an example of human relationships.

Generally the behavior and attitudes modeled by the parents will be adopted by the children as a standard of life (if parents cooperative, competitive, etc., so will children).

II. FOURTEEN COMMONLY OBSERVED LIFE STYLE THEMES

Although we have mentioned that each person has a unique life style, fourteen commonly observed recurring syndromes have been identified.

GENERAL LIFE STYLE THEME

RATED THEMSELVES "MOST WHEN COMPARED TO OTHER SIBLINGS"

1. Getter

Selfishness	Materialistic
Having own way	Rebellion
Temper tantrums	Sensitive

The "getter" actively or passively manipulates life and others by employing charm, shyness, temper or intimidation to put others into his/her service.

2. Driver

Hardest worker	Idealistic
Critical of others	Standards of accomplishment
Best grades in school	

The "driver" is the person perpetually in motion, the overly conscious, overly ambitious person constantly striving to complete a goal. Each day is viewed in terms of how best to get the most mileage with as few "pit stops: as possible. Life is a perpetual race for such persons although the goal or finish line is seldom attained. As one individual said, "I don't know where I am going but I have my foot on the floorboard."

3. Controller

Critical of others	Standards of
Rebellious	accomplishment
Intelligent	Having own way
	(Least) spontaneous

The "controller" either wants to control life or is afraid that it will dominate him or her. Surprises are disliked, spontaneity controlled, and feelings largely masked or hidden from others. Intellectualism, rightness, orderliness and neatness are favored actions. Such a person is always concerned about "saying the right thing at the right time."

4. Need to be Right

Critical of others
Conforming
Best grades in school

Sensitive-easily hurt
Trying to please

The "need to be right" scrupulously avoid making errors. Should they be caught in an error, they often will rationalize that others are wrong more than they are. "being right" becomes their obsession.

5. Need to be Superior

Selfishness
Temper Tantrums
Strongest
Attractive

Most Athletic
Having own way
Idealistic

People who need to be superior may refuse to enter life's tasks in which they cannot be the "center" or the "best." Such people may engage in such socially nonconstructive activities as seeing how many consecutive times they can jump on a pogo stick for the purpose of breaking the world record. "If I can't be first or best, then I will settle for last or worst" often characterizes such individuals.

6. Need to be Liked

Trying to please
Sensitive-easily hurt
Helping around the house
Attractive

Punished
Considerate
Conforming

People who need to be "liked" try to please everybody all the time, are sensitive to criticism and feel crushed when not enjoying universal and constant approval. They are adept at discovering how to be accepted by others and feel that such opinions are the only measure of their personal worth.

7. Need to be Good

Standards of
accomplishment
Critical of others
Hardest worker

Conforming
Idealistic
Most athletic

People who need to be "good" prefer living by higher moral standards than their peers. Such extreme goodness may serve as an instrument for moral superiority, so that such persons not only elevate themselves over others but may actually discourage the "inferior" person. This is the frequent device of the model child or the alcoholic's wife.

8. Opposed to Everything

Rebellious
Temper Tantrums

Spoiled
Sensitive-easily hurt

People who oppose everything rarely can be found to be something. They are quick to identify faults, constantly finding themselves opposed to the programs or desires of others.

9. Victim

Idealistic
Sensitive-easily hurt

Punished

The "victim" innocently or actively becomes a "disaster chaser", characterized by feelings of nobility, self-pity, resignations or proneness to accident. Seeking the sympathy or pity of others is commonly employed by such people.

10. Martyr

Sensitive-easily hurt
Trying to please

Punished
Idealistic

The "martyr" is similar to the victim, except that his or her "death" is for a noble or righteous cause. Moral indignation or silent suffering at the hands of unjust others are common actions.

11. Baby

Having own way
Temper tantrums
Selfishness

Attractive
Spoiled

The "baby" finds a place through the use of charm, cuteness, and the exploitations of others. Often but not always the youngest in the family constellation, such persons may have high pitched voices and childlike mannerisms employed to put others into their service.

12. Inadequate Person

Trying to please
(Low intelligence)

Sensitive-easily hurt
(Low) standards of
accomplishment

The "inadequate" person can do nothing right, being thoroughly awkward and clumsy. Often activities are limited to those in which some success is guaranteed, and assuming responsibility generally results in failure. Such a person loudly proclaims his/her own inadequacies, a living symbol of an "inferiority complex."

13. Avoids Feeling

Intelligent
Conforming

Stands of accomplishment
Best grades in school

People who avoid feelings believe that logical thinking and rational living can solve all life's problems. Their most prized characteristics consist of their logic, rationalization, intellectualization and "talking a good game."

14. Excitement Seeker

Sense of humor
Rebellious
Selfishness

Spoiled
Idealistic
Spontaneous

The "excitement seeker" despises dull, routine activities preferring constant thrill and motion. In searching for excitement, others are often employed in providing new exhilaration. "let's party tonight" is a frequent theme. Self excitements of tears or masturbation may be employed.

IN ORDER TO PURCHASE A COPY OF THE BOOKLET WHICH IS DESIGNED TO USE AS A GUIDE IN
GIVING AND INTERPRETING A LIFE STYLE INTERVIEW, PLEASE WRITE TO THE FOLLOWING:

Life Style: What It Is and How to Do It

by Daniel Eckstein, Le Roy Baruth, David Mahrer

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