

Running head: PARENTAL PREFERENCES AND PRE-DETERMINED  
ATTITUDE AFFECT CHILD

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Family Size Affect Child's Attitude and Achievement

Taylor M. Hodge

Southern Methodist University

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The majority of United States residents believe that only children are at a disadvantage. Statistics such as this shows the disapproving outlook a society concludes to only children. G. Stanley Hall initially put this negative view of the only child into play. Hall asserted that being an only child was a disease unto itself (Neal, 1927). A child's motivation to succeed through certain achievements is driven on the assumption of parental approval. The parent's approval is pre-determined based variables such as the conception of a normal family size, social norms, and cultural affluence. Government laws, parent's desired economic status, and personal preferences such as the commitment and time having multiple children will cause determine the parent's conception of a normal family size.

In 1979, the Republic of China implemented the one-child-per-family program in order to control the country's overpopulation. The Chinese feared the expected population of 2.1 billion by the year 2080, compared to the 1.2 billion in 2000. By 1985, 80% to 90% of Chinese couples in urban areas had responded in accordance to the family plan policy (Yang, Ollendick, Dong, Xia, & Lin, 1995). The book, The Joy Luck Club explains why Chinese parents desire to

indicate their own worth through their child (Tan, 1989). Traditionally, Chinese families valued the idea of having many children such as the American families' do. Around 14% of United States children are only children. While only child families begins to increase, the focus of only children research in the United States has been around for more than half a century with over 200 studies on only children (Zheng & Colombo, 2001). Many of the articles such as the Wan, Fan, Lin, and Jing (2001) study, Yang et al. (1995) study, the Shen & Yuan (1999) study, and the Wang, Kato, Inaba, Tango, Yoshida, Kusaka, et al. (2000) study are tested in China because of the one-child-per-family law. However, results from these studies can be biased when cultural and social norms are not accounted for.

The Zheng and Colombo (2001) study was based on the Snow, Jacklin, & Maccoby (1981) study that found only children exhibit more assertiveness and total social behavior when observed in a one-on-one social situation where the number of toys is limited. In 2001, Zheng and Colombo duplicated the study to find specific social behaviors amongst only versus sibling children. The results were completely different based on one factor. The Snow et al. study observation was conducted in a constrained one-on-one environment with limited variables while the Zheng

and Colombo study observation took place during group-oriented free-play period (Zheng & Colombo, 2001). This sole factor showed Zheng and Colombo the difference a controlled environment can have on the results. The Zheng and Colombo (2001) study is more pertinent and rationale in larger group situations, while the Snow et al. (1981) study can be more reliable in one-on-one child encounters.

The Yang et al. (1995) study found only children reported lower levels of fear, anxiety, and depression than sibling children in the Republic of China. The study was conducted in the urban area of China only, and the one-child-per-family policy was enacted and made law prior to the study. Logically, sibling children would have higher levels of fear, anxiety, and depression in urban China when they are not within the social norm and the law demands otherwise. The family with more than one child is subjected to economic sanctions as well (Yang et al., 1995). In Shen and Yuan's (1999) study the researchers agree with the illustrations of The Joy Luck Club, and go on to say that Chinese parents with one child seem to have only one chance to realize their worth through that child. Instrumental values such as leadership, self-motivation, and kindness are implemented as vehicles to accomplishment (Shen & Yuan, 1999). The Wan, Fan, Lin, and Jing (2001) study shows

achievement motivation as the only significant difference in only children versus sibling children. While three grades, one, three, and five were included, only grade one yielded the results. The first grade children are the only children that were born after the Republic of China one-child-per-family provision. Parents placed a significant difference on their children when they knew that would be their only child. The parents' only descendent to carry down the bloodline. The way the child succeeded in life also proved how successful the parents were.

By focusing solely on Korea, Doh and Falbo were able to yield similar results to most Chinese studies in concurrence that parental preference and attitude affect a child's attitude and achievement. The Doh and Falbo (1999) studied parental preferences such as attentiveness and overprotectiveness and compared only children versus sibling children in Korea. Mothers who said they were more attentive had less selfish, more popular, and sociable children than mothers who did not address an overly attentiveness preference (Doh & Falbo, 1999). While Chinese and Korean studies can seem irreverent, the Roberts and Blanton (2001) study was conducted in the United States and achieved similar results. The study focused on only child college students recalling their childhood. Most students

agreed that pressures to succeed came from the parent's approval. The approval to produce grandchildren, demands of being the sole caretakers of their aging parents, and the sorrow that would come with losing all connection to their families of origin after their parents' death all play overwhelming negative affects on being an only child in the United States. While benefits such as a tight-knit relationship with their parents, enjoying needed time alone, and avoiding fights with siblings were mainly overlooked by the downside of being an only child (Roberts, & Blanton, 2001).

The strong correlation of the literature and this study is apparent through many aspects. Parental preferences are normally in tune with the social norms and these norms change over time, and can be different culturally as well. The past literature illustrates key pattern and behavior traits parents illustrate based on changing times. The Chinese one-child-per-family provision is an example of the dramatic affect a culture and its law have on pre-determined attitudes and preferences on family size. The literature shows the positive and negative affects family size has on children while this study intertwines past data to support current hypotheses. This study would not be valid if it were not for the hundreds

and hundreds of past studies, the validity and invalidity of these studies, and the topics they depict. Families come and go, but the concept of a family will forever be in time. This study pertains to each and every person that was once a child, only or sibling. Without past facts and data, the current methods and procedures would be non-existent. While history is repeated, the building block of learning from past successes and failures grows plentiful.

How is a child's attitude and achievement affected by the parent's pre-determined attitude and preference on family size? This question is relevant and hits home to every human being. By understanding the reasoning and factors of why a parent's approval is so important to a child's success is only the beginning. The way a child is raised not only determines how that child will act, but how the child will parent their future children. The study of how a child's attitude and achievement is affected by parental attitude and preference on family size digs deep into the cause and affect measure and method. Is it because the child is an only child in a family among many sibling families, sociological explanations, or do parents really have this undisputed accountability and approval soundness for their child's motivation towards achievement and success? Parents have an unknowing, everlasting affect on

their children and attitudes they will forever implement and carry.

## Method

### Participants

Thirty children (16 male, 14 female), the children's three teachers, and the children's parents were observed for this study. The children were enrolled in a preschool program at Southern Methodist University. The children's mean age was six years. Of the 30 children, 14 were only children. Of the remaining 16 children, 10 had one sibling, 4 had two, and 2 had four.

### Measures/Materials

A correlation design will be used to measure the sibling children and only children. The teachers filled out a ranking survey on a daily basis based on the children's social interactions and behaviors. The teachers paid special attention to dominating character traits, and observed how the children interacted with one another. There was a special section to note unusual or disturbing behavior such as children that played by themselves and children that had to be in control at all times. The parents of the children also filled out a similar daily ranking survey. The parents took into special consideration the actions and attitudes that they had throughout the day



based on their feelings of having one to multiple children. Their actions were measured against their child's actions to see the similarities and differences the children had in comparison to their parents. The scale measured the response time and conditions the children had towards their parents and other individuals throughout the day. The children were also interviewed weekly to assess their behavior and how they were coping with their parent's reactions and social interaction. While it is hard to interview preschoolers this is an important step to understanding the children's reactions to the parent's attitudes and preferences.

#### Procedures

The children had three teachers watching over them throughout the day. Each teacher recorded 10 children for five days. The teachers would then rotate the next week and record 10 more children. This continued for three weeks until all three teachers had recorded all 30 students. The parents ranked their children's behavior and attitude on a daily basis for 30 days. The children were chosen based on availability and consent from the parents or legal guardians. The children were also cross-examined to make sure they were mentally stable, and capable of completing the study. The parent's recorded their children's behaviors

daily for 30 days. The children's bedtime was an appropriate time to record the data in order to gather all of the necessary information needed from that day. The teachers responded to the surveys for three straight weeks excluding weekends. The children each had 15 surveys completed per child by three teachers. The children responded weekly to an interviewer who examined their actions and reactions for the week. The data that was collected was analyzed, and studied by all researchers who took part in the study. The researchers divided the sibling children versus only children surveys into two piles, and compared and contrasted the similarities and differences the two groups portrayed. Personalities tend to remain consistent within each child, and that is why additional measurement is needed. In order to break through and dig deep into the slightest change in a child's personality all the measurement that is possible should be done.

Assumed behavior traits include the children to act and feel certain ways based on how the parent's act and treat their children. Children who feel they do not adequately fulfill their parent's needs will act differently than the children who feel a sense of completion in regards to their parent's actions. This study will be successful only with the utmost respect and

fairness from the parents. The parent's honesty is crucial in order to achieve the desired results. Confidentiality will be overemphasized in order to reassure the parent's privacy. Incentives will be offered in order to receive the most accurate data possible. The parents and children will receive sporting event tickets for the entire family, and the teacher will receive tickets for their entire family. This reiterates the need to spend quality time with the family in a fun, laid back setting. Positive and negative effects will be taken into consideration to determine how the parent's pre-determined attitude and preference regarding family size affect a child's attitude and achievement.

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