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THE ORDER of SUCCESS



FORGET STAR SIGNS AND PERSONALITY TESTS. JUST LOOK AT WHETHER THEY WERE BORN FIRST, LAST OR IN-BETWEEN. **LOUISA DEASEY** REPORTS.

WOULD CONDOLEEZZA RICE EXUDE such self-assurance in the hot seat of power if she wasn't a 'super firstborn'? Would Nicole Kidman have made it to Hollywood if Antonia had come first? Would Kylie Minogue's success have superceded little sister Dannii's if their birth order was reversed? A growing number of theorists say the answer is no.

In the political arena at least, firstborns literally rule. Historically, more than half of US Presidents were born first in the family, and many of the first astronauts sent into space were firstborns or only children (also known as 'super firstborns').

If you were born later in line and think success has a little more to do with self-determination, a couple of statistics prove birth order is more than a pop psychology fad. A study of 1.5 million Norwegians suggests eldest children are more successful at school and work – regardless of family size and income. Another study, published in *The Pecking Order: Which Siblings Succeed and Why* by Dalton Conley, (Random House, \$47.95),

reveals firstborns and only children usually end up earning more than anyone else in the birth line.

But firstborn regality does have its downsides. An Italian study found a majority of heart attack patients are firstborns, while another grim study revealed first-born perfectionism often carries over to increased suicide attempts. And unlike later-borns, firstborns are twice as likely to get it right the first time.

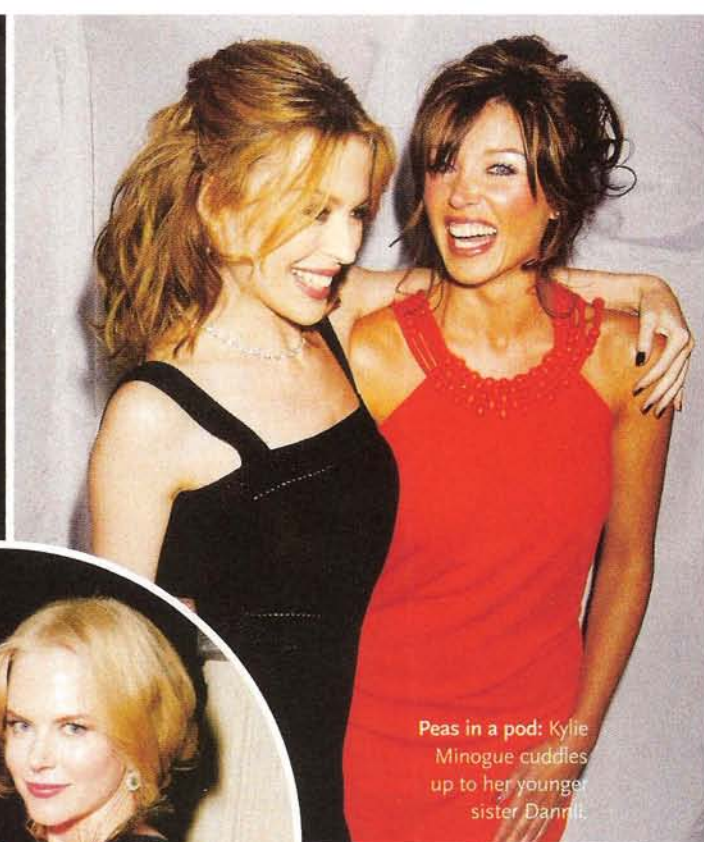
Frank Sulloway, who studied birth order dynamics in the lives of historical figures for *Born To Rebel*, (Penguin, \$28), sums up why, although not a genetic determinant, birth order has such a strong influence on lifetime behavioural patterns. "Children do not inherit special genes for being firstborns or later-borns – only genes for engaging successfully in competition for parental investment."

To put it simply: firstborns are used to being the focus of parental attention, and learn to earn accolades through superiority and responsibility. Later-borns, however, tend to concoct more



Model children: Elle and Mimi McPherson share the limelight.

RIGHT: Nicole Kidman leads the way for younger sister Antonia.



Peas in a pod: Kylie Minogue cuddles up to her younger sister Dannii.



creative ways to gain attention and develop higher levels of emotional charm. Also free of the constantly watchful eye, youngest children are more inclined to choose a less conservative path and are often considered to be 'ideas' people.

Michael Grose, an Australian birth order expert and author of *Why First-borns Rule The World and Last-borns Want to Change It*, (Random House, \$24.95), says "knowledge of birth order can even improve business management, if you know where people fit in the birth line." Frequently called in to workshop birth order theories in under-performing business teams, Grose claims, "older children love authority, middles prefer more social roles, and if you want some new ideas or a more creative approach, just ask the youngest child".

The changing business culture of the new millennium – which favours risk, flexibility, innovation and swift adaptability – might imply that it's finally time for those further down the birth line to shine.

Innovation isn't the firstborn's strong point and neither is risk, according to experts such as Grose and Sulloway. But suggest something is impossible to a youngest-born and they'll jump in head-first. Middle-borns are also more comfortable living away from the

PECKING ORDER

Many who share the same birth order tend to have certain personality traits in common. Here's how to tell them apart...

ELDEST CHILDREN

While inherent perfectionism may mean firstborns are prone to higher stress levels than their younger family members, their respect for authority tends to draw them to more leadership roles. Most firstborns possess the confidence, ambition and organisational skills to be successful leaders. Eldest children can usually be found among the ranks of politicians, business leaders, engineers, doctors and journalists, including famous firstborns such as Bill and Hillary Clinton, Oprah Winfrey and Winston Churchill.

MIDDLE CHILDREN

Significantly more social by nature, competitiveness among middle children can often lead to careers spent in the sporting arena. However, traits such as

increased flexibility, generosity, mental toughness, highly developed social skills and a commitment to achieving independence also make middle children effective diplomats, actors and publicists, while also often being natural masters of business networking. Madonna and Cathy Freeman are both middle children.

YOUNGEST CHILDREN

Youngest children tend to be more creative and playful than their elder siblings and are often also more outgoing as a result. Least afraid of failure, they are often persistent and most inclined to take risks, which also often makes them effective business entrepreneurs. With a propensity toward the unconventional in life, youngest-born children usually become 'ideas people' and may be drawn towards more creative careers in entertainment and the arts, as well as sales. Mahatma Gandhi, Laurence Olivier and Drew Barrymore are all the youngest children in their families.

family home, and make up the highest percentage of interstate and overseas ex-pats. "They're used to being often displaced," says Grose.

Sociologist and author Bernard Salt, who has spent years documenting social shifts in the workforce, predicts that generational changes in the global marketplace over the next 20 years will call for a whole new set of business skills.

Generation Y, currently shaping the shift, are known for their techno-savvy curiosity and impatience, as well as a strong preference for work-life balance over a 'job for life'. In many ways, these values mirror those of the youngest born rather than the eldest.

Does this mean we're moving to a point where the baby of the family could still become Prime Minister? Probably not, says Grose, because firstborns will always make up the Australian majority. "A person standing for politics over the coming decades would stand a better chance of election if (they) stood on the conservative side due to the higher proportion of firstborns," he argues.

So what is it about the firstborn that makes them so primed for success? "Firstborns tend to end up in positions of leadership whether they want to or not," explains Grose. He attributes this to early comfort with responsibility, as well as the fact that "to parents, everything the firstborn does is very important." Come to the second or third child and this attention has usually been watered down. On a subconscious level, this sense of power must sink in.

But does this intense parental scrutiny have any other downsides, aside from the occasional heart attack?

Yes, says Grose. "First borns tend to be 'type A' personalities. Being perfectionists, they often will not try anything new unless they're guaranteed to find success. They are also so intensely focused on approval that it can chain them in, which is why later-borns tend to take bigger risks."

A glimpse at a few business success stories of the past century shows that while later-borns may never become President, they know how to take a

leap of faith. Microsoft boss Bill Gates, Body Shop founder Anita Roddick and cosmetics queen Estée Lauder were all born later in the birth line, and all

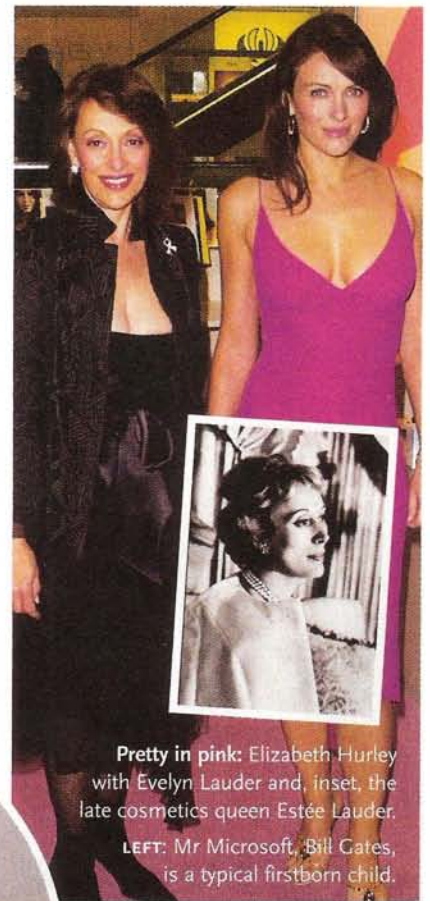
made their fortunes through radical risk.

"Youngest children are born into the unenviable position where everyone in the family is bigger, brighter and more capable than them," says Grose. They're comfortable with the fact they are

imperfect and this, says Grose, "gives them more freedom to take risks".

"Fear of failure doesn't cripple later-borns, while firstborns often think that if they can't do it perfectly, they won't try." ▶

“ Firstborns end up in leadership roles whether they want to or not. ”



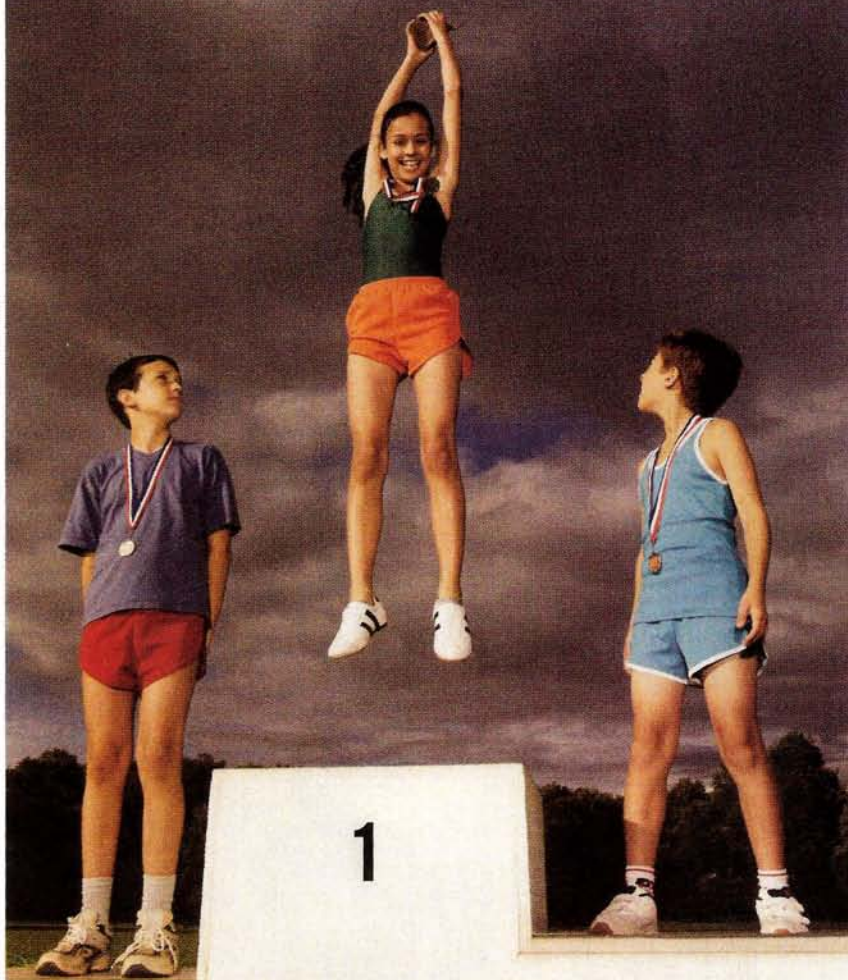
Pretty in pink: Elizabeth Hurley with Evelyn Lauder and, inset, the late cosmetics queen Estée Lauder.

LEFT: Mr Microsoft, Bill Gates, is a typical firstborn child.



All in the skin: Body Shop creator and later-born sibling Dame Anita Roddick.

Tough at the top: Firstborns are natural winners, but often burdened with perfectionism.



HOW TO HANDLE SIBLING RIVALRY

Whether you're selling to siblings or managing them, here are some handy hints to get you across the line...

SELLING

Kevin Leman, in *New Birth Order Book*, (Strand Publishing, \$24.95), offers advice for using birth order knowledge in sales roles. When selling to eldest children it's important to be direct, while still letting them feel like they are in control. Focusing on the practical and avoiding pressure is the best bet, while the more social middle children will respond better to a salesperson interested in forming a relationship with them. Youngest children will be attracted to new products and

trends, and will be more inclined to seek out solutions than gloss over the details.

MANAGING

Eldest children are usually eager to please, so praising them in front of other people will keep their satisfaction levels high. They respond best to roles encompassing responsibility and authority, and will take naturally to leading people. With highly developed social skills, middle children are good communicators and will most likely embrace mediation roles and opportunities to chair meetings. The least organized, youngest children are best utilized in creative roles and will thrive in unstructured situations where they are free to invent fresh, new ideas.

“Middle children can be **hard to figure out**, but they generally do things differently to the sibling above them.”

The late Estée Lauder, youngest of nine, once said: “I have never gone a day in my life without selling”. Grose believes this typifies the way a youngest child learns to live. Arriving last means you've no responsibility except to get some attention for yourself – a trait that, according to Grose, makes youngest-borns the best salespeople.

Middle children, says Grose, can be the hardest to figure out, “but a general rule is that they will do things very differently to the sibling above them.” One interesting statistic on middle-borns indicates they have the least criminal records of any in the birth line. Another showed they are more likely to move out of home first, and also have the best social skills in group situations.

With personality testing for job candidates on the rise, it might not be long before the question “are you the eldest, middle or youngest?” becomes a common sight on HR hiring documents.

Grose was once called in to help an underperforming sales team and quickly discovered that they were all firstborns.

“Firstborns sell differently to middle and younger children. They are less playful, more blunt and to the point,” he says. “Sales come naturally to the youngest born, they've been working on creative ways to get attention all their lives, and they take rejection a lot less seriously than elder children.”

By directing the team to mix it up with some later-borns, as well as educating the firstborns on their own blind spots, the team became more effective and sales started rising immediately.

“Understanding how your place in the family affects you can be the difference between running against the wind and smooth sailing,” he says. “By educating businesses on birth order, I see a lot of lightbulbs going on in people's heads.” ■