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Perception of Parental Favoritism in Young Adults: The Influence of Extreme
Favoritism vs. Slight Favoritism

By

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ABSTRACT

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This study examined perceived parental favoritism in a sample of 91 male and female undergraduate students from Union College. Participants were given a series of questionnaires asking about their demographics, academic achievement, and favoritism within their family. In addition, participants were given Rosenberg's self-esteem questionnaire. This research was meant to investigate the possible predictors and effects of parental favoritism by assessing the following variables: birth order, gender, self-esteem, problem behavior and academic achievement. As hypothesized, results showed a significant correlation between perceived parental favoritism and academic achievement. Participants who reported more extreme favoritism within their families had overall lower grade point averages than participants who reported slight favoritism. This research is discussed in terms of the impact perceived parental favoritism has on young adults.

Parents tell their children countless lies to protect their feelings and preserve their innocence; parents fib about the tooth fairy's responsibility, swear that Santa Clause can actually climb down the chimney, and always tell their children that their artwork is impressive. While these white lies are told in almost every household around the world, there is one lie in particular that parents continue to tell through every generation, "we do not have a favorite child" (Kluger, 2011). Whether this statement is believable or not, it is reasonable to assume that not all parents favor their children equally. In addition, previous research shows that favoritism might not be displayed as subtly as parents think. Results show that an overwhelming majority of mothers report being emotionally closer with one of their children and prefer to discuss personal problems with that child (Suitor, Sechrist, Steinhour, & Pillemer, 2006). For example, Suitor et al. (2006) found that children could usually accurately report when their mothers preferred one child over another. Parents may feel that they are treating all of their children equally, but the majority of individuals detect a slight to extreme level of parental favoritism. The current study investigated possible correlates of perceived parental favoritism including birth order, self-esteem, problem behavior, and academic achievement.

Parental favoritism occurs when one or both parents treat one of their children in a more positive manner than the others. Favoritism may begin during the early stages of life and continue through adulthood (Suitor et al. 2008). Parents may prefer one child over another consciously, unconsciously, or even not at all, but children generally perceive parental favoritism on some level within their families (Kiracofe, 1992). Literature shows that more than half of the population will generally perceive

parental favoritism. According to Brody, Copeland, Sutton, Richardson, and Guyer's (1998) research, 65 percent of participants between the ages of 18 and 32 reported parental favoritism within their families. Zervas and Sherman (1994) found similar results because parental favoritism was perceived by 62 percent of their college-aged participants. Harris and Howard (1985) found that girls were more likely to report parental favoritism than boys and participants of three-child families reported the most parental favoritism compared to families with 2 children and families with more than 3 children. Not only is perceived parental favoritism high, but the level to which people perceive themselves as the favorite is also high. Kiracofe (1992) found that 72 percent of participants reported themselves as being the favorite of one or both parents.

Parental favoritism encompasses several different factors such as warmth and affection. Jenkins and O'Connor (2003) differentiate between two types of differential treatment: differential positivity and differential negativity. Differential positivity occurs when one child within a family receives more positive engagement and involvement from one or both parents than other children in the family. Differential negativity occurs when one or both parents direct negative behavior toward one child more than another within the same family. There are multiple ways to assess parental favoritism within a family. We can assess this variable by examining differential treatment within a family through interviews, surveys, or observation. However, one can speculate that interviews and observation are sometimes open for interpretation. Surveys are generally more reliable because participants choose from a limited list of responses. Researchers can compare

participants that responded the same, but in an interview or observation it is very unlikely that any two participants will respond in exactly the same way.

There are many different underlying reasons for parental favoritism that are supported by different branches of psychology. For example, psychodynamic theorists emphasize the unconscious and use theories of projective identification to explain favoritism. Projective identification occurs when individuals deposit their unwanted personality attributes on another person, sometimes one of their children (Steinberg & Ogradniczuk, 2010). In other words, parents can blame some of their own negative personality characteristics on their offspring. For example, one can assume that an extremely anxious woman may project this personality characteristic on to one of her children by continually protecting her child from fear. As a result, the child may develop anxiety without the comfort and security from their mother. The child may actually have a higher level of anxiety than his or her siblings, but this was originally just a personality attribute of the mother. These unwanted characteristics influence behavior and development. In this situation, high anxiety can cause children to be more dependent on their mothers than their siblings. Projective identification explains certain favoritism because requiring more attention might cause the mother to prefer other children. Of course, this process is unconscious, or out of our awareness.

Another theory to explain parental favoritism developed by Bandura (1978) is the social learning theory. This theory analyzes behavior in terms of reciprocal determinism. Bandura suggests that external factors are not the only influences on our behavior because our environment is of our own making. He describes our

environment as “an autonomous force that automatically shapes, orchestrates, and controls behavior.” (Bandura, 1978, p.344). Thus, one can speculate that different people react to a variety of aspects in the environment. This can be applied to parental favoritism because if people respond differently to physical characteristics such as size, sex, and attractiveness, they will treat their children differently based on these traits. Thus, physical characteristics can result in differential treatment among siblings in a family. For example, we can apply Bandura’s theory to suggest that a man who reacts positively to red-headed individuals is likely to favor his son with red hair more than his other blonde children. A woman who values attractiveness is most likely to favor her attractive daughter more than her other children.

A third theory is the evolutionary theory and is rooted in survival needs. Evolutionary theorists suggest that parents are most likely to favor their oldest offspring because these children are bigger and healthier than their siblings. Parents want to replace themselves through the following generations so they favor their older offspring because these offspring are closer to their reproductive years than their younger siblings (Kluger, 2011). Thus, one can also speculate that according to the evolutionary theory, parents would be more likely to favor children that have already gone through puberty. Parents may favor a child for other reasons when all siblings of a family have not yet reached this stage of life, but favoritism may shift when the oldest child reaches puberty. Also, the oldest children historically have been more likely to be the tallest and the strongest. These children have a greater chance of being reproductively successful, and will therefore have a greater chance at carrying out their parents’ wishes (Kluger 2011). Thus, the evolutionary theory would predict that

parents are more likely to favor certain children over others because of their birth positions in the family.

The psychodynamic, behaviorist, and evolutionary theories are just a few of many possibilities to explain parental favoritism. It is also likely that there are alternative influences on differential treatment within a family. For example, if one sibling has the same passions and interests as a parent and feels more emotionally connected, a parent may positively attend to that child more. Also, if one child in a family has a disability, the child with special needs will receive different treatment than his or her siblings. Jenkins, Rasbash, and O'Connor (2003) also found that children's ages were a significant factor in the amount of positive parenting. With each additional one year of age, children reported lower levels of positivity, which means that older children reported less positive parenting than younger children. Baskett (1985) also suggests that parents may be biased toward their own sibling group, which means that parents who are oldest children are more likely to favor their oldest children. There are numerous theories that can be considered when assessing perceived parental favoritism.

Research suggests that some families are more predisposed to differential treatment among siblings than others due to shared family context (SFC). Jenkins et al. (2003) defined shared family context as traits that affect every member of the family, such as socioeconomic status and marital conflict. Their study used a questionnaire to look at the way SFC influences differential treatment among children. Children ranged from newborns to eleven years old and were followed up every two years. They found that families with a lower socioeconomic status, larger

family size, and greater marital dissatisfaction presented more parental differential treatment than families with a higher socioeconomic status, smaller family size, and less marital dissatisfaction. Each family has its own structure and history, causing the possibilities for favoritism to be endless. It is likely that favoritism relies on aspects from the psychodynamic, behavioral, and evolutionary theories depending on the family. The current study was not intended to identify the cause of parental favoritism; it was meant to look at differences between favored and non-favored individuals.

Favoritism is an important area of research because it has the ability to shape a child's identity. From a young age, parental favoritism impacts the way a child seeks attention and approval from others. Less favored children may feel inferior, angry, depressed, unattractive, incompetent, and confused about their identities (Harris & Howard, 1985). On the other hand, if a child is the favorite and receives an abundance of positive attention, he or she will benefit from feeling more appreciated. It is easy to assume that favored children will only experience positive consequences, but it seems likely that favored siblings will face jealousy and behave in self-centered ways that could cause negative attention from peers. Regardless of whether a child is the favorite or not, the presence of parental favoritism may cause rivalry between siblings. According to Finzi-Dottan and Cohen's research (2011) differential treatment shapes narcissistic traits among siblings, which is the underlying reason for negative sibling relationships. Their study looked at predictors of positive and negative sibling relationships. Finzi-Dottan and Cohen found that perceived parental favoritism for the target sibling correlated with higher levels of conflict and lower

levels of warmth between siblings than when there was perceived parental favoritism for the respondent. This research supports the notion that parental favoritism is a possible predictor of sibling relationships, which can impact family life and several other personal factors.

Parental favoritism does not only influence children; even though adults are less dependent on their parents, differential treatment may have a large impact on the middle-aged population. Boll, Ferring, and Filipp (2003) argue that parental favoritism has a strong effect on individuals throughout life. These researchers found similar results to Finzi-Dottan and Cohen (2011) because differential treatment was linked with sibling conflict. However, Boll, Ferring, and Filipp found that regardless of whether a participant was favored or disfavored, siblings had less conflict when they reported equal treatment. These researchers also looked at other consequences of differential treatment, such as parent-child relationships. Results showed that if participants were favored to a moderate degree, they had better relationships with their parents than if favoritism was stronger than moderate. Thus, one can speculate that perceived parental favoritism is an important area of research not only in children and adolescence, but according to Boll et al. (2003), favoritism can have lasting effects through adulthood that impact familial relationships.

Parental favoritism is also an important area of research because research shows that differential treatment can influence several other variables besides sibling-sibling and sibling-parent relationships. Sheehan and Noller (2002) looked at differences between favored and disfavored twins to examine some of the possible costs of perceived parental favoritism. They found that disfavored twins had more

attachment insecurities and anxiety. Shanahan, McHale, Crouter, and Osgood (2008) suggested that individuals are even vulnerable to more consequences if they perceive parental favoritism in their families. These researchers conducted a longitudinal study and tested participants from middle childhood through late adolescence. Shanahan et al. examined other covariates of differential treatment, such as depressive symptoms, sibling warmth, and sibling conflict. This study also looked at parental favoritism specifically and grouped participants into the “disfavored” group if participants reported lower levels of parental warmth and higher levels of conflict in comparison to their siblings. Two siblings from each family were examined in this study to compare results. Shanahan et al. (2008) found that girls and participants that were older in age who reported less parental warmth experienced a significantly higher amount of depressive symptoms than boys and younger participants.

Shanahan et al.’s (2008) findings are crucial to our knowledge of favoritism because this relationship reveals a potential relationship between perceived parental favoritism and mental illness. However, this study is correlational and does not imply causation. Depression or other mental illnesses may be a cause or effect of parental favoritism. Most of the previous literature regarding perceived parental favoritism has been linked with birth position in the family, and a few articles suggest a relationship with problem behavior and self-esteem, but the current study was intended to extend previous literature by examining the differences in academic achievement between favored individuals and less favored individuals.

Birth position impacts children from the moment they are born into the world. Research has shown that first borns, middle borns, last borns, and only children differ

in a variety of ways. Eckstein, Aycock, Sperber, McDonald, Wiesner, & Watts (2010) examined the 200 articles regarding birth order across several online databases to compare results and found many statistically significant personality factors. For example, twenty-three studies found that first borns have the highest level of academic success. Eleven studies have shown that youngest children have the highest social interest and are most agreeable. Eckstein and his colleagues compiled several tables that organized the lifestyle characteristics that have been significantly linked to birth order. Although this research makes it obvious that birth order has an influence on our personality, several psychologists provide different theories for why this might occur.

Alfred Adler is known as the first psychologist to explore the importance of birth position in the family and its effect on personality (Eckstein et al, 2010). He suggests that each child is born into a different “family” based on his or her birth order. Adler explains that birth positions provide children with a certain place in the family, which gives each child a specific familial role. For example, Adler says that the character structure of the youngest child is clear. In one of his writings he retells the Biblical story of Joseph to portray a typical character type of a youngest child. Joseph wants the moon and the stars to bow before him, but when he shares his dreams with his brothers, they put him in a pit and sell him. Joseph subsequently becomes the breadwinner for the family and saves the entire population. Adler suggests that it is common to find that the youngest child will become a prominent person, and whether it is for better or for worse, he or she becomes a valuable part of the family. Youngest children are born into a different “family” than the rest of their

siblings because the youngest sibling is the only child without a successor (Adler, 1963).

Because first and middle born children are replaced as the youngest by their siblings, their familial positions change without their control. Thus, youngest children are the only siblings who do not experience the tragedy of having someone else take their place in the family. Later borns are therefore more likely to feel the least threatened from other family members throughout childhood (Adler, 1963). Youngest children may feel more comfortable with family dynamics, which can have a positive influence on development. Adler describes only children in a different light from youngest children. Only children are more likely to have someone behind them cleaning up their messes and picking up their forgotten pieces. Adler (1963) describes a situation where an only child very obviously has the life of a pampered child. Familial position might influence youngest children to be more social because others do not threaten them, while only children are more likely to have a low need for affiliation due to their dependence on adults. Eckstein et al's (2010) research supports these predictions; there are several articles that document high sociability in youngest children and a low need for affiliation in only children.

These differences in personality attributes may influence parents to favor some children over others. In Eckstein et al's (2010) research, youngest children were more sociable than first borns, middle borns, and only children. One can speculate that parents may favor a more social child due to this characteristic. No matter the birth position in the family, Alfred Adler would argue that physical placement in the family provides children with an immediate family role that impacts their lifestyles.

Other theories suggest that birth order impacts later personality characteristics because parental relationships differ with each ordinal position. Dielman and Barton (1983) explain their theory that mothers are more interfering, extreme, and inconsistent with firstborns than later-born children, and as a result, first borns tend to be more dependent than their siblings.

There has been a substantial amount of research regarding the link between birth position and academic and intellectual achievement. It seems likely that a child with younger siblings would be subjected to more baby talk and childish games at an older age than an only child or youngest child would. This may hinder intellectual and academic development, as well as play a key role in personality. However, most research shows an opposing view: oldest children have greater academic and intellectual achievements than their siblings (Dielman and Barton 1983). This relationship between birth order and intellectual performance is shown in Dielman and Barton's (1983) research because their results showed that parents had more time to provide intellectual stimulation to their oldest children, but after having multiple children, parents did not provide as sophisticated stimuli to their younger children.

Other research shows similar results, but has alternate theories to explain the relationship between birth order and academic achievement. Zajonc (2001) explains that first borns have greater intellectual achievement because when their younger siblings reach a certain maturity, they begin to ask their older siblings questions. In a sense, the oldest sibling becomes a tutor. Zajonc suggests that this differential exposure will later boost achievement in verbal fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Some research suggests that publishing these findings may affect the

role of birth position in society; people might take birth order into account when making decisions regarding mating, promotions, and other distinctions (Herrera, Zajonc, Wieczorkowska, and Cichomski, 2003). Herrera et. al conducted several studies that looked at birth position and personalities. They found that occupational prestige was a significant correlate of birth order; oldest children were the most prestigious. In addition, oldest children had the most schooling compared to other birth positions. Overall, first borns were seen as more academic than any other birth position.

Birth order research is comprised of correlational studies that cannot imply causation, however, it is reasonable to believe that birth order influences these personality variables. Adler stressed the importance of birth order in personality and development, but there is a lack of research by his followers concerning parental favoritism. His writing mentions that favoritism can have detrimental effects on development. Adler's negativity towards favoritism may be rooted in the fact that he himself was not a maternal or paternal favorite. He suggests that less favored children are likely to resent their parents and siblings, but favored children only experience positive benefits (Adler, 1963). However, other researchers have argued that even being the favorite child could have a negative impact on development. Adler's followers have lacked research in parental favoritism.

Although Adlerian psychologists have not made a connection between birth position in the family and perceived parental favoritism, this relationship has been a point of interest for other researchers. There are several disagreements among psychologists when correlating perceived parental favoritism and birth order.

Evolutionary theorists provide a rationale for why parents usually favor their oldest child. According to Kluger (2011), this is because the oldest children have been more likely to be the tallest, strongest, and have a greater chance of being reproductively successful. Joonghwan Jeon (2008) conducted a study that supported this theory. He suggested that older offspring have a greater reproductive value so parents favor oldest children because they have the highest chance of reproductive success. Jeon's (2008) study created a mathematical model to examine the way parents allocate their limited resources among offspring of different ages, and the impact of allocating these resources on offspring. His results showed that parents generally provide greater resources to the older siblings in almost all circumstances. He also found that in relation to allocating more resources, the degree of parental favoritism increased as the age spacing between two offspring increased. Jeon's study modeled bird behavior, but his findings can be generalized to the human population. This evidence provides support for the evolutionary perspective on parental favoritism.

Even though Jeon's study supports the evolutionary view, he does not take into account several variables that literature shows can play a key role in parental favoritism. For example, oldest children may be allocated the most resources, but this does not mean that the oldest children are necessarily parental favorites. Parents might recognize that they are providing more for their older and stronger children, and become more sympathetic towards younger children. This could cause parents to favor middle or younger children to compensate for their uneven allocation of resources. Also, if resources are extremely limited in a family, parents might be inclined to not favor children that deplete the most resources. This would put older

children at a disadvantage. Jeon does not discuss birth position in the family as an influence on parental favoritism as much as he discusses age as a primary variable. We cannot completely generalize Jeon's research on bird behavior to human behavior because it is likely that older siblings are allocated more resources than their younger siblings because of age, not position in the family. Toddlers may require fewer resources than their older siblings because of their ages, regardless of their birth positions. It is important to recognize that age may not be the crucial factor as Jeon suggested; previous research has found strong correlations between parental favoritism and birth order without looking at age. However, we cannot examine age as a factor without taking into account birth order.

On the other hand, opposing research shows that maternal favorites are often the youngest child. Harris and Howard's (1985) study demonstrated this idea. They required sophomores, juniors, and seniors from Western high schools to answer a multiple-choice questionnaire regarding their views of their parents, perceptions of favoritism, their own personal adjustment, political-social-personal attributes, and other demographic and family related questions. About half of the students in Harris and Howard's study claimed to have no parental favoritism in their families. Results showed that youngest children most often reported being the favorite of at least one parent, but more often the maternal favorite than the paternal favorite. Harris and Howard (1985) explained that this might be because mothers have the need to nurture the baby of the family. They also explained that this could be an avoidance skill because mothers do not want to have an empty nest. One can also speculate that parents are more sentimental about having their last child, causing every occasion to

feel like a greater milestone. Parents are likely to recognize every part of the developmental process as the “last time” and celebrate aspects of this process more for youngest children than oldest and middle children. Harris and Howard found that middle children reported being the nonfavorite significantly more than oldest children and youngest children. Middle children may be the least likely to hold a strong familial role, so it would seem likely that they would be the least obvious choice for a maternal or paternal favorite.

Other research supports Harris and Howard’s (1985) assertion that youngest children are most often the parental favorites, but disagree that middle children are the least favored. Chalfant (1994) measured the correlation between birth order and perceived parental favoritism and provided evidence that oldest children are the least likely to report being the favorite. She had two samples of participants: one consisted of college-aged students and the other was made up of participants who were twenty-five years of age and older. Participants were given a questionnaire based on Harris and Howard’s (1983) original questionnaire regarding perceived warmth and acceptance from parents. Participants answered based on a Likert scale from one to five and the twelve items were averaged to calculate a mean score for maternal and paternal warmth and acceptance. In addition, participants were asked questions such as “who was your mother’s favorite?” and “who was your father’s favorite?” to determine if children perceived parental favoritism in their families. Chalfant found that there was a strong correlation between birth order and parental favoritism. Oldest children reported being favored least of the three groups, and through the sequential birth positions, perceived parental favoritism increased. Similar to Harris and

Howard's (1985) research, the majority of participants who reported being a maternal favorite were youngest children. In contrast to Harris and Howard, the majority of the participants who reported being a paternal favorite were middle children.

Kirakofe and Kiracofe (1990) conducted a similar study, but found opposing results. Their study greatly differed from Chalfant's (1994) and Harris and Howard's (1983) studies. The Kiracofes found that middle children reported being the maternal favorite more than first borns and last borns. Middle children reported being the favorite of one or both parents the most often, then oldest children, then youngest children. However, paternal favorites were generally the oldest or youngest children, so a significant number of participants who reported being maternal favorites were middle children. These results do not support Harris and Howard's research because they found that middle children were least likely to report being the favorite.

Chalfant's research does not support the Kiracofe's findings because she found that youngest children were most likely to perceive parental favoritism. Kiracofe and Kiracofe's (1990) results may be skewed due to their less reliable methods; they used an interview approach instead of a questionnaire, which may yield different results. In an interview, demand characteristics can influence people to answer differently for many reasons. For example, if they know the researcher's hypothesis, participants may want to present data that supports their predictions. Subjects may also try harder to present socially acceptable results than if they were to answer a questionnaire.

Lastly, personality attributes may contribute to the way they answer questions in an interview format. Chalfant's methods were more controlled and may be more reliable because she distributed the same exact questionnaire to every participant.

Specifically, Chalfant's research should have higher interrater reliability because participants' answers were more limited than in the Kiracofe's interviews.

Although birth order is an important area of research when examining parental favoritism, it is important to note that individuals perceive favoritism differently between their mothers and fathers, regardless of their birth position. Previous research shows that most people perceive more paternal favoritism than maternal favoritism. Kiracofe and Kiracofe (1990) assessed birth order and individuals' perceptions of parental favoritism through a life-style interview and their results supported this hypothesis. Participants' responses were coded to group participants into four categories: favored by father, favored by mother, favored by both, or favored by neither. Results showed that favoritism was most often attributed to fathers because 38% of participants reported paternal favoritism in their families, while only 30% reported maternal favoritism. Forty-five percent of the first born children perceived themselves as the paternal favorite and only 25% thought they were the maternal favorite. Thirty-five percent of youngest children reported being the paternal favorite and only 20% the maternal favorite. Overall, participants were more likely to perceive paternal favoritism than maternal favoritism.

Birth order is not the only factor in influencing parental favoritism; research has shown that gender may also elicit differential treatment from parents. Chalfant (1994) found that females were more likely than males to report being a parent's favorite with 34% claiming to be their fathers' favorites and 18% to be their mothers' favorites. In comparison, only 17% of men reported being their fathers' favorites and 29% reported being their mothers' favorites. These results are similarly shown in

other scientific literature because the majority of maternal favorites have been found to be males while the majority of paternal favorites are females (Kiracofe & Kiracofe, 1990). This is important since according to Jeon's (2008) theory, parental favoritism is more likely to impact girls because they are more affected by their parent-child relationships and sibling relationships than boys. He suggests that females personalize favoritism more than males. If this is true, non-favored females may show signs of lower self-esteem than non-favored males. However, Brody et. al's (1998) study found no differences in perceived parental favoritism between males and females; both groups reported about the same favoritism within their families. Chalfant (1994) suggests that there are some sex differences. She argues that maternal favorites are likely to be males and paternal favorites are likely to be females because parents have higher expectations for same-sex children.

Birth order and gender are likely to influence parental favoritism and the way favoritism is perceived among families. Depending on how severe favoritism is within a family, it can have a moderate to strong impact on a child's development and personality. It is impossible to infer causation using these correlational studies, but it is likely that birth order and gender influence parental favoritism because these are inherited traits that begin at birth. It would be impossible for parental favoritism to cause these variables. However, it is also important to remember that a third variable could be causing this correlation as well. These other variables are most likely related to gender or birth order. The current study also examined several possible outcomes of parental favoritism: self-esteem, problem behavior, and academic success. It is

difficult to determine the cause-and-effect relationship with these variables and parental favoritism.

One important and somewhat obvious developmental outcome to assess when analyzing parental favoritism is individual self-esteem. Self-esteem is a crucial variable to assess in young adults because it impacts academic and social development. Rauer and Volling (2007) suggest that self-esteem is linked with romantic distress in young adults. Freud connected parental favoritism with self-esteem when he suggested that maternal favoritism would lead to an increase in her son's or daughter's self-confidence (Zervas & Sherman, 1994). This was relevant to his own life because Freud was extremely favored by his mother. Freud's mother had high expectations that her firstborn would be special and great, and she nurtured him in hopes of achieving this dream (Anderson, 2001). On the other hand, being disfavored by one or both parents can have very negative effects. Kluger (2011) mentions in the *Time* article that disfavored children can grow up feeling undeserving of love. Brody et. al (1998) theorize that non-favored individuals are likely to resent their siblings and will experience feelings of shame. It is also reasonable to assume that children who feel a sibling is being favored will be jealous of the sibling's attention and feel unworthy of positive attention themselves. Several previous studies support this claim.

Parental favoritism's influence on self-esteem has been researched in two different respects: the first approach to this research compares self-esteem in favored vs. non-favored individuals. Zervas and Sherman (1994) conducted a study that examined this area of research with volunteers with a mean age of 18.5 years. Zervas

and Sherman assessed self-esteem using the Coopersmith (1967) Self-Esteem Inventory, a scale that looks at several different dimensions of self-esteem. Participants were also given a 6-item questionnaire regarding parental favoritism and a demographic sheet that required participants to answer questions about their sex, age, race, and religion. Among these participants, they found that participants who reported being the favorite of one or both parents had significantly higher self-esteem than participants who were not the favorite, but still perceived parental favoritism in their families (Zervas & Sherman, 1994). Sheehan and Noller (2002) found similar results among adolescent twins; the twins that claimed to be the disfavored child of the pair reported lower personal self-esteem than the twins that claimed to be the favored member of the pair. This supports Zervas and Sherman's (1994) findings because of the families that reported favoritism, favored participants had higher self-esteem than disfavored participants.

The second approach to self-esteem research looks at individuals who report parental favoritism occurring vs. those who do not perceive parental favoritism within their families regardless of whether they were the favorite children. Research suggests that individuals who report favoritism in their families may have lower self-esteem than those who do not. A study conducted by de Man (2003) examined adolescents in Hong Kong to measure the relationship between perceived parental favoritism and suicidal ideation. Self-esteem encompasses many dimensions, but research has found a strong correlation between suicidal ideation and self-esteem; individuals with suicidal ideation have lower self-esteem than those who are not suicidal. De Man (2003) assessed differential parental treatment with the Sibling Inventory of

Differential Experience (SIDE; Daniels & Plomin, 1984 as cited in de Man, 2003) and suicidal ideation with the Scale for Suicide Ideation (de Man & Leduc, 1994). Results provided evidence for a strong correlation between differential treatment and suicidal ideation. Although De Man's (2003) results did not differentiate between favored and not favored children, the individuals who reported differential treatment in their families scored higher on the Scale for Suicide Ideation than those who reported no differential treatment. Therefore, one can deduce that the mere presence of favoritism in a family, whether an individual is favored or not, is related to suicidal ideation, which means parental favoritism could have an impact on self-esteem. However, this is again correlational research and we cannot imply a cause and effect relationship. It could be that parents are less likely to favor children with lower self-esteem.

Multiple studies have been conducted that found similar results to De Man's (2003) research, which suggested that whether participants were favored or disfavored, perceived parental favoritism is related to self-esteem. For example, Zervas and Sherman's study (1994) compared different dimensions of self-esteem and found that the group of participants who reported no parental favoritism had higher social self-esteem than participants who reported parental favoritism in their families. Rauer and Volling (2007) conducted a similar study that examined possible associations with differential treatment among 200 young adults between the ages of 18 and 22. Rauer and Volling were particularly interested in romantic distress during these ages and looked at self-esteem as one of the predictors of romantic distress. Rauer and Volling (2007) found that regardless of whether participants were the

favorites or disfavorites, those who perceived parental favoritism had overall lower self-esteem than participants who did not report parental favoritism in their families. De Man (2003), Zervas and Sherman (1994), and Rauer and Volling (2007) all provide evidence for the idea that the mere presence of parental favoritism can be related to self-esteem, regardless of whether they are the favorite child. Thus, perceived parental favoritism is related to other aspects of our development as well.

Previous research shows that self-esteem has been linked with several variables, such as academic and social success. Carranza, Sukkyung, Chhuon, and Hudley (2009) analyzed the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement in Mexican-American grade school students. By using Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem scale, the literature revealed that academic achievement was related to acculturation, parental involvement, and self-esteem. A significant relationship showed that students with higher academic aspirations tended to have higher self-esteem. Therefore, children with higher self-esteem will want to concentrate more on academics to further their educational studies. This study also could indirectly suggest a relationship between academic performance and parental favoritism because it is likely that this is relevant to parental expectations or parental involvement in academics. For example, if a parent prefers one sibling over another, they could be more likely to devote their time helping the favored child academically. This relates to Jenkins and O'Connor's (2003) term, differential positivity, which occurs when a child receives more parental involvement than his or her siblings. Jenkins and O'Connor would explain Carranza et al.'s study by saying that parents who are more involved in a child's academics are using differential positivity. This

type of differential treatment is a way to assess the parental favoritism within a family. Academic achievement may be one of the beneficial aspects of favoritism, but several negative behaviors may be rooted in perceiving oneself as the less favored child.

One of the most prominent negative outcomes of differential treatment in adolescents and young adults is the appearance of problem behavior. Problem behavior is an important focus when analyzing the daily lives of undergraduate students because a healthy lifestyle may be related to differential treatment or parental favoritism as a child. Some students have perfect attendance records, stay sober, and prioritize their academic course loads, but other college students tend to get a reputation for binge drinking, abusing drugs, and prioritizing partying over attending class. This type of behavior can have long-term health effects on an individual, in addition to hindering one's education. Individuals engage in these behaviors for different reasons.

Previous literature has examined the relationship between problem behavior and parental favoritism and has predicted that less-favored children will show more problem behaviors than favored children. Kiracofe (1992) looked at this relationship among 412 clients between the ages of 14 and 66. Each of the participants was being seen at an Adlerian counseling practice by certified therapists. Participants were given the Life-Style Inventory, (Shulman & Mosak, 1988 as cited in Kiracofe, 1992) which was constructed of two parts. First, the family constellation section required subjects to list all of their siblings and their ages. In addition, participants wrote a brief description of their siblings, as well as themselves. Then they rated their siblings from

“most” to “least” on a list of characteristics and answered questions regarding the interrelationships in the family. The second section focused on early recollections, which collected data about perceived parental favoritism. Participants were grouped into one of four groups after completing the inventory: favored by father, favored by mother, favored by both, or favored by neither. Kiracofe (1992) found that 72 percent of participants reported being the favorite of one or both parents.

This study provided evidence for correlations between perceived parental favoritism and two outcome variables: disciplinary problem behaviors and exceptional achievement. Exceptional achievement included several variables: intelligence, hard work, best grades, and high standards of achievement. Kiracofe (1992) examined problem behavior from childhood, so he considered characteristics like “rebellious,” “spoiled,” and “punished.” These characteristics were self-rated, and participants also rated their siblings’ characteristics. This study’s findings are important because those who were a part of the less favored group were seen as most rebellious. This might be explained because we could assume that children who are not favored would feel angry and alienated, which can cause a child to become rebellious for attention. On the other hand, one could argue that rebellious children would cause their parents to favor them less; the direction of causality remains unclear.

Kiracofe (1992) also found that participants who reported being punished the most were categorized in the non-favored group. Again, parents may punish certain children more because they are the non-favorites, or disobedient children could elicit more punishment from their parents and therefore perceive themselves as being the

non-favorites. Participants with high standards of achievement usually reported being the favorite of one or both parents. Kiracofe's study is correlational, and cannot determine causation; do parents choose a favorite based on their children's behaviors, or does parental favoritism influence children's behavior? Nevertheless, Kiracofe's (1992) research supports the concern that parental favoritism within the family may have detrimental effects on the development of an individual.

Throughout development there are two areas of competence that are of high importance and have lasting influences on adulthood: academic competence and social competence (Palmen, Vermande, Dekovic, & van Aken, 2011). Social and academic competences have the ability to hinder or improve self-esteem, which as previously discussed can have alternate effects on an individual. Academic success is important to note when examining undergraduate college students because their levels of success are likely to determine what university they attend, how much further they plan to extend their education, and what their career aspirations are. Although there is no documented literature that details a relationship between perceived parental favoritism and academic achievement, academic achievement has been linked to several other factors that may be influenced by differential attention. Kiracofe's (1992) study looked at favoritism and standards of achievement, but this variable had many contributing parts such as intelligence, hard work, best grades, and high standards of achievement. There is no known research that examines a measure of academic achievement, such as GPA without looking at intelligence. The current study examined the relationship between perceived parental favoritism and academic achievement directly.

A clear relationship between academic success in young adults, such as GPA, and parental favoritism has not been found. However, poor academic achievement has been linked to problem behavior in children and adolescence. Children with poor academic achievement have been found to engage in more problem behaviors and individuals with high academic success do not tend to participate in these behaviors. A four-year longitudinal study conducted by Palmen, Vermande, Dekovic, and van Aken (2011) exemplified this relationship. Children were interviewed during grades 1 and 3 regarding social relations with classmates, feelings of loneliness, and several peer nomination measures such as aggression and prosocial behavior. In the fifth grade, children filled out questionnaires about social relations and problem behavior, as well as self-reports on feelings of loneliness and self-worth. Results showed that competence predicted later problem behaviors more strongly than problem behavior predicted later competence. These findings revealed a connection between academic achievement and problem behavior (Palmen, Vermande, Dekovic, & van Aken, 2011). Due to the relationship between problem behavior and parental favoritism, we can assume that there is likely a relationship between perceived parental favoritism and academic achievement.

Perceived parental favoritism has been examined in scientific literature and has been directly and indirectly linked to several important variables that the current study intended to analyze. In order to gain a better understanding of parental favoritism and its correlates, this study asked undergraduate participants to fill out a questionnaire regarding birth order, gender, academic achievement, self-esteem, and problem behavior. Previous research has shown that there is a relationship between

parental favoritism and gender, birth order, problem behavior, and self-esteem. Other research has shown a possible indirect relationship between perceived parental favoritism and academic achievement. Based on Kiracofe and Kiracofe's (1990) research, I predicted that females would be more likely to be paternal favorites, males would be more likely to be maternal favorites, and overall participants would report more paternal favoritism than maternal favoritism. I do not feel that Kiracofe's method of interviewing would have impacted the relationship between gender and parental favoritism, thus the first hypothesis is based on Kiracofe's findings.

However, due to the Kiracofe's method of interviewing participants, I predicted that results would support Chalfant's (1994) research regarding the correlation between birth order and parental favoritism. Similar to the current study, Chalfant gave a questionnaire to college aged students regarding parental favoritism. It is likely to assume similar results because of the parallel methodology. I proposed that a significant sample of maternal favorites would be youngest children, while participants who claimed to be the paternal favorite would be middle children. Previous research is not in agreement when it comes to this relationship, but the current study's results were expected to support Chalfant because of her methods. These results would contradict Kiracofe and Kiracofe's (1990) results because they found middle children were often the maternal favorites whereas paternal favorites were the oldest and youngest children. This prediction also defies Klugger's (2011) theory that oldest children are favored for evolutionary purposes and Harris and Howard's (1985) results that showed middle children to be the least favored.

Based on Zervas and Sherman (1994) and de Man's (2003) research, I predicted that favored participants and participants who report no parental favoritism in their families would have higher self-esteem than participants who reported being the non-favorites. In addition, I proposed that favored participants and participants who reported no parental favoritism in their families would show fewer signs of problem behaviors than non-favored participants. This prediction is based on Kiracofe's (1992) study that linked non-favored individuals with rebelliousness, which is a crucial factor in problem behaviors. Academic achievement has not been examined directly in relation to parental favoritism, but has been correlated with problem behavior and other variables that are linked to parental favoritism. The current study expanded on the existing literature by proposing that favored participants would be more academically successful than non-favored participants.

To sum up the emphasis of the current study, I proposed that paternal favorites would be females, maternal favorites would be males, and overall participants would report more paternal favoritism than maternal favoritism. I also proposed that maternal favorites would be younger children and paternal favorites would be middle children. Participants who reported being the favorite of one or both parents and participants who reported no parental favoritism in their families would have higher self-esteem, greater academic achievements, and fewer problem behaviors than non-favored participants.

Methods

Participants

Participants were Union College undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 22 and recruited from an online website, Freud.union.edu. Participants had the option of receiving a half hour of course credit or cash payment. The study examined 91 students but one participant's data was thrown out due to unreliable answers. Participants were comprised of 27 males and 63 females. Participants ranged in undergraduate majors across 28 different subjects. Data from five only children, 34 oldest children, 13 middle children, and 38 youngest children were used for analysis.

Materials and Procedures

The study was completed in various academic buildings. The study was administered to small groups of participants, ranging from two to fifteen students, or given one-to-one with the researcher. The approximate time for each participant to complete the entire study was about fifteen minutes. Each participant received a consent form (Appendix A), which explained that the study was voluntary. Participants had the option of leaving the study at any time. Participants were given a four-page questionnaire (Appendix B).

First, participants were asked several demographic questions such as age, gender, birth position, and GPA. Some questions, such as "How old are you?" required participants to circle the answer that applies to them. Other demographic questions, such as "my major(s) at Union College is:" required participants to write in the appropriate answer.

Next, participants were asked 4 questions related to their problem behaviors and daily lives. These questions included, “On average, how many days a week do you consume alcohol or use other recreational drugs?” “On average, how many classes do you miss a term (not for illness)?” “On average, how many classes do you miss a term due to illness?” and finally, “On average, when consuming alcohol, how many drinks do you consume in one evening?” Some of the questions regarding daily life were meant to fill the questionnaire so that participants could not figure out the exact hypothesis of the study. For example, participants were asked, “On an average school night, how many hours of sleep do you get per night?”

The third section of the questionnaire required participants to fill out a chart detailing their siblings’ genders and ages. They were asked to put the first initial of their siblings’ first names in order of their birth position, circle M (for male) or F (for female) to describe their siblings’ genders, and write their siblings’ ages in years. A sample chart was provided with arbitrary data to clarify the instructions. Participants were then asked to mark the statement that best applies to them regarding parental favoritism. Instructions explained that parental favoritism can range from very slight to extreme. Participants chose among the following statements: “my mother favored a child in the family but my father did not,” “my father favored a child in my family but my mother did not,” “both of my parents favored the same child,” “my mother and father favored different child in the family,” or “neither of my parents favored a child.” Participants were asked to indicate which child their mother favored and which child their father favored by using the numbers from the previous chart. Names were not included in the questionnaire to preserve anonymity. If subjects responded

that at least one of their parents favored a child, they were asked to rate the degree of parental favoritism on a Likert Scale from 1 to 5. This variable was referred to as “extreme favoritism.” This questionnaire was based on a portion of Chalfant’s (1994) questionnaire regarding parental warmth and favoritism.

The next section asked participants to complete Rosenberg’s (1965) 10-item self-esteem scale. These items required answers based on a Likert scale from one to four. For example, one item said, “I take a positive attitude toward myself.” If participants strongly agreed they wrote a “1” next to the item. If they strongly disagreed with this statement, they placed a “4” next to the item. Certain answers were reverse coded and then a mean score was found for a complete score. In the current study internal reliability was assessed using Chronbach’s Alpha, which was .89. The higher the score, the more self-esteem a participant possessed. Finally, the subjects completed Buss and Plomin’s (1984) temperament questionnaire but this was not used for further research.

Results

Forty-three participants reported favoritism within their families and 41 reported no favoritism. Five participants said their mothers favored a child and their fathers did not, 13 said that their fathers favored a child but their mothers did not, 6 said that both of their parents favored the same child, and 21 participants said that their mothers and fathers favored different children in the family. Of these 43 participants who reported favoritism within their families, 31 reported being the favorite. Participants were comprised of 9 maternal favorites, 17 paternal favorites, 5

that were favored by both mother and father, 12 disfavored participants, and the remaining participants reported no favoritism in their families. Participants reported a total of 31 maternal favorites, 12 were male and 19 were female. Of these maternal favorites, 11 were oldest children, 6 were middle children, and 14 were youngest children. Participants reported a total of 40 paternal favorites, 9 were male and 31 were female. Of the paternal favorites, 15 were oldest children, 9 were middle children, and 16 were youngest children.

Preliminary analyses showed that the problem behavior measures were intercorrelated. (See Table 1 for these correlations.) Therefore, the researcher transformed each problem behavior variable into a standard score and computed the mean of the problem behavior scores. This resulted in one composite variable for problem behavior, which was used for the remainder of the analyses. (Cronbach's Alpha = .71) Problem behavior was significantly correlated with self-esteem, $r = -.26$, $p < .05$, such that students with more problem behaviors had lower self-esteem than students with fewer problem behaviors. Problem behavior was also significantly negatively correlated with GPA, $r = -.35$, $p < .01$, such that students with more problem behaviors had lower GPAs than students who showed fewer problem behaviors. GPA was significantly correlated with birth order, $r = -.23$, $p < .05$, such that first borns had higher GPAs than last borns. Although SAT scores were highly correlated with GPA, $r = .44$, $p < .01$, no significant correlation was found between problem behavior and SAT scores. Table 2 shows the correlations between self-esteem, problem behavior, GPA, birth order, and SAT scores for the whole sample.

Initial analyses compared differences in problem behavior, academic achievement, and self-esteem in male and female participants. There were differences in means for academic achievement, self-esteem, and problem behavior. Females had a higher GPA than males, $t(86) = .03$. Females had a mean GPA of 3.42 and males had a mean GPA of 3.20. Females exhibited fewer problem behaviors than males, $t(32.54) = 2.59, p = .01$. After calculating the compiled problem behavior scores, females had a mean score of .17, while males had a mean score of .39. Males and females showed very similar levels of self-esteem, but males showed a slightly higher score on Rosenberg's scale, $t(88) = .31, p = .76$. Female participants had a mean score of 3.33 and male participants had a mean score of 3.37. There were not enough males to examine genders separately, so for the remaining analyses males and females were included together.

The data were analyzed to examine possible differences in problem behavior, academic achievement, and self-esteem comparing favored participants, non-favored participants, and participants that report no parental favoritism in their families. Three analyses of variance revealed no significant differences among the three groups. When examining self-esteem, $f(2,82) = .37, p > .05$. When examining problem behavior, $f(2,82) = .32, p > .05$. When examining GPA, $f(2,82) = .34, p > .05$. The means and standard deviations of these variables can be viewed in Table 3.

Further analyses computed correlations for the 43 participants who had reported perceived parental favoritism, regardless of whether they were the favorite or not. When only looking at the sample that reported parental favoritism, a correlation was found between extreme favoritism and GPA, $r = -.33, p < .05$, such that students

who perceived more extreme levels of favoritism within their families had lower GPAs than students who reported slight levels of favoritism within their families. Correlations were computed for the same 43 participants that reported perceived parental favoritism but no significant correlation was found between extreme favoritism and self-esteem, $r = -.004$, $p = .98$. In addition, no significant correlation was found between extreme favoritism and problem behavior, $r = .004$, $p = .98$.

DISCUSSION

The current study was meant to examine correlates of perceived parental favoritism. Some of the proposed hypotheses were supported and some were not. I proposed the females would be paternal favorites and males would be maternal favorites, however most participants reported females as maternal and paternal favorites. I proposed that paternal favoritism is more common than maternal favoritism which was supported through results. Secondly, I proposed that maternal favorites would be youngest children while paternal favorites would be middle children. This hypothesis was not supported through results; oldest and youngest children were favored by both parents more than middle children were favored. The third and fourth hypotheses suggested that participants who reported no parental favoritism in their families and favored participants would have higher self-esteem and fewer problem behaviors than disfavored participants. Results did not support this prediction. The final hypothesis proposed that participants who did not report parental favoritism in their families and favored participants would have higher academic achievements than disfavored participants. Although this prediction was not

supported through research, results showed that extreme favoritism was related to academic achievement.

The first hypothesis predicted a relationship between gender and parental favoritism. It was proposed that females would be paternal favorites and males would be maternal favorites. Only part of this hypothesis was supported; results showed that both maternal and paternal favorites were more likely to be females. Kiracofe and Kiracofe (1990) suggested that fathers would be more likely to favor their daughters and mothers would be more likely to favor their sons, but these results only support their prediction regarding paternal favoritism. This may be due to the large majority of females in the sample. An overwhelming majority of participants that reported favoritism in their family claimed to be the favored child. Because there are more female participants than male participants, there is a greater likelihood that females will report being the favored gender. There are more males reported as the maternal favorite than the paternal favorite, so with a greater sample size or with a greater number of male participants, results may have been supported this hypothesis.

It was also proposed that participants would be more likely to report paternal favoritism than maternal favoritism. The results support this prediction: 13 participants reported a paternal favorite and no maternal favorite in their families, while only five participants reported a maternal favorite and no paternal favorite in their families. When looking at the total number of reported favorites in the participants' families, not just the participants themselves, there were 40 paternal favorites and only 31 maternal favorites. This supports Kiracofe and Kiracofe (1990) who suggested that children are more likely to report paternal favoritism than

maternal favoritism. It is unclear whether fathers actually favor a child more than mothers; perhaps mothers are just more objective in their behavior. There may actually be more maternal favorites than reported because this study only looked at perceived parental favoritism, not the actual presence of favoritism. Although paternal favoritism is reported more frequently, mothers may be just as likely to prefer one of their children to another. Mothers may be more inclined to hide favoritism due to their stereotyped role of the primary caregiver. In addition, women tend to be more affectionate than men. Therefore, mothers probably show more affection to their disfavored child than a father would, so it might be difficult to distinguish a mother's favorite from her non-favorite.

The second hypothesis proposed a relationship between birth order and perceived parental favoritism: it was thought that maternal favorites would be last borns, while paternal favorites would be middle children. These relationships were not found to be significant. There was not a strong relationship between birth order and perceived parental favoritism. However, results showed that maternal favorites were most often youngest children, followed by oldest children. There were an equal amount of oldest and youngest paternal favorites. However, when examining birth order and perceived parental favoritism, it was evident that middle children rarely reported being the maternal or paternal favorites. These results support Harris and Howard's (1985) research because they found that maternal favorites were usually youngest children. Harris and Howard suggested that mothers prefer to nurture the baby of the family. Perhaps youngest children provoke more sentimental emotions because each milestone is the family's last. Harris and Howard also reported that

middle children were most often the disfavored children. As previously explained, middle children may lack a strong familial role, causing them to be an unlikely choice for a maternal or paternal favorite. Overall, the current study's results most closely resembled the results of Harris and Howard's (1985) research.

The third and fourth hypotheses proposed that favored participants and participants that reported no parental favoritism would have higher self-esteem and exhibit fewer problem behaviors than non-favored participants. When comparing these groups of participants, results showed no significant differences in self-esteem or problem behavior. These results may be influenced by the sample's demographics. All participants are undergraduate students at Union College. It seems likely that young adults with a lot of problem behaviors would not attend a prestigious college. Future research should consider a sample of undergraduate students across several types of universities, including junior colleges. This diversity, along with a greater sample size, may reveal significant differences in problem behavior between favored and non-favored young adults. It also seems likely that self-esteem plays a key role in assessing problem behavior. One can assume that low self-esteem will be associated with more problem behaviors. Again, if future research could examine a more diverse population, these hypotheses may be supported.

Lastly, I predicted a relationship between parental favoritism and academic achievement. I proposed that favored individuals and participants that reported no parental favoritism in their families would have higher academic achievement than non-favored participants. Results showed no significant difference in academic achievement between these groups of participants. However, when examining only

the sample that reported favoritism in their families, I found that participants who reported more extreme favoritism had lower academic achievement than participants who only reported slight favoritism. This tells us that it may not matter who is the favored child; the mere presence of extreme favoritism can negatively impact a child's academic achievement. One can speculate that being the favorite or disfavorite has a variety of effects on individuals, but results showed only one significant correlation because each individual responds differently to favoritism. It is also important to note that the ways in which children are favored differ across families. Nonetheless, results show that there are negative consequences when favoritism is perceived. This provides different results from Kiracofe's (1992) study because she suggested a relationship between favoritism and standards of achievement. She did not look at a specific correlation between grades or GPA and favoritism. Kiracofe separated her participants into favored and non-favored participants, but in the current sample of undergraduate students, no significant difference was found in academic achievement between favored and non-favored individuals. Instead, results showed that it did not matter whether the participant was favored or not favored, but the intensity of favoritism had a greater impact.

This study used GPA to measure academic achievement, which is not only a measure of academic potential. It seems likely to assume that GPA is a combination of intelligence, potential, and work ethic. No significant relationship was found between SAT scores and extreme favoritism, although there was a strong correlation between SAT scores and GPA. These results were to be expected because SAT scores are supposed to measure academic potential. GPA is a combination of academic

potential and effort to succeed. One can assume that parental favoritism would be more closely associated with GPA than SAT scores because differential treatment could influence worth ethic. Parents favor their children for different reasons: some may favor the highest achieving child, while others may favor their most attractive child, while some parents may prefer their most social child. Either way, extreme favoritism can add pressure on a child to uphold their place in the family. Whether or not they are the favorite, it may be likely that strong favoritism creates a type of self-fulfilling prophecy. This may explain why extreme favoritism could be related to lower GPAs because the participants that reported themselves as the extreme disfavorite may have a sibling who is favored for being the most academically successful. On the other hand, participants who reported themselves as being the extreme favorite might be favored for reasons that are not related to academics. For example, some parents might be inclined to favor their most social or popular child. If this type of favoritism is extreme, the favored child is likely to regard academics with little importance and concentrate his or her efforts on social engagements. Overall, any extreme favoritism can be related to family conflict, either as a cause or effect of the contention. Within family conflict may have an indirect relationship with GPA, which is a variable not measured in this study. Future research may want to take this third variable into consideration.

Although academic achievement was significantly correlated with strength of favoritism, there were no significant correlations found with extreme favoritism and problem behavior or extreme favoritism and self-esteem. These results were unexpected. Previous research has shown that the presence of favoritism can have a

detrimental impact on self-esteem. De Man's (2003), Zervas and Sherman's (1994), and Rauer and Volling's (2007) research showed that participants who reported favoritism in their studies had lower self-esteem than participants who did not report parental favoritism. One can speculate that therefore the strength of favoritism should have an influence on self-esteem as well. There are no noted studies that look at the relationship between the presence of favoritism and problem behavior, but it is likely to assume that the strength of differential treatment in a family would be associated with problem behavior in young adults. This study may not have found such results because self-esteem and problem behavior are influenced by several other factors. As previously mentioned, participants were all Union students. Union has strict policies regarding drinking and missing academic classes. Future research should incorporate a more diverse population in the sample to gain a clearer understanding of the relationship between extreme favoritism and problem behavior, as well as the relationship between extreme favoritism and self-esteem.

This study had a few limitations. Most importantly, time and funding limited my sample size to 91 participants. This did not allow enough variation in birth position to look at differences between maternal favorites and paternal favorites. Specifically, the sample was lacking enough middle children. Also, a large majority of the sample were female participants. There were not enough males to compare males and females in each of the different variables. More participants would have made some of the slight correlations more significant. Secondly, this study allowed participants to self-report SAT and GPA scores. Although participants had no reason to lie about their statistics, it is always better to obtain academic credentials from a

reliable source. Some of the college's seniors may not have accurately remembered their SAT scores, which were taken up to 5 years prior to the study.

Future research should consider a longitudinal study with similar methods. It would be interesting to survey elementary aged children until adulthood to see if their views on parental favoritism changed as they got older. For example, one participant in this study reported having no favoritism within her family as a child. In the present day, she felt that she was the obvious maternal favorite. This posed a crucial question in the current study: are we more concerned with parental favoritism as a child, or parental favoritism today? Which would have a greater impact? These are questions that are unable to be answered by the current study, but a longitudinal study would provide us with a better idea of how parental favoritism differs between children and adults. It seems likely that more extreme favoritism and consistent favoritism would have a greater impact than slight or short-term favoritism. The present study provides evidence that the way we perceive parental favoritism as young adults or late adolescents can influence academic achievement, but it is important to see if this correlation exists among children and continues in the same direction through adulthood.

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Table 1

Problem Behavior Correlations

Subscale	1	2	3	4
Students (n = 90)				
1. Skipped Classes	-	.40**	.51**	.29**
2. Missed Classes for Sickness		-	.23*	.90
3. Days Drinking			-	.59**
4. Number of Drinks				-

* p < .05, ** p < .01

Table 2

Self-Esteem, Problem Behavior, GPA, Birth Order, and SAT Correlations

Subscale	1	2	3	4	5
Students (n=90)					
1. Self-Esteem	-	-.26**	.01	.10	-.11
2. Problem Behavior		-	-.35**	-.003	.13
3. GPA			-	-.23**	.44**
4. Birth Order				-	.15
5. SAT Scores					-

* p < .05, ** p < .01

Table 3

Mean Problem Behavior, Self-Esteem Score, and GPA as a Function of Perceived Parental Favoritism

Perceived Parental Favoritism	Variable		
	Problem Behavior	Self-Esteem	GPA
Favored by mother, father, or both	.04 (.77)	3.39 (.48)	3.37 (.42)
Disfavored	-.16 (.73)	3.36 (.45)	3.43 (.33)
No favoritism reported in family	-.05 (.74)	3.30 (.45)	3.32 (.49)

Note. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

Appendix A: Informed Consent

My name is Amanda Wiener and I am a student at Union College. I am inviting you to participate in senior thesis study. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. A description of the study is written below.

I am interested in learning more about parental favoritism. You will be asked to fill out a series of questionnaires asking about you, your daily activities, and your family. This will take approximately twenty-five minutes. There are no known risks to participating in this study. If you no longer wish to continue, you have the right to withdraw from the study, without penalty, at any time.

This study does not require you to write your name on any of the questionnaires and there will be no way to link your answers with your name at any point. All information will be kept anonymous and confidential. At the completion of the study, I will ask that you place your packet into a manila envelope with the rest of the participants' questionnaires. You will place your signed consent form in a separate envelope to ensure complete anonymity. If you wish to participate in this study, please read the following and sign below.

I understand that even though all aspects of the study may not be explained to me beforehand (e.g., the specific hypothesis of the study), during the debriefing session I will be given additional information about the study and have the opportunity to ask questions.

All of my questions have been answered and I wish to participate in this research study.

Signature of participant

Date

Print name of participant

Name of investigator

Date

III. Please fill out the chart below. In the “Family children” column please put the initial of all of your siblings’ first names in order from oldest to youngest. Please write “Myself” in the box where you would fit. If you are an only child, fill in your own information in the first row. Under the gender column, circle M for male or F for female. Please indicate how old you and your sibling(s) are.

Family Children (oldest to youngest)	Gender (male or female) (circle)	Age (in years)
1. J	<u>M</u> F	23
2. Myself	M <u>F</u>	21
3. E	M <u>F</u>	19

My Family’s Children (oldest to youngest)	Gender (male or female) (circle)	Age (in years)
1.	M F	
2.	M F	
3.	M F	
4.	M F	
5.	M F	
6.	M F	
7.	M F	
8.	M F	

IV. The majority of people surveyed reported that there was one form of parental favoritism in their family. Parental favoritism can range from very slight to extreme. Please put an “X” beside the statement that best applies to your family.

_____ My mother favored a child in my family but my father did not.

_____ My father favored a child in my family but my mother did not.

_____ Both of my parents favored the same child.

_____ My mother and father favored different children in my family.

_____ Neither of my parents favored a child.

V. If you feel that one or both of your parents had a favorite child, please indicate which child they favored. Use the sibling number from the chart above. If a parent did not have a favorite, write "NONE" in the space provided.

My mother's favorite was child # _____

My father's favorite was child # _____

VI. If you felt that there was favoritism in your family, how extreme was it? (circle the corresponding number on the scale below)

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 (not at all) (extremely)

VII. Please answer the following items with a 1, 2, 3, or 4.

1= strongly agree

2= agree

3= disagree

4= strongly disagree

1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others. _____
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities. _____
3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. _____
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people. _____
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of. _____
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself. _____
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. _____
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself. _____
9. I certainly feel useless at times. _____
10. At times, I think I am no good at all. _____

VIII. Rate each of the items on a scale of 1 (not characteristic or typical of yourself) to 5 (very characteristic of typical of yourself).

1. I like to be with people.
1 2 3 4 5
2. I usually seem to be in a hurry.
1 2 3 4 5
3. I am easily frightened.
1 2 3 4 5
4. I frequently get distressed.
1 2 3 4 5
5. When displeased, I let people know it right away.
1 2 3 4 5
6. I am something of a loner.
1 2 3 4 5
7. I like to keep busy all of the time.
1 2 3 4 5
8. I am known as hotblooded and quick-tempered.
1 2 3 4 5
9. I often feel frustrated.
1 2 3 4 5
10. My life is fast paced.
1 2 3 4 5
11. Everyday events make me troubled and fretful.
1 2 3 4 5
12. I often feel insecure.
1 2 3 4 5
13. There are many things that annoy me.
1 2 3 4 5
14. When I get scared, I panic.
1 2 3 4 5
15. I prefer working with others rather than alone.
1 2 3 4 5
16. I get emotionally upset easily.
1 2 3 4 5
17. I often feel as if I'm bursting with energy.
1 2 3 4 5
18. It takes a lot to make me mad.
1 2 3 4 5
19. I have fewer fears than most people my age.
1 2 3 4 5
20. I find people more stimulating than anything else.
1 2 3 4 5

Appendix D: Debriefing

Thank you for participating in my senior thesis study. Before you leave, I would like to explain the full purpose of my study. Previous research has shown that birth position in the family is correlated with many personality attributes and can affect several aspects of life through adulthood. Important to this particular study, birth order has been correlated with perceived parental favoritism. Some research suggests that mothers usually favor the youngest child while fathers tend to favor the middle children. Opposing research provides evidence that mothers and fathers are likely to favor their youngest and oldest children alike, but middle children rarely perceive themselves as being the favorite because they don't have a strong familial status. Like birth order studies, perceived parental favoritism may be correlated with personality attributes. I intend to focus on whether or not children perceive parental favoritism in their family and how it relates to other aspects of their personalities. By conducting this study, I plan to extend the literature regarding parental favoritism by proposing that being the favorite of one or both of our parents will be correlated with a high level of self-esteem and a high level of academic achievement. I also predict that participants with higher self esteem and participants that are more academic will drink less, skip fewer classes, and overall engage in healthier behavior.

The questionnaires distributed were meant to assess each of the variables being researched: birth position, perceived parental favoritism, self-esteem, and academic achievement. I appreciate your assistance with my research and ask that you do not discuss the contents of this study with anyone to preserve the integrity of my project. Please feel free to ask me any questions now, and if you have any questions at a later time you may reach me at wienera@garnet.union.edu. If participation in this study made you feel uncomfortable in any way and you feel as though you may need support, Union College's Counseling Center is available at your convenience. You can contact them at 518-388-6161 or hotalinm@union.edu. You can also visit their website at www.union.edu/counseling.

Thanks again for you participation.

Amanda Wiener