THE ONLY CHILD SYNDROME

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[Assignment: Write an essay about a social situation you know well, where patterns of interaction can be explained as causes and effects. Try to defend a generalization about those patterns that will explain how they work to your reader.]

(1) "You're so lucky. I wish I could be spoiled rotten like you." I have heard these words one too many times. Of course, every only child must sit and listen to this abuse, because he or she has already been labeled as the typical only child. We have no defense because the stereotypes about the only child seem to be written in stone. However, this only child is ready to fight back. This stereotypical conception of the only child is inaccurate, and specially so because the people analyzing our lifestyles are members of larger families. How can these people know exactly what it is to be an only child if they weren't one themselves? I will grant that some conceptions about an only child are true, but others are definitely misconceptions. Like anything else, being an only child is a mixed blessing and only an only child can fully appreciate the drawbacks.

(2) The single most prevalent stereotype associated with only children is that they are all spoiled. I would, however, rephrase this by saying that the only child receives more attention. This is understandable because the love of parents is concentrated on one child rather than being spread among a number of children. For example, my mother would never have been able to attend all my tennis and basketball games if she had more than one child. I'm not saying the only child receives more love than a child with siblings because love really can't be divided or quantified. My mother doesn't love me any more than another mother loves her children; she simply has more time to express her love by attending things in which I'm involved. It works almost like an optical illusion. The only child only appears to receive more love because he or she is the sole recipient of the parents' love. Similarly, I may have more things than children from larger families since there are fewer in my family to buy for. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that I have been spoiled. In fact, my parents have disciplined me quite effectively and taught me not to take their generosity for granted.

(3) There are some advantages of being an only child that I know I have enjoyed. Whenever I need to be alone, I don't have to travel any farther than the next room. Being alone allows me to act more freely and sometimes a little crazier. For example, I can be in my room listening to Guns n Roses and pretend I'm Axel Rose by wildly slamming off all four walls without worrying about an annoying little sister interrupting my guitar solo. This freedom is one of the reasons for the assumption
that only children are more outgoing. Of course, they are practically forced to be outgoing. Unlike most of my friends, I have no older brothers or sisters who can serve as my entry point in social life. For example, I have one friend whose older brother was a good basketball player and very popular in high school. For the most part, his brother's fame helped him to at least get his foot in the door to being popular. Sometimes, when we would go to the high school people would say, "Hey, aren't you Tony's brother?" Perhaps he didn't always like being known as Tony's brother (he even owned a shirt which said it), but it was still better than not being known at all. If I am to have any friends, then I have to take the initial step by making myself known.

Being constantly alone, I had to learn to entertain myself. Although my parents gave me a lot of attention, they couldn't play with me every second. So I had to acquire the ability to keep myself busy by making up games. For instance, when I went shopping with my Mom at the mall, I would count name brand tennis shoes on people passing by. When my Mom finally decided to leave, I would declare one brand as the winner. Such games made time pass quickly. At home too I was forced to use my imagination. Perhaps because the only child uses his or her imagination so early in life, he or she is often considered to be more creative than other children. I can remember playing Nerf hoops and making up a running commentary on the game at the same time. After hours of playing and a few close calls with the furniture, I would write down each score with the leading scorer of the game as if there had actually been a game. I would continue this through the finish of the NBA season and then I would start with baseball. I did run into problems with football because I never could imagine being tackled without it hurting. Although I had no siblings, I was never bored to the point that I couldn't think of something to do. I've always kept myself entertained, and I believe that this creativeness has carried over to my adolescent years.

Although creativeness and independence are enhanced by being an only child, there are many times when it gets just plain lonely. I can't tell you how many times people have said to me that they wish they could trade places with me. This shocks me because I can't understand why people don't appreciate their brothers and sisters. I am now too comfortable being an only child but if I were offered an opportunity on a trial basis, with a guaranteed return to normal, I would certainly jump at it. Maybe it would be nice to have an older brother bully me or an older sister yell at me for looking through her room. These are experiences I'll never know. But I do miss the love between brothers and sisters. I had no one to share my childhood or its memories with except my parents. When they are gone, I will feel even lonelier. At times I regret being an only child; but for the most
part, I am content with my situation. As with any situation, there are both gains and losses, and though I may regret the losses, I like being me.