



# The values of only-children: Power and benevolence in the spotlight

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 24 November 2020

Revised 20 March 2021

Accepted 25 March 2021

Available online xxx

### Keywords:

Only-children

Personal values

Personality

Personality development

## ABSTRACT

The stereotype that only-children are more self-centered than others has gained little support from studies on personality traits but had not been previously tested with respect to personal values, which are also an important part of personality. Data from 3085 Australian adults revealed that only-children give more importance to power values and less importance to benevolence values than individuals with siblings. These differences, which are consistent with the stereotype, were strongest in young people but diminished gradually with age and disappeared in those over 62 years old. The results challenge the view that personality is largely unaffected by shared life-experiences associated with family structure, at least regarding the values aspect of personality.

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Everyone knows that our personalities are shaped by our childhood relationships with parents and siblings, right? Wrong. For over twenty years the evidence has been clear: psychologists have repeatedly found parental influence is largely exerted through genetic inheritance, and that the presence or absence of siblings has no consistent effect on adult personality.

Song director Neil Griffiths believes this is because psychologists were measuring personality in terms of traits – mostly using ‘Big Five’ psychometrics that measure Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism. While often treated as the gold standard of personality assessment by psychologists, Neil is not a fan.

His evolutionary theory of universal values (**Deep Values**) is that our values are by the far the most important aspect of our personalities. They explain why we do things rather than describe the things we do. Are we agreeable because we want to make a good impression, or because we are inherently kind? Are we a con merchant or a saint? There is big difference, and it is revealed in our values.

This research, published in the prestigious Journal of Research in Personality, shows what ordinary people have long believed to be true: only-children tend to be more self-centred than those raised with siblings – probably because they are the sole recipients of parental devotion and miss out on the rounding effects of a childhood filled with the rough and tumble of siblings.

It shows how we see the world and interact with it are shaped by our environment, and points toward how we can use this information to develop ourselves and others, for our own benefit and the benefit of those around us.