



TITLE: Birth order, identity and life pathway formation: Findings from a cohort study of young Queenslanders

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Prior research suggests that first-born children receive a greater share of their parental attention and resources than their later-born siblings, resulting in their higher academic achievement and future earnings. Yet even as family sizes decline in Western societies - potentially strengthening this nexus between biological and social rank - the broader role of birth order in life pathway formation remains under-investigated. Using recent data from a large cohort of young Queenslanders (n=3,653) participating the Social Futures and Life Pathways ('Our Lives') project, we analyse relationships between respondents' birth order and (1) their career aspirations and beliefs about identity roles during adolescence (aged 14-15); and (2) their work, study, and partnering outcomes in early adulthood (aged 19/20). We found that first-born children were more likely to aspire to university when compared to both middle-order and last-born children, who gravitated towards more vocational pathways. First-born respondents also displayed greater certainty than their later-born counterparts about identity roles in various life domains - a gap that widened as they approached adulthood. Three years after high school, later-born respondents displayed more limited engagement in work and study, and higher odds of being single, than first-born children, even when these earlier associations are accounted for.