

**Children's experiences of the repositioning of their  
psychological birth order in a reconstituted family**

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- The parents who gave consent for their children to participate in this study.

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this study, titled **Children's experiences of the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family** is my own work and that all the references that were used or quoted were indicated and recognised.

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Martie also proofread this study.

Martie Bester

## **SUMMARY OF THE STUDY**

The aim of this study is to explore and describe children's experiences of the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family. The aim of this study is also to contribute to a better understanding of this phenomenon to aid the parents of these children as well as professionals working with such families.

The systems theory was used as the meta-theory of this study. Gestalt field theory formed the connection between the systems theory and Adlerian theory, to portray the interaction between the individual and the different subsystems of which they are part, and formed the lens through which the study was done. Adlerian theory was used to explain the subsystems function in the micro system, with the focus on children's experiences of the repositioning of their birth order in a reconstituted family.

A qualitative research method with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used as research design. Eight children took part in this study. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to explore their experiences of the repositioning of their psychological birth order and the data was analysed thematically. The researcher had a discussion with the participants' parents to determine the children's psychological birth order and to obtain background information regarding the original and reconstituted families.

The findings indicated that children's experiences in relation to their parents and siblings had the most profound effect on how they experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family. It seemed that participants preferred their parents treating them congruent to their psychological birth order within the reconstituted family and they experienced incongruent treatment to their psychological birth order, as negative. Participants enjoyed being favoured by their parents. If the sibling who caused the repositioning was favoured, or his or her parents unfairly blamed the relevant participant, it contributed to tension in the sibling and child-parent relationships. Participants seemed to associate less time spent with parents as well as less attention from parents with step- and half-siblings in the reconstituted family. Participants expressed less responsibility in the reconstituted

family as a favourable aspect and more responsibilities in the reconstituted family as a unfavourable aspect of being repositioned.

In the participants' experiences, which related to their siblings, the children seemed to defend their psychological positions in their renegotiation for new positions and roles in the reconstituted family often resulting in power struggles and sibling rivalry. Age and gender differences played a role in this process. When participants were ineffective in their negotiation of a new position within the new sibling subsystem, feelings of isolation were reported. Participants experienced frustration when they were unsuccessful in their negotiations regarding former roles associated with their psychological birth order in the new family system. Participants expressed companionship with a step- or half-sibling of the same gender as a favourable experience in their repositioning. The time elapsed since the reconstitution of the family, seemed to play an important role in how children experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order.

## **KEY TERMS**

Psychological birth order

Reconstituted family

Repositioning of psychological birth order

Children

Systems theory

Gestalt field theory

Adlerian theory

## **OPSOMMING VAN DIE STUDIE**

**Titel: Kinders se ervarings van die herposisionering van hul psigologiese geboorte-orde in 'n hersaamgestelde gesin.**

Die doel van hierdie studie is om kinders se ervarings van die herposisionering van hul psigologiese geboorte-orde in die hersaamgestelde gesin te ondersoek en te beskryf. Die doel is ook om die begrip rakende hierdie verskynsel te verbeter om hierdie kinders se ouers by te staan, en om professionele persone wat met sulke gesinne werk van hulp te wees.

Die sisteemteorie is as meta-teorie in die studie gebruik. Gestalt-veldteorie is as 'n verbinding tussen sisteemteorie en Adler se teorie toegepas om die interaksie tussen die individu en die onderskeie subsysteme waarvan hul deel vorm, te verduidelik. Gestalt veld teorie vorm die lens waardeur die studie gedoen is. Adler se teorie is gebruik om die kind as 'n sub sisteem in die mikrosisteem te beskryf, met die fokus op kinders se ervarings van die herposisionering van hul psigologiese geboorte-orde in 'n hersaamgestelde gesin.

'n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsbenadering met Interpretatiewe Fenomenologiese Analise is as navorsingsontwerp gebruik. Agt kinders het aan die studie deelgeneem. Die navorser het van semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude gebruik gemaak om die deelnemers se ervarings van die herposisionering van hul psigologiese geboorte-orde in die hersaamgestelde gesin te ondersoek. Die data is tematies geanaliseer. Die navorser het ook 'n bespreking met die ouers gehad om die deelnemers se psigologiese geboorte orde te bepaal en agtergrondgeskiedenis oor die oorspronklike en hersaamgestelde gesinne te bekom.

Die navorsingsresultate het aangedui dat kinders se ervarings van die herposisionering van hul geboorte-orde hoofsaaklik deur hul ouers en sibbe beïnvloed is. Dit blyk dat deelnemers verkies het dat hulle ouers hul in ooreenstemming met hulle psigologiese geboorte-orde in die hersaamgestelde gesin, hanteer. Indien ouers egter nie die deelnemers in ooreenstemming met hul geboorte-orde hanteer het nie, het die deelnemers dit as negatief ervaar. Deelnemers het ook aangedui dat hul dit geniet het indien hul ouers hul voorgetrek het. Indien die sib wat die herposisionering veroorsaak het egter begunstig is, of die

deelnemer deur die ouers blameer is, is die ouer/kind en die sibbe-verhouding ongunstig beïnvloed. Die deelnemers het verder aangedui dat hul minder tyd en aandag van hul ouers met die teenwoordigheid van stief en halfsibbe geassosieer het. Deelnemers het aangedui dat hulle minder verantwoordelikheid in die hersaamgestelde gesin verkies en het meer verantwoordelikheid in die hersaamgestelde gesin as ongunstig ervaar.

Dit blyk dat kinders hul psigologiese geboorte orde verdedig het in die onderhandeling van nuwe posisies en rolle in die hersaamgestelde gesin. Tydens hierdie onderhandelingsproses tussen sibbe het deelnemers dikwels betrokke geraak in 'n magstryd wat tot konflik gelei het. Deelnemers het 'n gevoel van isolasie gerapporteer indien hul oneffektief was in die onderhandeling vir 'n rol in die nuwe sisteem en hul frustrasie ervaar indien die onderhandelingsproses vir ou psigologiese geboorte rolle onsuksesvol was. Deelnemers het genoem dat kameraadskap met 'n stief of halfsib van dieselfde geslag bygedra het tot 'n gunstige ervaring van die herposisionering van hul psigologiese geboorte-orde. Die tydsverloop na die hersamestelling van die gesin het ook 'n rol gespeel in hoe kinders die herposisionering van hul psigologiese geboorte-orde ervaar het.

## **SLEUTELWOORDE**

Psigologiese geboorte-orde

Hersaamgestelde gesin

Herposisionering van psigologiese geboorte-orde

Kinders

Sisteemteorie

Gestalt-veldteorie

Adler se teorie

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to contextualise the study; to provide the rationale for and formulate the research problem and questions that were identified for the study; to indicate the aim of the study; and to discuss the research context.

### 1.2 CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE STUDY

Within the South African context, divorce implies the dissolution of a marriage formed as a civil marriage, customary marriage or a civil union (Stats SA, 2010:1). According to Stats SA (2010:6) it was found that 54,4% of divorces in South Africa involved children under the ages of 18. The distribution of children affected by divorce according to population groups, indicated the following percentages: Black African 57.1%, Coloured 64.4%, Indian/Asian 57.8%, White 48.1%, and Unspecified 48.9%. Although South African statistics about remarriages involving children, are not known, the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000:249) postulates that 17% of all children were living in reconstituted families that included half- and stepsiblings. From this, it becomes apparent that a large number of children are affected by the adaptations related to living in a reconstituted family, and that they have to contend with the stresses related to adjusting and living in a reconstituted family (Hetherington, 2003:224; Webb, 2011:250). Although the reconstitution of a family may occur after the death of a parent, it is more common that a reconstituted family occurs as a result of divorce (Bray, 1999:253). As indicated by the South African divorce statistics (Stats SA, 2010:3), this might also hold true for the South African context.

There seems to be different terms that are used to describe the situation when parents remarry to form a new family. The different terms that Bray (1999:253-254) refers to are stepfamilies, remarried families, blended families, bi-nuclear families, reconstituted families, second families and two fans. Webb (2011:250) refers to this type of family, as a reconstituted family, sometimes also called a blended family, and describes this as a family constellation where one or both spouses have been

married before and are combining two families. For the purpose of this study, the term 'reconstituted family' is used since it implies that both parents in the reconstituted family have children from a previous relationship or that these parents have mutual children.

### **1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY AND PROBLEM FORMULATION**

Within the reconstituted family, many adaptations need to be made by parents and children alike (Hetherington, 2003:40). Webb (2011:250) mentions that children in reconstituted families encounter stressors that children in intact families do not have to deal with. These stressors are discussed in detail in 2.3.2. According to Bray (1999:256), the risk factors that might affect both children and adults in the reconstituted family involve aspects such as family conflict, parenting conflict, stress, difficulties in stepparent-child relationships, problems with the non-residential parent, and role ambiguity. Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (2002:225) is of the opinion that many of the difficulties associated with a remarriage are related to the entrance of a new stepparent and, sometimes, stepsiblings.

Therefore, when two families become reconstituted, the children may experience a repositioning of their status in terms of their birth order. In this regard, Deal (2006:183) mentions that all shifts in birth order represent change and further states that, "change brings loss and loss added to substantial previous losses generates weariness and insecurity". However, it is not clear how children experience this repositioning of their psychological birth order. Therefore, this research will attempt to explore how these children perceive the experiences of the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family.

Stewart and Campbell (1998:1) mention that Adler is seen as the 'father' of the psychological birth order theory, as he postulated his theory regarding psychological birth order in 1918. There are four psychological birth order positions that are relevant to this study, namely that of oldest child, middle child, youngest child or an only child. Adler (1932:144-153) also ascribed specific characteristics to each of these birth order positions. With regard to the oldest children, Adler (1932:147) indicates that these children fear dethronement in an intact family. Adler (1932:145)

therefore states that the arrival of a new sibling is normally a big change for an oldest child. The new baby takes love, attention, and appreciation away from the oldest child. This could lead to the child developing problematic behaviour to regain the attention of his or her parents (Adler 1932:145) and thus might hold true for children experiencing the repositioning of their psychological birth order in the reconstituted family. The tendency of the oldest child to take control (Gfroerer, Gfroerer, Curlette, White & Kern, 2003:31) might contribute to adverse reactions when he or she becomes integrated in a reconstituted family and when he or she loses his or her status as the oldest child.

Stewart and Campbell (1998:51) mention that middle children often feel insignificant and perceive rejection in various relationships. They often have lower self-esteem (Dunlap, 2004:89, Lohman, Lohman & Christensen, 1985:325) and feel that they do not belong (Eckstein, Aycock, Sperber, McDonald, Van Wiesner, Watts & Ginsburg, 2010:416, Stewart & Campbell, 1998:51). Middle children often feel 'squeezed out' by their other siblings (Stewart & Campbell, 1998:51). Gfroerer *et al.* (2003:32, 38) mention that middle children could become discouraged and view their childhood as more negative than other birth orders. Based on the aforementioned, the researcher is of the opinion that middle children might experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order as more negative than children from other birth orders. However, Gfroerer *et al.* (2003:32) indicates that middle children could develop peacemaking skills and Newman (1994:125) states that middle children might develop negotiating skills in the family. These skills might be an asset in children who experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order in the reconstituted family.

Other family members (Dunlap, 2004:90; Stewart & Campbell, 1998:51) usually spoil youngest children. Therefore, the repositioning of the psychological birth order of a youngest child might cause the child to react adversely to receiving diminished attention within the reconstituted family. However, youngest children might use their charming skills (Stewart & Campbell, 1998:44) as part of their integration in the reconstituted family.

Adler (1932:154) asserts that an only child is used to being the centre of attention. This might be why Gfroerer *et al.* (2003:39) indicated that only children often have feelings of entitlement, causing problems in relationships with their peers. Only children might struggle to adapt to the repositioning of their psychological birth order within the reconstituted family, as they need to adjust to instant siblings as well as not being the centre of attention in the family any more.

Newman (1994:125) mentions that when two families merge to form a reconstituted family and two sets of siblings live together permanently, these children are more likely to experience emotional distress because of changes in sibling positions. Hoopes and Harper (1987:129) support this notion and state that, whether both sibling subsystems live in the same household or in different households and visit regularly, the interactions of the two sibling subsystems with parents and stepparents, and with each other, will still create a complex family system. The structure is even more complex when the parents have children together. In situations like these, Newman (1994:125) is of the opinion that, "Some of these children may feel confused, anxious, hostile, uncertain and jealous as a result of a step-sibling displacing their birth-order". A reconstitution of a family implies changes on a systemic level. The following theoretical frameworks will guide this study.

Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2009:156,157) state that, according to family systems theory, each individual has a unique relationship with other individuals in the family and together they function as an interrelated system. Each member of a family is affected by what happens to any other member. Thus, family members are interconnected and mutually influence each other. Within a reconstituted family, two sets of families come together with their unique subsystems and, according to Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992:2) the different marital, sibling and parent-child relationships will therefore interact to influence the adjustment of all family members within the reconstituted family. To study a subsystem in the broader family system, Adler's theory will be used, as he asserted that it is important to understand the individual within the systems in which they live (Corey, 2012:104).

Gestalt field theory will be used as the lens through which the study is done, as field theory correlates well with systems theory by explaining the interactions between the different subsystems in the following way: the field is seen as a systematic web of

relationships and a unitary whole where everything affects everything else in the field (Yontef, 1993:322). The individual is always seen as part of his or her environmental field (Yontef, 1993:294). In the instance of this study, the children will be seen as part of their reconstituted family where all the subsystems have interdependent relationships. According to gestalt theory, the field changes over time (Yontef, 1993:313). The field theory however aligns well with the chronosystem of systems theory as this temporal dimension emphasises that changes over time in either the child or any of the ecological systems can influence the direction of development (Shaffer, 2009:89).

Adler (1932:12), Adler (in Way, 1956:77) and Newman (1994:124), hold that children's personalities, with its related birth order characteristics, are set by the age of five. Should changes related to birth order occur after this age, these children will however, retain most of the personality traits associated with their original psychological birth order position (Newman, 1994:124). In other words, within a reconstituted family there might be more than one child with the same psychological birth order position.

### **1.3.1 Contribution of the Research Study**

Changes in any system require unique adaptation. This is true for everyone in the family, but more so, for children who have to adjust to changes due to being part of a reconstituted family, especially when this happens after the age of five. This occurs because children have to adapt and develop new roles within the new family system. The findings of this study could form the groundwork to enhance future adaptation of children who experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order in the reconstituted family.

Furthermore, Stewart (2012:101) indicates that future research on psychological birth order roles should be done in ways that are cognisant of contemporary demographic trends, such as reconstituted families, due to the higher occurrence of single parent families as well as reconstituted families.

Previous studies done on psychological birth order (Eckstein, 2000; Eckstein *et al.*, 2010; Eckstein, Sperber & Miller, 2009; Gfroerer, *et al.*, 2003; Lohman, *et al.*; Pilkington, White & Matheny, 1997; Pulakos, 1987; Stewart, 2012; Stewart &

Campbell, 1991 & 1998; Stewart, Stewart & Campbell, 2001), did not include any studies within a reconstituted family, nor did it include children's experiences of the repositioning of their psychological birth order.

### **1.3.2 Research Question**

From the above rationale and problem formulation, the following research question has been formulated for the purpose of this study: **How do children experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order within the reconstituted family?** The formulation of a research question is an important step in the research process as it is, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2012:218), used to guide the study.

## **1.4 RESEARCH AIM**

Van der Riet and Durrheim (2006:84) state that a research aim indicates the focus of the research study. The research aim for the purpose of this study will be to explore and describe how children, of school going age, experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family. It is also the intention of the researcher to provide a better understanding of this phenomenon in order to aid parents of children who have experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order and to assist professionals working with such families with a better understanding of the children's experiences.

## **1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Monette, Sullivan and DeJong (2008:86) assert that the unit of analysis entails "the element about which data are collected and inferences made". Within this study, the unit of analysis will be children who experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family after the age of five. A qualitative research method with IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) as research design will be utilised in order to explore and describe how participants experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family. The researcher will make use of non-probability sampling with purposive sampling as a method to select participants according to certain criteria for inclusion in the study. The researcher intends to hold a discussion with the participants' parents before the commencement of their interviews. This discussion will aid the researcher in gaining

familial background about the original and reconstituted families as well as determine the participants' psychological birth order. These discussions will be recorded and transcribed but it does not form part of the data collection that is to be analysed as part of the findings of the study.

The researcher will use semi-structured interviews to collect data. The data will be analysed according to the steps suggested by Smith and Eatough (2007:45) for an IPA study.

In this study, the researcher intends to use the constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985:219), to establishing the 'truth' value of this qualitative study. The researcher wants to add authenticity as an additional construct as proposed by Whitmore, Chase and Mandle (2001:530).

The researcher intends to ensure that the study is conducted in an ethical manner at all times. The ethical considerations, as well as the research methodology applied in this study, will thus be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

## **1.6 REPORT LAYOUT OF THE STUDY**

Chapter One: Introduction and overview of the study

Chapter Two: Conceptual framework of the study

Chapter Three: Research methodology

Chapter Four: Research findings

Chapter Five: Integrated summary of the study, conclusions and recommendations

## **1.7 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the researcher attempted to contextualise the study, indicate the rationale for the study, and formulate the research question and aim. The researcher also indicated the research methods to be used in order to answer the research question, and that will fulfil the aim of the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the main concepts of the study, which include psychological birth order, reconstituted families, and the theories underlying the study. These concepts are presented in this chapter to form the basis of the conceptual framework of the study.

#### **2.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL BIRTH ORDER**

As early as 1918, Alfred Adler emphasised the contribution of a person's psychological birth order in understanding an individual's lifestyle or personality processes (Stewart & Campbell, 1998:41). Psychological birth order is the perceived sibling role that individuals develop in their effort to find a way to belong to and find acceptance in their family, depending on the available or ascribed roles that exist in the family. Although actual birth order and family atmosphere play a role in finding a unique family niche, it does not determine psychological birth order (Oberst & Stewart, 2003:200). According to Oberst and Stewart (2003:66), actual birth order is seen as a starting point in the development of psychological birth order. With regard to psychological birth order, the emphasis is rather placed on people's perception of their position in the family. Therefore, "It is not, of course the child's number in the order of successive births which influences his character, but the situation into which he is born and the way in which the child interprets it" (Adler, 1956:377). It is thus clear that psychological birth order is determined by the way in which children interpret their place within the family environment. Adler (1932:144) postulates that each child in a family is born into, and grows up in a different home environment as the family circumstances change with the birth of each new child.

Adler (1932:12) also recognises that children have a set pattern of behaviour that is determined by the end of their fifth year. It therefore follows that psychological birth order is fixed by the age of five. This pattern of behaviour relates to the original meaning given to their life, and it forms their style of life. Adler (1932:13) further notes that children's styles of life form the backdrop against which they interpret any experience. Style of life or lifestyle refers to what is meant by 'personality' and is reflected in the way people experience and respond to their family atmospheres, roles in the family of origin, early developmental experiences, and so forth (Oberst & Stewart, 2003:199).

According to Adlerian theory children are viewed in relation to the people they are living with (Oberst & Stewart, 2003:16) as part of different subsystems. The family systems theory and Adler assert that embeddedness and interactions within these systems influence each individual's behaviour and are interrelated and interdependent (Sherman & Dinkmeyer, 1987:3, 5). Any movement in one of the subsystems, such as parent/stepparent, parent and stepparent/child, sibling and stepsibling and sibling/stepsibling subsystems will create movement in the other.

### **2.2.1 Family Roles**

Stewart, *et al.* (2001:365) adapted McCall and Simmons (1978) and Stryker and Strathans' (1985) role theory to the family. They determine that three features characterise perceived family roles. These features are as follows:

Each identifiable role within a family has its own organised and identifiable set of behaviours (Stryker & Strathan, in Stewart *et al.*, 2001:365). Oberst and Stewart (2003:150) indicate that this prediction has established the construct validity of at least four psychological birth order positions within a family, namely the oldest, the middle, the youngest, and the only child (Stewart & Campbell 1998; Stewart *et al.*, 2001). Thus, in the family context, a family role is instantiated by a specific person and the corresponding role behaviours activated during interaction with other family members (Stewart *et al.*, 2001:365).

Furthermore, the thoughts, feelings, and behaviour associated with a role, take place in the context of either corresponding or contradictory roles, portrayed by other family members. These roles are therefore interactional (Oberst & Stewart,

2003:150). Observing and experiencing the self in the process of repeatedly portraying a role, cultivates a sense of role identity that embodies internalised standards for that role (McCall & Simmons & Stryker in Stewart *et al.*, 2001:365). The behaviours that are part of each identifiable role, known as psychological birth order characteristics, will be discussed in the following section.

## **2.2.2 Psychological Birth Order Characteristics**

According to Eckstein (2000:483), birth order characteristics are not meant to stereotype people into rigid categories, but should rather be coupled with information such as gender, how reconstituted families are organised, and family atmosphere, in order to form a comprehensive picture of the individual. Adler (in Way, 1956:77) for instance, indicates that if a child is five or six years old before the next child is born, the main line of the specific child's character will be formed before the dethronement occurs. Carlson, Watts and Maniaci (in Eckstein *et al.*, 2010:409) state that age differences greater than five years often place children in subgroups that confound strict ordinal positions. Gender, according to Eckstein *et al.* (2010:409) may also have an influence in the development of birth order when parents model strong sex role differences, for example, when parents treat a third-born boy among girls more as a first-born.

Each birth order however, has characteristics that are specific to them and are discussed as follows:

### *2.2.2.1 Oldest children*

Adler (1927:153) mentions that oldest children are often entrusted with the role of helpers of their parents. It is valuable to children when their environment entrusts them with responsibilities and therefore oldest children tend to be responsible, gravitate towards positions involving leadership and are achievement-driven (Adler, 1932:147; Gfroerer *et al.*, 2003:36; Newman, 1994:125; Stewart & Campbell, 1998:50). Gfroerer *et al.* (2003:36) add to this by stating that oldest children often work hard to stay ahead of other siblings. This forms a pattern of setting high standards and expectations for themselves and it correlates with their characteristic of striving for perfection. Oldest children, according to a study by Gfroerer *et al.* (2003:31), also tend to seek recognition.

Adler (1927:153) also points out that oldest children behave in socially appropriate ways and are sensitive to issues of protocol and authority. They prefer order, structure, and adherence to norms and rules (Adler, 1932:147). Oldest children, however, also want others to adhere to norms and rules by doing things in the correct way (Stewart & Campbell, 1998:50). Newman (1994:125) and Stewart *et al.* (2001:384), further found that oldest children are likely to be nurturing, critical, serious, bossy, overcommitted, controlling, self-disciplined, and that they initiate and accomplish goals through directing, leading, achieving and attempting to please.

Adler (1932:144) has further found that oldest children, due to the fact that they are used to being the centre of attention, often find the birth of a second child difficult, as they fear dethronement from their sibling position (Adler, 1932:147). However, oldest children whose parents prepared them well for the birth of the second child become individuals who strive to protect and care for others. These oldest children often act as surrogate parents and feel responsible for their siblings' welfare (Dunlap, 2004:89) and they often develop great organisational skills.

#### *2.2.2.2 Middle children*

Stewart and Campbell (1998:51) support Adlerian theory and indicate that middle children often feel that they don't have their parents' full attention, are treated more unfairly, are taken less seriously, feel less loved, feel 'squeezed out' by siblings, tend to be confused about their identity, are lower achievers, are followers, competitive, and shy (Newman, 1994:125). Middle children may therefore often experience feelings of insignificance or perceive themes of rejection. Dunlap (2004:89), for instance, mentions that middle children often feel that what they do is not good enough. According to Lohman and Lohman (1985:325), as well as Dunlap (2004:89), middle children in general seem to have lower self-esteem than other birth orders.

In a study by Kidwell (1982:225), it was found that middle-born adolescent males have significantly lower self-esteem when compared to first- and last-born males. An age gap of two years between the middle born and their adjacent siblings resulted in an even more significant decrease in self-esteem. However, when a middle-born male has only female siblings, self-esteem is enhanced considerably.

Gfroerer *et al.* (2003:32) also note that middle children may feel that they do not have a special place and, when they are discouraged, may go through life feeling that life is unfair. They also view their childhood more negatively than other birth order positions and approach life with caution (Gfroerer *et al.*, 2003:38). However, when middle children are encouraged they may develop peacemaking and justice skills within the family (Gfroerer *et al.*, 2003:32).

### 2.2.2.3 Youngest children

Adler (1927:149-150) mentions that youngest children usually experience attentive treatment from their parents and because they are the smallest family members they receive the most help. Youngest children often act as if they are neglected and have feelings of inferiority. Adler (1932:150) further mentions that youngest children can never be dethroned, as they have no followers, but many pacemakers.

The youngest child is often the most pampered (Adler, 1932:150) and spoiled (Dunlap, 2004:90; Stewart & Campbell, 1998:51) and because they have so many chances for competition against older siblings, they often excel (Adler, 1932:150). Dunlap (2004:90) adds that youngest children are often seen as “charming and outgoing”. The reasons for this charming behaviour, according to Dunlap (2004:90), as well as Stewart and Campbell (1998:51), are to manipulate others into doing things or to provide for them. This may contribute to the fact that youngest children are seen as outgoing and popular. Stewart *et al.* (2001:384) note that youngest children may also use persuasion, complaints or even guilt to achieve goals. Gfroerer *et al.* (2003:38) further mentions that youngest children will use their ability to please others to gain a sense of significance within the family. Further characteristics of youngest children involve that they are likely to be playful, undisciplined, irresponsible, dependant, troubled by feelings of inadequacy, adventurous, friendly and creative (Newman, 1994:125) and are often risk takers (Dunlap, 2004:90).

Adler (1927:150) also recognises that some youngest children might become discouraged if they are unable to establish a useful social role among siblings. Alternatively, they may become the saviours (Adler, 1927:151) and pillars of their families (Adler, 1932:151) and, in so doing, gain considerable self-esteem. Often youngest children have a strong desire to prove that they are the very best and their striving for power becomes accentuated (Adler, 1927:150).

#### *2.2.2.4 Only children*

Only children are most frequently the centre of attention (Adler, 1932:154) and often search for support from others (Adler, 1927:154). Dunlap (2004:89) notes that these children never have to compete with any siblings for attention, often resulting in higher self-esteem and self-efficiency than other birth orders. Their lifestyle decisions are based on significant adult relationships in their lives (Gfroerer *et al.*, 2003:32). Although they share many characteristics with oldest children, only children have more perceived pressure from adults, as there are no other siblings in the family (Gfroerer *et al.*, 2003:32 & 39) and hence this child is often hyper vigilant and careful. They are likely to carry feelings of entitlement, which could cause problems in getting along with peers. This is corroborated by Dunlap (2004:89), who mentions that it is more difficult for only children to share and work as part of a team. Other characteristics of only children according to Newman (1994:125) are that they tend to be independent, loners, achievers, selfish, intolerant and serious.

### **2.2.3 Repositioning of Psychological Birth Order**

Newman (1994:126) mentions that children become accustomed to their position in the family. Therefore, if something happens, such as the arrival of a new baby, or the death of a sibling, the status or positions of some of the siblings change. The younger the child is when such a change in birth order occurs, the more likely that child is to take on the characteristics of the new position over time. For instance, if a two-year-old is no longer the youngest child, it is most likely that this child will adopt the characteristics of a middle child.

According to Newman (1994:126), however, should the change with regard to the child's birth order take place after the age of five, most of the personality characteristics of the child's original birth order will be maintained. Thus, when the family system changes, the aspects related to the children's experiences of having their psychological birth order repositioned are not clear. Therefore, this forms the focus of the study.

## **2.3 RECONSTITUTED FAMILY**

Bray (1999:253-254) states that there are many terms for stepfamilies, such as remarried families, blended families, bi-nuclear families, reconstituted families, second families and two fans. The researcher chose to use the term 'reconstituted families' and will apply this term throughout the study, regardless of what was used in the particular literature. According to Webb (2011:250) a reconstituted family consists of a family where one or both spouses have been married before and are combining two families into one and may, according to Baham, Weimer, Braver, Fabricius (2008:176) also include a half-sibling. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, a reconstituted family is understood to be a family where both parents have children from a previous relationship, and in some cases, where parents have a mutual child (Refer to 1.2).

The occurrences of reconstituted families are on the increase and in 1998 in the USA, the number of remarriages equalled the number of first marriages (US Bureau of the Census, 1998). Dunlap (2004:79) reports that one out of every five children younger than 18 years old live in a reconstituted family in the USA. However, statistics with regard to the occurrence of reconstituted families in South Africa were not available.

### **2.3.1 Sibling Relationships in a Reconstituted Family**

It seems that in a reconstituted family sibling relationships might involve full siblings, stepsiblings as well as half-siblings that are all constantly in interaction. Stepsiblings and half-siblings differ from full siblings in intact families, as they have experienced the loss of a previous family system and now have a new family system (Baham *et al.*, 2008:185). The research of Hetherington (1993:48), and Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992:12) who found that early in remarriage, the biologically related

sibling relationships resemble those in divorced families, showing greater negativity and less positivity than intact families, corroborate this. It therefore seems that with the formation of a reconstituted family, biological as well as stepsibling relationships are affected adversely.

When stepparents bring their own children into the reconstituted family, it creates a complex web of new relationships and these relationships are related to the structure of the reconstituted family (Hetherington, 2003:231). Therefore, children need to adjust to the addition of new stepsiblings as well as the possibility of half-siblings (Baham *et al.*, 2008:185). Stepsiblings are also often seen as 'intruders' (Dunlap, 2004:79). According to Cuyler (2003:6) adolescent stepsiblings may either develop friendships or disengage from one another.

In intact families, siblings are companions as well as support systems and usually help each other through difficult tasks and provide comfort during periods of emotional stress (Dunlap, 2004:88). This would entail any difficult circumstance and would thus include the death of a parent. With the dissolution of a marriage, the siblings often seek a degree of emotional security in their relationship with each other (Newman: 1994:128). Whether they fight constantly or get along well, the familiar emotional bond helps them feel better (Newman, 1994:128). However, when children become part of a reconstituted family the coming together of two sets of children can possibly be traumatic for them. Hetherington (2003:231) interestingly mentions that boys are less likely to be buffered by positive sibling relationships, as they tend to receive less support from their siblings. According to Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992:120), sisters, on the other hand, are more capable than brothers to act as buffers for each other and to fill the emotional void left by an unresponsive parent during a marital transition.

Often stepsibling rivalry occurs when a bond starts to emerge between his or her parent and a stepsibling (Beer 1988:116). This is possibly sparked off by jealousy about the new relationship. Dunn (in Dunlap, 2004:88) reports that sibling rivalry among stepsiblings tends to be strong and between six and nine per cent of the time this leads to aggression, which can result in diminished educational performance, school dropout, peer rejection, and/or delinquency.

However, Baham *et al.* (2008:201) find that among adolescents the better the quality of the relationship between biological siblings, step- and half-siblings, the fewer internalising problems such as depression and anxiety, and externalising problems such as acting out and delinquency, are experienced. In other words, the higher the quality of the relationship amongst siblings in a reconstituted family, the more positive behaviour is displayed. In this regard, Newman (1994:131) mentions that in a reconstituted family, family life is forever changing and in many reconstituted families, new and positive stepsibling relationships can be formed over time.

### **2.3.2 Stressors in the Reconstituted Family**

Hetherington (2003:225) states that many of the difficulties associated with remarriage are related to the entrance of a new parent and sometimes of new siblings. In this regard, when new siblings form part of the reconstituted family, there are often children who experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order. According to Eckstein, *et al.* (2010:408), a child within a reconstituted family cannot be a second- and a fourth-born at the same time. These authors also assert that multiple psychological birth order positions occur in a reconstituted family. This is likely the reason why children in situations like these are most likely to experience emotional distress due to changes in their sibling position (Newman, 1994:125). As mentioned in 1.3, some of these children might feel “anxious, resentful, hostile, uncertain and jealous” because of the inevitable sibling displacement (Newman, 1994:125). Therefore, it seems that children who experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family, could experience this phenomenon as an added stressor related to their adaptation within a reconstituted family.

Other stressors that children in a reconstituted family might have to deal with according to Webb (2011:250) include some of the following aspects:

- Their socio-economic conditions might change.
- Children might be caught up in custody battles between biological parents.
- Children may experience divided loyalties regarding their parents.
- Children may experience changes in their home and school environment.

- Children may experience different rules and lifestyles in different homes.
- Children have to adjust to a stepparent and stepsiblings and other new relatives.
- Children may experience reduced and sometimes absent communication with their non-custodial parent.
- Children may experience a loss of an entire group of grandparents, uncles and aunts as the custodial parent feels uncomfortable in the presence of this group.
- Children have a confused feeling of where they belong.

In the immediate aftermath of divorce or remarriage, Hetherington (2003:220) notes that most children experience emotional distress and behavioural problems as they try to cope with the confusion and apprehension of changing relationships in the family and shifts in their life situation. These behaviour problems include anger, resentment, being demanding, non-compliant, and suffering from anxiety and depression. Children's relationships with parents, siblings, and peers are marked by increased negativity, conflict, aggression, and coercion as they are affected by their parent's marital transitions (Hetherington, 2003:220). In some instances, children may display severe, enduring characteristics, while others may appear to adapt well in the early stages of the reconstitution of the family and then show problems at a later stage (Hetherington, 2003:220).

However, Hetherington (2003:220) notes that most often these responses start to become less frequent in the third to fifth year following remarriage. Bray (1999:254) asserts that it has been estimated that adjustment in reconstituted families may take between two and four years or, according to Cherlin and Furstenberg and Hetherington *et al.* (in Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002:289), as long as five to seven years. This could mean that a child who was 12 years old at the time of the reconstitution of the family may already have left home when equilibrium is reached within the reconstituted family. Bray (1999:257), however, highlights a very important point by stating that family relationships in a reconstituted family do not solely depend on the current state of affairs, but are also affected by previous individual

and family experiences, developmental issues of both individual family members as well as developmental issues in the reconstituted family as a whole.

According to Hetherington (2003:225), some researchers such as (Bray, 1999:257) argue that the new stressors that are part of reconstituted family life work against the benefits children may obtain in the reconstituted family. These new stressors include building of positive relationships between stepparents and stepchildren as well as between stepsiblings, trying to build a strong marital relationship and balancing relationships within the household with the non-custodial parent.

Risk factors that may affect children and parents in a reconstituted family include family conflict, parenting conflict, difficulties in the stepparent-child relationships, problems with the non-residential parent, and role ambiguity (Bray 1999:256). According to Bray (1999:264-265) conflict is more predictive of children's adjustment in reconstituted families than in first-marriage families. Moreover, conflict has a stronger effect on children's current, as well as long-term externalising problems than on other aspects of adjustment. In this regard, Hetherington (2003:226) refers to a previous study by Hetherington (1999b), where it was found that parental conflict which either directly involved children, or is physically violent, or where the children felt caught in the middle, had the most adverse consequences on the well-being of these children.

Although children and adults in divorced and remarried families may have more stressors to deal with, and have shown more problems regarding family relations and personal adjustment, especially in the early years following a transition than intact families, Hetherington (2003:224) has found that most of them are resilient and able to cope with their new life situation. Lussier (2001:4), however, cautions parents who have adjusted well not to assume that their children have also done so in the reconstituted family.

### **2.3.3 Child-Parent Relationships in the Reconstituted Family**

There are mainly two kinds of parent-child relationships within a reconstituted family: the biological relationship between a parent and their children; and the stepparent-child relationship. In this regard, Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (2002:290) state that children's relationships with parents and stepparents are important in the adjustment of children in divorced and remarried families.

Hetherington (1993:43) notes that stresses and conflict between children and parents were more pronounced if the remarriage took place when the children were nine years or older. Stepparents seem more readily accepted by young children than by young adolescents, and boys appear to accept stepfathers sooner than girls would accept stepfathers (Bray, 1999:262). Beer (1988:115) further notes that in a single-parent family a closely formed dyad between a mother and the oldest child is a frequent phenomenon. In a remarriage, the oldest child will not give up this quasi-adult status willingly, as the child has clearly won status above his or her siblings and has even replaced the non-custodial parent in a way. Remarriage means that this child is directly demoted by the stepparent to ordinary child status amid his or her siblings and stepsiblings. Resentment towards the stepparent and stepsiblings is likely, as such a loss of status is not accepted easily.

Mother and daughter conflict tends to appear in response to remarriage. In a single parent household, daughters tend to have a very close, confiding relationship with their mothers. When a remarriage occurs, the daughter has to share her mother's attention, time, and affection with her mother's new husband (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002:299). This could lead to resentment towards both the mother and the stepfather (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002:299). Hetherington (2003:230) is of the opinion that relationships between stepdaughters and stepfathers are more problematic than those with stepsons are, as boys are more likely to benefit from the relationship with an authoritative stepfather. However it seems from research (Bray, 1999:262; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992:130) that most stepfathers remain less involved, are less nurturing and warm, communicate less with their stepchildren, exercise less control and have less positive views of their relationships with their stepchildren (Dunn, Davies & O'Connor, 2000:959).

In situations where the custodial mother retains full responsibility for discipline, is authoritative, and the stepfather is warm and supportive towards the children, involves himself indirectly in their discipline by supporting their mother, children have been found to adjust well (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002:300). Individuals that parent from this stance gradually establish influence with regard to the joint responsibility of the well-being of the children (Hetherington, 2003:230). Although this could be the ideal situation in which children and parents in a reconstituted family could find themselves, research by Hetherington (2003:230) has shown that stepmothers often have more parenting responsibilities in the reconstituted family, resulting in a relationship between stepchildren and stepmothers that is even more difficult.

The research conducted by Hetherington (2003:228) has shown that a supportive, warm, authoritative relationship with open communication with at least one parent acts as a protective factor in the healthy development of a child who had experienced divorce and remarriage. In this regard, Bray (1999:262) found that children in reconstituted families indicated that they preferred verbal affection, such as praise and compliments from stepparents, rather than physical contact. Verbal affection from their stepparent related to better adjustment in the reconstituted family. It is important to note that the presence of a stepparent can potentially offer emotional, practical and social support for biological parents and children (Hetherington, 2003:225).

## **2.4 THEORIES UNDERPINNING THE STUDY**

The systems theory is the meta-theory of this study. According to the systems theory family systems are interdependent, interconnected and changes over time. The aforementioned corresponds with the underlying assumptions of field theory. However, within the context of this study, the systems theory does not seem to explain the interactions that occur between the two family systems that merged due to the reconstitution of the families.

For the purpose of this study, Gestalt field theory will be used as the bridge between the systems theory and Adlerian theory, because it supports the integration of two family systems. In this study, Adlerian theory will be utilised to explain the content of these experiences, namely the psychological birth order of the child and the

repositioning thereof. Adlerian theory will thus help to explain the focus of the study: how children experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family. Adlerian theory will be used within a lens of Gestalt field theory to explain this subsystem since both theories assert that:

- the individual is seen as more than his or her thoughts, emotions, and behaviour;
- human behaviour always takes place in a particular context;
- the relationships constantly change within the field; and
- each person within the field is responsible for his or her own meaning.

#### **2.4.1 Holistic Entity**

According to Gestalt theory, holistic entity means that the sum total of children's physical, emotional and spiritual aspects, language, thought and behaviour are more than these components. According to Blom (2006:23), the aforementioned components can be distinguished, but not separated. This is in accordance with Adler, who saw children from a holistic point of view; who regarded their thoughts, feelings, cognitions and behaviours as unified (Oberst & Stewart, 2003:13). Therefore, in this study, psychological birth order forms part of each participant's internal field and will affect all the other internal aspects within the child, such as his or her emotions, thoughts and behaviour.

#### **2.4.2 Individuals are seen in Context**

According to Mackewn (1997:50), people can never be understood in isolation as humans are interactive beings and entail the whole person, within their context and the relationship between the person and their context (Adler in Oberst & Stewart, 2003:17). Lewin (in Clarkson, 2004:9) also mentions that people can only be understood within the system of which they are a significant part, in other words as part of an environmental field. Therefore, children are seen as part of their reconstituted family with all the related subsystems, such as the sibling subsystem, parent-stepparent subsystem, the parent-child subsystem, and the stepparent-stepchild subsystem within these families. According to Parlett (2005:48), meaning can be derived only by looking at the total situation, the totality of co-existing factors.

Mackewn (1997:58) states that all aspects of the field are interconnected and potentially significant. The field, according to Reynolds (2005:154), may include the inner and outer world of the child's developing self-process, such as inner experiences, family dynamics, peer and adult relationships and educational experiences. The field approach offers a framework for holistic and comprehensive understanding of human events and patterns of interaction. Hence, it follows that all internal aspects, such as thoughts and feelings related to the repositioning of psychological birth order, influence the way in which participants experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order.

All aspects related to the relevant children's external environment such as full, half- and stepsiblings, parents, stepparents, and even grandparents, play an important role in how children experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order in the reconstituted family.

#### **2.4.3 Web of Relationships**

Yontef (1993:295, 298) mentions that the field is a systematic web of relationships and that this web of relationships has an inherent systematic organisation. In field theory, understanding the pattern of relationships in the field is essential to understand the phenomenon, which is studied. In this study, the pattern of relationships would entail the relevant participants who experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family. Thus, it is important to gain knowledge of the new as well as of the original family constellation in which these participants exist.

#### **2.4.4 Field is Interdependent**

Each person in the family is influenced by the behaviour and attitudes of other family members and, in return, affects the family as a whole (Yontef 1993:306). Adler (in Oberst & Stewart, 2003:13) asserts that when an individual influences another person, a change occurs in both individuals regarding their feelings, opinions and behaviour, as well as in the relationship that defines them. From a systems theory point of view, Bray (1999:256) also indicates that the family systems theory view family members as part of an interdependent emotional and relational system that mutually influence other aspects of the family, and applies this to the stepfamily.

Bray (1999:256) further mentions that change within one aspect of the subsystem is believed to produce change in other parts of the subsystem, concurrently and over time.

Hetherington (1993:40) agrees with this stance and adds that changes associated with marital transitions must be considered from the perspective of change in the entire family system.

Consequently, when applied to this study, the whole family will be affected by the way in which the relevant child participants experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order. Hetherington (1993:40) continues by stating that adaptation and positive coping in one individual or family system is not necessarily related to positive adjustment in others.

#### **2.4.5 The Principle of Changing Process**

The field is constantly changing. Everything in a field is a process, where everything is becoming and changing (Yontef, 1993:313). Process refers to the dynamics of change in time and space and takes the temporal dimension into account (Yontef, 2005:85). Change happens as a function of the whole field (Yontef, 1993:313). This is also supported by systems theory. According to the chronosystem or temporal dimension in systems theory, the individual is influenced by changes in the individual or any other system of which the child is part, over time (Shaffer, 2009:89).

Mackewn (1997:54) states that people change their perception of the field as they understand it differently from moment to moment. In Gestalt theory the focus is on the 'here and now'; on the constellation of influences that both 'explains' behaviour and that constitutes the actual present experience of the person at present (Parlett, 2005:149). It might include recollections from the past or even plans for the future.

Hetherington (1993:40) further mentions that adaptation in families is a continuous process as the family and its members confront new challenges. The experiences related to the changes of marital transitions vary for parents, children, and even for children within the same family. In this study, the children who experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order are part of a reconstituted family and they might be affected by the changes related within this field of which they are part. The time that has passed since the remarriage might also influence how children

experience this changing process in the reconstituted family. In this regard, Bray (1999:256) mentions that the time elapsed since the divorce and the remarriage is important to take into consideration when looking at the reconstituted family.

People are responsible for the meaning they give to their experience. Yontef (1993:300) notes that people are only defined by the field that they are a part of and the field can only be understood by someone's experience or point of view, or according to Adler (1932:4), by the meaning that individuals give to their reality as they interpret it. The field further consists of an individual's internal world, his or her external world and the ever-changing relationship between these worlds (Joyce & Sills, 2001:24). The internal field is also known as the experiential field. The experiential field refers to the field of an individual's awareness, which is also known as the way in which individuals organise their experiences and it is their reality of the phenomenological field, that is unique to them (Joyce & Sills, 2001:24).

People give individual meaning to the events they experience (Mackewn, 1997:54). Therefore, people are responsible for the co-creation of their environment, as well as for the meaning they give to their field (Mackewn, 1997:58). This meaning is influenced by the individual's mental framework of beliefs and habits (Mackewn, 1997:54). Expectations or attitudes influence the way in which people experience their phenomenological field, therefore children's lifestyles will determine how they interpret their reality (Adler, 1932:2-3). Psychological birth order is an important aspect of children's lifestyles (Stewart & Campbell, 1998:41). It therefore, seems that children's perspectives of their birth order and the repositioning of their psychological birth order play an important role in how they experience the repositioning of their birth order in the reconstituted family.

## **2.5 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, psychological birth order was defined and the characteristics related to each birth order were discussed. Thereafter, reconstituted families were discussed. The theoretical underpinnings of the study, namely the systems theory, Adlerian theory and Gestalt field theory were discussed and explained in this chapter. The next chapter will focus on the research methodology of the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Bonds-Raacke and Raacke (2012:262) indicate that the purpose of the research methodology section is to provide the reader with information on how the study was conducted. According to Fouché and Delport (2011:61), the research methodology can also be seen as an indication of the research process, which was used to solve the research problem.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH METHOD**

The researcher chose a qualitative method to investigate children's experiences of the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family. The qualitative process, which was followed in this research study, allowed the researcher to be flexible in all areas of the research process. Kumar (2005:12) points out that the flexibility of the approach in a research study is one of the key characteristics of qualitative research. Leedy and Ormrod (2005:94-97) assert that the qualitative research process is "more holistic and 'emergent' with the specific focus, design, data-collection methods (e.g. interviews) and interpretations developing and possibly changing along the way".

The motivation for choosing qualitative research is to capture life as experienced by the participants rather than through predetermined categories of the researcher. Fouché and Delport (2011:65) and Nestor and Schutt (2012:355) are further of the opinion that the qualitative approach allows the researcher to focus on participants' accounts of their experiences and meaning, and produces data in the participants' spoken words. Therefore, the focus was on inductive reasoning and understanding of context (Nestor & Schutt, 2012:355, 470).

The researcher wanted to improve the understanding of how children experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order to aid parents of children who have experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order, as well as to assist professionals working with such families with a better understanding of the children's

experiences. The use of a qualitative approach thus supported the researcher's intentions in terms of the study.

According to Bonds-Raacke and Raacke (2012:20), basic research is used to further collective knowledge about a topic, while applied research is used to solve a practical problem within a field of study. Evans and Rooney (2011:17) further assert that in applied research, the researcher wants to apply the knowledge to benefit humankind. The findings of this study were intended to be of practical relevance and this constitutes applied research.

The existing knowledge base on this particular research topic was also expanded through this study as little research existed that addressed this research question and this constituted to exploratory research as indicated by Fouché and De Vos (2011:95). According to Babbie (2010:93), exploratory research is used to gain insight. The approach was also descriptive, as Kreuger and Neuman indicate that descriptive research focuses on the specific details of a situation or relationship and focuses on 'how' questions. The aim was to explore and describe how children experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family.

Therefore, the researcher made use of applied research to explore and describe children's experiences of the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family. Thus, a combination of the applied, exploratory, descriptive research was used in this study.

### **3.2.1 Design**

#### *3.2.1.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)*

For the purpose of this study, the researcher made use of IPA. An IPA study is concerned with trying to understand what something is like from the person's viewpoint (Smith & Eatough, 2007:36). According to Larkin and Thompson (2012:102), Smith and Eatough (2007:36), and, Smith and Osborn (2008:53), the meanings participants hold about experiences and events form the main currency of IPA. Importantly, Larkin and Thompson (2012:102) state that meaning should be conceptualised "at the level of the person in context" as the experience holds significance for that participant.

In this study, it thus involved exploring the participants' personal experience of the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family phenomenological, from their unique perception.

According to Larkin and Thompson (2012:102-103), IPA has an interpretative phenomenological epistemology and is interested in an individual's relation to the world through their meanings based on the following assumptions:

- Understanding of the world is a prerequisite to an understanding of experience.
- The people that the researcher engages with are immersed in linguistics, relationships, culture and a physical world.
- An ideographic approach needs to be taken to facilitate a detailed focus on the particular.
- Researchers, through a process of interrelated meaning making, access experience.
- In order to engage in the experience of other people, the researcher needs to base these interpretations on participants' views and be able to reflect on their role in producing these interpretations.

IPA studies are conducted on small sample sizes using case studies (Smith & Osborn, 2008:55), in order to provide details about the perceptions of these case studies. Fouché and Schurink (2011:320) assert that qualitative researchers make use of a case study design, as they are interested in the meaning participants give to their life experiences and need to obtain a familiarity with this small number of people to identify patterns in the participants' lives, words and actions in the context of the case as a whole. Because IPA examines individual case studies, it is an ideographic mode of enquiry (Smith & Eatough, 2007:37) and makes it possible to make specific statements about those individuals (Smith & Osborn, 2008:56).

### **3.2.2 Research Context**

The researcher made use of children and their residing parents living in Alberton and surrounding areas as the researcher lives in Alberton. Weathington, Cunningham, and Pittenger (2010:199) assert that, most often, the sampling population consists of people who live or work near the researcher. Alberton forms part of Gauteng, it is a suburban area and the families who live in this area tend to be of the middle class representing all cultures and population groups of South Africa. However, participants were fluent in either English or Afrikaans as the interviews were conducted without the use of an interpreter. Unfortunately, Stats SA do not include statistics on remarriages per province and this data could not be considered in this study.

### **3.2.3 Universe and Population**

Cottrell and McKenzie (2011:125) define universe as all individuals who possess the characteristics that interest the researcher. In this study, the 'universe' was all children living in a reconstituted family in Gauteng.

According to Walliman (2011:175), a population refers to the total quantity of cases that forms the object of the study. All children that experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family, after the age of five, living in Alberton and surrounding areas, formed the 'population' from which the sample was drawn.

### **3.2.4 Sampling**

Walliman (2011:175) defines a sample as a "small part of a whole (population) to show what the whole is like"; or according to Bonds-Raacke and Raacke (2012:139), a smaller set of individuals that represent the larger population.

According to Cozby (2007:140) and Evans and Rooney (2011:122), non-probability sampling occurs when it is not possible to specify the probability of selecting an individual. Furthermore, according to Cottrell and McKensie (2011:235) purposive sampling as a non-probability sampling method allows the researcher to intentionally select cases that could contribute to an in-depth understanding of the topic at hand. Babbie (2010:193) states that purposive sampling allows the researcher to select

units that form part of the sample based on the researcher's judgement of which units will be most useful or representative. The unit of analysis entails the individuals, which the researcher intends to describe and explain (Babbie, 2012:99). In this study, the unit of analysis consisted of children who experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family. In this regard, Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003:107-108) state that purposive sampling's key feature is the selection criteria for the sample, based on known characteristics that are relevant to the research topic.

The criteria for inclusion in this study were as follows:

- Children between the ages of 7 and 18 (This is the age range of school going children in South Africa. Therefore, ages 7 and 18 were used as the cut off points for inclusion in this study.);
- Children who are currently living in a reconstituted family and who are experiencing the repositioning of their psychological birth order;
- The repositioning of their psychological birth order must have been experienced after the age of five;
- Parents to provide background information about the family and to determine the children's psychological birth order;
- Participants had to be Afrikaans- or English-speaking;
- Voluntary participation was a prerequisite.

The sample was selected in the following manner: The researcher approached a principal of a private nursery school where the researcher had previously provided some counselling. The principal agreed to give letters to parents in reconstituted families within the school. The principle then provided a letter containing the reason for the study and criteria for participation to these parents. They had to indicate if they were willing that, their children take part in the study. The researcher then contacted the parents who agreed that their children could voluntarily take part in the study and set up an interview date and time. Although three parents indicated that they were willing to take part in the study, only two families met the criteria of having

children repositioned that were older than five at the reconstitution of their family. In order to expand the sample size, the researcher therefore incorporated referral sampling. According to Evans and Rooney (2011:124), referral sampling includes participants referred by other participants. The researcher then telephonically contacted the parents referred by other participants, who indicated that their children could take part in the study. During the telephone conversation, the purpose of the study was explained in more detail and an interview date and time was set.

### **3.2.5 Data Collection**

Walliman (2011:99) defines a semi-structured interview as “one that contains structured and unstructured sections with standardised and open questions”. The one-on-one semi-structured interview was employed. The reason for this decision was based on Larkin and Thompsons’ (2011:103) viewpoint that the questions within the semi-structured interview of an IPA study should focus on the experience or understandings of specific people in a certain context. Furthermore, according to Smith and Osborn (2008:59), the advantages of a semi-structured interview are that it facilitates rapport, allows more flexibility, and tends to produce richer data while going into novel areas. Therefore, when applied to this study, a semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to facilitate a rapport with the relevant children that constituted the participants and focused on their perceptions.

Consequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants to broaden the researcher’s understanding of the participants’ experiences of the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family. The interviews were held at the researcher’s office. As a result, in this study, the interview schedule included different open- and closed ended questions that related to the specific participant’s experience of his or her psychological birth order in his or her original family, as well as to the experience of the repositioning of his or her psychological birth order within the reconstituted family. An interview schedule (refer to Addendum D), in accordance with Greeff (2011:352), as well as Smith and Eatough (2007:42), was used to guide the interview rather than to dictate it and to gain a detailed picture about the research topic.

In order for the researcher to explore the participants' experiences of their repositioning, it was necessary to determine the participants' psychological birth order. The focus of this study was not on actual birth order, but rather on psychological birth order. It further seems that various psychological birth order positions occur in a reconstituted family and it therefore seemed relevant to determine the psychological birth order position of the participants. In this regard, Stewart (2012:101) indicates that researchers doing birth order research should consider to either, use a measure of psychological birth order such as the Psychological Birth Order Inventory (PBOI), modify the PBOI, or create new measures of psychological position for their unique research purposes. Furthermore, the reliability and validity of the PBOI was shown in a study by Stewart and Campbell undertaken in 1998.

For the purpose of this study, a discussion was held with the residing parent to determine the participant's psychological birth order. This was done by tapping the themes of the oldest, middle and youngest scales in the PBOI, refer to Addendum C. The PBOI was developed by Stewart and Campbell (in Oberst & Stewart, 2003:173) to determine children's psychological birth order in the original family. The questions for the oldest birth order tapped themes of leadership, an achievement, pleasing orientation, feeling powerful and important, and an emphasis on following rules. The questions relating to the middle psychological birth order tapped themes of feeling 'squeezed out' by siblings, and feeling less loved and less important than other family members. Questions for the youngest psychological order included themes related to having other family members do things for them, and being perceived as charming and sociable. The researcher did not use the PBOI to determine the psychological birth order of only children, because they can be solely psychological only children. The PBOI, as such, was not used as tapping of the themes of the PBOI, best suited the qualitative nature of the study. Another reason for the discussion with the residing parent of each participant was to gain some information about the background of the original family as well as that of the reconstituted family to gain an understanding of the familial field or context of the participants. This information is displayed in the genograms and short description of the participant's familial background information in chapter 4.

Before the actual interview commenced, the researcher provided a short summary of what the interview was about, as suggested by Kelly (2006: 299). The participant interviews and parental discussions were done individually, face to face, at the researcher's office as suggested by Cozby (2007:136). The interview was conducted in the participants' mother tongue to make it is easier for participants to understand the questions and to express themselves. Evans and Rooney (2011:232) assert that the advantages of a face-to-face interview are that the researcher can gather information directly from the people in which the researcher is interested and that complex issues can be explored. The disadvantage is that this method is time-consuming. The researcher interviewed eight participants, however, only seven were used in the study. The researcher disregarded one of the participant's interviews as the participant was only 18 months old when the reconstitution occurred and therefore no longer met the criteria of the study.

The parent discussions were recorded with consent from the parents and the participant's interviews were recorded with consent from the parents as well as assent from the participants, as recommended by Bonds-Raacke and Raacke (2012:41), Greeff (2011:359) and Kelly (2006:299).

Process notes were taken during the interview as well as directly after the interview, as suggested by Greeff (2011:358) and Kelly (2006:299). The researcher applied Kelly's (2006:299) recommendation that these process notes should include how the researcher felt, interesting things that might have been discussed when the tape recorder was switched off, and additional questions the researcher would have liked to ask the participants. The researcher made use of Kelly's (2006:289) suggestion that data collection continues until saturation occurred and when the researcher is able to state that the data was thoroughly explored and that additional cases no longer provided additional information to the researcher's unfolding analysis. The researcher then applied the suggestion made by Creswell (2009:18), and Smith and Eatough (2007:45) to transcribe the interviews.

The data was stored securely in a lockable cabinet at the centre for Child Youth and Family studies in Wellington as well as on the researcher's personal computer protected by a password, only known to the researcher, as suggested by Greeff (2011:359).

### 3.2.6 Data Analysis

In a qualitative research study the point at which data collection ends and analysis begins, is not clear (Terre Blance, Durrheim & Kelly, 2006:321). At first, the researcher mainly collects data and, at the end, the researcher mainly analyses what is collected.

The researcher made use of the method of analysis indicated for an IPA study as it was important to the researcher to capture the participants' accounts of how they experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family. The researcher made use of the steps of data analysis suggested for IPA (Smith & Eatough, 2007:45; Storey, 2007:55). Smith and Eatough (2007:45) as well as Smith and Osborn (2008:67) highlight the fact that these steps are mere guidelines and could be adapted by researchers in light of the specific research aim. Storey (2007:52) mentions that the case study approach accords well with the ideographic commitment of IPA, which starts with the analysis of one case and then moves to the analysis of other cases. While doing the interpretative analysis, the researcher attempted to interpret it from an emphatic point of view. This involves staying close to and focussing on the data, yet with enough distance to see the phenomenon in a new perspective, as suggested by Terre Blanche *et al.* (2006:321). The researcher also followed the recommendation of Smith and Osborn (2008:66), who state that the researcher has to engage with the text in a process of interpretation to capture meanings related to the participant's world. Smith and Eatough's (2007:45) statement that the researcher should also keep a record of thoughts and points that had potential significance while transcribing each interview, was applied to this study.

The following phases were followed during the data analysis process:

#### 3.2.6.1 *Several close readings of the transcript*

With this step, the researcher starts by reading and re-reading an individual transcript to get a 'feel' of the interview (Storey, 2007:54). While the researcher re-reads the transcript several times, notes should be made of anything the participant said that seemed significant or of interest (Smith & Eatough, 2007:4; Smith & Osborn, 2008:67). The researcher read and re-read each transcript and made notes

of information she considered important for the purpose of the study. The researcher found that what Smith and Osborn (2008:68) state held true for this study, as some parts of the interviews were 'richer' than others; and while some comments were simply an overview, others were almost preliminary interpretations. The researcher also made comments about similarities, differences, amplifications and contradictions about what a specific participant was saying.

#### *3.2.6.2 Identifying and labelling themes*

According to Smith and Eatough (2007:46), the purpose of this phase is to transform the initial notes and ideas into more specific themes. Therefore, during this stage, the researcher returned to the transcripts and used the existing notes to produce themes in the right-hand margin. The transformation of initial notes into themes was continued throughout the whole transcript, and a theme title was indicated when repetition of themes occurred, as suggested by Smith and Osborn (2008:69). This process is known as 'coding' and it means that the data is divided into labelled, meaningful pieces, with a view to later cluster the relevant coded material under coded headings (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006:325).

According to Creswell, (2009:187) and Storey (2007:56), the researcher should attempt to ensure that theoretical interpretation arise from the data during the coding process and the researcher therefore applied the aforementioned in this study. The researcher made use of the statement by Terre Blanche *et al.* (2006:323) when using the participant's language to label themes. The researcher started from scratch in the case of each participant and then proceeded to the next phase of linking themes for the study as a whole. The researcher also attempted to look for divergence and convergence as was recommended by Smith and Osborn (2008:74) when analysing the transcripts. The objective of the coding was to identify what was thought to be the most important themes in the transcripts.

#### *3.2.6.3 Linking themes and identifying thematic clusters*

The researcher listed themes on sheets of paper and looked for connections between them as suggested by Smith and Osborn (2008:70). Smith and Osborn (2008:70) state that during this phase the researcher has to make sense of the emerging themes. Therefore, some of the themes were clustered together and some

emerged as subthemes. Inducing themes and codes allowed the researcher to carefully compare sections of text that belonged together. The researcher also made use of elaboration, closely exploring themes to capture the nuances that were not captured during the first coding system as indicated by Terre Blanche *et al.* (2006:326). During this stage, some themes were discarded if they did not have a strong evidence base. Smith and Osborn (2008:70) state that although the researcher should interpret the text, the researcher has to constantly check as to what the participants actually said. Therefore, in this regard, the researcher continuously ensured that the relevant themes corresponded with the actual words that were used by participants.

The researcher kept the following tips stated by Creswell (2009:186-187) in mind when analysing the data. These tips helped the researcher to identify recurrent themes in the data that was analysed. The researcher thus incorporated:

- Codes that are surprising and were not anticipated at the beginning of the study.
- Codes that readers would expect to find based on past literature and common sense.
- Codes that are unusual, or of conceptual interest.
- Codes that address a larger theoretical perspective in the research.

The researcher attempted to apply the following statement to this study made by Terre Blanche *et al.* (2006:326) that coding, elaboration and recoding should continue until no further significant insights emerge.

#### *3.2.6.4 Producing a final table of themes*

During this stage of the research, a table was produced from the analysis of the cases in the study. The table showed each theme with its subordinate subthemes, which convey the conceptual meaning within, as suggested by Smith and Eatough (2007:48).

The researcher thus identified two main themes:

- Participants' experiences in relation to parents.
- Participants' experiences in relation to siblings.

#### *3.2.6.5 Writing up a narrative account*

Smith and Osborn (2008:76) indicate that during the writing up of the narrative account, the meanings inherent to the participants' experiences are emphasised. According to Smith and Eatough (2007:48), it is important to ensure that the participants' account of their experiences are preserved as far as possible, and the researcher attempted to apply this statement by focusing on the participants' unique accounts of their experiences, while interpreting the data. The researcher further agreed with Smith and Eatough (2007:48), who state that the researcher ought to endeavour to provide a close contextual reading of the participants' account in his or her own words as well as different levels of interpretation, clearly indicating the difference between account and interpretation and therefore the researcher attempted to do so in this study.

Smith and Osborn (2008:76) mention further that, during this phase, the researcher attempts to expand the analysis by explaining, illustrating and enhancing the relevant themes. The researcher did this by discussing each theme and subtheme, using illustrations from participants' accounts, and linking these to relevant literature as suggested by Smith and Osborn (2008:76). In this regard, Creswell (2009:189) is of the opinion that themes and subthemes display multiple perspectives from individuals and must be supported with diverse quotations and specific evidence. According to Creswell (2009:189), themes represent the major findings of a study and accordingly, the researcher used themes and subthemes to create headings in the findings section.

#### *3.2.6.6 Interpretation*

Throughout the discussions, the researcher included a personal interpretation as suggested by Creswell (2009:188), which was derived from a comparison with information gleaned from literature and theories. The researcher also suggested new questions that need to be asked based on the findings of the study.

### **3.3 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY**

Yardley (2008:235) states that evaluating the research involves making a judgement about how well the research was done and whether the findings can be regarded as trustworthy and useful. Lincoln and Guba (1985:219) propose the following four constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability in establishing the 'truth' value of qualitative research. The researcher incorporated the work of Smith (2008:238-243) within the framework of Lincoln and Guba and added authenticity as a fifth construct as proposed by Whitemore, Chase and Mandle (2001:530).

#### **3.3.1 Credibility**

Credibility replaces internal validity in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:219). In order to assure credibility, the researcher attempted to ensure that the research subject has been accurately identified and described. In accordance with Schurink, Fouché and De Vos (2011:420), the researcher therefore, attempted to accurately state the parameters of the setting, population and theoretical framework of the study.

Smith (2008:237) asserts that most qualitative researchers generally seek to maximise the benefits of engaging actively with the participants in the study. This means allowing the participants to influence the topic and data, by using open-ended questions, (as well as a semi-structured interview), while also acknowledging and analysing how the researcher may have influenced the findings. The researcher attempted to follow the aforementioned suggestions by applying it to this study. This was achieved through active engagement with the participants during the semi-structured interview, allowing the participants to influence the topic and data and acknowledging that the researcher may have influenced the findings.

Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2009:35) state that crystallisation refers to the validation of results through the use of data collection and analysis. Therefore, an independent coding specialist was utilised to audit the data analysis.

The researcher further attempted to achieve credibility through applying Maree and Van der Westhuizen's (2009:35) recommendation that the supervisor and co-supervisor have to confirm or disapprove the themes and subthemes discovered in the data.

Lastly, the researcher attempted to achieve structural coherence by integrating the loosely connected data into a logical holistic picture in this research document as advised by Krefting (1991:13).

### **3.3.2 Transferability**

Schurink *et al.* (2011:420) indicate that transferability refers to whether the research findings are transferrable from a specific situation to another. Transferability in this research was not applied to generalise the findings, but to use the data to build theory, which could be transferred to other contexts of reconstituted families. The researcher also made use of multiple cases to strengthen the study's usefulness to other cases. According to Smith (2008:238), researchers should aspire that the insights gained from one study would be useful in other contexts with the same similarities, instead of expecting their findings to be replicatable. Therefore, when applied to this study, the researcher aspires that the information gained from the participants' experiences of the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family could be used in studies with similar contexts.

Rich, thick descriptions were used to convey the findings as suggested by Creswell (2009:191). The researcher also applied the statement made by Krefting (1991:4) that data should be described sufficiently in order to allow comparison. The researcher used data to conceptualise different aspects of the study and to illuminate aspects of the findings that were either supported by literature, or differed from what literature asserted.

### **3.3.3 Dependability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985:219) state that dependability replaces reliability in a qualitative study and is concerned with the consistency of findings (Krefting, 1991:14). Seale (2003:172) indicates that peer auditing could achieve dependability, and therefore in this study, the supervisor and co-supervisor conducted a form of auditing of the research methodology used by the researcher.

Schrurink *et al.* (2011:420) asserts that to achieve dependability, the researcher should account whether the research process was logical and well documented. The researcher attempted to do this in Chapter Five. Furthermore, Smith (2008:240) asserts that it should always be possible to provide evidence linking the raw data to the final report. Availability of a paper trail serves to reassure others that the study was documented carefully and professionally. Therefore, the researcher attempted to provide a detailed description of the process that was followed. This included the reason for the study, sampling, data collection procedures, data analysis, a presentation of the findings and a summary of conclusions and recommendations. The researcher also made use of coding and recoding of data as suggested by (Krefting, 1991:15) where the researcher waited at least two weeks after coding data after which she returned to recode the same data and then compared the results.

### **3.3.4 Confirmability**

Seale (2003:172) asserts that auditing is useful in establishing confirmability of a study. Openness about the research process is indicated as an aspect that contributes to crystallisation (Ellingson, 2008:9). The findings were also verified with a literature control and by employing a theoretical perspective as proposed by Krefting (1991:16). For the purpose of the study, this was achieved through an integration of Adlerian theory with Gestalt field theory, with systems theory as the meta-theory. The researcher also had a supervisor who conducted an audit throughout the study and a co-supervisor who conducted an audit towards the end of the study, which enhanced the confirmability of the study as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985:219).

### **3.3.5 Authenticity**

Authenticity is in concordance with the IPA method that was used in this study, which according to Smith and Eatough (2007:36), tries to understand what the phenomenon is like from the participant's point of view. The researcher tried to practice bracketing. According to Joyce and Sills (2001:17), this involves putting aside preconceptions and judgements and being open to this unique person. Therefore, when interviewing the participants, the researcher put aside any preconceived ideas about the participant as well as the subject matter at hand and focused on what this unique participant was sharing during the interview.

Ellingson (2008:13) suggests that to achieve crystallisation the participants' 'voices' (opinion) should be respected and that their accounts should be considered as valid accounts of their experiences. Thus, the researcher attempted to give a valid account of how the participants expressed their experiences of the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family. Finally, the researcher attempted to reflect a central aspect of crystallisation by acknowledging herself as the object of research, according to Ellingson (2008:19). The researcher constantly reflected on her observations, feelings and experiences through journaling and by talking to peers.

### **3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY**

The researcher has an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the participants (Creswell, 2009:198). In this study, the researcher intended to consider the well-being of the participants at all times, based on the Nuremberg Code of Principles governing research using humans, as cited in Weathington, Cunningham and Pittenger (2010:42-43). The researcher also adhered to ethical standard 8 of the APA: Research and Publication regarding human participants cited in Cozby (2007:55).

The researcher gained ethical clearance with the research committee of NWU to commence with this study and the following ethical number, NWU-00060-12-A1, was designated to this study.

The researcher attempted to conduct a study that was safe and minimised the potential risk or harm. The researcher tried to ensure that the participants understood the aim of the study, what would happen in the research process and that participation was voluntary. As a result, the researcher developed a consent form (Addendum B), based on the suggestions of Strydom (2011:115-126) and the APA (2002) guidelines for informed consent (Weathington, *et al.*, 2010:46).

Each participant was provided with a copy of the consent form. As the study was conducted with children, the researcher needed parental consent for participants to take part in the study. The consent form was therefore, discussed with each parent of the participant as well as with the participant before the start of the interview, as

the researcher also needed assent from the children to take part as participants of the study.

Participants were then given the opportunity to ask questions and clarify any uncertainties related to the study. The documents were signed by the parents in agreement of the ethical code of the study and as consent for their children to take part in the study. However, the child participants had to give verbal assent that they were willing to take part in the study, based on the discussion of Addendum B. Only participants who gave assent were interviewed and recorded, as suggested by Cozby (2007:55).

The research was conducted with children and hence the researcher attempted to ensure their safety and well-being as suggested by Evans and Rhooney (2011:54). In accordance with these authors, the researcher attempted to design a study that minimised harm and maximised benefits. Therefore, questions were designed and posed in a way that honoured the participants' well-being. The researcher assured participants that they could choose whether they wanted to share certain information or not. The safety of the study was also monitored by keeping the interviews centred on the children's experiences about the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family.

The researcher explained that participation in this study was voluntary. According to Thompson and Chambers (2012:34), participation may consequently be discontinued at any time without the provision of a reason. Subsequently, the researcher explained that participants could choose to withdraw at any stage of the interview.

Although there is no immediate benefit to society, the findings might be used by parents and professionals working with these children. The only benefit on a personal level for the participants would be that they had the opportunity to voice their experiences. This is in accordance with Thompson and Chambers (2012:30) who state that emotional disclosure in research have been found to be beneficial to participants.

The researcher followed the suggestion of Thompson and Chambers (2012:30) and indicated to the participants that they could access additional support if needed.

The researcher also indicated that no payment would take place in exchange for participation in the study.

According to Strydom (2011:119) confidentiality implies that all information is handled in a confidential manner. The researcher therefore used pseudonyms in the research report to protect the participants' identity. All information in connection with this study remained confidential and was stored on the researcher's personal computer with a password that is only known to the researcher. The information is also to be stored at the Child Youth and Family centre in Wellington in a lockable cabinet. The video recordings were destroyed once the research was complete.

Debriefing was done at the end of the interview in accordance with Nestor and Schutt (2012:461), by evaluating participants' personal reactions regarding their interview. Consequently, at the end of each interview, participants were given some time to reflect on the interview and discuss their experience of taking part in the study. Cozby (2007:57) states that debriefing also entails an opportunity for participants to obtain appropriate information about the results and conclusions of the research. In this case, a copy of the research findings will be available at the completion of the study.

### **3.5 SUMMARY**

The researcher aimed to explain the research process followed in this qualitative study. Specific attention was given to the trustworthiness of the study as well as to ethical aspects that formed part of the study. The main findings of the study will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The chapter starts with an indication of the participants' psychological birth order in the original family system and the repositioning that occurred in the reconstituted family. The aforementioned information is presented as genogram (figures 4.1 – 4.7). The genogram follows a short family background, which is provided to contextualise the repositioning of each participant in the relevant reconstituted family. Thereafter a discussion of the main themes and subthemes will be provided. The chapter ends with a conclusion of the findings. Hereafter, the relevant participants will be referred to as participant A, B, C, D, E, F and G.

#### **4.2 INDICATION OF PARTICIPANTS' PSYCHOLOGICAL BIRTH ORDER**

##### **4.2.1 Background information regarding Participant A**

Participant A's biological father passed away when he was 3 years old. Participant A and an older sister were born from this marriage. His mother remarried when he was 8 years old and his stepfather did not have children at the time. Two children were born from the second marriage. The participant was the psychological youngest in his original family. He was repositioned by his half-brother. All the children reside together permanently in this family and at the time of the research study the family had been reconstituted for about ten years.

### Genogram : Participant A (Psychological Youngest)

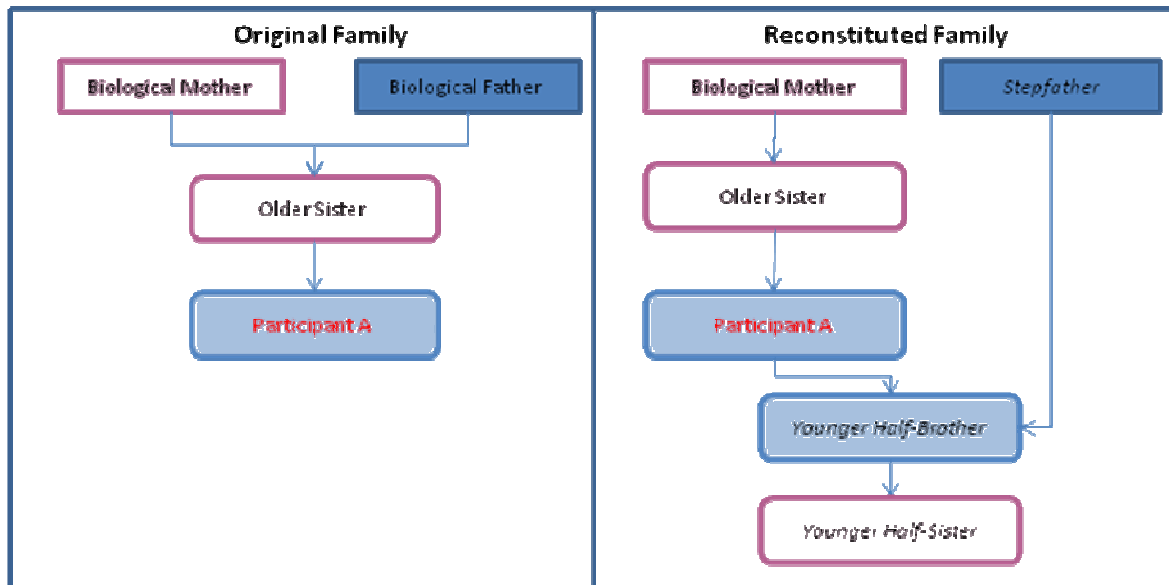


FIGURE 4.1

#### 4.2.2 Background information regarding Participant B

Participant B's father passed away when she was about 2 years old. Participant B and her younger brother were born from this first marriage. Her mother remarried when she was 5 years old. Her stepfather brought his two children into the reconstituted family. All the stepsiblings reside permanently within this reconstituted family and they have been part of this family for eleven years. The stepfather's children visit their biological mother every second weekend. Participant B is a psychological oldest. Participant B's birth order was repositioned by her older stepsister. Although her brother was also repositioned, he was only 2 years old when his mother married his stepfather. Therefore, the brother did not meet the criteria of inclusion for the study.

### Genogram : Participant B (Psychological Oldest)

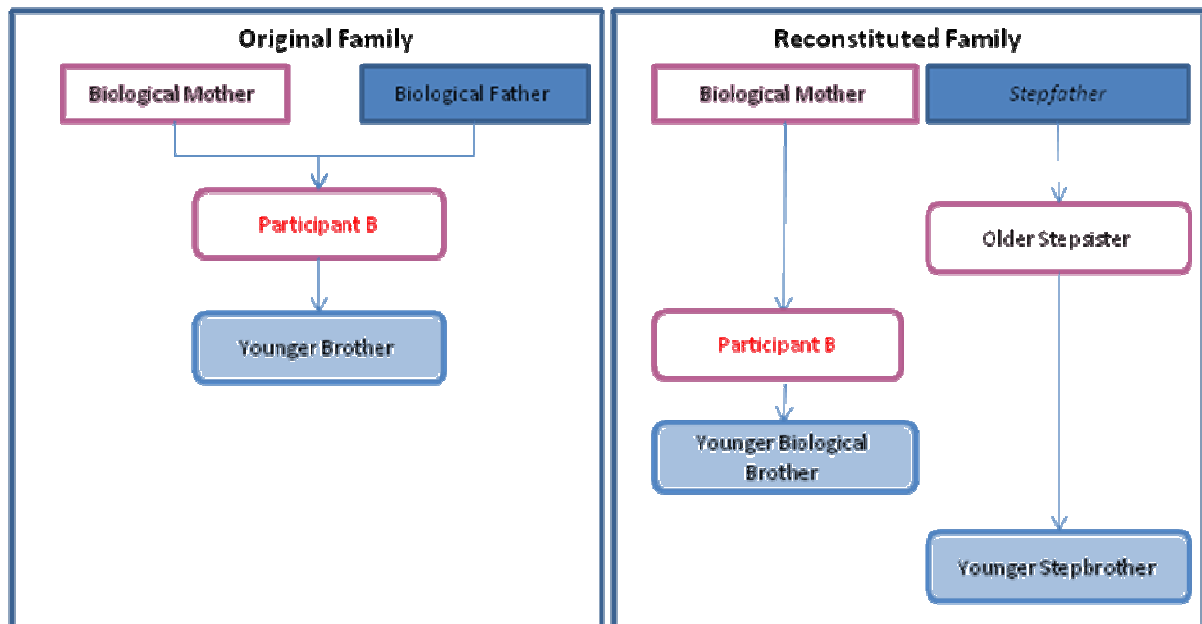


FIGURE 4.2

#### 4.2.3 Background information regarding Participant C

Participant C's mother and father are divorced. Participant C and her younger brother were born from this first marriage. This family reconstituted when the participant was 6 years old and they have been a reconstituted family for three years. Participant C is a psychological oldest. The stepfather has a daughter from his first marriage and she resides permanently with her mother and comes to visit every second weekend and during school holidays.

### Genogram : Participant C (Psychological Oldest)

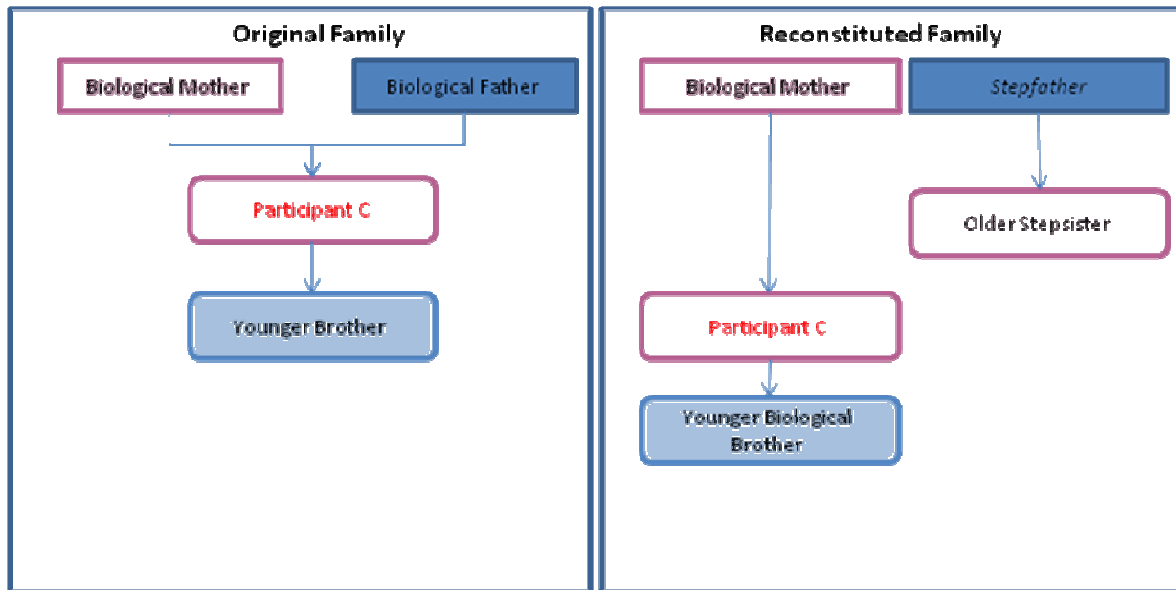


FIGURE 4.3

#### 4.2.4 Background information regarding Participant D

Participant D's parents are divorced and her biological father lives in KwaZulu-Natal. Participant D and her younger brother were born from this marriage. Her mother remarried her stepfather whose wife passed away in 2008. The stepfather brought three children into the reconstituted family. They have been in the reconstituted family for eighteen months. All the children reside together permanently. Participant D is a psychological oldest. Participant D was repositioned by her older stepsister. Her brother was repositioned by the youngest stepsister, but he was too young to take part in the study.

## Genogram : Participant D (Psychological Oldest)

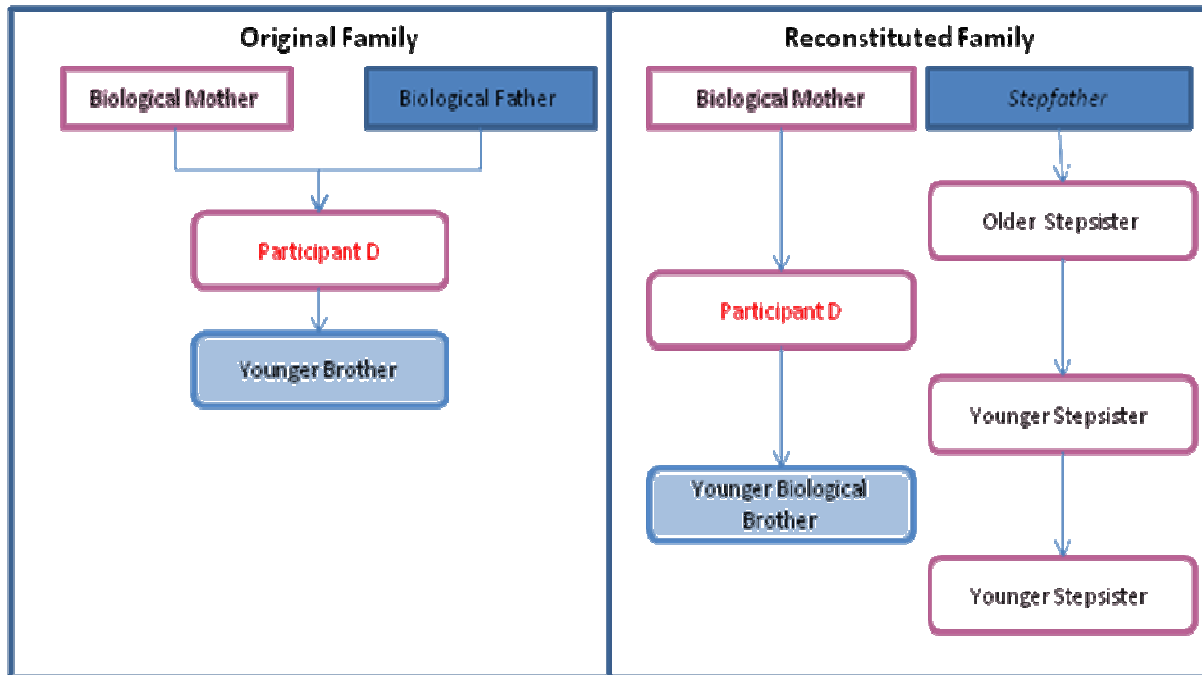


FIGURE 4.4

### 4.2.5 Background information regarding Participant E

Participant E's father passed away nine years ago, but her parents had already been separated since she was 16 months old. Her mother remarried her stepfather and they have been part of the new family system for almost ten years. She was an only child at the time of the remarriage. The three stepchildren only came to visit during long weekends and school holidays. Her stepbrother came to live with them permanently for the five years of his secondary school education when Participant E was seven years old. Her half-sister was born when Participant E was 6 years old. She mentioned that she experienced repositioning when her half-sister was born.

### Genogram : Participant E (Psychological Only)

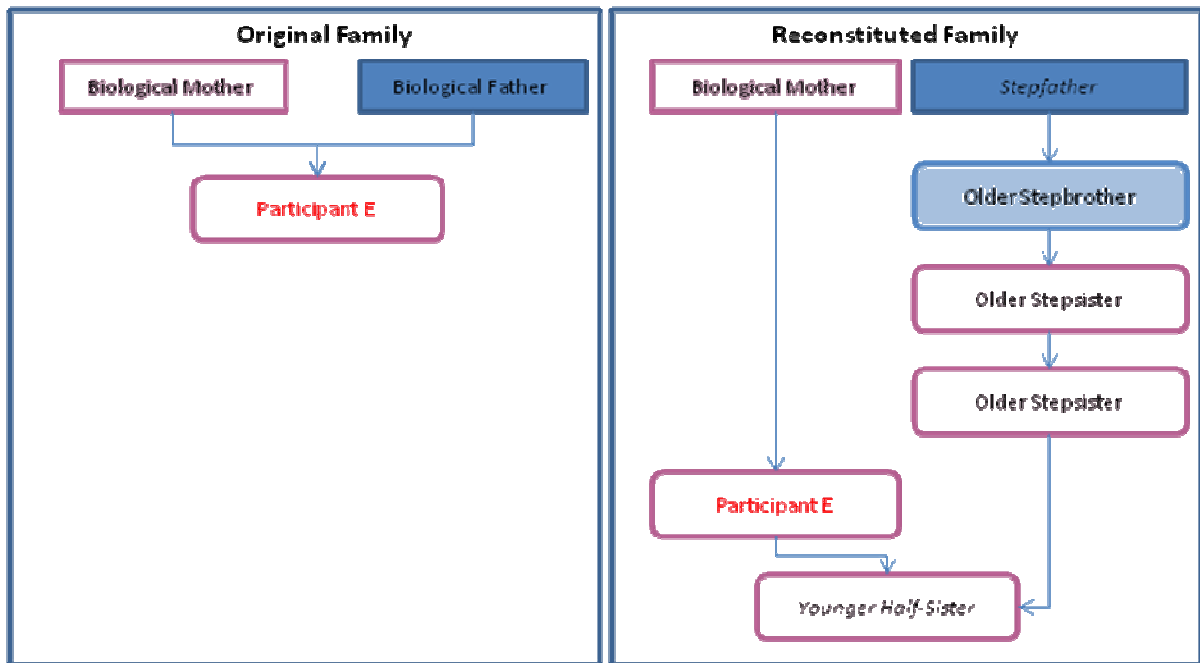


FIGURE 4.5

#### 4.2.6 Background information regarding Participant F

Participant F's parents divorced when she was 6 years old. Participant F and her younger sister were born from this marriage. Her mother remarried her stepfather when Participant F was 7 years old. Her stepfather brought two children into the reconstituted family. All the children have been residing together in this reconstituted family for the past five years. Participant F is a psychological oldest. Participant F was repositioned by her older stepbrother and stepsister. Although her stepsister is only six months older than her, participant F displays the characteristics of a psychological youngest. The researcher was unable to interview the stepsister, who was also repositioned, as consent was not given for this interview to take place.

### Genogram : Participant F (Psychological Oldest)

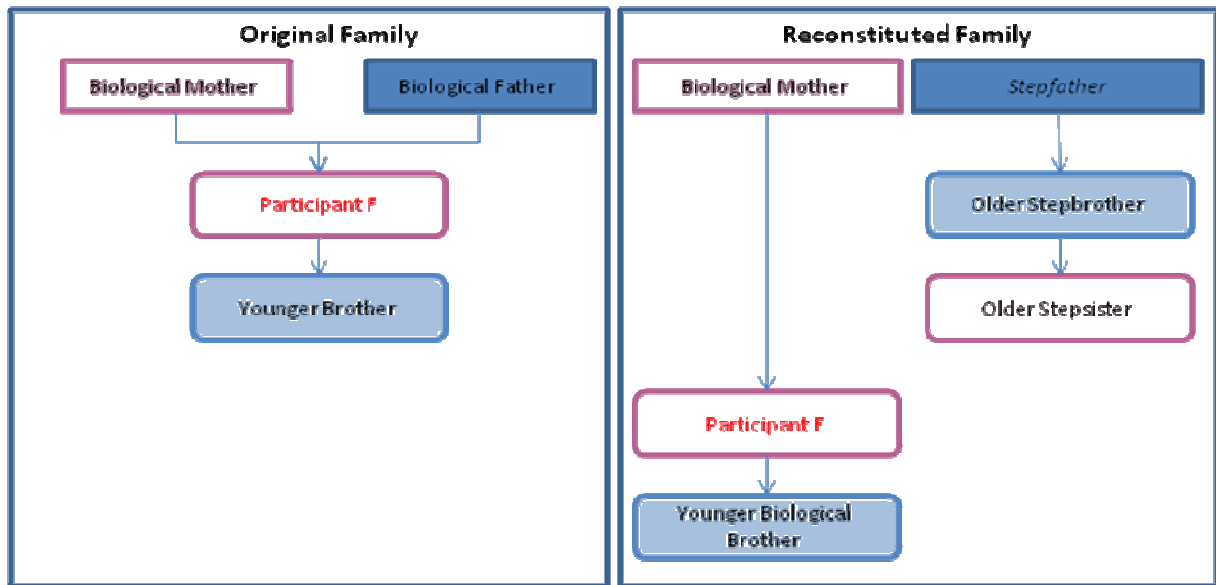


FIGURE 4.6

#### 4.2.7 Background information regarding Participant G

Participant G's mother and father divorced when she was a baby. Participant G and her older sister were born from this marriage. Her mother cohabitates with her fiancé, who does not have children. Participant G and her older sister have been part of this family for three years. Her father has been living with a woman who has a four-year-old son, for the past two years. Participant G lives with her mother and stepfather permanently, but stays with her father on weekends, sometimes only on a Saturday and at other times for the whole weekend (due to her mother's occupation). Participant G is a psychological youngest. She experienced repositioning in her father's home where she is no longer the youngest.

Genogram : Participant G (Physiological Youngest)

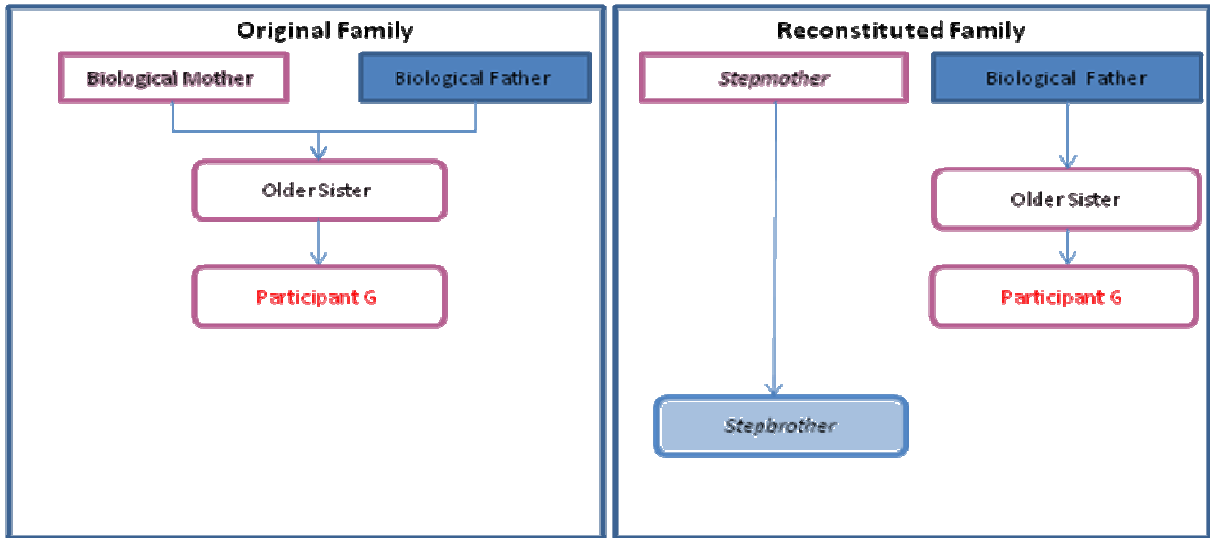


FIGURE 4.7

### 4.3 MAIN THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

For the purpose of the study, the following main themes were identified:

- Participants’ experiences in relation to parents.
- Participants’ experiences in relation to siblings.

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 represent these themes together with their subthemes.

**Table 4.1: Main theme 1 and related subthemes**

Main theme1	Subthemes
Participants’ experiences in relation to parents	<u>Parental treatment</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congruent and incongruent parental treatment</li> <li>• Favouritism and blaming</li> <li>• Responsibility</li> </ul> <u>Adjustment to less time and attention</u>

### **4.3.1 Main Theme One: Participants' experiences in relation to parents**

Parents form an important part of the participants' field and it thus follows that parents play an important role in how participants experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family.

#### *4.3.1.1 Parental treatment*

- *Congruent and incongruent parental treatment*

Congruent parental behaviour refers to children's perceptions of their parents' behaviour towards them as it consisted before and after the family's integration. Children expressed appreciation when their parents' behaviour was congruent to their behaviour prior to the reconstitution of the family. For example, when parents still treated a repositioned first-born as a first born, that child experienced it as confirmation of who they were and their birth order position. For instance, Participant D commented that her mother, "Still treats me as the oldest".

According to Participant B the older stepsister in her reconstituted family was treated as the oldest. However, Participant B felt that she and her stepsister both take the leading role and often their parents will "put both the girls 'in charge'" of their younger brother. Therefore, although her parents treat her sister as the oldest, Participant B still has the opportunity to display her first-born characteristics. Participant B expressed that "it is nice to set an example and feel someone can look up to me". This comment seems to correspond with research by Gfroerer *et al.* (2003:36), who supports the Adlerian view that first borns are achievement-driven and seek leadership roles. Participant C mentioned that although her parents treat her stepsister as the oldest, she does not mind. This is explained by the fact that because participant C's stepsister only came to visit every second weekend and during school holidays, Participant C was still able to display her first-born characteristics most of the time. Seemingly, when children experienced congruency in how they were treated before and after the family reintegration, they express feelings of being confirmed and appreciated.

Mackewn (1997:17) states that often people may undergo feelings of frustration and, sometimes, painful compromises because frequently, people may experience genuine competing values and desires and at times are unable to fulfil these needs.

This statement seems to hold true for Participant F who, together with her stepbrother is a psychological oldest. It follows that they are competing to fulfil their desire to be the oldest, but unfortunately, Participant F is unable to do so. Participant F corroborated this by saying that she cannot take the lead anymore and that she does not "... have a say in things we do anymore". She mentioned that the family now does what the older brother wants to do and that she has "... to submit". It seemed that although Participant F wanted to lead she felt that it was better for her to submit in her new familial field as her parents treat her stepbrother as the oldest. She therefore has to compromise her role of being the psychological oldest in her reconstituted family.

Participant G is eight years old and visits her father's house every weekend where she is not the youngest anymore. She shared that "it is really nice to be the youngest". In her residing home she is still treated as the youngest as she is pampered and spoiled by her mom. Participant G mentioned that when she is not allowed to play computer games, her mother will say, "Quickly play one". She mentioned that in her father's home her half-brother of four is treated as the youngest child. She is therefore unable to fulfil her role of being the youngest child when she visits her father and experiences this as unpleasant. Although Lemansky (2009:67) refers to ordinal birth order, he is of the opinion that children should not be treated as if they had a different birth order within the reconstituted family, as a reconstituted family does not create new birth order positions. Within the context of the study it however seems as if most of the participants experience that they are treated to a different birth order in their reconstituted family.

Interestingly, Ritala-Koskinen (1997:158) mentions that 10- to 13-year-olds are the exception and do not mind when they are not the youngest anymore. The researcher is of the opinion that it could be that they are now pre-teenagers. Ritala-Koskinen (1997:158) asserts that 10- to 13-year-olds who were previously only or youngest children enjoy the feeling of being the older person. They enjoy the changed status (of now being older) that they have, because they now have a younger step- or half-sibling.

In this regard, Participant A, who was 10 years old when his half-brother was born, mentioned that although he enjoyed being the youngest it was a “good experience for him when his half-brother was born”. He also experienced the fact that his parents expected more of him and treated him more like an adult as flattering.

- *Favouritism and blaming*

Parental favouritism refers to the unequal treatment of children by the parents in the reconstituted family. Word and Belanger (2010:159) state that a child may feel secure and valued when favoured by his or her parents. This, however, might contribute to the undermining of the self-confidence of the other siblings. For instance, Participant D mentioned that in their reconstituted family, “My brother and I are my mom’s favourites”. Although Participant D thus experiences favouritism as positive, it nevertheless seems to strain the sibling relationship with her stepsister. This reaction is supported by the Gestalt field theory (Yontef, 1993:306) and systems theory (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2009:156) in that each member of a family is affected by what happens to other members. In this case, favouritism by a parent has an immediate influence on sibling relationships.

Parental favouritism towards the child who caused the repositioning specifically resulted in a negative experience for the repositioned child. It was further evident that parent favouritism not only caused negative experiences to the repositioned child, but also had a negative influence on the sibling relationship. Participant F, for instance, commented that when she did not want to play with her stepsister, her stepsister would run to her father and complain. She further mentioned that she then got into trouble and she felt that: “It’s always like that. No one ever comes up for me”. It therefore seems evident that Participant F feels discouraged by the favouritism towards her half-sibling. In this regard, Adler (1932:142) mentions that it is important that no favouritism should be shown by a parent towards any of the children, as this may lead to discouragement in childhood.

Dekovic and Buist (2005:469) highlight the fact that differential treatment by parents will have an adverse affect on sibling relationships. Although favouritism, according to Strong, DeVault and Cohen (2011:505), also occurs in first marriages, it often takes a different form in reconstituted families and tends to run among lines of kinship. Therefore, the parents tend to favour their biological child. In this regard,

Participant F articulated that her stepfather treats her stepsister, “like a little angel. She is everything to him. I know he loves me, but he will never really listen to my side of the story. It is like he is not interested”.

Beer (1988:130) is of the opinion that stepchildren experience it as unfortunate when stepparents become estranged from their stepchildren after the birth of their own child. Beer’s statement is corroborated by Participant A who expressed that his stepfather used to spoil him, but after his half-brother was born “his [the stepfather’s] attitude changed”, and it felt as if his stepfather was “always angry” towards him. From Participant A’s feedback, it seems as if the stepfather mainly focuses on his biological son, the participant’s half-brother and tends to favour the half-brother. This has affected the relationship between the stepfather and the participant negatively.

Participant E shared that she gets angry with her mother and accused her of favouring her half-sister because her sister would do wrong and not be reprimanded, but if she did things wrong her mother would scold her. Participant E gave examples of the favouritism by mentioning that her mother would “forget” her sister’s punishment, for example “no TV”, but if Participant E watched television when she was not supposed to, her mother would take her phone away. It seems that Participant’s E’s reaction of anger towards her mother correlates with findings of Altus (1990:74) who state that children experience increased feelings of anger and depression when they perceived a sibling to be favoured over them. This favouritism towards Participant E’s half-sister also seems to have an adverse affect on the mother-daughter relationship. In this regard, Participant E expressed that “We [the mother and Participant E] are not close anymore”.

The following comment by Participant F describes the effect that parent favouritism has on a family:

“Every time when we [repositioned child and older stepbrother] fight, my mom will jump in because no one is on my side, not my real sister, not my stepsister, not my stepbrother, then I am always wrong. Even if I am right and my mom takes my side, then my stepdad will take my stepbrother’s side and my mom and I will be wrong and my mom and [stepfather] fight and then it is miserable for a week in the house. It is just terrible. My stepdad will speak to no one.”

Yontef (1993:287), who states that the individual influences the rest of the field and the rest of the field influences the individual, corroborates the abovementioned expressions. It is therefore, evident that parental favouritism towards a sibling affects all the relationships within the reconstituted family.

Another aspect that seems to be experienced by some of the participants has to do with being blamed for things that one of the other siblings did. Stratton (2003:162) states that “blaming in families has a cost” and that although partners may retaliate, children may accept the blame and either feel guilty (Zuk & Zuk in Stratton, 2003:162), or feel the need to repair the alleged damage done. Participant G expressed the following about being blamed: “The worst is that I get scolded when it was him [the stepbrother] because it was him and not me. When my dad scolds [my stepbrother] then she [my stepmom] will say it was me”. According to Participant G her stepmother would for instance say to the participant’s father: “Don’t scold him [stepbrother], it was her”. This aspect has resulted in Participant G not wanting to visit her father anymore and being blamed all the time is making her “feel guilty”.

With regard to blaming, Participant E mentioned that: “If my sister [half-sister] falls, my mom will scold me even if she does not know what happened”. She gave an example of when a fight between her and her half-sister took place. Her half-sister then wanted to climb through the car window and by doing so, bumped her head. The mother immediately took it for granted that Participant E was to blame for her sister bumping her head. From these discussions, it seems as if parent blaming not only affects the emotional well-being of the repositioned child, but also the parent-child relationship.

- *Responsibility*

Within this study it was found that some participants experienced less responsibility, while others experienced more responsibility within their particular reconstituted families. It was interesting to note that participants mentioned that having less responsibility in the new family system contributed to a positive experience of having their psychological birth order repositioned. In this regard, Participant B mentioned that her parents ask her older sister to help her younger brother with schoolwork and not her, and that she prefers it that way. In another instance, the researcher asked

Participant F how it felt not being the oldest child anymore, after which she answered, “the good part is that I don’t have all the responsibility anymore”.

Adler (1932:147), Dunlap (2004:89), and Sulloway (2007:303) state that oldest children are usually responsible and take care of their younger siblings. These oldest children are often entrusted with the responsibility of taking care of the younger siblings. Participant C mentioned that she did not always enjoy taking care of her younger brother and she appreciates it when her stepsister helps her do these tasks. Participant D mentioned that although she changed her brother’s diapers and looked after him when her mother was tired, she “did not want all the responsibility” as she might be blamed if she makes a mistake and her brother follows her example. In the new family system both the older stepsister, Participant D and the younger stepsister are given different tasks to be responsible for, which lessen the responsibility of Participant D as well as the possibility to make a mistake. Therefore, Participant D experiences less responsibility within the reconstituted family as favourable.

However, some of the participants described that they had more household chores than previously or had more responsibility among the siblings, such as being in charge or looking after the other siblings. Added responsibility within the reconstituted family was experienced as negative. Beer (2011:36) quotes an example from his research where conflict occurs among siblings over more chores and responsibilities in the stepfamily. With regard to this study, some participants also shared their negative experiences due to having more chores and responsibilities. Participant E articulated that she had more responsibilities when her stepbrother came to reside with them permanently. In this regard, she mentioned, “I had to do dishes. I never had to do anything before he came. Then I got more work. It was not nice”. She also mentioned that on a Saturday her mother sleeps in and wants the house clean when she wakes up. Her sister just plays and participant E expressed that she has “to do the dishes, do the washing, make all the beds and move the couches”. According to Mackewn (1997:59), an individual’s meaning is influenced by his or her beliefs or according to Adler (1932:2) by the way; in which individuals interpret their reality. To Participant E, having added chores when her stepbrother became part of the family and having more responsibilities than her half-sister was experienced as unpleasant in terms of the repositioning of her psychological birth order in the reconstituted family.

With regard to a comment made by Participant D relating to chores in the reconstituted family it seems that she thought that the added responsibility of extra chores were related to the formation of the reconstituted family. She commented that in her original family, “We did not have chores then”, however, “We have chores now.” She does not seem to be aware that the added chores might be a result of the fact that they are now part of a much larger family and this implies extra work that has to be done. There are five children in this reconstituted family and they were only two children in the original family.

#### *4.3.1.2 Adjustment to less time and attention*

Strong *et al.* (2011:507) mention that in a stepfamily, where parents are harried, time is precious. Kotze (2008:79) indicates further, that the presence of siblings might take time away from the parent-child relationship. Duties are doubled when visiting stepchildren arrive (Strong *et al.*, 2001:507). Stepchildren have to compete for their parents’ time and attention. Participant F for instance mentioned that, “My mom does not spend that much time with us because she has so many kids to drive around and do things everywhere”. Participant F also mentioned that she receives less individual attention from her mother since her mother remarried. Her mother used to teach her how to do things first, as she was the oldest girl. However, “now it is mostly all of us that learn things, like she used to teach me how to bake biscuits, but now she teaches all three girls and I don’t get time with my mom like I used to”.

Participant E seems to have more or less the same experience as she stated, “When it was just my mom and I, we still had a relationship. She only gave attention to me and no one else”. However, it seems as if this relationship changed with the arrival of a half-sibling, after which Participant E had the following experience, “They (parents in the reconstituted family) never listen to you when you talk, never take your side, never listen to your side (of the story)”. According to her, she and her mom do not have a close relationship anymore. The presence of other siblings, whether biological, step or half-, therefore, seems to have an adverse effect on how participants experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order. This mainly has to do with the fact that participants feel that more siblings demand more attention from the parents and the quality of their relationship with their parents had been diminished.

**Table 4.2: Main Theme Two**

<u>MAIN THEME</u>	<u>SUBTHEMES</u>
Participants' experiences in relation to siblings	<p data-bbox="810 331 1289 369"><u>Renegotiating positions and roles</u></p> <ul data-bbox="858 416 1404 846" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="858 416 1305 454">• Age and gender differences</li> <li data-bbox="858 472 1098 510">• Sibling rivalry</li> <li data-bbox="858 528 1404 622">• Feelings of isolation as a result of ineffective negotiations</li> <li data-bbox="858 640 1404 734">• Negotiating for old roles in a new family system</li> <li data-bbox="858 752 1404 846">• Time since the reconstitution of the family</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="810 864 1034 902"><u>Companionship</u></p>

**4.3.2 Main Theme Two: Participants' experiences in relation to siblings**

Tervo (2003:139) asserts that a person's behaviour is experienced and demonstrated in relationship to others. This implies that within a reconstituted family, participants' experience and demonstrate their behaviour in relationship to their biological and stepsiblings. Hetherington, Henderson and Reiss (1999:1211) indicate that within a reconstituted family less positive and more competitive behaviour occur among stepsiblings. This was found to be true in this study.

*4.3.2.1 Renegotiating positions and roles*

Siblings seem to defend their psychological positions in the negotiation for new positions and roles. This often leads to conflict and power struggles. The renegotiation of positions and roles depends on the age and gender differences, the flexibility of children to negotiate for new places as well as the experience of being isolated when negotiations for a position is ineffective.

- *Age and gender differences*

Sulloway (2007:304) notes that:

“Birth order effects were most pronounced when the age spacing between successive children were between two to four years, enough to create inequality in age and size but not enough to disrupt the competitive dynamics that go on between siblings that are reasonably close in age.”

In this regard, Dunn (2004:88) mentions that siblings close in age argue more but at the same time have close bonds. Although Participant D acknowledged that she and her stepsister often argue, she also mentioned that it was nice to have someone of the same gender to talk to.

It further seemed that although children of the same gender experienced severe conflict when the age gap was one to three years, it also seemed that there was intense conflict when the age gap was more than four years, regardless of gender. Participant F and her stepbrother differed more than four years. In this regard, Participant F commented: “We have never gotten along”. During the interview, it was evident that the stepbrother had a vindictive relationship with the participant. The researcher is of the opinion that it might be as a result of other contributing factors (such as having to share his sister) that play a role within the sibling dynamics in a reconstituted family. This could be explored in further research.

However, within this study, conflict was reported in all cases regardless of age gaps, except for Participant B who mentioned that although there was conflict among her and her younger brother, as well as between her older stepsister and her younger brother, she seemed to get along well with all her stepsiblings.

- *Sibling rivalry*

The researcher found that when there are two siblings displaying first-born qualities, it caused a power struggle between the repositioned child and the child that caused the repositioning. Power struggles between participants and siblings are often ongoing and results in conflict among siblings, which is often severe. It seems that Participant F is constantly bossed around by her stepsister, as she commented that, “She [older stepsister] bosses me the whole time. She tries to be the boss. She is very witty, she tries to manage me the whole time”. To further illustrate this,

Participant F mentioned that her older stepsister, “normally has the remote. She’ll put MTV on and I will say we are watching music videos. We don’t want to watch that and she’ll be ugly to me, nasty”. When the researcher asked if the child participant and her stepsister sorted out their conflict, she replied, “No never. It will end up in a fistfight. She believes she is the strongest and I believe I am the strongest”. According to Dunn (in Dunlap, 2004:88), stepsibling rivalry tends to be particularly strong and that these conflicts might lead to aggression in 6 – 9% of sibling conflicts. The aforementioned example does not seem to differ from this viewpoint.

Strong *et al.* (2011:505) indicate “certain types of stepfamily conflicts are of a frequency and intensity or nature that distinguishes them from traditional nuclear families”. Participant F’s relationship with her stepbrother seems to be such a poor relationship where conflict is frequent and very intense. Both these children are psychological oldest children. Participant F, for instance, commented that, “we have never gotten along” and that they have always argued.

According to Participant F, her stepbrother belittles her by making negative comments about her appearance and personal interests. He will say to her: “You have no goals”. He also seemed to be vindictive towards her. Participant F, for instance, referred to an incident where she accidentally tore his mask. Her stepbrother then retaliated by cutting her new doll’s hair off.

It is however interesting to note that it seems that Participant F tries to justify the sibling rivalry and her stepbrother’s negative behaviour towards her by saying that he may feel as if she stole his sister away from him and he has to share his father with everyone in the reconstituted family. Her stepbrother’s mother passed away and from Participant F’s point of view, he only had his sister and father and he now has to share them with the other members in the reconstituted family.

Felson (in Mackey, Fromuth & Kelly, 2010:957), points out that sibling rivalry is often a problem, which stems from the resentment of an older sibling towards a younger sibling stealing parental attention. This might be true in participant E’s family, where the mother, as have been discussed, favoured and gave more attention to the younger half-sibling.

Participant E for instance explained how she and her half-sister fights over almost everything and by the examples that she gave, it became clear that participant E resented the presence of her younger sibling, hence the constant fighting and arguing.

Ongoing conflict between siblings not only has an adverse effect on the children experiencing the repositioning but also on the family atmosphere as a whole. According to Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992:12-13), the entire reconstituted family will be affected by the behaviour of each individual member who is part of the reconstituted family. Therefore, everyone living in the reconstituted family will be affected by ongoing conflict between the repositioned sibling and the sibling that caused the repositioning. In this regard, Participant D mentioned that her oldest stepsister “fights with us, because we are the new kids around”. Participant D and her older stepsister often fight and bicker. Participant D mentioned that, “I wanted a sister, but not one that would boss me around, or be so mean”.

- *Feelings of isolation as a result of ineffective negotiations*

Participant F mentioned that her stepbrother “got along well with her biological sister” but “we argue about everything”. When the two of them fight, she feels that none of the other siblings takes her side. She feels left out because the other three siblings get along. In this regard, Crocker (1999:171-172) mentions that the self is an essential part of the environmental situation and continually responds to the surrounding environment. Participant F does not seem to fit into the sibling subsystem the way she wants to, nor does she occupy the status of being the oldest and as a result she feels left out and this contributes to a undesirable experience for herself.

Feeling left out particularly seemed to influence Participant’s D’s perception of her field. In this regard, Participant D expressed that although the siblings in her reconstituted family were trying to form a relationship, it seemed to her that her older stepsister “does not want to because she is a teenager and teenagers are more like grown-ups”. Therefore, she feels that her older sister is not interested in a relationship with her. She also expressed, “If my older and younger stepsister do things together then I feel left out”. It could be that in this family, adjustment to the reconstituted family and its interrelated relationships are still taking place as this

particular family reconstituted just more than a year earlier. Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992:13) are therefore rightly of the opinion that it takes time to adjust to the new roles and relationships in the stepfamily.

To further explain 'feeling isolated', Participant E shared how she (Participant E) used to feel like an outsider and felt left out when her stepsiblings came to visit, because they did not want to involve her in the games they played. However, Participant E mentioned that now she and her stepsisters got along well as they have more in common. According to Participant E, their half-sister, who is much younger, now feels left out when they visit. Although being left out is experienced as undesirable, the researcher established that being in the same developmental phase also seemed to play an important role in feeling part of the sibling subsystem.

- *Negotiating for old roles in a new family system*

Joyce and Sills (2001:24) assert that the experiential field is the way a person organises his or her experience and it represents his or her reality, unique to him or her. With most oldest children, their reality is associated with power among siblings and privileges from parents (Beer, 2011:59). In a reconstituted family with the repositioning of birth orders, this does not seem to be guaranteed. In this regard, Participant D mentioned, "She [new oldest] had more privileges than me, my bed time changed to that of the younger ones. I was able to watch PG movies, now I am not allowed to watch them anymore". Participant F almost had the same experience when she shared that, "you can't take the lead you always have to follow". She also expressed that "if my stepbrother [new oldest] does it, we must all do it. I don't have a say in things we do anymore". It therefore seems that the loss of privileges, which is associated with being the oldest, is experienced as a negative aspect in the repositioning of psychological birth orders of oldest children.

Furthermore, and as have been stated before, oldest children most often take the lead among their siblings. They also want recognition and strive for perfection and when they lose the ability to do so, it results in an unfavourable experience of the repositioning of their psychological birth order. This seems evident from Participant D's reaction, as she is not recognised as the oldest anymore. Participant F cannot take charge among her siblings anymore.

According to Dunn (2004:87), “Younger siblings tend to admire older siblings and turn to them as key role models and tutors”. In reconstituted families, the difficulty associated with the experience of the repositioning of participants’ psychological birth order is enhanced when siblings start to look up to the new oldest sibling and the repositioned sibling experiences a loss of status coupled with their dethronement. It also seems to have an adverse effect on the sibling relationship and in this regard, Participant F stated:

“I am not my sister’s number one priority. She does not see me as her heroine anymore. She started looking up to my stepsister. I still am the oldest of my family [biological family not reconstituted]. She’s my blood sister and I don’t know why I am from a ten to a three. Now it is like I am nothing, my stepsister is everything.”

The abovementioned discussion supports Adler’s notion that oldest children fear dethronement. With regard to this study, it seems that oldest children experience the dethronement associated with the repositioning of their psychological birth order as distressing.

It was found that the experience of having one’s psychological birth order repositioned seemed to be intensified when siblings in the reconstituted family resided together permanently than when siblings moved in and out of the reconstituted family on weekends and holidays. Concerning permanency, Newman (1994:127) agrees that children are more prone to experience emotional distress as a result of changes in their sibling position when the two sets of children live together permanently than if they don’t.

- *Time since the reconstitution of the family*

Bray (1999:256) mentions that the time elapsed since the divorce and the remarriage is an important factor to take into consideration when looking at the reconstituted family. According to Hetherington (1999:2), it takes approximately five years for the family to stabilise after the reconstitution has taken place. Some children reported that they had more conflict with their siblings in the first few years of the reconstituted family and that after a few years the experience became more positive. Participant B mentioned that when they were younger they did not really get along, but now they got along well. Participant E also mentioned, “In the beginning I irritated them like all

small kids do, but now we are close”, regarding her relationship with her older stepsiblings. Both these participants were part of their reconstituted family for more than five years.

However, although more than five years since the reconstitution of Participant A’s family has passed, it seems that the relationship between him and his brother has worsened. Participant A reported that the experience was more positive when his half-sibling was born (he was excited to have a younger brother), but mentions that he and his half-brother now fight more often. Nevertheless, other factors than time might influence this relationship as the new half-brother developed as a psychological oldest and is very bossy.

#### *4.3.2.2 Companionship*

Companionship in this research refers to the friendships between siblings. In this regard, Dunn, Kendrick, Ellis, Rogoff and Cromer (in McMurray Smith, 2007:27), and Furman and Buhrmeister (in McMurray Smith, 2007:27) respectively indicate that siblings are important sources of companionship for young children and pre-adolescents.

Some of the participants expressed that having a step- or half-sibling as a companion to play with, and as part of their new field, contributed to a favourable experience for them. Participant C expressed that, “I used to play alone, now when my stepsister comes we play Barbies”. Participant A mentioned that, “When he came [when the half-brother was born] we were always playing because he is a boy”. When asking Participant D what it was like not being the only girl anymore she answered, “That’s actually nice then I can talk about girl stuff, not boy stuff”. Participant B said: “We tell each other everything, the nicest is to do everything together”. According to Hinde (in McMurray Smith, 2007:28), siblings “are well placed to become confidants given the unique reciprocal (mutual sharing and playing) and complementary (instrumental support) features of their relationship”, in the context of their shared environment.

From the research data, it therefore became evident that siblings who did not have a same gender sibling in the original family system and now had a sibling of the same gender experienced companionship in their stepsibling relationship. This companionship contributed to a favourable experience of the repositioning of their psychological birth order.

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

From the above discussions of the main themes and subthemes it became clear that participants' environmental field played an important role in how they experienced their repositioning. The researcher found that within this environmental field the different subsystems of which participants are part, all influenced participants' experiences. It thus seemed that the parental and sibling relationships had the most influence on how participants experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth in a reconstituted family.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **INTEGRATED SUMMARY OF THE STUDY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this chapter is to determine whether the research question was answered. The researcher will also present a summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations based on the results of the study in this chapter.

#### **5.2 AIM**

The aim of this study was to explore and describe children's experiences of the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family. It was the intention of the researcher to provide a better understanding of the experience of children in a reconstituted family to aid parents of children who have experienced the repositioning of their birth order and to assist professionals working with such children. Although this study was of limited scope, it could be used as a starting point for future research.

A qualitative approach with an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) design was used to gain an understanding of how children experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family. The sample was selected from the population through purposive and referral sampling. In order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experience, seven semi-structured interviews with the relevant participants were conducted. The face-to-face interviews were videotaped with consent and field notes were taken. The interviews were then transcribed, thereafter analysed, and themes and subthemes were identified. These results were discussed in Chapter 4.

A discussion was held with the residing parent to determine the participants' psychological birth order and to gain background information concerning the original and reconstituted families.

To realise the aim of this study, the researcher provided a conceptual framework for the study, which formed part of the literature study in Chapter 2. Chapter 2 also included a discussion of psychological birth order, reconstituted families and the theories underpinning the study. These theories included systems theory as the meta-theory; Adlerian theory that described the individual within his or her system or field, and Gestalt field theory which explained the interaction between the individual and the different systems of which he or she are a part. Gestalt field theory formed the lens through which the study was conducted.

An empirical study was conducted where semi-structured interviews were utilised as a data collection method with children who experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family after the age of five. The researcher analysed the data through several readings of the transcribed interviews and by analysing each case as well as across cases to generate the research findings. The researcher made use of concurrent literature to verify the findings of the study. The literature control served the purpose of triangulating the data to validate the findings of the study.

The findings of the study were presented by discussing the main themes and subthemes in Chapter 4. Conclusions and recommendations for parents and therapists working with children who experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family will be provided in this chapter.

The researcher therefore asserts that the aim of this study was met.

### **5.3 EVALUATION OF ANSWER TO THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

The following research question was formulated for this study:

**How do children experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family?**

The two main themes that were identified were as follows:

- Participants' experiences in relation to parents.
- Participants' experiences in relation to siblings.

These themes were further divided into subthemes and were discussed and verified with literature in Chapter 4.

Conclusions and recommendations are provided in this chapter to parents whose children experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order and to professionals who work with these children who experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family.

#### **5.4 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

In this study, the focus was on how children experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order in the field of the reconstituted family. Each participant contributed to the study phenomenologically.

The researcher applied the suggestion of Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (in Parlett, 2005:44), who indicate that each investigation should look at the interaction between an organism and their environment, and by remembering that the field is interacting. This was kept in mind when the children who experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order in the reconstituted family were interviewed.

In this study, the various aspects of the participants' environment as well as their psychological birth order were brought together in an attempt to understand how they experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order in the reconstituted family. As a result, the internal aspects related to their experiential field or the way in which they organise their reality were taken into account.

The children's original psychological birth order as well as all aspects related to their relationships with their residential and non-residential parents, stepparents, siblings, stepsiblings and the interrelationships between all of the abovementioned subsystems affected how the children experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order in the reconstituted family. All aspects of the field mentioned by the participants were considered as equally significant, and interrelated as suggested by (Mackewn, 1997:58). Consequently, the individual meaning each participant gave to the experience of the repositioning of their psychological birth order in the context of the reconstituted family was taken into account during analysis of the results and identification of the themes and subthemes.

Although many aspects in the field could affect the children's experience of their repositioning, this study highlighted the key aspects pertaining to the parental and sibling relationships that affected the participants' experience of the repositioning of their psychological birth order. It appears that parental treatment of the repositioned participants in the reconstituted family is pivotal to how participants experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order.

Through the data analysis, it became clear that children still displayed the characteristics of their original psychological birth order in the reconstituted family. Therefore, parents treating participants congruent to their original birth order or not, played an important role in determining how participants experienced their repositioning. It therefore appeared that Newman's (1994:126) statement that children would maintain most of their personality traits associated with their original birth order seemed to hold true in this study as participants also wanted to be treated accordingly.

Participants seemed to also enjoy being favoured by their parents. However, when a sibling who caused repositioning was favoured, it had a detrimental effect on the parent or stepparent-child relationship, as well as on the family as a whole. Being blamed was experienced as an undesirable aspect related to the children's repositioning, as it seemed that the participants felt that their parent took their sibling's side and that the participants were falsely accused. Blaming thus leads to a diminished parent-child relationship and participants who experienced this often, expressed resentment in this particular sibling relationship. In some instances, participants experienced that they had less responsibility since the reconstitution of their family due to shared responsibilities with a stepsibling and they experienced this as favourable. However, participants disliked having more responsibility as well as chores within the reconstituted family. They seemed to be oblivious to the fact that in a larger family there are more responsibilities and chores. Participants experienced that, since the reconstitution of the family, their parents seem to spend less time with and pay less attention to them, resulting in a diminished relationship with their parents.

Sibling rivalry emerged as part of many participants' renegotiation for positions and roles within the new sibling subsystem. Conflict seemed to be reported by all participants as part of the renegotiation process, regardless of age and gender. Participants attributed a feeling of isolation within the new sibling subsystem due to ineffective negotiation with their siblings. This feeling of isolation from the new sibling subsystem often resulted in conflict with their siblings and seemed to affect their sibling relationships adversely. Participants also seemed to negotiate for their old psychological birth order roles within the new subsystem and seemed frustrated when they were unable to do so. The time elapsed since the reconstitution of their families, also seemed to influence the participants' experience of the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family. Participants who had a sibling from the opposite gender in their family of origin seemed to enjoy the companionship of a step- or half-sibling of the same gender.

## **5.5 CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY**

Within this study, the researcher came to the following conclusions:

- It seems that many of the challenges associated with the children's repositioning might be because parents do not understand the repositioning of psychological birth order. Parents might be unaware of the fact that children still display their original psychological birth order characteristics in the reconstituted family and want to be treated accordingly. It seems as if parents have not acknowledged this fact, because oldest and youngest children mentioned that they were not treated as congruent to their psychological birth order in their reconstituted family.
- It also seems that parental treatment plays a crucial role in how children experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order. Aspects such as parental blaming and favouritism of a sibling other than the participant, as well as less time spent with parents were mentioned. From all these aspects, it seemed that parental favouritism of the child who caused the repositioning had the most adverse affect on the family as a whole. Children's sense of self, the parent-child relationships, sibling relationships, the parent-stepparent relationships, and the family as a whole seemed to be influenced by the aforementioned form of favouritism. It could well be that parents were either

unaware of how they treated their children in the reconstituted family or they could have been focused on their own adjustment within the reconstituted family, which might explain how they treated their children in the reconstituted family.

- Experiencing the repositioning of psychological birth order could be seen as an added stressor for children in the reconstituted family. The reason for this could be that children have to renegotiate for their old roles and positions in the 'new' family system, which often results in painful compromises if they are unable to do so. Children further have to adjust to the new members that now form part of their family, which also involves adjusting to siblings that are of the same psychological birth order.
- Children often seemed to struggle to negotiate for a role in the new sibling subsystem and an inability to do so leads to a feeling of isolation. The researcher is of the opinion that this might lead to discouragement of the child who experiences the repositioning of his or her psychological birth order.
- The researcher believes that when siblings and step- or half-siblings reside together permanently, they experience their repositioning more intensely because they are forced to renegotiate roles and positions in the new family system.
- The researcher is of the opinion that the sense of self of the child who is experiencing the repositioning of his or her birth order might be influenced adversely. For instance, if the inability to display their first-born qualities is coupled with dethronement and a loss of privileges associated with their birth order, this might lead to problematic internalising as well as externalising behaviour.
- Companionship with a sibling of the same gender, however, seems to aid the adjustment process to new positions and roles within the sibling subsystem.
- The researcher concludes that not only did the whole field play a role in how children experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order, but the family as a whole was also affected by how children experienced the

repositioning of their psychological birth order in the reconstituted family. This can be explained against the backdrop of the field as well as systems theory, which indicate that all relationships within the reconstituted family are interconnected and interrelated, and this means all the members of the family reciprocally affected each other.

## **5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The researcher would like to make the following recommendations based on the findings of the study regarding how children experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order within a reconstituted family.

### **5.6.1 Recommendations to Parents**

- It would be advantageous if parents familiarise themselves with the characteristics related to each psychological birth order, because that not only affects how children experience their repositioning, but children also seem to respond according to their original birth order within a reconstituted family.
- Parents should know that parental treatment plays an important role in how their children experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order.
- Parents ought to treat repositioned children congruent to their original birth order, especially in the case of oldest children.
- Parents have to attempt to delegate responsibilities fairly among all the children in a reconstituted family, taking their age as well as birth order into account.
- Parents must avoid favouritism and blaming within the reconstituted family.
- Parents must be sensitive to the fact that less attention affects children negatively in the reconstituted family.
- Parents ought to be aware that the repositioning of psychological birth order has a reciprocal affect between the children who experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order and their siblings as well as stepsiblings.

- Parents should understand that a power struggle often occurs between the repositioned sibling and the sibling that caused the repositioning. Especially when there are two psychological oldest, youngest, an oldest and youngest or an only child who experienced repositioning in a reconstituted family.
- Parents must be aware that repositioned children often experience dethronement as a result of the fact that they were repositioned within the reconstituted family and this not only influences the repositioned child negatively but also impacts on the sibling relationships.
- Parents have to be conscious of the fact that children need time to adjust to their repositioning.
- Parents ought to be aware of the fact that repositioned children often struggle to fit into the new sibling subsystem and should actively assist children in the adjustment process of fitting into the new sibling subsystem within a reconstituted family.
- Children seem to experience their repositioning more intensely when the siblings and the step- or half-siblings reside together permanently.
- Parents have to be aware that the repositioning of psychological birth order seems to be an added stressor that children have to deal with in a reconstituted family and plays an important role in their adjustment within the reconstituted family.
- If the children display enduring, externalising or internalising problems related to the experience of having their psychological birth order repositioned, professional help should be sought.

### **5.6.2 Recommendations to Professionals**

- Professionals need to familiarise themselves with the concepts of ordinal birth order, psychological birth order and repositioning of psychological birth order in a reconstituted family.
- Professionals especially need to familiarise themselves with the related birth order characteristics associated with each psychological birth order as this would help them understand these children.
- Workshops could also be presented to professionals in order to enhance their understanding of how to work with children who experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order as well as their families.

### **5.7 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.**

- This study provided insight into children's experiences of the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family.
- The study has potential significance in helping parents and professionals dealing with children who experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order due to being part of a reconstituted family.
- A limitation of the study was that the sample was not completely representative of all races within the South African context and could thus, only be applied to Caucasian children and families.

### **5.8 FUTURE RESEARCH**

In terms of future research, the following recommendations are made:

- Future research could replicate this study in a multi-cultural context.
- Future research could be done on a larger sample size and be more in depth.
- A future research study could include psychological middle children to gain more knowledge of their experience of having an added middle sibling in the reconstituted family.

- Future research could also interview the child who caused the repositioning to gain insight into his or her perspective of having a sibling of the same psychological birth order in a reconstituted family.
- A programme can be developed to assist reconstituted families to help children who have experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order.

## **5.9 FINAL COMMENT**

The researcher is of the opinion that the research question was answered and the goal for the study was met adequately. The researcher attempted to adhere to ethical conduct throughout the study and tried to ensure that the study was trustworthy.

The researcher thus proposes that this study provided insight into how children experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family and therefore expanded the existing knowledge base on this specific topic. The researcher further postulates that this knowledge could aid parents whose children experienced the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family to understand and treat their children better. The conclusions reached in this study may also aid professionals working with these children.

The researcher hopes that the findings of this study will be put to good use, and make a difference in relation to the understanding and treatment of children who experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family.

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## ADDENDUM A – Letter for Participation



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY<sup>®</sup>  
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NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT  
POTCHEFSTROOMKAMPUS

Sentrum vir Kinder-, Jeug- en Familiestudies  
Hoek van Oos en Kollegestraat  
**Wellington**  
7655

Tel: 021 8643593

Faks: 021 8642654

Dear parent,

I am currently doing research on children's experiences of having their psychological birth order repositioned within the reconstituted family. Repositioning refers to when both parents bring children into the reconstituted family and the position of the children in the new family change, for example an only child gains siblings or an oldest child is no longer the oldest or a youngest child is no longer the youngest. The repositioning should have occurred after the age of five. This study forms part of the completion of my degree in Masters of Psychology at the North-West University.

I would like to conduct an interview with your child on this particular experience. The child needs to be of schoolgoing age. I would also like to have a discussion with the residing parent to gain some background information on the family and to determine the children's psychological birth order.

Please could you indicate whether you are willing/not willing to participate in this study? If you are willing to participate, could you please provide a contact number below.

Parent cell number:

If you have any queries please feel welcome to contact me on 083 308 2619.

Kind regards,

Lizelle van Jaarsveld

## ADDENDUM B – Consent Form



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY<sup>®</sup>  
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7655

Tel: 021 8643593

Faks: 021 8642654

Dear parent,

The researcher would like to explain certain aspects related to the study to you so that you will know what the study is about, how it will be conducted, understand that participation is voluntary and be assured that the researcher intends to adhere to a high ethical standard. Your child will only be interviewed if you give written consent for him or her to participate.

Your child is asked to participate in a research study conducted by Lizelle van Jaarsveld, from the Centre for Child, Youth and Family studies at the University of North-West. The research is done in part fulfilment of a Masters degree in Psychology.

**Title of the research: Children's experiences of the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family.**

### **Purpose of the study**

The aim of the research is to explore how children experience the repositioning of their birth order within the reconstituted family. Your child's input will help to gain a better understanding of how children experience the repositioning of their psychological birth order in a reconstituted family.

## **Procedures**

Should you give consent and your child chooses to participate in this study the researcher will have a face-to face interview with him or her. The interview will help the researcher gain a better understanding of how this repositioning is experienced by the child. The interview will last about one hour, it will be videotaped with you/ your child's permission and transcribed. All data (information obtained from the interview) will be stored in a safe place and will only be accessible to the researcher. During the interview, your child will be asked a few questions related to their experience of not having the same birth order in the reconstituted family as before.

The researcher would also like to have a discussion with you, as the parent, to determine the child's psychological birth order and to gain some background information on the original and reconstituted family. Feedback, if requested, will be provided to you and your child before the final report is published.

## **Potential risks and discomforts**

The study will be using interviews to explore your child's experiences of the repositioning of his/her psychological birth order within the reconstituted family. This may cause your child to feel some discomfort when sharing information, but it will be the child's choice what he/she wants to share. If your child or yourself feel uncomfortable during the interview because of emotional pain, the interview will be stopped and the researcher will organise for your child to receive the necessary support. The researcher will be available to address any queries, issues, concerns and provide your child with the necessary support in the form of recommendations, information or referrals. The child may withdraw at any stage of the study.

It will also be your choice of what you are comfortable with in sharing with the interviewer during the discussion that will be held with you.

## **Potential benefit to subject/society**

There is no immediate benefit expected from this research. However, the findings of this study can contribute to the expansion of existing knowledge about children and their experiences of the repositioning of their psychological birth order within the reconstituted family. This study can also form the groundwork to enhance future

adaptation of the child who experiences the repositioning of psychological birth order within the reconstituted family. Your child will be granted an opportunity to voice his/her experience.

### **Payment for participation**

No payment will be made for participation in this research study, nor will any fees be charged by the researcher.

### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality will be maintained by using pseudo names for each participant to make sure that your child's identity is protected. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you or your child will remain confidential. All data will be labelled with pseudo codes and stored in a locked file on the researcher's personal computer that is protected by a password only known to the researcher.

The researcher's supervisor and the associated university will have access to the information, but no identities of the research participants will be revealed. Data will be stored in a lockable cabinet at the centre of Child Youth and Family studies in Wellington. Interviews with the participants are to be videoed for reference purposes and will be destroyed once the research is complete.

The final research report, using pseudo names, will be published at North-West University.

### **Participation and Withdrawal**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If your child chooses to take part in this study, he or she may withdraw at any time without any consequences. Your child may also refuse to answer any questions. The researcher may withdraw your child if any circumstance arises that warrants doing so. Your signature and your child's verbal assent indicate that you have agreed for your child to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this consent form.

**Identification of researcher**

If you have any questions or concerns about research, please feel free to contact Lizelle van Jaarsveld (student) by telephone (083 3082619) or by e-mail ([lizelle@pro7.co.za](mailto:lizelle@pro7.co.za)), or my study leader, Mrs. I. Jacobs, at 021 8643593 or 21829446@nwu.ac.za.

**Rights of research subjects**

You or your child may withdraw his/her consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. Your child is not waiving any claims, rights or remedies because of his/her participation in the research study. If you or your child has any questions regarding his/her rights as a research participant, contact Mrs. Van Jaarsveld or Mrs. Jacobs.

**Signature of research participant or legal representative:**

The information above was explained to [me / the participant]\_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_ [name of relevant person] in [Afrikaans/English] and I understand this language or it was translated in a satisfactory manner to me. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent that my child as the participant may participate in this study. I further give consent to take part in a discussion to determine my child’s psychological birth order and to gain familial background about the original and reconstituted families. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participants.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature.

Signature of Researcher

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ (participant and parent). The explanation was conducted in [Afrikaans/ English] and no translator was used.

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**Signature of Investigator**

---

**Signature of Supervisor**

## **ADDENDUM C – Determining of Child’s Psychological Birth Order**

### **Background information**

#### **Before remarriage**

- How many children do you have? What is their gender?
- What are the ages of your children?
- Which of your children were taking the role of being the leader, were more responsible, were more rule-conscious among their siblings before you were remarried? *(Determines psychological oldest child.)*
- Does this child tend to be a perfectionist? Does this child tend to want to please authority? *(Determines psychological oldest child.)*
- Are there any children that might feel that they are less loved, less important than their siblings, or ‘squeezed out’ of the family? *(Determines psychological middle child).*
- Who was pampered most by the other siblings? Did this particular child also get other siblings to do things for them? *(Determines psychological youngest child.)*
- If you have an age gap of more than five years between one of your children and the child just older than them, would you please describe this child? *(Determines psychological oldest or youngest child.)*
- If the gender between your oldest and second oldest child differs, would you say that only the oldest child or both of them display characteristics related to that of an oldest child? *(Determines psychological oldest child.)*

### **Reconstituted family**

- How long have you been remarried/living together?
- Please could you explain the new family system in terms of ages and gender to me.
- Who is taking the leader role or responsible role in the current family?
- Who do you treat as having the role of oldest within the new family system?
- Is there a youngest child that now has a step- or half-sibling that is younger?
- Who is now treated as the youngest?

## **ADDENDUM C – Bepaling van Kind se Geboorte-orde en Agtergrondgeskiedenis**

### **Vorige gesinsisteem**

- Hoeveel kinders het u? Wat is hul geslag?
- Wat is die ouderdomme van die kinders?
- Wie van die kinders neem meestal die leidende rol en is meer verantwoordelik, reëlgebonde en prestasie-georiënteerd? (*Bepaal psigologiese oudste kind.*)
- Is hierdie kind geneig om perfeksionisties te wees? Wil hierdie kind gewoonlik outoriteitsfigure behaag? (*Bepaal psigologiese oudste kind.*)
- Is daar enige van die kinders wat moontlik minder belangrik of geliefd voel as hul ander of voel hul dat hul deur die ander sibbe 'uitgedruk' word? (*Bepaal psigologiese middelkind.*)
- Wie is die meeste bederf deur die ander sibbe? Het hierdie spesifieke kind ook vir die ander kinders gevra om vir haar of hom take te verrig/goed te doen? (*Bepaal psigologiese jongste kind.*)
- As daar 'n gaping van vyf jaar of meer tussen een van u kinders is, hoe sal u daardie kind beskryf? (*Bepaal psigologiese oudste of jongste kind.*)
- Indien u oudste en tweede oudste kinders se geslag verskil, sou u sê dat slegs die oudste kind of albei kinders karaktertrekke van 'n oudste kind toon? (*Bepaal psigologiese oudste kind.*)

### **Nuwe gesin (Hersaamgestelde gesin)**

- Hoe lank is jul al deel van die nuwe gesin?
- Kan u asseblief vir my die nuwe gesin in terme van geslag en ouderdomme beskryf.
- Wie neem nou die leier of verantwoordelike rol in die huidige gesin aan?
- Wie word as die oudste behandel?
- Is daar 'n jongste kind wat nou 'n stief- of 'n halfbroer- of suster bygekry het?
- Wie word nou as die jongste kind behandel?

## **ADDENDUM D – Interview Schedule: Only Child**

- How old are you?
- Do you have any brothers or sisters or any stepbrothers/stepsisters?
- How old are they?
- Do they live with you permanently?

### **Only Child**

#### Previous family system

- Could you please describe being an only child?

#### New family system

- Did it change in the new family?
- Could you describe how this is for you?

## **ADDENDUM D – Interview Schedule: Oldest Child**

- How old are you?
- Do you have any brothers or sisters or any stepbrothers/stepsisters?
- How old are they?
- Do they live with you permanently?

### **Oldest**

#### Previous family system

- Could you please describe being the oldest child?

#### New family system

- What has changed?
- Could you describe how this is for you?

## **ADDENDUM D – Interview Schedule: Youngest Child**

- How old are you?
- Do you have any brothers or sisters or any stepbrothers/stepsisters?
- How old are they?
- Do they live with you permanently?

### **Youngest:**

#### Previous family system

- Could you please describe how it was being the youngest in your family?

#### New family system

- What has changed?
- Could you describe how this is for you?

## **ADDENDUM D – Onderhoudskedule: Enigste kind**

- Hoe oud is jy?
- Het jy enige boeties/sussies of stiefboeties/stiefsussies?
- Hoe oud is hulle?
- Bly hul permanent by julle?

### **Enigste kind**

#### Vorige gesin

- Kan jy asseblief vir my vertel/beskryf hoe dit is om 'n enigste kind te wees?

#### Nuwe gesin

- Het dit in die nuwe gesin verander?
- Hoe het jy dit ervaar?

## **ADDENDUM D – Onderhoudskedule: Oudste kind**

- Hoe oud is jy?
- Het jy enige boeties/sussies of stiefboeties/stiefsussies?
- Hoe oud is hulle?
- Bly hul permanent by julle?

### **Oudste kind**

#### Vorige gesin

- Kan jy vir my vertel hoe dit is om die oudste te wees?

#### Nuwe gesin

- Het dit in die nuwe gesin verander?
- Hoe het jy dit ervaar?

## **ADDENDUM D – Onderhoudskedule: Jongste kind**

- Hoe oud is jy?
- Het jy enige boeties/sussies of stiefboeties/stiefsussies?
- Hoe oud is hulle?
- Bly hul permanent by julle?

### **Jongste kind**

#### Vorige gesin

- Kan jy vir my vertel hoe dit is om die jongste te wees?

#### Nuwe gesin

- Het dit in die nuwe gesin verander?
- Hoe het jy dit ervaar?