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On possibility, the researchers

say, is family dynamics. When new siblings arrive, they siphon off parental attention, and in response firstborns feel the need to compete more and cooperate less. The behavior of children without siblings fits that explanation: They behaved like middle and lastborns. "That suggests that what influences cooperative behavior isn't being born first ... but instead a child changes his behavior when another sibling arrives," Courtiol says. He cautions, however, that although birth order is a stronger influence than other factors studied, it explains less than 10% of the variation in subjects' game behavior.

Personality researcher Del Paulhus of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, in Canada says that the findings make sense, but he offers an alternative interpretation. "All the strength and maturity is in [firstborns'] hands for a number of years," Paulhus says. "So they don't have to go out of their way to bargain or tradeoff with other siblings." And the finding that laterborns cooperate more jives with the theory that they are the bigger risk-takers, says evolutionary psychologist Frank Sulloway of the University of California, Berkeley. "Cooperation [as a strategy] often entails risks, because cooperation isn't always reciprocated."

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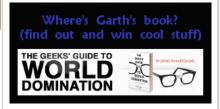
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