

Katherine Kim  
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Final story: Students on Sibling Academic Performance Study

Participants of an informal survey conducted on the Rutgers New Brunswick campus last week supported the study done by professors in September stating that parenting strategies played a large role in their children's academic performance.

The study done by Dr. V. Joseph Hotz and Dr. Juan Pantano entitled "Strategic Planning, Birth Order and School Performance" for the National Bureau of Economic Research claimed that firstborn children are more likely to perform better academically than later born children. Although the study acknowledged that there are many other existing hypotheses specifically about birth order to explain why firstborn children often tend to have the higher marks, it attributed parents' methods of raising children as the main factor in this trend among siblings.

Dr. David Wilder, a professor in the Department of Social Psychology at Rutgers, supported the claims made in the study by emphasizing the parents' influence in their children's resulting capability for achievement. As a parent and a brother, Dr. Wilder drew upon experiences from both situations in stating his opinion.

"First-borns get a more enriched adult environment, while younger siblings have to compete for their attention," said Dr. Wilder. "Multiple factors play a role, but the environment plays a huge role."

The study claimed that the types of disciplinary environment that parents created early on in the developmental years affected the motivation their children had to perform better in school. Because firstborn children were recipients of the parents' first attempts at parenting, the disciplinary methods used on them tended to be harsher than with later born children.

"If a parent is tough, he will punish by principle," said Dr. Hotz and Dr. Pantano in the study. "If the parent is a lenient type, she will punish poor preference in order to establish and/or maintain a reputation for toughness so as to prevent later born children from taking advantage of her leniency. As a result, we expect earlier born children playing mostly through this initial phase of the equilibrium to do better in school."

A range of eldest, middle, and youngest children living in New Jersey were also asked to take part in the survey, which consisted of a few simple questions geared towards people who had experience being a sibling to at least one other person. The participants were asked how the conclusions of the study applied in relation to their own families.

Student Ryan Larkin, 19 of Flemington, disagreed with the fact that the eldest children always perform the best academically, for that was not the case in his family. Larkin, the older brother of two, did, however, agree that his parents pushed him harder in other aspects of academics.

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“I feel like my brother is smarter than me,” said Larkin. “His GPA’s maybe a few tenths higher than mine. I think they [parents] were harder on me, but then I think that they pushed me to do more things like extra-curricular activities. I believe that my IQ would be higher because my brain is more mature.”

Similarly, Julianne Kim, 21 of Demarest, stated that there were many more expectations placed on her older brother, the eldest grandchild of the extended family, by not only their parents, but also by the grandparents and other relatives. While these expectations did not necessarily make her brother the strongest academic performer in her family, they did motivate him to work harder towards a higher set of standards.

“I believe first-borns have the most pressures of being “more” when growing up—more responsible, more mature, more obedient, more thoughtful, more intelligent,” said Kim. “They are often expected to be role models and pushed to provide the footsteps for their younger siblings to follow. These expectations that are often put upon them and the burden of being admired can strongly motivate them to succeed and do well in their life.”

In the family of Monica Garcia, 21 of Edgewater, the eldest sibling did perform the best academically, yet she stressed the point that there are types of achievements that can be made beyond the classroom. Garcia, the youngest of three siblings, stated that her mother raised each child by different parenting methods, which attributed to the different strengths each child was able to cultivate.

“Honestly, my brother is definitely school smart, definitely more than my sister and I,” said Garcia. “He had a 4.0 in high school. I can’t say that I believe the study a hundred percent because if you want to say ‘smarter’ there’s always book smart and street smart. At the end of the day, because I am the youngest, my mom will baby me, like that was just her [on the phone], calling to make sure I’m in class.”

<http://www.nber.org/papers/w19542>