



**Beyond Diathesis-Stress :
Differential Susceptibility to Environmental Influences**

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Abstract

An evolutionary-biological argument is advanced for the differential-susceptibility hypothesis (Belsky, 1997b; Belsky, 2005; Belsky, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & van Ijzendoorn, 2007), which stipulates that some individuals are not just more vulnerable to the negative effects of adversity, as the prevailing diathesis-stress view of psychopathology (and of many environmental influences) presumes, but that they are also disproportionately susceptible to the beneficial effects of supportive and enriching experiences (or just the absence of adversity). Evidence consistent with this proposition that individuals differ in plasticity is reviewed, some of it produced by the author, documenting multiple instances in which (a) phenotypic temperamental characteristics, (b) endophenotypic attributes, and (c) genes function less like “vulnerability factors” and more like “plasticity factors”, thereby making some individuals more malleable or susceptible to both positive *and* negative environmental influences than others--not just more vulnerable. The nature and nurture of such individual differences in plasticity are considered, along with other unknowns in the differential-susceptibility equation.

Biography

Professor Belsky is Director of the Institute for the Study of Children, Families and Social Issues and Professor of Psychology at Birkbeck University of London. Professor Belsky obtained his Ph.D. in 1978 in Human Development and Family Studies from Cornell University. Prior to relocating to London in 1999, Professor Belsky served on the faculty at Penn State University for 21 years, rising to the rank of Distinguished Professor of Human Development. In 1983 he won the Boyd McCandless Award for Distinguished Early Contribution from the Developmental Psychology Division of the American Psychological Association. In 2002 the Institute of Scientific Information, Philadelphia, PA granted Professor Belsky the Highly-Cited-Researcher designation. In 2007 he was awarded the American Psychological Association Urie Bronfenbrenner Award for Lifetime Contribution to Developmental Psychology in the Service of Science and Society.

Professor Belsky is an internationally recognized expert in the field of child development and family studies. His areas of special expertise include the effects of day care, parent-child relations during the infancy and early childhood years, the transition to parenthood, the etiology of child maltreatment and the evolutionary basis of parent and child functioning. He is a founding and collaborating investigator on the NICHD Study of Child Care and Youth Development (US) and that National Evaluation of Sure Start (UK). He is the author of more than 300 scientific articles and chapters and the author/editor of several books, including most recently *The National Evaluation of Sure Start: Does Area-Based Early Intervention Work* (The Policy Press, 2007).

~~~~~ All Are Welcome ~~~~~