Abstract
The Origins of You; How Childhood Shapes Later Life (2020) explores the results of the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study, a longitudinal look at 1,000 participants since 1970. This review examines the works’ significant correlations between health and delinquency in adulthood based on childhood experiences, neighborhoods, family dynamics, and genetic predispositions. The Dunedin Study discoveries regarding childhood personality disorders, ADHD, bullying, puberty, and parenting styles offer bold statements that challenge generally accepted ideas. With over 1,200 publications on the findings of the Dunedin Study—several appearing in peer-reviewed journals—this book accomplishes in its purpose what many others have not: sharing the study’s results in a way that is meaningful and enjoyable in a reference-book format. This book review discusses why The Origins of You (2020) is a great resource for parents, educational professionals, teachers, and school administrators.

Keywords Dunedin Longitudinal Study · Childhood and Parenting · Preschool · Family Dynamics · Bullying · Delinquency

Caspi, A., Belsky, J., Moffitt, T. E., Poulton, R. (2020). The Origins of You: How Childhood Shapes Later Life. United States: Harvard University Press

Reading great literature can be a cinematic adventure. Traditionally, such a thrill ride is not found in a scientific text or academic journal, which is what makes The Origins of You so unique; it is a compelling journey exploring the results of the Dune-
Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study, a longitudinal look at 1,000 participants since 1970. Interestingly, the authors almost titled the book *Adventures in Human Development*. The text navigates the geography of childhood adversity, family dynamics, adolescent psychology, human development, and genetics and is similar to Jules Verne’s *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1867). After a fifty-year-long research journey in New Zealand, its findings are the x-marks-the-spot treasure trove that will help teachers, school administrators, and child psychologists support the growth and development of children.

**Organization**

*The Origins of You* consists of 20 chapters reviewing the results of the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study. The first section, “Child as Father to the Man,” includes themes of irritable temperaments, impulsivity, and ADHD in childhood and adulthood. The second section, “The Family,” is about parenting, troubled boys, maturing girls, and the good and bad news about preschool. Every hero’s journey needs to start somewhere, and the setting and circumstances of the study subjects are explained in detail. But not all stories have happy endings. The third portion of the book is called “Beyond the Family,” which introduces concepts outside the family structure including findings on neighborhoods, bullying, marijuana use, and smoking. The fifth section, “Genetics,” shares the results of the polygenic scores, genotypes, epigenetic research, and chapters entirely on the dependent variables, morphing into action-fantasy storytelling and what sounds like science fiction but is actually, well, science. The last section, “Aging in the Midlife,” follows the original main cast of study subjects into their 30s and beyond as the long-term effects of their childhood surface in the data. The conclusion has only one chapter, and it is frostily titled “Miles to Go Before We Sleep,” summarizing the research and findings across the book’s multiple chapters.

**Background on the Dunedin Study**

The Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study (sometimes shortened to the Dunedin Study) is a longitudinal study of the “health and behavior of a complete birth cohort” gathered from New Zealand’s South Island (Poulton, Moffit, and Silva, 2015, p. 1). Dunedin is a metropolitan area, and the study participants (n=1037) were born approximately between 1972 and 73 and were first observed, evaluated, and tested for the base sample at age 3. Obtaining data on the subjects from that point on was possible through a prospective-longitudinal, correlational design (Poulton, Moffit, & Silva, 2015), which allowed for several types of studies, including outcome prediction research, epidemiological examinations of the prevalence and incidence of health and behavior problems, and methodological studies of reliability and sampling biases, among others (Poulton, Moffit, & Silva, 2015).
Presented Themes and Findings

The authors and distinguished psychologists and scientists, Jay Belsky, Avshalom Caspi, Terrie Moffitt, and Richie Poulton present answers that lead the reader through adventurous twists and turns. The researchers explain how their study subjects’ tests and interviews revealed significant correlations between health and delinquency in adulthood based on childhood experiences, neighborhoods, family dynamics, and genetic predispositions. The Dunedin Study discoveries regarding childhood personality disorders, ADHD, bullying, puberty, and parenting styles offer bold statements that challenge generally accepted ideas. For example, the authors devote an entire chapter to the debate on the positive and negative aspects of preschool, which is a must-read for interested parties in early childhood education. The book also provides data on how such positive methods of intervention as supportive peer groups at a young age can help children combat the negative side effects of bullying and troubles at home (Belsky, Caspi, Moffitt, & Poulton, 2020).

The News About Preschool

Chapter 8 depicts a struggle between the light and dark sides of early childhood education as the authors reveal the “Good and Bad News about Preschool.” There is evidence for both when it comes to the effects of day care, with most of the good news reflecting the developmental benefits of good-quality care for cognitive development and most of the not-so-good news reflecting the developmental risks to social and behavioral functioning of early, extensive, and continuous care.

Here are the findings—“the good, the bad and the ugly.” The bad news is rather unfortunate for advocates of preschool and early childhood education. The data showed that the more time a child spent in day care across the first four-and-a-half years of life, the more problems he or she would have involving aggression and disobedience (p. 156). Further, the results presented evidence that more time in childcare across the infancy, toddler, and preschool years predicted somewhat elevated levels of problem behavior during the first year of school (p. 169). The good news is that better-quality childcare did make a significant difference in children’s cognitive functioning (p. 172). The authors make an excellent point noting that “our youngest and most vulnerable citizens have every right to a decent quality of life, day in and day out. We need to think more in terms of the rights of children and what is moral and ethical than what the return on the investment will be of providing care of one type or another” (p.177).

Overall Book Evaluation and Review

With over 1,200 publications on the findings of the Dunedin Study—several appearing in peer-reviewed journals—this book accomplishes in its purpose what many others have not: sharing the study’s results in a way that is tangible, meaningful and enjoyable in a reference-book format. The text certainly remains true to explaining...
the findings and the main positive impacts that the researchers discuss in their 2015 article in *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*. Here are just a few of the ways in which they do this: First, the book explains the value of multidisciplinary data and the importance of longitudinal research, which can build on papers previously published (Poulton, Moffit, & Silva, 2015). Second, the *Origins of You* explains how the researchers handled such current issues as the quality of preschool programs, and those science has been tackling for generations, such as “nature-nurture interplay” (Poulton, Moffit, & Silva, 2015). Third, the work is an advocate for theory, research, practice, and policy by being sensitive to the Dunedin Study’s strengths, i.e., “half a lifetime of detailed socio-behavioral data allowing for a holistic view of physical health and wellbeing” (Poulton, Moffit, & Silva, 2015, p. 4).

With so many positive aspects to the book, one of the few cons is the authors’ failure to associate the findings with the latest theory of Adverse Childhood Environments, or ACEs (Jimenez et al., 2017). The ACEs are a recent development linking the number of traumatic experiences from birth to 18 years of age to a range of negative aftereffects, from lower literacy rates to higher rates of suicide and drug use (Jimenez et al., 2017). It is arguable that the information was not included in the book because the Dunedin study began in the 1970s, long before the work by Jimenez was published. However, both kinds of research found similar results connecting childhood experiences to issues in adulthood, one in New Zealand and the other in the United States. It would have been interesting and informative to know the *Origins of You* authors’ thoughts on the ACEs study.

Overall, the *Origins of You* is a great resource for parents, educational professionals, teachers, and school administrators. Its contents are germane for professional development, social-emotional learning (SEL) curricula, changes to school policy, and more. Although the negative effects of daycare present challenges for proponents of early childhood education, this data should not diminish the morale of preschool teachers and educators. The loving and hardworking individuals who teach our youngest learners follow a noble calling. Perhaps they are the chosen ones who live in the realm between early childhood education and human development. After all, both topics intertwine into a long path that all must travel on the quest for knowledge. There are many obstacles to face and mountains to climb to attain quality professional development, or at least a good view from the top. Thankfully, reading *The Origins of You* is an enjoyable part of the journey. At the end of this “road trip,” early childhood educators learn that being one great teacher in a child’s life does make a positive impact on their social-emotional wellbeing, and one could not ask for a better result. On this perilous journey of reading, teaching, and researching, we need to keep moving, keep walking, and keep working toward what’s best for students, no matter what.

“It’s a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don’t keep your feet, there’s no knowing where you might be swept off to.”  
J.R.R. Tolkien 1954, *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

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