

# Preface

In scientific scholarship, knowledge is constructed as a *social enterprise*, in relationships between the scholar and others (Nelkin & Lindee 2004). This is what makes scholarship fun and engaging (even though it may not always feel that way) and makes human inquiry unique when compared to every other type of knowledge system in the universe. To say that scientific scholarship is socially constructed is not to say that science is not real—it most certainly is real in the sense that our knowledge of the mechanisms and processes of all that surrounds us depends completely on our collective abilities to see, hear, feel, and touch that which we aim to understand. But ultimately, our understanding emerges from social action. We observe, explain, debate, reason, defend, debunk, and/or rationalize our understanding of the world with each other. We socially negotiate the “truth” by agreeing with each other, anchoring our agreements to sets of standards that work well for delimited periods of time and space. But occasionally assumptions get challenged, standards fall, and intellectual revolutions ensue. This is the fun part.

The story of this scholarly edited book is a case in point. The seed for this book was planted in the late winter of 2005, when we first met. Kirby had come to Virginia Tech for a faculty interview in developmental science. At that time, his work was focused on applying statistical modeling approaches to partitioning variance into “pockets” of genetic, shared environmental, and non-shared environmental influences on individual difference attributes—and, whether these effects were additive or interactive. Robin’s empirical work was centered on infants’ perception of aspects of adult communicative action that lead to successful language learning. But her teaching was often focused on issues and controversies within the domains of genetic and epigenetic contributions to developmental outcomes (largely due to the influence of Gilbert Gottlieb, Timothy Johnston, and Robert Lickliter during her graduate training). On the surface, it was unlikely that Kirby and Robin were headed into any social negotiations of their science!

Like all academic job interviews, Kirby’s itinerary was packed with meetings and the job talk was stressful. However, his memory of dinner with Robin and their department chair is clear as a bell. While he consumed sea scallops and a very dry martini, Robin confessed that she had reservations about his statistical interactionist

method and view of genes and environments as separable and quantifiable; nonetheless, she would be a willing and true colleague who would engage him in debate and inquiry. She could not have known it at the time, but that was precisely the kind of “look in the eye and hand in the hand” that Kirby was looking for in a new collaboration and friendship. We were on our way to social negotiation of science after all.

In the true spirit of collaborative scholarship, we eventually co-taught an integrated graduate/undergraduate seminar on “genetics and epigenetics in development.” Each week, we would meet with a group of 10 graduate students for an hour, then 2 hours with an additional 40 undergraduate seniors (overlapping with the graduate students), and a final hour with just the undergraduates. Throughout this time, we worked collectively and intensively to understand important readings concerning gene and non-gene processes that affect developmental outcomes and trajectories (with the graduate students serving as mentors to the undergraduates).

This “seminar-fest” was exhausting but also exhilarating. It made us realize how hungry we were, and our students were, for this different kind of discourse. The seed had been planted years before, and the seminar watered it well. Still, it took us five more years before we converged on the idea to co-edit this book. (Development is hard, and it takes time.) The opportunity arose to bring together voices of a broad range of scientists who could speak to our emerging collaborative perspective on stress, parenting, intergenerational transmission, and developmental systems. With excitement and considerable anxiety, we forged ahead with our invitations to authors and were simply astonished by how receptive our colleagues were to the ideas for the book. We purposefully approached scholars who not only examine various aspects of parenting stress as it relates to developmental processes, but do so from a dynamic, organic, and multidirectional perspective. The end product is a book that fully embodies the perspective to which we are committed, and that we feel is the most likely to generate fruitful discussions and inspire future thinking about this very complex web of relationships. We are grateful to these authors for capturing our enthusiasm and bringing it to each page of their contributions.

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## Reference

Nelkin, D., & Lindee, M.S. (2004). *The DNA mystique: The gene as a cultural icon*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Parental Stress and Early Child Development

Adaptive and Maladaptive Outcomes

Deater-Deckard, K.; Panneton, R. (Eds.)

2017, XIV, 316 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-55374-0