

Preface

The idea for the research summarized in this book began in late 1968 when popular and scientific debate was coalescing around the twin issues of the importance of early experience and the wisdom of expanding day care facilities for infants and young children. Many child psychologists and pediatricians were apprehensive about the possibility of large numbers of young children enrolled in day care centers because they feared that group care experience for infants would dilute the intensity of the child's attachment to the mother and perhaps retard cognitive development. These worries stemmed from historical presuppositions, extant theory, and preliminary empirical data on the effects of institutionalization on early development. Since it seemed likely then that Congress might appropriate and the president might approve the release of funds for the establishment of day care centers—possibilities that were, of course, not realized—it seemed useful to initiate a study that would provide some initial information on this issue.

Because a field experiment of this magnitude is much too large for any single investigator, it was fortunate that chance had placed the authors in the same community, with similar motivation, and that public and private funding sources were willing to support the work so generously. Our initial plan to work exclusively with black children in the Roxbury area of Boston had to be abandoned when political pressures forced us to shift location to the South End of Boston. Thanks to the friendship of the Chinese-American community in Boston we were able to complete the study in close accord with our original plans. The officials of the Chinese Christian Church were helpful in persuading local community leaders of the value of the research and of the potential benefit to the community of a day care center that would remain as a neighborhood day care center after the investigation was completed. Since the neighborhood in which the day care center was located

had a significant proportion of Chinese families, we felt it appropriate to enroll about one-half Chinese and one-half Caucasian infants in the research program. Although this decision was essentially politically motivated, the opportunity to compare the growth of Chinese and Caucasian children provided theoretically provocative information.

The question we probed cannot be answered by any one investigation. Fortunately, several other studies of day care were being implemented at the same time and, as we shall see in chapter 3, the results of most of these studies are consonant with our conclusions. The questions that surround the many influences on early development are complex, and this book makes only a small contribution to the generalizations that the future owes us.

We faced a major problem in deciding how to present the results of our investigation. In order to arrive at some tentative conclusions about the influences of group care outside the home, we gathered a large corpus of data on matched groups of infants, one group attending a day care center and the other cared for at home. The empirical information is also relevant to some very specific concerns of developmental psychologists, especially the growth functions for the response dispositions of infants and the intraindividual stability of those dispositions. Because the day care issue has a wider audience than the other two themes, we have prepared a major text and an appendix. The text presents the theoretical foundations of the work and a concise summary of the effects of group care on development. The extended appendix, which is more technical and intended for a professional audience, has the empirical detail that the interested scientist demands. The reader who wishes to consult evidence for summary statements made in chapter 5 can find it in the appendix to the unabridged edition of this book.

We had slightly different responsibilities during this long project. Although Kagan, Kearsley, and Zelazo jointly designed and monitored the work, Kearsley was responsible for the daily supervision of the day care center and Zelazo and Kagan for supervising the evaluation of the infants. Minton and Kagan were responsible for the analysis of the data. Because heavy responsibilities fell upon Kearsley and Zelazo at the completion of the data-gathering phase of the project, Kagan volunteered to prepare the first complete draft of the book, and he assumes responsibility for this particular organization of ideas. However, all the authors are in essential agreement with the major conclusions that are summarized in chapter 6. Whenever the sex of an individual is not specified, we have followed the convention of using masculine pronouns; we apologize to those who dislike this practice.

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