



# Brain To Society Decision and Behavior Seminar Series

Date: Monday, February 19, 2018

Time: 5:30 PM to 7:00 PM EST

Location: The Jonathan C. Meakins Amphitheatre (Room 521)  
McGill University's McIntyre Medical Building  
3655 Promenade Sir-William-Osler | Montreal QC H3G 1Y6

Stream: [Live on YouTube](#)

Topic: **Beyond Risk, Resilience and Dysregulation:**  
*Differential Susceptibility & "For Better and for Worse" Environmental Influences*

**Abstract:** Classic understanding of how the interaction of personal characteristics and environmental exposures influence development is based on diathesis-stress thinking, stipulating that for genetic, physiological and/or temperamental reasons *some individuals are more susceptible to the adverse effects of negative developmental experiences (e.g., harsh parenting) than are others*, who prove resilient. An evolutionary critique of this perspective raised the possibility that so-called vulnerable individuals are not just especially likely to develop poorly in the face of adversity, but are also disproportionately likely to benefit from support and enrichment. In other words, the very individual "risk factors" associated with heightened vulnerability to adversity should also function as "opportunity factors", making the same individuals especially likely to be positively affected by growth-promoting experiences, thus making them developmentally plastic "for better and for worse". This line of thinking has generated a great deal of research over the past decade, with much observational research now showing that temperamental, physiological and genetic "risk" factors also function as "opportunity" factors. Notably, recent experimental-intervention work reveals much the same thing. Thus, those personal characteristics found to distinguish individuals more and less susceptible to environmental influences in observational work help account for heterogeneity in the effects of intervention efforts. Implications of such findings for the targeted provision of services when resources are limited will be discussed.

Presenter: Jay Belsky, Ph.D.



Professor Belsky is an internationally recognized expert in the field of child development and family studies. His areas of special expertise include effects of day care, parent-child relations and other developmental experiences and environmental early in life on psychological and behavioural development, the transition to parenthood, the etiology of child maltreatment and the evolutionary basis of parent and child functioning. He was a founding and collaborating investigator on the NICHD Study of Child Care and Youth Development (US) and Research Director of The National Evaluation of Sure Start (UK). He is the author of more than 450 scientific articles and chapters and the author/editor of several books.

Jay Belsky is the Robert M. and Natalie Reid Dorn Professor of Human Development at the University of California, Davis (2011-present). Professor Belsky obtained his Ph.D. in 1978 in Human Development and Family Studies from Cornell University. For 21 years thereafter, he served on the faculty at Penn State University, rising to the rank of Distinguished Professor of Human Development.

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