

## Historical Analysis in Pediatric Psychology: Two Seminal Articles

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### Abstract

The field of pediatric psychology arose in the 1960s in response to a variety of societal and professional needs. Two seminal articles written during this time, by Jerome Kagan (1965) and Logan Wright (1967), played key roles in the field's development. However, their efficacy in galvanizing a response from medical professionals and psychologists **had much to do with broad-ranging developments in** pediatric public health, intraprofessional changes among medical specialties, and a growing preoccupation with “psychosocial” and parenting issues. The purpose of this paper is to situate Kagan's (1965) and Wright's (1967) contributions within their social and historical contexts, and thereby to elicit reflection on the field's subsequent and continued development.

*Keywords:* pediatric psychology, historical analysis, field development, seminal articles

Historical analysis in pediatric psychology: The influence of societal and professional conditions on two early pediatric psychology articles and the field's subsequent development

Historically speaking, the field of pediatric psychology arose in response to various needs within the fields of pediatrics and psychology, as well as in society more generally. Surprisingly, despite a general recognition of the potential benefits of collaboration between these areas as early as the 1890s (e.g., Witmer, 1896; as cited in White, 1991), and again in the 1930s (Anderson, 1930), pediatric psychology did not begin to emerge in a more formal sense until the mid-1960s (Aylward, Bender, & Graves, 2009; Lee & Kazak, 2014; Mesibov, 1984). This was also a time when two seminal papers which communicated the need for a new field were penned by developmental psychologist Jerome Kagan (1965, "*The New Marriage: Pediatrics and Psychology*"), and clinical psychologist Logan Wright (1967, "*The Pediatric Psychologist: A Role Model*").

Kagan (1965) and Wright's (1967) papers articulated a growing awareness among professionals in both pediatrics and psychology of the need for a closer collaboration with each other (Abidin, 2011). These publications played an integral role in setting the terms and parameters of this potential partnership, and yet, while they were clearly impactful, they also came at a time when pediatric and psychological landscapes were such that they were receptive to their writing. Specifically, Kagan and Wright's papers provided direction in a developmental sense. In addition to facilitating discussion and action among other interested patrons, these articles addressed clinical issues relevant to children that were also budding issues within the public consciousness. Without widespread dissemination of the ideas and issues raised by Kagan (1965) and Wright (1967), it could be argued that people would not have been brought together as quickly as they were or in the same way.

Given the limited scope of this paper (i.e., it is not by any means exhaustive), the objectives are to: 1) describe some of the societal and professional conditions that laid the groundwork for Kagan and Wright's articles, and 2) explore how these select conditions may have augmented the impact and contribution of these articles (both directly and indirectly).

**Following a brief review of the two articles,** this paper will highlight the changing context of pediatric public health, an emerging focus on "psychosocial" issues in pediatric practice, and a growing cultural preoccupation with parenting practices and children's welfare as key developments facilitating the rise of pediatric psychology. Our purpose is to contextualize Kagan and Wright's contributions socially and historically as a way to think more deeply about their impact. The paper will conclude with reflections on aspects of contemporary concerns in pediatric psychology in light of Kagan's and Wright's papers in their historical context.

The observations presented in this paper are based on a review of published historical accounts of the development of pediatric psychology, as well as historical documents available through the Society of Pediatric Psychology (SPP). Literature in the fields of the history of psychology and the history and sociology of medicine were also consulted. Cited reference searches for Kagan (1965) and Wright's (1967) articles were conducted in order to trace the uptake and elaboration of their ideas in later publications. An interview was conducted by the first author with Dr. Kagan (July 2013) to further contextualize and understand his perspective of the conditions during the time period in which he saw and broadly communicated the need for pediatric psychology. Unfortunately, as Dr. Logan Wright passed away in 1999, it was not possible to interview him.

~~———The paper proceeds as follows: First, a brief review of the two articles will ensure that the reader has a general understanding of their content and significance. Second, specific aspects of~~

~~the societal and professional conditions out of which pediatric psychology emerged will be reviewed. Our purpose is to contextualize Kagan and Wright's contributions socially and historically as a way to think more deeply about their impact. The paper will conclude with reflections on aspects of contemporary concerns in pediatric psychology in light of Kagan's and Wright's papers in their historical context.~~

#### A Brief Content Review

##### A Marriage between Pediatrics and Psychology: Jerome Kagan (1965)

Jerome Kagan, a developmental psychologist and Harvard professor *emeritus*, is best known for his work on temperament and shyness (e.g., Kagan, 1962, 1994, 1998; Kagan, Reznick & Snidman, 1988; Kagan & Snidman, 2004). Widely regarded as one of the pioneers of developmental psychology, Kagan has been listed as one of the top 25 most eminent 20<sup>th</sup> century psychologists, as well as one of the top 25 psychologists most frequently cited in both professional literature and introductory psychology textbooks (Haggbloom et al., 2002). Kagan's (1965) article was based on a seminar given to staff of the Pediatric Clinic of Massachusetts General Hospital, and directly addressed a need for collaboration between pediatrics and psychology. In it, he outlined a potential role for psychologists in pediatric settings for a predominantly medical audience. Referring to this collaboration as a "marriage", Kagan's (1965) article anticipated numerous outcomes of this partnership including benefits for both psychologists (e.g., an opportunity to test theories and development of inductive hypotheses) and pediatricians (e.g., developing research knowledge and looking beyond symptoms to precipitating and perpetuating factors). Importantly, Kagan argued that a confrontation with the daily realities of pediatric practice would "ground" theory and research in developmental psychology, while, on the other hand, the scientifically-oriented cognitive style of psychologists

would sensitize pediatricians to look for the mechanisms that lay behind the clinical presentations they encountered in practice. From Kagan's perspective, then, psychology had much to offer to pediatrics in broadening its empirical base. Kagan (1965, p. 273) saw a number of "empirical areas" in which collaboration would be particularly useful including early identification of childhood psychopathology, incorporating theory into interventions, and matching treatments to symptom profiles. In this respect, Kagan's background as a developmental psychologist shone through in his emphasis on research, theory, and developmental trajectories.

#### The Pediatric Psychologist: Logan Wright

In contrast, Wright's (1967) article was addressed primarily to psychologists and was more clinically-focused and explicitly programmatic (e.g., he provided specific short and long-term goals). While many of the general concepts, ideas and needs regarding psychology's role in pediatric care had been expressed in the past by individuals such as Witmer (1896; as cited in White, 1991) and Anderson (1930), it could be argued that a specific term (i.e., "pediatric psychologist") to describe an individual who would meet said needs was not viewed by others as "coined" until Wright's (1967) publication (Mesibov, 1984; Wright, 1979; Aylward et al., 2009). Wright's explicit distinction between the role of pediatric psychologists in a health care setting and that of traditional child clinical psychologists may have contributed to this widespread view. Reflecting a clear emphasis on health promotion and prevention, Wright envisioned pediatric psychologists as more focused on behavior in a normative context, primarily involved in conducting cognitive and developmental assessments and responding to questions focused on child-rearing. He also called for pediatric psychologists to conduct applied research to identify short-term, cost effective treatments. Wright was strategic in acknowledging that there were

psychologists already working in pediatric settings, and called for research to determine exactly how they were already contributing. His paper closed with three recommendations for furthering the field of pediatric psychology; the need for: (1) a clear role definition, (2) specific training, and (3) a new knowledge base.

Kagan (1965) and Wright (1967): A Critical Analysis of Societal and Professional Conditions

Kagan (1965) and Wright's (1967) articles were published at a time when the public health and societal contexts were receptive to the roles that psychologists could play in medical settings. Additionally, growth and differentiation in the medical profession were simultaneously opening the way for the recognition of psychosocial and behavioral issues in pediatric practice (Halpern, 1990; Pawluch, 1983), while psychology had gained scientific and professional credibility through its involvement in the Second World War and its aftermath (Herman, 1995).

Kagan's (1965) assertions spoke directly to the social and public health conditions facing the profession of pediatrics. Today, Kagan notes that the 1960s was a time period in which many pediatric medical improvements were made, including the decline in prevalence and morbidity rates of several serious childhood infectious diseases (e.g., diphtheria; J. Kagan, personal communication, July 3, 2013 [hereafter, "J. Kagan, interview"]; Dixon, 1984). Further, parents increasingly began to consult physicians for their children's psychosocial difficulties (e.g., behavioral challenges) and parenting advice (J. Kagan, interview; Routh, 1975). This change in focus of pediatric consultations may have also been further impacted by the popularization of psychologically-informed parenting advice by pediatricians themselves. For example, pediatricians such as Benjamin Spock published parenting books **which became popular** (e.g., *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*; Sulman, 1973) and indicated a growing consciousness of parenting as something about which one should receive expert advice. **Some**

historical analyses, for example, suggest that concerns about the socialization of children became particularly prominent in popular American literature between 1950 and 1970, in which parenting advice from experts played an important role (Bigner, 1972). These changes would have placed challenging demands on many pediatricians who would not have been trained to respond adequately (J. Kagan, interview; Routh, 1975; Stein et al., 1993; Wright, 1967). In his interview, Kagan noted that the motivation to write his paper stemmed from recognition of this emerging zeitgeist (J. Kagan, interview).

Kagan also highlighted the important role played by the civil rights movements in the 1960s and a younger, more tolerant generation who was willing to recognize the part that social conditions (such as poverty and inequality) could play in the development of psychological and behavioral problems (see, for example, McGovern, 1970). He likened the services provided by pediatricians at the time to a kerosene lamp specialist being approached by a public wanting electric lamps (J. Kagan, interview). Kagan attributed much of the credit for the rise of pediatric psychology to those individuals initially working in clinical pediatric settings, who were not only able to influence (and be influenced by) pediatricians, but also acted as a force in the development of early scientific journals and other institutional structures.

What is missing from Kagan's account of this time period, however, is the importance of the changing position of pediatrics in relation to the medical profession as a whole. Indeed, the shifts toward psychosocial issues in pediatric medicine were not only brought about by changes in the socio-political and public health context. Rather, the early development of the field of "psychosocial pediatrics"—driven mainly by members of the Ambulatory Pediatrics Association—served as a means for establishing the legitimacy of *general ambulatory care* as a specialty in medical academic departments (Halpern, 1990). In this sense, marriage propositions

between pediatrics and psychology were also part of broader intraprofessional changes in medicine itself.

What of Kagan's (1965) paper? Though relatively well-cited, Kagan himself does not believe his paper to have been influential (J. Kagan, interview). A review of articles citing Kagan's (1965) publication revealed that while some elaborate on a variety of his points (e.g., Fischer & Engeln, 1972; Mesibov, 1984; Routh, 1975), the vast majority simply mention his marriage metaphor (e.g., Brown & Roberts, 2000; Drotar, 1991; Karazsia & McMurtry, 2011; Mesibov, 1984). Wright (1967) himself embraced Kagan's (1965) marriage metaphor, further elaborating on and envisioning "offspring" of the potential union. Could this metaphor have given the emerging field the traction it needed? Without overstating its significance, studies of scientific communication have argued that metaphors form an integral part in the way that new concepts and ideas cross interdisciplinary and interprofessional boundaries (e.g., Hoffmann, 2006).

Further attention may have been drawn to Kagan (1965) given that some did not regard a "marriage" to adequately describe the joining of these fields, and expressed other ideas and conceptualizations. For example, Cushna (1968) argued that perhaps collaboration or "sharing of ideas" may be a better way to conceptualize these changes, given the limitations and potential areas of confusion that could arise if interpreted too literally. That said, in comparison to Wright's (1967) paper, more specific assertions made by Kagan (1965) did not appear as saliently throughout later pediatric psychology publications. While it is unclear why Kagan's (1965) specific ideas were not later elaborated by pediatric psychologists, convergences between his ideas and current emphases in pediatric psychology can be found. For example, Kagan's



insistence on the importance of early detection is relevant to the contemporary focus on primary care and prevention.

Logan Wright's (1967) seminal paper followed Kagan's (1965), and further conceptualized pediatric psychology as a field. It could be argued that in articulating a formal title and proposed role description, the existence and importance of the "pediatric psychologist" was presented as a foregone conclusion, thus legitimizing the role and profession. Additionally, Wright's use of applied, clinical language as well as his focus on training **as well as establishment of institutional processes** and structures helped to concretize "pediatric psychology". For example, Wright highlighted short-term intervention and knowledge translation from professionals to parents in relation to children's behavior, an emphasis still in place today (Cohen et al., 2008). Wright also gave clear and feasible short and long-term recommendations for the field, likely facilitating their application in clinical practice. Several other factors which may have helped to disseminate his ideas within the field of psychology include his publication in the flagship *American Psychologist*, and Wright's active leadership role in advocating for the field's formalization within the American Psychological Association (APA). Specifically, Wright greatly influenced the establishment of pediatric psychology through his early involvement with other early contributors (Magrab, 1989), his initial leadership role as the first president within **SPP** (Magrab, 1989), his position in an academic institution as a professor (Willis, 2000), and finally, his subsequent articles related to the field of pediatric psychology (e.g., Wright, 1969).

Both Kagan and Wright's papers appeared when the increased prevalence of clinical child psychologists working directly with pediatricians in health care settings provided more opportunities for ongoing sharing of ideas between them (J. Kagan, interview). **Wright's (1967)**

paper inspired Lee Salk, who would later become one of pediatric psychology's pioneers, to establish a clear role for pediatric psychologists distinct from that of a psychometrist and also to connect with Division 12 (Magrab, 1989). This connection ultimately led to the development and distribution of a survey about psychologists in pediatric settings to over 300 heads of pediatric departments across the United States (Magrab, 1989; White, 1991). The survey's relatively large number of respondents (96% response rate, with psychologists present in the pediatrics departments of approximately 70% of U.S. medical schools; White, 1991) likely helped expedite the process of further legitimizing the need for and subsequent formation of the field itself.

These pioneering efforts took place in the midst of widespread advocacy for children's rights and the improvement of child services in general. For example, the White House Conferences on Children and Youth—a series of presidentially hosted meetings on childhood welfare—helped to shape American child policy throughout the 1900s, with a particularly large and influential conference occurring in 1960 (Grahn-Farley, 2013). This likely contributed not only to early SPP members' focus on child advocacy, but also impacted the level of public interest in SPP's activities (Magrab, 1989).

SPP was initially established in affiliation with the APA's Division 12, Section 1 (Clinical Child Psychology) in 1969, becoming a Division (54) only in the year 2000 (SPP, n.d.). Its formation, as recounted by SPP historian Phyllis Magrab (1989), was due largely to the impact of Wright's (1967) article in galvanizing Lee Salk and Dorothea Ross into action. It should be noted, however, that the direction of the field was also influenced by other interested psychologists - a by-product of the early conception of SPP. The founding of SPP led eventually to the launch of the *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* in 1975 (Kazak, 2000); both provided the grounding for a great deal of the growth, development, and direction of the field in its early years

and beyond. Many of SPP's primary goals upon inception (e.g., development of training) mirrored Wright's initial recommendations and continue to be emphasized in the field today (Black, 2002; White, 1991). Kagan, on the other hand, foresaw the field's contemporary emphases on primary, secondary and tertiary prevention, and health promotion. Having briefly examined the initial visions of pediatric psychology articulated by Kagan and Wright, as well as something of the context that gave these purchase, we turn now to a consideration of the field today in light of this historical account.

### Pediatric Psychology Today

Just as Kagan and Wright described the reciprocal influences possible between pediatrics and psychology, it is also clear that pediatric psychology **as a field** has succeeded in tailoring itself to specific needs of the public. There are two facets of contemporary pediatric psychology in particular that a re-reading of Kagan and Wright's articles can lead us to reflect upon: **(1) the continual development and evolution of the field of pediatric psychology and how these are impacted by societal foci, and (2) Kagan and Wright's initial assertions in relation to the field's research methodology and training practices.** When early pioneers established the field of pediatric psychology, they defined its purpose in a way that could meet societal needs. This purpose has evolved in response to or anticipation of society's changing needs. For example, a public health perspective has been a specific focus for this field, and remains so to date (e.g., injury prevention, pediatric primary care; Kirshman, Mayes, & Perciful, 2009; Stancin, Perrin, & Ramirez, 2009). This focus is evident in forums such as special issues of **JPP** (i.e., *Special Issue on Pediatric Mental Health Services in Primary Care Settings*; Stancin, 1999) and **American Psychologist** (i.e., *Special Issue: Primary Care and Psychology*; McDaniel & deGruy III, 2014), as well as past presidential addresses (e.g., see Black, 2002). Additionally, scholarly publications

have focused on areas such as the role and contributions of psychologists in primary care settings (e.g., Bray, 2004; Stancin & Perrin, 2014), development of adequate training programs for psychologists in this role (e.g., Talen, Fraser, & Cauley, 2005), and generation of practical tips for psychologists working in these settings (Haley et al., 1998). Wright himself would later publish on the concept of primary mental health care (e.g., Wright, 1986). Kagan also attended to prevention issues through the concept of early detection and the impact of temperament in child development (e.g., Kagan & Snidman, 1991). In pediatrics, prevention, detection, and intervention have also been noted and explored of late (e.g., see American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) clinical practice guidelines such as AAP, 2000), in some instances in collaboration with pediatric psychologists (Stancin et al., 2009). ~~It was also predicted that media and technology would continue to be important in the field (Magrab, 1989). This is probably more crucial today in our media-saturated society than could have been foreseen 25 years ago. For example, the media has been used to target adolescents in health promotion initiatives, such as those associated with drug and alcohol use (Wilson & Lawman, 2009). There has also been a rapid increase in the emphasis on e-health technologies in both research and applied settings for a variety of purposes (e.g., health promotion, treatment delivery; Palermo & Wilson, 2009).~~

The field's evolution can also be viewed through other developments, such as the focus on genetic versus social/behavioral factors and how this has influenced work in the field. Kagan notes that "in the '60s, people were willing to say the major factor [in psychological/behavioral difficulties] was social conditions – after 1980, geneticists started to make big advances and they took over and said it was genetic" (J. Kagan, interview). In his interview, Kagan cautioned that an emphasis on genes to the exclusion of social/behavioral factors is problematic. This concern is

echoed in the most recent edition of the *Handbook of Pediatric Psychology*, in which Tercyak (2009) highlights the potentially positive impact that increased knowledge of heredity could have on the enhancement of health-related prevention and control strategies, but also warns of the potentially problematic ethical, legal, and psychological issues that may arise. **Additional societal changes over the last 50 years that were perhaps not foreseen by Kagan or Wright, relate to the changing demographic and familial structure of U.S. society. For example, U.S. birthrates are low, while grandparents live longer; there also is more diversity in family structure (e.g., single-parent, multi-ethnic, diverse sexual and gender identities; Benokraitis, 2012).** Interestingly, neither Kagan (1965) nor Wright (1967) explicitly foreshadowed the extensive involvement of pediatric psychologists in chronic diseases or illnesses (e.g., diabetes, cystic fibrosis, cancer) that is evident today. **An exploration of how this evolved is beyond the scope of this article; however, it may have reflected a general shift in industrialized, wealthy nations from infectious to chronic diseases (Omran, 1971).**

Kagan's (1965) and Wright's (1967) premonitory comments on research methodology and training are still highly relevant to pediatric psychology today. For example, Kagan (1965) highlighted the importance of focusing on both inductive and deductive research in building the field's empirical base. In his interview, Kagan also stressed the importance of direct observation of behavior, and thus a need for increased use of naturalistic observation methods as opposed to questionnaires, for example (J. Kagan, interview). This is of particular relevance today, and has led this journal (JPP) to commission a forthcoming special issue on the topic of "Direct observation in pediatric psychology research". Evidence-based practice—an outcome of the emphasis on the field's empirical base—is highly valued in pediatric psychology (Cohen et al., 2008). Further, Wright's (1967) early recommendation for pediatric psychologists to develop

training and implement scientific approaches and outcomes in practice is still present. Training programs and expectations for those interested in pediatric psychology are in place and continuing to develop at varying levels of post-secondary education (Karazsia & McMurtry, 2012; Palermo et al., 2014). ~~That said, Kagan expressed concern that while pediatricians may have recognized the increased need for training in developmental psychology in the 50 years since his 1965 paper, there are as yet very few educational and training opportunities related to this (J. Kagan, interview).~~ Finally, Wright's call all those years ago to examine the roles played by psychologists in pediatric settings has been answered; pediatric psychologists are now involved in many different roles and settings (e.g., medical settings, private practice, community mental health, post-secondary institutions; Mullins et al., 2001).

### Conclusion

The liaison envisioned by Kagan in 1965 continues to prosper, and many of those recommendations articulated by Wright in 1967 continue to stand today. While no scientific or professional fields develop solely because of the efforts of one or two people, the work of these two individuals still guides the field today because of both their timeliness and clarity of vision. Both were able to speak to and inspire people across the disciplinary and professional divide. Kagan's (1965) early contribution to the field of pediatric psychology illustrates the importance of continued reflection on the field's position in relation to pediatrics, and more broadly, to the medical profession. It is thus important to consider the changing dynamics of both fields when exploring the impact on the pediatric psychologist. Changing societal and professional conditions, including but not limited to changes in pediatric settings, increased emphasis on parenting practices, and contributions of pioneers in pediatric psychology play(ed) key roles in

shaping the field. Though the field has evolved with time, its roots have remained intact, continuing to shape the manner in which pediatric psychologists do their work.

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