

Eliot-Pearson Newsletter

March 2022

From the Chair's Desk

Greetings to all, as we welcome the longer daylight hours and warmer weather of spring! As Tufts prepares tentative plans for relaxing COVID restrictions on the Medford/Somerville campus we look forward to more in-person events. We are delighted to be able to host the traditional celebrations for the graduating students, including the department's commencement reception on Sunday, May 22nd from 11:30-1:00 pm at the Eliot-Pearson building.

Please join me in congratulating two of our Eliot-Pearson faculty who have received professional recognition in recent months.

Professor Richard Lerner received the Society for the Study of Human Development Distinguished Lifetime Career Award.

Professor Marina Bers was selected as one of 18 American Educational Research Association Fellows, honored in 2022 for their exceptional contributions to education research.



Jayanthi Mistry
Professor & Chair



Pictured: Eliot-Pearson at springtime

Feature Story

Promoting Social Justice Through Eliminating Genetic Reduction from Developmental Science

Richard M. Lerner

For more than 200 years the specious claims of genetic reductionists and their error-ridden research methodology have combined to claim that all facets of human development and all differences between people in their development can be explained by reducing the complexity of human life to the genes inherited at conception. But if everything a person does or becomes exists as an inherited blueprint residing in specific genes inherited at conception, then there is no way that socially progressive policies and programs, equitable education, health and medical resources, or employment opportunities can successfully diminish or eliminate specific developmental outcomes of any individual or provide ways to improve human life for all people by changing inequitable social conditions.

Sadly, within the past decade, a renewal of precisely such genetic reductionist claims have appeared in both science publications and major media outlets. For instance, developmental psychologist Jay Belsky published an Op-Ed piece in the New York Times Sunday Review in November 2014, asserting that:

“What distinguishes children who prove more versus less susceptible — for better and for worse — to developmental experiences? There is no single factor, but genetics seems to play a role... Should we seek to identify the most susceptible children and disproportionately target them when it comes to investing scarce intervention and service dollars? I believe the answer is yes... One might even imagine a day when we could genotype all the children in an elementary school to ensure that those who could most benefit from help got the best teachers.”

More recently, behavior geneticist Robert Plomin (2018) claimed in his book, *Blueprint*, that:

“Genetics is the most important factor shaping who we are” (p. viii) and that “the DNA revolution has made DNA personal by giving us the power to predict our psychological strengths and weaknesses from birth” (p. vii).

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Plomin (2018) then asserts that, through genetic reductionism, scientists have:
“the ability to predict our psychological problems and promise from DNA...Our future is DNA” (p, xiii).

And just last year, behavior geneticist Kathryn Paige Harden, in her 2021 book, The Genetic Lottery: Why DNA Matters for Social Equality, asserted that:

“Yes, the genetic differences between any two people are tiny when compared to the long stretches of DNA coiled in every human cell. But these differences loom large when trying to understand why, for example, one child has autism and another doesn't; why one is deaf and another hearing; and... why one child will struggle with school and another will not. Genetic differences between us matter for our lives. They cause differences in things we care about. Building a commitment to egalitarianism on our genetic uniformity is building a house on sand” (p. 19).

Today, mainstream developmental science rejects such genetic reductionism. Most scientists studying human development use models and rigorous research methods to interrogate the mutually-influential relations between individuals and their contexts – dynamic coactions usually symbolized as individual context relations. Current science indicates that the contribution of genes to human development depends on the context in which they exist. Across the nation and world, both epigenetics research and developmental science research document that human development is marked by enormous plasticity because of the specific dynamics of each person's individual context relations.

Using this knowledge, programs and policies can promote thriving in each individual. The Eliot-Pearson community can give their voices and scholarship to creating social understanding and actions that erase from science and society the counterfactual and dehumanizing pronouncements of genetic reductionists, thereby helping create a more socially just world for all people across all of life.



Student Spotlight

Maddie Smith



For Maddie Smith, second year master's student, Eliot-Pearson is much more than an academic institution: it is a community. As an active member of the Master's Student Association (MSA), Maddie organizes social events for graduate students in the department. She fondly remembers events such as E-P Field Day and Pumpkin Carving, both featured in past newsletters. Besides the social community at E-P, Maddie has also gotten involved through being a Teaching Assistant and Research Assistant. By working with undergraduates and contributing to research in the Crehan and Pinderhughes labs, Maddie has found herself building connections with many members of the Eliot-Pearson community.

Alumni Spotlight

Interview with Joyce Pastor

G (George): Joyce, your student days at Eliot-Pearson began in 1963, a time when the "Eliot-Pearson School," as it was then called, was about to become a full-fledged department at Tufts. Can you tell us something about what it was like to be part of this historic time for E-P?

J (Joyce): Well, all of us had a choice to either get our degree from the Eliot-Pearson School or from Jackson College for Women, essentially from Tufts. I chose to get my degree from Tufts and so had to take additional courses on the Hill to fulfill requirements for the BA.

G: Can you tell us some of your memories of what it was like to be a student 'back then'?

J: One thing I remember quite well is how close we were as a student group. We were all friends and spent a great deal of time together outside of our work.

G: How do you think it was different back then?

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J: Well, there were certain restrictions on us as women that aren't restrictions right now. For example, except on days when it was exceptionally cold, we weren't allowed to wear pants, and I remember sitting on the floor to hold meetings with the children and worrying about others who might be watching me.

G: From your experience as an E-P student, what do you think stayed with you and influenced your ways of working with children and parents?

J: Throughout my days at Eliot-Pearson, there was a big emphasis on observation. We spent many hours observing teachers and children through screens and in the classroom. That discipline of observing stayed with me in my own practice and contributed to my knowing how good teachers teach and how children behave.

G: You have told me that Eliot-Pearson set you up to work in Jamaica Plain – at a school where half the children were Black and from low-income neighborhoods? Can you say what that meant to you then and now?

J: It was a huge experience in my development as a teacher. It meant a great deal that I won the trust of the Black assistant teacher and found myself loving each and every child in the classroom.

G: Recently, you and your husband were featured in the Combined Jewish Philanthropies' newsletter – for your legacy of service and philanthropy. In that newsletter, you indicate your work has a spiritual grounding. Can you say how that grounding has supported your work with children and how it might also relate to your experience at Eliot-Pearson?

J: There is a Jewish saying, "Every soul a holy soul," and I think there was a similar message in the Eliot-Pearson way of insisting that all of us respect each and every child.



News from Faculty and Research Labs

Pinderhughes Lab

Doctoral research assistant Seungmi Lee received \$1000 from the Graduate Student Research Competition (GSRC) Fall 2021 on her research project, "Family Influences on Asian American Young Adults' Critical Reflection." This study investigates how Asian American young adults engage in critical reflection (i.e., awareness of unequal social structures), and how AAs' critical reflection can be influenced by family messages about social inequality.

DevTech Lab

Marina Bers was announced to be a 2022 AERA Fellow. The AERA Fellows Program honors education researchers for their exceptional contributions to, and excellence in, education research.

Eliot Pearson doctoral candidate Emily Relkin won first place in the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) Graduate Student Research Competition at the Special Interest Group Computer Science Education (SIGCSE) Technical Symposium in Providence, RI. She will now advance to the ACM Grand Finals where she will compete against other first place ACM conference winners from around the world.

C3 Lab

Julius Anastasio started a job as a Human Services Researcher at Mathematica. Natalya Zaika passed her Dissertation Defense on March 10th.

Read a recent publication in *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, "High residential mobility and young children's healthy development in low-income families: Exploring the moderating role of Head Start" (Anastasio, J., Leventhal, T., & Amadon Anderson, S. 2022) here:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0885200621001253>

E-P Voices Blog Posts

Read an excerpt from the most recent addition to our community blog, E-P Voices:

Where were you in camp? Japanese children interned during WWII.

By Martha Pott

“Where were you in camp?” I was standing next to my friend, Hiroshi (David) Yamamoto, who had just been introduced to someone who was also Japanese American. They weren’t talking about summer camp. Hiroshi was four years old when his family was interned at Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Wyoming, where he lived with his parents and two older sisters until he was eight.

After Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7, 1941, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 that incarcerated people of Japanese descent in internment camps in the western US in an effort to “curb potential Japanese espionage.” Those who were identified as at least 1/16th Japanese were given 6 days to dispose of their property and possessions. In fact, there were no charges ever brought against Japanese Americans for espionage or sabotage against the United States. Most of those interned were US citizens. Over half of those interned were children. In 1980, the US government established the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC), which concluded that Executive Order 9066 “was not justified by military necessity” but was driven by “race prejudice, war hysteria, and failure of political leadership.”



This photo shows the Mochida family in Hayward, California, waiting for a bus that will “evacuate” them to an “assembly center” and, eventually, a “relocation center.” The US government used identification tags “to aid in keeping the family unit intact during all phases of evacuation.” The father, Mr. Mochida, ran a nursery with five greenhouses, raising snapdragons and sweet peas.

Read the rest of the piece here: <https://sites.tufts.edu/epvoices/2022/03/25/where-were-you-in-camp-japanese-children-interned-during-wwii/>

If you are interested in writing a piece for the blog or have any feedback, please reach out to martha.pott@tufts.edu for more information.

To donate to Eliot-Pearson, please use one of the following links:

[Eliot-Pearson's Greatest Needs Fund](#)

[Eliot-Pearson Children's School Scholarship Fund](#)