

This Week's Citation Classic

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Kagan J & Moss H A. *Birth to maturity: a study in psychological development.*

New York: Wiley, 1962. 381 p.

[Fels Research Institute, Yellow Springs, OH and National Institute of Mental Health, Rockville, MD]

An analysis of the intra-individual stability of motivational and behavioral properties from birth through mid-adulthood revealed minimal preservation of most qualities from the behaviors coded prior to school entrance but moderately significant preservation from age ten through adulthood. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*[®] (SSCI[®]) indicates that this book has been cited over 460 times since 1966.]

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"The research report contained in *Birth to Maturity* began with an invitation in 1956 from Lester W. Sontag, the director of the Fels Research Institute, to assume responsibility for evaluating the adult subjects who were members of the Fels longitudinal population and integrating that information with the extensive data that had been gathered on each person from their infancy through late adolescence. After reading excerpts from the individual records I became convinced that this project provided an unusual opportunity to learn more about the genesis of personality, and in January 1957, I began the work. Howard Moss, who had just received his degree from Ohio State University, joined me as a collaborator. He took responsibility for quantification of the longitudinal records while I interviewed the adults and, with Moss as well as John and Beatrice Lacey, administered a battery of experimental procedures designed to evaluate characteristics concerned with the adult's hierarchy of motives and conflicts.

"The generalizations revealed by the analysis of the extensive corpus of data have influenced, directly or indirectly, most of my subsequent research.¹ This project became the major incentive for the subsequent investigations of reflection-impulsivity as well as the study of tempo of play in young children.² One of the most surprising relations in the corpus was the discovery that the only psychological characteristic quantified during the first three years of life that had any predictive power for future behavior was the variable Moss and I called passivity. I now think it should have been labeled 'inhibition in the face of uncertainty.' The most inhibited infant boys retained that characteristic through adolescence and adulthood. The most recent research in my laboratory indicates that this temperamental dimension is robust and related to biological qualities of the infant. It may be that 20 years after *Birth to Maturity* my colleagues and I will finally clarify the meaning of the relationships that puzzled us so many years ago.

"The popularity of *Birth to Maturity*, which won the Hofheimer Prize of the American Psychiatric Association, is due, I think, to the fact that it was the first extensive report on the degree of continuity and discontinuity in human development, a theme of major interest to both psychologists and parents. Additionally, some of the work's major conclusions were in accord with the presuppositions of the psychological community; namely, there is preservation of individual differences from childhood to adulthood but that local sex role standards and the social class of the child's family would affect the degree of preservation. When a scientist's conclusions match the *a priori* beliefs of the community, the work is generally not given as critical a review as generalizations that violate consensus. When, a decade after *Birth to Maturity*,³ I suggested that there might be minimal preservation of the individual qualities of infants, that statement generated considerably more resistance. A general reference which provides a review of this field has been published."⁴

1. Kagan J. A psychologist's account at mid-career. (Krawiec T S, ed.) *The psychologists*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972. Vol. 1. p. 137-66.
2. -----, *Change and continuity in infancy*. New York: Wiley, 1971. 298 p.
3. Kagan J & Klein R E. Cross-cultural perspectives on early development. *Amer. Psychol.* 28:947-61, 1973.
4. Kagan J & Brim O G. *Constancy and change in human development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980. 754 p.