Book Review

Narvaez, D., Panksepp, J., Schore, A.N., & Gleason, T.R. (Eds.) (2013). *Evolution, Early Experience, and Human Development: From Research to Practice and Policy*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 78-0-19-975505-9

A literature search piqued by the publication of an interesting article about babies on the internet led me to this text book filled with essays from some of my favorite researchers and authors in the field of attachment, neuroscience, and early nervous system development. Darcia Naevaez, PhD, associate professor of psychology at the University of Minnesota, published a short list, "Ten Things Everyone Should Know About Babies" (Naevaez, 2013) in her blog in Psychology Today. The subheading caught my eye: *Ignorance about babies is undermining society*. Previously I did not know about Narvaez, and then, I just had to read everything she wrote.

I get excited every time I pick up this volume of essays and commentary. It is composed of publications of presentations from the conference, "Human Nature and Early Experience: Addressing the 'Environment of Evolutionary Adaptedness,'" held in 2010 at the University of Notre Dame. Not only is it filled with recent findings from excellent researchers like Allan Schore, Dan Siegel, Jaak Panksepp, Michael Meaney, Helen Ball, Bruce Perry, and many more, but it offers the hungry pre and perinatal intellectual practitioner exceptionally juicy discussion about necessary and titillating topics such as epigenetics, morality, culture, infant sleep, human evolution, parenting practices, play, and more. It also offers up tastes of ideas of little known writers and researchers in our field who have exceptional things to say.

The book's arrangement is underscores its engagement factor: there are contributions from many wonderful thinkers in the pre and perinatal field, and then commentary on their ideas from selected authors. From the outside, the editors set the tone with a series of questions:

> How much does early experience matter and for what? Can we integrate findings across subfields of science regarding early life experience? How should ancestral environments inform human developmental science? How malleable is human nature? Are suboptimal outcomes to be expected by evolutionary mechanisms, or do they represent interference by human ideologies and cultural drift from evolutionary behaviors? Do we have enough information now to make recommendations for policy and practice or must more research be done? (p. xi)

The book is arranged in five sections: Human Nature: The Effects of Evolution and Environment; Early Experience: The Effects of Cultural Practice; Themes in Human Evolution; Perspectives and Counterperspectives;

and Conclusion. The first three sections present essays and then responses to these writings called "Commentary." I enjoyed witnessing the authors read and respond to each other, providing thoughtful and sometimes critical feedback. I especially enjoyed Michael Lamb's response to papers on evolution, for example, alluding to patterns in our culture that perhaps we do not see and how this might color our perception. I equally enjoyed Bruce Perry's response to a series of technical papers on neurobiology with a question about empathy. For those among us who love neuroscience, these points and counterpoints about our basic but complicated human evolution and function are very stimulating. "Simply stated," Perry comments, "the human brain is not designed for the modern world . . ." (p. 199). I found myself nodding in agreement with many of his points, but equally enjoying the previous authors' comments on brain function, dopamine, oxytocin, and social development.

There are many parts of this volume that are also very grounding. For example, the second section on the effects of cultural practice included detailed descriptions of the first hour after birth, the importance of sleep, nighttime and daytime nursing, perceptions of infant pain and touch, skin-to-skin contact, and our ability to adapt. I was very pleased to see essays on the importance of play in human development as well. Yes! Of course! How could we leave out the importance of play in our evolutionary development? Yet I find it barely present in our schools and communities.

Section four offers a series of perspectives on our current condition and the evolution of our species. Each of the seven "Perspectives" offer questions, criticisms, observations, and some recommendations on the topics of the conference and the volume, specifically the role of science and research and the nature of our species. The authors here present concerns from philosophical to practical, from visionary to specific. It was a relief to read self-reflection in the respective fields represented.

Finally, the editors of the volume make recommendations for policy to support the ultimate health of our species. It is clear from the data that we are suffering, particularly in the United States. It answers some of the question, "What do we do now?" The volume is about self-confrontation on an academic and practical level with regard to what we are doing to ourselves in our modern culture. It is an excellent read, well written and thorough. It would make an excellent text book for an advanced course in pre and perinatal psychology theory and practice.

Kate White, MA, CMT, RCST®, NCBTMB
Director of Education, APPPAH
educate@birthpsychology.com

Narvaez, D. (2013, December 8). Ten things everyone should know about babies: Ignorance about babies is undermining our society [Web log post]. Retrieved from https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/moral-landscapes/201312/ten-things-everyone-should-know-about-babies