
Toward an Integrated Developmental Science: Social Structuring, Human Agency, and Historical Change

Lives in Time and Place: The Problems and Promises of Developmental Science

by Richard A. Settersten Jr.

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Review by Carsten Wrosch

For developmental science, it is essential to study the factors that influence and determine people's development across the life course. The knowledge and hypotheses about the impact of ontogenetic, contextual, and historical factors on human development can be expected to shape those future projects that will help to further illuminate the complex processes of lifelong development.

Lives in Time and Place addresses these issues and is a helpful and rich source for researchers who are interested in the study of lifelong human development. The book discusses the many theoretical approaches and empirical findings that have emerged in developmental science. By considering both psychological and sociological perspectives on human development, it documents the exciting advancements in a field that is still young, historically speaking. This is an important issue, given that, some decades ago, many scientists almost equated developmental psychology with child psychology. An indicator that documents these changes in the focus of research and theory can be found in the professional databases. By searching the American Psychological Association database PsycLIT for the keyword "life-span," I found eight entries between 1960 and 1969, but I found 568 entries between 1990

and 1999. Clearly, the study of human development has established its own disciplines that go beyond the childhood age, and Settersten's book is an excellent example for this development.

The strength of the book for the field of human development lies in its interdisciplinary nature. A prototypical example reflecting the author's intention to bridge different disciplines within human development is provided by the following statement:

We must better understand social structures and their impact on the life course. But we must also take the developmental person to be active, even proactive, in constructing her or his life, and interactive with her or his environments. In this sense, we must bridge psychology and sociology, micro and macro. (p. 221)

Although approaches of linking persons and contexts have a long tradition in research and theory (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Elder, 1974; Lewin, 1939), integration of individual-based and contextual theories is still an important issue for developmental science. Research in human development does not always consider different approaches to studying people's lives. For example, it is rare that alternative explanations for observed age differences in cross-sectional research (e.g., cohort, generation; see Baltes, 1968) are explicitly studied, given the various problems with disentangling these factors. The author,

however, takes these issues seriously. Throughout the book it is claimed that psychological research should implement social structure and cohort, and sociological research is encouraged to address the importance of people's subjective concerns. Indeed, it seems to be extremely relevant to integrate both the psychological and sociological perspectives on human development into a broader theoretical framework. The book stimulates such changes of theoretical focus and empirical implementation by suggestions to overcome fragmentation across disciplines and to move toward a more integrated study of lives.

Developmental Theories and Debates

The book starts with a discussion of propositions derived from life-course sociology and life-span developmental psychology. It becomes evident that sociological approaches also include individuals as important factors of development, just as psychological models of development address the importance of contextual factors. However, the author argues that developmental science has a significant distance to go to meet these objectives. Though "subjective concerns are generally of little or no importance" (p. 20) in macrosociological frameworks, life-span psychologists often "do not take historical embeddedness seriously" (p. 31), and "a conception of environmental opportunities and constraints is particularly absent in the current state of research in life-span psychology" (p. 27). Although these statements might be true for some research, it seems important to note that they do not apply to other people's work. Indeed, sociologists and psychologists have collaboratively produced integrative work (Baltes & Mayer, 1999;

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Diewald, Huinink, & Heckhausen, 1996). In addition, some psychological models explicitly incorporate opportunities and constraints of development as central tenets of theory and research (e.g., life-span theory of control; see Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995).

The author also discusses emerging debates concerning deregulation and flexibility of life-course patterns. This issue is presumably of particular importance, considering recent changes in key developmental domains, such as family and work. In addition, historical change of life-course patterns has probably just started, and we definitely do not know what kind of changes in the sociostructural conditions of development might occur in the new millennium. Thus, it seems to be crucial for developmental science to study more precisely how individuals and societies adapt to historical change. By analyzing both opportunities for and barriers of age flexibility, the book takes a moderate position in the ongoing debates concerning deregulation and age integration of life-course patterns. It is argued that more empirical evidence would be needed to shed light on these emerging debates. Given the interdisciplinary aim of the book, however, the topic could have been elaborated by discussing in more detail how individuals and societies adapt to historical change. One possible area of interest would relate to examining changes in the importance of individuals' active processes (e.g., self-regulation, control) and societal means if people confront changing conditions of development (Wrosch & Freund, 2001). For example, individuals' active processes might become more influential during periods of rapid historical change, given that societal means often lag behind historical developments (Riley, Kahn, & Foner, 1994), individuals presumably receive less social support (Schulz & Rau, 1985), and people confront less normatively structured environments.

The second chapter addresses the role played by age and age structuring in human development. The au-

thor shows that the meaning of age and age structuring varies across different levels of observation, such as individuals, life domains, and cultures. To obtain a better understanding of the meaning of age, Settersten emphasizes that the developmental scientist must continue to describe and explain the complexities of life-course patterns. This seems to be an important issue, given that chronological age itself is probably not the cause of many life-course-related changes. Accordingly, the variables (age and cohort) that are most central to life-span developmental psychologists and life-course sociologists are both described as "empty" variables. As a consequence, the book raises the important issue that developmental science must also develop more precise measures of the underlying sociostructural, psychological, and biological conditions of age-graded development.

In addition, psychological aspects such as subjective age, developmental goal setting, and stereotypes are considered. In particular the section on developmental goal setting exemplifies the interdependence between contextual factors that canalize people's lives and individuals' active attempts to regulate their development throughout life. It reveals important pathways of successful development by discussing how people adjust their active processes to changing contextual conditions across the life course.

Complementing the section on age and age structuring, the book continues by discussing the concept of generation and challenges associated with a possible confound between age and cohort. The unique experience shared among members of a certain generation is expected to contribute to subsequent differences between generations. Thus, generation effects might also contribute to age differences obtained in cross-sectional research. Another issue addressed in the chapter is described in the possibility that historical events differentially affect the development of people from different cohorts (e.g., life-stage principle). This middle part of the book is important because it

reveals the complex nature of human development. It becomes evident that the same phenomenon can be approached from different perspectives and that developmental science might obtain a better understanding of human development by integrating psychological, sociological, and historical perspectives.

How to Study Lifelong Development?

After having introduced different theoretical frameworks that might contribute to an integrated science of life, methodological and conceptual issues relating to how people's lives can be analyzed in the long run are addressed. This section includes discussion of central parameters of the study of the life course, such as life events, turning points, life transitions, and trajectories. Among other dimensions, these parameters are described to have a specific timing, are sequenced in certain order, and last for a certain amount of time. It is also addressed that developmental scientists should consider individual variation in the parameter and dimensions of life-course patterns. In other words, studying deviations from normative life paths or nonnormative development might shed light on the complex processes of lifelong development. Presumably, this issue will become particularly relevant in future research, given that life-course patterns have become less institutionalized and individuals can establish more flexible and less normative life paths.

The author also addresses different strategies of assessing (e.g., life history calendar, life review) and analyzing (e.g., trajectory analyses, measurement of change) life-course data. In particular, the section on analyzing trajectories seems to be important for understanding life-course data because trajectories explicitly address change over time, go beyond linear analyses, and thus might also provide a more accurate picture of human development. To complement the section on trajectory analyses, it seems relevant to note that there is also a new methodological approach

for analyzing trajectories that is not addressed in the book but that might contribute to a more profound understanding of human lives. The method involves a group-based trajectory approach that identifies different subgroups of a population who follow distinct trajectories over time (e.g., developmental trajectories; see Nagin, 1999).

Finally, the book discusses how social context affects human lives. Among other issues, the link between changing environments and changing individuals is addressed. Thus, this chapter also bridges psychology and sociology by asking how changing environments affect the individual, but also how human agency and individual differences play out in changing environmental contexts. Moreover, the chapter discusses different approaches of studying lives and addresses the respective emphasis on the person, the environment, and the person-environment link.

An Agenda for Developmental Science

The book closes by proposing an agenda for developmental science. This section represents a condensed form of the various issues discussed in much more detail throughout the entire book. It points to the many unsolved problems and questions of developmental science, such as overcoming barriers across disciplines, understanding age and cohort, incorporating social context, linking social structure and human agency, and deregulation of life-course patterns. The issues raised in the proposed agenda for developmental science, however, are still somewhat fragmented and do not completely reveal how sociological and psychological aspects of human development can be integrated in future research. Thus, the final chapter probably missed the opportunity to link the different aspects and unsolved research questions more closely together. Although it is obviously a difficult task to achieve, it would have been useful to formulate a conceptual model that might guide future

research on human development. Such a model might help to overcome the existing barriers across disciplines by integrating the importance of social structuring and human agency across age and historical time. In general, it becomes apparent that research on human development has accomplished a lot during the past decades. *Lives in Time and Place* is an important book that documents these developments. In addition, it points to the many unsolved problems of research in human development that can be overcome by a less fragmented and more integrated developmental science. □

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