



# NEW FRONTIERS IN SOCIALIZATION

Volume 7

Richard A. Settersten, Jr. &  
Timothy J. Owens

# NEW FRONTIERS IN SOCIALIZATION

# ADVANCES IN LIFE COURSE RESEARCH

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ADVANCES IN LIFE COURSE RESEARCH VOLUME 7

# NEW FRONTIERS IN SOCIALIZATION

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# **PREFACE**

## **SERIES PURPOSE AND ORIENTATION**

*Advances in Life Course Research* publishes original theoretical analyses, integrative reviews, policy analyses and position papers, and theory-based empirical papers on issues involving all aspects of the human life course. Adopting a broad conception of the life course, it invites and welcomes contributions from all disciplines and fields of study interested in understanding, describing, and predicting the antecedents of and consequences for the course that human lives take from birth to death, within and across time and cultures, regardless of methodology, theoretical orientation, or disciplinary affiliation. Each volume is organized around a unifying theme. Queries and suggestions for future volumes are most welcome. Please see [http://icdweb.cc.purdue.edu/~towens/ALCR/Pages/volumes\\_description.htm](http://icdweb.cc.purdue.edu/~towens/ALCR/Pages/volumes_description.htm)

## **PURPOSE OF THIS VOLUME**

The present volume (Number 7) is subtitled *New Frontiers in Socialization*. A combination of invited and author initiated papers—all anonymously peer reviewed—this volume seeks to produce a cohesive though wide ranging source of information on both socialization and the life course, as each relates to the other. The volume advances theory and research related to socialization during specific periods of adult life or across adulthood. We focus on the adult years because most scholarship on socialization pertains to the first two decades of life. The book addresses socialization experiences within one or more contemporary contexts – families, neighborhoods and communities, peer and friendship groups, educational settings, work organizations, volunteer associations, medical institutions, the media, or nation and culture. The volume also discusses the processes that occur in these settings, the primary agents of socialization, the content of socialization messages, or the consequences of these experiences for individuals, groups (e.g. age, cohort, sex, race, social class), or society at large.

Timothy J. Owens  
*Series Editor*

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Richard A. Settersten, Jr.  
Timothy J. Owens  
*Volume Co-Editors*



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**PART 1:**  
**THE FIELD OF SOCIALIZATION**  
**IN REVIEW**

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# NEW FRONTIERS IN SOCIALIZATION: AN INTRODUCTION

Timothy J. Owens and Richard A. Settersten, Jr.

The purpose of this volume is to advance theory and research on socialization both within and across specific periods of the life course. We focus primarily, though not exclusively, on the adult years. Since the bulk of the literature on socialization has heretofore been dominated by problems, issues, and contexts of childhood and adolescence, this decision seems particularly justified. We thus hope, in some small way, to tip the scales in favor of a more balanced literature.

The contributions gathered here – all original and peer reviewed – address socialization experiences within one or more contemporary contexts, such as families, neighborhoods and communities, peer and friendship groups, educational settings, work organizations, medical institutions, the military, history, nation and culture. The volume also discusses the processes that occur within these settings, the primary agents of socialization, the content of socialization messages, and the consequences of these experiences for individuals, groups (e.g. age, cohort, sex, race, social class), or society.

The volume includes 17 chapters organized in two parts. Part 1 (The Field of Socialization in Review) serves as the frame. It orients the reader to some of the broader issues and themes of a life course view of socialization. Part 2 (Socialization in Specific Contexts) forms the mass of the volume. Here we delve deeper into a number of contexts and settings that act, intentionally or not, as important venues of socialization.

## PART 1: THE FIELD OF SOCIALIZATION IN REVIEW

Chapter 1 (Socialization and the Life Course: New Frontiers in Theory and Research) by Richard Settersten considers the meanings and uses of “socialization” from the vantage points of psychology and sociology. It explores socialization experiences within and across specific periods of adult life, as well as within its focal settings (especially education, work, and family). It considers how the life course perspective, as a critical lens for understanding human development, offers exciting new potentials for scholarship on socialization. Because the life course perspective bridges disciplines and levels of analysis while emphasizing matters related to time and place, it offers many new insights into an established topic.

Chapter 2 (Self-Socialization and Post-Traditional Society) by Walter Heinz argues for a transformation of the socialization framework into a more dynamic perspective of *self-construction* over the life course. Beginning with a brief overview of major changes in broader socialization theory, Heinz goes on to discuss selected sociological contributions to individualization of the self. Social constructionism is then introduced as a theoretical framework with the potential to link institutions and socialization. Finally, Heinz pulls the different threads together by delineating convergent perspectives from sociology and social psychology. The result is a sketch of an action theory of self-socialization that takes into account the challenges for an adequate theory of personality and society posed by post-traditional society. In so doing, the author combines self-identity, agency, biography, and self-socialization as major themes.

Chapter 3 (Life Careers and the Theory of Action) by Janet Giele combines existing conceptual and interpretive schemes for understanding the life course with a larger theory of action. The synthesis is accomplished by conceiving of the socialization process and the shaping of life outcomes as a series of dialectical interchanges between person and social context that can be observed from three different perspectives: (1) between social context and the individual, (2) between individual self and life outcomes, and (3) between life outcomes and the social structure. These interchanges, moreover, can be understood as addressing four universal functional problems each social system must face in order to survive, à la Parsons’ theory of action: *legitimation* and pattern maintenance; *integration* of sub-subsystems; *goal attainment*; and *adaptation* to the environment. To demonstrate how this scheme is applicable to the life course, Giele draws on various classic life course studies and then classifies them according to universal functional problems (innovation and tradition, reform and conformity, success and failure, and precocity and delay). The four functions are again identified in stories of the key elements required to produce

a given outcome such as success; and in the developmental processes involved in making life choices. The chapter concludes with an explicit statement of how all three types of interchange connect the social context to individual life course structure, the self to life outcomes, and life outcomes back to social structure. A “Life Course Listener’s Guide” is proposed for collection of data on social context, developmental processes, and actor’s intentions.

## **PART 2: SOCIALIZATION IN SPECIFIC CONTEXTS**

Chapter 4 (Understanding Adaptation to Work in Adulthood: A Contextual Developmental Approach) by Daniel Hyson focuses primarily on socialization that promotes positive adaptation within work settings. Sociological and developmental theorists alike agree that success in the transition to work is among the most salient developmental tasks of young adulthood, primarily because it constitutes a critical step in peoples’ life-long socioeconomic careers. Using data from the Minnesota Parent-Child Project (a 25-year ongoing longitudinal study of at-risk children and their families), Hyson highlights the ways in which worker attributes and earlier socialization experiences within other settings interact to affect success in the transition to work in young adulthood. Throughout the chapter, the author makes a case for adopting a contextual developmental model to comprehensively examine pathways to success in adult work. This integrative approach accounts for both individual and contextual factors in a dynamic model of the complex transaction between multiple levels of influence affecting adaptation to work in adulthood.

Chapter 5 (The Relationship of Turning Points at Work to Perceptions of Psychological Growth and Change) by Elaine Wethington employs quantitative and qualitative methods to examine self-reported turning points at work and their relationship to perceptions of positive psychological growth and change. According to the author, a turning point at work is a time when a person perceives that his or her work life has taken a different direction from its previous trajectory. Current research and theory in adult development and the life course suggests that work turning points will be associated with work achievements, such as promotions and other upward career moves. However, work turning points may also be related to stress exposure. Dialectical perspectives on adult development and socialization also predict that reports of work turning points will be related to personality characteristics, particularly those enabling people to cope better with challenging events and situations. Wethington’s quantitative analyses stem from data from the MacArthur Foundation National Study of Midlife in the United States (MIDUS), a national sample of adults aged 25–74. Her qualitative analyses employ two additional

studies: (1) a sample of 724 MIDUS participants re-interviewed three years later, and (2) 632 residents of upstate New York who took part in the Cornell Couples and Careers Study. Work achievements and difficulties were associated with reporting turning points at work. This finding held net of demographic factors that affect the probability of reporting turning points, personality, and beliefs that may affect how one typically copes with stress.

Chapter 6 (In the Shadows of Giants: Identity and Institution Building in the American Academic Profession) by Joseph Hermanowicz notes that major sociological approaches to professions have neglected the people behind the work. In this chapter, people are “brought in” to the study of professions through a case study of American academe. *Ambition* is treated as a way to frame the study of professionals and professions because it may be viewed as the core requisite for professional entry and success among incumbents. Hermanowicz’s study is based on interviews with three cohorts of sixty scientists working at three different types of universities across the United States. They and academe are studied for how ambition gets narrated as careers unfold in time and place. The results demonstrate how ambition evolves in systematically distinct fashions in conjunction with the organizational environments in which professionals work. Master narratives – shared ways of accounting for passage in a profession based upon one’s work environment – are offered as a way to conceptualize what professions are, in accord with a “people focus.”

Chapter 7 (Socialization and the Family Revisited) by Norella Putney and Vern Bengtson asserts that in post-industrial societies characterized by economic and moral uncertainty, marital instability, and a proliferation of new family forms, traditional approaches to family socialization are limited. The authors look at family socialization from a wider perspective by extending the frame of analysis to multigenerational families and by addressing such socialization processes as intergenerational influence, transmission, and status inheritance. They also posit that affectual solidarity between generations is a largely unacknowledged but necessary condition for positive socialization to occur. Their model accounts for family socialization that is psychosocial as well as structural, where influence and transmission flows between generations may be reciprocal, and where family socialization can occur throughout the adult years. This broader perspective allows a better understanding of individual change and continuity across the life course. Further, an understanding of intergenerational resemblance and inheritance processes and their linkages to intergenerational bonds of affection and affirmation over time helps in the assessment of family continuity and change across generations and cohorts. Putney and Bengtson forward their argument by presenting recent research findings on intergenerational socialization using data from the 30-year Longitudinal Study of Generations.

Chapter 8 (Moving and Still: Neighborhoods, Human Development, and the Life Course) by Richard Settersten and Tanetta Andersson examines neighborhood effects on a variety of life course outcomes. The authors postulate, for example, that the structural characteristics of neighborhoods, the social processes that occur within them, and the specific combinations of structure and process may affect physical, psychological, and social outcomes. Several aspects of neighborhoods seem especially important to human development, including neighborhood composition (e.g. race, sex, age, and income); the quality of schools and other local institutions; the availability of resources and services; the degree and types of social cohesion, order, and control, and changes in these over time. To date, most scholarship has focused on the impact of neighborhood environments on the social outcomes of children and adolescents. Several prominent theoretical models have also guided most inquiry in this area, including contagion models, models of collective socialization, institutional models, competition models, models of relative deprivation, and models of social disorganization. After reviewing these effects and models, Settersten and Andersson discuss how they might be extended to the development of adults and the elderly. The chapter ends with a discussion of the complexities of handling neighborhoods in research and social policy.

Chapter 9 (Careers and Lives: Socialization, Structural Lag, and Gendered Ambivalence) by Phyllis Moen and Robert Orrange presents theory and research findings related to the micro-level impacts of a major societal transformation – the revolution in gender roles. Such macro-level changes are invariably uneven processes, with society offering mixed messages. Women and men are either socialized into one world but find themselves in another, or come to hold variant and even contradictory cognitions and expectations regarding work and family life. In this “half-changed world,” socialization does not provide guideposts but, rather, ambiguity and uncertainty. Not only do the media, parents, and teachers offer mixed messages, but also the structure of contemporary institutions (work, family, gender, and the life course) lags behind societal and personal expectations. People, therefore, must actively engage in the construction of their own life course in a world characterized by structural lag and conflicting signals. The resulting double binds produce a sense of ambivalence among many women and men regarding their own occupation and family career paths. Moen and Orrange draw on both qualitative and quantitative data from the Cornell Careers Institute and other sources in an assessment of working men and women at *all stages of the life course*. They focus, however, on people in their *20s and 30s* as they negotiate work and family career plans, options, and expectations.

Chapter 10 (Individual Risk for Crime is Exacerbated in Poor Familial and Neighborhood Contexts: The Contribution of Low Birth Weight, Family



Adversity, and Neighborhood Disadvantage to Life Course-Persistent Offending) by Alex Piquero and Brian Lawton asserts that research on the etiology of criminal behavior over the life course has tended to focus either on individual-level or social-structural-level risk factors. In contrast, this chapter advances the notion that a more complete understanding of crime over the life course should focus on how the relation between individual risk and antisocial behavior varies as a function of familial and neighborhood socialization contexts. To examine this issue, the authors use data from the Baltimore portion of the National Collaborative Perinatal Project. Using multi-level modeling, Piquero and Lawton provide support for a family adversity  $\times$  individual risk interaction in predicting involvement in life course-persistent styles of antisocial behavior. Moreover, their results show that the interaction is exacerbated in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Chapter 11 (The Death of Friends in Later Life) by Brian DeVries and Colleen Johnson begins by noting that the death of close friends in later life is an ubiquitous yet rarely studied loss, a surprising limitation of current research given the pivotal role of friends in the lives of older individuals. The authors aim to reduce this gap by drawing upon data from two primarily qualitative longitudinal studies: a study of 150 community-dwelling individuals aged 85 and older and a companion study of 100 individuals between the ages of 70 and 85. In-depth interviews reveal seven broad themes when the seniors reflected on the recent loss of close friends through death. The themes are: an accounting of the number of friends that have been lost, the quality of the lost relationship, the context of the loss, the emotional reactions generated by the loss, temporal or life course accounts, the philosophical dimensions of loss, and an accounting of the lost activities. Several themes distinguish the younger old from the oldest old. Specifically, in contrast to the younger old, the oldest old were more likely: (1) to mention their advanced age and the concomitant normative nature of the death; (2) to comment that they are now the "sole survivors" of a long life; and (3) to question their continued existence and the moral of having lived through loss. These data provide a unique vantage point for observing and elucidating the experience of friendship, bereavement, and life in the later years.

Chapter 12 (Educational Participation across the Life Course: Do the Rich Get Richer?) by Aaron Pallas analyzes the social determinants of three different forms of adult education: credential program participation, work-related education, and participation in personal development classes. Drawing on the 1995 and 1999 waves of the National Household Education Survey, the author examines how participation in adult education varies with life course stage and other characteristics of adults. Participation in these forms of adult education

is surprisingly high, even among those over the age of 65, and is significantly higher in 1999 than in 1995. Life stage adds substantially to the predictive power of the models. The effect of life course stage on the likelihood of participation varies across forms of adult education, and also varies by gender. These findings suggest that individuals and employers judge the value of education to be contingent on an individual's location in the life course.

Chapter 13 (The Life Course as an Organizing Principle and Socializing Resource in Modern Medicine) by Dana Rosenfeld and Eugene Gallagher seeks to redress the neglect of: (a) the role of medicine and medical personnel as agents of socialization in the life course, and (b) how medicine and medical personnel use notions of the life course to socialize individuals into the patient role. In keeping with post-structuralist approaches to regulation and social control, the authors treat modern medicine as a people-processing institution whose goal is, among other things, to produce a person who accepts the logic and practices of modern medicine. This leads many researchers to emphasize the fact that medicine organizes illness around life course expectations as a way to produce standardized, routinized and compliant patients. The authors suggest that the medicalization of the life course and the social construction of childhood and old age as dependent states are fruitful ways to understand the context in which patients are socialized to adopt the role that medicine has created for them. Using secondary sources, Rosenfeld and Gallagher then discuss how these formulations are used in medical interactions with children and elders to produce both compliant patients and a medicalized life course. Specifically, they examine how the life course is applied and elaborated in medical interactions, suggesting that medical agents often engage in "life-coursing" – that is, how medical agents use the life course as an interpretive resource for approaching physical and mental health statuses and experiences.

Chapter 14 (*Die Bildung* of the Warrior Class: Socialization and the Acquisition of Cultural Resources) by James Dowd focuses on a rarefied group whose adult socialization involves an encounter not only with the generic social world of the upper-middle class professional but also with a distinctive segment of this social world – the military. The author's research is based on extensive interviews with 62 United States Army generals. According to Dowd, more than a little tension exists in this dual experience since, ideally, the army officer is expected to demonstrate both a mastery of military skills *and* the knowledge and sophistication associated with civilian professionals. The socialization of younger officers is weighted clearly on the side of military skills. As they advance in rank, however, the focus of socialization efforts shifts from military skills to social skills. Indeed, prerequisite for promotion to *general* officer is the demonstrated acquisition of more than the minimal level of cultural

capital deemed necessary for comfortable passage through the pressured and polished worlds of diplomats, politicians, corporate executives, and military leaders of other services and from other countries. Although it might be argued that this layer of sophistication is the result of individual effort and personal style, which indeed it is, it is also the end-product of specific institutional mechanisms designed to enable this very outcome. To analyze the ways in which socialization operates in adulthood, Dowd considers four principal venues, each of which serves as an arena, or conduit, for the acquisition of cultural resources. He examines each of these venues in turn in order to explore their contribution to the formation of senior military leaders who are both technically proficient and possess the cultural capital that the rank of general officer requires. The author concludes that there is sufficient commonality across the individual career narratives to indicate that the process is not random but a structural aspect of the military career itself.

Chapter 15 (*Racial and Gender Differences in the Transition to Adulthood: A Longitudinal Study of Philadelphia Youth*) by Julie Kmec and Frank Furstenberg derives from the most recent wave of a longitudinal study of nearly 500 families in urban Philadelphia neighborhoods collected over a nine-year time span. Earlier findings revealed remarkable continuity in success trajectories from early to mid-adolescence despite hazards imposed by poor neighborhoods, low economic standing, and poor schooling opportunities. Despite this stability, qualitative interviews with the adolescents suggested a flattening slope of success and an increasing slope of failure and risk during the transition to adulthood for minority men. They begin their chapter by describing the association between the youth's performance in 1991 and their socioeconomic standing in 1999 for different race and gender sub-groups. Findings from logistic regressions support the predictions of a growing racial divergence for minority men. The findings also suggest that early and late adolescent attributes do not mediate the strong effect of race on early adult success. Their research highlights the role of individual characteristics, the family, and peers in socializing adolescents into adulthood. Minority men are the group most likely to have low socioeconomic standing in early adulthood. Moreover, they conclude that among this group, attending a comprehensive public school as opposed to a private or magnet school is the strongest predictor of their poor performance.

Chapter 16 (*The Imprint of Time: Historical Experiences in the Lives of Mature Adults*) by Richard Settersten and Lisa Martin addresses the link between lives and history. Contemporary cohorts of mature adults have experienced landmark historical events and dramatic social change in the course of their lives. Which historical events and changes are viewed as carrying

significant personal effects, and how were they important? Does significant variability exist among more specific cohorts of individuals within the larger group of mature adults? To shed light on these questions, the authors draw on data from the Intersection of Personal and National History, a national probability sample. Using a subset of 1,069 respondents, four separate cohorts are the focus of inquiry: those who entered adulthood between 1920–1934 ( $N = 153$ ), (2) 1935–1945 ( $N = 203$ ), (3) 1946–1959 ( $N = 274$ ), and (4) 1960–1973 ( $N = 439$ ). Surprisingly, the majority of respondents do, indeed, reference the personal effects of macro-level events and changes. Times of war, especially World War II and Vietnam, are most often viewed as having left the most significant marks on these individuals and their families. Consistent and significant cohort differences underlie findings for the sample as a whole. The authors turn our attention to historical time as a distal but critical context for human development, and to cohort as an important source of variability in socialization and in life chances, expectations, and experiences.

Chapter 17 (Social Change, the Life Course, and Socialization: Biographies of Labor Market Entrants after Unification) by Susanne Falk and Ansgar Weymann compares socialization experiences of adolescents and young adults in pre-1989 unification of East and West Germany with their post-unification professional careers. Specifically, the authors ask two fundamental questions: Are there differences in the transition from education to employment across cohorts of East and West Germans entering the labor market, and did their subsequent life courses converge after unification? To what extent do life course events depend on the specific institutional arrangements and opportunities of pre- and post-unification generations? At the theoretical center of their argument is a concept of individual choices made within the institutional and structural constraints of a society in transition. The authors assess the issue by comparing longitudinal data from three cohorts of East German labor market entrants who graduated from university or professional schools in 1985, 1990 and 1995. Whereas the oldest cohort completed their education, first job entry, and five years of employment under socialism, the youngest cohort graduated under West German conditions. The middle cohort completed their schooling in the German Democratic Republic, but their first job entries fell within the turmoil of its collapse and the disarray of the unification year. The reference group for comparing the particularities of East German life course events after unification is a West German Sample from the German Socio Economic Panel, a retrospective longitudinal data-set which is representative for persons and households in the Federal Republic of Germany.