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ABSTRACT

Postmodern, multicultural, and feminist critiques of psychology have changed how longitudinal researchers construct their inquiries and frame their data. Also the new scholarship brings to the longitudinal investigation perspectives from other disciplines including sociology, anthropology, and history, among others. The book used as a framework for this discussion, "Women's Lives Through Time," is an assembly of different studies, thus providing perspective on the changing discipline of longitudinal research. Many studies on women were out of print and there was an absence of interdisciplinary dialogue about women's adult development. Some broad themes weaving together all the studies are: (1) all of the women studied had attended college; (2) strong evidence existed for increased well-being and feelings of competence in women as they mature; and (3) all the women were affected by role socialization and gender discrimination. The studies included in the book indicated that longitudinal methodologies have diversified over the years. More subjective and context-sensitive methods were incorporated; some caution needs to be taken to ensure that the research retains analysis of measurable data. Another methodological challenge has to do with incorporating issues of socio-historical context into lifespan research. Incorporating subjective and contextual material is the wave of the future in life studies research. (CC)

LEGACIES AND LESSONS: INSIGHTS FROM LONGITUDINAL STUDIES OF EDUCATED WOMEN

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The publication this year of both Women's Lives Through Time: Educated American Women of the Twentieth Century (Hulbert and Schuster, 1993) and Studying Lives Through Time (Funder, Parke, Tomlinson-Keasey, and Widamon, 1993) indicates the presence of a "marker event" in the lifespan development of longitudinal research! Indeed, more than twenty years have passed since Jack Block (1971) first described the burdens and excitement of the longitudinal process and argued persuasively that only this approach adequately "encompasses time and the trajectory of individual lives" (p. 3). These books have arrived at a time of many changes within the field of human development. A new generation of researchers has come to the study of adulthood and aging informed by literatures and methodologies that many of us had to invent as we went along. Recent scholarship on lives now embraces issues of gender, ethnicity, social class and social context that typically were ignored or discounted in earlier research. A lively energy for secondary analysis of existing data sets has erupted (Elder, Pavalko, and Clipp, 1992; Brooks-Gunn and Elder, 1991), and a variety of old projects are being revived with the help of efficient, cost-effective computer programs.

Also, the way we currently "think about" lives, including whose lives we even think to think about, has opened up and diversified. The postmodern, multi-ethnic, and feminist critiques of psychology have left their mark on our assumptions and questions and have influenced how we construct our inquiries and interpret our data. Changing demographics have had an impact on how we conceptualize and give meaning tonotions of age and of aging (Neugarten and Neugarten, 1987). And we now have new early, middle and later adulthood populations to study--individuals and groups whose late twentieth century experiences do not readily conform to theoretical models of development that were popular in decades past.

And so, as the twenty-first century beckons, we are in a splendid position both to look back to the legacies of earlier research and to look forward to new ways of studying lives. For Kathy Hulbert and me, the experience of bringing together 15 longitudinal studies of educated women has afforded a particularly rich opportunity, first, to assemble a disparate literature on women's adult development that was surprisingly inaccessible in mainstream publications about the lifespan and, second, to foster a dialogue among researchers whose work had evolved in a variety of academic disciplines and from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives. This dialogue helped to situate us in a community of scholarship we described as "life studies research" and enabled us to embrace a broad view of this emergent field. By our definition, life studies research brings to the longitudinal psychological investigation of human development perspectives from several disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, education, career development, economics, and history. The questions raised in these disciplines push us beyond traditional parameters of meaning and help us to look, in Daniel Levinson's words, not just at variables but at whole lives (quoted in Rosenfeld and Stark, 1987).

Kathy and I began our collaboration in 1989 with a conviction that the lives of educated women in the twentieth century were still not being fairly assessed and interpreted--that even white, middle-class, privileged college cohorts were still being studied in terms of outdated, generally masculine definitions of competence, well-being, and success. And we came to our work as volume editors with a particular appreciation for the many ways that lives had been and can be studied through time.

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Table 1 displays the scope of the work assembled in our book. It reveals that longitudinal studies of educated women have been ongoing since the 1920s and that data exist about groups that entered college in each decade since that time. It is no accident that Kathy and I met at a conference for longitudinal researchers hosted by the Henry Murray Center for the Study of Lives at Radcliffe College; nor is it surprising that many of the studies presented in the book are archived at the Murray Center, the foremost repository of data on lifespan development in the country. What did surprise us in our earliest discussions about research on women's lives was the number of key studies of women that had long been out of print and the likelihood that a considerable proportion of such studies had never been made available to a broad readership. And when we looked collaboratively at the work of longitudinalists from various fields, we realized how little cross-fertilization there had been across disciplines in long-term research on women's lives. Thus, despite parallel concerns in the work of, say, Ginzberg and Yohalem, labor economists who studied work and family patterns of educated women of the 1950s, and Helson, a psychologist who looked at personality development of women who entered adulthood in the 1960s, and Almquist and Angrist, sociologists who investigated how college women actualized their career aspirations in the 1970s, these authors typically did not cite one another or endeavor to build on one another's work. The absence of a true interdisciplinary dialogue about women's adult development seemed particularly unfortunate at a time when so much creative work on women's lives was evolving in a variety of related fields.

As we envisioned bringing these studies together in one place, we were inspired by the perspective of anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson. In her book, Composing a Life, Bateson demonstrated, through a series of case examples, the value of, in her words, "setting lives side by side." In studying women's lives, she argued, this comparative structure helps to "make the invisible visible" and offers the opportunity to "recognize common patterns...that have not been [previously] acknowledged or fostered." (p. 5) Our project, designed to place investigations of 15 groups of educated women side by side and to look for common patterns among them, was undertaken with Bateson's thesis in mind.

My remarks today focus on three of these common patterns. After I describe these commonalities, I will mention some lessons we have learned about innovation in longitudinal methodology, and I will then conclude with some observations about the subjective experiences of investigators who conduct longitudinal research.

Constructing Commonalities

Identifying common patterns across the 15 studies proved both illuminating and challenging for Kathy and me. To begin with, these longitudinal projects were initiated during different sociohistorical eras, were grounded in different theoretical and methodological traditions, and were based on samples that could not be readily held up to systematic comparisons. Moreover, most of the studies did not begin with longitudinal objectives and many were designed specifically to measure isolated variables about personality or sociopolitical attitude formation or career decisionmaking. As research projects, these works were not part of a tradition of studying whole lives, and when most were begun there was no tradition of studying *women's* lives. So, in one way, our attempt to construct a literature of life studies of women confirmed our suspicions that there was persistent fragmentation in the study of women's adult experience.

Despite this fragmentation, however, we found interesting parallels across the groups and were persuaded that these 15 research projects shared a number of important, unifying commonalities. Several broad themes wove their way through the studies which we believe contribute to the integration of research on women's lives through time. For present purposes, I would like to discuss three of these themes; subsequently Kathy Hulbert will comment on several others.

First, the groups of women described in the book share the common denominator of having pursued a college education. The studies show that over time the lives of the women in each of these groups were enriched and broadened by the access to higher education and by expanding opportunities for lifelong learning. Given the fact that today more than half of the current college population is female (Pearson, Touchton, and Shavlik, 1989), the issue of the impact of higher education on women's adult development cannot be minimized. Taken together, these studies demonstrate the many ways in which college experiences affected the later choices and decisionmaking in the lives of select groups of Euro-American, middle class, relatively privileged women. To date, no comparable longitudinal studies of educated working class women or women of color have been sustained. Certainly, the need for such work cannot be overstated.

Second, in all of these studies of educated women who had reached midlife and beyond, there is evidence of increased well-being and feelings of competence through time. Ravenna Helson's (1990) recent finding that the fifties may be experienced as the "prime of life" for the women in the Mills study certainly is consistent with what is reported in the book about theTerman, Vassar, Bennington, Columbia, and UCLA study participants at midlife. And it well may be that this pattern will soon be found in follow-ups of the Radcliffe, Michigan, and Carnegie-Mellon alumnae, all of whom who will turn fifty by the year 2000. For each of these groups, early and middle adulthood has afforded opportunities for identity consolidation, and these studies display an impressive vitality and optimism at midlife that cannot be ignored.

Third, the lives of the women in all of these groups have been affected significantly by gender role socialization and gender discrimination. The studies reveal that in each generation a consciousness of the struggle for gender equity has shaped the expectations and influenced the well-being of educated American women. There are indications as well of escalating professional status and personal authority among successive generations of women who went to college. Nevertheless, the later studies in the book suggest that the youngest cohorts still feel somewhat limited in their choices and perhaps even disenfranchised by a society that does not provide structures for women to comfortably sustain multiple career and family roles during the early adult years. Examples of personal and professional disequilibrium are particularly evident in the two studies in the book that compare women and men. In describing the lives of graduates of the University of Michigan Inteflex program, Inglehart, Brown, and Malunchuk report that compared to their male classmates, the women doctors have not been able to get rewarded equally for their work--either financially or in terms of their preferred values about career and lifestyle--and consequently have suffered from what may be regarded as problems with "environmental fit ". And the theme of disequilibrium is also seen in the Illinois Valedictorian Study, in which Karen Arnold reports significant gender differences in self-esteem and career achievement during early adulthood; in 1991, ten years out of high school, the female valedictorians appeared to be having a much harder time integrating their multiple selves than did their male counterparts.

These three themes--the effects of higher education, identity consolidation at midlife, and the significant impact of gender on adult well-being--are critical aspects of studying women's development and certainly should become integral parts of future life studies research.

Diversifying Methodologies

Let me turn now to some thoughts on method. The studies in Women's Lives Through Time provide insight to a number of significant issues about *how* we inquire about women's experiences over the years and about how longitudinal methodologies have been diversified and transformed during the twentieth century. Recently, psychologists have been urged by Fonow and Cook (1991), Harding (1987), Gergen (1988), Lather (1992) , Stewart and Healy (1989), among others, to move beyond conventional approaches to studying lifespan phenomena, incorporating more subjective and context-sensitive methods

into our inquires. For life studies researchers, the challenge to diversify methods has been met creatively. In fact, Datan, Rodeheaver, and Hughes (1987) described a range of alternative approaches in 1987 when they commented that developmental psychologists were moving toward a more systematic use of

> autobiography, biography, story, ..conversation, diaries, literature, clinical case histories, historical fiction and the like, with a new emphasis upon the person's construction and reconstruction of the 'life story,' rather than upon what might be considered a more objective account of what happened. (p. 154)

And, indeed, in life studies research a primary objective generally has been to build stories of whole lives. However, as Ravenna Helson cautioned us in 1989, sometimes our work risks being perceived as elaborate story-telling rather than as more controlled analyses of measurable data; in framing broad questions about lifespan development, we often are asking about what Helson described as "fuzzy" or tender issues, and therefore we need to use multiple methods to tease out the interwoven, multifaceted aspects of lives through time. Life studies research affords us the opportunity to show how different methods and complex findings can "speak" to one another, and we believe that it is within these multidimensional dialogues that some of the most synergistic approaches to interpreting lives will be found.

The studies described in our book report the use of a wide array of data gathering and analysis techniques, and, taken together, they provide a window on how diverse longitudinal methodologies have been used through time. Historically, nearly all of these studies collected survey and/or psychometric data, and most tended to report quantitative findings that conformed to traditional positivist standards for social science research. In many cases, more open-ended questionnaire and/or interview material was obtained as well, but since it was not fashionable to publish the participants' "voices," the result was a rather flat picture of how the women were living their lives. This "adherence to the numbers" was particularly evident in the bulk of work on women's lives published prior to the 1960s. This quantitative "yoke" was thrown off with the publication in 1966 of Ginzberg and Yohalem's book, Educated American Women: Self-Portraits, and since that time life studies research about women has more consistently included the subjective experiences of the women involved.

For our book, we specifically invited our contributors to showcase qualitative material, although we also asked them to update their research and to recapitulate all study findings. This invitation was particularly exciting for those contributors who either collected new data or returned to their files and unearthed a wealth of material that had never been published before. For example, in their work on the Terman women, Carol and Blake Tomlinson-Keasey proposed new analyses of old data about the women's lives in terms of significant differences between those women who graduated from college and those who did not. And Donald Brown and Rosemary Pacini, in their analysis of women who attended Vassar between 1929 and 1935, extended an earlier model of college student identity development by constructing case studies drawn from decades of accumulated alumnae data. In the chapter on the Bennington women, Ronald Cohen and Duane Alwin gave voice to individuals who had been interviewed several times between 1935 and 1984; previously these women's personal perspectives about their lives had been obscured by the publication of exclusively quantitative findings about their sociopolitical attitudes. In all, the chapters of the book have been enriched by the inclusion of new and complex quantitative and qualitative material, and the added dimensions certainly have made the diverse experiences of educated women come alive.

Another methdological challenge confronting life studies researchers has to do with issues of sociohistorical context. Over recent years many of us have broadened our inquiries in order to ask study participants to describe the effects of the historical era on their adult development. In the book, we asked our contributors to reflect on their studies--to set the research in time and place and to provide

some contextual information about what was occurring in society at each wave of data collection. While none of the chapter contributors is an historian, they collectively recognized the importance of looking at the developmental experiences of their respondents in the context of cohort and social change. Thus, for example, in the two chapters on Vassar graduates, Brown and Pacini differentiate between the challenge of being a midlife Vassar graduate in the 1950s compared to being one in the 1990s. And in their account of life outcomes among University of Michigan women--outcomes that the women themselves had not anticipated--Sandra Tangri and Sharon Jenkins describe the women's life patterns in the context of the complex social forces that affected the Class of 1967 in their post-college years.

Incorporating subjective and contextual material is, we believe, the wave of the future in life studies research. Diversifying methods, combining approaches, and developing lenses that help us to look both across and deeply into lives certainly will enrich our analyses through time.

Identifying the Investigator(s)

Finally, one of the most gratifying aspects of editing Women's Lives Through Time was the opportunity Kathy and I had to interact directly with nearly two dozen longitudinal researchers--and with a whole host of their predecessors by proxy. In doing so, we became increasingly interested in who these investigators were and what their own developmental experiences had been in participating in longitudinal endeavors. Our discussions revealed that all of the contributors had their own stories to tell--including anecdotes about interactions with study participants that had not been included in the official descriptions of the research. And we learned that the research had been shaped by various personal, social, and historical forces--such as funding opportunities, changing interests, fashionable questions, or the passing of the torch to a new group of scholars--and that these "stories of the studies" also were integral aspects of the work we were assembling.

Indeed, a vital dynamic of life studies research is the reality that living people are asking living people about living--and this sets up a whole set of issues about the relationship between the researcher and the researched through time. For example, one of the book's contributors described what it was like to revisit study participants as new mothers when she herself had not had children; she wondered how these women, who were six to eight years her junior, were processing her responses to questions about what had happened in her life since the last interview. Another wondered how much the high response rate in her follow-up studies reflected her own active commitment to the women's self-actualization when they were undergraduates. An interviewer was struck by the eagerness of her study's respondents--women in their early forties--who seemed to appreciate the invitation to reflect non-defensively about their post-college choices. And, in contrast, another contributor commented on the frustration of not being able to revisit study participants because of archive restrictions placed on the particular data set from which she had conducted her one-time follow-up project; she wondered whether the participants might now welcome the opportunity to update her--and our--understanding of their lives through time.

Life studies research, we have learned, is *not* an altogether objective process and it does not end when the book is published. In fact, as Jack Block commented in 1971, it is "when the long season of waiting has been survived and the data are in" that the excitement of longitudinal work really begins. Now that Women's Lives Through Time is in hand, the legacies and lessons it contains are becoming even more intriguing and more apparent. Longitudinal work takes time--and both the researcher and "the researched" change with time. The rich legacies we have received from our predecessors invite us to look anew at our inheritance and to assess what these studies can tell us about adult development and aging. From these treasures, we can identify questions that will enrich and help build new work. For those of us who care deeply about studying the course of *all* adult lives through time, these questions cannot help but engage us in the many lessons yet to be learned.

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WOMEN'S LIVES THROUGH TIME:
EDUCATED AMERICAN WOMEN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Kathleen Day Hulbert and Diane Tickton Schuster, Editors
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Overview of 15 Longitudinal Studies of Educated American Women

Study	*Sample*	*Year of Data Collection*	*n*	*Primary Focus of Research*	*Research Methods Used*
Terman	Gifted children born 1902–1920	1922–present	672	Characteristics of gifted individuals over the life course, including personality traits, marital satisfaction, educational and occupational achievement, life satisfaction	Case data; parent reports; teacher ratings; tests of intelligence, personality, and character; questionnaires; interviews
	Gifted women	Secondary analysis, 1990–1991	657	Comparison of women who graduated from college with those who did not, to assess long-term impact of college	Identification and analysis of eight significant dimensions that affected the women's adult-life outcomes
Vassar College	Alumnae, classes of 1929–1935	1954	50	Life patterns	Personality inventories, group tasks, interviews
		1960	40	Political orientation and action	Mailed survey, personality inventories
		1990	10	Life satisfaction	Mailed survey
Bennington College	Entering classes of 1932–1938	1935–1939	527	Effects of college attendance on political attitudes	Measures of political attitudes, questionnaire, written report
		1960–1961	345	Development of political attitudes up to midlife	Measures of political attitudes, mailed survey, interviews
		1984	335	Lifelong trajectories of political attitudes	Mailed survey
Columbia University	Superior graduate students, 1945–1951	1963	311	Decision-making patterns in adult life	Mailed survey
		1974	226	Employment experiences, effects of women's movement	Mailed survey
Vassar College	Classes of 1957 and 1958	1957–1958	700	The role of individual personality determinants and social-political-economic determinants on life patterns	Measures of personality and attitudes, faculty assessments, interviews
		1963	400	Postcollege life patterns	Mailed survey
		1974	125	Identity issues at midlife	Mailed survey
		1990	300	Components of life satisfaction in adulthood	Mailed survey
Mills College	Classes of 1958 and 1960	1958–1960	142	College life, personality characteristics, plans for adult life	Personality inventories, questionnaires, demographic data, some interviews
		1963–1964	99	Life since college, including work, education, marriage, moves, childbearing, shifts in personality, outlook	Personality inventories, questionnaires, demographic data, some interviews
		1981	130	Social-clock patterns, effects of social change, effects of women's movement	Personality inventories, questionnaires, demographic data
		1989	123	Social influences on adult life; prime-of-life experiences and outlook	Personality inventories, questionnaires, demographic data
University of California, Los Angeles	Gifted students, class of 1961	1957	41	Values, interests, personality characteristics	Study of Values, MMPI, Strong Vocational Interest Blank
		1984	35	Life since college, including education, career, family, political involvement, use of intellectual talent, persistence of values	Study of Values, mailed survey, interviews
		1990	28	Use of talent, sense of self, impact of societal forces at midlife	Mailed survey
Radcliffe College	Class of 1964	1960	244	Personality characteristics	Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)
		1974	122	Influence of personality and life-situational factors on early-adult outcome	Mailed survey
		1976	96	Mental and physical health consequences of life stress	Mailed survey

Study	Sample	Year of Data Collection	n	Primary Focus of Research	Research Methods Used
Radcliffe College	Class of 1964	1980	133	Life-style and social influences at age 43	Mailed survey
		1986	102	Social-clock projects in adult life	Mailed survey
University of Michigan	Class of 1967	1967	200	Family background, personality and college experiences that might influence the choice of role-innovative occupations	Michigan Student Study questionnaire, TAT cues, semantic differential
		1970	152	The pursuit of occupational choices, early-adult work and educational experiences	Mailed survey, some interviews
		1981	117	Adult-life experiences of women in role-innovative and traditional occupations	TAT cues, mailed survey
Carnegie Mellon	Class of 1968	1964–1968	87	Expectations for adult life-style, plans for meshing work and family	Questionnaires, interviews
		1975	64	Postcollege life-style	Mailed survey
		1990	30	Implementation of life-style aspirations up to age 44	Telephone interviews
Radcliffe College	Class of 1969	1969	248	Postgraduation activities	Mailed survey, career-office data
		1979	142	Work and educational histories since graduation, family background, future plans	Mailed survey
		1990	151	Career and family experiences, attitudes and beliefs at age 43	Mailed survey, some interviews
Riverside High School	High school juniors	1970	27	Post–high school expectations, sociopolitical orientation	Questionnaire, interviews
		1979	18	Education, work, marriage, family, political orientation up to age 26	Interviews
		1987	18	Education, work, marriage, family, political orientation up to age 34	Interviews
Women and Career Options Program	Program participants	1973–1975	245	Career goals in nontraditional fields	Application essay questionnaires, field reports
		1984	100	Education, employment, personal life up to age 30	Mailed survey
Inteflex Program and Standard Medical School Program, University of Michigan	Program participants	1974–1990	Approximately 50 Inteflex and 160 Standard Program students per year	Precollege career aspirations, values, interests; ongoing medical school experiences, specialty choices, career values	Questionnaires, interviews
		Six years post-graduation	•	Perceptions of medical education, career experiences, life-style	Mailed survey
		Ten years post-graduation	•	Specialty fields, career advancement, life-style	Mailed survey
Illinois Valedictorian Study	High school valedictorians, salutatorians	1981–1985	81	Academic achievement, career and life aspirations	Annual interviews, questionnaires
		1988	78	Education, work, relationships; career and life aspirations	Mailed survey
		1991	81	Early-adult personal, educational, and career experiences; view of achievement	Questionnaire, interviews

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