



Macrosystem Challenges to Lifespan Human Development: *Advancing Conceptualizations, Methodologies, and Strategic Responses*

Society for the Study of Human Development 2021-22 Conference Series

Details: Keynote Topics and Speakers (Highlights of the full conference series are [here](#))

Conference Theme

Individuals' developmental trajectories and outcomes are affected by personal characteristics, behaviors, and experiences. These individual qualities do not emerge in isolation, however. They are co-created as part of a dynamic system which involves the distal, overarching macrosystem, described by Bronfenbrenner (1994) as "a societal blueprint for a particular culture or subculture [including] belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, life-styles, opportunity structures, hazards, and life course options." Macrosystems provide contexts for development, and do so differently across history, lifespans, and social groups.

Our contemporary macrosystem seems especially replete with threats. Some (like COVID) are newly emerging; others (like racism and environmental injustice) are long-standing, but increasingly visible to greater swaths of humankind. The theme of the SSHD 2021-22 Conference Series is designed to share and encourage scholarship that advances conceptualizations of macrosystem challenges; the methodologies that may be used to study them (e.g., new methods for data collection, analysis, or communication); or strategies that may be used to respond to such challenges (e.g., societal interventions, policies, or personal practices aimed at eliminating, reducing, or at least sidestepping negative consequences of a macrosystem threat).

Conference Organization

The conference spans four seasons, each with a Monday-Tuesday pair (Nov 1-2, Feb 7-8, April 4-5, June 13-14). In each season, Monday is used for keynote events, with a particular focus:

- **Fall:** Conceptualizing Macrosystems
- **Winter:** Community Macrosystems
- **Spring:** Attitudinal Macrosystems
- **Summer:** Existential Challenges to the Macrosystem

The current document, "**Details: Keynote Topics and Speakers**," describes the four Monday keynote topics and structures, presents information about speakers, and gives current titles and abstracts (subject to additions and modifications). Basic information about other parts of the conference series (e.g., information about Tuesday programs, opportunity to submit to the program) is available in "[Highlights: SSHD 2021-22 Conference Series](#)." Updated information (e.g., specific schedules, how to access live and recorded sessions) will be posted periodically on the [SSHHD website](#).

FALL: Conceptualizing and Operationalizing Macrosystems

Keynote Events: November 1, 2021

What are macrosystems? Why do they matter? How do conceptualizations and methodologies used to examine and understand macrosystems affect the study of human development? How can resulting scholarship be used to generate, implement, and evaluate policies and programs?

In the opening Keynote Event, the conference organizer, **Lynn Liben**, will overview the purpose and structure of the SSHD 2021-22 Conference Series and will then host a conversation about the conference theme with two leaders in the field of human development—**Lawrence Aber** and **Cynthia Garcia Coll**. Drawing on their decades of experience in human development, Aber and Garcia Coll will reflect on the evolving ways that macrosystems or contexts have been conceptualized, ignored, measured, and used in the study of human development. They will share how they have thought about and incorporated macrosystems and contexts in their own work, and offer suggestions for how scholars can respect and build on the diversity of people and contexts in future research and action.

Part II of the keynote event will include “illustrations and extensions” to showcase projects in which macrosystems or contexts have played a central role. First, **Dana Townsend** and **Mark Cummings** will describe a longitudinal project of youth in Northern Ireland. They will focus their presentation on youth’s emotional-security outcomes in relation to the political macrosystem—a context in which levels of tension and unrest are constantly changing. In addition to presenting substantive findings about emotional development, the speakers will discuss methodological challenges in international, longitudinal research, and the challenges and rewards of creating a new way to assess the political macrosystem.

The second presentation will be given by **Kim Bard**, a comparative developmental psychologist who studies social and cognitive phenomena, including the process of joint attention (JA). Recognizing that conclusions are incomplete and distorted if data are drawn exclusively from “WEIRD” societies (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic, see **Henrich** 2020). Bard and colleagues study JA in multiple and diverse samples of social partners (humans and chimpanzees), interacting in their everyday (and highly diverse) socio-ecologies, and using culturally inclusive definitions of key constructs. Bard will share methods and findings, and discuss both rewards and challenges of studying phenomena inclusively.

WELCOME AND CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

Lynn S. Liben

President-Elect, SSHD; Evan Pugh University Professor of
Psychology; Human Development; and Education
The Pennsylvania State University
liben@psu.edu

PART I. KEYNOTE CONVERSATION

Reflections on Conceptualizing and Operationalizing Macrosystems: Looking Back, Side-to-Side, and Ahead

Lawrence Aber

Willner Family Professor of Psychology and Public Policy; and University Professor
New York University
lawrence.aber@nyu.edu
<https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/people/j-lawrence-aber>

Cynthia Garcia Coll

Charles Pitts Robinson and John Palmer Barstow Professor Emerita, Brown University
Adjunct Professor in the Pediatrics Department at the University of Puerto Rico Medical School
cynthia.garciacoll@upr.edu

PART II. ILLUSTRATIONS AND EXTENSIONS

Measuring and Studying the Impact of the Political Macrosystem: A Longitudinal Study of Youth in Northern Ireland

Dana Townsend

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Specialist
Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) Foundation, Washington, D.C.
dtownsend@sams-usa.net

and

Mark Cummings

William J. Shaw Center for Children and Families Professor of Psychology
University of Notre Dame
cummings.10@nd.edu; <https://psychology.nd.edu/faculty/e-mark-cummings/>

Contextualizing Infant Social Cognition: Rewards and Challenges in Decolonizing the Study of Joint Attention

Kim Bard

Professor of Comparative Developmental Psychology
Psychology Department, University of Portsmouth, UK
Kim.bard@port.ac.uk
<https://www.port.ac.uk/about-us/structure-and-governance/our-people/our-staff/kim-bard>

ABSTRACT

Joint attention, an early form of triadic connectedness among infants, social partners, and shared topics, is an important developmental milestone. Developmental theories link joint attention with language and theory of mind, while evolutionary theories suggest it is the beginning of human unique social cognition. The vast majority of studies, however, have prioritized the behavioral manifestations and belief systems of WEIRD settings where infants are expected to initiate visual engagements with parents about objects. Our big challenge was to develop a culturally-inclusive scheme for describing joint attention that allows for all types of engagement experiences (e.g., touch in proximal caregiving practices), all types of shared topics (e.g., social activity), and the many varieties of belief systems that infants experience around the world (e.g., expectations that infants obey and fit in) that could be applied to our multiple and diverse samples of human and chimpanzee infants. We accomplished this by merging a top-down perspective (i.e., triadic connectedness) with bottom-up contextualization. The joy was to observe the many

behavioral variations of joint attention by infants in their everyday settings. Triadic connectedness was very common in all groups of human and chimpanzee infants, suggesting that a decolonized definition captures normativity. There was significant variation in the behavioral forms of joint attention, highlighting the extent to which social cognition is contextualized, already at 1 year of age. We found no indication that joint attention was unique to humans. We suggest that current evolutionary and developmental theories of social cognition require more inclusive and diverse databases that captures contextualized joint attention in humans and other great apes.

WINTER: Community Macrosystems Keynote Events: February 7, 2022

How can human development be understood in the context of the places (e.g., neighborhoods) in which people live and act? How do individuals and families create their own activity spaces in relation to their diverse backgrounds and identities?

The Keynote events on Community Macrosystems focus attention on the places in which families live and act during their daily lives. All invited events are drawn from the NSF-funded **PLACE Development Working Group** (hereafter, PLACE: People; Locations; Activity spaces; Contexts, Ethnicity, race, and culture; Co-PIs Dawn Witherspoon and Rebecca M. B. White). The work of PLACE is anchored in recent conceptual and methodological advances from *cultural-developmental* and *activity-space* frameworks. By expanding existing research on neighborhood effects, this interdisciplinary, collaborative team is providing a more comprehensive science of human development in diverse contexts.

The event will begin with a Keynote Address presented collaboratively by the Co-PIs, **Dawn Witherspoon** and **Rebecca White**, and co-authored by the full PLACE group which includes **Mayra Bámaca-Colbert**, Christopher Browning, Linda Burton, Debra Furr-Holden, Keren Horn, Tamara Leech, Tama Leventhal, **Stephen Matthews**, Candice Odgers, **Amanda Roy**, Naomi Sugie, and **Erin Winkler**. Following the address will be three presentations in which a sub-set of PLACE group members (names bolded above) will present specific PLACE projects. The presentations have been selected to illustrate diverse ways of thinking about, and studying human development in place. The examples will feature quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods spanning multiple disciplines, including geography, sociology, and the developmental sciences.

PART I. KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Lifespan Development within Culturally Informed Understandings of Place

Dawn P. Witherspoon

McCourtney Family Early Career Professor and Associate Professor, Psychology

The Pennsylvania State University

dpw14@psu.edu; <http://contextlab.la.psu.edu>

and

Rebecca M. B. White

Associate Professor of *Family* and Human Development
T. Denny Sanford School of Social and Family Dynamics, Arizona State University
Rebecca.white@asu.edu; <https://thesanfordschool.asu.edu/content/rebecca-m-b-white>

ABSTRACT

From decades of research focused on how human development unfolds within neighborhood contexts, developmental scholars are currently advancing two new lines of research that can inform scientific understandings of development within macrosystems. First, cultural-developmental neighborhood researchers are advancing neighborhood -effects research that explicitly recognizes the ways that race, ethnicity, and culture matter for neighborhood environments and for developmental demands, affordances, experiences, and competencies. Second, activity-space neighborhood researchers are recognizing that residential neighborhoods have important implications for broader activity spaces – that is, the set of locations and settings to which youth are regularly exposed (Browning & Soller, 2014). They are using newer technologies and geographic frameworks to assess exposure to residential neighborhood and extra-neighborhood environments (Browning & Soller, 2014; Witherspoon, Kim, Bámaca-Colbert, Bhargava, & Boggs, 2016). These perspectives recognize that time (from the microtime to mesotime; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and place are critically bound and that exposures can be operationalized at numerous levels of the ecological system (Krivo et al, 2013). White will overview the cultural developmental advances. Witherspoon will overview the activity space advances, and together, they will chart a path forward that integrates both cultural developmental and activity space perspectives to advance conceptualizations, methods, and strategic responses to lifespan human development.

PART II. ILLUSTRATIONS AND EXTENSIONS

Race, Place, and Power: Perspectives of Black and Latinx Children Experiencing Homelessness in the Bronx

Erin N. Winkler

Associate Professor of African & African Diaspora Studies
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
winklere@uwm.edu; <https://uwm.edu/african-diaspora-studies/people/winkler-erin-n/>

ABSTRACT

Winkler will explore emerging themes related to the roles of race, place, and power in the developing perspectives of Black and Latinx children ages 6-16 experiencing homelessness in the Bronx. Qualitative data gathered through photo journeys, artwork, interviews, and observation will be shared.

Inside Out: An Investigation of Shared Space and Place among Latinx Caregiver-Adolescent Dyads

Stephen A. Matthews

Liberal Arts Professor of Sociology, Anthropology, and Demography
The Pennsylvania State University
sxm27@psu.edu; <https://sociology.la.psu.edu/people/sxm27>

and

Mayra Bámaca-Colbert

Associate Professor of Developmental Psychology
University of California Merced
mbamaca@ucmerced.edu; <https://bamacaimpactlab.weebly.com/>

ABSTRACT

Matthews and Bámaca-Colbert will focus on how shared space and time among 60 Latinx caregiver-adolescent dyads impact caregivers' parenting strategies (e.g., monitoring) and youth outcomes (e.g., problem behaviors). The Latinx families live in a new destination area in which they are the racial-ethnic minority, a context limiting cultural assets and expanding exposure to places beyond their immediate neighborhoods. Data on shared activity space are collected using GPS location-logging, and shared spaces are characterized by using census-based indicators.

Dynamic Risk Exposure and Adolescents' Daily Moods

Amanda L. Roy

Associate Professor, Community & Prevention Research
University of Illinois Chicago
alroy28@uic.edu; <https://www.edhuiclab.com/>

ABSTRACT

A common critique of place-based research is that reliance on fixed measurements of risk assume that youth living in similar neighborhoods are all equally exposed to risk. The research we describe addresses this limitation by using GPS coordinates from a sample of 50 Chicago youth. We combine these data with publicly available information on environmental characteristics (e.g., crime, alcohol and tobacco retailers, abandoned buildings) to create a more precise measure of youths' exposure to environmental risks; we then examine associations between risk exposure and patterns of youths' daily moods.

SPRING: Attitudinal Macrosystems
Keynote Events: April 4, 2022

How do cultural and individual attitudes co-evolve across time and space? How are social attitudes and categories transmitted across generations? How can varied disciplinary perspectives illuminate the interplay of individual and macrosystem processes?

The invited program on Attitudinal Macrosystems will begin with two keynote addresses by scholars who represent varying disciplinary perspectives, emphasizing different levels of analysis.

Joe Henrich, well known for having brought attention to the disproportionate scholarly focus on research involving people from WEIRD cultures (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic), will draw from multiple disciplines (e.g., anthropology, evolutionary biology, economics, and sociology) to examine the interplay between individual human minds and societies.

Rebecca Bigler, working primarily in the traditions of developmental and social psychology, will draw on "ism" theory and research (e.g., racism, sexism, heterosexism) to highlight key challenges faced in studying cultural attitudes in human development. These include conceptualizing the nature of cultural social attitudes; identifying processes entailed when children construct, learn, and internalize these attitudes; and examining the impact of these attitudes on individual development.

In the second part of the keynote event, speakers will discuss contexts related to particular *isms* of the attitudinal macrosystem, paying particular attention to programs and research that address strategies for reducing or navigating those *isms*. **Diane Hughes** focuses on ethnic-racial identity, socialization, and discrimination during adolescence. She argues that these three processes are fundamentally inseparable, and that they are co-produced by features of the spaces in which youth spend time (i.e., settings or macrosystems). Drawing on her contextualized perspective, she considers how parents help their children learn about race and teach them how to navigate the challenges of systemic racism. In her analysis, she considers environmental conditions that affect the nature of macrosystem challenges and thereby also affect what strategies may be used to respond to them.

The second presenter, **Paul Poteat**, studies school-based experiences of sexual and gender minority youth, examining both individual- and group-level processes. He will discuss school-based policies and programs that can counteract bias-based bullying which is experienced by LGBTQ+ youth, and can promote LGBTQ+ affirming and inclusive climates. He will give particular attention to the role of Gender-Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) in supporting youth empowerment and thriving, not only in members of the GSAs, but also in other students in the school.

PART I. KEYNOTE ADDRESSES

WEIRD Minds

Joseph Henrich

Professor and Chair, Department of Human Evolutionary Biology
Harvard University

henrich@fas.harvard.edu; <https://henrich.fas.harvard.edu/>

ABSTRACT

Over the last few decades, a growing body of research has revealed not only substantial global variation along several important psychological dimensions, but also that people from societies that are Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic (WEIRD) are particularly unusual, often anchoring the ends of global psychological distributions. To explain these patterns, I will first show how the most fundamental of human institutions—those governing marriage and the family—influence our motivations, perceptions, intuitions, and emotions. Then, to explain the peculiar trajectory of European societies over the last two millennia, I lay out how one particular branch of Christianity systematically dismantled the intensive kin-based institutions in much of Latin Christendom, thereby altering people's psychology and opening the door to the proliferation of new institutional forms, including voluntary associations (charter towns, universities and guilds), impersonal markets, individualistic religions and representative governments. In light of these findings, I close by arguing that the anthropological, psychological, and economic sciences should transform into a unified evolutionary approach that considers not only how human nature influences our behavior and societies but also how the resulting institutions, technologies, and languages subsequently shape our minds.

***Attitudinal Macrosystem Challenges and Responses:
The Case of Cultural Stereotypes and Prejudices***

Rebecca S. Bigler

Professor Emerita of Psychology
University of Texas at Austin

rebeccabigler28@gmail.com; <https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/psychology/faculty/bigler>

ABSTRACT

The macrosystems in which children develop are filled with attitudinal messages about the world and its people. In my talk, I draw on "ism" theory and research (e.g., racism, sexism, heterosexism) to highlight key challenges one faces when studying the role of cultural attitudes in human development. One challenge is finding a way to conceptualize the nature of cultural social attitudes, including their types, facets, and contents. Another is identifying what processes are engaged when children detect, construct, and internalize (or reject) these cultural attitudes. A further challenge is understanding how social attitudes influence individual development, including the ways that cultural attitudes shape children's personal identities and social relationships. I close by considering how parent-to-child intergenerational socialization may be inverted as youths' collective, evolving social selves and behaviors re-socialize earlier generations.

PART II. ILLUSTRATIONS AND EXTENSIONS

***Parental Strategies for Helping Children
Navigate and Resist a Racist Macrosystem***

Diane L. Hughes

Professor of Applied Psychology, Steinhardt School of Culture, Development, and Education
New York University

diane.hughes@nyu.edu; <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/people/diane-hughes>

***Sexual and Gender Diverse Youth: School-Based Policies and Programs that
Reduce and Protect against Peer Bullying***

V. Paul Poteat

Professor, Counseling, Developmental & Educational Psychology
Boston College

PoteatP@bc.edu
<https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/lynch-school/faculty-research/faculty-directory/paul-poteat.html>

ABSTRACT

There have been tempered improvements in the school-based experiences of LGBTQ+ youth. Schools remain a setting wherein many LGBTQ+ youth experience discrimination, yet they thrive when schools implement affirming policies and practices. In this presentation, I highlight several key approaches at the institutional and interpersonal level that counteract bias-based harassment against LGBTQ+ youth in schools and that promote more inclusive climates. I give particular emphasis to the roles of Gender-Sexuality Alliances (GSAs)—school clubs that provide opportunities for support and advocacy among

LGBTQ+ and ally youth. In doing so, I highlight ways in which GSAs foster youth empowerment and thriving among their members and among students in the larger school population. I conclude by outlining advances needed in ongoing work with GSAs and their connection with other LGBTQ+ affirming policies and practices in schools.

SUMMER: Existential Challenges to the Macrosystem Keynote Events: June 13, 2022

What existential challenges confront humankind and Earth? Do climate movies like The Day After Tomorrow or pandemic movies like Contagion inspire people to reduce carbon footprints and increase their interest in vaccinations, to dismiss real threats as fantasy, or to cope in some other way? How can Earth, environmental, developmental, and learning scientists educate people to reduce or respond to existential challenges?

The Keynote Events on Existential Challenges to the Macrosystem begin with two invited addresses. The first is a Keynote Address by **Roger Downs**, a behavioral geographer whose work focuses on the interplay among the developing mind, the environment, and the process of education. He examines two categories of contemporary existential threats—one *natural* (e.g., pandemics) and the other *anthropogenic* (e.g., human-induced climate change). He will argue that cognitive and emotional limitations make it challenging for individuals to deal with phenomena that are probabilistic, uncertain, and abstract. Motivated to identify what can be done to enhance understanding and responses to existential threats, he ends by discussing implications for education and demography.

Next is the SSHD Presidential Address, delivered by outgoing President **Carolyn Aldwin**. She will focus on recent work related to one of the most salient existential challenges of our time—COVID. Her work on COVID fits squarely within her more general program of research in which she studies how individuals cope with stressors ranging from hassles to trauma, and how these stressors are linked to health-related outcomes. As would be expected given Aldwin’s doctoral training in adult development and aging, she will directly address how older individuals cope with COVID stress. In addition, she will examine a broader developmental paradox—the observation that although it is older individuals who are medically most vulnerable to COVID, it is younger adults who are psychologically especially vulnerable. Aldwin demonstrates that the COVID pandemic is a valuable window into understanding the interplay among developmental stage, ecological sources of stress, and adaptation.

The “illustrations and extensions” section of the keynote event will focus on *anthropogenic* threat. First, **Janet Swim**, a national and international leader in research and action on sustainability, uses her expertise in social psychology and environmental psychology to study adults’ thoughts and emotions about climate change, and to examine the relevance of these factors for encouraging adults’ climate-protecting behaviors and support for related policies. She will draw from studies in which she teaches about climate change and environmental systems, and those in which she surveys adults of different cohorts (e.g., the Silent Generation and iGen’ers) about their environmental concepts, knowledge, emotions, and behaviors. She will discuss the importance of planning education and policies with attention to peoples’ emotional responses to specific behaviors and specific policies, not just to their reactions to abstract environmental goals.

A second set of examples will be discussed by **Victoria Carr**, also an expert on encouraging environmentally responsible behaviors, but with a focus on young children. She will draw illustrations not only from her academic research and teaching experiences as a faculty member in early childhood education and human development, but also from her experiences as Executive Director of the Arlitt Center for Education, Research, and Sustainability, a center housing among the oldest early childhood laboratory schools in the United States. A major focus of her current work is on early childhood education for sustainability. She participates in the Transnational Dialogues on Early Childhood Education for Sustainability and, in collaboration with Australian and Swedish colleagues, is guest-editing a special issue on the UN Sustainable Development Goals for the *International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education*.

PART I. KEYNOTE/PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESSES

Human Development in a Time of Existential Threat: Understanding the Challenges

Roger M. Downs

Professor of Geography

The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA, USA

rd7@psu.edu, <https://www.geog.psu.edu/directory/roger-downs>

ABSTRACT

For all practical purposes, Earth is the ultimate macrosystem. It is the home of humankind. The sustainability of that home is, however, open to question. The modern world faces multiple existential threats, *natural* (e.g., asteroid impact, vulcanism, ecosystem collapse and loss of biodiversity, pandemics) and *anthropogenic* (e.g., nuclear war, nuclear power plant meltdown, biogenetic manipulation of crops). Two threats stand out because of the degree of threat that they pose and because of the role that anthropogenic factors play in them: climate change is fundamentally anthropogenic, and the COVID pandemic is heavily shaped by anthropogenic factors. Whether, when, and how we choose to respond to these two existential threats will determine the future of human development. Why are we experiencing such difficulty in responding to these threats? I will argue that the difficulty arises from the challenge of understanding the spatial and temporal properties of climate change and the COVID pandemic. Cognitively and emotionally, we are not well-equipped to deal with phenomena that are probabilistic, uncertain, and abstract. What must we do to understand and respond to these two threats? I will close by discussing the implications for education and demography.

Developmental Perspectives on Vulnerability and Resilience during the COVID Pandemic

Carolyn Aldwin

Professor of Human Development & Family Sciences

Jo Anne Leonard Director of the Center for Healthy Aging Research

Oregon State University, Corvallis OR

Carolyn.Aldwin@Oregonstate.edu; <https://health.oregonstate.edu/people/carolyn-aldwin>

ABSTRACT

Older adults were especially vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic, having much higher rates of mortality than younger adults. Thus, they were strongly urged and sometimes even forced to socially distance and to be in lockdown to prevent contagion, increasing the risk of social isolation and loneliness, with the attendant adverse effects on health. However, research from our lab and that of others has shown that community-residing older adults were often surprisingly resilient to the stressful effects of COVID. Nearly all of the older adults we sampled identified stressful aspects of the pandemic, but a surprising two-thirds were able to identify positive aspects as well. Being able to contribute to the larger community was an important source of resilience for older adults. In contrast, younger adults have developed more psychological problems than older adults, as indicated by their sharp increase in mental health problems, including drug overdoses. I will discuss possible reasons why this widespread, systemic trauma can have dramatically distinctive effects at different life stages.

PART II: ILLUSTRATIONS AND EXTENSIONS

Adults' Thoughts and Emotions about Climate Challenges and Climate Solutions

Janet K. Swim

Professor of Psychology; Director, Pro-environmental Action Group (PAct)
The Pennsylvania State University
JSwim@psu.edu; <https://swimlab.weebly.com/>

Appreciating and Sustaining the Natural Environment from the Start: Early Childhood Education for Sustainability

Victoria Carr

Professor, School of Education
Executive Director, Arlitt Center for Education, Research, & Sustainability
University of Cincinnati
victoria.carr@uc.edu; <https://researchdirectory.uc.edu/p/carrvw>