Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

FRIEDER R. LANG and KAREN L. FINGERMAN (eds.), Growing Together: Personal Relationships across the Life Span. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 393 p. Index.

Growing Together is an edited collection of contributions on personal relationships across the life span. According to the editors, the term "personal relationships" implies that individuals have social connections to specific people who affect their lives. This focus pursues the meaning of social ties at an individual rather than at a societal level. It is consistent with this individualistic approach that most of the contributors hold appointments in departments of psychology and only one contributor is a sociologist. Nevertheless, in these days of interdisciplinary work, certain chapters in this volume may be of interest to some sociologists.

All of the chapters in the volume address precursors and outcomes of personal relationships across the life span. Some chapters, however, focus on specific structures of social ties (e.g. the parent-child dyad, sibling relationships, or the social convoy), while others emphasize specific processes that occur in personal relationships (e.g. social cognition, motivation, or emotion regulation). The former chapters are of most relevance to sociology.

Two features of the structure of relationships are worth considering: 1) the types of social partners that individuals of different ages encounter; and 2) the nature of a specific relationship (parent, sibling, friend) over time. With respect to types of social partners, two factors account for relationships: availability and choice. Individuals at different stages of the life span may have different social partners available to them. For example, public education may place children in school settings and adults in the workforce. As a result, individuals of different ages have the opportunity to interact daily with different social partners. Individuals of different ages also choose to interact with different types of social partners. For example, in young adulthood romantic partners and friends may take precedence, whereas in midlife and later years ties to family may be more important.

Concerning how the structures of particular relationships change over time, the contributors tend to view such changes as a result of the dynamics between relationships and individual development. Important in this context is the social convoy model of relationships. Some authors consider further variability across the life span with regard to the parent-child tie,

sibling ties, romantic ties, and friendships. Chapters that are more likely to be of interest to sociologists include Antonucci, Langfahl, and Akiyama's "Relationships as Outcomes and Contexts," Noack and Buhl's "Child-Parent Relationships," and Adams and Stevenson's "A Lifetime of Relationships Mediated by Technology."

Antonucci, Langfahl, and Akiyama discuss the convoy model of relationships, before turning to examine factors affecting social relations such as culture, gender, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Finally, the authors outline a support/efficacy model of individual well-being. They hypothesize that under optimal conditions individuals receive support from their relationship partners. At the same time, the recipient of such support receives communications about the support. The support received and the perception of that support by the recipient then develops within the support recipient a positive sense of self, ability, and self-worth. These supports accumulate and translate into feelings of self-efficacy, which then positively affect individual health and well-being.

Noack and Buhl give an overview of the development of the relationships of parents and their offspring. Their work reviews what is known about child-parent relationships across the life span. The chapter then focuses on individuality and relatedness, the active role that parents and their offspring play in shaping their relationship, the importance of a biographical perspective on relationship development, and contextual influences on child-parent relationships.

Adams and Stevenson survey the effects of technology on social relationships, with a special interest in the internet. They remind us how dramatically the context for social relationships has changed as geographic constraints on social interaction have been reduced. The authors provide a theoretical framework to guide future research on how communications and transportation technology might facilitate or inhibit the evolution of family and friendship relationships at various stages of life course development.

In conclusion, sociological readers of this book will need to be selective in identifying those sections that are likely to be of most interest.

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