

College of Public Health and Human Sciences

# Social Relationships in the Life Course: Some Thoughts on “Linked” and “Unlinked” Lives

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# **Nine Ways that Social Relationships Matter for the Life Course**

1. Relationships permeate and punctuate the life course
2. Other people are sources of life course decisions and expectations
3. Relationships help judge progress in life
4. Relationships are drivers of ambition, persistence, and achievement
5. Relationships are sources of stability and disruption, protection and risk

# **Nine Ways that Social Relationships Matter for the Life Course**

6. Relationships are conditioned by local environments ...
7. ... and by distal environments
8. Relationships are core to human identities
9. Relationships are essential to human experience and emotion

# “Unlinked Lives”

- Unlinking from others: Formal processes
- Unlinking from others: Informal processes
- Dynamics related to the self
  - Leaving people and places to become “ourselves”
  - Returning to people and places to remember who we are
  - Unlinking from a former identity

# 3 Key Papers

Settersten, R. A., Jr. (2015). Relationships in time and the life course: The significance of linked lives. *Research in Human Development, 12*, 217-223.

Settersten, R. A., Jr. & Thogmartin, A. (2018). Flux: Insights into the social aspects of life transitions. *Research in Human Development, 15*, 360-373.

Settersten, R. A., Jr (2018). Nine ways that social relationships matter for the life course. In D. F. Alwin, D. H. Felmlee, & D. A. Kreager (Eds.), *Social networks and the life course: Integrating the development of human lives and social relational networks* (pp. 27-40). New York: Springer Science.

# Thank you!

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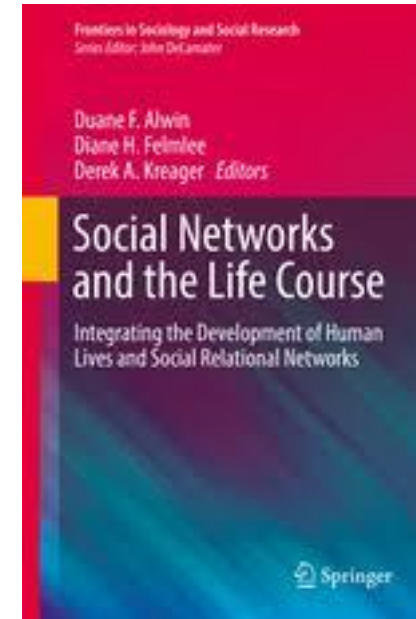
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## Chapter 2

# Nine Ways That Social Relationships Matter for the Life Course

**Richard A. Settersten Jr.**



Human life is social. Indeed, an individual's life course is hardly their own because it is so enmeshed with other people. A key tenet of a life course perspective – ‘linked lives’ first put forward by Glen Elder in 1994 as one of its four ‘paradigmatic prin-

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# Flux: Insights into the Social Aspects of Life Transitions

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Life transitions are often conceptualized and studied as individual experiences. But in reality, transitions are rarely individual: they are relational. We offer a set of insights into the social aspects of transitions. Transitions are experienced with and alongside others in states of interdependence. Family and other relationships can be key sources of support for transitions but also create risks.

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# Relationships in Time and the Life Course: The Significance of Linked Lives

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Life's strongest storylines are punctuated by and enmeshed with other people. The principle of "linked lives"—that the lives of individuals affect and are affected by the lives of others—is repeated as a mantra in life course literature. And yet this stands in direct contrast to the state of research,