LIFE Newsletter Volume 19, No. 1
April 2025

Editorial

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the latest issue of the newsletter which is a little shorter than usual because a planned contribution could not be completed.

Alumna Julia Rohrer kindly stepped in at very short notice to replace an alumna who had to drop out due to illness. Special thanks to Julia for her willingness to help out! She gives an in-depth introduction to the age–period–cohort problem that is highly relevant for everyone working on the life course.

Berlin faculty Laurel Raffington answers our 10 questions and includes some interesting reading tips.

We then introduce seven new fellows from Berlin and Zurich to LIFE as well as a new LIFE faculty member at UVA.

The usual LIFE-related publications and the latest news from the four LIFE sites follow.

The photos throughout this newsletter show various aspects of water, starting with a photo of our blue planet.

As always, many thanks to the contributors to this edition!

Best wishes,

Julia Delius

Credit: John Giannicchi / Photo Researchers / Universal Images Group

Table of Contents

Reminder

Fellows, alumni, and faculty, please keep us informed about your LIFE-relevant news (e.g., awards, career moves)! Fellows and alumni, please check that your web profiles are up-to-date—they are often the first thing that pops up when your name is googled! Send your updates to delius@mpib-berlin.mpg.de

LIFE Website: https://www.imprs-life.mpg.de

BlueSky: @imprs-life.bsky.social


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Everything You Always Wanted to Know About the Age–Period–Cohort Problem* (*But Were Afraid to Ask)

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If you are interested in the human life course, then it is quite likely that you will occasionally be interested in the effects of age. And if you are interested in the effects of age, you are guaranteed to run into one problem: the age–period–cohort identification problem. This problem has been discussed since the 1870s (when the basic underlying equations were worked out; Keiding, 2011) and let's just say the debate is still going strong. At one point, Paul B. Baltes, the founder of the LIFE program, also participated in it in an episode that may be referred to as the Schaie-Baltes controversy (summarized by both sides in Schaie & Baltes, 1975).

The bad news is that the age–period–cohort problem is as fundamental as it was 150 years ago. The good news is that there have been fairly recent advances in our understanding of it, which in turn allows us to reason about it more clearly and more transparently. Here, I will provide a very short introduction to this updated understanding (for a longer version, see Rohrer, in press).

A very short summary of the problem

The crux of the matter is that age, period, and cohort are in a deterministic relationship; age equals period minus cohort. For example, if I told you at the time of writing (in 2025) that I was 35 years old, you could conclude that I was born in 1990 (2025 minus 35, or maybe 1989 if I was turning 36 this year). Due to this relationship, any association that we observe with one of the variables (e.g., age) can always be explained just as well by the others (e.g., cohort and period).

Let's say you are interested in how life satisfaction changes with age. Imagine you had a cross-sectional sample and found a positive correlation, with older individuals being more satisfied. You cannot conclude that this is a positive age effect because in your sample, older individuals belong to younger cohorts. So, the pattern you observe might just as well be a negative cohort effect (with more recently born cohorts less satisfied), or any combination of some age effect and some cohort effect. There could even be a strong negative age effect that is "overruled" by an even stronger negative cohort effect—maybe that's not substantively plausible, but it's just as compatible with the data.

Clearly, if you are affiliated with LIFE, it would immediately occur to you that cross-sectional data are not helpful for the task at hand; longitudinal data are needed instead. Unfortunately, that does not fix the problem either. For example, let's say our analysis focuses on within-person change over time. For each person, cohort is a constant, so this variable can no longer confound our conclusions about age effects. However, we have now introduced variability in period: it takes a year to age a year. For example, if we observe that people become more satisfied as they age, this could be an age effect—but it could also be a period effect, with things just getting better as history progresses. This issue remains the same even if multiple cohorts are observed.

So, the age–period–cohort problem holds regardless of the design with which the data were collected. Furthermore, it is an identification problem (*sensu* Manski, 2003), which means that it holds regardless of the amount of data that we have collected. We could observe everyone in the population across their whole life course and would be none the wiser with respect to the age–period–cohort problem (although, to be fair, those data would still be rad). And the age-period-cohort problem cannot be solved through advanced statistical modeling—while there are models that purport to provide all-purpose solutions, no such solution can exist. This is because the age–period–cohort problem is a feature of the underlying reality; an infinite number of combinations of underlying age, period, and cohort effects will result in precisely the same observable data. The data cannot possibly tell you which combination created them.

What can the data tell you?

So much for the bad news. The good news is that the data can tell you some things about the underlying effects. To see how that's possible, let's look at some data in which we do know the true underlying effects because we picked them ourselves. Figure 1, Panel A, shows the effects which were simulated: the outcome increases by 0.4 points per year of age, decreases by 0.3 points per year of historic time (period), and increases by 0.5 points per year of cohort. Panel B shows different ways to visualize the resulting data over age, connecting either by cohort, by period, or by neither. Notice how the cohort-wise and period-wise lines over age seem to imply (or at least strongly suggest) certain age effects. If we connect by cohort, it looks like an increase of 0.1 points per year of age instead; if we connect by period, it looks like a decrease of 0.1 points per year of age. As we happen to know, none of these numbers matches the true age effect of +0.4 points per year of age. So, data visualization can't solve the age–period–cohort problem either.

But while the slopes of these lines in Panel B do not reflect the effects of interest, they are not arbitrary either. Let's start with the panel on the left. Moving from left to right, we see the change in the outcome when a given cohort moves one year forward in time, meaning that both age and period increase by one year. So, what we can see here is the effect of aging one year, in combination with the effect of one year of period passing: age + period. In fact, the slope precisely equals the sum of the age effect plus the period effect: 0.4 + (– 0.3) = 0.1 points per year. This quantity, age effect plus period effect, is also referred to as the "individual change effect" (Bell, 2020). This is the metric we would recover if we compared individuals with themselves over time in a longitudinal study.

If we look at the middle panel, moving from left to right, we see the difference when, at a given point in time, we look at a person who is one year older. This person's age will be one year higher, but at the same time, their birth cohort will be one year lower. Thus, we end up with the age effect minus the cohort effect, 0.4 – 0.5 = –0.1 points per year. This happens to be the association with age that we would observe in a cross-sectional study (Palmore, 1978, refers to it as the cross-sectional difference).

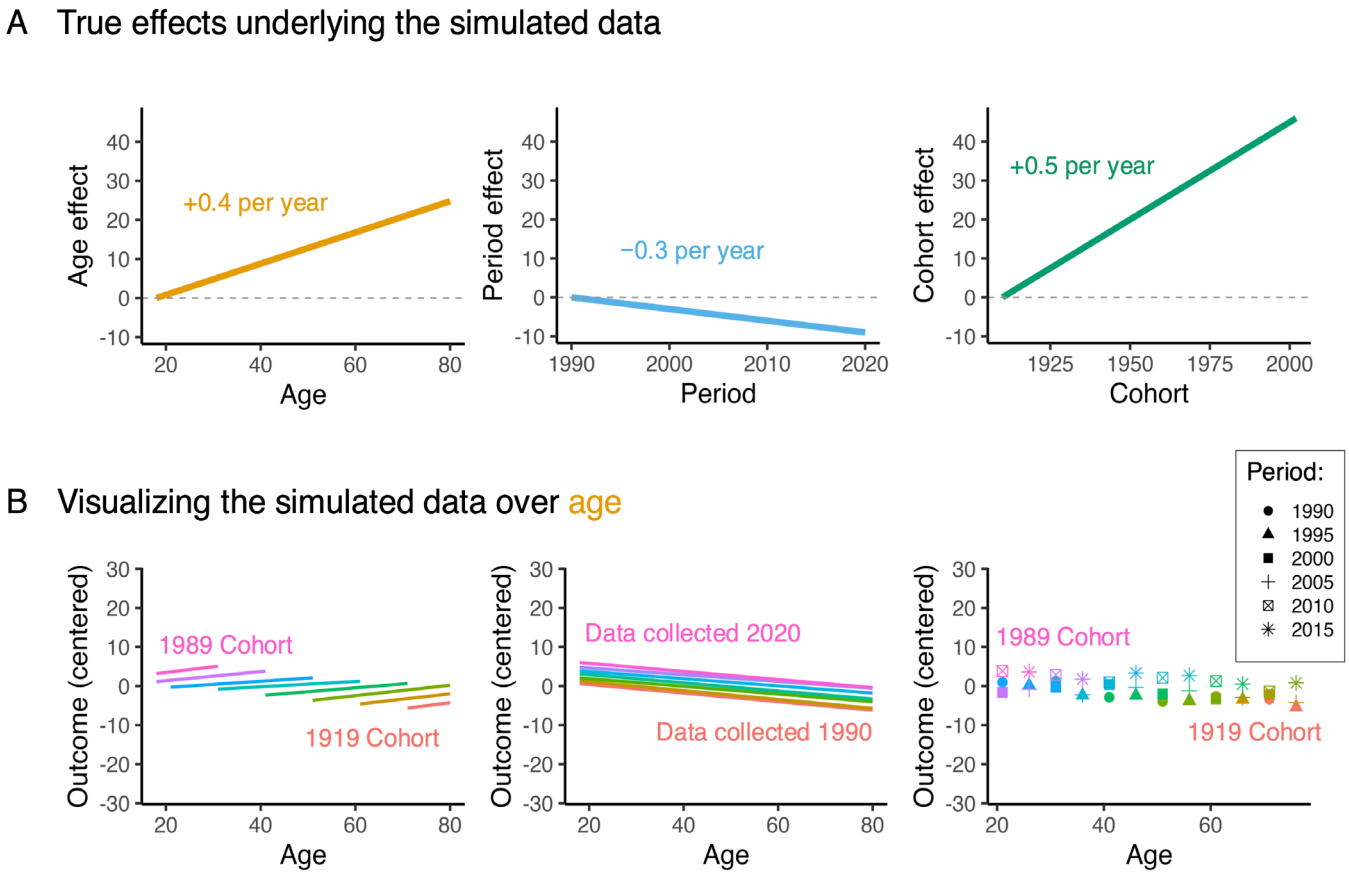

Figure 1. Simulation of age, period, and cohort effects and different ways to visualize the resulting data.

So, while the data definitely cannot tell us which age, period and cohort effects generated the data, they tell us that combinations of these effects need to add up to certain values. Think of it this way: The age–period–cohort problem is like an infinite three-dimensional space. One axis captures the magnitude of the age effect, the second one the magnitude of the period effect, the third one the magnitude of the cohort effect. What we would like to know is a single point in that space which corresponds to the true effects that generated the data. The data do tell us that the age effect and the period effect have to add up to a certain value (here, 0.1 points). This limits our search to a two-dimensional plane in the three-dimensional space on which all points fulfill this requirement. The data also do tell us that age effect minus cohort effect results in a certain value (here, –0.1 points), which results in a second two-dimensional plane on which all points fulfill this requirement. As both requirements must be true at the same time, the correct solution must lie on both planes; which is to say: it must lie on the line in which the two two-dimensional planes intersect.

Figure 2, Panel A, shows a visualization of the three-dimensional space I just described, but

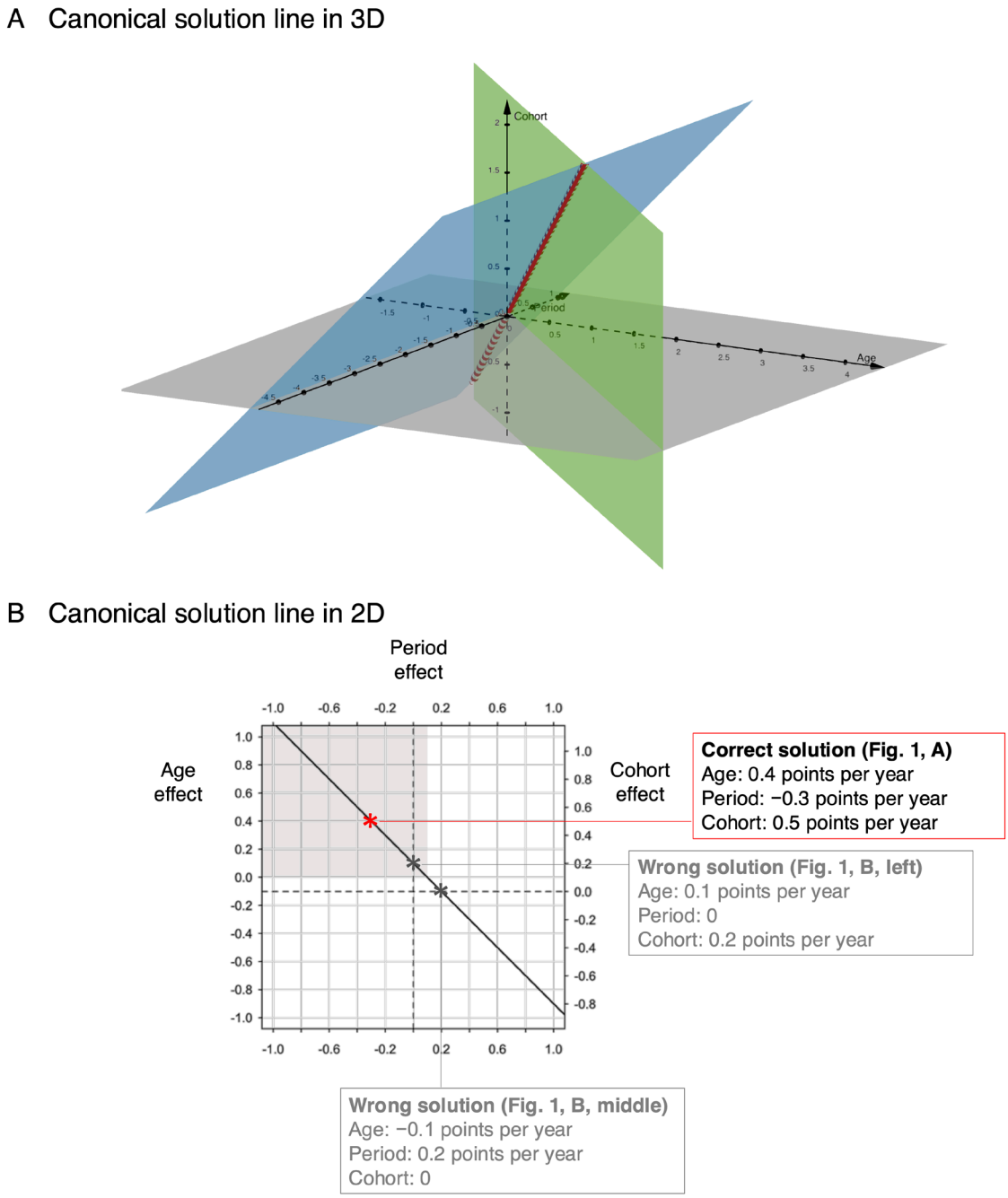

Figure 2. What the data do tell us about the age, period, and cohort effects simulated according to the values in Figure 1.

the interactive figure which can be rotated may be more helpful to really see what's going on: https://www.geogebra.org/3d/ek3ntf4h. Luckily, we can project that whole thing into two dimensions without any loss of information (Fosse & Winship, 2018), which results in Panel B. This is the so-called canonical solution lie. Any single point on the line represents a combination of age, period, and cohort effects that match the observed data equally well. On this line, we can find the correct solution marked by a red star, but also the wrong solutions implied by the lines in Figure 1, Panel B (marked by grey stars). Like any line, this line contains an infinite number of points, each of which contains one of the infinite number of solutions to the age–period–cohort problem that would be compatible with the data at hand (i.e., each one would imply precisely the same observed data).

But wait! We don't live in a linear world!

The strictly linear effects we have simulated so far are unrealistic. What about nonlinearities, any deviation from such linear trends? It turns out that the age–period–cohort problem does not apply to them—if we are willing to assume that age, period, and cohort do not interact (Fosse & Winship, 2018). This assumption may be unrealistic in its own right, but it's frequently made in the age–period–cohort literature, simply because the whole identification problem (which is already impossible to solve) only gets a lot worse if we allow for interactions (Fosse & Winship, 2019a, p. 471). So, let's keep it for now.

Why are nonlinearities exempt from the age–period–cohort problem, at least under this assumption? It's because nonlinearities result in data patterns that are distinct and cannot be wrongly attributed to the wrong temporal variable. For example, Figure 3 shows a peak-like period nonlinearity. This peak cannot be an age effect; if it were, it would occur at the same age for every cohort. It also cannot be a cohort effect; if it were, it would not be visible across age but simply shift some of the lines vertically. That only leaves period as an explanation.

Importantly, what we can learn from the data alone are not whole nonlinear trajectories, but rather deviations from any underlying linear trend. So, for example, the data alone may tell us that there is a U-shaped nonlinearity. If we combine that with no linear age effect, we end up with a U-shaped age trajectory; if we combine it with a positive linear age effect, we may end up with a monotonous age increase that accelerates; if we combine it with a negative linear age effect, we may end up with a monotonous age decrease that decelerates. So, this is not some hack that enables us to make statements about age trajectories by simply declaring that reality is nonlinear. It only allows us to make statements about deviations from the underlying linear trends. And these linear trends are unfortunately still very much affected by the age–period–cohort problem.

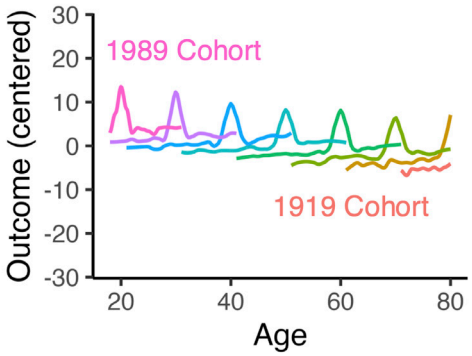

Figure 3. A period nonlinearity results in a distinct pattern.

Where do we move from here?

Our updated understanding of the age–period–cohort identification problem looks like this. First, we will never be able to identify the linear effects of age, period, and cohort, based on the data alone—no matter which data are available and how we analyze them. However, the data do allow us to find all combinations of linear effects that are compatible with the data and plot them on a single line. Second, any nonlinearities on top of the linear effects can be identified based on the data alone (assuming no interactions).

There are different ways to deal with this in a consistent manner (Figure 4). One way is to abort the whole mission. Age, period, and cohort are very strange causes to begin with—they can never have direct causal effects and are essentially just bundles of various more proximal causes, such as age-related biological changes, age-related changes in social norms, cohort-related changes in educational experiences, and so on. If one is interested in those more proximal causes anyway, it makes more sense to investigate them directly

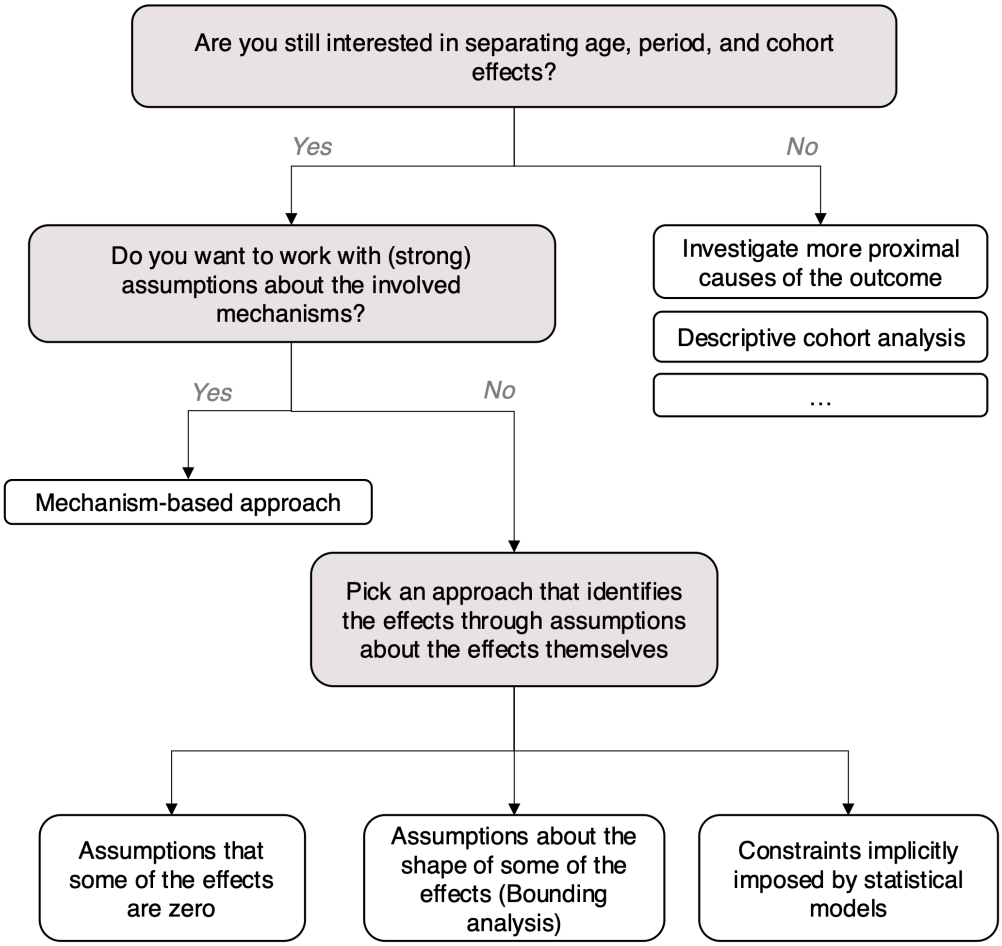

Figure 4. Different ways to deal with the age–period–cohort effect.

(which will be challenging in its own way) rather than doing the age–period–cohort thing. Or maybe we are still interested in describing what happens as people age, but give up the hope of disentangling the three temporal variables. After all, there is no way to age but in historic time! In that case, we could conduct a so-called cohort analysis (Fosse & Winship, 2023), a more descriptive approach rooted in sociology that still builds on the up-to-date understanding of the problem outlined above.

If we still do want to make statements about age, period, and/or cohort effects, we will instead need a so-called identification strategy. What these strategies essentially do is pick a point (or a range of points) on the canonical solution line with the help of certain assumptions. This point then determines which age, period, and cohort effects we are going to report. All of these strategies are necessarily fallible (that's in the nature of the age–period–cohort problem), but clearly a strategy with defensible assumptions is a better bet than one that makes outrageous assumptions.

One class of identification strategies relies on assumptions about the actual mechanisms underlying the effects (Bijlsma et al., 2017; Winship & Harding, 2008). In brief, if we are willing to assume that we know (and measured!) all variables through which one of the temporal variables operates, that allows us to identify the effects of all temporal variables. For example, if we were willing to say that the effects of period on life satisfaction are fully mediated by the current unemployment rate, gross domestic product and the average positivity of news stories at the time, we would be able to identify period effects on life satisfaction; but once we know the period effects, we also automatically know the age and the cohort effects (as the possible combinations of these effects are determined by the data, see canonical solutions line).

Other types of assumptions directly work on the effects of interest. For example, we could simply assume that some of the effects do not exist. Imagine we had a longitudinal study and were willing to commit to the assumption that period does not affect the outcome. Then we can interpret the within-person changes as age effects.

Assumptions of this type are often made implicitly—numbers are presented, and then they are interpreted one way rather than another, without further justification. That's not optimal because in many scenarios, readers won't even notice that assumptions are involved, which makes it impossible for them to properly evaluate whether they should accept the results. From a scientific perspective, it's much preferable if instead assumptions are clearly articulated, and maybe even critically discussed in the limitations section.

More sophisticated assumptions about the shape of the effects of interest are involved in so-called bounding analyses (Fosse & Winship, 2019b). In this approach, we explicitly work with the canonical solution line and the nonlinearities, which are extracted with the help of a simple linear model that is parametrized in a certain manner. We can then apply varies types of assumptions to rule out parts of the canonical solution line—for example, maybe we are willing to commit to the assumption that the outcome overall goes down with age, or that it goes down past a certain age. We may even be willing to commit to a monotonical decrease past a certain age which, in combination with the identified nonlinearities, often goes a very long way to narrow things down considerably. We could also make assumptions about the direction or shape of period effects and/or cohort effects. Once we have applied all assumptions, we're left with a stretch of the canonical solution line that we cannot rule out via assumption. We can then plot a bounded range of trajectories of age, period, and cohort effects—these are all solutions to the age–period–cohort problem that are compatible with both the empirical data and our assumptions. I provide a worked example of this approach (including code) in Rohrer (in press), in which I analyze how age, period, and cohort affect Germans' approval of mothers working.

Last but not least, as I mentioned before, there are models that purport to provide all-purpose solutions to thr age–period–cohort problem. I hope what I have explained so far has made it clear that this is not possible unless there are assumptions involved. There is no free lunch! Models such as the hierarchical age–period–cohort model (or other variations of random effects models) and the intrinsic estimator very much do impose assumptions. It's just that those assumptions are completely opaque; it requires considerable reverse engineering to work out how the models pick a solution (Bell & Jones, 2014; Luo, 2013; Luo & Hodges, 2020; Luo et al., 2016). For example, the hierarchical age–period–cohort model will, in typical data situations (in which the cohort variable has a wider span than age and period), estimate effects so that there is no linear cohort effect; to understand why that happens one needs to know how multilevel models minimize unexplained variation. I personally would not recommend using these models, unless you have actually worked out which constraints the model will imply in your particular use case and consider these constraints substantively defensible. If that's the case, knock yourself out. But you will have to explain to readers what your model does and why that's the right thing.

Final thoughts

The age–period–cohort identification problem is frustrating because it cannot be solved by throwing more data or more complex models on it. It's also fun because the conceptual underpinnings are fairly straightforward. The problem nicely highlights how researchers' substantive assumptions ultimately shape inferences. On a more general level, the identification problem forces us to be specific about our analysis goal (if we are not interested in the effects of age or period or cohort, we don't even have to bother with it) as well as about our assumptions (which, we can be certain, must always exist if age or period or cohort effects are involved). Being specific about these things is essential to connect any form of statistical evidence with theory (Lundberg et al., 2021); at the same time, it's something that many researchers are not well-equipped to do. As a result, we see a literature filled with articles with ambiguous analysis aims (such as causal inference pretending to be prediction; Grosz et al., 2020) in which results and conclusions are connected by vibes at best. It's time to do better than that!

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10 Questions

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How did you get involved in the study of epigenetics?

My interest in epigenetics originated from my research focus on gene–environment interplay, a central theme of my postdoctoral work. I was awarded a postdoc grant by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) to explore this interplay in child and adolescent cortisol secretion and cognition, utilizing twin modeling with LIFE alumni Elliot Tucker-Drob and Kathryn Paige Harden in Austin, Texas. Upon arriving, I worked with traditional behavior genetic twin models and was soon presented with the opportunity to analyze new epigenetic data that had yet to be examined. I jumped on that opportunity and developed that epigenetic research stream within the Texas Twin Project (https://sites.la.utexas.edu/twinproject), which proved challenging at first. While I don't specifically identify as an "epigenetics researcher," I am passionate about any biological substrate and method that aids in studying gene–environment interplay throughout the lifespan.

Could you name books or articles that have profoundly influenced your own thinking about the field?

A few of the papers that I keep as printed versions plus books in my office:

- Scarr, S., & McCartney, K. (1983). How people make their own environments: A theory of genotype → environment effects. *Child Development, 54*(2), 424–435. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.1983.tb03884.x

  So spot on and well-written.

- Horvath, S., & Raj, K. (2018). DNA methylation-based biomarkers and the epigenetic clock theory of ageing. *Nature Reviews Genetics, 19*(6), 371–384. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41576-018-0004-3

  Horvath's DNA methylation work is just ground-breaking and daring. Also he's German-American.

- Harden, K. P. (2021). *The genetic lottery: Why DNA matters for social equality*. Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691226705

  Paige was writing this book while I was a postdoc there and I learned that writing pop-science books is very hard. Quite a few researchers in social science genetics now consider this their Bible.

- Belsky, J., Caspi, A., Moffitt, T. E., & Poulton, R. (2020). *The origins of you: How childhood shapes later life*. Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674245143

  Recently, I've had fan-girl dreams come true by working on papers with Moffitt and Caspi.

- Lorde, A. (2017). *A burst of light: And other essays*. Courier Dover Publications. https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674245143

  I have read quite a lot of Black feminist literature and fiction, which also has some brilliant ideas about the origins of individual differences and how those are situated within social systems across development.

What are you currently reading?

- Feiner, N., Feldman, M., Gilbert, S. F., Lala, K. N., & Uller, T. (2024). *Evolution evolving: The developmental origins of adaptation and biodiversity*. Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691262406

Which do you consider a main current debate within the field?

At the last Behavior Genetics Association conference in London, a fascinating debate unfolded regarding the utility and projected legacy of polygenic scores, eventually leading to a broader discussion about the fundamental goals of science. Polygenic scores are single-score summaries of genetic variants that have been found to correlate with specific phenotypes, such as depression or higher educational attainment. These scores face several methodological challenges, some of which may be addressed in the future.

One major concern is that polygenic scores often capture what geneticists refer to as "environmental confounds," including social stratification, assortative mating, and dynastic effects. Additionally, the effect sizes of these scores are typically small, with R-squared values ranging from 5–16% for traits other than physical attributes like height (which is more like 40%). This limitation poses challenges for studying gene–environment interplay, especially in smaller samples with well-measured developmental phenotypic measures. However, it's worth noting that these effect sizes are comparable to many environmental measures, such as family income, but fall short of twin estimates of heritability, a phenomenon known as "missing heritability."

Some researchers believe that as genomic discovery sample sizes grow into the millions and samples become more diverse, the effect sizes of polygenic scores will improve. At the conference, Robert Plomin, a prominent behavior geneticist, argued that polygenic scores will be recognized for their predictive power regarding complex outcomes from birth, rather than for enhancing our understanding of genetic influences on human behavior. And for this prediction legacy it does not matter if the effect is driven by direct genetic effects, social stratification, etc.

This viewpoint sparked disagreement among many researchers, who countered with the argument that the ultimate purpose of science is to deepen our understanding of ourselves and the world. They contended that polygenic score research should not solely focus on maximizing prediction. Instead, it should aim to advance our comprehension of human nature, of gene–environment interplay, with any clinical applications of polygenic scores being secondary outcomes of this broader scientific endeavor. Therefore, we need to reduce the effects of "environmental confounds" on polygenic scores using within-family genomics and other methods.

What research topics have been neglected or have not received enough attention so far?

In the field of human genomics and its intersection with various other fields, such as developmental psychology, I think there is the sense that we are only at the beginning. For example, there is little developmental research probing how polygenic scores become correlated with the adult outcomes they are typically trained on. There's also little work integrating genetic methods into (quasi-)experimental environmental designs, which is such a great way to study gene–environment interplay.

We also have these fascinating new genome-wide epigenetic scores of biological aging and other phenotypes, like cognition. I speculate that they can help us study how prenatal and early environments interact with genetic dispositions to shape trajectories of individual differences. Again, we have few studies probing the how, when, and where, of these associations.

One of your foci is on the intersection of genetic influences and social inequality. Can you tell us more about this?

I focus on bridging the gap between genetic influences and social inequality, moving beyond the traditional nature versus nurture debate. My goal is to integrate two key factors: (1) the role of genes in human development, and (2) the influence of environmental factors.

Recent advancements in human genomics, particularly in the era of big data genome sequencing, provide new tools to incorporate genetic measures into the life sciences. However, these advancements come with methodological challenges and raise social and ethical concerns within behavioral social science genomics. Some scientists predict that heritable polygenic genome editing could become a reality within a few decades. Without proper discussion and regulation, this could lead to unintended consequences or exacerbate social inequalities.

It's crucial to adopt a perspective that recognizes the complex interplay between genes and environments in shaping human traits. Developmental psychology has a long history of providing this perspective, which is important to maintain in the light of genomic advancements.

How can your research be applied to everyday life?

I have two examples. With the rise of direct-to-consumer genetic testing companies, many individuals now have access to polygenic scores and genetic ancestry estimates. Our research aims to help the public better understand these genetic measures by placing them in the context of environmental and developmental factors. This understanding can lead to more informed decisions about health and lifestyle.

Second, one of our ongoing studies explores how financial support, specifically cash gifts to mothers at risk of poverty, can affect the epigenome of their children. We hypothesize that such early-life interventions may influence epigenetic patterns that play a role in aging processes and long-term health outcomes.

The Baby's First Years Study (https://www.babysfirstyears.com) is a randomized controlled trial that provides monthly cash gifts to mothers during the first six years of their child's life. We are examining whether these financial interventions impact children's epigenetic profiles related to health and well-being. Previous findings indicate that mothers who received cash gifts invested more in their children, both financially and emotionally. The children benefited by consuming more fruits and vegetables, spending more quality time with their mothers, and showing altered electroencephalographic (EEG) brain activity.

Beyond its scientific significance, this study offers direct policy implications. It highlights the potential benefits of financial support programs for young mothers, suggesting that such interventions can have a positive impact on child development and family well-being.

What are you currently working on?

I am probing whether we can generate a larger genomic dataset of German families to enable within-family genomics, somewhat akin to the Norwegian Mother, Father, and Child Cohort Study MoBa (https://www.fhi.no/moba-en). Studying gene–environment interplay by comparing unrelated people growing up in different families is complicated. Within-family estimates help in understanding how genetic variations contribute to differences in traits among siblings who share the same family environment. When I think about how genetic effects influence human development, I start by considering differences between my two children.

Together with my excellent team, I am also pushing the integration and methodological expansion of genome-wide epigenetic measures of biological aging, puberty, poverty to study the connection of development and aging.

What do you get out of LIFE as a faculty member and the added value of LIFE's internationality?

As a faculty member, LIFE offers the opportunity to train and co-mentor predoctoral students. This co-mentorship enhances the quality of our research. LIFE's internationality provides access to a vast network of researchers across Germany and other countries, fostering global collaboration and exchange of ideas. It also strengthens an international perspective on research questions, which is important for many reasons, including that we publish in international scientific journals and compete for international research grants. Supporting junior scientists by sharing my knowledge is an integral part of my job, as it is for every scientist. Science is a public good, and engaging in science is a team sport.

Lab website

https://www.mpib-berlin.mpg.de/research/research-groups/mprg-biosocial

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* with LIFE fellows *Muna Aikins* & *Deniz Främke*

Fraemke, D., Willems, Y. E., Okbay, A., Lindenberger, U., Zinn, S., Wagner, G. G., Richter, D., Harden, K. P., Tucker-Drob, E. M., Hertwig, R., Koellinger, P., & Raffington, L. (in press). Polygenic associations with educational attainment in East versus West Germany: Differences emerge after reunification. *Psychological Science*. https://doi.org/10.1101/2024.03.21.585839 (Preprint)
*with LIFE fellow *Deniz Främke*

Raffington, L. (2024). Utilizing epigenetics to study the shared nature of development and biological aging across the lifespan. *npj Science of Learning, 9,* Article 24. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41539-024-00239-5

New LIFE Fellows in Berlin & Zurich

Agnese D'Angelo. I am a PhD student at the Chair of Developmental Psychology: Infancy and Childhood at UZH. I hold a Joint Master's Degree in Language and Linguistics from the University of Turku, Finland, the University of Pavia, Italy, and Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, Germany. During my studies, I worked as a language teacher and tutor, which further deepened my interest in language acquisition, communication, and developmental psychology.

The research project I am working on aims to investigate the communicative environments in which multilingual children grow up, focusing on how they navigate between languages, cultural norms, social contexts, and different interaction partners. Using experience sampling methods and voice-activated recorders, the focus is to explore children's everyday communicative experiences in situ. My doctoral research is supervised by Moritz Daum and Stephanie Wermelinger as well as Julien Mayor (University of Oslo, Norway). The project is funded by a grant from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).

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Larissa Erchinger. I am a PhD student in Developmental Psychology at UZH, part of Moritz Daum's KleineWeltentdeckerInnen research group. My research focuses on how multilingual environments shape children's communicative development, specifically examining how diverse experiences influence the development and flexible use of communicative strategies. I grew up in the Black Forest in Germany and completed my Bachelor's in Psychology at the University of Konstanz, which included a year at Northern Arizona University in the US. I then specialized in Developmental Psychology with a Master's degree from Maastricht University in the Netherlands.

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Leonie Hagitte. I am a predoctoral student at Goethe-Universität Frankfurt and MSB Medical School Berlin and associated with the Center for Lifespan Psychology at MPIB. I am working on my dissertation with Martin Schultze (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt) and Andreas Brandmaier (MSB & MPIB). My research focuses on quantitative psychology, data literacy, and psychological assessment. I earned my bachelor's degree in psychology from the MSB Medical School Berlin in 2022; my thesis examined the validation of the CPC-12R questionnaire in Germany and the US. In early 2025, I completed my master's degree in psychology at HU Berlin with a thesis on the algorithm-based development of a self-rating scale for data literacy in non-professionals.

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Theodoros Koustakas. I am a predoctoral fellow at the Center for Lifespan Psychology at the MPIB under the supervision of Ulman Lindenberger. My research interests revolve around structural and functional brain changes associated with musical training and expertise. As a musician myself, I'm also interested in how our brain hears and processes music and the diversity of music representation. My academic background is in Biology and Neurosciences. I received my bachelor's degree in Biology at FU Berlin and then specialized in Neurobiology and behavior during my master's studies at the same university. In my master's thesis, supervised by LIFE alumna Elisabeth Wenger, I explored the neural representational space of diverse musical compositions and utilized acoustic features derived from the audio signal to further understand these representations. For my dissertation, I'm particularly interested in understanding the influence of singing on brain development.

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Maeike Slikkerveer. I am a PhD student at UZH as part of the research group Developmental Psychology: Infancy and Childhood led by Moritz Daum. My research focuses on the development of language production processes. Together with my supervisor, Sebastian Sauppe, I am exploring the neural dynamics of sentence production processes in children and adults. In addition, we plan to investigate how cross-linguistic differences influence these processes.
Originally from a linguistic background, I completed both my undergraduate degree in Linguistics and my Master's degree in Language and Cognition at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. During my Master's degree, I focused on differentiating the linguistic processes behind single word production.

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Anja Stanojlovic. I am a doctoral student at the Center for Environmental Neuroscience at MPIB under the supervision of Simone Kühn. For my Master's degree in Psychology at FU, I used a twin design to investigate the relationship between the physical environment and psychotic experiences, accounting for genetic and shared early-life influences. Building on this, my PhD leverages longitudinal twin datasets to examine how early-life environmental exposures—such as air and noise pollution, population density, and access to green spaces—shape neurodevelopmental and psychiatric outcomes across the lifespan. To disentangle the distinct contributions of environmental and genetic factors, I aim to integrate neuroimaging, behavioral, and genetic data.

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Sepideh Zarandooz. I am a PhD candidate in the Max Planck Research Group Biosocial – Biology, Social Disparities, and Development at MPIB. I hold an M.Sc. in Biology and Genomics science from the University of Bielefeld, Germany. My research focuses on saliva DNA methylation as a biomarker for social determinants of health across the lifespan and generations. In particular, I am interested in investigating the degree of similarity/dissimilarity of the epigenome between individuals in family members (such as parent–offspring and siblings) living in the same environment and how these factors shape individual epigenomes, while also examining how social and environmental factors, especially within families, impact biological aging and health.

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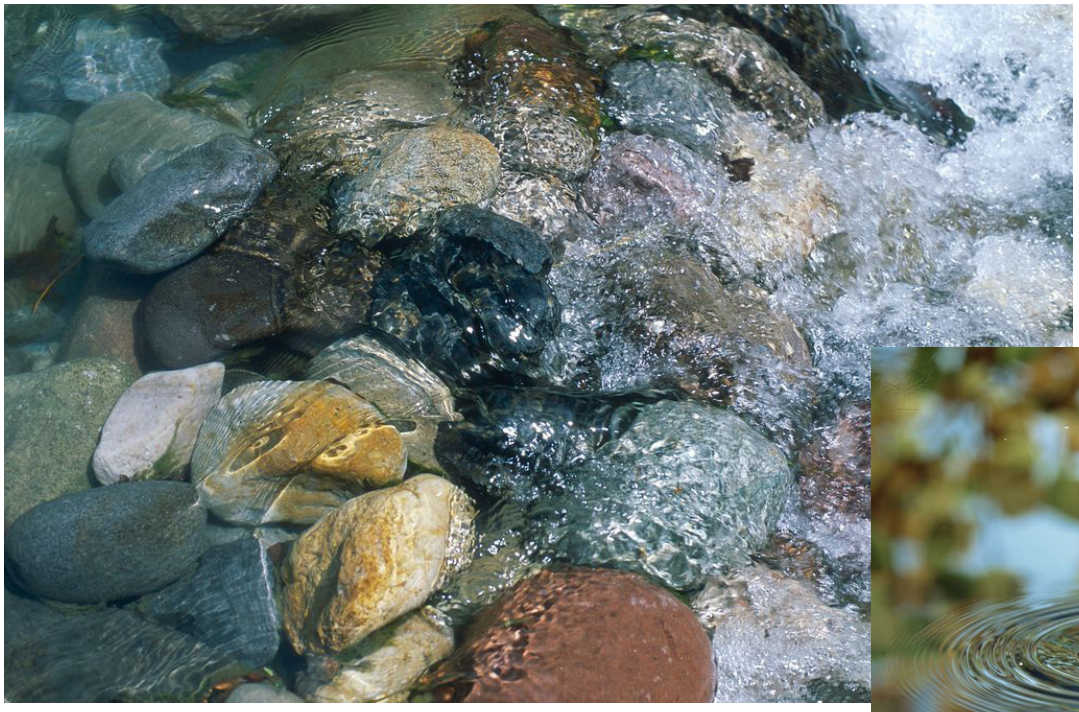

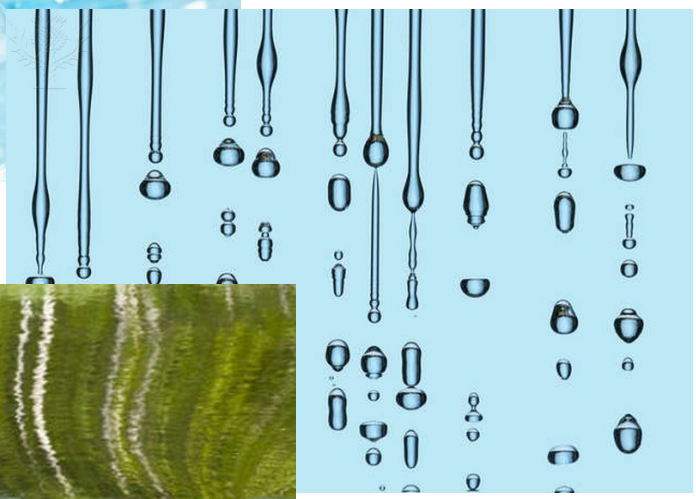

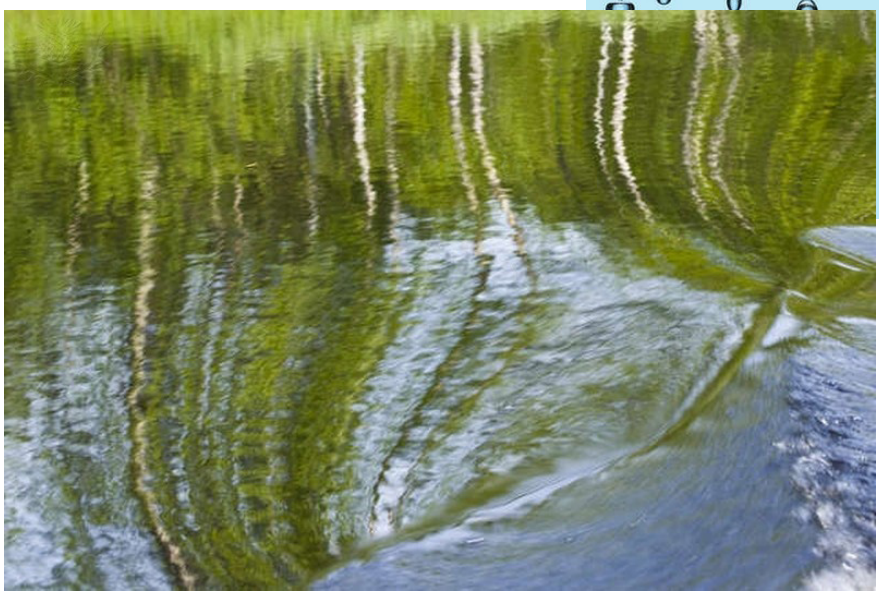

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From top: BSIP; Kim Taylor;
Emmeline Watkins; Kim Taylor;
Juan Carlos Munoz

New LIFE Faculty in Charlottesville

Mandy Rispoli is the Quantitative Foundation Bicentennial Professor of Special Education at UVA's School of Education and Human Development. She is the Editor-in-Chief of Behavior Modification and the Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*. She leads the Global Autism Initiative within the University of Virginia STAR autism collaborative. Mandy Rispoli has published over 140 peer-reviewed research articles and book chapters concerning educational interventions for children with autism and neurodevelopmental disabilities. Her scholarship is built upon sustained university-community partnerships to improve teacher and caregiver meaningful involvement in child assessment and intervention and to promote positive outcomes for young children with autism and neurodevelopmental disabilities. She is part of an international, interdisciplinary team of scholars and clinicians exploring and seeking to improve access to education for children with autism and neurodevelopmental disabilities in low- and middle-income countries. Her research is funded by the US Department of Education, the NIH, and the Spencer Foundation. In 2017 she was the inaugural recipient of the Trailblazer Award for Outstanding Midcareer Research and Scholarship at Purdue University, was selected as a Big 10 Academic Alliance Leadership Fellow in 2019 and received the Purdue University Faculty Scholar Award in 2020.

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Key publications

Rispoli, M., Richards, C., Borosh, A., Shannon, E., & Mason, R. (2023). Telehealth practice-based coaching in functional communication training for caregivers of young children with neurodevelopmental disabilities. *Journal of Behavioral Education*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10864-023-09527-3

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Credit: Kaj R. Svensson / Science Photo Library / Universal Images Group

LIFE-Related Publications

These include all recent articles reported by *LIFE fellows* as well as selected work by *LIFE alumni*. See also https://www.imprs-life.mpg.de/publications. If your work is missing, please let us know!

Aikins, M.*, Willems, Y.*, Mitchell, C., Goosby, B., & **Raffington, L.** (in press). Linked emergence of racial disparities in mental health and epigenetic biological aging across childhood and adolescence. *Molecular Psychiatry*. https://doi.org/10.1101/2024.03.26.586786 (Preprint)
* Shared first authorship

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Zarandooz, S., & **Raffington, L.** (in press). Applying blood-derived epigenetic algorithms to saliva: Cross-tissue similarity of DNA methylation indices of aging, physiology, and cognition. *Clinical Epigenetics*.

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LIFE News

- LIFE Michigan is hosting the Spring Academy from May 13 to 16, 2025 (arrival May 12, departure May 16) at UM.
- The Fall Academy will be hosted by the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development and the Department of Psychology, UZH from October 13 to 16, 2025 (arrival October 12, departure October 16/17).

Exchanges

- Zurich fellow *Julian Ockelmann* is visiting Patricia Reuter-Lorenz's lab for 7 weeks in April/May. They are looking at a dataset of 110 older adults with and without hearing loss.
- Michigan fellow *Rose Wang* will come to Berlin in June/July to work with MPIB faculty *Ralph Hertwig*.

LIFE Berlin

- *Leonie Hagitte*, *Theodoros Koustakas*, *Anja Stanojlovic*, and *Sepideh Zarandooz* have joined LIFE Berlin as fellows. See pp. 13f. for more information.
- The upcoming LIFE seminar is on "Methods in research on human development." It is organized by *Ulman Lindenberger* and includes LIFE faculty and guests as speakers.
- Alumna *Annette Brose* has taken up a new position at the Health and Medical University Potsdam as Professor of Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy. Her term as LIFE faculty has therefore ended. We thank her for her commitment and manifold contributions to LIFE!
- HU alumna *Tanja Gerlach* has returned to Germany from Northern Ireland to become Head of the Personality unit at the Leibniz-Institute for Educational Trajectories (LIfBi) in Bamberg. She remains an Honorary Lecturer in Psychology at Queen's University Belfast.
- FU alumna *Lena Keller* has taken up an assistant professorship (tenure track) at the Institute for Psychology of Learning and Instruction (IPL) at Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel, Germany. She will be working on the interplay between achievement and achievement motivation in students, gender differences and intersectionality in educational contexts, giftedness and high achievement, as well as teaching-related attitudes and competencies of (prospective) teachers. A key focus of her work will be the application and further development of complex quantitative methods for educational psychology and empirical educational research.
- FU alumnus *Mario Lawes* has started work as a consultant for d-fine, Berlin, a consulting firm specializing on analytical and technical projects.
- Fellow *Caroline Poppa* is extending her stay at UM after the upcoming Spring Academy until June. She will be working with LIFE Michigan Faculty *Kai Schnabel Cortina* and Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) project member Henning Silber—who moved from Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences in Mannheim to become a Research Assistant Professor at the Survey Research Center at the Institute for Social Research (ISR). The goal is to finalize a paper describing the prevalence of publication bias in two representative German academic access panels (GESIS Panel and SOEP-IS).
- Faculty *Laurel Raffington*, head of the Research Group Biosocial – Biology, Social Disparities, and Development at MPIB, has been awarded the prestigious Jacobs Foundation Fellowship. The program targets researchers worldwide who have completed their doctorate within the past decade. Beyond financial support, the Fellowship offers additional assistance to its recipients, fostering their continued success and impact in their respective fields.
- Faculty *Bernhard Spitzer* has joined the Faculty of Psychology at Technische Universität Dresden, Germany, as Professor/Chair of Biopsychology and is therefore leaving LIFE.

LIFE Michigan

- *Emily Diamond* and *Rachel Yan* have taken over from *Savannah Adams* and *Jahla Osborne* as Fellow Speakers.
- Fellow *Jessica Bezek* received the Psychology Department Dissertation/Thesis Grant as well as the Susan B. Meister Award for Best Paper in Child Health Policy from the Department of Pediatric Psychology, UM. This is awarded to the first author of a research paper expanding knowledge about a significant public health issue. She received the award for:

Bezek, J. L., Tillem, S., Suarez, G. L., Burt, S. A., Vazquez, A. Y., Michael, C., Sripada, C., Klump, K. L., & Hyde, L. W. (2024). Functional brain network organization in youth and multi-domain resilience to neighborhood disadvantage in youth. *American Psychologist, 79*(8), 1123–1138. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0001279

- Fellow *Emily Diamond* received a Graduate Research Award from the American Psychological Foundation for her study proposal examining the role of synchrony in the formation of relationships. She also received the Pillsbury Graduate Research Award.
- Faculty *Amie Gordon* has received the APA Distinguished Scientific Award for an Early Career Contribution to Psychology.
- Faculty *Cindy Lustig* was awarded the UM Department of Psychology's Amy L. and Kirk L. Wolfe Prize.
- Faculty *Andras Molnar* has been awarded the Association for Psychological Science (APS) Rising Star Award.
- Faculty *Leah Richmond-Rakerd* has been elected as an Association for Psychological Science (APS) Fellow.
- Fellow *Kali Sarver* received the 2025 Psychology Department Outstanding Graduate Student Instructor Award. She also received the Sallie P. Asche Travel Award for the Dallas Aging and Cognition Conference in February where she presented a poster.
- Fellow *Rachel Yan* received the Pillsbury Graduate Research Award.

LIFE Virginia

- *Mandy Rispoli* has joined the LIFE faculty at UVA. See p. 16 for more information.
- Alumna *Riana Elyse Anderson*, Columbia School of Social Work, has received the APA Distinguished Scientific Award for an Early Career Contribution to Psychology.
- Fellow *Natasha Bailey* was awarded a Distinguished Teaching Fellowship to teach her own course next academic year, titled "Psychology in the Juvenile Justice System."
- Speaker *Steve Boker* has received UVA's Distinguished Researcher Award. It recognizes a faculty member for their excellence in research through significant discoveries and scholarship. It is awarded to scholars who are making an impact in their field and on society, and are acknowledged as a leader in their field.
- Fellow *Kenn Dela Cruz* was awarded the Commonwealth of Virginia Engineering and Science Policy Fellowship to be a training scientific advisor for the Virginia state government.
- Faculty *Hudson Golino* has received UVA's 2024 Research Excellence Award.
- Alumna *Meltem Yucel*, currently postdoc at Duke University, is taking up an assistant professorship at Michigan State University in the fall.
- Faculty *Jim Soland* has received the Outstanding Faculty Award of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia.
- Fellow *Allison Rae Ward-Seidel* has defended her dissertation titled "Middle School Conditions that Promote Early Adolescent Thriving."

LIFE Zurich

- *Agnese D'Angelo*, *Larissa Erchinger*, and *Maeike Slikkerveer* have joined LIFE Zurich as fellows. See pp. 13f. for more information.
- Fellow *Esmee Alders* is piloting a web app "LEMON - Language Exposure Multilinguals ONline" in a first LIFE-funded study. LEMON is an online questionnaire to capture children's diverse language exposures.
- Berlin alumnus *Fivos Iliopoulos* has taken up a postdoc position in LIFE faculty *Nathalie Giroud*'s group at UZH.
- Faculty *Andreas Maercker* is stepping down from LIFE on the occasion of his retirement. We thank him for his many contributions to LIFE over the years!
- Fellow *Francesca Mele* has joined her advisor *Kaspar Burger* at Universität Potsdam.
- Fellow *Julian Ockelmann* has been awarded a competitive project grant (4000 CHF) by the UZH graduate campus for a research project on parietal alpha oscillations as a predictor of cognitive load during speech-in-noise comprehension. He is also organizing and chairing a symposium entitled "Cognition, Hearing & Tinnitus: Mechanisms and Implications" at the 2025 Psychologie & Gehirn conference in Würzburg.
- Fellow *Sofia Scatolin* is planning an 8-week research stay at Dylan Gee's Clinical Affective

Neuroscience & Development Lab at Yale University this spring.

- Fellow *Kevin Schoenholzer* successfully defended his dissertation entitled "Educational Stratification in Comparative Perspective: The Role of Welfare Policies, Normative Beliefs, and Educational Expansion" in February. He is now working at the Interfaculty Centre for Educational Research (ICER), Universität Bern, Switzerland. The overarching goal of ICER is to promote empirical scientific findings in educational research across all educational levels and with a perspective on the entire course of life.

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Frequently used acronyms in LIFE

CRTD: Center for Regenerative Therapies Dresden

DIW: Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung [German Institute for Economic Research]

DZA: Deutsches Zentrum für Altersfragen [German Centre of Gerontology]

DZNE: Deutsches Zentrum für Neurodegenerative Erkrankungen Dresden [German Center for Neurodegenerative Diseases]

FU: Freie Universität Berlin

HU: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

LIFE: International Max Planck Research School on the Life Course

MPIB: Max-Planck-Institut für Bildungsforschung [Max Planck Institute for Human Development]

SHARE: The Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe

UM: University of Michigan

UVA: University of Virginia

UZH: University of Zurich

LIFE Newsletter

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Aim of the newsletter
The LIFE newsletter encourages collaboration and interaction among people within the LIFE program.lt provides an information platform where fellows, alumni, and faculty members can learn more about each other's research, and identify colleagues with similar interests and possible projects for collaboration.

Contributions
Please send contributions, suggestions, and input to the editor.

Publishing information
The LIFE newsletter is published three times a year as a PDF document and sent to LIFE members only.

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