

A DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOPATHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE ON PERSONALITY DISORDER: INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

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Personality disorders (PDs)—disrupted or maladaptive patterns of characteristic emotions, cognitions, and behaviors, often marked by impairment in identity or interpersonal relationships—are not uniquely adult disorders, but constitute psychopathology that often emerges early in life. It is no longer necessary to make this statement tentatively or with great disclaimers, as researchers have converged on evidence for the manifestation of personality pathology in childhood and adolescence, the validity and reliability of early PD measurement, the stability of these constructs across development, and the predictive validity of these problems in youth for negative consequences across multiple domains (Cicchetti & Crick, 2009; Tackett, Balsis, Krueger, & Oltmanns, 2009). Indeed, parallel consensus has emerged among developmental researchers, who are paying increasing attention to personality traits early in life and their role in psychopathology emergence (Shiner, 2009). Greater synthesis between developmental researchers and PD researchers is quite natural, with the discipline of *developmental psychopathology* offering a particularly rich theoretical and conceptual framework for deepening our understanding of PD development (Cicchetti & Toth, 2009). The goal of the present issue of the *Journal of Personality Disorders* is to leverage key concepts and principles from the developmental psychopathology approach to elucidate the nature and course of PDs across the lifespan.

The developmental psychopathology framework has proven a useful tool for better understanding multiple domains of psychopathology and holds great promise for the domain of PD. We argue that several principles of this framework are particularly well suited to a better understanding of PD emergence and development, however, and that better integration of developmental psychopathology principles will yield enormous benefits for PD researchers. Specifically, although a comprehensive developmental psychopathology framework is much broader than the points we highlight here, we used three key principles to guide the creation and organization of this

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special issue: (1) the juxtaposition of normal and abnormal development, (2) a focus on divergent pathways from common risk factors and to common endpoints, and (3) an emphasis on examining psychopathology development on multiple levels of analysis (Cicchetti & Toth, 2009).

One of the most fundamental tenets of the developmental psychopathology perspective is the emphasis on examining the development of *normal* and *abnormal* processes alongside one another. Nowhere in modern psychiatry is the relevance of this juxtaposition more evident than in the PDs. Although the ultimate outcome for PDs in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed. (*DSM-5*; American Psychological Association, 2013) was likely disappointing for many PD researchers and practitioners, the process leading up to *DSM-5* revealed a greater impact on PDs by research on its “normal” counterpart (normal-range personality traits, their measurement, and development) than in any other diagnostic category (Krueger, in press; Widiger, in press). The potential relevance and impact of these intertwined domains (i.e., the fields of normal personality and PD research) is especially important when shifting focus to earlier parts of the lifespan. Many adult manifestations of psychopathology may not be directly observed, or even relevant, in childhood. By shifting emphasis away from purely clinical constructs (which are largely derived from adult populations) observed in isolation to a more comprehensive perspective interweaving psychopathology with underlying normative constructs and processes, we greatly facilitate developmental research on core components of PDs (Shiner, 2009; Tackett et al., 2009). This central tenet of the developmental psychopathology framework is intended to provide an overarching organization for the current special issue. Specifically, we selected topics cutting across multiple PDs across the lifespan: emotion, social cognition, reward processing, hormonal mechanisms, aging, relationships, and identity. For each of these topics, we asked scholars to provide empirical contributions tackling these issues from a PD perspective. We then paired these empirical contributions with scholars with expertise on normative counterparts of the domain of interest (e.g., emotion) to read the empirical contribution and provide a brief commentary. In this way, we hoped to highlight the natural intersection between adaptive and maladaptive development across multiple relevant domains for the study of PDs, as well as provoke researchers focusing on either side—adaptive or maladaptive processes—to consider their own ideas from a new angle.

A second tenet of a developmental psychopathology framework that holds great relevance for the study of PDs is the need to examine divergent pathways from common starting or ending points (i.e., a common starting point resulting in divergent outcomes versus divergent starting points resulting in a common outcome). The terms *multifinality* and *equifinality* capture these concepts. Multifinality reflects the idea that certain individuals with shared risk factors (e.g., childhood maltreatment) develop along divergent pathways, both to maladaptation (e.g., adult borderline PD) and adaptation (e.g., adult emotional adjustment) as well as different types of maladaptation (e.g., antisocial versus borderline PD). Equifinality reflects the idea that different starting points and trajectories may lead to similar diagnostic

outcomes (e.g., grandiose versus vulnerable developmental trajectories to a Narcissistic PD diagnosis). These concepts are highly relevant when trying to understand why some individuals with PD risk factors go on to well-adjusted outcomes, and how best to track the junctures in such pathways and better understand those factors that lead to PD outcomes in childhood and adolescence, as well as through middle and later adulthood. All of the topic domains in the current issue reflect potential cross-cutting components relevant for multiple PD constructs that may facilitate research on PD development in multifinality and equifinality frameworks.

The third tenet that fits within our approach to understanding PDs is an emphasis on multiple levels of analysis. PD research and theory have often broadly examined risk factors spanning biological, characterological, social, and environmental domains in attempts to uncover PD etiology (e.g., Crowell, Beauchaine, & Linehan, 2009), so the application of a multiple levels of analysis approach to PD research is a natural extension for the field. We might conceive of the multiple levels of analysis approach more broadly than a disorder-specific perspective, however. For example, all of the topics highlighted in this special issue focus on cross-cutting issues that are in no way specific to any given PD diagnosis. Further, many of the topics inherently reflect differential levels of analysis, from etiology (hormones, reward processing) to self (social cognition, emotions, identity), to interpersonal relationships and developmental course. These domains apply to many, if not all, PD diagnostic categories. Thus, examining PD constructs from a comprehensive multiple levels of analysis approach has the potential to yield generalized scientific insight on the broader area of PD research by integrating transdiagnostic constructs relevant for PDs.

In sum, we feel that the developmental psychopathology framework offers a unique opportunity to examine PD development across the lifespan (Cicchetti & Crick, 2009). Rounding out this special issue, we are fortunate to include a final commentary from Dante Cicchetti, a founder of the modern developmental psychopathology framework. This brings us full circle in our journey, investigating cross-cutting domains underlying personality pathology, across multiple levels of analysis, from both normal and abnormal perspectives. We hope you enjoy and benefit from this issue as much as we have.

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