

EDITORIAL

## Developmental approaches to depression

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This special issue of *Development and Psychopathology* is devoted to developmental approaches to the study of depression. Because the developmental perspective has only recently begun to be applied to the study of the mood disorders, it is hardly surprising that relatively little work exists that focuses on the relation between developmental processes and the affective disorders.

Early attempts to view depression from a developmental perspective primarily involved targeting a particular psychological or psychobiological mechanism known to occur in adult depression in order to discern the possible operation of this process throughout the course of ontogenesis (Cicchetti & Schneider-Rosen, 1986; Rutter, 1986). Even within the limits of these earlier efforts to consider the implications of the developmental perspective for elucidating the understanding of the affective disorders, it became apparent that there were many domains of development that needed to be taken into account (most notably, socioemotional, cognitive, linguistic, social-cognitive, neurobiological, and neurochemical; see Cicchetti & Schneider-Rosen, 1986; Puig-Antich, 1986; Radke-Yarrow & Zahn-Waxler, 1990; Zahn-Waxler & Kochanska, 1990).

Moreover, from the integrative perspective of developmental psychopathology, it is argued that it is essential to engage in a comprehensive evaluation of those factors (e.g., biological, psychological, environmental, social, intrafamilial; cf. Cicchetti & Aber, 1986) that may influence the na-

ture of individual differences, the continuity of adaptive or maladaptive behavioral patterns, and the different pathways by which the same developmental outcomes may be achieved (Cicchetti & Schneider-Rosen, 1986; Kovacs, 1986; Rutter, 1986; Sroufe & Rutter, 1984). In practice, this entails a comprehension of and appreciation for the developmental transformations and reorganizations that occur over time; an analysis of the risk and protective factors and mechanisms operating in the child and his or her environment; the investigation of how emergent functions, competencies, and developmental tasks modify the expression of a disorder or lead to new symptoms and difficulties; and the recognition that a particular stress or underlying mechanism may result in different behavioral difficulties, at different times in the developmental process and in different contexts (Cicchetti & Aber, 1986; Cicchetti & Schneider-Rosen, 1984; Garber, 1984; Garber & Dodge, 1991; Kovacs, Feinberg, Crouse-Novak, Paulauskas, & Finkelstein, 1984; Kovacs, Feinberg, Crouse-Novak, Paulauskas, Pollack, & Finkelstein, 1984; Nurcombe, in press; Rutter, 1986).

Influenced by the publication of the seminal empirical work of Kovacs and her colleagues (1984), the theoretical writings of Rutter and Garmezy (1983), and the volume integrating developmental and clinical approaches to depression edited by Rutter, Izard, and Read (1986), the past decade has witnessed a proliferation of interest in developmental approaches to the epidemiol-

ogy, symptomatology, psychobiology, etiology, precursors, onset, course, sequelae, and treatment of depression across the life-span (see, e.g., Beardslee & Podorefsky, 1988; Cicchetti & Schneider-Rosen, 1984, 1986; Davidson, 1991; Downey & Coyne, 1990; Field, 1989; Harris, Brown, & Bifulco, 1990; Radke-Yarrow & Zahn-Waxler, 1990; Rose & Abramson, in press; Rutter, 1988; Rutter et al., 1986; Trad, 1987; Tronick & Field, 1986). Continuing in this

tradition, the contributors of this special issue address a variety of developmental aspects of depression. We think you will concur that the theoretical, review, and empirical papers that appear in this issue not only reflect recent advances that have occurred in this area but also that they serve as a necessary research agenda if progress in understanding the mechanisms, processes, and developmental course of depression is to continue.

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