

Technology & Medicine Spring 2015 Seminars

Organized by: Columbia Engineering & Columbia Medical Center

More Years, More Life: The Plasticity of Aging

Ursula M. Staudinger, PhD

Professor of Psychology and Director of Columbia Aging Center

Feb 4, 2014, 4:00-5:00 pm

Mudd 214, Morningside Campus (Corner of 120th and Amsterdam)



Abstract: Neither human development nor aging are biologically or contextually determined. Instead they are probabilistic in nature, as they are the result of continuous interactions between biological and sociocultural forces. This is why developmental trajectories can take many different shapes within biological limits. This variability has been labeled ‘plasticity of human development’. An empirically observed developmental trajectory of a person depends on the internal and external resources that are available to her/him.

Examples from demography, cognitive and personality functioning are introduced to illustrate the plasticity of aging and its limits. The limits of plasticity have been identified mainly in very old age. Given the findings accumulating from the field of epigenetics, the question arises whether these age-related limits are biological constants that outlast even cultural change or whether these limits also underlie historical change. Given the plasticity of human development and aging, it is worthwhile compiling more and more scientific knowledge about which characteristics of sociocultural contexts are optimal for unfolding the potential of aging. Also, it is crucial to systematically collect cohort comparative longitudinal data to be able to ascertain historical changes in the aging process.

Bio: Ursula M. Staudinger, PhD, director of the Columbia Aging Center, and president of the ILC U.S.A., is a lifespan psychologist and an internationally recognized aging researcher. Prior to joining Columbia in 2013, Dr. Staudinger focused on understanding productive aging, with an emphasis on education and the labor market at the Jacobs Center on Lifelong Learning and Institutional Development at Jacobs University Bremen. Previously, she held a chair in lifespan psychology at the Technical University Dresden and had been a senior researcher at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin. Her research produced important findings on the plasticity of cognitive and personality aging as well as examining wisdom across the life span. Dr. Staudinger’s academic leadership is also reflected in her appointments as Vice President and Foreign Secretary of the German National Academy of Sciences and Chairwoman of the Board of the Federal Institute of Population Research.

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Refreshments will be served

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