Understanding the Interplay between Individual Characteristics & Socioeconomic Status: An Interactionist Perspective

Traditionally researchers have either proposed that the economic environment affects the development of individuals (the social causation perspective) or that human traits affect the individual's economic environment (the social selection perspective). Conger and Donnellan (2007) argued that neither of these views adequately captures the dynamics of real life and proposed that individual traits and socioeconomic circumstances will be mutually influential in a transactional process (the interactionist perspective). This new theory is reviewed and initial findings are presented that evaluate theoretical hypotheses across three generations of family members.

RAND CONGER is a Distinguished Professor of Human and Community Development and Psychology at UCD. His research focuses on social and economic stress, family interactions, and life course development. He is a Center for Poverty Research affiliate.