Dimensions of HUMAN BEHAVIOR

THE CHANGING LIFE COURSE

EDITION 6

ELIZABETH D. HUTCHISON

Competency 7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities. Social workers

- collect and organize data, and apply critical thinking to interpret information from clients and constituencies;
- apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in the analysis of assessment data from clients and constituencies;
- develop mutually agreed-on intervention goals and objectives based on the critical assessment of strengths, needs, and challenges within clients and constituencies; and
- select appropriate intervention strategies based on the assessment, research knowledge, and values and preferences of clients and constituencies.

Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities. Social workers

- critically choose and implement interventions to achieve practice goals and enhance capacities of clients and constituencies;
- apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in interventions with clients and constituencies;
- use interprofessional collaboration as appropriate to achieve beneficial practice outcomes;
- negotiate, mediate, and advocate with and on behalf of diverse clients and constituencies; and
- facilitate effective transitions and endings that advance mutually agreed-on goals.

Competency 9: Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities. Social workers

- select and use appropriate methods for evaluation of outcomes;
- apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in the evaluation of outcomes;
- critically analyze, monitor, and evaluate intervention and program processes and outcomes; and
- apply evaluation findings to improve practice effectiveness at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Dimensions of Human Behavior: The Changing Life Course and Social Work Core Competencies

Chapter	Ethical and Professional Behavior	Engage Diversity and Difference	Human Rights and Justice	Research and Practice	Policy Practice	Social Work Engagement	Assessment	Intervention	Evaluation
1	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
2	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
3		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
4		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
5	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	
6	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
7		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
8		√	√	√		√	√	√	
9		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
10	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Total Chapters	5	10	9	10	9	10	10	10	5

To all the teachers and students who have inspired me to think more critically about human behavior. They are always in my head and heart as I continue to learn about the fascinating subject of human behavior.

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Dimensions of Human Behavior

The Changing Life Course

Sixth Edition

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Virginia Commonwealth University, Emerita
and Contributors

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• Brief Contents •

• Detailed Contents •

• Case Studies •

• Preface •

Like many people, my life has been full of change since the first edition of this book was published in 1999. After a merger/acquisition, my husband took a new position in Washington, DC, and we moved to the nation's capital from Richmond, Virginia, where we had lived for 13 years. I changed my teaching affiliation from the Richmond campus of the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Social Work to the satellite program in northern Virginia. While I worked on the second edition of the book in 2002, my mother-in-law, for whom my husband and I had served as primary caregivers, began a fast decline and died rather quickly. A year later, my mother had a stroke, and my father died a month after that. Shortly after, our son relocated from Pennsylvania to North Carolina, and our daughter entered graduate school. In 2005, we celebrated the marriage of our daughter. After the third edition was published, we welcomed a first grandchild, my husband started an encore career in California, and our son was married. In the year I worked on the fourth edition, I retired from teaching and joined my husband in California, we welcomed a second grandchild, and my mother's health went into steep decline and she died. That was a year of great change in our family. After the fourth edition, my son moved back to Massachusetts and now lives in the neighborhood where we lived when he was a toddler. He and his wife are raising their own young daughter there, and when we visit them, I am reminded that sometimes the life course takes us in circles. Just as the fifth edition went to press, my husband and I sold our home in California and moved to Reno, Nevada, where we live 5 minutes from my daughter's family and 40 minutes from beautiful Lake Tahoe. With this move, we have been able to participate actively in the lives of two of our grandchildren. These events and transitions have all had an impact on my life course as well as the life journeys of my extended family.

But change has not been confined to my multigenerational family. Since the first edition of the book was published, we had a presidential election for which the outcome stayed in limbo for weeks. The economy has peaked, declined, revitalized, and then gone into the deepest recession since the Great Depression in the 1930s. It is strong again, for now. Also since the first edition, terrorists hijacked airplanes and forced them to be flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and into the Pentagon near my school. The United States entered military conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the one in Afghanistan continues to be waged at this writing, the longest war in U.S. history. Thirty-three students at Virginia Tech died in a mass murder/suicide rampage that shook the campus on a beautiful spring day, and a number of school shootings have broken our collective hearts, including the recent shooting at Marjory Stoneham Douglas High School in Florida. Natural disasters have killed and traumatized millions around the world, and the climate is becoming increasingly unstable. New communication technologies continue to be developed at a fast clip, increasing our global interdependence and changing our behavior in ways both good and bad. The United States elected, and then reelected, its first African American president, but our government has been locked in an increasingly polarized philosophical division, made worse by foreign interference in a presidential election and increasingly hostile interactions on social media.

Since I was a child listening to my grandmother's stories about the challenges, joys, and dramatic as well as mundane events in her life, I have been captivated by people's stories. I have learned that a specific event can be understood only in the context of an ongoing life story. As social workers you will hear many life stories, and I encourage you to remember that each person you meet is on a journey that is much more than your encounters might suggest. I also encourage you to think about your own life story and how it helps and hinders your ability to really see and hear the stories of others.

Organized around life course time, this book tries to help you understand, among other things, the relationship between time and human behavior. The companion volume to this book, *Person and Environment*, analyzes relevant dimensions of person and environment and presents up-to-date reports on theory and research about each of these dimensions. This volume

shows how these multiple dimensions of person and environment work together with dimensions of time to produce patterns in unique life course journeys.

Life Course Perspective

As in the second, third, fourth, and fifth editions, my colleagues and I have chosen a life course perspective to capture the dynamic, changing nature of person–environment transactions. In the life course perspective, human behavior is not a linear march through time, nor is it simply played out in recurring cycles. Rather, the life course journey is a moving spiral, with both continuity and change, marked by both predictable and unpredictable twists and turns. It is influenced by changes in the physical and social environment as well as by changes in the personal biological, psychological, and spiritual dimensions.

The life course perspective recognizes *patterns* in human behavior related to biological age, psychological age, and social age norms. In the first edition, we discussed theory and research about six age-graded periods of the life course, presenting both the continuity and the change in these patterns. Because mass longevity is leading to finer distinctions among life phases, nine age-graded periods were discussed in the second through fifth editions and are again covered in this sixth edition. The life course perspective also recognizes *diversity* in the life course related to historical time, gender and gender identity, race and ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, ability/disability, and so forth, and we emphasize group-based diversity in our discussion of age-graded periods. Finally, the life course perspective recognizes the *unique life stories* of individuals—the unique configuration of specific life events and person–environment transactions over time.

General Knowledge and Unique Situations

The social and behavioral sciences help us to understand *general patterns* in person–environment transactions over time. The purpose of social work assessment is to understand *unique configurations* of person and environment dimensions at a given time. Those who practice social work must interweave what they know about unique situations with general knowledge that comes from theory and empirical research. To assist you in this process, as we did in the first five editions, we begin each chapter with three stories, which we then intertwine with contemporary theory and research. Most of the stories are composite cases and do not correspond to actual people known to the authors. In this sixth edition, we continue to expand on our efforts in the last five editions to call more attention to the successes and failures of theory and research to accommodate human diversity related to gender and gender identity, race and ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, disability, and so on. We continue to extend our attention to diversity by being intentional in our effort to provide a global context to understand the human life course.

In this sixth edition, we continue to use some special features that we hope will aid your learning process. We have added learning objectives to each chapter. As in the first five editions, key terms are presented in bold type in the chapters and defined in the glossary. As in the fourth and fifth editions, critical thinking questions are used throughout the chapters to help you think critically about the material you are reading. Active learning exercises and web resources are presented at the end of each chapter.

The bulk of this sixth edition will be familiar to instructors who used the fifth edition of *Dimensions of Human Behavior: The Changing Life Course*. Many of the changes that do occur came at the suggestion of instructors and students who have been using the fifth edition. To respond to the rapidity of changes in complex societies, all chapters have been comprehensively updated. As the contributing authors and I worked to revise the book, we were once again surprised to learn how much the knowledge base had changed since we worked on the fifth edition. We did not experience such major change between the first four editions, and this led us to agree with the futurists who say we are at a point where the rate of cultural change will continue to accelerate rapidly. You will want to use the many wonders of the World Wide Web to update information you suspect is outdated.

Also New in This Edition

The more substantial revisions for this edition include the following:

- Learning objectives have been added to each chapter.
- Consistency with Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) curriculum guidelines is emphasized in Chapter 1.

- Coverage of advances in neuroscience continues to expand.
- More content on traumatic stress appears throughout the book.
- Content on the impact of information, communication, and medical technologies on human behavior in every phase of life is greatly expanded.
- Coverage of the global context of human behavior continues to expand.
- More content has been added on the effects of gender and gender identity, race and ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, and disability on life course trajectories.
- New content on gender identity and expression was added to several chapters.
- New exhibits have been added and others updated.
- Some new case studies have been added to reflect contemporary issues.
- Web resources have been updated.

Digital Resources

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- **Learning objectives** reinforce the most important material.
- Exclusive access to full-text **SAGE journal articles** that have been carefully selected support and expand on the concepts presented in each chapter.

One Last Word

I hope that reading this book helps you understand how people change from conception to death and why different people react to the same situations in different ways. I also hope that you will gain a greater appreciation for the ongoing life stories in which specific events are embedded. In addition, when you finish reading this book, I hope that you will have new ideas about how to reduce risk and increase protective factors during different age-graded periods and how to help clients find meaning and purpose in their own life stories. I also hope you will have new ideas about the implications of scientific knowledge about human behavior across the life course for social work engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation.

You can help me in my learning process by letting me know what you liked or didn't like about the book. Sometimes communications from student readers have led to additions to the book.

—Elizabeth D. Hutchison
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• Acknowledgments •

A project like this book is never completed without the support and assistance of many people. A sixth edition stands on the back of the first five editions, and over the years, a large number of people have helped me keep this project going. I am grateful to all of them, some of them known to me and others working behind the scenes in a way not visible to me.

Steve Rutter, former publisher and president of Pine Forge Press, shepherded every step of the first edition and provided ideas for many of the best features of the second edition that are carried forward in this book. Along with Paul O'Connell, Becky Smith, and Maria Zuniga, he helped to refine the outline for the second edition, and that outline continues to be used, in large part, in this sixth edition. I am especially grateful to Becky Smith, who worked with me as developmental editor for the first two editions. She taught me so much about writing and readers, and I often find myself thinking *How would Becky present this?* Kassie Graves provided disciplined and creative editorial assistance from 2006 to 2016, for the third, fourth, and fifth editions of this book, and she became a dear friend.

The contributing authors and I are grateful for the assistance Dr. Maria E. Zuniga offered during the drafting of the second edition. She provided many valuable suggestions on how to improve the coverage of cultural diversity in each chapter. Her suggestions improved the second edition immensely and have stayed with us as lasting lessons about human behavior in a multicultural society.

I am grateful once again to work with a fine group of contributing authors. They were gracious about timelines and incorporating feedback from reviewers. Most important, they were committed to providing a state-of-the-art knowledge base for understanding human behavior across the life course. I am also grateful to collaborators who have provided rich case studies for Chapters 5, 7, and 8.

We were lucky to be working again with the folks at SAGE. Joshua Perigo came aboard as I worked to turn months of research and writing into what you see in this book. He came with prior experience in working with professors who use the book and with an organized view of what is helpful to instructors and students. He has consistently been responsive to my questions and concerns. How lucky I am to be working with Mark Bast as copy editor again. He is a delight to work with, catches my errors, and makes the words flow better. I would work with him forever. I am grateful to have Tracy Buyan join the project as production editor; she is the person who turns words and ideas into a gorgeous book. Thanks also to Alexandra Randall who has provided editorial assistance with a number of tasks. Many more people have worked behind the scenes to help us complete this project. I wish I could thank them by name. I love the folks at SAGE.

I am grateful to my former faculty colleagues at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) who set a high standard for scientific inquiry and teaching excellence. They also provided love and encouragement through both good and hard times. My conversations about the human behavior curriculum with colleagues Rosemary Farmer, Stephen Gilson, Marcia Harrigan, Holly Matto, Mary Secret, and Joe Walsh over many years have stimulated much thinking and resulted in many ideas found in this book.

My students over 30 years also deserve a special note of gratitude. They taught me all the time, and many things I learned in interaction with them show up in the pages of this book. They also provided a great deal of joy to my life journey, and I continue to enjoy keeping up with many of them on social media. Those moments when I learn of former students doing informed, creative, and humane social work are special moments, indeed, and I am happy to say there are many such moments. Three former students are chapter authors, and two former students have contributed case studies for this edition. I have also enjoyed receiving e-mails from students from other universities who are using the book and have found their insights to be very helpful.

My deepest gratitude goes to my husband, Hutch. Since the first edition of this book was published, we have weathered several challenging years and experienced many celebratory moments. He is constantly patient and supportive and often technically useful.

But, more important, he makes sure that I take time for fun and celebration. What a joy it has been to travel over three fourths of my life journey with him.

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A Life Course Perspective

Elizabeth D. Hutchison

Chapter Outline

Learning Objectives

1.1 Compare one's own emotional and cognitive reactions to three case studies.

1.2 Summarize the relevance of the life course perspective for social work competencies.

1.3 Identify some of the theoretical roots of the life course perspective.

1.4 Summarize five basic concepts of the life course perspective (cohorts, transitions, trajectories, life events, and turning points).

1.5 Critique six major themes of the life course perspective (interplay of human lives and historical time, timing of lives, linked or interdependent lives, human agency in making choices, diversity in life course trajectories, and risk and protection).

1.6 Evaluate the strengths and limitations of the life course perspective.

1.7 Recognize where themes of the life course perspective are consistent with eight other major theoretical perspectives on human behavior.

1.8 Apply basic concepts and major themes of the life course perspective to recommend guidelines for social work engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation.

Maria is a busy, active 19-year-old whose life was changed by the events of September 11, 2001. Her mother, Emma Suarez, worked at the World Trade Center and did not survive the attack.

Emma was born in Puerto Rico and came to the mainland to live in the South Bronx when she was 5, along with her parents, a younger brother, two sisters, and an older brother. Emma's father, Carlos, worked hard to make a living for his family, sometimes working as many as three jobs at once. After the children were all in school, Emma's mother, Rosa, began to work as a domestic worker in the homes of a few wealthy families in Manhattan.

Emma was a strong student from her first days in public school and was often at the top of her class. Her younger brother, Juan, and the sister closest to her in age, Carmen, also were good students, but they were never the star pupils that Emma was. The elder brother, Jesus, and sister, Aida, struggled in school from the time they came to the South Bronx, and both dropped out before they finished high school. Jesus returned to Puerto Rico to live on the farm with his grandparents but has recently moved back to the South Bronx now that both grandparents have died.

During her summer vacations from high school, Emma often cared for the children of some of the families for whom her mother worked. One employer was particularly impressed with Emma's quickness and pleasant temperament and took a special interest in her. She encouraged Emma to apply to colleges during her senior year in high school. Emma was accepted at City College and was planning to begin as a full-time student after high school graduation.

A month before Emma was to start school, however, her father had a stroke and was unable to return to work. Rosa and Aida rearranged their work schedules so that they could share the care of Carlos. Carmen had a husband and two young children of her own. Emma realized that she was now needed as an income earner. She took a position doing data entry in an office in the World Trade Center and took evening courses part-time. She was studying to be a teacher, because she loved learning and wanted to pass on that love to other students.

And then Emma found herself pregnant. She knew that Alejandro Padilla, a young man in one of her classes at school, was the father. Alejandro said that he was not ready to marry, however. Emma returned to work a month after Maria was born, but she did not return to school. At first, Rosa and Aida were not happy that Emma was pregnant with no plans to marry, but once Maria was born, they fell hopelessly in love with her. They were happy to share the care of Maria, along with Carlos, while Emma worked. Emma cared for Maria and Carlos in the evenings so that Rosa and Aida could work.

Maria was, indeed, an engaging baby, and she was thriving with the adoration of Rosa, Carlos, Aida, Juan, and Emma. Emma missed school, but she held on to her dreams to be a teacher someday.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, Emma left early for work at her job on the 84th floor of the south tower of the World Trade Center, because she was nearing a deadline on a big project. Aida was bathing Carlos when Carmen called about a plane hitting the World Trade Center. Aida called Emma's number but did not get through to her.

The next few days, even weeks, are a blur to the Suarez family. Juan, Carmen, and Aida took turns going to the Family Assistance Center, but there was no news about Emma. At one point, because Juan was worried about Rosa, he brought her to the Red Cross Disaster Counseling Center where they met with a social worker who was specially trained for working in disaster situations. Rosa seemed to be near collapse.

Juan, Rosa, and Aida all missed a lot of work for a number of weeks, and the cash flow sometimes became problematic. They were blessed with the generosity of their Catholic parish, employers, neighbors, and a large extended family, however, and financial worries were not their greatest concerns at that time. They struggled to understand the horrific thing that happened to Emma, and although she didn't understand what had happened, Maria was aware of a great sadness in the household for several years. Emma's remains were never identified, but the Catholic parish helped the family plan a memorial service.

Maria is lucky to have such a close, loving family, and they have tried to give her a good life. She continues to live with Aida and Rosa while she attends City College. Juan has married and has two young children now, living around the corner from Aida and Rosa. Carlos died in 2011, 10 days before the 10-year anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. Carmen and her family also live nearby, and Maria has become close friends with Carmen's two daughters. She also has a special relationship with Carmen, who reminds her of the pictures she has seen of her mother.

Maria is a good student and is meeting her dream of studying to be a teacher. She loves to hear stories about the mother she can't remember, and one of Rosa's favorite stories is about how smart Emma was and what a great teacher she would have been. On Maria's 13th birthday, Rosa gave her the necklace that had been Emma's 13th birthday gift, and Maria wears it every day. Growing

up in the Bronx, Maria has seen many television images of those airplane attacks at the World Trade Center. She was disturbed, however, by all the media coverage at the time of the 10th anniversary of the attack. She began to think a lot about what her mother might have suffered before her death, and she had nightmares for several nights. She built a small memorial to her mother in the backyard and goes there to talk with her mother when she is feeling particularly sad or when good things happen.

After Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico in September 2017, Maria had a taste of what her family had gone through after the airplanes struck the World Trade Center. It was weeks before they learned the whereabouts of all their relatives still living in Puerto Rico, and Maria thought she saw a reactivation of traumatic stress in her grandmother and Aunt Aida. Some of their relatives lost their homes and moved in with other relatives, and the future is still uncertain for most of them. A social worker doing disaster relief must be aware of the large impact that disasters have on the multigenerational family, both in the present and for years to come.

Michael Bowling always thought that if you are willing to work hard, you will never need public assistance. He realizes now that he made judgments about other people's lives without really knowing much about them. And he is convinced that his very life depends on getting some public assistance. Here is his story.

Michael grew up in a small town in Missouri, the oldest of five children. His parents were White hardworking factory workers who had grown up in the midst of the Great Depression. His dad had to turn down a college scholarship to work odd jobs to help scrape together enough to feed the family. Michael's parents were determined to give their children an easier time, and though it was never easy, at least Michael and his siblings never went to bed hungry. They always felt loved, and their parents had high hopes for their children's futures.

Michael started working 20 hours a week when he was 16 to help his parents pay a hospital bill for one of his younger brothers. When he graduated from high school, he joined the U.S. Army, hoping that might provide some financial security for him and his family. He stayed in the U.S. Army for 4 years and then returned to his hometown. He soon found that there were no good jobs there for him, and he decided to move to a nearby college town to begin to study for a college degree. He found a low-paying job for 30 hours per week, so it took him 7 years to earn his engineering degree.

When he graduated from college, he married the woman he had been dating and found an engineering job in a larger city. The marriage lasted for 7 years, there were no children, and the divorce was friendly. The career went well, and Michael moved up the ranks in small and moderate-size firms. He was able to buy a small house. He never married again, but he has been very close to a younger sister who lives in the same city, and he became a kind of substitute dad to her son and daughter after her husband left the family. His parents lived long enough to see him doing well and took pride in his success. Both parents died at a relatively young age, however, his dad of a stroke at age 55 and his mother of breast cancer at age 58, after moving in with Michael and using hospice care during her final 5 months.

At the age of 50, Michael got his dream job in a very large engineering firm. Life was good! Then the firm hit hard times, and as one of the last hired, Michael was one of the first to be laid off. He had some savings, so he could make his mortgage payments and put food on the table. He cut where he could, things like his gym membership and cable television, but held on to the car and cell phone because he would need them for the job search. He put out 10 resumes a day and made two cold calls per day. He felt lucky when he found temporary jobs, but these projects never lasted long, and they never offered health insurance. For the first 2 years after he was laid off, he bought a very expensive individual health insurance policy, but as his savings diminished, he dropped the policy.

Then one morning, when he was only 55 years old, Michael awoke with a severe headache, numbness in the right side of his face, and weakness in his right arm and leg. Because of his earlier experience with his father's stroke, Michael recognized these symptoms as warning signs of a stroke. He also knew that it was imperative that he get immediate medical care; he called 911 and was taken to the comprehensive hospital a few blocks from his home. Over the next 2 years, Michael used all his savings and took a second mortgage on his house to pay his hospital and rehabilitation bills. He was lucky that his stroke was not as serious as the one that had killed his dad, that

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he knew to get immediate help, and he has made a good recovery. The only remaining noticeable symptom is some left-sided weakness, particularly when he is tired. As he recovered from the stroke, he resumed the job search but, to date, has only found one very short-term project. His two brothers have helped him out a little, when they realized that he was choosing between buying food or his medication to prevent another stroke. But Michael knows that his brothers struggle financially, and he finally realized that he had to swallow his pride and apply for SNAP (food stamps) and energy assistance, which he did in early 2014. At the same time, he signed up for health insurance through the Affordable Care Act's federal marketplace. He is sad that he is not able to help send his niece and nephew to college as he had expected to do, but he is still very involved in their lives. Michael is grateful to have survived his stroke, and he says that one bright spot is that he has begun a daily meditation practice, which he finds spiritually, emotionally, and physically beneficial. He credits this practice for helping him to stay calm in the midst of the stresses in his life, and he adds that it has helped him develop better understanding of himself and his life journey. It has also helped him to pay attention to what is happening in his body. He attends a stroke recovery support group at the rehabilitation center and has developed some close friendships in the group.

Le Thi Phoung, or Phoung Le as she is officially known in the United States, grew up in Saigon, South Vietnam, in the midst of war and upheaval. She has some fond memories of her first few years when Saigon was beautiful and peaceful. She loves to remember riding on her father's shoulders down the streets of Saigon on a warm day and shopping with her grandmother in the herb shops. But she also has chilling memories of the military presence on the streets, the devastation caused by war, and the persistent fear that pervaded her home.

Phoung was married when she was 17 to a man chosen by her father. She smiles when she recounts the story of her future groom and his family coming to visit with the lacquered boxes full of betrothal gifts of nuts, teas, cake, and fruit. She admits that, at the time, she was not eager to marry and wondered why her father was doing this to her. But she is quick to add that her father made a wise choice, and her husband Hien is her best friend and is, as his name suggests, "nice, kind, and gentle." Their first child, a son, was born just before Phoung's 20th birthday, and Phoung reveled in being a mother.

Unfortunately, on Phoung's 20th birthday, April 30, 1975, life in Saigon turned horrific; that is the day the North Vietnamese army overran Saigon. For Phoung and Hien, as well as for most people living in South Vietnam, just surviving became a daily struggle. Both Phoung's father and her father-in-law were in the South Vietnamese military, and both were imprisoned by the Viet Cong for a few years. Both managed to escape and moved their families around until they were able to plan an escape from Vietnam by boat. Family members got separated during the escape, and others were lost when pirates attacked their boats. Phoung's father and one brother have never been heard from since the pirate attack.

Phoung and Hien and their son spent more than 2 years in a refugee camp in Thailand before being resettled in Southern California. Their second child, a daughter, was born in the camp, and a second daughter was born 1 year after they resettled in California. Over time, other family members were able to join them in the large Vietnamese community where they live. Phoung's and Hien's opportunities for education were limited during the war years, but both came from families who valued education, and both managed to receive several years of schooling. Luckily, because they were living in a large Vietnamese community, language did not serve as a major barrier to employment in the United States. Phoung found a job working evenings as a waitress at a restaurant in Little Saigon, and Hien worked two jobs, by day as a dishwasher in a restaurant and by night cleaning office buildings in Little Saigon. Phoung's mother lived with Phoung and Hien and watched after the children while Phoung and Hien worked. Hien's parents lived a few blocks away, and several siblings and cousins of both Phoung and Hien were in the neighborhood. The Vietnamese community provided much social support and cultural connection. Phoung loved taking the children to visit the shops in Little Saigon and found special pleasure in visiting the herb shops where the old men sat around and spoke animatedly in Vietnamese.

Phoung grieved the loss of her beloved father and brother, but she wanted to create a positive life for her children. She was happy that she was able to stay connected to her cultural roots and happy that her children lived in a neighborhood where they did not feel like outsiders. But she also wanted her children to be able to be successful outside the Vietnamese community as well as a resource for the community. She was determined that her children would have the education that she and Hien had been denied. Although she could have gotten by well in her neighborhood without English, she studied English along with her children because she wanted to model for the children how to live a bilingual, bicultural life. She was pleased that the children did well in school and was not surprised at how quickly the older two adapted to life in their adopted country. Sometimes there was tension in the multigenerational family about how the children were acculturating, and Phoung often served as the mediator in these tensions. She understood the desire of the older generation to keep cultural traditions, and she herself loved traditions such as the celebration of the Chinese New Year, with the colorful dresses and the little red lai-see envelopes of good-luck money that were given to the children. She wanted her children to have these traditional experiences. But she also was tuned in to the children's desire to be connected with some aspects of the dominant culture, such as the music and other popular media. She was also aware of how hard it was for the family elders to enforce the traditional family hierarchy when they depended on younger family members to help them navigate life in the English-speaking world outside their cultural enclave.

When her children reached adolescence, Phoung herself was uncomfortable with the Western cultural ideal for adolescent independence from the family, but she found ways to give her children some space while also holding them close and keeping them connected to their cultural roots. Other mothers in the neighborhood began to seek her advice about how to handle the challenging adolescent years. When her own adolescent children began to be impatient with the pervasive sadness they saw in their grandparents, Phoung suggested that they do some oral history with their grandparents. This turned out to be a therapeutic experience for all involved. The grandparents were able to sift through their lives in Vietnam and the years since, give voice to all that had been lost, but also begin to recognize the strength it took to survive and their good fortune to be able to live among family and a community where much was familiar. The grandchildren were able to hear a part of their family narrative that they did not know because the family had preferred not to talk about it. Phoung was so pleased with this outcome that she asked to start a program of intergenerational dialogue at the Vietnamese Community Service Center. She thought this might be one way to begin to heal the trauma in her community while also giving the younger generation a strong cultural identity as they struggled to live in a multicultural world. She continues to be an active force in that program, even though her own children are grown.

Their 40s and early 50s brought both great sorrow and great joy to Phoung and Hien. Within a 2-year period, Phoung's mother and Hien's mother and father died. Phoung and Hien became the family elders. They provided both economic and emotional support during times of family crisis, such as a sibling's cancer, a niece's untimely pregnancy, and a nephew's involvement with a neighborhood gang. But there was also great joy. Phoung was very good at her job and became the supervisor of the wait staff at the best restaurant in Little Saigon. Hien was able to buy his own herb shop. After attending the local community college, the children were all able to go on to university and do well. Their son became an engineer, the older daughter became a physician, and the younger daughter recently finished law school. Their son is now father to two young children, and Phoung finds great joy in being a grandmother. She is playing an important role in keeping the grandchildren connected to some Vietnamese traditions. Phoung finds this phase of life to be a time of balance in all areas of her life, and she is surprised and pleased to find renewed interest in spiritual growth through her Buddhist practices.

Social workers working with refugee families must be aware of the conditions that led these families to flee their home countries as well as the adjustments they have made upon resettlement.

THE LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE AND SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

One thing the stories of the Suarez family, Michael Bowling, and Phoung Le have in common is that they unfolded over time, across multiple generations. We all have stories that unfold as we progress through life. A useful way to understand this relationship between time and human behavior is the **life course perspective**, which looks at how biological, psychological, and social factors act independently, cumulatively, and interactively to shape people's lives from conception to death, and across generations. It attempts to explain how humans change and stay the same as they make their journey from conception to death. It also examines how cultures

and social institutions shape the patterns of individual and family lives. Time, as well as characteristics of the person and the environment in which the person lives, all play a large part in human behavior (see Exhibit 1.1). It is common and sensible to try to understand a person by looking at the way that person has developed throughout different periods of life and in different environments.

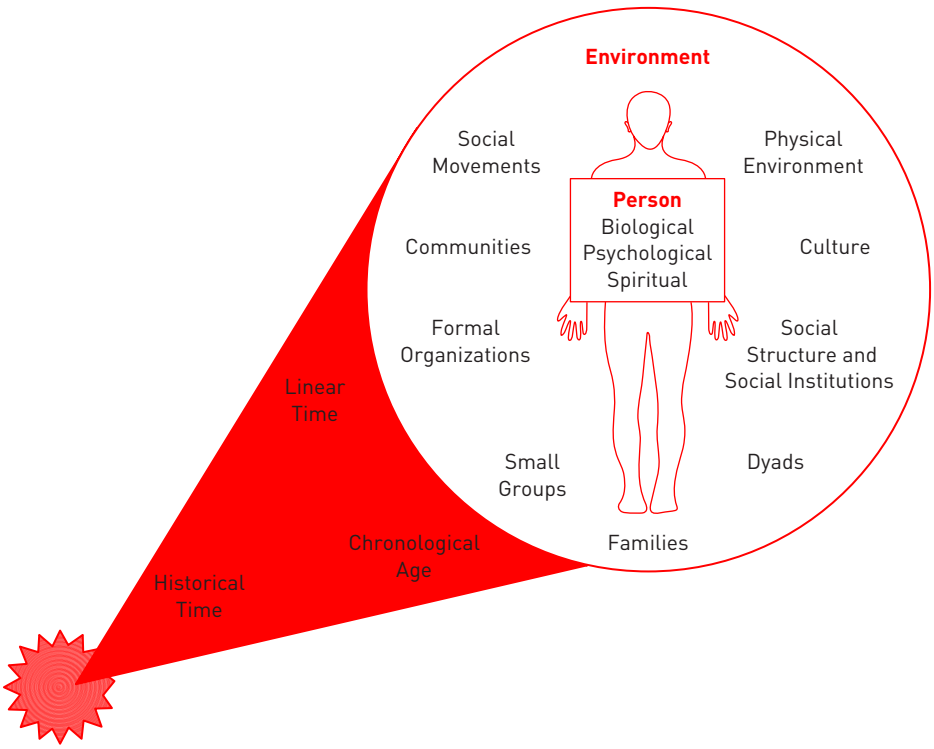
You could think of the life course as a path. But note that it is not a straight path; it is a path with both continuities and twists and turns. Certainly, we see twists and turns in the life stories of Emma Suarez, Michael Bowling, and Phoung Le. If you want to understand a person's life, you might begin with an **event history**, or the sequence of significant events, experiences, and transitions in a person's life from conception to death. For young Maria Suarez, the events of September 11, 2001, will become a permanent part of her life story, even though she has no memory of that day. She looks forward to the time when she will realize her mother's dream of becoming a teacher. Hurricane Maria has become another important part of the event history of her family. An event history for Michael Bowling might include joining the army, college graduation, wedding, divorce, buying a house, deaths of his mother and father, dream job at age 50, and stroke at age 55. Phoung Le's event history would most likely include military presence in the streets, getting married, becoming a mother, escaping from Saigon, time spent in a refugee camp, resettlement in California, family loss, and promotion at work.

You might also try to understand a person in terms of how that person's life has been synchronized with family members' lives across time. Maria Suarez's, Michael Bowling's, and Phoung Le's stories are thoroughly entwined with those of their multigenerational families.

Finally, you might view the life course in terms of how culture and social institutions shape the pattern of individual lives. Maria Suarez's life course was changed forever by culture-related geopolitical conflict. The economic and health care institutions are playing a central role in Michael Bowling's life in late midlife. Phoung Le lives biculturally and has taught her children to do that as well.

This book and its companion volume *Dimensions of Human Behavior: Person and Environment* provide ways for you to think about the nature and complexities of the people and situations at the center of social work practice. To begin to do that, we must first clarify the purpose of social work and the approach it takes to individual and collective human behavior. This was laid out in the 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards of the Council on Social Work Education:

EXHIBIT 1.1 ● Person, Environment, and Time Dimensions



> The purpose of the social work profession is to promote human and community well-being. Guided by a person and environment construct, a global perspective, respect for human diversity, and knowledge based on scientific inquiry, the purpose of social work is actualized through its quest for social and economic justice, the prevention of conditions that limit human rights, the elimination of poverty, and the enhancement of the quality of life for all persons. (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 1)

Let's put that statement in some historical context. In 1952, at the annual meeting of the American Association of Schools of Social Work, a forerunner of the Council on Social Work Education, the presenters of a workshop titled "Who Should Teach What in Human Growth and Development" opened the workshop with this statement: "Knowledge and understanding of human behavior is considered an indispensable base for social work education and all of social work" (Social Welfare History Archives, 1952). That made sense in 1952, and it makes sense today. At the time of the workshop, human growth and behavior (HG&B) was identified as essential content for the education of social workers. After the formation of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) in 1952 and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in 1955, the first working definition of social work was drafted in 1958. In that definition, Harriet Bartlett linked the person-in-environment perspective on human behavior to the definition of social work (Kondrat, 2008). As you can see in CSWE's 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, six decades later social work professional organizations continue to use the person-in-environment—or person and environment—construct to describe the profession's approach to understanding human behavior. Different subjects and different theories have been considered essential to knowledge of person and environment at different times, but the person-in-environment perspective has been a signature feature of the social work profession. The life course perspective is a relatively recent attempt to understand how people and environments influence each other and change over time. It is an important theoretical perspective for developing several social work competencies as outlined in the 2015 CSWE Educational Policy Statement and presented in abbreviated form in Exhibit 1.2. One of the reasons it is such an important theoretical perspective is that it has

EXHIBIT 1.2 ● Summary of Social Work Competencies Supported by the Life Course Perspective

Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice
"Social workers understand how diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity."
Relevance of the life course perspective (LCP): Diversity of life course trajectories is one of the major themes of the LCP.
Competency 4: Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice
"Social workers understand that evidence that informs practice derives from multi-disciplinary sources and multiple ways of knowing."
Relevance of the LCP: The LCP has been supported by research across a large number of disciplines, using different research methodologies, including both quantitative and qualitative research.
Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice
"Social workers recognize and understand the historical, social, cultural, economic, organizational, environmental, and global influences that affect social policy."
Relevance of the LCP: Interplay of human lives and historical time is one of the major themes of the LCP, and life course scholars engage in study of how policy varies across historical times. Linked lives is another major theme of the LCP, and some life course researchers examine the link between public policy and life course trajectories.
Competency 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
"Social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge to facilitate engagement with clients and constituencies, including individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities."
Relevance of the LCP: The LCP incorporates other theories of human behavior, and life course researchers have applied life course concepts to the study of families and other social groups as well as to individuals. Three important themes of the life course perspective—timing of lives, diversity in life course trajectories, and human agency—are particularly useful for engaging diverse individuals and social groups.

(Continued)

EXHIBIT 1.2 ● (Continued)

Competency 7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

"Social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge in the assessment of diverse clients and constituencies, including individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities."

Relevance of the LCP: The LCP, with its emphasis on timing of lives and developmental risk and protection, is particularly strong in guiding assessment with individuals and families. Its emphasis on linked lives provides guidance for assessing groups, organizations, and communities.

Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

"Social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge to effectively intervene with clients and constituencies."

Relevance of the LCP: Guidelines for social work intervention can be extrapolated from all six LCP themes: interplay of human lives and historical time, timing of lives, linked lives, human agency in making choices, diversity in life course trajectories, and developmental risk and protection.

Competency 9: Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

"Social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge in evaluating outcomes."

Relevance of the LCP: The LCP has strong research support that can be helpful in evaluating practice outcomes.

PHOTO 1.1 The life course perspective emphasizes ways in which humans are interdependent and gives special emphasis to the family as the primary arena for experiencing the world.

been supported by a growing body of multidisciplinary research as you will see in the ensuing discussion in this and all other chapters of the book.

Social workers also have a well-defined value base to guide their efforts to promote individual and community well-being. Six core values of the profession have been set out in a preamble to the Code of Ethics established by the National Association for Social Workers (NASW) in 1996 and revised in 2017 (NASW, 2017). These values are service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. Throughout the chapters of this book, the contributing authors and I provide suggestions about needed social work services and how to provide those services in an ethical and trustworthy manner. We take social work's commitment to social justice seriously, and social justice issues are highlighted in every chapter. The life course perspective that forms the basis of this book puts equal value on individual agency and human connectedness; therefore, it serves as a good framework for social work's commitments to both the dignity and worth of the person as well as the importance of human relationships. The contributing authors and I draw on the best available evidence about the life course to assist you to develop and enhance expertise in working with people of all life stages. The analysis of the life course perspective presented in this book supports the development of the remaining two social work competencies identified by the 2015 CSWE Educational Policy Statement:

- Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior: "Social workers understand the value base of the profession and its ethical standards."
- Competency 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, and Economic, and Environmental Justice: "Social workers understand the global interconnections of oppression and human rights violations, and are knowledgeable about theories of human need."

THEORETICAL ROOTS OF THE LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE

The life course perspective (LCP) is a theoretical model that has emerged over the last 50 years, across several disciplines. Sociologists, anthropologists, social historians, demographers, epidemiologists, and psychologists—working independently and, more recently, collaboratively—have all helped to give it shape. The ideas have been developed from multidisciplinary theory and research.

Glen Elder Jr., a sociologist, was one of the early authors to write about a life course perspective, and his work is still foundational to the ongoing development of the perspective. In the early 1960s, he began to analyze data from three pioneering longitudinal studies of children that had been undertaken by the University of California, Berkeley. As he examined several decades of data, he was struck with the enormous impact of the Great Depression of the 1930s on individual and family pathways (Elder, 1974). He began to call for developmental theory and research that looked at the influence of historical forces on family, education, and work roles.

At about the same time, social history emerged as a serious field. Social historians were particularly interested in retrieving the experiences of ordinary people, from their own vantage point, rather than telling the historical story from the vantage point of wealthy and powerful persons. Tamara Hareven (1978, 1982a, 1996, 2000) played a key role in developing the subdiscipline of the history of the family.

As will become clearer later in the chapter, the life course perspective also draws on traditional theories of developmental psychology, which look at the events that typically occur in people's lives during different stages. The life course perspective differs from these psychological theories in one very important way, however. Developmental psychology looks for universal, predictable events and pathways, but the life course perspective calls attention to how historical time, social location, and culture affect the individual experience of each life stage. A primary contribution of the life course perspective is its focus on the life course as a whole, how what happens in one period of a person's life is connected to what happens in other periods of that person's life. For example, it calls attention to the ways in which what happens in adolescence is influenced by what happened in childhood and also influences the long period of adulthood (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2011).

The life course perspective is still relatively young, but its popularity has grown across a broad range of disciplines (Alwin, 2012). In recent years, it has begun to be used to understand the pathways of families (Min, Silverstein, & Lendon, 2012), organizations (King, 2009), and social movements (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). I suggest that it has potential for understanding patterns of stability and change in all types of social systems. Gerontologists increasingly use the perspective to understand how old age is shaped by events experienced earlier in life (Seabrook & Avison, 2012), but it has also become an increasingly popular perspective for considering adolescent and young-adult transitions, such as the transition to high school (Benner, 2011) and the transition to motherhood

(Umberson, Pudrovska, & Reczek, 2010). The life course perspective has become a major theoretical framework in criminology (Chen, 2009; Prior, 2013) and the leading perspective driving longitudinal study of physical and mental health behaviors and outcomes (Bauldry, Shanahan, Boardman, Miech, & Macmillan, 2012; Evans, Crogan, Belyea, & Coon, 2009). It has also been proposed as a useful perspective for understanding patterns of lifetime drug use (Hser, Longshore, & Anglin, 2007; Lindström, Modén, & Rosvall, 2013).

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS 1.1

Think of your own life path. How straight has your path been? What continuities can you identify? What, if any, twists and turns have been a part of your life journey?

BASIC CONCEPTS OF THE LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE

Scholars who write from a life course perspective and social workers who apply the life course perspective in their work rely on a handful of staple concepts: cohorts, transitions, trajectories, life events, and turning points (see Exhibit 1.3 for concise definitions). As you read about each concept, imagine how it applies to the lives of Maria Suarez, Michael Bowling, and Phoung Le as well as to your own life.

Cohorts

As noted, Glen Elder Jr.'s observation that historical, sociocultural forces have an impact on individual and family pathways was a major inspiration for development of the life course perspective. With their attention to the historical context of developmental pathways, life course scholars have found the concept of cohort to be very useful. In the life course perspective, a **cohort** is a group of persons born during the same time period who experience particular social changes within a given culture in the same sequence and at approximately the same age. *Generation* is another term used to convey a similar meaning. Generation is usually used to refer to a period of about 20 years, but a cohort may be shorter than that, and life course scholars often make a distinction between the two terms, suggesting that a birth cohort becomes a generation only when it develops some shared sense of its social history and a shared identity (see Alwin, McCammon, & Hofer, 2006).

Cohorts differ in size, and these differences affect opportunities for education, work, and family life. For example, the baby boom that followed World War II (1946 to 1964) in the United States produced a large cohort. When this large cohort entered the labor force, surplus labor drove wages down and unemployment up (Pearlin & Skaff, 1996; Uhlenberg, 1996). Recently, researchers have been interested in the Millennial generation, born from 1980 to the late 1990s, a generation that has now surpassed baby boomers as the largest demographic group in the United States. They have been found to have more student loan debt, poverty, and unemployment when compared to the previous two generations at the same age, and it is not yet clear how these circumstances will affect the long-term trajectories of their lives (Drake, 2014).

Some observers suggest that cohorts develop strategies for the special circumstances they face (Newman, 2008). They suggest that "boomers"—the large cohort born from 1946 to 1964—responded to the economic challenges of their demographic bubble by delaying or avoiding marriage, postponing childbearing, having fewer children, and increasing the presence of mothers in the labor force. However, one study found that large cohorts in affluent countries have higher rates of suicide than smaller cohorts, suggesting that not all members of large cohorts can find

EXHIBIT 1.3 ● Basic Concepts of the Life Course Perspective

Cohort: Group of persons born during the same time period who experience particular social changes within a given culture in the same sequence and at the same age
Transition: Change in roles and statuses that represents a distinct departure from prior roles and statuses
Trajectory: Relatively stable long-term processes and patterns of events, involving multiple transitions
Life event: Significant occurrence in a person's life that may produce serious and long-lasting effects
Turning point: Life event or transition that produces a lasting shift in the life course trajectory

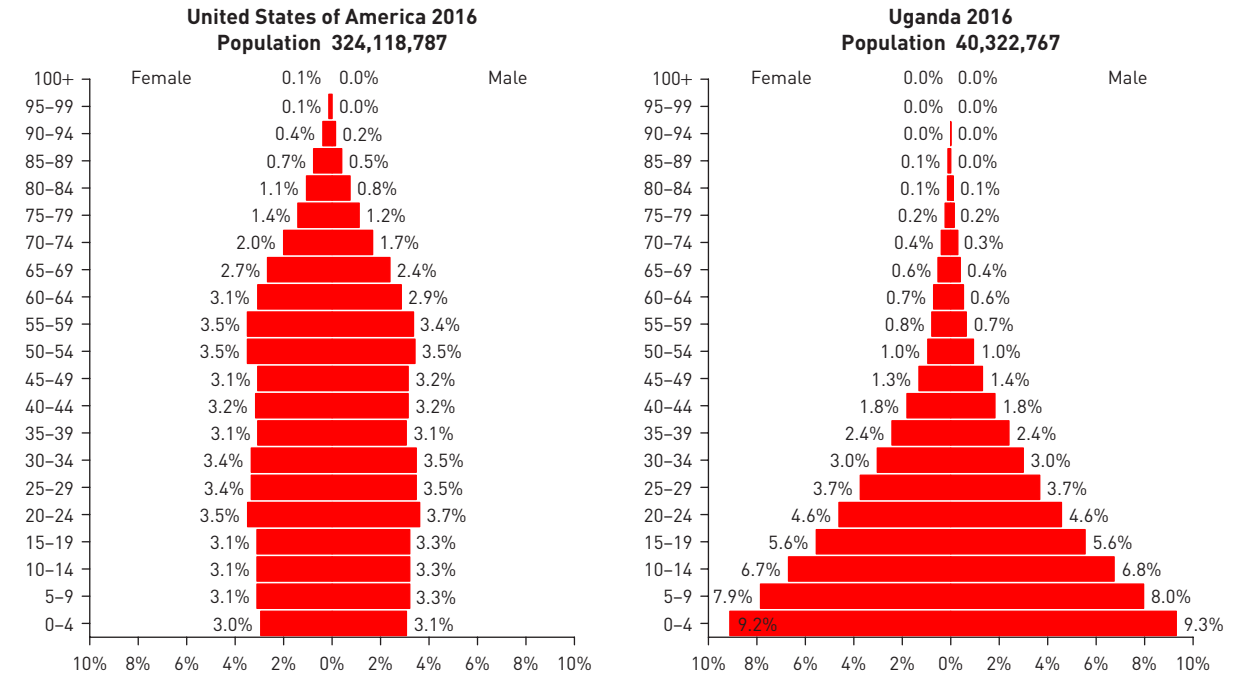
positive strategies for coping with competition for limited resources (Stockard & O'Brien, 2002). Other researchers have been interested in the adaptations of Generation X—born from 1965 to 1979—and the Millennial generation. Gen Xers grew up with fewer siblings and experienced higher rates of parental divorce than the boomers. They have been less likely than earlier generations to marry (Carlson, 2009). The Millennial generation is more ethnically diverse than previous cohorts and grew up in a time of great technological innovation. They have been found to be more tolerant of diversity and more media-connected than earlier cohorts (Fry, Igielnik, & Patten, 2018).

One way to visualize the configuration of cohorts in a given society is by using a **population pyramid**, a chart that depicts the proportion of the population in each age group. As Exhibit 1.4 demonstrates, different regions of the world have significantly different population pyramids. The first pyramid shows the age distribution in the United States, one of the Global North countries that has both low birth rates and low death rates. The populations are getting older in these societies, with a declining youthful population. These countries are becoming increasingly dependent on immigration (typically more attractive to young adults) for a workforce and taxpayers to support the aging population. It is predicted that 82% of the projected U.S. population increase from 2005 to 2050 will be the result of immigration (Passel & Cohn, 2008). Despite the economic necessity of immigrants in societies with aging populations, in the United States, as in many other affluent countries, there are strong anti-immigrant sentiments and angry calls to close the borders.

The second pyramid in Exhibit 1.4 shows the age distribution for Uganda, one of the less affluent Global South countries that have high birth rates and shorter life expectancy, leading to a situation in which the majority of people are young. In these countries, young people tend to overwhelm labor markets and education systems, and national standards of living decline. Some of these countries, such as the Philippines, have developed policies that encourage out-migration, whereas other countries, such as China, have developed policies to limit fertility.

Exhibit 1.4 also shows the ratio of males to females in each population (women are represented on the left of each pyramid and men on the right). A cohort's **sex ratio** is the number of males per 100 females. Sex ratios affect a cohort's marriage rates, childbearing practices, crime rates, and family stability. Although there are many challenges to getting reliable sex ratio data, it is estimated that there are 105 males born for every 100 females in the world (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). However, several countries have a sex ratio at birth of more than 110 males per 100 females. It is

EXHIBIT 1.4 ● Population Pyramids for United States and Uganda



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division (2016).

thought that high sex ratios at birth represent a kind of sex discrimination in some countries, where it might be attributed to sex-selected abortion and infanticide. As you can see in Exhibit 1.4, sex ratios decline across adulthood because males die at higher rates at every age. Sex ratios can be further unbalanced by war (which leads to greater male mortality) or death at childbirth (which leads to greater female mortality) or to high rates of either male or female out-migration or in-migration.

Transitions

A life course perspective is stagelike because it proposes that each person experiences a number of **transitions**, or changes in roles and statuses that represent a distinct departure from prior roles and statuses (Torres & Young, 2016). Life is full of such transitions: starting school, entering puberty, leaving school, getting a first job, leaving home, migrating, retiring, and so on. Leaving the military, marrying and divorcing, and rehabilitation from a stroke were important transitions for Michael Bowling. Phoung Le has experienced a number of transitions, including the beginning of war, becoming a mother, escaping, moving to a refugee camp, and resettling in California. A transition is a process of gradual change that usually involves acquiring or relinquishing roles, but it can be any change in status, such as change in health status (Barban, 2013) or citizenship status (Torres & Young, 2016). A transition can produce both stress and opportunity (Benner, 2011).

Many transitions relate to family life: marriages, births, divorces, remarriages, deaths. Each transition changes family statuses and roles and generally is accompanied by family members' exits and entrances. We can see the dramatic effects of birth and death on the Suarez family as Maria entered and Emma exited the family circle. Health professionals have recently used the life course perspective, the concept of transitions in particular, to understand role changes that occur in family caregiving of older adults (Carpentier, Bernard, Grenier, & Guberman, 2010; Evans et al., 2009). The concept of transitions is also increasingly used to study the migration/immigration process (Gong, Xu, Fujishiro, & Takeuchi, 2011).

Transitions in collectivities other than the family, such as small groups, communities, and formal organizations, also involve exits and entrances of members as well as changes in statuses and roles. In college, for

PHOTO 1.2 The life course is full of transitions in roles and statuses; graduation from college or university is an important life transition that opens opportunities for future statuses and roles.

example, students pass through in a steady stream. Some of them make the transition from undergraduate to graduate student, and in that new status they may take on the new role of teaching or research assistant.

Trajectories

Each life course transition is embedded in a trajectory that gives form to the life course (Alwin, 2012). They are entry points to a new life phase. In contrast with transitions, **trajectories** involve relatively stable long-term processes and patterns of life, involving multiple transitions (Ruark et al., 2016). For example, you may look forward to graduating from your program of social work study. Graduation is a transition, but it is a transition embedded in a career trajectory that will probably involve a number of other transitions along the way, such as a licensing exam, job changes, promotions, and perhaps periods of discontent or burnout. At some point, you may look back on your career path and see patterns that at the moment you can't anticipate. Trajectories are best understood in the rearview mirror. We do not necessarily expect trajectories to be a straight line, but we do expect them to have some continuity of direction. Hser et al. (2007) recommend the life course perspective for understanding drug use trajectories (or careers) that may include onset of use, acceleration of use, regular use, cessation of use, and relapse. Treatment may or may not be included in this trajectory.

Because individuals and families live in multiple spheres, their lives are made up of multiple, intertwined trajectories—such as educational trajectories, family life trajectories, health trajectories, and work trajectories (Leong, Eggerth, & Flynn, 2014). These strands are woven together to form a life story. The interlocking trajectories of a life course can be presented visually on separate lifeline charts or as a single lifeline. See Exhibit 1.5 for instructions on completing a lifeline of interlocking trajectories.

Life Events

Specific events predominate in the stories of Maria Suarez, Michael Bowling, and Phoung Le: terrorist attack, a stroke, escape from the homeland. A **life event** is a significant occurrence in a person's life that may produce serious and long-lasting effects. The term refers to the happening itself and not to the transitions that occur because of the happening. For example, loss of a spouse is a relatively common life event in all societies. The death of the spouse is the life event, but it precipitates a transition that involves changes in roles and statuses. When we reflect on our own lives, most of us can quickly recall one or more major life events that had long-lasting impact.

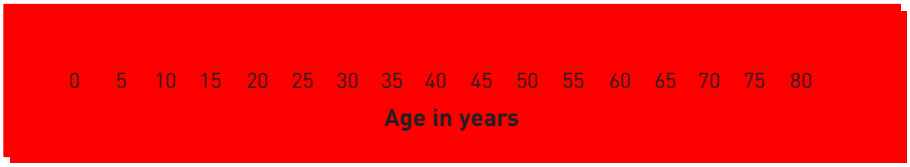
One common method for evaluating the effect of life events is the use of a life events rating scale such as Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe's Schedule of Recent Events, also called the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (Holmes, 1978; Holmes & Rahe, 1967). The Schedule of Recent Events, along with the rating of the stress associated with each event, appears in Exhibit 1.6. Holmes and Rahe constructed their schedule of events by asking respondents to rate the relative degree of adjustment required for different life events.

Inventories like the Schedule of Recent Events can remind us of some of the life events that affect human behavior and life course trajectories, but they also have limitations:

> Life events inventories are not finely tuned. One suggestion is to classify life events along several dimensions: major versus minor, anticipated versus unanticipated, controllable versus uncontrollable, typical versus atypical, desirable versus undesirable, acute versus chronic. (Settersten & Mayer, 1997, p. 246)

Most existing inventories are biased toward undesirable, rather than desirable, events. Not all life events prompt harmful life changes. Indeed, researchers have begun to distinguish between positive and negative life events and to measure their different impacts on human behavior. For example, one research team explored the impact of recalled positive and negative life events on

EXHIBIT 1.5 ● My Lifeline (Interlocking Trajectories)



Assuming that you live until at least 80 years of age, chart how you think your life course trajectory will look. Write major events and transitions of your lifeline—you may want to write family events and transitions in one color, educational events and transitions in another, occupational events and transitions in another, and health events and transitions in another.

EXHIBIT 1.6 ● Life Change Events From the Holmes and Rahe Schedule of Recent Events

Life Event	Stress Rating
Death of a spouse	100
Divorce	73
Marital separation from mate	65
Detention in jail or other institution	63
Death of a close family member	63
Major personal injury or illness	53
Marriage	50
Being fired at work	47
Marital reconciliation with mate	45
Retirement from work	45
Major change in the health or behavior of a family member	44
Pregnancy	40
Sexual difficulties	39
Gaining a new family member (e.g., through birth, adoption, elder moving in)	39
Major business readjustment (e.g., merger, reorganization, bankruptcy)	39
Major change in financial state (a lot worse off or a lot better off than usual)	38
Death of a close friend	37
Changing to a different line of work	36
Major change in the number of arguments with spouse (more or less)	35
Taking out a mortgage or loan for a major purchase	31
Foreclosure on a mortgage or loan	30
Major change in responsibilities at work (e.g., promotion, demotion, lateral transfer)	29
Son or daughter leaving home	29
Trouble with in-laws	29
Outstanding personal achievement	28

Life Event	Stress Rating
Wife beginning or ceasing work outside the home	26
Taking out a mortgage or loan for a lesser purchase (e.g., a car, TV, freezer)	26
Major change in sleeping habits (a lot more or a lot less sleep, or change in part of day when asleep)	25
Major change in number of family get-togethers (e.g., a lot more or a lot less than usual)	24
Major change in eating habits (a lot less food intake or very different meal hours or surroundings)	23
Vacation	20
Christmas	20
Minor violations of the law (e.g., traffic tickets, jaywalking, disturbing the peace)	20
Beginning or ceasing formal schooling	19
Major change in living conditions (e.g., building a new home, remodeling, deterioration of home or neighborhood)	19
Revision of personal habits (e.g., dress, manners, associations)	18
Trouble with the boss	17
Major change in working hours or conditions	16
Change in residence	15
Major change in usual type and/or amount of recreation	13
Major change in church activities (e.g., a lot more or a lot less than usual)	12
Major change in social activities (e.g., clubs, dancing, movies, visiting)	11
Change to a new school	5

Source: Holmes, T. H., & Rahe, R. H. (1967). The social readjustment rating scale. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 11*(2), 213–218.

the psychological well-being of adolescents and found that the impact of recalled events varies by personality type (Garcia & Siddiqui, 2009). Another research team investigated how positive and negative life events trigger weight loss and weight gain, finding that weight loss is more associated with positive life events and weight gain with negative life events (Ogden, Stavrinaki, & Stubbs, 2009). And another research team examined the impact of positive and negative life events on oral health, finding that negative life events are associated with poor oral health, but no association exists between oral health and positive life events (Brennan & Spencer, 2009).

However, the preponderance of research on the impact of life events on human behavior focuses on the negative impact of negative life events, and researchers still find life events scales to be useful tools, especially in light of evolving research on developmental risk and protection. Some researchers are trying to understand the mechanisms that link stressful life events with immune system pathology (Herberth et al., 2008). Other often researched topics include the role of negative life events in depressive symptoms (Miklowitz & Johnson, 2009) and high blood pressure (Feeney, Dooley, Finucane, & Kenny, 2015), and the impact of traumatic life events on mental health (Mongillo, Briggs-Gowan, Ford, & Carter, 2009). One research team found the Holmes-Rahe scale to be helpful in predicting suicide risk in a Madrid, Spain, sample (Blasco-Fontecilla et al., 2012). A Chinese research team used Zhang's life events scale and found death of a spouse and financial crisis to be associated with higher risk of cognitive impairment in older adults (Deng et al., 2012).

Psychologists have long studied the short- and long-term impact of stressful life events on child, adolescent, and adult functioning. More recently, they have also studied the relationships among stressful life events, biology, and personality. Here are three examples of that research. A Swiss research team (Orth & Luciano, 2015) studied the relationships among self-esteem (defined as one's evaluation of one's worth), narcissism (characterized by grandiose self-concept, feelings of superiority, and self-centeredness), and stressful life events. They found that people high in narcissism have an increased likelihood of experiencing a larger number of stressful life events. They also found that an increase in stressful life events was predictive of lower self-esteem. A team of international researchers (Salvatore et al., 2015) studied a U.S. sample to investigate the interaction of stressful life events and the GABRA2 gene in producing intergenerational continuity in parents' and adolescents' externalizing behavior (problem behavior directed toward the external environment). They found that parental externalizing behavior predicts a greater number of stressful life events, which in turn predicts higher levels of adolescent externalizing behavior. However, they found that the pattern of parental externalizing → stressful life events → adolescent externalizing was stronger for those adolescents with a specific GABRA2 genotype. Another international research team (Hygen et al., 2015) studied longitudinal data from a sample of children living in Norway to investigate the relationships among child exposure to stressful life events, the COMT gene, and aggression. They found that children with the COMT gene were more likely to behave aggressively in reaction to stressful life events than children without the gene. Taken together these three studies suggest that both biological and personality factors play a role in how different people respond differently to the same stressful life events.

Turning Points

It would be interesting to ask Michael Bowling and Phoung Le whether they identify any turning points in their lives. We might be surprised by their answers. Even though Maria Suarez was too young to think of September 11, 2001, as a turning point in her life, there is no doubt that the events of that day changed the course of her life. A **turning point** is a time when major change occurs in the life course trajectory. We sometimes call these "defining moments." Turning points may occur in the individual life course, but social science researchers also study turning points in social systems such as families, cultures, organizations, economies, or governments.

At the individual level, the turning point may involve a transformation in how the person views the self in relation to the world and/or a transformation in how the person responds to risk and opportunity (Cappeliez, Beaupré, & Robitaille, 2008; Ferraro & Shippee, 2009). It serves as a lasting change and not just a temporary detour. As significant as they are to individuals' lives, turning points usually become obvious only as time passes (George, 2009). Yet in one Finnish study, 99% of respondents in their mid-30s reported that there had been at least one turning point in their lives; the average number of reported turning points was three (Rönkä, Oravala, & Pulkkinen, 2003).

The addition of the concept of turning point is an important way that the life course perspective departs from traditional developmental theory. According to traditional developmental theory, the developmental trajectory is more or less continuous, proceeding steadily from one phase to another. But life course trajectories are seldom so smooth and predictable. They involve many discontinuities, or sudden breaks, and some special life events become turning points that produce a lasting shift in the life course

trajectory. Inertia tends to keep us on a particular trajectory, but turning points add twists and turns or even reversals to the life course. For example, we expect someone who is addicted to alcohol to continue to organize his or her life around that substance unless some event becomes a turning point for recovery (Hser et al., 2007).

Transitions and life events do not always produce the major change that would constitute a turning point. However, either a transition or life event may be perceived as a turning point as time passes. Longitudinal research indicates that three types of life events can serve as turning points (Rutter, 1996):

1. Life events that either close or open opportunities
2. Life events that make a lasting change on the person's environment
3. Life events that change a person's self-concept, beliefs, or expectations

Some events, such as migration to a new country, are momentous because they qualify as all three types of events (Gong et al., 2011). Migration, whether voluntary or involuntary, certainly makes a lasting change on the environment in which the person lives; it may also close and open opportunities and cause a change in self-concept and beliefs. Certainly, that seems to be the case for Phoung Le. Keep in mind, however, that individuals make subjective assessments of life events. The same type of life event may be a turning point for one individual, family, or other collectivity, but not for another. For example, one research team found that an HIV diagnosis was a turning point for 37% of their sample of HIV-positive people but was not reported as a turning point for 63% of the sample (Kremer, Ironson, & Kaplan, 2009). Another researcher found that myocardial infarction can be a turning point because it leads to reevaluation of attitudes about self, life, religion, and others (Baldacchino, 2011). It appears that Michael Bowling's stroke was a turning point in the same way.

We have been talking about life events as turning points, but slower-moving transitions can also serve as turning points depending on the individual's assessment of their importance. A transition can become a turning point under five conditions (Hareven, 2000):

1. When the transition occurs simultaneously with a crisis or is followed by a crisis
2. When the transition involves family conflict over the needs and wants of individuals and the greater good of the family unit
3. When the transition is "off-time," meaning that it does not occur at the typical stage in life
4. When the transition is followed by unforeseen negative consequences
5. When the transition requires exceptional social adjustments

One research team interviewed older adults aged 60 to 87 about perceived turning points in their lives and found that the most frequently reported turning points involved health and family. The perceived turning points occurred across the entire life course, but there was some clustering at midlife (ages 45–64), a period in which 32.2% of the reported turning points occurred (Cappeliez et al., 2008). Gender differences have been found in reported turning points in samples of young adults as well as samples of older adults, with women reporting more turning points in the family domain and men reporting more turning points in the work domain (Cappeliez et al., 2008; Rönkä et al., 2003). It is not clear whether this gender difference will be manifested in future cohorts if women's work trajectories continue to become more similar to men's. Researchers have studied the turning points that lead women to leave abusive relationships (Khaw & Hardesty, 2007) and the turning points in the caregiving careers of Mexican American women who care for older family members (Evans et al., 2009). This latter research identifies a "point of reckoning" turning point when the caregiver recognizes the need for extensive caregiving and reorganizes her life to accept responsibility for providing care.

Loss of a parent is not always a turning point, but when such a loss occurs off-time, as it did with Maria Suarez, it is often a turning point. Emma Suarez may not have thought of her decision to take a job in the World Trade Center as a turning point for her family, because she could not foresee the events of September 11, 2001.

Most life course pathways include multiple turning points, some that send life trajectories off track and others that bring life trajectories back on track. In fact, we could say that the intent of many social work interventions is to get life course trajectories back on track (Olsson, Strand, & Kristiansen, 2014). We do this when we plan interventions to precipitate a turning point toward recovery for a client with an addiction. Or we may plan an intervention to help a deteriorating community reclaim its lost sense of community and spirit of pride. It is interesting to note that

many social service organizations have taken "Turning Point" for their name. Criminal justice researchers have been interested in learning what types of role transitions can become turning points in a criminal career, leading to desisting from criminal activities. They have found that for some offenders, marriage, military experience, employment, or becoming a parent can precipitate such a turning point (Michalsen, 2011; Schroeder, Giordano, & Cernkovitch, 2010). One researcher found that residential change can be a turning point for parolees leaving prison (Kirk, 2012). Researchers have also found that turning points can facilitate posttraumatic growth for men with histories of child sexual abuse, although the exact nature of these turning points is not clear (Easton, Coohey, Rhodes, & Moorthy, 2013).

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS 1.2

Consider the life course story of either Michael Bowling or Phoung Le. Based on the information you have, what do you think would be the chapter titles if Michael Bowling wrote a book about his life? What would be the chapter titles if Phoung Le wrote about her life? How about a book about your own life to date: what would be the chapter titles of that book? Which show up more in the chapter titles, life transitions (changes in roles and statuses) or life events (significant happenings)?

MAJOR THEMES OF THE LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE

Two decades ago, Glen Elder Jr. (1994) identified four dominant, and interrelated, themes in the life course approach: interplay of human lives and historical time, timing of lives, linked or interdependent lives, and human agency in making choices. The meaning of these themes is discussed shortly, along with the meaning of two other related themes that Elder (1998) and Michael Shanahan (2000) have subsequently identified as important: diversity in life course trajectories and developmental risk and protection. These six themes continue to be the framework for life course researchers across a number of disciplines, although different researchers emphasize different themes. The meaning of these themes is summarized in Exhibit 1.7.

EXHIBIT 1.7 ● Major Themes of the Life Course Perspective

Interplay of human lives and historical time: Individual and family development must be understood in historical context.
Timing of lives: Particular roles and behaviors are associated with particular age groups, based on biological age, psychological age, social age, and spiritual age.
Linked or interdependent lives: Human lives are interdependent, and the family is the primary arena for experiencing and interpreting wider historical, cultural, and social phenomena.
Human agency in making choices: The individual life course is constructed by the choices and actions individuals take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances.
Diversity in life course trajectories: There is much diversity in life course pathways as a result of, for example, cohort variations, social class, culture, gender, and individual agency.
Developmental risk and protection: Experiences with one life transition or life event have an impact on subsequent transitions and events and may either protect the life course trajectory or put it at risk.

Interplay of Human Lives and Historical Time

As sociologists and social historians began to study individual and family life trajectories, they noted that persons born in different years face different historical worlds, with different options and constraints. They suggested that different social, political, and economic contexts of different historical eras may produce **cohort effects** when distinctive formative experiences are shared at the same point in the life course and have a lasting impact on a birth cohort. The same events of a particular historical era may affect different cohorts in different ways. For example, Elder's (1974) research on children and the Great Depression found that the life course trajectories of the cohort that were young children at the time of the economic downturn were more seriously affected by family hardship than the cohort that were in middle childhood and late adolescence at the time. He also notes, however, that these young children were adolescents when fathers were fighting in World War II and mothers were often in the workplace. More recently, Australian researchers (Page, Milner, Morrell, & Taylor, 2013) found that the cohort born after 1970–1974 was more prone to suicide across the young-adult period than earlier cohorts. The researchers also found that this cohort faced higher rates of unemployment and underemployment as they entered

young adulthood than earlier cohorts and propose a relationship between these two factors.

Analysis of large data sets by a number of researchers provides forceful evidence that changes in other social institutions impinge on family and individual life course trajectories (Vikat, Speder, Beets, Billari, & Buhler, 2007). Researchers have examined the impact of globalization, declining labor market opportunities, and rising housing costs on young-adult transitions (see Newman, 2008; Scherger, 2009). These researchers are finding that transitions associated with young adulthood (leaving the parental home, marriage, first parenthood) are occurring later for the current cohort of young adults than for their parents in many countries, particularly in countries with weak welfare states. The popular media in the United States has described the relationship between some parents and their Millennial young adults as helicopter parents and landing pad kids, suggesting that the intense support offered by many parents to their adult offspring violates earlier norms of the young-adult transition. One research team found, however, that young adults who received such intense support reported better psychological adjustment and life satisfaction than young adults who did not receive such support. The parents were less satisfied with provision of intense support, however (Fingerman et al., 2013).

The social, political, and economic contexts of different historical eras have also been a focus of some attempts to understand the impact of military service and immigration on health. One research team (Landes, Wilder, & Williams, 2017) considered a finding from earlier research that military service is a protective factor for subsequent health and mortality. They found that veteran cohorts who served during nonwar eras had lower rates of mortality before the age of 85 than their nonveteran peers, but veteran cohorts who had served during war eras did not have a mortality advantage over their nonveteran peers. Researchers who study the impact of immigration on health point out that immigrants face different social, political, and economic contexts during different historical eras as conditions change in both their sending and receiving countries. In addition, shifting immigration policies and shifting attitudes toward particular immigrant groups change the landscape for immigrants over different historical eras (see Torres & Young, 2016).

Demographers analyze the myriad impacts on human functioning of what they describe as first and second demographic transitions. The first demographic transition occurred in the 19th century and involved declines in both mortality (death) and fertility (reproduction). The second demographic transition began in the 1960s in western Europe and North America and involved postponed marriage and parenthood, diversity in living arrangements, increased cohabitation, and increased births to unmarried women (Avison, 2010). Tamara Hareven's (2000) historical analysis of family life documents the lag between social change and the development of public policy to respond to the new circumstances and needs that arise with social change. One such lag today in the United States is between trends in employment among mothers and public policy regarding childcare during infancy and early childhood. Social work planners and administrators confront the results of such a lag in their work. Thus, they have some responsibility to keep the public informed about the impact of changing social conditions on individuals, families, communities, and formal organizations.

Timing of Lives

"How old are you?" You have probably been asked that question many times, and no doubt you find yourself curious about the age of new acquaintances. Every society appears to use age as an important variable, and many social institutions in advanced industrial societies are organized, in part, around age—the age for starting school, the age of majority (age at which one is legally recognized as an adult), retirement age, and so on. In the United States, our speech abounds with expressions related to age: "terrible 2s," "sweet 16," "20-something," "life begins at 40," "senior discounts," and lately "60 is the new 40."

Age is also a prominent attribute in efforts by social scientists to bring order and predictability to our understanding of human behavior. Life course scholars are interested in the age at which specific life events and transitions occur, which they refer to as the timing of lives. They may classify entrances and exits from particular statuses and roles as "off-time" or "on-time," based on social norms or shared expectations about the timing of such transitions (McFarland, Pudrovska, Schieman, Ellison, & Bierman, 2013). For example, child labor and childbearing in adolescence are considered off-time in late-industrial and postindustrial countries, but in much of the world such timing of roles is seen as a part of the natural order. One research team found that people diagnosed with cancer at earlier ages had a greater increase in religiosity than people diagnosed at later ages, suggesting that off-time transitions are more stressful than on-time transitions (McFarland et al., 2013). Further support for this idea is found in research on family trajectories that finds that nonnormative early entry into family formation and parenthood is associated with lower self-reported health (Barban, 2013). Survivors' grief is probably deeper in cases of "premature loss" (Pearlin & Skaff, 1996), which

is perhaps why Emma Suarez's family continues to say, "She was so young; she had so much life left."

Dimensions of Age

Chronological age itself is not the only factor involved in timing of lives. Age-graded differences in roles and behaviors are the result of biological, psychological, social, and spiritual processes. Thus, age is often considered from each of the perspectives that make up the biopsychosocial framework (Solomon, Helvitz, & Zerach, 2009). Although life course scholars have not directly addressed the issue of spiritual age, it is an important perspective as well.

Biological age indicates a person's level of biological development and physical health, as measured by the functioning of the various organ systems. It is the present position of the biological person in relation to the potential life cycle. There is no simple, straightforward way to measure biological age, but there is an ongoing process to identify an optimal set of biomarkers for accurate measure of biological age (Jee & Park, 2017). One method is to compare an individual's physical condition with the conditions of others; for example, bone density scans are compared with the scans of a healthy 20-year-old.

Psychological age has both behavioral and perceptual components. Behaviorally, psychological age refers to the capacities that people have and the skills they use to adapt to changing biological and environmental demands. Skills in memory, learning, intelligence, motivation, emotions, and so forth are all involved. Perceptually, psychological age is based on how old people perceive themselves to be. Life course researchers have explored the perceptual aspect of psychological age since the 1960s; recent research has referred to this perceptual aspect of age as "subjective age" or "age identity."

The preponderance of research on subjective age has focused on older adults and found that older adults in Western societies feel younger than their chronological age (Stephan, Chalabaev, Kotter-Grühn, & Jaconelli, 2013). This has not been found to be the case among Chinese oldest old, but recent research finds that the percentage of China's oldest old reporting not feeling old has increased in the past decade (Liang, 2014). It is important to remember that, traditionally, Chinese culture has accorded high status to old age, but the traditions are weakening. A large majority of a Polish sample of older adults reported feeling younger than their chronological age, with an average discrepancy of about 12 years (Mirucka, Bielecka, & Kisielewska, 2016). Youthful subjective age was associated with high satisfaction with life and high self-esteem in this sample. A French research team (Stephan, Sutin, Caudroit, & Terracciano, 2016) used a longitudinal design that asked about subjective age at Time 1 and 4 years later tested for memory performance. They found that younger subjective age at Time 1 was associated with better memory performance 4 years later. Another French research team found that a sample of older adults performed significantly better on a physical test when they were told that their earlier performance on the same test was better than 80% of the people their age; the improvement did not happen in the control group who did not receive this feedback (Stephan et al., 2013).

Other researchers have examined the subjective age of early adolescents, young adults, and middle-aged adults. One research team (Hubley & Arim, 2012) found that a sample of Canadian early adolescents reported slightly older subjective ages, on average, than their chronological ages. This tendency to feel older than one's chronological age began at 10.4 years of age and peaked at 14.1 years. Subjective age in this sample was influenced by pubertal timing, with late-maturing adolescents reporting a subjective age that was about the same as their chronological age in contrast to the older subjective age of earlier maturers. Young adults have been found to feel their same age or slightly older. Middle-aged and older adults' subjective age is related to their self-reported health, but that is not the case for younger adults (Stephan, Demulier, & Terracciano, 2012). In their study of 107 organizations, German researchers found that a workforce that, on average, feels younger than their chronological age is associated with an improvement in the overall performance of the organization (Kunze, Raes, & Bruch, 2015).

Social age refers to the age-graded roles and behaviors expected by society—in other words, the socially constructed meaning of various ages. The concept of **age norm** is used to indicate the behaviors expected of people of a specific age in a given society at a particular point in time. Age norms may be informal expectations, or they may be encoded as formal rules and laws. For example, cultures have an informal age norm about the appropriate age to leave the parental home. Conversely, many countries have developed formal rules about the appropriate age for driving, drinking alcohol, and voting. Life course scholars suggest that age norms vary not only across historical time and societies but also by gender, race, ethnicity, and social class within a given time and society. They have paid particular attention to recent changes in age norms for the transitions of young adulthood (Newman, 2008; Scherger, 2009).

Although biological age and psychological age are recognized in the life course perspective, social age receives special emphasis. For instance, life course scholars use

life phases such as middle childhood and middle adulthood, which are based in large part on social age, to conceptualize human lives from birth to death. In this book, we talk about nine phases, from conception to very late adulthood. Keep in mind, however, that the number and nature of these life phases are socially constructed and have changed over time, with modernization and mass longevity leading to finer gradations in life phases and consequently a greater number of them. Such fine gradations do not exist in most nonindustrial and newly industrializing countries (Dannefer, 2003a, 2003b).

Spiritual age indicates the current position of a person in the ongoing search for meaning, purpose, and moral relationships. Michael Bowling appears to be in a different position in his search for life's meaning than he was before his stroke. Although life course scholars have not paid much attention to spiritual age, it has been the subject of study by some developmental psychologists and other social scientists. In an exploration of the meaning of adulthood edited by Erik Erikson in 1978, several authors explored the markers of adulthood from the viewpoint of a number of spiritual and religious traditions, including Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Several themes emerged across the various traditions: contemplation, moral action, reason, self-discipline, character improvement, loving actions, and close community with others. All the authors noted that spirituality is typically seen as a process of growth, a process with no end.

James Fowler (1981) has presented a theory of faith development, based on 359 in-depth interviews, that strongly links it with chronological age. Ken Wilber's (2000, 2001) integral theory of consciousness also proposes an association between age and spiritual development, but Wilber does not suggest that spiritual development is strictly linear. He notes, as do the contributors to the Erikson book, that there can be regressions, temporary leaps, and turning points in a person's spiritual development.

Standardization in the Timing of Lives

Life course scholars debate whether the trend is toward greater standardization in age-graded social roles and statuses or toward greater diversification (Brückner & Mayer, 2005; Scherger, 2009). Simone Scherger (2009) examined the timing of young-adult transitions (moving out of parental home, marriage, becoming a parent) among 12 cohorts in West Germany. Cohorts of a 5-year range (e.g., born 1920–1924) were used for the analysis, beginning with the cohort born 1920–1924 and ending with the cohort born 1975–1979. This research indicated a trend toward destandardization. There was greater variability in the timing of transitions (moving out of the parental home, marriage, and becoming a parent) among the younger cohorts than among the older cohorts. Scherger also found the transitions were influenced by gender (men made the transitions later than women) and education level (higher education was associated with delay in the transitions). It is important to note, however, that another research team found that young-adult transitions have remained stable in the Nordic countries where strong welfare institutions provide generous supports for the young-adult transitions (Newman, 2008). The implication for social workers is that we must pay attention to the uniqueness of each person's life course trajectory, but we can use research about regularities in the timing of lives to inform social policy.

Many societies engage in **age structuring**, or standardizing of the ages at which social role transitions occur, by developing policies and laws that regulate the timing of these transitions. For example, in the United States there are laws and regulations about the ages for compulsory education, working (child labor), driving, drinking alcohol, being tried as an adult, marrying, holding public office, and receiving pensions and social insurance. However, countries vary considerably in the degree to which age norms are formalized (Newman, 2008). It is often noted that formal age structuring becomes more prevalent as nations modernize. European life course scholars suggest that U.S.-based life course scholars have underplayed the role of government in age structuring, suggesting that, in Europe, strong centralized governments play a larger role than in the United States in structuring the life course (Leisering, 2003; Marshall & Mueller, 2003). Indeed, there is evidence that life course pathways in Germany and Switzerland are more standardized than in the United States and Britain (Perrig-Chiello & Perren, 2005). There is also evidence that events and transitions in childhood and adolescence are much more age-normed and structured than in adulthood (Perrig-Chiello & Perren, 2005). Life course trajectories also vary in significant ways by gender, race, ethnicity, and social class (Scherger, 2009).

Linked or Interdependent Lives

The life course perspective emphasizes the interdependence of human lives and the ways in which people are reciprocally connected on several levels (Djundeva, 2015). It calls attention to how relationships both support and control an individual's behavior. **Social support**, defined as help rendered by others that benefits an individual or collectivity, is an obvious element of interdependent lives. Relationships also control behavior through expectations, rewards, and punishments.

Social and behavioral scientists have paid particular attention to the family as a source of support and control. In addition, the lives of family members are linked across generations, with both opportunity and misfortune having an intergenerational impact. The cases of Maria Suarez, Michael Bowling, and Phoung Le are rich examples of lives linked across generations. But they are also rich examples of how people's lives are linked with those of people outside the family.

Links With Family Members

We are all linked genetically to our intergenerational families, and we may live with both genetic vulnerability and genetic advantage. Researchers have recently examined how women living with hereditary breast and ovarian cancer risk cope over the life course. One research team (Hamilton, Innella, & Bounds, 2016) studied a sample of women who had tested positive for a BRCA gene mutation associated with greater risk of breast and ovarian cancer and found that women cope in different ways at different stages of the adult life course. For the cohort in their 40s and 50s, linked lives was the overriding concern; women in this cohort were focused on their daughters' risk and how to talk with their daughters about this genetic vulnerability. The cohort in their 30s was also concerned about linked lives, but human agency was the dominant theme in their interviews, what they could do to manage the risk. Human agency and linked lives were important themes of the cohort in their 20s, but this group was more focused on the timing of events in the immediate future, with questions about what if any screening to pursue and whether or when to have prophylactic mastectomies and/or oophorectomies.

Shared genetics is not the only way that parents' and children's lives are linked. Elder's longitudinal research of children raised during the Great Depression found that as parents experienced greater economic pressures, they faced a greater risk of depressed feelings and marital discord. Consequently, their ability to nurture their children was compromised, and their children were more likely to exhibit emotional distress, academic trouble, and problem behavior (Elder, 1974). The connection among family hardship, family nurturance, and child behaviors and well-being is now well established (e.g., Barajas, Philipsen, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Conger & Conger, 2008). In addition to the economic connection between parents and children, racial discrimination has an intergenerational effect. It is generally reported that students do better in school when their parents are involved in the schooling process, but one research team (Rowley, Helaire, & Banerjee, 2010) found that parents who perceived racial discrimination from their own teachers were more reluctant than other parents to be involved with their children's schooling. In recent years, we are also aware that deportation-related family separation impacts the relationships between children and parents. Yoshikawa (2011) reports that mothers' fear of deportation increases the likelihood of maternal depression, which in turn is associated with impaired cognitive skills among preschool age children. Parental hardship has a negative impact on child development, but parents also provide social capital for their children, in terms of role models and networks of social support (Szydlik, 2012).

It should also be noted that parents' lives are influenced by the trajectories of their children's lives. For example, parents may need to alter their work trajectories to respond to the needs of a terminally ill child. Or parents may forgo early retirement to assist their young-adult children with education expenses. Parents may be negatively affected by stressful situations their children face. Emma Suarez's tragedy was a source of great stress for her mother and her siblings, and Hurricane Maria has impacted the entire extended family. One research team found a relationship between the problems of adult children and the emotional and relational well-being of their parents. Research participants who reported having adult children with a greater accumulation of personal and social problems (e.g., chronic disease, mental health problems, substance abuse problems, work-related problems, relationship problems) also reported poorer levels of well-being than reported by participants whose children were reported to have fewer problems (Greenfield & Marks, 2006). Without longitudinal research, it is impossible to know which came first, reduced parental well-being or adult child problems, but this research does lend strong support for the idea that lives are linked across generations.

The pattern of mutual support between older adults and their adult children is formed by life events and transitions across the life course. It is also fundamentally changed when families go through historical disruptions such as wars or major economic downturns. For example, the traditional pattern of intergenerational support—parents supporting children—is often disrupted when one generation migrates and another generation stays behind. It is also disrupted in immigrant families when the children pick up the new language and cultural norms faster than the adults in the family and take on the role of interpreter for their parents and grandparents (Clark, Glick, & Bures, 2009).

What complicates matters is that family roles must often be synchronized across three or more generations at once. Sometimes this synchronization does not go smoothly. Divorce, remarriage, and discontinuities in parents' work and educational trajectories may conflict

with the needs of children. Similarly, the timing of adult children's educational, family, and work transitions often conflicts with the needs of aging parents (Huinink & Feldhaus, 2009). The "generation in the middle" may have to make uncomfortable choices when allocating scarce economic and emotional resources. When a significant life event in one generation (such as death of a grandparent) is juxtaposed with a significant life event in another generation (such as birth of a child), families and individual family members are especially vulnerable.

Links With the Wider World

The life course perspective has its origins in Elder's (1974) research on the ways that families and individuals are linked to situations in the economic institution, and in recent years life course researchers have been documenting the ways that individual and family life course trajectories are linked to situations in the labor market, housing market, education system, and social welfare system (Newman, 2008; Scherger, 2009; Szydlik, 2012). This line of research is well illustrated by one research project that examined young-adult transitions in western Europe and Japan (Newman, 2008). Katherine Newman (2008) reports two divergent trends in the timing of young-adult transitions in postindustrial societies. On the one hand, young adults are staying in the parental home for a prolonged period in Japan and the southern European countries. For example, in Japan, the age of marriage has been rising, and more than 60% of unmarried men and 70% of unmarried women aged 30 to 34 live with their parents. On the other hand, youth typically leave home at the age of 18 in the Nordic countries of northern Europe (Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden). This raises a question about the structural arrangements in these countries that are producing such divergent trends in life course trajectories.

First, changes in the labor market are driving the delayed departure of young adults from the parental home in southern Europe and Japan (Newman, 2008). In the 1980s, when globalization began to produce higher unemployment, governments in southern Europe and Japan began to loosen their commitment to lifetime employment. As a result, companies began to hire part-time and temporary workers; such tenuous connection to the labor market is associated with continued co-residence of young adults with their parents.

PHOTO 1.3 Parents' and children's lives are linked—when parents experience stress or joy, so do children, and when children experience stress and joy, so do parents.

Unemployment has always been higher in southern Europe than in northern Europe, but the divergence in young-adult transitions in these two European regions is not fully explained by conditions in the labor market.

Second, timing of departure from the parental home is linked to situations in the housing market. In the United States, there are a number of housing options for marginally employed young adults, including pooling resources with a roommate or romantic partner or finding rental housing in a less desirable neighborhood. Such options depend on a strong rental housing market, however. In southern European countries, great emphasis is put on owner-occupied housing, and relatively little rental housing is available. For example, more than 85% of the population in Spain lives in homes they own. In addition, European banks typically are willing to lend only 50% of the cost of a house. In contrast, in the Nordic countries, there is a large rental sector in the housing market, with only 60% to 65% of the population living in homes they own. Katherine Newman (2008) builds the case that these conditions in the housing market influence the timing of departure from the parental home.

Third, it is often suggested that there is a linkage between the education system and timing of departure from the parental home. More specifically, it is argued that young adults who participate in higher education leave the parental home later than those who do not participate in higher education and that the trend toward greater participation in higher education is an important factor in the trend toward later departure from the parental home (see Scherger, 2009). This is not the whole story, however, because the Nordic countries have a higher proportion of emerging adults in higher education than countries in southern Europe, and yet young adults in the Nordic countries depart the parental home earlier than those in southern Europe (Newman, 2008).

And, finally, there is strong evidence of a linkage between the social welfare system and the timing of departure from the parental home (Newman, 2008). More specifically, the early departure from the parental home in Nordic countries is subsidized by a generous welfare system that provides generous housing and educational benefits. The Nordic governments provide much of what families are expected to provide in the weaker welfare systems in southern Europe and Japan.

Katherine Newman (2008) argues convincingly that it is a confluence of situations in different societal systems that impact individual and family life trajectories. In terms of linked lives, she found some evidence that young adults feel more closely linked to their families in Japan and southern Europe than in Nordic countries—a situation that carried both positive and negative consequences. Nordic young adults, conversely, feel more closely linked to the government and the welfare institution than young adults in Japan and southern Europe.

Using data from 11 European countries, Marc Szydlik (2012) has taken a similar look at the influence of the social welfare system on family solidarity between older adults and their adult children. He found strong family solidarity across the 11 countries but some differences in how the state and family are linked across national lines. He found that adult children in countries with strong social welfare systems provided more practical household help (e.g., home repairs, gardening, transportation, shopping, household chores, and paperwork) to their aging parents than adult children in countries with weaker social welfare systems. On the other hand, adult children in countries with weak social welfare systems provided more personal care (e.g., dressing, bathing, eating, getting in and out of bed, using the toilet) to their aging parents than adult children in countries with stronger social welfare systems. Szydlik suggests that societies with an aging population need family-friendly policies to protect family members from excessive demands, noting that middle-aged adults may get overburdened from the need to care for aging adults while also supporting their young-adult offspring who are struggling in a labor market becoming increasingly less secure.

Here is another example from the research about how social policy affects individual and family lives. Researchers have documented a wage penalty for mothers compared to childless women, with childless women receiving higher wages than mothers. In a study of the motherhood penalty in 13 European countries, one research team (Abendroth, Huffman, & Treas, 2014) found that there is also an occupational status penalty to motherhood, with motherhood depressing the occupational status of women over time. They also found, however, that the motherhood penalty is lower in countries that provide higher public expenditures on childcare. This is a good example of how links with family members intersects with links with the wider world.

It is important for social workers to remember that lives are also linked in systems of institutionalized privilege and oppression. The life trajectories of members of minority groups in the United States are marked by discrimination and limited opportunity, which are experienced pervasively as daily insults and pressures. However, various cultural groups have devised unique systems of social support to cope with the oppressive environments in which they live. Examples include the extensive and intensive natural support systems of Hispanic families like the Suarez family (Price, Bush, & Price, 2017) and the special role of the church for African Americans (Billingsley, 1999). Others construct lives of desperation or resistance in response to limited opportunities.

Philip McMichael (2017) reminds us that, in the global economy, lives are linked around the world. The lifestyles of people in affluent countries depend on cheap labor and cheap raw products in Africa, South America, the Caribbean, parts of Asia, and other places. Children and women in impoverished countries labor long hours to make an increasing share of low-cost products consumed in affluent countries. Women migrate from impoverished countries to become the domestic laborers in affluent countries, allowing women in affluent countries to leave the home to take advantage of career opportunities and allowing the domestic workers to send the money they make back home to support their own families.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS 1.3

What, if any, historical event or events have had a large impact on your cohort? In your family of origin, what were the norms about when young adults should leave the parental home, complete formal education, establish a committed romantic relationship, or become a parent? How consistent are your own ideas about these young-adult transitions with the ideas of your family of origin? Cross-national research indicates that the social welfare system has an influence on intergenerational family relationships. Do you think that research supports a strong welfare system or a weak welfare system? Explain.

Human Agency in Making Choices

Phoung Le and her husband decided that they wanted to live a bilingual, bicultural life, and this decision had a momentous impact on their own life course as well as the life course trajectories of their children. In other words, they participated in constructing their life courses through the exercise of **human agency**, or the use of personal power to achieve one's goals. The emphasis on human agency may be one of the most positive contributions of the life course perspective. Steven Hitlin and Glen Elder Jr. (2007) note that the concept of human agency is used by different theorists in different ways, but when used by life course theorists it refers to "attempts to exert influence to shape one's life trajectory" (p. 182). It involves acting with an orientation toward the future, with an eye for "possible selves" (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Possible selves represent our ideas of what we might become, what we would like to become, and what we are afraid we will become. They serve as incentives for action.

A look at the discipline of social history might help to explain why considering human agency is so important to social workers. Social historians have attempted to correct the traditional focus on lives of elites by studying the lives of common people (Hareven, 2000). By doing so, they discovered that many groups once considered passive victims—for example, working-class people and slaves—actually took independent action to cope with the difficulties imposed by the rich and powerful. Historical research now shows that couples tried to limit the size of their families even in preindustrial societies (Wrigley, 1966), that slaves were often ingenious in their struggles to hold their families together (Gutman, 1976), and that factory workers used informal networks and kinship ties to manage, and sometimes resist, pressures for efficiency (Hareven, 1982b). These findings are consistent with social work approaches that focus on individual, family, and community strengths (Walsh, 2016a).

Emphasis on human agency in the life course perspective has been greatly aided by the work of psychologist Albert Bandura. Bandura (2002, 2006) proposes that humans are agentic, meaning they are capable of intentionally influencing their own functioning and life circumstances. In his early work, he introduced the two concepts of *self-efficacy*, or sense of personal competence, and *efficacy expectation*, or expectation that one can personally accomplish a goal. More recently (Bandura, 2006), he has presented a psychological theory of human agency. This theory proposes three modes of human agency:

1. *Personal agency* is exercised individually, using personal influence to shape environmental events or one's own behavior.
2. *Proxy agency* is exercised to influence others who have greater resources to act on one's behalf to meet needs and accomplish goals.
3. *Collective agency* is exercised on the group level when people act together to meet needs and accomplish goals.

Bandura argues that everyday life requires use of all three modes of agency. There are many circumstances, such as those just discussed, where individuals can exercise personal agency to shape situations. However, there are many situations over which individuals do not have direct control, and they must seek out others who have greater influence to act on their behalf. Other circumstances exist in which goals are only achievable or more easily and comprehensively achievable by working collectively with others.

Cultural psychology critics of the concept of human agency argue that it is a culture-bound concept that does not apply as well in collectivist societies as in individualistic societies (see Markus & Kitayama, 2003). They argue that individualistic societies operate on a model of *disjoint agency*, where agency resides in the independent self. In contrast, collectivist societies operate on a model of *conjoint agency*, where agency resides in relationships between interdependent selves. Markus and Kitayama (2003) provide empirical support for their proposal that agency is experienced differently by members of individualistic and collectivist societies. They cite several studies providing evidence that European American children perform better and are more confident if they are allowed to make choices (of tasks, objects, and so on), but Asian American children perform no better if allowed to make such choices. Markus and Kitayama do not deny that individuals from collectivist cultures sometimes think in terms of personal agency and individuals from individualistic cultures sometimes think in terms of collective agency. They argue, however, that there is a difference in the emphasis placed on these approaches to agency in different cultures. Gretchen Sisson (2012) suggests that in the United States, working-class individuals are more likely than middle-class individuals to follow a conjoint model of agency concerned with obligations to others. She notes that pregnancy prevention programs typically are based on a disjoint model, which may be inappropriate for the intended audience.

Bandura (2002, 2006) argues that although people in all cultures must use all three modes of agency (personal, proxy, and collective), there are cultural variations in the relative emphasis put on the different modes. He also argues that there are individual variations of preferences within cultures and that globalization is producing some cultural sharing.

Parsell, Eggins, and Marston (2017) argue that "human agency is core to social work" (p. 238), but social workers also recognize the barriers to expressing individual agency. Social work's person-in-environment approach recognizes how the environment influences the individual as well as how the individual influences the environment. Parsell et al. (2017) engaged in content analysis of 48 social work journals to examine how social work academic literature deals with the concept of human agency. They found that social work scholars think of human agency in two primary ways: first, they think of human agency as taking action in the context of particular supports and constraints, and, second, they think of human agency as actively making meaning of oneself and one's world and actively participating in identity development.

Clearly, human agency has limits. Individuals' choices are constrained by the structural and cultural arrangements of a given historical era. For example, Phoung Le and her family did not have the choice to continue to live peacefully in Saigon. Michael Bowling assumed that he had few economic choices but to enlist in the military after high school, and he now faces choices he never expected to face, choices such as applying for SNAP and energy assistance or forgoing the refill of his medications to prevent another stroke. Unequal opportunities also give some members of society more options than others have. For example, voluntary immigrants seeking better educational and economic opportunities can exercise more agency in the migration process than refugees like Phoung Le's family who are fleeing war or other dangers (Gong et al., 2011). Hitlin and Elder (2007) acknowledge both biological and social structural limits to agency. They note research indicating that greater perceptions of personal control contribute to better health among older adults but also propose that agency declines across the life course because of declining physical functioning.

The concepts of proxy agency and collective agency bring us back to linked and interdependent lives. These concepts add important dimensions to the discussion of human agency and can serve to counterbalance the extreme individualism of U.S. society. These modes of agency also raise important issues for social workers. When do we encourage clients to use personal individual agency, when do we use our own influence as proxy agents for clients, and when is collective agency called for?

Diversity in Life Course Trajectories

Life course researchers have long had strong evidence of diversity in individuals' life patterns. Early research emphasized differences between cohorts, but increasing attention is being paid to variability within cohort groups. Some sociologists have suggested that globalization is leading to less diversity in the world. In this vein, some have suggested that the Millennial generation is the first "global generation," for which generational consciousness overrides national culture (Pollak, 2013). However, in their comparative analysis of the work values of Greek Millennials, Papavasileiou and Lyons (2015) found that Millennials around the world are not homogeneous in their work values. Much diversity continues to exist in this generation and others.

We want to interject a word here about terminology and human diversity. As we attempted to uncover what is known about human diversity in life course trajectories, we struggled with terminology to define identity groups.

We searched for consistent language to describe different groups, and we were dedicated to using language that identity groups would use to describe themselves. However, we ran into challenges endemic to our time related to the language of diversity. First, not all members of a given identity group at any given time embrace the same terminology for their group. Second, as we reviewed literature from different historical moments, we recognized the shifting nature of terminology. In addition, even within a given era, we found that different researchers used different terms and had different decision rules about who comprises the membership of identity groups. So, in the end, you will find that we have not settled on fixed terminology used consistently to describe identity groups. Rather, we use the language of individual researchers when reporting their studies, because we want to avoid distorting their work. We hope you will recognize that the ever-changing language of diversity has both constructive potential to find creative ways to affirm diversity and destructive potential to dichotomize diversity into *the norm* and *the other*.

As we strive to provide a global context, we encounter current controversies about appropriate language to describe different sectors of the world. Following World War II, a distinction was made between First World, Second World, and Third World nations, with *First World* referring to the Western capitalist nations, *Second World* referring to the countries belonging to the socialist bloc led by the Soviet Union, and *Third World* referring to a set of countries that were primarily former colonies of the First World. More recently, many scholars have used the language of First World, Second World, and Third World to define global sectors in a slightly different way. *First World* has been used to describe the nations that were the first to industrialize, urbanize, and modernize. *Second World* has been used to describe nations that have industrialized but have not yet become central to the world economy. *Third World* has been used to refer to nonindustrialized nations that have few resources and are considered expendable in the global economy. This approach has lost favor in recent years because it is thought to suggest some ranking of the value of the world's societies. Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1979) uses different language but makes a similar distinction; he refers to wealthy *core* countries, newly industrialized *semiperiphery* countries, and the poorest *periphery* countries. Wallerstein is looking not to rank the value of societies but to emphasize the ways that some societies exploit other societies. Other writers divide the world into *developed* and *developing* countries (McMichael, 2017), referring to the level of industrialization, urbanization, and modernization. Although scholars who use those terms are not necessarily using them to rank the value of different societies, the terms are sometimes used that way. Still other scholars divide the world into the *Global North* and the *Global South*, calling attention to a history in which the Global North colonized and exploited the resources of the Global South. This system of categorization focuses specifically on how some societies exploit other societies. And, finally, some writers talk about the *West* versus the *East*, where the distinctions are largely cultural. We recognize that such categories carry great symbolic meaning and can either mask or expose systems of power and exploitation. As with diversity, we attempted to find a respectful language that could be used consistently throughout the book. Again, we found that different researchers have used different language and different characteristics to describe categories of nations, and when reporting on their findings, we have used their own language to avoid misrepresenting their findings.

Life course researchers have recently begun to incorporate intersectionality theory to understand diversity in life course trajectories (see Raphael & Bryant, 2015; Warner & Brown, 2011). **Intersectionality theory** recognizes that all of us are jointly and simultaneously members of a number of socially constructed identity groups, such as gender, race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, age, religion, geographical location, and disability/ability identity groups (Guittar & Guittar, 2015). The theory is rooted in the writings of U.S. Black feminists who challenged the idea of a universal gendered experience (see Collins, 2012). For any one of us, our *social location*, or place in society, is at the intersection of our multiple identity groups. Either advantage or disadvantage is associated with each identity group, and when considering the life journey of any one individual, it is important to consider the multiple identity groups of which he or she is a part (see Hankivsky, 2012; Seng, Lopez, Sperlich, Hamama, & Meldrum, 2012).

An important source of diversity in a country with considerable immigration is the individual experience leading to the decision to immigrate, the journey itself, and the resettlement period (Gong et al., 2011). The decision to immigrate may involve social, religious, or political persecution, and it increasingly involves a search for economic gain. Or, as in Phoung Le's case, it may involve war and a dangerous political environment. The transit experience is sometimes traumatic, as was the case for Phoung Le and her relatives, who were attacked by pirates and separated, never to see some family members again. The resettlement experience requires establishment of new social networks, may involve changes in socioeconomic status, and presents serious demands for acculturating to a new physical and social environment. Phoung Le and her family were lucky to be able to settle

into a large community of Vietnamese immigrants, a situation that eased the process of acculturation. Gender, race, social class, and age all add layers of complexity to the migration experience. Family roles often have to be renegotiated as children outstrip older family members in learning the new language. Tensions can also develop over conflicting approaches to the acculturation process (Falicov, 2016). Just as they should investigate their clients' educational trajectories, work trajectories, and family trajectories, social workers should be interested in the migration trajectories of their immigrant clients.

Developmental Risk and Protection

As the life course perspective has continued to evolve, it has more clearly emphasized the links between the life events and transitions of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (Gilman, 2012). Studies indicate that childhood events sometimes shape people's lives 40 or more years later (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009; Shonkoff, Garner, and the Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2012). Indeed, recent biomedical research has suggested we should look at factors that occur earlier than childhood, focusing on fetal undernutrition as a contributing factor in late-life cognition and late-life health conditions such as coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and hypertension (see Joss-Moore & Lane, 2009; Rooij, Wouters, Yonker, Painter, & Roseboom, 2010).

It is quite an old idea that what happens at one point in the life journey influences what happens at later points. No doubt you have heard some version of this idea for most of your life. However, the idea of earlier life experience affecting later development has taken on new energy since the explosion of longitudinal research a few decades ago. In longitudinal research, researchers follow a group of people over a period of time, rather than comparing different groups at one point in time. This allows them to study individual lives over time, noting the factors that influence individual life trajectories.

Two different research traditions have examined how early life experiences affect later outcomes, one based in sociology and the other based in ecological developmental psychology. The sociological tradition is interested in cumulative advantage/cumulative disadvantage. The ecological developmental tradition is interested in risk, protection, and resilience. As you can see, we are borrowing language from the ecological developmental tradition. For a long time, there was little cross-flow of ideas between these two disciplinary traditions, but recently, there has been some attempt to integrate them.

Let's look first at research that focuses on **cumulative advantage/cumulative disadvantage**. Life course scholars have borrowed these concepts from sociologist Robert Merton to explain inequality within cohorts across the life course (Crystal, Shea, & Reyes, 2016). Merton (1968) found that in scientific careers, large inequalities in productivity and recognition had accumulated. Scholarly productivity brings recognition, and recognition brings resources for further productivity, which of course brings further recognition and so on. Merton proposed that, in this way, scientists who are productive early in their careers accumulate advantage over time whereas other scientists accumulate disadvantage. More recently, a similar process of accumulating advantage and disadvantage over time has been found for nongovernmental charitable organizations (Leek, 2015). Sociologists propose that cumulative advantage and cumulative disadvantage are socially constructed; social institutions and societal structures develop mechanisms that ensure increasing advantage for those who succeed early in life and increasing disadvantage for those who struggle (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009). Researchers have applied the concepts of cumulative advantage/cumulative disadvantage to study racial health disparities across the life trajectory (Pais, 2014), financial assistance from midlife parents to adult children (Padgett & Remle, 2016), and evolving patterns of inequality among late-life adults (Crystal et al., 2016). Leopold (2016) found that even in Sweden, a relatively egalitarian country, cumulative socioeconomic advantage produced health gaps, but the life course pattern of health disparity was different from the U.S. pattern. In the United States, the health gap continued to widen throughout late adulthood, but in Sweden the health gap widened throughout middle adulthood but came to a halt at the age of 55. Leopold suggests that one explanation for this difference in health disparity patterns between the United States and Sweden may be the more robust welfare system in Sweden.

Consider the effect of advantages in schooling. Young children with affluent parents attend enriched early childhood programs and well-resourced primary and secondary schools, which position them for successful college careers; which position them for occupations that pay well; which provide opportunities for good health maintenance; which position them for healthy, secure old age. This trajectory of unearned advantage is sometimes referred to as **privilege** (McIntosh, 1988). Children who do not come from affluent families are more likely to attend underequipped schools, experience school failure or dropout, begin work in low-paying sectors of the labor market, experience unemployment, and arrive at old age with compromised health and limited economic resources. **Oppression** is the intentional or unintentional act or process of placing restrictions on an individual, group, or institution; it may include

observable actions but more typically refers to complex, covert, interconnected processes and practices (such as discriminating, devaluing, and exploiting a group of individuals) reflected in a perpetuation of exclusion and inequalities over time.

Now let's look at the other research tradition. Longitudinal research has also led researchers across several disciplines to study human lives through the lens of ecological developmental risk and protection. They have attempted, with much success, to identify multidimensional **risk factors**, or factors at one stage of development that increase the probability of developing and maintaining problem conditions at later stages. They have also been interested in individuals who have adapted successfully in the face of risk and have identified **protective factors**, or factors (resources) that decrease the probability of developing and maintaining problem conditions (see Hutchison, Matto, Harrigan, Charlesworth, & Viggiani, 2007; Jenson & Fraser, 2016). For example, recent longitudinal research of a sample of New Zealanders born in 1972 and 1973 found childhood lead exposure to be associated with lower cognitive functioning and socioeconomic status at the age of 38, with declines in IQ and status occurring over time (Reuben et al., 2017). In the same journal edition in which this research was reported, neuropsychologist David Bellinger (2017) reported that interventions to reduce lead exposure in the United States over the past 40 years have resulted in a mean increase in IQ of about 4.5 points. In this example, exposure to lead is a *risk factor*, and societal interventions to reduce lead exposure is a *protective factor*.

In the past decade or so, biomedical researchers have proposed an *ecobiodevelopmental* framework for studying health and disease across the life course, and their research has greatly enriched and expanded the ecological developmental risk and protection approach (see Shonkoff et al., 2012). They articulate the ways genetic predispositions interact with social and physical environments to drive development, referring to the human life course as "nature dancing with nurture over time" (Shonkoff et al., 2012, p. e234). They draw on neuroscience, molecular biology, geonomics, developmental psychology, epidemiology, sociology, and economics to consider how early life experiences and environmental circumstances can leave a lasting impact on brain architecture and long-term health.

The major focus of ecobiodevelopmental research is on the ways that early toxic stress disrupts brain development and development in other biological systems. One example of this research is the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study initiated by the health maintenance organization Kaiser Permanente and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The original study found that as the number of adverse childhood experiences increased so did the likelihood of risky health behaviors, chronic physical and mental health conditions, and early death (Felitti et al., 1998). Other researchers have found early life stress, such as economic deprivation, discrimination, and maltreatment, to be associated with reduced head circumference and height deficit, and impairments in learning and behavior, including problems in linguistic, cognitive, and social-emotional skills; decision making; working memory; self-regulation; and mood and impulse control (Abajobir, Kisely, Williams, Strathearn, & Najman, 2017; Shonkoff et al., 2012). Adversity may begin in the prenatal period, either in the form of undernutrition or as exposure to maternal stress.

Researchers have been identifying the biological mechanisms by which chronic and/or traumatic stress become a risk for subsequent disease and impairment (see Shonkoff et al., 2012). Here are some examples of what they are finding. The body responds to stress by a process that increases stress hormones that are protective in transitory situations. But chronic or traumatic stress creates an overexposure to stress hormones and produces inflammatory cytokines in the immune system (which pass to the brain), leading to vulnerability to disease, including mood disorders. The chemical processes involved in intensive or chronic stress response can disrupt the architecture of the developing brain. For example, chronic stress during early life has been found to produce enlargement and overactivity in the amygdala and orbitofrontal cortex and loss of neurons and neural connections in the hippocampus and medial prefrontal cortex. Impaired memory and emotion regulation are two of the consequences of these brain changes. Researchers are discovering how environmental conditions and early life experiences influence "when, how, and to what degree" specific genes are actually activated (Shonkoff et al., 2012, p. e234). Neuroscientist Richard Davidson puts it this way: "Genes load the gun but only the environment can pull the trigger" (Davidson & Begley, 2012, p. 63).

Recently, gerontologists in the life course tradition have tried to integrate the cumulative advantage/disadvantage and the ecological developmental risk and protection streams of inquiry. Kenneth Ferraro and Tetyana Shippee (2009) present a cumulative inequality (CI) theory. They propose that advantage and disadvantage are created across multiple levels of systems, an idea similar to the multidimensional aspect of the ecological risk and protection approach. They also propose that "disadvantage increases exposure to risk but advantage increases exposure to opportunity" (p. 335). They further submit that "life course trajectories are shaped by the accumulation of risk, available resources, and human agency" (p. 335).

It is important to note that neither cumulative advantage/disadvantage theory nor the ecological developmental risk and protection approach argue that early deprivations and traumas inevitably lead to a trajectory of failure. Research on cumulative advantage/disadvantage is finding that cumulative processes are reversible under some conditions, particularly when human agency is exercised, resources are mobilized, and environmental conditions open opportunities (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009; O'Rand, 2009). For example, it has been found that when resources are mobilized to create governmental safety nets for vulnerable families at key life transitions, the effects of deprivation and trauma on health are reduced (Gilman, 2012).

In the ecological developmental risk and protection stream of inquiry, protective factors provide the antidote to risk factors and minimize the inevitability of a trajectory of failure. Researchers in this tradition have begun to recognize the power of humans to use protective factors to assist in a self-righting process over the life course to fare well in the face of adversity, a process known as **resilience** (Jenson & Fraser, 2016). For example, researchers have found that disadvantaged children who participated in an enriched preschool program had higher levels of education, employment, and earnings and lower levels of crime in adulthood than a control group of similar children who did not participate in the program (Heckman, Moon, Pinto, Savelyev, & Yavitz, 2010). Werner and Smith (2001) found that a relationship with one supportive adult can be a strong protective factor across the life course for children with an accumulation of risk factors.

The life course perspective and the concept of cumulative disadvantage are beginning to influence community epidemiology, which studies the prevalence of disease across communities (e.g., Dupre, 2008; Mishra, Cooper, & Kuh, 2010). Researchers in this tradition are interested in social and geographical inequalities in the distribution of chronic disease. They suggest that risk for chronic disease gradually accumulates over a life course through episodes of illness, exposure to unfavorable environments, and unsafe behaviors, which they refer to as a *chain-of-risk model*. They are also interested in how some experiences in the life course can break the chain of risk.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS 1.4

Do you think Maria Suarez would endorse a disjoint or conjoint form of agency? What about Michael Bowling? Phoung Le? Explain. Of what identity groups are you a member? Which identities provide you with privilege? Which provide you with disadvantage? How might your social location affect your ability to provide social work services to someone like Maria Suarez, Michael Bowling, or Phoung Le? What risk factors do you see in the lives of Maria Suarez, Michael Bowling, and Phoung Le? What protective factors do you see?

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE

As a framework for thinking about the aspect of time in human behavior, the life course perspective has several advantages over traditional theories of human development. It encourages greater attention to the impact of historical and sociocultural change on human behavior, which seems particularly important in rapidly changing global societies. Its emphasis on linked lives shines a spotlight on intergenerational relationships and the interdependence of lives. At the same time, with its attention to human agency, the life course perspective is not as deterministic as some earlier theories and acknowledges people's strengths and capacity for change. Life course researchers are also finding strong evidence for the malleability of risk factors and the possibilities for preventive interventions. With attention to the diversity in life course trajectories, the life course perspective provides a good conceptual framework for culturally sensitive practice. And finally, the life course perspective lends itself well to research that looks at cumulative advantage and cumulative disadvantage, adding to our knowledge about the impact of power and privilege and subsequently suggesting strategies for social justice.

To answer questions about how people change and how they stay the same across a life course is no simple task, however. Take, for example, the question of whether there is an increased sense of generativity, or concern for others, in middle adulthood. Should the researcher study different groups of people at different ages (perhaps a group of 20-year-olds, a group of 30-year-olds, a group of 40-year-olds, a group of 50-year-olds, and a group of 60-year-olds) and compare their responses, in what is known as a cross-sectional design? Or should the researcher study the same people over time (perhaps at 10-year intervals from age 20 to age 60) and observe whether their responses stay the same or change over time, in what is known as a longitudinal design? I hope you are already raising this question: What happens to the cohort effect in a cross-sectional study? This question is, indeed, always a problem with studying change over time with a cross-sectional design. Suppose we find

that 50-year-olds report a greater sense of generativity than those in younger age groups. Can we then say that generativity does, indeed, increase in middle adulthood? Or do we have to wonder if there was something in the social and historical contexts of this particular cohort of 50-year-olds that encouraged a greater sense of generativity? Because of the possibility of cohort effects, it is important to know whether research was based on a cross-sectional or longitudinal design.

Although attention to diversity may be the greatest strength of the life course perspective, heterogeneity may be its biggest challenge. I am using diversity to refer to group-based differences and heterogeneity to refer to individual differences. The life course perspective, like other behavioral science perspectives, searches for patterns of human behavior. But the current level of heterogeneity in countries such as the United States limits our capacity to discern patterns. Along with trying to understand patterns, social workers must try to understand the unique circumstances of every case situation. Another challenge related to diversity—perhaps a larger challenge—is that much of the research of the life course perspective has been done with samples from wealthy advanced industrial societies. This is true of all existing social and behavioral science research. I would suggest, however, that there is nothing inherent in either the basic conceptions or the major themes of the life course perspective that make it inappropriate for use to understand human behavior at a global level. This is particularly true if human agency is understood to include proxy agency and collective agency, conjoint as well as disjoint agency.

Another possible limitation of the life course perspective is a failure to adequately link the micro world of individual and family lives to the macro world of social institutions and formal organizations. Social and behavioral sciences have, historically, divided the social world up into micro and macro and studied them in isolation. The life course perspective was developed by scholars like Glen Elder Jr. and Tamara Hareven, who were trying to bring those worlds together; much progress has been made in this area, but there is still much work to be done (Mitchell & Wister, 2015). It can probably be said that the life course perspective does a better job than most other behavioral science theories in this regard.

INTEGRATION WITH A MULTIDIMENSIONAL, MULTITHEORETICAL APPROACH

The Council on Social Work Education (2015) notes that social work practice is guided by "knowledge based on scientific inquiry" (p. 5). It further states that "social workers understand that evidence that informs practice derives from multi-disciplinary sources and multiple ways of knowing" (p. 8) and that social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment" (pp. 8–9) and use that knowledge to engage with, assess, intervene with, and evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. The life course perspective was derived from and is continually informed by multidisciplinary research, using both qualitative and quantitative methods as well as historical analysis. One of its greatest strengths is its ability to incorporate new research in disciplines that include anthropology, developmental psychology, demography, epidemiology, neurobiology, and sociology. Scientific knowledge about human behavior is an essential part of engaging in research-informed practice. Clearly both theory and empirical research are important to social work practice, and the life course theoretical perspective is strongly supported by ongoing empirical research. It has been used to suggest practice and policy interventions and to evaluate them.

A companion volume to this book, *Dimensions of Human Behavior: Person and Environment*, recommends a multidimensional, multitheoretical approach for understanding human behavior. This recommendation is completely compatible with the life course perspective presented in this volume. The life course perspective clearly recognizes the biological and psychological dimensions of the person and can accommodate the spiritual dimension. The life course emphasis on linked or interdependent lives is consistent with the idea of the unity of person and environment presented in *Dimensions of Human Behavior: Person and Environment*. It can also easily accommodate the multidimensional environment (physical environments, cultures, social structure and social institutions, families, small groups, formal organizations, communities, and social movements) discussed in the companion volume.

Likewise, the life course perspective is consistent with the multitheoretical approach presented in *Person and Environment*. The life course perspective has been developed by scholars across several disciplines, and they have increasingly engaged in cross-fertilization of ideas from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Because the life course can be approached from the perspective of the individual or from the perspective of the family or other collectivities, or seen as a property of cultures and social institutions that shape the pattern of individual lives, it builds on both psychological and

sociological theories. In addition, throughout each chapter, you are introduced to a number of theories that are pertinent to particular developmental stages and can be enfolded into the life course perspective. To help you track the theories covered in this book, Exhibit 1.8 provides an overview of the theories introduced in Chapters 2 through 10.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS 1.5

Which concepts and themes of the life course perspective seem most useful to you? Explain. Which, if any, concepts and themes would you argue with? Explain.

EXHIBIT 1.8 ● Theories Introduced in Chapters 2 Through 10

Chapter 2 Conception, Pregnancy, and Childbirth	Social constructionist perspective; developmental risk and protection theory
Chapter 3 Infancy and Toddlerhood	Classical conditioning theory; operant conditioning theory; Piaget's cognitive theory; information processing theory; Erikson's psychosocial theory; Davidson's theory of emotional styles; Bowlby's theory of attachment; Ainsworth's theory of attachment; developmental risk and protection theory
Chapter 4 Early Childhood	Piaget's cognitive theory; Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective on cognitive development; information processing theory; theory of mind; psychodynamic approach to moral development; social learning approach to moral development; Piaget's, Kohlberg's, and Gilligan's cognitive approaches to moral development; Erikson's psychosocial theory; developmental risk and protection theory
Chapter 5 Middle Childhood	Piaget's cognitive theory; nonlinear dynamic systems theory; Freud's psychosexual stage theory; Erikson's psychosocial theory; Kohlberg's and Gilligan's moral development; Selman's theory of perspective taking; Schwartz's value theory; intersectionality theory; social learning theory; social constructionist orientation; feminist psychodynamic theory; Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences; developmental risk and protection theory
Chapter 6 Adolescence	Positive psychology theory; Piaget's cognitive theory; intersectional perspective on identity; Freud's psychosexual stage theory; Erikson's psychosocial theory; Kegan's stage model of early adolescence; Marcia's theory of identity development; Kohlberg's theory of moral development; Rosenberg's model of identity development; Meed's theory of the generalized other; developmental risk and protection theory
Chapter 7 Young Adulthood	Erikson's psychosocial theory; Levinson's theory of life structure; Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood; Piaget's cognitive theory; Kohlberg's theory of moral development; Fowler's theory of faith development; Marcia's theory of identity development; developmental risk and protection theory
Chapter 8 Middle Adulthood	Erikson's psychosocial theory; Jung's and Levinson's theories of finding balance; life span theory; trait approach to personality; human agency approach to personality; life narrative approach to personality; Fowler's theory of faith development; socioemotional selectivity theory; social convoy theory; developmental risk and protection theory
Chapter 9 Late Adulthood	Theory of cumulative advantage/cumulative disadvantage; disengagement theory; activity theory; continuity theory; social construction theory; feminist theories; social exchange theory; life course capital perspective; age stratification theory; productive aging theory; environmental gerontology perspective; programmed aging theories; damage or error theories of aging; developmental biocultural co-constructivist theory; Erikson's psychosocial theory; developmental risk and protection theory
Chapter 10 Very Late Adulthood	Erikson's psychosocial theory; Kubler-Ross's stages of accepting impending death; Freud's theory of mourning; Lindeman's stage theory of grief work; John Bowlby's model of grief; Rando's stage model of grief; Worden's tasks of mourning; Martin and Doka's approach to adaptive grieving

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The life course perspective has many implications for social work practice, including the following.

- Engage clients to make sense of their unique life journeys so they can use that understanding to improve their current situations. Where appropriate, help them to construct a lifeline of interlocking trajectories.
- Work with client systems to assess the historical contexts of their lives and the ways that important historical events and public policies have influenced their behavior.
- Where appropriate, use life event inventories to assess the level of stress in a client's life.
- Be aware of the potential to develop social work interventions that can serve as turning points that help individuals, families, small groups, communities, and organizations get back on track.
- Work with the media to keep the public informed about the impact of changing social conditions on individuals, families, communities, and formal organizations.
- Recognize the ways the lives of family members are linked across generations and the impact of circumstances in one generation on other generations.
- Recognize the ways lives are linked in the global economy.
- Use existing multidisciplinary research on risk, protection, and resilience to assess and intervene with individuals and families and to develop community-based prevention programs.
- When working with recent immigrant and refugee families, be aware of the age norms in their countries of origin.
- Be aware of the unique systems of support developed by members of various cultural groups and encourage the use of those supports in times of crisis.
- Support and help to develop clients' sense of personal competence for making life choices.

age norm 19
age structuring 20
biological age 19
cohort 10
cohort effects 17
cumulative advantage 27
cumulative disadvantage 27
event history 6
human agency 24
intersectionality theory 26
life course perspective 5
life event 13
oppression 27
population pyramid 11
privilege 27
protective factors 28
psychological age 19
resilience 29
risk factors 28
sex ratio 11
social age 19
social support 20
spiritual age 20
trajectories 13
transitions 12
turning point 15

Prepare your own lifeline of interlocking trajectories (see Exhibit 1.5 for instructions). What patterns do you see? What shifts? How important are the different sectors of your life—for example, family, education, work, health?

One research team found that 99% of young-adult respondents to a survey on turning points reported that there had been turning points in their lives. Interview five adults and ask whether there have been turning points in their lives. If they answer no, ask about whether they see