Towards a dialectical theory of adult development.

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TOWARDS A DIALECTICAL THEORY OF ADULT DEVELOPMENT

A Thesis Presented

By

DIANA DIAMOND

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Department of Psychology
TOWARDS A DIALECTICAL THEORY OF ADULT DEVELOPMENT

A Thesis Presented
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ABSTRACT

Towards a Dialectical Theory of Adult Development

February 1981

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During the past decade, there has been a major reconceptualization of adulthood as a period characterized by predictable and sequential developmental stages. Researchers and theorists have attempted to chart the sequence of developmental stages that adults pass through with as much certainty as psychologists once described the terrible twos or the traumas of the adolescent identity crisis. This study provides a review and critique of the salient research and theory of adult development, focusing on the tendency of most researchers to eliminate every social and historical element from the study of the psychological lives of adults -- a tendency that is reflected in the considerable sex, class and race bias of the existing literature. Riegel's (1975, 1975, 1979) dialectical paradigm, which conceptualizes adult development changes as resulting from the interactive effect of inner-biological, individual-psychological, and cultural-sociological factors, will be offered as a compelling conceptual schema for the study of adult developmental transitions.

This dialectical theory of adult development is illustrated with the results of a qualitative, exploratory study designed to generate hypotheses about the ways in which factors such as gender, social class, race, age and/or cohort status interact to precipitate adult developmental
transitions for a population of working- and lower-middle-class adults. Particular focus is on the role of socio-cultural and economic factors in catalyzing growth and change in adulthood.

The data for the study were generated through in-depth biographical interviews with 20 working- and lower-middle-class adult men and women between the ages of 28 and 50. The subjects, all of whom were currently enrolled in a non-traditional adult degree program, represented a variety of ethnic groups and occupations. The interview was designed to elicit information on the major turning points and transitions of adult life, with particular focus on the transition associated with returning to school. In this study, gender, social class and cohort status emerged as far more important than age or stage-related inner-psychological shifts in precipitating adult developmental transitions. Whereas for the women in the sample, adult turning points and transitions coincided with crucial events in the family life cycle, for the men in the study such transitions were experienced in terms of fluctuations in work or professional life. In both cases, chronological age was less important than crucial family-based, work-related or socio-cultural events in precipitating developmental changes. Such pivotal events often precipitated a spiral of changes by creating disjunctions between the inner-psychological and cultural-sociological dimensions of the participants' lives. In sum, for this predominantly working- and lower-middle-class sample, adult development must be conceptualized as an interlocking spiral of changes in the inner-psychological and external-sociological realm, precipitated by crucial shifts in the social and interpersonal worlds of the respondents.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee, Howard Gadlin, Alexandra Kaplan and Dalton Miller-Jones, each of whom has been uniquely important to me both personally and professionally. Each made invaluable contributions to both the conceptualization and organization of this project. More importantly, each in his or her own way, has emerged as a leading critical voice within the discipline of psychology, thereby insuring that projects of this nature will continue to be undertaken. I would especially like to thank my chairperson, Howard Gadlin, for the intellectual and emotional support which he gave me at crucial points in this project's creation, and for his steadfast commitment to integrate the perspectives of critical social theory into psychology, which has so greatly influenced my own thinking. I would also like to thank my typist, Anne Raymond, who as a returning student recognized her own experience in this study, and who gave so generously of her time to help me meet my deadline. My thanks also to John Alschuler who stood by me as I experienced many of the same transitions as the adults in this study. Finally, I wish to express my gratitude always to the men and women who shared their life histories with me. They taught me at least as much, if not more, than I was ever able to teach them.
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During the past decade, there has been a major reconceptualization of adulthood as a period characterized by predictable and sequential developmental stages. Researchers such as Neugarten (1968), Levinson (1978), and Gould (1978) have attempted to chart the sequence of developmental stages that adults pass through with as much pattern predictability as psychologists describe the developmental sequences from early childhood through adolescence.

This research study represents an attempt to contribute to the already extensive literature on adult development, and to the growing literature and interest in developing a dialectical paradigm of life-span developmental psychology. The purpose of this study is to generate hypotheses about the ways in which factors such as gender, social class, race, age and/or cohort status interact to precipitate adult developmental transitions. Particular focus will be on the role of socio-cultural and economic factors in determining the course of adult development. This study is also intended to explore the applicability of existing conceptual models of adult development, which have been formulated through research with a population which is predominantly white, male and/or middle-class, to a population which is predominantly minority, female and/or working-or lower-middle-class.

In order to better understand and evaluate this wave of research on adulthood, of which this study is a part, it is necessary to place
such research on its historical context. Current notions of adulthood, and indeed of the life cycle in general, are largely social artifacts reflecting dominant social and intellectual trends. Throughout the twentieth century, the trend in American psychology has been to segment the life cycle into increasingly discrete and well-defined units, each with its own identifying maturational changes and psychological characteristics. As life stages such as infancy, childhood and adolescence have become increasingly differentiated and well-defined, they have come to represent not only temporal segments of the life cycle, but also specific psychological syndromes (Jordan, 1978).

Most recently, this trend towards differentiation of the life course has been extended to adulthood and the later stages of the life cycle. The obsession of social scientists with measuring and charting the psychosocial crises of childhood and adolescence has been supplanted by attempts to chart the predictable crises of adult life. During the past 25 years, the literature on adult development has moved from general and tentative sketches of the adult life cycle to more detailed descriptions of adult life stages which are "universal, genotypic and age-linked" (Levinson, 1974, p. 244).

The trend among researchers in adult development to conceptualize adulthood as a series of invariant and age-related stages with an inner-psychological causation provides a counterpoint to the trend among social historians and historians of psychology to demystify childhood and adolescence as unchanging, biologically determined life stages. Aries' (1962) classic study of the history of childhood, for example, demonstrates that our conception of childhood, with the prolonged
isolation of children from adult roles and responsibilities, is dictated more by social custom than by biological necessity. According to Aries, childhood did not become a distinct stage of life until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During the Middle Ages, children were integrated into the adult world as soon as they had mastered basic physical and intellectual skills, which they did through direct emulation of adults.

Just as childhood was a social discovery of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, so was adolescence a social invention of the nineteenth century. Similarly, adolescence as a distinct stage of life has been revealed by Erikson (1968), Kenniston (1969), Kett (1975) and others as an historical creation of advanced, industrial society with its prolonged periods of educational and technical training, its chronic unemployment, and the separation of public (work) from private (family) life. According to Kenniston (1969), our conception of adolescence reflects "a real change in the human experience, a change intimately tied to a new kind of industrial society that was emerging in Europe and America" (p. 333).

Similarly, the notion of adulthood as a life stage characterized by predictable psychosocial crises is itself a social artifact of certain twentieth-century historical and demographic trends. The decline in fertility and mortality rates as well as the acceleration of technological and social change have contributed to decrease the proportion of the adult life cycle consumed by traditional work and family roles, thus potentially freeing adults to experience the psychological growth and
turmoil of adult "passages" (Jordan, 1978; Hareven, 1978). Recent historical research, then, has increasingly demonstrated that our conceptions of developmental stages are the result of a complex interplay among socio-cultural, economic and psychological factors.

However, the social and historical perspective which has transformed the vision of developmental researchers on earlier life stages is strikingly absent from the recent research on adult development. With few exceptions, most of the recent research on adult development is both ahistorical and uncritical: ahistorical because such research does not explore the ways in which new conceptions of adulthood are the result of historical and social changes; and uncritical because such research remains unaware of its political roots and social implications. As developmental psychologists become obsessed with measuring the intrapsychic conflicts and developmental crises of each stage of adult life, the external catalysts, indeed the very social conditions which make such adult life crises possible, remain obscured.

The application of developmental psychology to the adult life cycle, which is determined by certain demographic and historical factors, also serves certain social functions. In a recent review of Sheehy's Passages, a chief popularizer of current notions of adult development, Lasch (1976) has commented on the ways in which such research serves the

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1The word critical is here used in the sense of social examination and social critique developed by the Frankfurt school of social philosophers, who aimed to produce an understanding that would not simply reproduce society's illusions about itself.
needs of an advanced industrial society. By stressing the need for periodic change in career and personal relationships, Lasch hypothesizes that theories of adult development support the social trend towards assigning workers to premature and planned obsolescence and towards the severance of transgenerational family ties. Accusing Sheehy of bringing to her subject "a therapeutic sensibility incapable of transcending its own limitations" (p. 212), Lasch (1978) warns that the application of developmental psychology to adulthood is a further indication of the insidious intrusion of "doctors, psychiatrists, and faith-healers" -- all in their own way agents of the bureaucratic state -- into the shrinking sphere of private life and personal autonomy. According to Lasch (1978), by reducing major life events to the predictable crises of adulthood, adult developmental researchers neutralize the existential realities of the human condition, on the one hand, and on the other, abstract such life crises from their social and historical context.

Lasch's critique of the application of developmental psychology to adult lives seems to emphasize only one aspect of the complex process involved in the discovery of a new life stage. Hareven (1978) describes this process as follows:

First, individuals become aware of the specific characteristics of a given stage of life as a distinct condition. This discovery is then passed onto society in popularized versions. If it appears to be associated with a major social problem, it attracts the attention of agencies of welfare and social control. Finally, it is institutionalized: legislation is passed and agencies are created to deal with its special needs and problems (p. 203).
What we are witnessing with the recent wave of literature on adult development is in fact the institutionalization and popularization of a new life stage. In true dialectical fashion, this literature both reflects a new historical reality -- the existence of more dramatic and frequent transitions in the adult life cycle and their reflections in the inner-psychological life of the adult -- and serves to reinforce or rationalize the very phenomena that it describes.

In contrast to social critics such as Lasch who emphasize primarily the repressive aspects of the applications of developmental psychology to the adult life cycle, it seems important also to articulate the progressive moment in this trend. As a teacher in an adult education program, I was continually amazed by the capacity of adults to transform themselves and their lives, to re-examine their experience in the light of new learning, and to reform basic features of their identities. I have also become increasingly aware of the inner turmoil and conflict which such growth and change entail, especially in a society which provides little support for substantial redefinitions of the self after adolescence. The trend towards the development of theories describing the normative crises of adult life has been welcomed by countless numbers of adults who may have previously labeled the pain and turmoil which accompany major life transitions as pathological. I would concur with Gould's (1972) statement that

Through the years of adulthood, there is an ever increasing need to win permission from oneself to continue developing ... towards becoming more tolerant of oneself, more appreciative of the complexity of both the surrounding world and of the mental milieu (p. 2).
One should critique, then, not the attempt of researchers to apply developmental theory to adult life, which is long overdue, but the tendency to eliminate every social and historical element from a study of adult development. This tendency is reflected in the considerable sex, class, and racial bias of most of the existing studies. Researchers on adult development have assumed that their developmental models, formulated through research with a population that is predominantly white, male and middle class, are generalizable to other populations. This is not necessarily the case, however. Neugarten (1979) and others have warned psychologists to be wary of making "too-quick generalizations regarding ... concepts of adult stages" (p. 888), especially given the exploratory nature and skewed data base of most recent research on adult life stages.

The tendency of researchers on adult development to generalize from limited and biased research samples raises political as well as methodological questions. As their theories of adult development based on a white, male and middle-class model become crystalized into universal truths, they provide one more distorting mirror in which women, minorities and working-class adults can perceive their lives as deviant or inadequate. Indeed, many developmental researchers now agree that we need to do more naturalistic, in-depth, comparative studies of adult lives in historical context before we can generalize
further about adult development.¹

This research study represents an attempt towards a critical reformulation of the existing theory and research on adult development. The second chapter will present a review and critique of the major theoretical and empirical studies of adult development, with a focus on the sex, class, and racial bias of the literature as well as on the extent to which these studies take into account the social and historical dimension of adult development. The third and fourth chapters describe an exploratory research study which focuses on the role of socio-cultural and economic factors in precipitating adult developmental transitions among a population of working- and lower-middle-class adults. The fourth chapter discusses the critical reformulations in theories of adult development that are suggested by this research.

¹A recent film on adult development, shown at the American Psychological Association in Toronto in 1978, points out the contradictions and inconsistencies in the leading theories of adult development. The majority of the developmental researchers interviewed state that more naturalistic, comparative case studies are required before any further attempts are made to chart the predictable crises of adult life.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research and Theory on Adult Development: The First Wave (1930-1968)

Charlotte Buhler and Else Frenkel-Brunswick are generally recognized as the first psychologists to attempt to chart human development throughout the entire life cycle. Working in Vienna during the 1930's, Buhler and Frenkel-Brunswick collected and critically studied the biographies and autobiographies of 400 people from all social classes. In their research they focused on several dimensions of the selected lives, including the impact of factors such as occupation, social class, education, and the reflection of these events in the inner lives of the individuals studied.

The empirical research led them to identify five distinct developmental stages which are based on the biological curve of the life cycle, and which are also accompanied by corresponding psychological changes. These include four stages which span the adult years of the life cycle: 1) the stage which begins at about 16 and ends at about 28 during which the individual explores various occupational and social roles and establishes a network of independent personal relationships; 2) the stage which spans the years from 28 to 50 during which the individual makes a final choice of vocation and establishes a home and family; 3) the stage which spans the years from 48 to 60 when the individual's decline in physical capacities
leads to a decrease in the number of dimensions in which he or she is active and in which the dominant psychological tone is one of negativism; and 4) the stage which spans the years from the early sixties through death and which is characterized by a complete withdrawal from professional activities and an increasing concern with the development and sharing of wisdom.

Although Buhler and Frenkel-Brunswick were pioneers in the application of developmental psychology to the adult life cycle, their work is limited by their tendency to conceptualize psychological change as a correlate of biological change. Frenkel-Brunswick (1963) insists that there are no exact parallels between biological and psychological development, but her description of the psychological turning points of adulthood closely parallel biological or physiological changes, such as changes in the individual's reproductive capacities or the physical decline associated with age. Frenkel-Brunswick does, however, acknowledge that in the second half of life, the development of competence and autonomy through various familial and occupational roles may retard or counteract biological decline. Buhler's belief that the trend towards achievement, productivity and the search for meaning is inherent in the human organism also leads her to speculate on the importance of the social and cultural factors in the psychological development of individuals.

Another somewhat neglected theorist of the life cycle is Carl Jung whose essay "The Stages of Life" presents a view of adult development which is both poetic and provocative, if unsubstantiated
by empirical research. Jung (1933) divides the life cycle into four major stages: childhood (to about age 12), youth (13 to 40); maturity (40 to 65); and old age (65 and beyond). These stages are demarcated by changes in the balance between the conscious and unconscious aspects of the psyche. According to Jung, during childhood the individual is largely unconscious of his or her surroundings and motivations. However, with the advent of puberty, as s/he attempts to establish roots in the world through training for an occupation and through the expansion of personal relationships and commitments, the young adult becomes increasingly conscious of his or her relationship to social reality. This trend continues until midlife when the individual becomes increasingly preoccupied with the development of the inner life, often through an exploration of the symbols and mythology of our culture. Finally, old age is seen to be a period of progressive decline, when the individual becomes increasingly dependent on others and is again submerged in the unconscious.

Although Jung's conception of development during the life span is based on a somewhat static and ahistorical notion of the human psyche as a repository of opposites, he is not unaware of the importance of the social context in shaping the psychological life of the individual. Jung acknowledges that "the achievements which society rewards are won at the cost of a diminution of the personality" (p. 314), and that the particular type of diminution varies according to sex (although he completely ignores the influence of race or social class). One of the major developmental
tasks of midlife is to explore and reintegrate those aspects of the self which have been repressed during the first stage of adulthood when the individual is preoccupied with the learning and fulfillment of social roles. Indeed, Jung maintains that midlife, which is the beginning of biological decline, is the time during which there is the maximum potential for personality growth. For both men and women, the major developmental task of this period is to confront their own "contra-sexual aspects", which often involves living out the opposite sex role or developing personality traits usually associated with the opposite sex. According to Jung, a confrontation with these developmental tasks of midlife leads to new psychic integration, involving the development of a more androgynous personality; while an avoidance of these developmental tasks leads to stagnation and possible neurosis -- a point which he illustrates with rich examples from his clinical practice and from the experience of the life cycle in primitive cultures.

Erik Erikson developed the first major theory of life-span developmental psychology which conceptualizes individual development as the result of a complex interplay between biological, social, cultural, and historical forces. In the "Eight Ages of Man", Erikson (1950) outlines the sequence of the phases of psychosocial development from infancy through old age, focusing on one nuclear conflict which is central for the ego during each developmental stage. Each of these conflicts represents a normative crisis or turning point for the individual, who must solve the central development task -- which is
determined in part by the individual's biological development and in part by the society in which he or she lives.

The central importance of Erikson's developmental theory is its exploration of the process through which different societies shape the psyches of their individual members by structuring the developmental tasks which the individual must resolve at each stage. Erikson's (1975) self-proclaimed task was to chart the ways in which development during "the life cycle is interwoven throughout with the history of the community" (p. 18). This mutuality between individual development and the perpetuation of social structure is brilliantly explored in the essays in *Childhood and Society*, where Erikson delineates the ways in which the cultural patterning of childrearing practices and socialization produces different types of personality structures in different societies.

But whereas Erikson's psychosocial perspective on human development enlarges his understanding of the cultural and historical determinants of child development, it inhibits his understanding of the cultural variability of adult development. In his conceptualization of the adolescent and adult stages of life, Erikson seems to abandon the anthropological and historical insights which he exhibits in his comparative studies of child development in both advanced industrial and "primitive" cultures. His conception of psychosocial development during adolescence and adulthood exhibits considerable sex, class, and racial or cultural bias. The following brief description and critique of these four developmental stages will hopefully illustrate
this point. The stage of adolescence is included in this critique because its central developmental task -- that of identity formation -- often remains a salient issue well into adulthood.

Erikson (1968) defines ego identity as "the actually attained but forever-to-be revised sense of the reality of the Self within social reality" (p. 92). During adolescence, the individual moves through successive identifications to identity formation, integrating some aspects of childhood identifications and rejecting others until a stable identity configuration is formed. The inability to resolve this crisis leads to identity diffusion which may postpone this stage well into young adulthood. Erikson (1968, 1975) recognizes that the resolution of identity conflicts is influenced by psychobiological, psychosocial and historical factors, and that during certain historical periods, social and political factors may prolong or exacerbate the crisis of identity formation.

Erikson's description of the three major stages of adult life is far more skeletal than this fully fleshed portrait of adolescence. The central conflict of the first adult stage is that of Intimacy versus Isolation. This is the stage during which the young adult, having formed a provisional identity, either establishes an intimate relationship with someone of the opposite sex -- a relationship which includes mutual trust and commitment experienced through full emotional and sexual sharing -- or withdraws into pseudointimacy or isolation. The second adult life stage is that of Generativity versus Stagnation. This stage, which begins in the mid-twenties and continues throughout midlife, involves a commitment to generativity in the broadest sense --
that is, the assumption of responsibility for the perpetuation of oneself and one's culture through the guidance, nurturance, and education of the next generation. Failure to take on this commitment leads to stagnation or the inability to invest much of the self in one's children or in society.

The final stage of the life cycle is that of Ego Integrity versus Despair. During this stage, the individual must review and accept the inevitability of his or her own life cycle. Erikson (1950) defines this stage as that in which the individual realizes that his or her "life is the accidental coincidence of but one life cycle with but one segment of history; and that for him (or her) all human integrity stands or falls with the one style of integrity of which he (she) partakes" (p. 268). The danger at this stage is that the individual who has failed to find fulfillment in work or personal relationships will become depressed or despairing as he or she approaches old age and death.

Erikson posits these stages as being universal for adults, and seems almost totally unaware of the extent to which they may be cultural or historical artifacts. The concept of identity formation provides a case in point. Erikson acknowledges that the concept of the identity crisis is historically based and is thus limited to adolescents in advanced industrial societies, but he fails to consider that even within these societies the realities of gender, race, and/or social class may dictate that individuals experience this crisis in different ways during different periods of their
lives, or perhaps not at all in the self-conscious manner implied by Erikson. Indeed, the identity crisis, which often necessitates a lengthy psychosocial moratorium during which the individual experiments with various life styles and social roles, may be the developmental norm primarily of the professional middle class. Rubin (1977), Sennett and Cobb (1972) and other social scientists who have studied the patterns of working-class life, have reported that the process of identity formation among working-class adolescents is often truncated by the lack of educational opportunities or by the economic pressures of working-class life.

Erikson concedes that the process of identity formation among women may differ considerably from that which he has outlined as the universal norm. According to Erikson (1974), the fact that women bear children "makes it doubtful that they can have an identity before they know whom they will marry, and for whom they will make a home" (p. 354). Erikson's double standard of identity formation for men and women is, unfortunately, confirmed by empirical research. A study of undergraduates at the University of Rochester indicates that whereas most men had developed a firm sense of identity by the end of their fourth year of college, most women were in a state of identity diffusion (Constantinople, 1969).

Recent research on the socialization of women, and particularly that of Bardwick (1971), Chodorow (1974), and Weitzman (1975) indicates that the patterning of roles and behaviors within the family and the ambivalent messages which adolescent or young adult women receive
about the relative merits of achievement versus nurturance, may make it extremely difficult for women to resolve identity conflicts during adolescence or early adulthood. Many women may seek their self-definition through marriage and childrearing during early adulthood, only to be faced with their postponed identity conflicts later in life.

The concept of generativity, like that of identity, may also be more of a cultural product than an innate human potential. Generativity as it is defined by Erikson involves the widening of one's sphere of influence in the world as well as the nurturance of the next generation. Recent historical studies such as those by Aries (1968) and Hunt (1970) suggest that the exaggerated solicitude for the welfare of children implied by the concept of generativity is a distinctly modern phenomenon. Also subject to cultural variability is the notion of generativity in the broader sense -- as the guidance and education of the next generation. The attainment of generativity through assuming such a mentor role is possible primarily for those whose class position and status in society allow them to control their own lives and to influence the lives of others. As Sennett and Cobb (1972) point out, among the most pernicious results of the hidden injuries of class are the lack of freedom and dignity, the feelings of powerlessness and lack of control experienced by working-class people in this society. It is impossible for workers who experience themselves as passive agents in their own lives to take an active, guiding role in the lives of others. Similarly, it may be impossible for women, who have devoted themselves to the care and nurturance of others from early adulthood, to attain generativity
in its fullest sense. Indeed, during the years when they might be acting as teachers or mentors for the next generation, women are often completing their own professional training.

The above examples demonstrate that although Erikson stresses the interdependence of individual and cultural development, he often fails to take into account the shaping influence of gender, race or social class on the individual life cycle. Moreover, Erikson's developmental schema seems to imply a predetermined schedule of psychosocial crises which unfold from within in sequential order throughout the life cycle.

We claim only that psychological development proceeds by critical steps -- "critical" being a characteristic of turning points, of movements of decision between progress and regression, integration and retardation .... This indicates 1) that each critical item of psychological strength discussed here is systematically related to all others, and that they all depend on the proper development in the proper sequence of each item and 2) that each item exists in some form before its critical time normally arrives (1963, pp. 270-271).

The above passage highlights the essentially intrapsychic focus of Erikson's developmental schema. Erikson maintains that a particular intrapsychic conflict is central for the ego during each stage of development and that these same conflicts may remain, albeit in less salient form, in preceding and later stages of the life cycle. However, while his developmental schema suggests that there is a predetermined sequence of critical crises or turning points in the adult life course, it fails to adequately explore the precipitating factors for such crucial developmental shifts.
There is the suggestion in Erikson's developmental schema of an inner-biological as well as individual-psychological basis for this predetermined unfolding of adult developmental stages. Thus, Erikson suggests that the physiological changes of puberty may help to precipitate adolescent identity conflicts; biological maturation during adulthood, the search for intimacy and impulse towards generativity; physical decline, the quest for integrity. Also embedded in Erikson's schema is the notion that these psychological and biological factors interact with historical and cultural factors to precipitate adult developmental shifts. However, Erikson does not go far enough in considering how historical changes and/or the realities of gender, race, or social class may inhibit or activate particular conflicts or crises at various points in the life cycle. Ultimately, the specific ways in which history and culture may influence the nature and timing of developmental change during adulthood is suggested, rather than fully developed, in Erikson's theory of adult development.

Like Erikson, Robert White conceptualizes adult development as an interaction of external and internal forces. White's longitudinal studies of adult lives indicate that adult development cannot be adequately understood without a consideration of the impact of culture and social class on the individual life course. White (1952) maintains with Cooley and Mead that "the self is a social product," and stresses the need for a total approach to the study of the individual who stands at "the nexus of biological, developmental,
social and cultural forces" (p. 322).

White's (1952) in-depth study of three lives (two men and one woman) from young adulthood through middle age leads him to conclude that individuals develop at significantly different rates during adulthood. He therefore cautions against attempts to delineate adult developmental stages which are age-specific rather than role-specific. For example, White hypothesizes that individuals enter young adulthood whenever they begin to tackle the five developmental tasks or "growth-trends" specific to that stage. These tasks include the stabilizing of ego identity through career or vocational choices and the expansion of generativity through marriage and procreation.

In contrast to Erikson, who insists that the resolution of identity conflicts is an age-specific developmental task, White recognizes that the consolidation of identity is largely influenced by the individual's occupational role or status. Thus, according to White, the stabilization of identity may be prolonged until the individual is in his or her thirties or forties if career choices and commitments have been delayed. White's research indicates that not only identity formation, but also adult development in general, is inextricably interconnected with the individual's increasing competence in the fulfillment of key social roles.

The first wave of attempts to describe the progression during adulthood in terms of developmental stages is characterized by several major trends: The gradual loosening of theories of development from the biological curve of the life cycle, with the conception that substantial psychological growth and change does not necessarily
parallel the cycles of biological growth and maturation; and an increasing focus on the ways in which adult developmental shifts result from the interaction between the external-socializing experiences of adults and their inner-psychological development. In addition, the first wave of research and theory on adult development tends to divide the adult life cycle into relatively few developmental periods characterized by specific psychosocial tasks with only rough age-specification.

Research and Theory on Adult Development: The Second Wave (1968-Present)

While the work of the earlier theory and research traced the broad outlines of the field of adult development, contemporary work in this area has sketched in the fine details of adult life stages. In general, recent research and theory in adult development (roughly from 1968 to the present) has developed in several distinctive directions, each of which was preshadowed by the first generation of life-span developmental researchers. The first and most popular trend, perhaps best represented by the work of Levinson (1978), Gould (1978), and Vaillant (1977) has involved attempts to develop universal, invariant, and age-linked stages of adult development with an emphasis on inner-psychological causation. A second trend, represented by the work of Neugarten (1968, 1975, 1979), Lowenthal et al (1975) and Rubin (1979) has further defined adult development as the result of shifts in psychosocial patterns and role transitions as the individual moves from one stage of life to another with an emphasis on the impact of external socializers on developmental change during adulthood.
Researchers in a third trend, most notably Riegel (1975, 1976, 1979), have attempted to establish a dialectical paradigm of life-span developmental psychology, which further explores the interactive effects of biological, psychological, socio-cultural and outer-physical events on the adult life course. Each of these trends will be examined and evaluated in turn.

Recent research in the first trend, of which Daniel Levinson's *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, is perhaps the leading work to date, attempts to further develop Erikson's notion of adulthood as a pre-determined sequence of age-specific stages and developmental tasks. Levinson (1972, 1978) advances a developmental schema of age-specific life stages, transition points and psychosocial crises which adult males experience as they move from early to middle to late adulthood. His developmental framework was generated through in-depth biographical study of the lives of 40 adult men between the ages of 35 and 45, from a variety of occupations and social-class backgrounds. Through his intensive exploration of the life patterns of these 40 men, Levinson found markedly age-linked periods of transition and stability, with stable periods lasting six or seven years, followed by transitional phases lasting four or five years. The central developmental task of the stable periods, according to Levinson is the establishment of a "personally and socially viable life structure" (1972, p. 247); while the central developmental task of the transitional periods is to revaluate the existing life structure and to "explore various possibilities for change in self
and world" (1978, p. 49).

The specific sequence of phases of stability and transition in adult life are as follows: The first adult developmental stage is the Early Adult Transition which spans the ages from 17 to 22. During this period the individual, who is on the boundary between adolescence and adulthood, must experiment with adult roles while moving out of the family of origin. This stage ends when the individual has begun to consolidate an adult identity, and is followed by the phase of Entering the Adult World, spanning the ages from 22 to 28 when the individual explores various social and professional roles, and establishes a provisional life structure. During the Age Thirty Transition, which extends from 28 to 33, the individual reevaluates the occupational and marital choices made during the twenties and often revises the life structure in important ways. This period of intense questioning is followed by the Settling Down phase of the thirties, during which the individual consolidates a second life structure, deepens his commitment to work and family, and concentrates on "making it" in the occupational world. At the end of the thirties, the individual enters the phase of Becoming One's Own Man, when the achievement of recognition and authority in the occupational sphere are of paramount concern. The Mid-Life Transition, which lasts from age 40 to 45, is usually a period of intense inner turmoil and crisis during which the life structure must be reevaluated and possibly revised to accomodate previously
denied or repressed aspects of the self, or to better reflect the self one has become. The Mid-Life transition involves not only an assessment of the "fit between the life structure and the self" (Levinson, 1972, p. 254), but also a confrontation between earlier dreams and ambitions, and actual accomplishments. The Mid-Life Transition is followed by a period of restabilization in the mid-forties in which the individual settles into a revised life structure.

The dominant motif in the above developmental schema, based on the lives of Levinson's 40 subjects, is the emphasis on work and occupational concerns. Levinson maintains that the events in the spheres of both work and family form the crucial components of the life structure; however, the life patterns of his subjects manifest an obsession with professional success which eclipses the importance of marriage and parenting.

Moreover, Levinson's developmental framework, with its emphasis on professional advancement and on the subjective experiences which accompany career shifts, seems far more reflective of the experience of the middle-class than of the working-class male. In fact, Levinson (1978) acknowledges that many of the workers in his sample reached an occupational plateau by their mid-thirties, and were unable to meet the developmental challenges of the later stages of adulthood, as the following case example indicates:
Perhaps the most devastating story is that of Luke Doby, an uneducated Southern Black worker. He moved north at 16, married at 18, became a construction worker and raised a family of eleven children. He recalls his 37th year as a season of funerals: "Every time you look around, somebody die." At 38 his spleen was removed and his wife had surgery to prevent further childbearing. These events marked the beginning of a precipitous decline. He could find no way to become his own man (emphasis mine) ... He may live briefy or for some years, but all that awaits him is death. He can find no way to begin the next phase of his life (p. 281).

Leivnson insists that the life of Luke Doby made a "profound impression" on him and that he remains a "curiously important figure" in his mind. Yet, he does not speculate on the economic and social forces that might truncate the adult development of working-class adults like Doby.

Indeed, he does not fully explore the implications of either class, gender and/or race or ethnicity for the adult development of his subjects. In reviewing the life histories of the working-class men in Levinson's sample, it is clear that, for the most part, they deviate considerably from the developmental trajectory followed by the middle- and upper-middle-class subjects, despite Levinson's attempts to impose the same developmental schema on subjects from all class backgrounds. Given the fraction of working-class subjects in his sample, and the absence of female subjects althgether, one must question Levinson's (1972) stated purpose of generating "relatively universal, genotypic, age-linked adult developmental periods" (p. 244). The developmental stages which he has identified may only be universally applicable to middle- and upper-middle-class men in advanced industrial societies.
Levinson's research is limited not only by its sex and class bias, but also by its neglect of social and historical influences on sequences of developmental change during adulthood. Levinson explicitly states that he has woven socio-cultural and historical processes into his theory of individual development during adulthood through his concept of the life structure. According to Levinson (1972), the life structure exists "on the boundary between the individual and society" (p. 247); thus, it determines not only the individual's position within the social world, but also his core identity and personality. Ultimately, however, Levinson's focus on the life structure limits his vision and exploration of the complex interconnections between individual developmental changes and social and historical progressions. He fails to consider the ways in which the life structure itself, and thus the development of the individual, are shaped by social and historical forces.

In a recent critique of Levinson's study, Rossi (1979) comments on the cohort particularity of Levinson's sample, and maintains that while Levinson claimed to study the adult development of his 40 subjects in its social and historical context, in fact he neglects this aspect of his subjects' lives. Rossi points out several crucial social factors that may have shaped the life structure of Levinson's subjects far more than the psychological shifts that he emphasizes. First, the young adulthood of the majority of his subjects was interrupted by military service in the Korean war -- a social fact that may account for the late settling down period of the men in the
Secondly, the majority of the subjects came to maturity and established their careers during the expanding economies of the fifties and early sixties -- a fact which may account for the rapid occupational advancement, and preoccupation with professional success on the part of the majority of his subjects. Rossi speculates that the ultimate value of Levinson's study lies not in its general theory of adult development, but in its historical portrait of the lives of a particular generation of adult males. "Properly labeled, Levinson's study will stand as an invaluable historical document, even if not self-consciously so like Elder's study of the children of the Great Depression" (Rossi, 1979, p. 9).

Even more than Levinson, Roger Gould (1972, 1978) abstracts adult development from its social and historical context. Leaving the social world almost entirely behind, Gould conceptualizes adult development as a chronological sequence of inner changes which unfold relatively independently of either external changes in the individual's life course or of social and historical events. Gould's theory of adult development is based on two research studies: an observational study of psychiatric outpatients who were divided into homogeneous age groups, and a questionnaire study of 524 non-patients, in which the questionnaire administered reflected the dominant themes identified in the observational study. In both of these studies, Gould is primarily concerned with the individual's subjective experience of his or her particular life stage, or with the "out-of-focus, interior, gut-level organizing perceptions of self and nonself, safety, time, size, etc."
that make up the background tone of daily living and shape the attitudes and value base from which decisions and actions emanate" (1972, p. 524).

On the basis of these studies and his own clinical practice, Gould has identified five major stages of the adult life course which are characterized by distinct psychological themes and common perceptions of self and others. During the first stage, from the ages of 16 to 22, the individual begins the psychological work of separating from the family of origin, and establishing an autonomous work and social life. The primary concern of the second period, which spans the ages from 22 to 28 is the achievement of competence in adult roles in the spheres of work and family. The next stage which spans the ages from 29 to 34 is a period of revaluation of the life patterns established during the twenties. This period often entails a revision of the life course to satisfy inner aspects of the person which have been denied or neglected in the push to achieve professionally and to establish and consolidate an intimate relationship during early adulthood. The subsequent phase, the midlife decade (from 35 to 45) is characterized by several major trends: A sense that time is finite which brings a final push to realize one's dreams and ambitions; a turning away from the external demands of work and family to confront one's passionate, inner core and to develop the emotional, intuitive aspects of the self; and a confrontation with the demonic, evil, irrational aspects of oneself and others. The individual who weather the psychological turmoil of the midlife crisis then
enters the post midlife period in which he or she becomes more inner directed, and finds satisfactions through contemplation and philosophical reflection rather than action.

According to Gould, each of these stages is accompanied by crucial "transformations" in the individual's consciousness which involve confrontations with irrational childhood fears and fantasies, a giving up of illusions and defenses, and a reworking of crucial aspects of one's identity and personal relationships. Thus, during the twenties, the individual must establish the self as an independent and competent person, and give up the illusion that parents or spouses can facilitate one's growth or development. During the thirties, the individual must turn inward to face the contradictory forces within the self, and outward to further acknowledge the complexity of social reality. Finally, during the midlife decade, the individual must confront his or her own mortality, existential aloneness and demonic or shadow self.

Gould (1978) defines adult development as synonymous with these transformations in adult consciousness. Indeed, he claims that through his experiences as an analyst he has come to understand growth and change during adulthood as "the release from arbitrary internal constraints" (p. 321). Gould acknowledges that these internal constraints, as well as the major psychological issues which emerge during each life stage, may be determined as much by a learned set of cultural values or by socialization as by age; but he fails to adequately explore psychological growth as part of an historical social process.
Nor does he adequately investigate possible subgroup variability in the psychological issues that emerge as salient for each age group based on factors such as sex, class, or race. Although he recognizes that an individual's gender or class status may in fact shape his or her life patterns in variable ways, he insists that there is little variation in the psychological shifts that adults undergo in the course of their development.

We should not forget that in terms of the painful psychological pilgrimage from childhood to adulthood, we all struggle, despite our different situations. There is no reason to believe that the psychological work is easier or harder in a working-class group than in a more privileged professional group — though the problems of survival and the quality of life are obviously more difficult (1978, p. 151).

By positing such a radical disjuncture between external, social factors and inner-psychological changes, Gould isolates the psychological development of the individual from the social and historical context in which it occurs.

Gail Sheehy's *Passages* has popularized the theories of adult development formulated by Levinson and Gould. Sheehy's research, which is based on in-depth interviews with 115 adult men and women, draws on the work of both researchers. While Sheehy (1976) adopts Levinson's age-specific developmental stages (with some key modifications for the lives of women), she focuses, as does Gould, on the inner changes which the individual experiences during these passages. Sheehy claims that it is the underlying impulses toward change which become activated at specific ages that in fact provoke or initiate developmental crises. Sheehy (1976) discounts the
importance of key events such as marriage, the death of a parent, divorce, or job changes, and maintains that the real catalysts for developmental change are the "crucial shifts in bedrock which take place in the inner life of the individual" (pp. 20-21).

Although the case histories in her work provide rich empirical data for her exploration of the inner dynamics of each developmental transition, her subjects were almost exclusively white upper-middle- and middle-class men and women. Sheehy provides the following rationalization for the class bias of her research:

I chose this group for several reasons. First I had to make a choice of one stratum of American society in order to be able to trace consistencies by exploring laterally within it. Second the people in this group become the carriers of our social values. They are also the major exporters to other classes of new life patterns and attitudes (pp. 16-17).

While Sheehy acknowledges that the educated middle class "has the greatest number of options and the least number of obstacles in choosing their lives", she fails to consider that the age-linked developmental stages which emerge from her study of the life patterns of this class may be a result of their privileged economic status. Nor does she acknowledge that these stages may not be representative of the experience of working-class or minority adults whose options may be severely curtailed by economic constraints.

While Sheehy is blind to the implications of her class bias in assuming that the developmental patterns of working-class adults will automatically follow those of the middle class, she is outraged by the sex bias of those who equate adult development with male adult
development. In comparing the developmental rhythms of adult men and women, Sheehy (1976) discovered that "the tempo of development is not synchronized for the two sexes," and that "men and women are rarely in the same place struggling with the same questions at the same age" (p. 15). She concludes that women go through the same age-linked passages as adult men, but that the central issues, confusions, and strivings experienced by the two sexes during these passages differ considerably for men and women:

During the twenties, when a man gains confidence by leaps and bounds, a married woman is usually losing the superior assurance she once had as an adolescent. When a man passes 30 and wants to settle down, a woman is often becoming restless. And just at the point around 40, when a man feels himself to be standing on a precipice, his strength, power, dreams and illusions slipping away beneath him, his wife is likely to be burning with ambition to climb her own mountain (p. 15).

These developmental discrepancies between men and women are particularly evident during the two major transitional stages of adulthood which Sheehy identifies as the Catch 30 (from 29 to 32) and the Deadlines Decade (from 35 to 45). Like Levinson (1978), Sheehy describes these two transition points as periods of heightened vitality and turmoil when the individual experiences radical changes in the sense of self and in the sense of time. These inner changes often necessitate radical revision in the life structure if the individual is to continue to grow and avoid stagnation.

During the first of these transition points, the Catch 30, both men and women begin to chafe against the restrictions of the life choices made during the twenties. Women who have devoted themselves
to the nurture of husband and children often refocus their energy on their own development through returning to school or work; women who have been pursuing careers may experience the sudden desire to become wives and mothers. The age 30 transition for men often entails a revision of career goals or the search for new personal relationships which will confirm what he has become. Similar revisions of the life structure are made by men and women during the mid-life transition (which for women usually begins at 35, for men at 40), when both sexes experience the inner pressure of aspects of the self that have been unfulfilled during the first half of life.

Sheehy's major contribution to the literature on adult development, then, is her exploration of the differences in the ways in which men and women experience the passages of adult life as a result of sex-role socialization. However, her work is limited by her view of adult development as a chronological sequence of inner changes which unfold independently of either external changes in the individual's life course or historical changes in society.

George Vaillant's *Adaptation to Life* is similarly limited by its exclusive focus on the inner-psychological dimensions of adult development. Vaillant's (1977) study represents a reinterpretation of the longitudinal data on one cohort of Harvard graduates (the classes of 1942 to 1944). Although Vaillant freely admits that his generalizations about adult development based on a sample of 95 Harvard graduates must have built sources of socioeconomic bias, he does not hesitate to draw sweeping conclusions about the nature of psychological
development during adulthood from his research with this relatively privileged and all male sample. Vaillant's central project was to examine how the defensive and adaptational styles of the adults in the sample changed over time. He maintains that maturation and change in adulthood are more dependent on development from within -- and specifically on shifts in the individual's defense mechanisms and coping strategies -- than on changes in the interpersonal environment or social world. Vaillant concludes that "the hierarchy of defenses" is the single greatest or most reliable predictor of adult developmental patterns.

Drawing on the work of psychoanalytic theorists such as Anna Freud and Heintz Hartmann, Vaillant (1977) develops a hierarchical schema of ego mechanisms of defense, which he relabels "adaptive mechanisms." Defenses such as projection, fantasy, hypochondriasis, and denial were categorized as immature and potentially psychotic. Defenses such as isolation, displacement and repression were called neurotic and intermediate. The so-called mature and healthy adaptive mechanisms included sublimation, suppression and altruism. Vaillant (1977) identifies the adaptive mechanisms of each of his subjects by analyzing each man's style of adapting to crises and important life events over a period of years. By observing changes which occurred in his subjects' defensive patterns and coping mechanisms, Vaillant hypothesizes that in the course of normal development, the mechanisms, of defense tend to evolve from immature to mature patterns, enabling the individual to become increasingly emotionally healthy and self-
actualizing. Thus, reaction formation, a neurotic defense, evolves over the course of the life cycle into altruism, a mature defense; repression, into suppression; fantasy, into humor.

Significantly, Vaillant found radical discontinuities in his study between the defensive structure or adaptational style of the mature individual and patterns of adjustment in childhood, indicating that significant psychological growth and change do occur during adulthood. However, this reviewer finds it difficult to concur with Vaillant's conclusion, on the basis of these data, that "man's adaptive devices are as important in determining the course of his life as are his heredity, his upbringing, his social position, or his access to psychiatric help" (1977, p. 19). While Vaillant quite effectively discusses how changes in individual adaptive mechanisms may affect career, marriage, health and/or friendship patterns over the course of the life cycle, he fails to consider how changes in the social or interpersonal realm may in turn lead to transformations in the individual's adaptive patterns. Moreover, he fails to consider the way in which the larger socio-cultural and economic structures may in fact foster and reinforce the formation of certain intrapsychic defensive patterns in the individual. Thus, it has been pointed out by Gutmann (1965) and others that characteristics, associated with ego strength in psychology, such as the capacity for sublimation, suppression, altruism and anticipation -- all listed by Vaillant under mature mechanisms of defense -- are in fact necessitated by the social milieu in which men live their lives.
While some recent researchers in adult development such as Levinson, Gould, and Vaillant have primarily concerned themselves with the intrapsychic dimension of developmental change during adulthood, others, and most notably Bernice Neugarten have focused on the contribution of external socializers of adult developmental changes. Like her predecessors Erikson and White, Neugarten is concerned with the social and historical dimension of adult development. However, she goes much further than any of these earlier theorists in identifying the specific social and historical factors which may influence the course of individual development during adulthood, and in researching the impact of these factors on the adult life course.

Neugarten's extensive empirical research on adult life stages and on personality change among adults has led her to conclude that "the major punctuation marks in the adult life line (those that is which are orderly and sequential) tend to be more often social than biological" (1975, p. 393). According to Neugarten, among the most important factors which influence psychological development during adulthood are the complex of age norms and the age-status system, themselves socially constructed, which define the parameters of adult behavior. Neugarten concludes that it is the internalization of these age norms which provides the catalyst for developmental transitions and often for personality change among adults.

Neugarten's research also indicates that perceptions of these age-status norms, which determine the shape of the adult life cycle, vary considerably according to sex and social class. She reports that both men and women, working- and middle-class subjects divide the life cycle
into four major stages: young adulthood, maturity, middle age, and old age. However, there is considerable variation in the age ranges which these stages encompass and in the individual's subjective experiences of these stages -- variations which seem to be a result of differences in gender and social class. For example, Neugarten (1975) reports that working-class men define themselves as middle-aged at forty, old at sixty, while upper-middle and middle-class men define themselves as middle-aged at fifty, old at seventy. As the following passage indicates, this data leads Neugarten (1975) to conclude that social class is a major factor in the establishment of the age norms and age expectations which shape the individual life cycle:

When we looked at life history data with regard to the ages at which major life events had actually occurred, we found striking regularities within social class groups, with the actual occurrences following the same patterns described above. The higher the social class, the later each of the following events was reported by our respondents: age at leaving school, age at first job, age at marriage, age at parenthood, age of top job, grandparenthood -- even in women their reported age of menopause -- The perception, the expectations, and the actual occurrences of life events ... are closely regulated, and the regularities within social class groups, indicate that these are socially regulated (p. 392).

Neugarten's theory that adult life stages are socially regulated rather than universally age-specific is also supported by the sex differences which emerged from her research on the transition to middle age. Neugarten (1968) found that whereas for women the transition to middle age often coincides with significant changes in the family life cycle such as the departure of children from the family, for men it is more often a result of change in their status in
career or public life. Again this example indicates, as do the majority of Neugarten's studies, that chronological age is less important than social factors in the patterning of adult development.

In her recent work, Neugarten (1979) has focused on the changes in the social timing of the adult life cycle, and the impact of these changes on the inner-psychological lives of adults. Neugarten reflects that crucial historical and demographic changes have led to the development of a more fluid life cycle, in which adults experience an unprecedented number of role transitions. This is especially true for women who are finding increasingly variable ways of combining work and childrearing, entering and withdrawing from the labor force at various stages in their children's and family's development. The general fluidity of the life cycle also applies to men, however, who are increasingly tending to change careers and return to school at various points in their lives.

Given the increasing number of role transitions and lack of traditional timetables for these transitions, Neugarten speculates that adults are more likely to experience these transitions as crises since they cannot rely on the usual age norms and social timetables to guide them through their adult lives. Despite this fact that the social timing of adult lives is in flux, Neugarten, in contrast to most researchers on adult development, distinguishes between the normal, socially prescribed turning points of the adult life course, and adult life crises. According to Neugarten adults who undergo the expectable life transitions such as marriage, parenthood, and retirement according
to a socially accepted timetable, do not experience these transitions as dramatic crises. Rather such transitions become life crises when their timing is at variance with the socially prescribed pattern of the adult life cycle.

The emphasis on the importance of the social and historical dimensions of adult development is also reflected in the growing literature on adult socialization. Brim (1960), Becker (1964), and Neugarten and Datan (1963) hypothesize that psychosocial development during adulthood is largely patterned by social roles and social institutions. Neugarten and Datan (1973) maintain that

the individual learns to think and behave in ways that are consonant with the roles he plays, so that performance in a succession of roles leads to predictable personality configurations (p. 56).

Similarly, Becker (1964) maintains that psychological development during adulthood is largely a result of "situational adjustment" which he defines as the adoption of perspectives or personality traits which are appropriate for different situations, and which endure only as long as the individual remains in that situation.

Brim (1972) identifies some of the situational changes which may catalyze psychological development during adulthood. These include changes in social status such as upward or downward mobility, and the assumption of new social roles such as those of parent or student. According to Brim, the major agents of adult socialization are the occupations, the family, and most recently education. Brim (1972) attributes the growing tendency of adults to return to school as an example of "self-initiated socialization", and comments on the necessity
for extensive research on the impact of this trend on adult personality and the adult life cycle.

Several recent studies of adult development such as The Four Stages of Life by Lowenthal, Thurnher, Chiriboga and Associates (1975) build on the conception of Neugarten and others that adult development is linked more to stage than to age, and that adult life stages are themselves socially determined. The Lowenthal study examines the psychological configurations of adults on the threshold of four major turning points in the adult life cycle: high school graduation, parenthood, the launching of children, and retirement. By sampling for stage of life rather than age, (although clearly these four transition points are roughly age-linked), Lowenthal et al hoped to further develop our understanding of psychosocial change in adulthood. In addition, recognizing the class bias of other studies, the researchers consciously recruited a working- and lower-middle-class sample.

The Lowenthal study includes several significant findings about the relative weight of age, gender, and social factors in shaping adult developmental transitions. For all of the subjects, gender differences were more pronounced than differences by age or stage of life. For example, the psychological configurations of the subjects seemed to be linked more to gender than to cohort status, with women showing markedly higher levels of psychological stress than the men at each stage of life. In addition, for women at all four stages of life, crucial psychological changes seemed to be linked to changes in
the family life cycle, while for men such changes in the inner life seemed to be linked to work-related events. Among the older cohorts -- the preretirement and middle aged -- two-thirds of the women as opposed to one-third of the men mentioned the empty nest as a primary transition point of later adulthood. By contrast, three-fifths of the men from both the older age cohorts mentioned retirement as the main turning point of middle and late adulthood.

Moreover, in contrast to other studies which portray midlife as a period of psychological growth and development (Levinson, 1978; Gould, 1978), the Lowenthal study suggests a picture of psychological stagnation and decline in the lives of most of the middle-aged and older adults. Lowenthal et al attribute this psychological stagnation to the diminution in satisfaction derived from traditional work and family roles on the part of their predominantly working- and lower-middle-class sample. The most stressed were the middle-aged women whose developmental needs during this period for a more active, instrumental role outside the home were frustrated by lack of educational and occupational resources. The findings suggest that economic and social constraints endured by working- and lower-middle-class adults can have a profound impact on their inner-psychological lives, and can stunt their inclinations towards developmental change during adulthood.

Like the Lowenthal study, Lillian Rubin's Women of a Certain Age: The Midlife Search for Self evaluates the impact of gender and social class on a particular stage of life. Rubin brings to her study a social and hisotrical consciousness that is notably absent from most
research on adult development. While she agrees with other researchers that adults pass through life stages at approximately the same age, she maintains that these life patterns are socially rather than biologically or psychologically determined. She historicizes the very notion of midlife as a developmental stage by showing how it is a result of certain crucial demographic and historical changes. Rubin attributes the midlife dilemmas of women, which she explores in her study, to two crucial social facts: The decrease in the number of years that women devote to bearing and raising children, and the increase in the post-parental phase of the family life cycle. (The average couple can now expect to spend 13 years together after the last child leaves home as opposed to a year and a half at the turn of the century). Rubin concludes that these demographic and social changes "have come together to present them (women) with a set of problems and opportunities unknown to earlier generations" (p. 10).

In contrast to the age-linked notions of midlife espoused by Levinson (1978) and others, Rubin maintains that midlife as a stage of adult development is more tied to shifts in family roles than to chronological age. Her interviews with 150 women between the ages of 35 and 54 confirm that midlife belongs to that point in the life cycle of the family when the children are grown and gone ... when perhaps for the first time in her adult life, a woman can attend to her own needs, her own desires, her own development as a separate and autonomous being (p. 7).

Thus, for women psychological issues in midlife are shaped by a set of shared social experiences.
Rubin's study also systematically examines class differences in the psychological issues faced by women in midlife. On the basis of her cross-class study (40 percent of the women were working class) Rubin concludes that gender transcends class as a major determinant of the life patterns and psychological dilemmas of middle-aged women. Rubin's research indicates that for women of all class backgrounds, midlife entails a prolonged and often painful search for an identity separate from the familial roles and relationships which defined the self in early adulthood. According to Rubin, many women in midlife exist in a state of identity diffusion, unable to consolidate a self separate from the family-based roles which dwindle in importance as children mature. Rubin's findings on the salience of identity conflicts for women in midlife contradicts Erikson's assertion that generativity is the dominant psychological issue for adults during this life stage.

Despite the prevalence of such identity conflicts, Rubin found that most of the midlife women in her sample did not engage in prolonged mourning about the maturation or exit of children from the home. Rather, women in this life stage seemed eager to enter the social world outside the home as students, workers or volunteers in order to develop a new and expanded definition of self.

Although she emphasizes the importance of gender in shaping the midlife experience of the women in her sample, Rubin does note some important class differences in the adult development of her subjects. The most important of these involves a curious reversal in the life patterns and self-concept of working-class and middle-class women.
Although, for the most part, better educated than their middle-class counterparts, by midlife, the majority of middle-class women (especially those who have not worked outside the home) have lost any sense of competence or achievement outside of their family-based roles. Working-class women, on the other hand, who are more likely to have worked outside the home throughout their adult lives, have increasingly developed a sense of competence and mastery even in their limited dead-end jobs. Rubin's study indicates that class, although secondary to gender, is not irrelevant in shaping the life patterns or in defining the psychological issues faced by women in midlife.

Alice Rossi (1979, 1980) similarly emphasizes the importance of gender in shaping the life patterns of adults. Rossi (1979) maintains that the "seasons of a woman's life" cannot be understood without reference to the broader system of familial relationships and friendship networks that surround women's lives. Although she stresses the importance of shifting historical and social contexts on adult development, Rossi speculates that women from several different age cohorts -- those who have combined marriage and childrearing with paid employment -- are likely to be intermeshed with the development of spouses, children and/or parents than is the adult development of men, whose lives are more powerfully molded by events in the occupational sphere. Rossi attributes the differences in the content and quality of the life structures of men and women to differential patterns of socialization.
Whereas women are socialized to conceptualize the self in relational terms, men are socialized by parents and mentors towards a more narrow and interpersonally isolating focus on work roles and professional concerns.

Rossi critiques adult developmental researchers for their lack of attention to the ways in which individual development is intertwined with familial and friendship networks. She also critiques the tendency of developmental researchers to ignore the ways in which "biological predispositions" may determine the parameters of growth and development throughout the life span. Specifically, Rossi speculates that the life curves of both men and women seem to be characterized by increased gender dimorphism in late adolescence and early adulthood which tapers off in midlife when adults begin to develop their contrasexual aspects. While women become more aggressive and agentic, men become more emotional and interpersonally oriented. Rossi (1979) sees in this trend evidence for her theory that the sexual dimorphism of adulthood is biologically determined, and further that it represents a "species adaptation with fundamental reproductive significance" (p. 18).

Rossi's focus on the biological underpinnings of adult development is supported by the cross-cultural research of David Gutmann. Briefly, Gutmann's research in four different cultures indicates that sharp sex role distinctions between men and women are bonded to the parental phase of adult life and tend to wane as the demands of parenthood diminish. Gutmann (1964, 1969, 1974) found that in four disparate cultures -- Middle American, Mayan, Navaho, and Israeli -- a definite
sex-role reversal takes place. Whereas men abandon their preoccupation with power and agentic work roles, turning inward towards their emotional core, women give up their preoccupation with nurturance and interpersonal relationships, becoming more domineering and independent. Like Rossi, Gutmann concludes from this data that the qualities we associate with masculinity and feminity are as linked to life stage (specifically to the parenting phase of adulthood) as to gender, and thus serve a specific species function of insuring reproduction.

The sociobiological perspectives of both Gutmann and Rossi represent valuable contributions to our understanding of the transcultural human biological processes which may contribute to adult developmental changes. However, in their attempts to explicate the biological underpinnings of adult developmental transitions, Rossi and Gutmann may in fact be resorting to biological explanations in order to explain complex social phenomena. Rossi's attempts in particular to postulate a biographical substrate for socially prescribed female life patterns, involving a period of early family centeredness, may in fact be perpetuating a "biological determinism" that could potentially undermine the increasingly complex and variable ways in which women (and men) are currently traversing the life cycle. Although Gutmann's research represents an important, empirical validation of Rossi's theory, it seems essential for future studies to further investigate the ways in which culture and social organization may mediate biological change across the life cycle. It seems that both researchers might pose more complex questions about the
ways in which the socio-cultural context interacts with biological predispositions to organize developmental change during adulthood.

While the research of both Rossi and Gutmann suggests that there are certain transhistorical and transcultural aspects to adult development, other studies suggest that the life cycles of men and women are more historically variable. For example, Van Dusen and Sheldon (1976) in an article entitled "The Changing Status of American Women: A Life Cycle Perspective" emphasize that the life of women must be seen in historical perspective. They assert that the life cycles of women are shaped by the variety of roles and opportunities available to the individual, and that these roles are in turn determined by historical and social trends. According to Van Dusen and Sheldon the following social and demographic trends have expanded the social roles available to adult women: the trend towards postponed marriage and/or childbearing, the increase in the divorce rates, the decrease in family size -- all of which have led to the increased participation of women in the labor force and the expansion of educational opportunities for women. These trends indicate that the extent to which women's individual lives have conformed to the rhythms of the family life cycle has greatly diminished.

A brief review of the literature on women returning to school, however, indicates that major life decisions and turning points for adult women are still intimately interconnected with changes in the family life cycle. Brandenburg (1974) found in her research among adult women at Queen's College that women typically decided to continue
their education when their last child had entered school. Although this usually occurred between the ages of 35 and 40, it was a developmental shift related more to role change than to age status. Similar conclusions were reached by Durchholz and O'Connor (1975) in a research project conducted among 245 women at the University of Cincinnati. Durchholz and O'Connor found that women returned to school at two significant turning points in the family life cycle: when the last child entered school, or when all the children had left home. Another study conducted among low-income women in a special program at Brooklyn College indicates that changes in the family life cycle such as divorce or the departure of children from the home combined with economic pressures to bring women back to school (Robinson, Peal, & Smith, 1973).

The foregoing review and critique of the literature on adult development indicates that researchers and theorists have tended to conceptualize growth and change during adult life primarily in terms of crucial shifts in one dimension of the adult life cycle: the inner-biological, individual-psychological or the external-sociological. Rarely, have developmental researchers investigated the ways in which changes in all of these dimensions might interact to create an adult developmental spiral. Further, researchers in adult development have tended to ignore or give only token importance to the broad sweep of historical events that make up the context of adult lives.

Klaus Riegel (1975, 1976, 1979) is one of the few developmental theorists who has attempted to develop a dialectical paradigm of adult development; that is, one which views adult development as resulting from a confluence of mutually interacting and reciprocally influential
changes along several dimensions of adult life including the inner-biological, the individual-psychological, the cultural-sociological, and the outer-physical. Riegel (1976) urges life span developmental psychologists to study development as a horizontal flow of interwoven event sequences rather than as a series of vertical time slices; we would apprehend the movie rather than look at a collection of separate frames of pictures (p. 698).

Riegel critiques other researchers in adult development on several accounts: First, for their tendency to study psychological change in adulthood as separate from historical and social changes; second, for their attempts to impose an overschematized order on the life cycle without adequate empirical evidence for doing so; and third, for the fuzziness of their concept of what triggers adult developmental crises. Riegel maintains that the developmental crises of the individual life cycle are intimately interwoven with generational and historical changes. Moreover, he hypothesizes that most adult life crises are the result of disjunctions among the four main dimensions of adult life: the inner-biological, individual-psychological, cultural-sociological or outer-physical. Riegel considers the occurrence of asynchronies among these dimensions of adult experience as the primary catalysts of adult developmental transitions. Such asynchronies result not only in individual developmental crises, but may also lead to social and historical change. Thus, adult developmental crises or transitions, by definition include a dimension of adult experience beyond the individual-psychological. Riegel suggests that adult developmental researchers adopt a broader conceptual framework which encompasses not
only individual change but also social and historical change.

Riegel's theoretical work forms part of a movement of life-span developmental psychology whose members are currently moving towards a major paradigm shift within psychological theory. Building on a contextualistic-dialectical model which conceptualizes development throughout the life span as "multidimensional" and "multicausal", researchers in this tradition have identified three sets of influences which "mediated through the developing individual, act and interact to produce life-span development" (Baltes, Reese & Lipsitt, 1980) p. 75). The first of these are termed "normative age-graded influences", and involve the system of age-related biological or maturational changes and the system of socially prescribed age-norms that set the timetable for major life cycle events in a particular culture. The second set of influences involve "normative history-graded influences" and involve the specific progression of historical events such as wars, economic depressions or recessions, and major political or social trends, as well as historical processes such as urbanization, industrialization or technological change. Life-span developmental researchers assert that different cohorts may experience such changes in different ways depending on the particular life cycle stage at which they occur. The third set of influences has been termed "non-normative life events", and includes those events which are inherently unpredictable and idiosyncratic in terms of their timing and occurrence in the individual life cycle. Divorce, unemployment, unexpected deaths or illnesses are all examples of such
events.

These three separate strands which contribute to the complex tapestry of adult development are interwoven differently at different points in the life cycle. Thus, Baltes, Reese & Lipsitt (1980) hypothesize that normative age-graded influences are particularly salient in development during infancy and childhood, but decline steadily in importance as the individual matures, perhaps enjoying a slight resurgence of importance as the individual ages and declines. In contrast, normative history-graded influences are particularly salient in shaping individual development during adolescence and early adulthood, when the individual must formulate a culturally acceptable identity, and form a life structure that follows the historically defined patterns of his or her culture. Non-normative life events, according to Baltes, Reese & Lipsitt (1980), play a crucial role in the variable patterning of individual development which occurs as the individual moves into adulthood and old age. Indeed, such non-normative life events are thought to be among the most powerful organizers of adult developmental transitions, and to account for many of the interindividual variations in development that can be observed during the latter half of the life cycle.

The major trend within life span developmental psychology, then, is the extension and application of Riegel's dialectical paradigm. This model, which incorporates the developmental patterns of individual, group, and culture, provides a compelling conceptual schema for studying the complexities of adult development.
CHAPTER III
ON PHILOSOPHY AND METHOD

Philosophical Foundations and Initial Research Concepts

The previous review of the salient literature on adult development demonstrates that the developmental rhythms of adults who are female, minority and/or working- or lower-middle-class remains relatively unexplored. This research study represents an attempt to contribute to such research among a specific population: a multi-racial and multi-ethnic population of working- and lower-middle-class adults enrolled in a non-traditional, external degree program at a major Northeastern University. Thus, a major purpose of the study is to explore the applicability of research on adult development to a population not represented in the literature.

In this pilot study of the developmental rhythms of a small sample of working- and lower-middle-class adults, the decision was made to focus on adult transitions and turning points. Again this focus was defined in response to an area of considerable weakness in the existing studies on adult development. As the preceding review of the literature indicates, the current wave of studies on adult development tends to conceptualize the adult life cycle as a series of stable stages, which are separated by transitional periods. According to Levinson's developmental schema, for example, such transitional periods constitute almost half of the adult life course.
Yet, the revisioning of adulthood as a period of dramatic transformation rather than as a developmental plateau, raises questions about the nature and causality of adult developmental transitions. With the exception of Riegel's dialectical theory of adult developmental crises, which is largely unsubstantiated by empirical research, the existing literature has failed to systematically explore the role of socio-cultural and economic factors in determining the course of adult developmental transitions, relying as it has on vague and unsubstantiated notions of a predetermined and predictable unfolding from within. Thus, this study attempts to apply Riegel's dialectical paradigm to an empirical study of developmental transitions among a population not represented in the literature.

Given this focus, the study is necessarily exploratory, qualitative and hypothesis generating rather than hypothesis testing. Researchers in the social sciences (Dolbeare, 1976; Piotrkowski, 1979; Rossi, 1979; Rubin, 1979) have increasingly recognized the value of such small-sample, qualitative research based on in-depth interviews for exploring human social life in all its complexity and diversity. Such research, which is dedicated to understanding "human life in its social form" (Piotrkowski, 1979, p. 288) implies a redefinition of what constitute the facts and focal point of research. The center of such exploratory, qualitative research is the person -- a concrete individual -- and his or her being in the world. From such a perspective, the "facts" of research are not isolated entities, but rather are intertwined with the totality of the individual's social existence, and cannot be
understood in isolation from an exploration of that totality. Thus, human facts are biography in an historical context (Sartre, 1968).

The capacity of traditional quantitative research to tell us anything truly representative of the total experience of people in their social worlds has been increasingly questioned. Rossi (1979), for example, maintains that adult development cannot be studied without reference to the varied social contexts and historical eras in which adult lives are lived. To study the life cycle in social and historical context entails embarking on exploratory research which does not necessarily fit the mold of neat quantitative designs. "But this is not necessarily a loss," according to Rossi:

On too many problems in an era of fast computers and complex quantitative tools we rush to premature definitive studies before we have mapped the terrain of the problem. As a consequence, we are too often like William James' myopic ant, crawling all over a building, tumbling into every microscopic crack and fissure, finding either nothing but inconsistencies or high correlations among trivia, never suspecting that a center or a structure is here at all (p. 25).

Similarly, Dolbeare (1976) maintains that the tendency among social scientists to examine only the tangible and measureable aspects of human social life effectively prevents them from conceptualizing or exploring the multiple, changing realities and social forces that shape individual lives. Dolbeare comments that any any given moment, people live in both "a context and a process."

Their context is that assembly of relationships with people and with things (as near as their family and job, as far as the President and war or inflation), that bear upon how they see themselves and understand their worlds. Their process is the dynamic created by today's context and aspirations against a background of yesterday's, the relevant history that
preceded that, and what that means for change in their personal existence. Both context and process are in motion, moving through time, interacting one with the other to produce the very special life experience and prospects of the individual under consideration (p. 6).

Traditional social science is not designed to capture the context or process in its full complexity. Instead, "social science merely slices into the ongoing interrelated entity, takes a relatively tiny number of measurements in snapshot fashion, and then withdraws to report findings" (Dolbeare, 1976, p. 7). Moreover, if we view human lives as inextricable from such an ongoing context-process, then we must explore all the mutually interacting and reciprocally influential forces that shape such lives before attempting to isolate specific variables for more precise measurement.

Qualitative research based on small samples is especially appropriate to research problems that necessitate the generation rather than the validation of theory and hypotheses (Piotrkowski, 1979). The study of adult development is one such research problem. The value of small-sample exploratory research in this field is that it selects a group of respondents with whom the researcher hopes to explore and refine questions, identify the salient issues of adult life, and develop hypotheses to guide subsequent research. While it may be argued that findings from such studies cannot yield statistical generalizations, they can point towards generalizations on a more abstract theoretical level, and can offer significant descriptions about complex patterns and relationships. Moreover, in a research area such as adult development where the existing theories are at best
working hypotheses, small-sample research can generate an important critique of the prevailing concepts and point toward necessary revisions in current theories.

Such small-sample qualitative research thus entails a revision of the usual relationship between theory and research findings. The theory which guides such research is often in the nature of basic assumptions or speculations which are then modified as new patterns and relationships are observed in the data. Piotrkowski (1979) describes such a relationship between theory and data as dialectical. Data are analyzed according to an initial set of research concepts, which are in turn continually revised or modified as the data yields new patterns and meanings that do not fit the existing conceptual framework.

In accordance with this model of maintaining a dialectical tension between theory and data, I began this study with several major assumptions or initial research concepts. The first of these is that adult development is a dialectical process in which the inner potentialities of the individual are shaped through continual social interactions. Goldmann (1969) presents a precise definition of this dialectical perspective when he describes the individual as

a living and conscious being placed in a world filled with realities that are economic, social, political, intellectual and the like. He sustains the whole effect on this world and reacts upon it in turn (p.87).

A dialectical perspective would define these economic, social and political realities as the primary determinants of both the individual's life course and his or her consciousness or inner life.
Marx (1844) states that "consciousness is from the beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all" (cited in Freeman, 1968, p. 75). Thus, a dialectical perspective would dictate that in order to fully understand adult life stages and transitions, one would have to explore the ways in which these transitions are interwoven with historical and social changes. To abstract any particular aspect of adult development from its relationship to the social totality is to study it from a distorted perspective.

A related assumption is that gender and social class are crucial determinants of both the life patterns and consciousness of individuals in our society. A "class" may be described as "groups of individuals who relate to the ownership and control of the means of production in similar ways" (Bowles & Gintis, 1975, pp. 14-15).

Similarly, Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich (1977) state that "a class is characterized by a common relationship to the economic foundations of society -- the means of production and the socially organized patterns of distribution and consumption" (p. 9). This common relationship to the economic foundations of society leads to the formations of particular psychic structures or world views among the members or a particular social class (Goldman, 1969; Kohn, 1969).

Piotrkowski (1979) points out that working- and lower-middle-class people share certain economic and occupational circumstances which shape both their life course and world view. More specifically, they have least control over the means of production and must earn their livelihood through daily labor, both of which make them particularly
vulnerable to shifts in the economy.

Just as a shared relationship to the means of production helps to pattern the life course for members of a particular social class, so does a shared relationship to reproduction lead to differences in the quality and content of the life structure for men and women. Researchers such as Rubin (1979) and Rossi (1979) hypothesize that the traditional division of labor in the family, although ameliorated somewhat by the increasing participation of women in the sphere of paid employment, continues to pattern the life course and consciousness of men and women in variable ways.

These two assumptions, one about the dialectical nature of adult development, and the other about the primacy of gender and social class in shaping the quality and content of the individual life course, provide the philosophical framework within which this research project was conceptualized and the data analyzed. The formulation of such a philosophical framework is consistent with the theory that there is no such thing as disinterested or value-free research in the social sciences. All research is informed by underlying biases, even if these are not explicitly stated or known. As Goldman (1969) points out, "Human facts never speak for themselves, but yield their meaning only when the questions put to them are inspired by a philosophical theory of the whole" (p. 87).
Locating the research participants. In locating the research participants, a decision was made to recruit adults who were enrolled in a non-traditional, external degree program which was designed specifically to provide access to the university for low-income, minority and/or female adults. This population seemed appropriate for this study for several reasons. First, by selecting a small sample of adults who have made such an unusual and visible change in their lives as returning to school, one is almost guaranteeing that they have experienced a major turning point. Secondly, to study adult development in the context of an adult education program represents an opportunity to understand the ways in which adult transitions are interwoven with historical trends. The dramatic increase in the number of adults, and especially of adult women who are returning to school, indicates that a major shift in the life patterns of adults may be occurring. A study from the U.S. Department of Commerce reports that between 1970 and 1974, the number of women students between the ages of 25 and 34 who were enrolled in undergraduate programs increased from approximately 409,000 to 831,000 -- an increase of 102 percent. The number of male students in this age group increased from 904,000 to 1,371,000 -- an increase of 46 percent (Van Dusen and Sheldon, 1976). Moreover, approximately 10 percent of all college students are now over 35; and 13 percent of adults aged 35 to 54 are involved in some type of continuing education (Neugarten, 1979).
The research problem, to explore the relationship between adult development and a major historical trend with a population not represented in the current literature on adult development, pointed toward a particular type of sample. The participants should be enrolled in full time study in an adult degree program for at least two semesters, a time span which would presumably allow for the process of returning to school to precipitate changes in the inner-psychological life and interpersonal worlds of adult students. In order to assess the impact of gender on adult development, I wanted to include men and women in roughly equal proportions. It also seemed important to include participants from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, the participants were to be working- or lower-middle-class in terms of family of origin and current class status, under the assumption that class status is an important determinant of adult developmental stages. In order to assess the relative impact of age or life stage versus shared social experience on adult development, it seemed essential to include participants who spanned a wide age range. It also seemed advantageous to have some variance in the levels and kinds of jobs that people were working at, as well as to include some adults who were unemployed.

Although the difficulties of finding subjects who conformed exactly to these basic criteria led to some slight variations between the "ideal" and the "real" samples (Piotrkowski, 1979), the actual group of research participants reflected these initial criteria fairly closely. The participants were 30 adults, 12 women and eight men who
had been enrolled for at least two semesters in an adult degree program at a major Northeastern university. They represented a continuum of ages (from 28 to 50) with the mean age of the women being 35; the mean age of the men, 37. In addition, they comprised a varied racial and ethnic mix; eight of the participants were white; eight, black; and four, Puerto Rican. All but two of the participants were employed at the time of the interview. They represented a variety of occupations, including paraprofessional teachers and counselors, clerical and service workers, skilled tradesmen, union employees, musicians, and health workers. A detailed breakdown of each research participant by age, sex, race, social class, marital status, and number of children is provided in Table 1.

The majority of the respondents (17 out of 20) were classified as working- or lower-middle-class in terms of current socio-economic status. Although the primary purpose of the study was to explore the developmental rhythms of working- and lower-middle-class adults, the five respondents who were middle class in terms of current or past socio-economic status were included to provide a limited data base for inter-class comparisons. The exact class categorization of the adults in the study was in some cases difficult to determine. The issue of class assignment was further complicated by the general confusion among social scientists both about the specific variables that determine an individual's class status, and about the very notion of class itself (Rubin, 1979, Piotrkowski, 1979). In general, the assumption was made that the most important determinants of an
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Class Status</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>No. of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lydia</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>working class</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>working class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elise</td>
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<td>Black</td>
<td>working class</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>working class/middle class/working class</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>working class</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iris</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>working class</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td>lower-middle class/upper-middle class</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>working class</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellie</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>working class</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>working class/middle class/working class</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mildred</td>
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<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>middle class/working class</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry</td>
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<td>Black</td>
<td>lower-middle class/working class</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>working class</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
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<td>lower-middle class</td>
<td>D</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>working class</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
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<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>working class</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>Black</td>
<td>upper-middle class/working class</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakim</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>working class</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

aThose research participants whose current class status differs from that of their family of origin have been assigned a dual class affiliation, with the second class assignment indicating that of the family of origin.
individual's class status were occupation, family of origin, and level of educational attainment (Rubin, 1979). Thus, the men in the sample were classified as working class if they worked at traditional blue-collar or lower-level white-collar occupations, had minimal education past high school, and were of working-class origins. The same general criteria were applied to women, with the additional consideration that they be married to men who qualified as working class.

The problem of defining class status, however, was especially complex with the female respondents. Oakley (1974), Kantor (1977) and Rubin (1979) have convincingly argued that a woman's class status should not necessarily be determined by her husband's, especially in cases where the woman works in the sphere of paid employment, and thus has her own position within the occupational structure. Moreover, Rubin (1979) has commented on the complexities of class assignment among divorced women who may have qualified as middle class for the duration of their marriages, but who may find themselves without the economic resources or educational training to maintain this status after the divorce. Thus, one female research participant who identified herself as middle class had only recently achieved this status as a result of marriage to a man in a professional position.

A definitive class assignment was also difficult in cases where the families of origin and thus the class culture or class consciousness of the respondents was middle- or upper-middle class, while the current educational level, occupation, and income pointed towards working-class assignment. In such cases an individual was
considered to have a dual class assignment, one based on class status of the family of origin, and the other on actual life circumstances.¹

Another complicating factor in defining the class status of the participants involved the fact that they seemed to be a group in class transition from the working- or lower-middle class to the professional-managerial class. In addition, one might expect that working- or lower-middle-class adults who return to school would be more upwardly mobile, self-confident and self-aware than the average working- or lower-middle-class adult. In fact, the majority of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their current class status and saw higher education as a means towards occupational and class mobility.

Regardless of their specific class status, however, the majority of the respondents were low-income. The median annual income of the male respondents was approximately $9,000; the median annual income of

¹That the issue of class assignment is made more complex by the fact that class identification has a subjective as well as objective dimension is shown by the ways in which the participants themselves responded to questions about their class identification. For example, two female subjects, both originally from upper-middle-class families and both downwardly mobile, responded as follows when asked about their class status:

Laura: "I've always seen myself as part of an upper class. I've been on welfare, I've been on medicaid, but I've never felt demeaned by it .... I'll probably never earn more money than I'm earning now, but that hasn't changed my class identification."

Mary: "My class identification has changed since I went back to school. I tend to see myself as working class ... if you're speaking in economic rather than cultural terms."
the females was approximately $8,900. In cases where the spouse of the respondent also worked in the sphere of paid employment, the total family income ranged from approximately $10,200 to $70,000, with a median income of $21,500.\textsuperscript{2} Table 2 provides more specific information on income and occupation.

At the time of the interview, 12 of the subjects were married, one for the second time; nine were separated or divorced. The average duration of the married participants' marriages was 13 years for the women, 12 years for the men. Of the 12 female subjects, all but one had one or more children, with the mean number of children being 3.5; of the male subjects, all but two had two or more children, with the mean number of children being 1.8. The mean age of the children of the respondents was approximately 10 years for the children of male respondents, and approximately 13 years for the children of female respondents.

The majority of the subjects (16 out of 20) had been enrolled in some form of higher education before entering the adult degree program in which they were enrolled. For 10 of the respondents, this training involved one to three years of part or full time study at a community college or university. For six of the respondents, this previous training involved one to three years of part or full time study at a community college or university. For six of the respondents, this previous training involved one to three years of part or full time study at a community college or university.

\textsuperscript{2}While these figures may at first glance seem high for a working- or lower-middle-class sample, it is important to note that income alone is not sufficient in itself to raise the class status of workers. Piotrkowski (1979) and others have pointed out that the inequities of class may persist even when workers achieve relative degree of affluence.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Annual Income</th>
<th>Spouse's Occupation</th>
<th>Annual Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Lydia</td>
<td>secretary</td>
<td>$8,000</td>
<td>drifter</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elise</td>
<td>clerical worker</td>
<td>$9,000</td>
<td>unemployed</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celia</td>
<td>unemployed</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>college teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
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</table>
study involved training of a technical or vocational nature either on the job, in one of the armed services or at a vocational training institute. Although the research participants may appear to be a relatively well educated group, it seems essential to point out that for the majority of participants, these previous attempts at education involved part-time study at local colleges with open admissions or continuing education programs. Moreover, the majority of the subjects cited financial limitations and/or family responsibilities as reasons for discontinuing previous attempts to attain a college degree.

The majority of the respondents resided in urban areas -- despite their participation in a rural-based educational program. Approximately one-fourth of the sample resided in the rural area in which the program was located; one-fourth in a nearby city of moderate size; and one-half in a large metropolitan area several hours away.

In recruiting these research participants, no attempt was made to choose a random sample in the usual sense of the term. Rather the research participants were selected from a computer list of students to represent certain age, gender, class and ethnic characteristics. Thus, the sample was chosen for its relevance to the factors that were under consideration. Piotrkowski (1979) comments that with such a non-random sample, the "inevitable sampling bias is treated as a condition of the discovered relationships -- it does not invalidate them" (p. 292, emphasis mine).

Another source of bias in the sample involved the fact that I was a teacher in the adult degree program in which the respondents
were enrolled at the same time that the interviews were fielded, and thus was familiar with the majority of the students in the program. Since half of the research participants were former students, there was some variability in interviewer-interviewee interaction. Again, however, my familiarity with the adults in the study formed a basic and often favorable condition of the research, which in some cases allowed for more in-depth exploration of the participants' life patterns. Piotrkowski (1979), Golden (1975) and others have similarly found that a prior rapport with subjects may facilitate rather than impede the goals of the research when such goals include a total reconstruction of people's life worlds and a depth understanding of their life patterns.

After selecting a suitable group of research participants from a computer list of students, I contacted each person by phone. This initial phone contact enabled me to briefly describe the research project to potential participants, and to further determine their suitability as subjects. The research was described as an exploratory study of adult development, with a focus on the transition around returning to school.

**Interviewing procedures.** The research was fielded in the spring of 1977 through in-depth biographic interviews with the 20 adult men and women. The value of such a biographical focus is that it combines aspects of a research interview and a clinical interview, enabling interviewer and respondent to collaborate in reconstructing the individual's life history (Dolbeare, 1976; Levinson, 1978; Rubin,
The set interview schedule (see Appendix A) was used as a guide to structure an intensive exploration of the individual life course, rather than as a means to gather isolated pieces of data. The style of the interviews, which was clinical and probing, was consistent with this purpose. In short, each respondent was encouraged to tell his or her story within a given framework.

All the interviews were in-depth discussions which lasted from two to four hours. In all but two cases, the interviews were conducted in the regional offices of the educational program in which the respondents were enrolled. Two of the female respondents requested that they be interviewed in their homes because childcare responsibilities made it impossible to travel to the usual interview site.

The interview was divided into three sections, the first of which explored the transition around returning to school, probing for the immediate factors which led to that decision and exploring the individual's experience of being a student. The questions in the first section were designed to elicit information about the impact of returning to school on the individual's self-concept, goals and aspirations, and relationships with others. The second section of the interview focused more closely on the impact of returning to school on roles and relationships within the family. In the third section of the interview, the respondent was asked to identify and explore the major turning points of his or her adult life, and to reflect on whether these turning points were precipitated by external events, by changes in the inner life or both. It was hoped that by
beginning with an exploration of a recent transition in the individual's life -- specifically the transition around returning to school -- the interview would gradually lead the subjects to explore the major turning points of their lives, and to locate this particular transition within the context of those turning points.

In general, the interviews were successful in guiding the respondents through the process of such life exploration. The probing, clinical nature of the interviews, as well as my familiarity with the majority of the adults in the study and with the external degree program in which they were enrolled, helped to break down the typical alienation between subject and researcher. In most cases, the interviews became mutual dialogues in which important insights emerged for both myself and the respondents. Many of the participants maintained that the interview was a dynamic learning experience in which they, often for the first time, explored and perceived patterns of growth and development in their adult lives.

Although the interview contained a set of standardized questions which were followed in set order for every subject, I attempted to maintain some flexibility and openness in the discussions which would allow for the emergence of unanticipated data. Such flexibility seemed especially crucial given the exploratory nature of the study.

All of the interviews were recorded on audio-tape and transcribed. None of the participants expressed any reluctance or inhibitions related to the taping of the interview. At the beginning of the interview
strict confidentiality was pledged. In order to insure that the respondents remain anonymous, all names are fictitious. In addition, all identifying characteristics have been disguised or deleted, with the exception of occupation, which in some cases was essential to an understanding of the respondents' developmental patterns.

Data analysis. The method of data analysis was consistent with the qualitative and exploratory design of the research. The interview transcripts formed the basic data for generating hypotheses about the ways in which age, gender, social class, ethnicity and/or social and historical factors interact to precipitate adult developmental transitions. No attempt was made to quantify these variables. Rather, the data were analyzed thematically; that is, the data were carefully examined for emerging patterns and relationships which formed the basis for working hypotheses about the adult development of the respondents.

Throughout the data analysis, I maintained a dialectical tension between scrutinizing the data in the light of the initial research concepts and revising these concepts in the light of new patterns and relationships which emerged from the data. Consequently, it was expected that some of the themes or patterns in the data would be consistent with the initial research concepts, while others would require the creation of new conceptual categories. For example, the clear distinction between the normal, expectable turning points of adulthood and adult developmental crises in the lives of the adults was unexpected; on the other hand, the shaping
influence of class and gender on the adult life cycle was anticipated. The continual interaction between data and theory in such thematic analysis necessitated repeated interpretation and reinterpretation of the interviews, and repeated classification and reclassification of the data as analytic categories were created or discarded.

The purpose of such a thematic analysis of the data is not simply to develop general descriptive patterns, but also to make inferences about and interpretations of the data which have theoretical relevance. The emphasis on the interconnection between data and theory is consistent with the idea that even qualitative research based on small, non-random samples can point towards necessary revisions of existing theory, especially when such theory has been formulated through research with a skewed or inadequate data base. Such small-sample, exploratory studies can also lay the groundwork for more systematic and experimentally controlled research.

In analyzing the data, no attempt was made to assess the "validity" of the respondents' reconstructions of their lives in the interview context. Nor was there any attempt made to correct for the bias inherent in the reconstructive approach to the study of lives (Vaillant, 1977). Rather, as is the case in a clinical interview, it was assumed that the respondents were the ultimate authorities on their life experience, and that their description of that experience was inherently valid (Dolbeare, 1976).
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

Introduction

The major unanswered question about adult development with which I approached the analysis of the interviews is the following: Does the developmental progression of adults follow a predictable sequence of age-specific stages, triggered by age-linked shifts in the inner-psychological realm; or should adult development be conceptualized as an interlocking spiral of changes in the inner-psychological and external-sociological dimensions, precipitated by crucial shifts in the social and interpersonal worlds of the individual? Despite the recent wave of research on adult developmental crises and transitions, the specific nature and causality of these transitions, and the extent to which they are interwoven with socio-cultural and economic factors remains in dispute. Also unclear from the existing studies is the extent to which gender, social class and/or race or ethnicity are crucial determinants of adult developmental shifts.

The most distinctive trend that emerges from an analysis of the interviews with this predominantly working- and lower-middle-class sample, is that adult development does not occur outside of specific social contexts. The immediate contexts of work and family, which form the major constituents of the life structures of both men and women, are the primary contexts in which adult development unfolds. However, the shifting social and historical context into which the
individual is born, comes to maturity and dies also constitutes a primary determinant of the possibilities for growth and change throughout the life cycle. In addition to socio-cultural and historical factors, gender, and social class emerge as far more important than age or inner-psychological events in precipitating adult developmental transitions. Indeed, the data indicate that for the most part psychological changes themselves are inextricably interconnected with the social experiences of the subjects, and thus cannot be abstracted from the social and historical matrix in which they occur.

This chapter will be organized to illustrate these points in greater depth. Specifically, the first section will examine the life patterns of the men and women in the study, focusing on the ways in which gender, social class, race and/or cohort status or shared social and historical experiences interact to precipitate adult developmental transitions. Particular focus will be on the developmental transition associated with returning to school, the one transition shared by all of the research participants. The data indicate that a major transition such as returning to school in adulthood, is not merely a function of inner-psychological shifts or life stage; rather, it is rooted in the socio-cultural context of a person's life, and cannot be understood without an examination of that context. The particular developmental pathways by which the adults in this study arrived at the decision to return to school will be explored, and the transition around returning to school will be compared with the other major transitions of the respondents' lives. The second section will examine the amplification
effect of a particular developmental transition. Specifically, it will explore the ways in which the shared social experience of returning to school transforms self-concept, affects the balance of roles and relationships within the family, and creates disjunctions between the individual and his or her broader social network.

The Adult Development of the Research Participants

The existing studies of adult development offer the following conceptualizations for the developmental trajectories of men and women. In studies of the male life course, the common assumption is of a linear progression of age-related stages, the majority of which are closely intertwined with events in the occupational sphere (Gould, 1978; Levinson, 1978; Lowenthal et al, 1974; Vaillant, 1977). In contrast, women's adult development is portrayed as intermeshed with family-based events and influences, with age and occupational or social events playing a more secondary role. (Lowenthal et al, 1975; Neugarten, 1979; Rossi, 1979; Rubin, 1979). An exploration of the life patterns of the adults in this sample indicates that previous theories have failed to adequately grasp the full complexity of development during adulthood for both men and women.

An analysis of the major turning points identified by the research participants reveals that there was considerable variation both in the number of turning points described by the adults in this sample, and in the specific ages at which such turning points occur. However, there was considerable agreement among the adults in this
study about the key precipitating factors for developmental transitions. The data summarized in Table 3 shows that for the adults in this sample, major turning points tended to be described in terms of changes in three crucial spheres: occupation, family, and the social world. These three strands of the individual life pattern are interwoven differently for the male and female respondents. Whereas the women in the sample attributed the majority of the major turning points in their adult lives to family-based events, the men discussed the majority of their adult transitions in terms of occupationally related concerns.

For both the men and women in the study, however, there was another crucial dimension to adult developmental transitions that has been largely neglected by the existing literature: The historical dimension which includes the social, political and economic changes that directly influenced the life patterns of the adults in this study. The majority of the respondents (13 out of 20) described at least one major turning point in their adult lives as interwoven with the processes of social, economic and political change.

The specific ways in which changes in the socio-cultural dimension interact with changes in the inner-biological and individual-psychological dimensions of the respondents' lives to precipitate adult developmental crises will be further explored in the following section on the life patterns of the adults in the study. Since significant sex differences emerged from an exploration of the life patterns of the men and women in the study, the data on each will be presented separately. Attempts will be made to compare and contrast
### Table 3

**Major Precipitating Factors for Adult Development Transitions of Research Participants**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Research Participants</th>
<th>No. of Turning Points</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Work-Related Events</th>
<th>Family-Based Events</th>
<th>Political/Social Movements</th>
<th>Economic Events</th>
<th>Individual Psychological Changes</th>
<th>Inner-Biological Changes</th>
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the research findings with existing theory and research on adult development. Given the paucity of studies on female adult development, such comparison and contrast of the data with existing theory and research will of necessity be more complete and systematic for the male respondents.

The life patterns of the female participants. A consistent pattern may be traced through the life cycles of the 12 female research participants. The majority of the women in the sample (9 out of 12) described the first two turning points of their adult lives in terms of assuming the responsibilities of marriage and motherhood. For all but four of these women (two of whom attended college briefly, and two of whom joined the army for a brief stint after graduating from high school), marriage, which occurred at an average age of 20.8 and motherhood, which occurred at an average age of 21, were synonymous with leaving home and entering the adult world. Thus, the prolonged period of exploration and identity formation, usually associated with late adolescence and early adulthood, was short-circuited for the women in this predominantly working- and lower-middle-class sample. All but one of the female subjects went through the transitions from adolescent to married adult to parent in a shorter span of time than is usually the case for their middle-class counterparts, for whom such transitions tend to stretch over a slightly longer period and, more importantly, to involve more varied opportunities to define and develop the self (Gould, 1978; Rubin, 1979).

Despite the minimal differences in the timing of marriage and
motherhood, which seem to be largely a result of the socio-economic status,¹ the pattern of the female respondents' lives in early adulthood tended to conform to the family-centered patterns described by other adult developmental researchers (Lowenthal, et al., 1975; Rossi, 1979; Rubin, 1979). Table 3 indicates that for the women in the sample, the majority of adult transitions and turning points were intermeshed with shifts in the sphere of family life, regardless of whether the woman was primarily a mother or housewife or whether she worked at a low-level job in the sphere of paid employment (as did nine of the female participants at the time of the interview). All of the women mentioned marriage and parenthood, and half, separation or divorce as major turning points of their adult lives. Other family-based events such as the illness of children (in two cases), and the illnesses or deaths of parents (in two cases) were also discussed as major turning points. Family life, then, provides a primary context in which women's adult development unfolds.

It is not the only context, however. For the majority of the women in the sample, there were other crucial experiences in the social world outside the home -- in the spheres of work and community -- which quite dramatically affected their adult development. At some point in their adult lives, the majority of the female respondents

²Since the difference in the average age of marriage between high school educated working-class women and college educated middle-class women is only three years, it has been argued by Rubin (1979) and others that women tend to move through life cycle stages at roughly the same age regardless of class.
underwent a transformative experience in the social world which initiated a revaluation of the personal goals and relationships established during young adulthood. Returning to school was usually the end result of such a period of exploration and turmoil, which in most cases was qualitatively different from the normal, expectable family-based turning points in the women's lives. Such transformative experiences in the social world involved profound shifts in identity, moments of critical choice and personal upheaval, that often did not characterize the turning points that were initiated by expected role shifts within the family context.

Significantly, there was no specific age at which such developmental crises occurred in the lives of the women in this sample. Rather, such developmental crises seemed to be catalyzed by events in two spheres: first, by crucial events in the family life cycle such as separation or divorce, the first or last child entering school or graduating from high school, or the illness or death of a spouse, child or parent; and second, and most importantly, by the possibilities for employment and/or social and political involvements available to the individual in the external world. The following case examples illustrate these points further.

Case Illustrations. The way in which women's adult development results from an interlocking spiral of events in the spheres of work, family and the broader social world is evident in the life of Grace, a 35 year old teacher's aide. Like the majority of the women in the sample, in early adulthood Grace sought her primary identity in marriage and
motherhood as her description of the first major turning point of her adult life indicates:

I guess getting out of the service, I see as a major turning point because I had to really put together a direction for myself .... I decided I wanted to have a family .... That was my warm, giving period.

Eight years later when her four children had all reached school age, Grace experienced a developmental shift in which she began to become "interested in things that were going on in the world." Whereas previously she claims never to have "thought about things political past my house," she began gradually in her late twenties to turn outward to the social world beyond the home, becoming active in a parent-organized movement for community control of schools in the major Northeastern urban center where she lived.

Grace's participation in this community based political movement led to a job as a paraprofessional teacher in an alternative education program, and subsequently to her decision to return to school in order to pursue teaching as a profession. She describes the developmental process that led to this major life transition as follows:

When I look at my life, I see that there were stages. There was a time when it was very important for me to be a mother. The baking of bread and the whole thing .... And then there was a time when I started to let my kids go and I began to take on community projects. I didn't want to leave home, but I wanted to play with a little stuff outside the home. And then it was sort of like feeling potent .... The degree was important for me to be able to do the things I felt competent to be able to do.

While it is clear from this passage that Grace's developmental stages were interwoven with crucial shifts in the family life cycle, it is also evident that socio-political events provided an equally
important catalyst for her adult development. She describes how her own developmental shifts were intermeshed with external socio-political factors as follows:

You know, I honestly believe that there are times when your psyche needs different things. I really had satisfied all my maternal instincts -- and I needed something else, and it just happened that externally the whole political thing was going on and that was important for me.

That was just a very active time. There was a mass movement of people who were politically active and the whole concept of change was in full bloom and I was just ready to accept and to question. That was when SDS was strong and there was a mass movement in the schools. That was during the Johnson administration; there was a war going on; there was a civil rights movement going on. Even though I had been active in civil rights during the 50's, it didn't have the same impact .... All of these things were going on. They were external.

This latter statement indicates that for women, adult developmental transitions are shaped by a myriad of influences: shifts in the family life cycle; the social and political climate; and the personal psychological response to that larger social context. Although the specific weight of each of these factors varies according to the individual woman involved, they are all interconnected to some extent in precipitating adult developmental transitions. Also evident from this data is the distinction between expectable, family-based turning points and those with a political or social dimension. The latter involve profound disjunctions between the inner-psychological and external-sociological dimensions of women's lives -- disjunctions which often initiate a spiral of changes.

The adult development of Celia, a 31 year old divorced woman with two children, illustrates this distinction between turning points that
are interwoven with predictable shifts in the family life cycle, and those that have a political and social dimension. The first major turning point of Celia's life was marriage which she choose to escape from the poverty and chaos of her family of origin.

A major turning point was when I got married. I was under 20 .... You see marriage as being the only thing that you have in life; you think it's going to be better -- then you find out it's not so.

Celia's marriage deteriorated steadily as a result of her husband's alcoholism and chronic unemployment, and three years later she was divorced, an event which she describes as the second major transition of her adult life. The divorce led Celia to seek paid employment as a bi-lingual secretary in a community agency, where she became exposed to a group of Hispanics who were engaged in organizing migrant workers. She links the third and most important turning point of her adult life to the political consciousness which she developed as a result of these experiences:

The biggest turning point in my life was when I got the awareness that I talk about. I met this person (through political activity) who began speaking to me about the economy and just different situations in this country politically .... I have developed a certain awareness about the situation of the Puerto Rican people, the political situation in Puerto Rico, its relationship to the U.S. Before that I was living like a little girl. I could only see people in a spiritual way -- either they were going to hell or they were going to heaven. Then when I got this awareness, I realized that there was something else to this life.

Celia describes her decision to return to school as one step in the developmental crisis that resulted from her becoming more politically active and aware.
My decision to go back to school came about when I realized that in this system you have to have a degree. I realize that I have potential in many areas, but like a lot of people, you're not given much opportunity to show what you can do unless you have the degree that they call for.

Another thing ... when I developed a certain awareness about the situation of the Puerto Rican people, I realized that this was the only way I could get ahead. That was the biggest turning point of my life. If you want to describe a turning point like you are on one road, and all of a sudden you're on another one, I'd say that was the last one, because ... going back to school, it's not really a turning point. Once I had developed a certain consciousness, I knew that I was going back to school. I was on that road already, and school and education just happened to be on that road.

Thus, the political consciousness which Celia developed as a result of her community involvements made it impossible for her to accept the limitations of her position as a working-class Hispanic woman.

Returning to school, which expanded her developmental possibilities, represented a step towards resolving this contradiction between individual aspirations and social limitations.

Like Celia, Nadia, a 32 year old drug rehabilitation counselor, describes the most significant turning points of her adult life in terms of shifts in consciousness which resulted from community and political involvements. For Nadia, as for most of the women in the sample, the first turning point of her adult life was marriage at the age of 17:

What pulled me out of high school was getting married .... I was married when I was 17, and ... I think that was a big change in my life, but I don't know how much it changed me. I think it might have changed my environment a lot, but I don't think it changed me a lot.

In contrast to marriage, which for Nadia was an expectable turning
point that did not lead to major transformations in consciousness, 
her participation in the civil rights movement at the age of 25, 
destructured the familiar order of her life, and initiated a spiral 
of external and inner-psychological changes.

Another turning point was the time that I divorced my 
first husband. I think I went through a lot of 
traumatic changes at that time because I was just becoming 
involved with the movement for civil rights. I was 
introduced to myself as a Black person with an under-
standing far greater than I'd ever had before. I was 
sort of saturated with what the problems were socially for 
Black people .... The whole movement at the time and my 
involvement with the movement ... played a part in my 
divorce and feelings about myself at that time. From that 
period, my life changed quite a bit. I left home and I 
was devoting myself to civil rights and the kids and being 
self-sustaining and proving that I could make it .... 
Before that I don't know if there was anything major.

The next major turning point in Nadia's life occurred two years 
later, when at the age of 27, she converted to Islam. Again this 
transition, which was interwoven with a major historical trend, created 
certain disjunctions between the inner-psychological and external-
sociological realms of her existence that she is still attempting to 
resolve:

I think another major turning point may have been when I 
changed my religion. I converted to Islam when I was about 
27. And I can remember a lot of social pressure about it, 
because it wasn't just that I felt as though I had changed 
spiritually, but it was a whole physical change and dietary 
change. Everything just got wiped away and I began a whole 
new life style.

I still am studying Islam and trying to continue to 
evaluate what it means to me to be living in the West and 
be converted from Christianity, and how much my own 
conditioning in this society will allow me to deal with the 
religion as it's set up to be. Sometimes it even gets to 
a point where I'm trying to bump heads with what is
religion and what is me .... Cause there are requirements of you and if you begin to ask, "if I can't meet all these requirements am I less of a spiritual person than I should be?" That's another major change.

Since Nadia's individual development was clearly interwoven with social and historical changes, it is not surprising that she underwent another major developmental shift when political activities began to wane in the early 1970's. She attributes her decision to return to school at the age of 30 to her realization that in the atmosphere of economic retrenchment and increasing political conservatism, funding for the community based programs to which she had devoted her life was drying up, and that she lacked the appropriate credentials which would give her occupational mobility.

It (her decision to return to school) was based on the understanding that placed in a certain kind of position ... it was not anything that was general or that could be used elsewhere except possibly to some extent as experience. A lot of people went through that too. Poverty programs were really paying a lot .... They had a lot of people coming in and getting on-the-job experience and being qualified as paraprofessionals, and then when it looked like the funding was going to leave, people were put out, and they really didn't have the kinds of skills or background necessary to say that they could do what they had been doing.

Thus, Nadia attributes the last major turning point of her life, her decision to return to school, to a major shift in the economy, involving both a general economic recession, and changes in funding priorities on the part of the federal government. In addition, there was an inner-psychological dimension to this transition for Nadia, involving her dissatisfaction with the limitations of her paraprofessional status and a desire for
recognition of competence.

The foregoing case examples illustrate that for many of the female respondents, the most significant adult transitions were inextricably interwoven with socio-cultural and economic events, as well as with family life cycle shifts. Grace, Celia and Nadia all underwent a major developmental transition at around the age of 30. However, for all three respondents the key variable in this turning point was not chronological age or age-related inner-psychological shifts, but the specific succession of social and historical events to which they were exposed in their late twenties and early thirties. For all three of these women, as for the majority of subjects, the social world was a compelling force which shaped their developmental trajectories in similar ways.

Although motivated primarily by a combination of socio-cultural and family-based events, the major developmental transitions described by these three respondents involved extensive inner-psychological changes. Thus, Grace describes the expanded sense of competence and independence that resulted from her teaching and community activities; Celia and Nadia, the kaleidoscopic shifts in consciousness and world view that often accompany intensive political involvements. For all three of the respondents, then, such inner-psychological changes were inseparable from crucial social experiences. Indeed, all three respondents attributed the major turning points of their adult lives to changes in both the inner-psychological and cultural-sociological realms. However, when
pushed to clarify their responses on the relative weight of inner-
endogenous versus external factors in precipitating adult develop-
mental transitions, they all asserted that changes in the social world
were primary, as the following excerpts indicate:

Celia: It's all external. It's all in the society you live in. Each one grows according to what s/he's exposed to; so it's not that this person is going to another stage so s/he's ready to change. It's by the exposure that people get. The societal change comes first -- then the internal change. It depends on your experiences, on your economic situation.

Nadia: I think that the change at 30 might have been internal, but the others were definitely external. With changing my religion, it had a lot to do with my sense of identity, with trying to understand who I was. I know that my divorce was really caused by my activities in the movement at the time. The types of activities that I was involved in didn't add to being able to build a marriage .... Well in a way, thinking about adult changes, the changes that people go through are more applicable to what it is they're meeting in life. Most of the adults I know have really been struggling and it seems to me that sometimes just being poor and living in poverty give rise to a lot of things that bring about changes in people -- It's almost like if you're really poor, you can't afford the luxury of analyzing stages ....

Even in cases where social and historical events did not
emerge as predominant factors in precipitating adult turning points,
it is clear that the immediate contexts of family and work, rather
than inner-psychological shifts, were the major catalysts of adult
developmental transitions. For half of the female respondents, events
in the social world were eclipsed by the more immediate contexts
of work and family.

For example, Iris, a 33 year old human services worker with a
long history of community involvement, was unable to enter the sphere
of paid employment or to turn her attention to events in the larger world until her late twenties because her life revolved around meeting the varied and complex needs of her extended family. She describes her early adulthood as follows:

When I first got married, I had a father who was dying, a mother who was older who had one leg, and was not well ... a child who was born with a spinal deformity ... and a husband who had some very special needs too ... so there were all those immediate things that needed my attention .... It wasn't until my father died, my mother died and my daughter stabilized that I had time to think about myself and what I wanted and what I needed.

Iris reports that trying to meet the immediate needs of her family was far more important and pressing at that stage in her life "than thinking about the Vietnam war, which at that point in time was distant, even though it affected me."

The first two major turning points of Iris' life were her parents' deaths. The death of her mother which occurred when Iris was 26 especially affected her. Her mother, an uneducated Portuguese immigrant, had devoted herself to family, but had died "alone" and "unfulfilled" feeling that "there must be something else." Iris reflects, "she had wanted me to go to school and be a professional person."

It was at that point in my life that I began to do a comparative analysis. I began to look at my own life and say that could be me 20 or 30 years from now ... I really began to change at that point .... I began to make demands on my marriage.

One of the demands that Iris made was that she be allowed to go to work, a step which she describes as the major turning point of her adult life.
The major catalyst was going out and finding a job .... My husband had this philosophy that a woman's place is in the home .... I never really believed him, but I went along with him. I finally said, I have to go to work, I'm going stir crazy ... I got a job in a social service agency .... I met some people there who helped me to grow and encouraged me to go beyond .... Meeting people who valued me as a person gave me a whole different perspective on life. There were a lot of ideals and philosophies I had to suppress just in order to survive in the family I was part of ... it was important for me to vocalize them ... then put them into action ... to work in the community.

While family-based events such as her parents' deaths and daughter's partial recovery propelled her into the occupational sphere, it was her experiences at work and in the community that led Iris to separate from her husband at the age of 29, an event which she describes as another major turning point of her adult life. Her decision to return to school at the age of 32, the last major change in her adult life, resulted from a spiral of mutually interacting and reinforcing events in the spheres of both work and family.

There were several things happening to me at that point in my life when I was thinking about going back to school. One was the fact that my husband and I had separated and we were going in different directions at that point .... Money was a factor ... I was really conscious that I would have to support myself ... and my two children were growing up, and my place in the home was not as paramount as it had been ... I had a job and there were people who were really encouraging me to go back .... I realized that in order to have my competence acknowledged, I had to do something about getting a degree.

The developmental crisis which led Terry, a 50 year old para-professional teacher, to return to school was similarly catalyzed by a confluence of family-based and work-related events. Terry describes eight major turning points of her adult life, the first six of which revolved around the prodigious tasks of managing a family of eight
children, on a low income and with little support from a husband from whom she was often estranged. The developmental transition associated with returning to school began during her mid-forties when her last child began junior high school. At that point she entered a community based training program in special education at a major urban hospital. She says about this experience, "It really changed me; I loved every minute of it." What also changed her was the decision to "take control of my own body."

Shortly thereafter, when she thought herself pregnant with her ninth child, Terry decided to have an abortion. Up until this point in her life, Terry had identified with her mother who had had 10 children. "At this point," she states, "I was beginning to realize that I wasn't going to be my mother. My kids were beginning to grow up a little bit. I was beginning to feel like there were a couple of things I wanted to do."

When the pregnancy turned out to be a false scare, Terry decided to have her tubes tied; instead, she emerged from the hospital with a full scale hysterectomy about which she was not informed. This event, which she identifies as another major turning point in her life, led to the deterioration of her marriage:

My husband's reaction to what was done to me was very negative. I don't feel that having that done to me made me any less of a woman ... but my marriage took a different turn .... My husband became interested in other people.

At around the same time that she separated from her husband, Terry was informed that the 766 laws had been changed and that she would have to return to school in order to keep her current job. She
attributes her decision to return to school, the last major turning
dpoint of her adult life, to changes in both family life and the
occupational sphere:

My decision to return to school came just before the changes
in the family, but they were all in full bloom at the same
time ... the changes at work, the problems in the family --
everything.

Thus, Terry's decision to return to school grew out of a particularly
discordant interface of biological, psychological, and sociological
changes. The loss of her reproductive function and the subsequent
breakdown of her marriage, her last child's entry into junior high
school, and the external, legislative and work-related changes -- all
were external events which dislocated her sense of self, and produced
disjunctions among the various dimensions of her life.

The adult development of Laura provides a striking contrast to
that of the majority of the other women in the sample. Laura is one
of the two women in the sample from middle- and upper-middle-class
backgrounds whose current life circumstances would define their
class status as working or lower middle class. This trend towards
downward mobility began for Laura in early adolescence when her
father died, placing the entire family in class transition. An
examination of Laura's life patterns will illustrate the subtle ways
in which social class may affect the way adults experience and
describe their major developmental shifts.

Despite her idiosyncratic class background, Laura's developmental
rhythms as a young adult follow the family centered patterns described
by the working- and lower-middle-class women in the sample. She
identifies the first three turning points of her adult life as dropping out of college and falling in love with the man to whom she is currently married at the age of 20, getting married at the age of 22, and becoming a mother at the age of 24. As was the case for many of the women in the sample, however, these expectable, family-based turning points, which altered the external form of the life structure, did not necessarily lead to fundamental inner-psychological change.

The first major turning point which precipitated such interactive changes in the external and internal dimensions of Laura's life involved her discovery when she was 26 that her son had epilepsy. That this unexpected event, which disrupted the established pattern of her life, precipitated a spiral of inner-psychological and external changes in her life is shown in the following passage:

When my son was a year and a half, my mother saw him have a seizure. She said, "your child, there's something wrong with him. I think he has epilepsy", so we took him to the hospital. And that was a big turning point for me because my husband left .... He couldn't deal with the fact that there was something drastically wrong with his kid. I was working and I had to take my son out of the hospital and get on Medicaid. I had to go through the whole thing on welfare. Even though I know it was only temporary it was a whole thing of discovering what poor people go through.

Another change at that time was realizing that the burden of the responsibility was mine. I had seen it at various times, but it wasn't until then that I realized I had this child, and that was my responsibility.

This realization led Laura to move into the occupational sphere in a more serious career as opposed to job-oriented way. Getting a job at the age of 26 as a pre-school teacher, which she described as "a real big turning point," enabled her to test and develop herself in
the occupational sphere and led to her decision to return to school three years later. She attributes the transition around returning to school both to the changes in her economic circumstances, resulting from her husband's inability to settle into an occupation, and to inner-psychological changes, involving her increasing sense of separateness within the marital relationship. That these changes in both dimensions of her life precipitated the decision to return to school is illustrated in the following passage:

I think I might have flunked out if I hadn't come to the realization ... that my relationship with my husband was such that neither of us knew how long we were going to be operating as a couple .... I guess that I had always assumed that I was not going to have to work all my life. I really had assumed that I'd live in a family and mostly be a mother and that I was only working until my husband got himself started and settled. And then it became obvious that he was probably never going to do that, and that I'm going to have to support myself and that I might as well have a degree and do it in a way that works out best for me.

So I went and had some therapy about a year ago and one of the things that I talked about a lot was what I was going to do with my life. Obviously, I was going to have to start taking it on as my life and stop thinking about myself as part of somebody else who was eventually going to take care of me. And that was a really good decision.

The above passage highlights the increased emphasis given to changes in the inner-psychological realm on the part of the women in the sample who were middle class in terms of family of origin and/or current class affiliation. Indeed, Laura describes one of the most significant turning points of her adult life in terms of the development of certain psychological insights which seemed unrelated to any immediate external changes in her life -- a phenomenon which
was notably absent from the life patterns of the working- and lower-middle-class women in the sample. She maintains that the last major turning point of her adult life had a purely inner-psychological causation:

The other real turning point that's occurred to me very recently is realizing that I had always assumed that I would grow up and marry somebody like my father, and in fact what I did was to grow up and marry somebody like my mother. Why was that a turning point?

Because it changes my whole idea of how I look at myself in relation to other people. It's a strange notion -- that I don't always relate to other people as I think I do.

Despite the fact that she was among the few women in the sample who described a major turning point of her adult life in terms of shifts in the inner-psychological realm, Laura, like the majority of the working- and lower-middle-class women in the study, attributes the major turning points of her adult life to both internal and external events. When asked whether the major turning points of her adult life were precipitated by external or internal changes, she replied that changes in both realms had catalyzed her major developmental transitions, but gave primacy to the changes in the external dimension. "I guess I don't change much without having external things push me into doing it", she reflected at the end of the interview.

The above case example illustrates that while gender seems to be the primary determinant of the developmental rhythms of the women in the study, social class, in both its objective and subjective dimensions, may fundamentally structure, not so much the actual
developmental patterns of the women in the sample, but the way that they conceptualize and describe their developmental transitions.

Conclusions. The data suggest several major conclusions about the adult development of the women in the sample. First the data indicate that for the majority of women, the search for intimacy precedes and often postpones the search for a personal identity. Early marriage and motherhood for the women in this predominantly working- and lower-middle-class sample foreclosed certain opportunities to test and expand the self in early adulthood, centering women in the family and defining the first turning points of their adult lives.

Despite the family centeredness of the lives of most of the women in the sample, the data indicate that the most significant adult developmental transitions -- those which led to substantial changes in the individual's self-concept, sense of identity and social roles -- were inextricably interconnected with experiences in the social world. For the majority of the female respondents, it was their entry into social contexts outside the home which initiated fundamental transformations in their lives and consciousnesses. The contexts could be political, work and/or educational, but their impact was similar; they all precipitated profound shifts in self-concept, social awareness, and sense of self in relation to others.

The data also indicate that crucial social contexts provided the opportunity for the development of certain psychological attributes -- the sense of competence and independence, the desire to be self-reliant, the sense of a firmly bounded identity separate from family-
based roles and relationships. These inner-psychological changes, which eventually led many of the women in the sample to return to school, were thus themselves clearly socially produced.

While there was little variation in the external social and family-based events that triggered major developmental transitions for the women in the sample, there were some variations which seemed to be the result of membership in different cohorts. The six younger women in the sample (those under 35) were more likely to portray the major turning points of their adult lives as interconnected with socio-political and economic events. In contrast, the older women in the sample (those over 35) tended to link the major turning points of their lives to the more immediate contexts of work and family, with the larger social and political climate described as a more distant backdrop. In addition, the lives of the older women in the sample followed a sequential pattern with the first 15 or 20 years of adulthood primarily devoted to marriage and childrearing, and the second part of adult life, the midlife years, devoted to work and education. The lives of the younger women in the sample, tended to follow a simultaneous pattern, with marriage, childrearing, work and education combined in various patterns from early adulthood on (Weingarten & Daniels, 1978). Despite certain commonalities in the life patterns of the female subjects, such as the salience of family relationships, it is clear that the historical era in which a woman comes to maturity is an important determinant of the parameters of her adult development.
Gender and cohort status thus emerged as the most significant determinants of the life patterns of the women in the sample. There are also indications in the data that although it may not fundamentally alter the life patterns of the female respondents, social class may determine the degree to which the women in the study ascribe the major turning point of their adult lives to inner-psychological as opposed to external-sociological factors. Racial differences among the women in the sample did not seem to account for any systematic variations in their developmental rhythms. The one possible trend in the data that may perhaps be attributed to racial factors is the heightened political awareness and commitment among the minority women in the younger age cohort in the sample, and the extent to which such political and social involvements constituted a major shaping force in the life structure.

Regardless of class, race, or cohort status, the life patterns of the majority of women in the sample indicate that there was a qualitative distinction between expectable, family-based turning points and those which involved unexpected events either in the family or in the social world. Turning points with a political or social dimension were often characterized by profound disjunctions between the individual and her social environs -- disjunctions which could only be resolved through further changes. Unexpected but pivotal events involving role shifts within the family, participation in socio-political movements, work experiences, and/or major economic trends often destructured the expected order of these women's lives, propelling
them into a spiral of changes. While changes in the sphere of parenthood and family life such as the maturation of children, separation or divorce were usually the original catalysts which propelled the women in this sample into the social world, it was equally likely that participation in socio-political movements or crucial work experiences would in turn cause major changes and disruptions within the family. The most significant developmental leaps, such as returning to school, often grew out of such an interlocking spiral of changes in the various dimensions of the female respondents' lives.

The life patterns of the male participants. The adult development of the men in the sample, like that of the women, results from a complex spiral of events in the spheres of work, family, and the social world. However, just as family-based events tended to predominate in shaping the majority of turning points for the female respondents, so did work-related events and occupational concerns emerge as primary catalysts for adult developmental transitions for the male respondents. The men in the study tended to describe the majority of the turning points and transitions of their adult lives in terms of events in the occupational sphere; job changes, promotions, and/or occupational successes or failures were the most frequently mentioned precipitating events for adult developmental transitions. Table 3 indicates that events in the sphere of parenthood and family life were secondary, but important catalysts for developmental transitions for the men in the sample.

In contrast to the women in the sample, however, the men in the study tended to discuss the turning points that revolved around family-based
events primarily in terms of their implications for their work lives. Also in contrast to the female respondents, whose lives as young adults seemed to be centered on family-based roles and relationships, the male respondents pursued a separate work identity and work-related goals at the same time that they underwent major family-based transitions.

While the lives of the men in the sample followed the developmental predictions of Levinson (1978) and others in terms of their work centeredness, the extent to which they conformed to the age-specific developmental stages established by previous researchers varied considerably. Since Levinson's schema of male adult development has been increasingly put forth as universal and invariant, it will be used as a base of comparison and contrast in the following discussion of the life patterns of the male subjects.

Briefly Levinson (1978) posits the following supposedly universal pattern of male adult development. During the twenties, the individual tests and defines the self through experimenting with various careers and social roles. The primary developmental task of this period is to establish a provisional life structure which includes tentative career and personal commitments. The thirties begin with a transitional period which entails a revaluation and possible revision of the life structure established during the twenties. In the mid-thirties, the individual is primarily concerned with establishing a career and with finding a mentor who will help him to do so. The major developmental task of the late thirties is "making it" within a profession; the individual must expand his influence and authority
within the chosen field or occupation, and become a mentor himself. Work is also central to the forties, when the man must negotiate the midlife transition, which entails a reassessment of his accomplishments and/or commitments in the occupational sphere, and often a reorientation towards interpersonal or familial concerns.

Levinson (1978) hypothesizes that the above sequence of age-related stages and developmental tasks unfolds relatively independently of the shifting social and historical context. His developmental schema is presented as a universal and invariant form whose specific content alone is affected by shifts in the historical dimension. An exploration of the major turning points of the males in this sample indicates, however, that there are considerable variations from this supposedly universal developmental schema -- variations which seem largely the result of the shifting social and historical context. As was the case with the female respondents, the succession of social and historical changes to which the male respondents were exposed, emerged as a crucial variable in structuring their adult development. The following case examples indicate that the occupational choices and possibilities which determined the turning points for the majority of men in the sample, were themselves inextricably interconnected with changes in the historical dimension -- that is with social, economic and political events which directly influenced the respondents' lives.

Case Illustrations. The ways in which an individual's developmental rhythms are interwoven with historical and social changes is illustrated by the adult development of Juan, a 33 year old community organizer.
Juan was part of a group of young minority leaders who, with plentiful federal funding to support their programs, rose quickly to positions of prominence during the late 1960's, often developing spectacular careers which collapsed when funding priorities began to change. Juan describes five major turning points in his adult life, all but one of which revolved around work-related experiences. However, the data clearly indicates that the occupational choices and possibilities which structured these turning points were themselves determined by larger social and economic trends.

Like many of the male respondents in this predominantly working- and lower-middle-class sample, Juan's entry into adulthood was synonymous with early marriage and parenthood. He stated that he went "from childhood to adulthood in one day." He attributes the first major turning point of his adult life, a physical collapse which occurred shortly after his marriage, to the abruptness of this transition.

My first turning point ... was when I was working for a bank. .... I became very sick physically ... At that time I was experiencing a change ... I was under a situation of extreme pressure, trying to live up to my manhood ... I was newly married ... I got married when I was 20, and looking back I realize I wasn't ready for it.

Juan spent his twenties trying to find meaningful work for himself in a society that, for the most part, denies such opportunities to its minorities. The next major turning point of Juan's life occurred at the age of 24 when, unable to find a white-collar job because, as he said, "no one wanted to hire a militant Puerto Rican," Juan took a job at the Post Office.
I think another major turning point in my life was when I was working in the post office .... It was the most depressing time of my life .... I spent one year in the postal system, but it was like ten years of my life went by.

Why was that a turning point?

Because I realized that this was not me ... this is not a life. This is not even an existence. An animal could live like this ... and I said to myself what a waste of human resources. I took a paycut to take a job at Manpower -- I didn't even know what it was, but they were looking for Puerto Ricans -- because I said to myself, "I'm not going to die here."

Although Juan was eventually fired from this job for political reasons, the skills that he had developed made him eligible for another position as the director of a community development program in a major Northeastern city, a career shift which he describes as the next major turning point of his life. It was in this position that Juan, in his late twenties, was able to achieve autonomy and authority in his work life.

My next turning point was when I left this area to go to _______. Then I had a tremendous growth period. I put it all together .... I began to feel like my people weren't getting a fair share. So I wrote a proposal and it got funded. Really what I did was to develop my own job .... This gave me the opportunity to learn first hand what it meant to be an administrator.... During this time I got to a point in my life in which I couldn't accept that things were the way they were, I've always been able to challenge things that have been around and say, no things have to be better.... On that concept I kept writing proposals. I brought half a million dollars in grants into ______. I pumped two and a half million dollars in loans into the Spanish community. It went on and on.... It was incredible; whatever I touched, it would work.

Juan rode the crest of this economic wave for four years. In his early thirties, with the political climate shifting and federal funding priorities changing, Juan found himself increasingly disillusioned with the efficacy of community work, but without job mobility. He describes the last major turning point of his adult life, which led to his decision to return to school, as the realization that he had "outgrown his job" and "had
nowhere to go." At this point he decided to change careers and enter the corporate sector, a step which necessitated that he earn a degree. He returned to school at the age of 32 because he realized that "the social and economic situation has changed for minorities."

It is clear from this data that Juan's developmental patterns -- his career choices and successes during the twenties and his transitional period in the early thirties -- were interconnected with social, economic and political changes. Although he mentioned age-related concerns, such as the desire to be established in a career in his early thirties, he attributes the major transitions and turning points of his adult life to the social era in which he came to maturity.

My growth had a lot to do with the social era that we were in at that time .... From 1968 on, it was kind of in vogue to be a minority. Everyone wanted to hire you. It was a good time for someone of my background to start to grow .... My personal growth had a lot to do with having a chance to grow. If it weren't for the fact that the agency I worked for existed in 1968, heaven knows what would have happened, because no other job would have given me the opportunity to get into as many things as I did get into .... It wouldn't have happened if the time wasn't right, if there wasn't massive social change .... If it had been some other time -- maybe even the 1950's, no I don't think I could have done it; even now, I don't think I could have done it.

The adult development of Jim, a 33 year old paraprofessional health worker, also cannot be understood without reference to the historical era in which he came to maturity. Jim describes four major turning points in his adult life, all of which are in some way interconnected with major political and social
events. The first major turning point of his adult life revolved around his decision to make political and community involvements the major focus of his life structure during the twenties:

The first major turning point ... was to decide to leave the seminary and not to be a priest anymore. The conflicts at that point were to follow the kind of things that my family saw as really important such as becoming a priest, or making decisions that I thought were important and doing things that I saw to be more valuable. What I started doing was civil rights organizing in the South, and I did that for the next three years.

The next major turning point of Jim's adult life came in his mid-twenties, when he felt conflicting pulls between his inclination to settle into a stable occupation and raise a family, and his desire to continue his political organizing activities. He opted for the former, married a woman with two children from a previous marriage, and took on a series of traditional working-class jobs in order to make a decent income and sustain his family. His dissatisfaction with these jobs, and his desire to continue his political involvements led to his divorce at the age of 29, an event which he describes as the third major turning point of his adult life.

I got divorced after three years, and that was another major turning point .... The major conflict there was kind of personal versus ideological -- which is more important and can you separate the two? Personal being my family, and ideological being questions like what's most important for people to spend their time doing ... I think at that point I made a decision that it was really important for me to do what I felt was important -- to be very politically active, very politically aware. The woman I married didn't really share
the need to put all that together .... The turning point was that I made a decision that was really important to work on, and I didn't feel like I could do it with her.

As was the case with the other major turning points of his adult life, Jim attributes his decision to return to school at the age of 32 primarily to economic and political factors. For Jim, the transition around returning to school was precipitated by his dissatisfaction with the limitations of his paraprofessional status. He had carved out a niche for himself as a paraprofessional in the human services, but was unable to advance professionally without a degree:

I think that initially, it (returning to school) was because the work I'd been doing in health education was fairly unique ... but I had a very difficult time in the place I was working in getting more responsibility ... but more importantly, I was having a difficult time implementing ideas that I had because of the notion in the agency I worked in that because I haven't gone to school, I wasn't competent to make decisions or suggest ways of doing the work better ... which was frustrating ... So I guess I decided that if I wanted to get a position with any kind of responsibility, a bachelor's degree was necessary.

The occupational concerns which precipitated this turning point are evident in the above passage; but at another point in the interview, Jim discussed the ways in which this occupational direction itself was shaped by the social and political movements in which he was active.

The other significant thing that's been happening to me in the past five years is that I've become very aware of feminist principles ... I've been involved in men's consciousness raising groups, and I've been active in the Boston Men's Center ... I think that the
area I'm in, health education, is very close to that .... I wanted the opportunity to expand in that field and pull together the things that I've been dealing with personally and in a professional area that is very close to it .... The closer these two can be brought together for me, the more whole kind of life I'll be able to lead .... I think going to school was a way to formalize that decision.

Finally, Jim cites age-related concerns which contributed to the transition around returning to school:

There's one other thing in terms of adult development. At age 33, I've begun to realize in the last three years perhaps, that I need to become comfortable in an area of skill that is self-sustaining, that gives me enough that I feel I have some worthwhile skills. That wasn't nearly as apparent to me in my twenties as it got to be when I was 30, 31 years old.

Thus, for Jim the developmental transition around returning to school was precipitated by a confluence of economic, political, occupational and age-related concerns.

Jim's descriptions of the major turning points of his adult life yields the following developmental pattern which conforms only superficially to the developmental trajectory described by Levinson. His twenties were spent experimenting with various jobs and social roles, and establishing a provisional life structure which involved both an occupational choice and marital commitment. He went through a transitional period at around thirty, revising his life structure through a divorce and an occupational shift to better accommodate his political interests and activities. In his early thirties, Jim was just beginning to settle into an occupation and to think about advancement within it. However,
as was the case with Juan, Jim attributes his major developmental transitions, his moments of critical choice and fundamental personal change, not to age-linked stages or to narrow occupational concerns, but to socio-political events:

The things that were happening around me, political and social developments, left me very on edge ... I felt like I had to be involved in understanding these things so that I could decide what was best for me. The social and economic and political change that was happening created the need for me to be a part of it so that I could understand it ... and if that hadn't happened, I might have been more secure about spending my time on my personal life ... so it was the external forces that prompted some of the turning points, most of them actually.

Jim's adult development, then, is best described not as a linear progression of age-related stages, but as a series of dialogues or disjunctions between self and social world that were precipitated by economic, social and political events.

The adult development of Jack, a 39 year old unemployed electrician also illustrates the ways in which the most significant turning points for the men in this sample were interconnected with social and economic events. In contrast to the previous two respondents, Jack came to maturity and settled into an occupation in the expanding economy of the 1950's and early 1960's. He describes only one major turning point in his life, that is, only one experience that affected him to the "point where I would drop certain beliefs or certain ways of living": his unemployment and return to school at the age of 38.

Up until that point Jack describes his life as "one fluid motion" .... "without dramatic changes." His first adult transition
involved "changing from a young single person to a dependable family man" -- a transition which he went through quite smoothly in his early twenties. His subsequent transitions were all work-related. He moved steadily through the ranks of his chosen occupation, rising "all the way up the ladder from apprentice to journeyman, to foreman to general foreman to superintendent." By his mid-thirties, Jack, like many blue-collar workers (Levinson, 1978; Rossi, 1979), had reached an occupational plateau. He had "pursued just about everything in the electrical business" and was unable to make any further significant advancement in his field.

At about the time that he had peaked in his occupation, the economic recession of the 1970's transformed the construction industry in his geographic area, creating substantial unemployment. After 30 years in the electrical business, Jack was left without a job. He attributes his decision to return to school, the most significant turning point of his life, primarily to this shift in the economy:

It was basically forced on me economically .... Conditions were 40 percent unemployment in the construction trades. When I was out of work, I went to the union and was told it would be roughly two years before I went back to work ... So I decided to go back to school.

I definitely know that when I was laid off and started into education that was a major turning point in my life. It was such a drastic change. Going back to school was definitely a turning point ... It's something I've always wanted to do. It's the first really great thing I've ever satisfied myself with.

Although external, economic factors were the major catalysts for the transition around returning to school, Jack also attributes this decision to his increasing sense of stagnation in his work life.
The biggest problem that I started to feel in the past two years before I was laid off, and eventually returned to school, was that I had just about accomplished everything there was to do in the field .... Even if this period of unemployment hadn't happened now, I might eventually have come around to pursuing my degree.

Thus, Jack's dissatisfaction with the ways in which his working-class occupation curtailed his possibilities for further growth and change was also a major precipitating factor for his decision to return to school.

The above case example supports the initial research concept that working- and lower-middle-class adults may be particularly vulnerable to shifts in the economy, and that such shifts may indeed be major catalysts for adult developmental transitions. In addition, Jack's life patterns illustrate that social class may shape the developmental possibilities of adults in important ways. Levinson's developmental schema, with its emphasis on career ascendancy in the late thirties, may be inappropriate for working-class men like Jack, who reach a career plateau in their mid-thirties and are unable to achieve the authority and autonomy involved in "becoming one's own man."

The developmental rhythms of Hakim, a 49 year old musician, further illustrates the ways in which race as well as socio-economic status may define the developmental possibilities of adults. Like the majority of the men in this sample, Hakim's first major turning point involved making an occupational choice at the age of sixteen, which he describes as follows:
In the year 1943, I heard the first records of Dizzy, Charlie Parker and the big bands. And I knew immediately that this was what I wanted to spend my life doing, playing that kind of music.

However, unlike the majority of the male respondents, this turning point involved another dimension -- Hakim's introduction to hard drugs, which he describes as "inevitable" given the life that he had chosen. For the next 25 years, Hakim maintained a marginal existence, playing with a number of the great Afro-American musicians when there was work, and retreating into hard drugs during his long periods of unemployment. He describes a number of events that occurred during this period, but maintains that the events "that stand out were not necessarily turning points", for indeed Hakim's life allowed little margin for real transformative change. For example, he describes his period of incarceration as follows:

I was 27 years old the first time I got into trouble with the police. I did five years in prison. I can't say it was a turning point in my life. The only thing I can say about it is that it gave me an experience that you can only have by being incarcerated over an extended period of time. It increased my knowledge of the world.

Another career related event which occurred after Hakim's release from prison, indicates the ways in which his developmental possibilities, and particularly his ability to advance in his chosen occupation and achieve mastery within it, were circumscribed by his racial identification:

Well, one turning point was when I had come out of prison. I had just gotten a job with Yuseff Latif, and I wasn't able to keep the job. The reason I wasn't able to keep the job was that there had been a white saxophone player prior to myself. And when I got out of prison, he let this fellow go, and hired me. And the club, when it
came time to renew this contract, told him if he didn't get this fellow back, they wouldn't renew his contract. Yuseff and everybody else in the band, except me, had families, wives, children. It was a decision that he had to agonize over, but nonetheless I lost the job ... so I went back to drugs.

What saved Hakim from collapsing into despair in a society that did not value his considerable talents was his connection during the early 1970's with a group of politically conscious Afro-American musicians. One of the leaders of this group became his mentor, and invited him on a European tour when Hakim was in his mid-forties. He describes this experience as a major turning point in his adult life:

Going to Europe was definitely a turning point because this was the first time that I ever played for people who loved the music and respected the musicians. I had never played in front of 40,000 people before and I found that although I had been virtually ignored by all forms of the media and the music business in the U.S., I discovered that my work was very well known in Europe and the Far East and South America. This was a very gratifying experience.

Hakim's experiences on this tour and his continuing association with a group of politically conscious musicians initiated a spiral of changes in his life, which included finally overcoming his dependency on drugs and entering an educational program. He describes these two events, both of which took place in his late forties, as the major turning points of his adult life:

Returning to school and getting rid of being dependent on methedone were the major turning points of my life. I now feel like I've been reincarnated and like I'm starting all over again. There's nothing that's beyond my grasp in terms of what I can do, my own self .... I'm approaching my instrument and music with a completely different outlook. I'm spending time with the instrument .... I'm spending time studying the academic and theoretical aspects of
music .... I'm analyzing the skills that I have possessed all these years, but never really looked at in an analytical light .... I feel like I'm starting out again just like a person who's just being born, or a person who's just reaching adulthood.

It seems significant that at the age of 49, Hakim feels "like a person who's just reaching adulthood." Although he had an occupational direction in his early adulthood, it was only in midlife, when certain educational and economic opportunities became available to him, that Hakim was able to settle into his chosen occupation, and expand his sphere of mastery and influence within it. It also seems significant that in his early forties, at a time when Levinson and others (1978) insist that men must give up mentors or be developmentally impaired, Hakim was just beginning to form a strong mentor relationship. Having been able to continue his own adult development through returning to school, Hakim is now beginning to experience the generative impulses, the inclinations to exercise authority and provide leadership, that are associated with mentoring. He states that one of his primary concerns is to act as a mentor to other musicians whose developmental possibilities have been stunted as his once were.

I feel that I've been one of the disinherited of the earth and I know many people who are magnificent musicians who are not in the mainstream of life. They've given up, they have no hope; if they do, its built on false promises. They're not trying anymore, and if they do try, they're fighting a losing battle. One of the things that I've been trying to do since I've been at school ... and what I'll probably be doing for the rest of my life, is to call attention to these people and to work for a situation that will cause some efforts to be made to bring these people into their own, rather than writing them off.
Conclusions. The data suggest several conclusions about the developmental patterns of the men in this study that point towards major revisions of the existing theories on male adult development. While the interviews indicate that the major turning points and transitions of adult life for the male respondents are centered around occupational concerns, they also show that there was little age-specificity to the developmental progression of the adult male subjects. The career shifts that marked the major turning points and transitions for the men in the study, were far more dependent on external social and economic trends than on inner-endogenous factors.

While there was no predictable timetable according to which the male subjects fulfilled supposedly universal and invariant developmental tasks such as choosing and settling into an occupation, or achieving mastery and authority within it (Levinson, 1978), there were some discernible trends in the life patterns of the men in the sample which seemed based on cohort membership. As was the case with the younger women in the sample, the developmental timetables of the four younger men in the sample (those under 35) were clearly shaped by the social and political movements of the 1960's. The political and community involvements of the younger men in the sample (exemplified by Juan and Jim) played a major role in shaping their career choices and changes. During their mid to late twenties, all of the male subjects under 35 became active in social and political movements which led to the development of career directions and commitments. In addition, all of the younger subjects went through a major developmental
transition at around thirty when the political currents that had directed and sustained their work commitments began to shift. At this point the younger male respondents returned to school either to solidify and expand the career choices made during the twenties, or to modify these occupational directions when the political climate in which they had been formed began to change. Thus, while the four younger male subjects did go through a major developmental transition around the age of thirty, this transition was clearly precipitated, at least in part, by the shifting social, economic, and political context.

The age thirty transition of the working- and lower-middle-class adults in this sample provides a striking contrast to the age thirty transitions of the middle-class subjects studied by Levinson (1978), Gould (1978), and Sheehy (1976). All three researchers attributed the age thirty transition noticed in their subjects not to external factors, but to a spontaneous, inner push to be something more. The generalizations of all three researchers about the internal causation and supposedly universal nature of the age thirty transition are strongly contradicted by the primacy of the external, and specifically economic and social factors, in precipitating adult developmental transitions for this working- and lower-middle-class sample. However, while there are indications that socio-economic status shapes the developmental rhythms of most adults in important ways, this conclusion must remain a tentative speculation, because it is based on comparisons with the existing literature rather than on
systematic trends in the data.

The cohort bindedness of the age thirty transition for the male subjects in this study provides further evidence of the dependence of adult transitions and turning points on external, socio-economic factors. None of the four older men in the sample (those over 35) experienced any major turning points at the age of thirty; nor did they experience any age-specific "mid-life crisis." Rather (with one exception) the older men in the sample, who came to maturity in the expanding economy of the 1950's and early 1960's, moved smoothly into stable working-class occupations and advanced steadily within them. The major turning points for the older cohort of subjects occurred in their late thirties to late forties, either when they realized that they had exhausted the possibilities for growth and advancement in their working- or lower-middle-class occupations, and/or when external social and economic factors transformed their possibilities for employment.

Thus, as was the case with the female respondents, variations in the developmental rhythms of the male respondents seemed primarily a result of cohort particularity. For this predominantly working- and lower-middle-class sample, such cohort effects emerged as more significant determinants of adult developmental transitions than either race or class.

Despite the salience of cohort membership in structuring the life patterns of the men in the sample, the data clearly indicate that, as was the case for the female respondents, the most significant
turning points for the male respondents were those which involved disjunctions between self and social world. In contrast to the normal, expectable turning points of adult life, which, for the men in the sample, revolved primarily around work-related transitions, the most significant adult developmental shifts, which were more in the nature of developmental crises, usually evolved from the impact of major historical, social or economic events on the individual life course. Such events in the cultural-sociological realm often destructured the expected order of the subjects' lives, initiating a period of profound discordance and turmoil. For the majority of the male subjects, the decision to return to school grew out of such periods of discordance, and represented an attempt to re-establish synchrony between the individual-psychological and cultural-sociological dimensions of subjects' lives. However, although returning to school was often a first step towards restructuring a synthesis in lives that had been destructured by social and economic events, it in turn created new disjunctions between self and social world, as the following section indicates.

The Transition Around Returning to School

The data indicate that for the majority of the adults in this study, returning to school was part of a major adult developmental crisis, and that this crisis was qualitatively different from the expected turning points of adult life. There are several reasons why this should be the case. First, as the preceding section
demonstrates, for the majority of the adults in this study, the decision to return to school resulted from disjunctions between the individual and his or her social world -- disjunctions that were created by the impact of socio-economic, historical and (for the women in the sample), family-based events on individual lives. Returning to school often involved attempts to reestablish synchrony at a particular discordant moment of individual, social and historical change.

That returning to school should involve a major developmental crisis is also indicated by the fact that such a major life change in adulthood entails a deviation from the age norms and age status system that Neugarten and Datan (1973) have identified as the most important determinant of adult life patterns. Despite the lack of age specificity to the turning points of the adults in the sample and particularly to the transition around returning to school, the majority of the adults in this study showed considerable awareness of the age-expectations in the society, and a painful self consciousness about the ways that they were off the socially-prescribed schedule. For example, one respondent describes her sense that in assuming the social role of student, she is going against the expected timetable of adult life:

Lydia: There are certain things that are expected at certain ages. You figure a woman is going to get married between the ages of 21 and 25, that they're going to have babies before they're 30 ... things like that are predetermined by society ... even going back to school. There just aren't that many people who go back to school at 28. I think I've broken the rules for what is expected for someone at certain ages.
The discordance between the traditional adult developmental timetables and the idiosyncratic developmental rhythms of the adults in this sample sometimes led to considerable internal conflict as the following statement indicates:

Jack: I'm doing something I've always wanted to do, and I'm enjoying it -- and I shouldn't be enjoying it. I should be out working, bringing money into the family. I feel this as a major turning point.

Both of these statements indicate an awareness, also expressed by the majority of the other respondents, of a disjunction between their individual needs and aspirations, their impulses towards growth and change during adulthood, and the socially defined and often personally constricting system of age norms and age expectations. Thus, the decision to return to school, which for the majority of the respondents represented an attempt to synchronize individual development with social and historical changes, in turn created new asynchronies between the individual and his or her social world.

This section will examine some of the major changes that resulted from returning to school along several dimensions of the respondents' experience, including changes in goals and self-concept, transformations in roles and relationships within the family, and changes in relationship to community, class or ethnic group, focusing on the sex, class and racial differences that emerged from the data on all of these dimensions.

Changes in goals and self-concept. The majority of the female respondents (10 out of 12) experienced dramatic changes in goals and self-concept as a result of returning to school. Whereas six of the female
respondents reported that before becoming students, their only significant goals revolved around fulfilling their family-based roles as wives and mothers; four of the women in the sample reported that before returning to school, they had no significant personal or career goals. These responses were made despite the fact that 10 of the 12 women had worked outside the home in the sphere of paid employment for two to 12 years before returning to school. After an average of three semesters in the program, however, all 12 of the female respondents reported a major shift in personal goals, which were increasingly defined in terms of career or work commitments. For example, one female respondent reported that before returning to school

Celia: The only goal I had was to be ... a good mother to my children. That's what I thought my place was -- to be a good mother and I guess a good secretary.

When asked if her goals had changed since she returned to school she replied that she has decided to pursue a law degree after completing her B.A.

My goals have changed very much. When I started reading and being exposed to school, I realized that I was actually more intelligent and that I could do more things than I had thought. My goals have no end now. I think I can do anything as long as I get prepared for it -- that's the difference.

Two other female respondents described similarly dramatic transformations in goals and aspirations as a result of returning to school:

Grace: I certainly saw myself moving through my husband in terms of goals. That he should be successful was a goal of mine which I certainly worked in any way possible to make happen .. but I don't know that I had personal goals ... My goals certainly are different now. I have goals that are
particularly my goals that only I can effect .... Well I guess I'd really like to have a career ... I'd like to continue to develop programs that I think are important to kids and I think I do that well.

Iris: Prior to returning to school, I can't really say that I had any goals. One of my major goals was to be a good parent. I thought that was my most important goal. I tended to set short term goals. Now my goals have become long range ... they're goals that I have set on my job; to get my bachelor's degree, my master's degree. My goals still include parenthood, but not to the exclusions of myself as an individual.

"But not to the exclusion of myself as an individual" -- these words indicate that for the women in the study, returning to school precipitates profound transformations in sense of self in relation to others. All of the female respondents reported a heightened sense of self-esteem and self-confidence as well as increased feelings of competence and independence. Such changes in identity and self-perception are reflected in the following responses to questions about the impact of returning to school on self-concept.

Lydia: I feel a lot better about myself. I feel like I'm accomplishing something. I feel that I'm contributing something. Even in my job because it's changed somewhat where I'm not typing anymore. I can understand what people are talking about in politics and labor from my studies .... I feel a hell of a lot better.

Celia: I used to see myself as a person who couldn't do anything and now with certain courses it (returning to school) has helped me. The awareness that you develop helps you to develop self-confidence -- helps your mind to grow.

Grace: The way I feel about myself has changed ... I've had a chance to be with people who are considered to be competent, intelligent people .... If I can work with someone who is traditionally educated and competent, and I too can be competent and not feel inferior, then I can feel secure about myself.
Terry: Before I returned to school I had a terrible complex. It was a combination of my eye (a slight physical deformity) and not having gone to college. I considered myself quite dull. I couldn't compete. When I got into school, that opened up a whole new thing. I had my own field. I found that I can teach. My self-image improved. I felt better about myself. I lost weight. I believe in spending money on myself which I didn't before ... I cut my hair in an Afro. This is me. I don't have to worry about the rain. And I don't wear sunglasses ... that's significant ... I feel much better about myself.

Whereas the responses of the female participants reveal that the experience of returning to school entails profound changes in goals and self-concept, the responses of the male participants to questions about changes in these two dimensions are less conclusive. Only three of the eight male respondents reported that their goals had changed substantially as a result of returning to school. For the majority of the men in the sample, returning to school was primarily a means to achieve career goals that had been formulated at an earlier point in the life cycle, but that had been unrealizable because of personal or financial limitations. For example, returning to school allowed one male respondent to realize a long-term career goal.

Jack: I'd always wanted to go to college, even in high school ... but my parents didn't have the money. Being in the electrical business, one of my main goals was always to be in the labor school. I'm definitely a labor person. My goals haven't changed since I returned to school.

The questions on changes in self-concept also elicited contradictory responses from the men in the sample. Three of the eight male respondents reported that they feel "stronger", more "self-confident" and more "validated" since they returned to school. The following statement is an example of the dramatic transformation in sense of
self experienced by some of the men in the sample as a result of returning to school.

Hakim: I used to think of myself as being lazy ... I haven't felt very good about myself and my abilities and this was debilitating to a large degree, and I don't think there was any significant change in that until last semester when I took four core requirements ... and I did well. This made me feel a lot better about myself and gave me quite a bit of confidence. I think this was a real turning point. I feel like I'm starting all over again with a new life, and the prospect of attaining the kind of abilities I need and want are available to me.

On the other hand, for three of the male respondents, returning to school initiated a period of self-doubt and diminished self-esteem. When asked if returning to school had affected their feelings about themselves, two male respondents replied as follows:

Jim: I guess I would say yes. If anything in the negative sense ... What made me angry was that I felt I was fairly competent ... and to come back to school and have to justify that competency to people who may not be very close to the field isn't something that made me feel any better ... I can't say its enhanced my feelings about myself.

George: It (returning to school) sobered me up quite a bit. I learned that there are people more intelligent than I am. It broadens you, but it also makes you more humble.

These fluctuations in self-concept were especially pronounced in cases where returning to school coincided with a period of unemployment as was the case with Jack:

The way I feel about myself has changed ... It was kind of a hard process to adjust myself to this type of living. I was brought up with the idea that ... if you are the man, you have to earn a living ... you are the breadwinner ... To fight this feeling I had to rely mainly on thoughts that I've developed over a period of years and it's quite a hard process. Even now I can still feel the effects of not being the head of the family ... the boss of the family. It's quite a hard adjustment.
The discrepancy in the ways in which the men and women in the study discussed changes in self-concept and in goals and aspirations leads to several speculations. The uniformly positive changes in goals and self-concept experienced by the female respondents as a result of returning to school, and the more ambiguous changes experienced by the male respondents may be attributed to the differences in the process of identity formation between the genders. There are indications in the data that the shaping of one's identity as a separate person over the course of the life cycle is a fundamentally different process for women than it is for men. For the women in this study, the quest for intimacy in early adulthood tends to take precedence over the consolidation of a personal identity separate from family-based roles and relationships. Thus, it is not surprising that prior to returning to school, the majority of women in the study, including those who worked in the sphere of paid employment, defined their primary goals in terms of their roles as wives and mothers. Indeed, the data confirm other research findings that indicate that women's self-esteem and identity are centered on familial, rather than occupational roles, regardless of their position in the labor force (Lowenthal et al, 1975; Rubin, 1979).

For the women in the study, then, returning to school involved a shift from defining the self vicariously in terms of others to developing, often for the first time, an autonomous and firmly bounded personal identity. One female respondent described this process with particular clarity as follows:
Mildred: I started working 2½ years ago at the same time that I went back to school. As a wife and mother I had lived a very sheltered life ... When I applied for that job 2½ years ago, I had no idea that my life was going to change so drastically. I have a feeling that I'm learning now what I should have known back in my twenties. .... In a way it's exciting, in other ways, it's frightening because I feel like somehow I've lost twenty years of my life in there. I wouldn't say I've lost them because I had my family, but I'm talking about my own me, my own "jo" in Spanish -- my own personal person. I felt like somehow I got cheated out of life. For 20 years I was very dormant. I just existed. I really didn't live. In the roles of mother and wife, yes, but I'm talking about Mildred, the person, me.

This excerpt highlights a theme that emerged in the majority of the interviews with the female respondents: that for women returning to school involves a developmental shift that is fundamentally discontinuous with their previous relational identity. It is not surprising, therefore, that the women in the sample tended as a group to experience a greater expansion in sense of self, and more profound changes in goals and aspirations than did the men in the sample, for whom returning to school may not have been so fundamentally discontinuous with their previous definition of self.

However, the fact that the men's responses to questions about changes in self-concept and goals were not as conclusive as those of the women in the study does not necessarily indicate that their core identities were not being affected by the experience of returning to school. The data does indicate that many of the male respondents seemed to have already developed an autonomous work-related identity before returning to school. However, for some of the male respondents, especially those who were in traditional working-class jobs or who
had experienced job discrimination because of their race, it is questionable how genuinely autonomous this separate, occupationally grounded identity actually was. With some of the male respondents, one has a sense that the previous work identity was as much prescribed by the limitations of class or race, as generated out of personal choice and searching. In fact, the three males who experienced dramatic changes in sense of self as a result of returning to school were those for whom entering an educational program involved entering a realm that they hadn't expected would be possible because of their class or race. Moreover, even those male respondents for whom returning to school was more continuous with their previous self-definition may have been experiencing shifts in their core identity. Perhaps these transformations in core identity and self-concept were not discussed by the men in the study to the same extent as the were by the women precisely because these changes were not so fundamentally discontinuous with previous sense of self, and thus were not accompanied by the same dramatic changes in self-awareness as was the case among the female respondents.

The gender differences in changes in self-concept that emerged from this study may also be attributed to the differential positions of men and women in the family -- especially given the working-and lower-middle-class status of the majority of the respondents. Previous studies have shown that sex-role stertotyping tends to be more pronounced in working- and lower-middle-class than in middle-class families, and that the socialization of working- and lower-
middle-class women is more delimited to their traditional roles as wives and mothers than is that of their middle-class counterparts (Komarovsky, 1976; Lowenthal et al, 1975; Rubin, 1979). If the polarization of sex roles within the working-and lower-middle-class family places women in a subordinate and limited position, it is not surprising that they would experience a greater expansion in their sense of self than did the men in the study.

For the male participants, on the other hand, returning to school often entailed a shift into a subordinate role which contrasted with their dominant position in the family and in blue-collar and lower level white-collar jobs which may have offered some autonomy. It seems significant that for the three male respondents who reported a diminution in self-esteem, returning to school was experienced in terms of a loss of autonomy and a move into a subordinate position. None of the minority males in the sample experienced such a diminution of self-esteem, indicating perhaps that their return to school did not necessarily entail a loss of status or power either in the family or in the occupational sphere. These speculations about the differential patterns of socialization and the fundamental role inequity between men and women in the working-and lower-middle-class family are supported by the differential impact which returning to school had on the family lives of the men and women in the sample.

Changes in family roles and relationships. The data suggest that for the adults in this study, returning to school transforms the nature of family life, altering the balance or roles and relationships
within the family and in some cases challenging the traditional division of labor. Again, there were significant sex differences which emerged from the data on all of these dimensions. Although the majority of both the male and female respondents reported that returning to school created considerable friction in the marital relationship, all of the married male respondents (6 out of 8), as opposed to only half of the married female respondents (3 out of 6), described their spouses as generally supportive of their decision.

The six married women in the sample characterized their husbands' reactions to their decision to pursue a degree as ranging from mild supportiveness to overt hostility. Nadia, a female respondent whose husband is a student at a local community college, described the marital conflict that was generated by her return to school as follows:

My husband and I at times have a lot of problems. I had a lot of trouble going to Amherst. I think if I had gone to a local school, if I was not so far from home base it might have been easier for me, but I wanted the university .... The jealousies and other kinds of psychological factors -- I tried to analyze them -- led to some conflict at times, enough for me to have to talk to a counselor about it. I had the feeling at times that he was deliberately trying to stop me from going -- and I should have had -- especially to the extent that I was giving him total encouragement.

Why do you think he was doing that?

It might have been the fear of my excelling. He's going for his associate's degree; I'm going for a bachelor's. That might represent in his mind that I would be in a better position socially than he would be.

Elise, another respondent, also described the psychological and marital conflict created by her husband's resentment towards her
attempts to establish an autonomous base outside the family through returning to school:

It (returning to school) definitely does cause changes in my relationship with my spouse. His feeling is that I'm breaking away from my family; my whole theory is that I'm not -- whatever I do will hopefully benefit everybody--that it's not a selfish thing. Really it is selfish -- selfish and then not selfish-- because my goal is to get a better job. It's not just to get educated just to get educated. It has at times caused a lot of friction because the program and being in school takes time away from them ... which causes him to re-evaluate our relationship. Therefore that's pressure on me and it's something that I have to fight.

The above excerpts highlight a theme that emerged from the interviews with three of the six married women in the sample: that the inner conflicts which women must overcome in order to make the type of serious commitment to their own self-development that pursuing a college education entails is considerably exacerbated by their husbands' lack of support and, in some cases, active attempts to sabotage their efforts. The psychological consequences of such an internal conflict with self and external conflict with spouse are considerable. The women whose spouses opposed their return to school had to struggle with debilitating feelings of guilt, self-doubt and anxiety about the possibilities that their quest for an autonomous self would shatter their marriages. Indeed, these data confirm previous research findings that in returning to school, women may be asserting a claim to autonomy that is fundamentally incompatible with their socially structured roles within the family, and which may thus lead to marital instability (Brooks, 1978; Rubin, 1979).

Significantly, three of the six female respondents who were
separated or divorced at the time of the interview reported that their decision to return to school was a major factor in the marital breakup. Grace, for example, describes the ways in which returning to school limited her capacity to respond as fully to the physical, social and emotional needs of her family. She attributes the deterioration of her marriage to the refocusing of her energy on social roles outside the home.

I'm divorced now and that was the beginning of that ... because my husband was very comfortable with the Grace who stayed home, who cooked, and who essentially was being of service to some other people, and that was the major focus of my life. And then when this other person starts to emerge who wants to be of service to the family, but for whom that was no longer the prime focus, it was difficult because I started to ask other people to make some adjustments, to accommodate me.

My husband found school threatening ... My relationship with him changed .... There were meetings, there were class nights, there were seminars and group sessions ... in the evenings. If I cooked supper, I often wasn't there to eat with them ... I wasn't sitting there and he found it really difficult, and I found it enjoyable ... that was the difficulty ... so our relationship deteriorated.

Other women in the sample found that returning to school led to the deterioration of relationships with extended families as well as of relationships with spouses. Iris, for example, reports that her decision to return to school further alienated her not only from her husband (from whom she had recently separated), but also from her extended family.

I got a lot of support for my decision to return to school, but interestingly enough, I didn't get it from my family. At that point I was separated from my husband. He was extremely threatened even though I was already separated. At that point we were going back and forth about whether we should reconcile or not ...
My sisters and brothers felt very threatened by both my work and my going to school. They thought I was trying to go beyond them. Of course, there were a lot of things that they were questioning ... the whole separation, the line of work that I was entering into, which is contrary to what they believe .... At one point they totally shut me out of their lives ... My sense of isolation when I was going through that turning point was very acute because I really believe in the family -- even though I had a different point of view than they did. It was very difficult when they totally rejected me. That sense of dissonance was so total and so complete, ... It was so different even from what I experienced with the marital breakup ... It was just an incredible loss for me.

The data suggest that the price for returning to school, and in a larger sense for seeking to develop an identity that is internally grounded, rather than inherently relational, that is centered on occupational and/or social commitments as well as on family, is especially high for the minority and working-class women in the sample. The above excerpts from the interviews indicate that the spouses and, in some cases, the extended families of the working-class women in this sample are threatened not only by the possibilities for increased autonomy and independence from the family which returning to school entails, but also by the possibilities for upward mobility which a degree provides.

Returning to school may indeed place the individual in class transition by expanding her access to middle-class occupations, and in a more general sense, by providing her with the opportunity to develop interests, attitudes and values that are predominantly middle-class in nature. It seems significant that the three married women in the sample whose spouses expressed considerable resentment about their decision to continue their education, as well as the
three female respondents for whom such a decision was a precipitating factor in the divorce or separation were married to men who were either working at traditional blue-collar jobs, enrolled in training programs of a vocational nature, or unemployed. It is possible that some of the hostility expressed by the spouses of the working-class and minority women in the sample whose marriages were severely stressed or ended by their decision to continue their education may have been generated by one spouse's insecurity at seeing the other in the process of such a class transition. The data suggest, then, that the marital tension and instability created by returning to school may be as much the result of class-related factors as of sex-role issues for the women in this predominantly working-and lower-middle-class sample.

The speculation that class-related factors may be as significant as sex-role issues in precipitating marital conflict for the women in the sample is substantiated by another trend in the data. The three married women whose spouses were supportive of their decision to return to school were themselves middle class in terms of current class affiliation and/or family background. Moreover, these women were married to men who were engaged in professional middle-class jobs or who were enrolled in advanced degree programs, and who were thus undergoing a similar class transition.

For example, Laura, the one respondent who is from an upper-middle-class background and who currently lives with her artist husband on a working-class level income, maintains that the increased sense of independence and autonomy which she has developed
since returning to school has substantially improved her relationship with her spouse.

My husband was very supportive. He thought it was a good thing -- my returning to school. I think partly because he sees our relationship as not being a long term relationship and that makes him feel more comfortable to know that since he wouldn't have been able to provide for us, now I can always provide for us. It's relaxed our relationship. We're better friends now. Last year we separated for six months. I guess when I finally get my degree, we'll decide whether we're going to stay together .... We're much more up front than we were before. It's much easier to say how we feel and not to feel that he might leave me if I say some things. I don't think it would be a disaster if he left me, and I don't think he'll leave me because of the things I say.

Another respondent of working class origins, whose husband is a professor at a major Northeastern university described a similarly positive transformation in her relationship with her spouse as a result of returning to school:

My husband was very positive. I know I was too dependent on him in that I was getting my identity from him and what he did. Naturally, he felt this in a lot of ways. Also he felt like he had to be the sole breadwinner .... We worked together so much and did everything together that when he first went to teach at ________, I was always in his office .... I was too dependent on him ... I know that he felt this. Now he feels more relaxed. If something happened to him, and he wanted to stop working, I could go out into the world.

It seems significant that the marital problems which arose for the women in the sample who were middle class in terms of family origin or current class status were attributed not to the spouse's attitude towards their decision to continue their education, but to the rechanneling of energy on the part of both spouses away from family-based roles and relationships into work and educational
commitments. Both Mildred and her husband, for example, are pursuing degrees in midlife -- she a bachelor's and he, a doctorate. Mildred maintains that her decision to return to school at the age of 40 was made largely as a result of her husband's encouragement, but states that the marital relationship has suffered as a result of their overburdened schedules:

My husband goes to school, too. He's working on his dissertation and he's working full time and his job is very demanding. What has suffered a little bit is our relationship. Sometimes when he goes out, I'm coming in; when I'm coming in, he goes out, and we don't have the time we used to spend with one another. It's been a very trying period for both of us. We're both very involved and committed. Sometimes it takes two or three days before we can catch up with one another to say, "What have you done for the last couple of days?"

In contrast to the women in the sample, for whom social class emerged as a significant factor in determining the degree of marital strife created by returning to school, all six of the married male respondents, regardless of class background, described their spouses as extremely supportive of their decision to return to school. Moreover, whereas the spouses of half of the female respondents experienced their wives' attempts to continue their education as incongruous with their role as wives and mothers, or as a fundamental threat to the stability of family life, the spouses of the men in the sample tended to perceive their husbands' return to school as a move which would benefit the family as a whole, and more importantly, as a natural extension of a man's socially defined and supported right to test and expand the self as fully as possible in the occupational sphere. The male respondents reported that their wives
expressed varying degrees of resentment about the time and energy that they devoted to their education; but only in one case did this resentment lead to anything like the degree of marital tension and conflict experienced by the women in the sample. The following responses to questions about changes in the marital relationship that resulted from returning to school will illustrate these points more concretely:

George: Well my wife wanted me to go back to school so when I finally did go back, she couldn't say too much. She understood what the situation was.... She always told me to improve myself. I finally started with one course which wasn't bad ... one night a week. Then I started taking on bigger loads ... two courses, then four courses, and she started grumbling. No so much that I was away from home at night, but that I was away on the weekends. I had to crack the books on weekends, and that really got to her. So I usually take her out to eat twice a week, and that helps, but I haven't had much of a problem. There's grumbling, there always is. She works, she's under pressure, but I don't think it's affected our home life.

Juan: The only person who really encouraged me to continue my education was my wife. It's one of those things where I'd been working a lot for other people, and not paying attention to my own personal growth ... so she wanted me to get my degree, so that I could do the things I wanted to do without feeling inadequate.

But it has changed the relationship because of the pressure that school has put on me .... You get on each other's nerves quicker .... And I'll do anything I can to help her, but when it gets into the battle for privacy and study time, it's touch and go .... Sometimes you can cut the tension in my house with a knife.

Despite the kinds of marital tension and conflict described above, all of the men cited their spouses' on-going emotional, and in three cases financial support as crucial factors both in their decision to return to school and in their capacity to withstand the stress of being a student. The data indicate that the wives of the
men in this sample, shared a fundamental assumption that work, rather than family, forms the core of a man's social identity, and thus were better able to tolerate the upheavals in family life that occurred when their spouse's returned to school than were the spouses of the majority of the married women in the sample.

Whether the marital relationship deteriorated or improved as a result of returning to school seemed to depend for the men in the sample not so much on class-related factors, but on the extent to which the adult development of the spouse followed a parallel course. It seems significant that the spouses of half of the six married male respondents had returned to school either before or concurrently with their husbands. By contrast, only one of the six married female respondents had a spouse who was enrolled in a comparable degree program at the time of the interview. That the course of the marital relationship may depend on the degree to which the adult development of two spouses is intertwined is supported by the following elaborations of two male respondents, both working class, on changes in the marital relationship which resulted from their returning to school. Jack, whose wife had "pioneered" his decision to continue his education by earning a B.A. five years earlier, reports that returning to school actually enhanced his marriage by expanding the interests and experiences shared in common:

My relationship with my wife changed when she returned to school. All my life, I've been interested in world history, world conditions, but she was pretty much the woman of the house. She could talk about diapers, about how to prepare a certain meal. But once she returned to college, her horizons broadened. In fact they broadened
beyond mine. Then I caught up with her, and now we're both back to school. We both appear to be on par.

In contrast, George, whose wife is an office worker with a high school education, acknowledges that returning to school has created a communication gap between himself and his wife:

She's a high school graduate. I accept that. Her interests are the typical interests of a secretary, a high school graduate. There's a communication problem as far as intellectual conversation goes. I don't resent it at all ... I accept her for what she is.

The sex and class differences that emerged from the data on changes in the division of labor within the household parallel those that characterized the data on changes in the marital relationship. Just as the spouses of the middle-class women in the sample were better able to tolerate their wives' increasing differentiation and independence from the marital relationship than were their working- and lower-middle-class counterparts, so also were they, in most cases, more willing to restructure the traditional division of domestic labor in order to assist their wives in their educational pursuits. Moreover, just as returning to school for the men in the sample did not precipitate the degree of marital crises experienced by many of the women in the study, nor did it lead to any fundamental transformations of the balance of roles and relationships within the family.

Not surprisingly, for the working- and lower-middle-class women in the sample whose husbands opposed their return to school, household labor continued to be divided along traditional lines,
with the woman shouldering the major responsibilities of housework and childcare. The majority of working- and lower-middle-class women in the sample expressed considerable guilt and anxiety about asking their spouses to consider even the most minimal readjustment of roles and responsibilities within the household. This point is illustrated by the response of Elise, whose husband felt that she was "breaking away" from the family by returning to school, to questions about whether returning to school has affected the way that she manages family and work responsibilities:

The way I've managed marriage, childrearing and career hasn't changed. I've just added school. I still do the work in the household. Because that was something that I said I would do. I would not ask that I go to school, and that he come home and cook and clean .... All I ask is that he watch the kids while I go. That's all I ask. I don't ask anything that would make him feel like he's being used or that would put him in a different role than he feels that he's supposed to be in. I do all that when I get a chance.

By contrast, the female respondents who were middle class in terms of family of origin or current status, and whose husbands supported their decision to continue their education, often initiated radical shifts in the division of labor within the family. Mildred, for example, reports that before she finalized her decision to return to school, she called a family conference in which her husband and five children discussed a more equitable division of household labor.

When I decided to go to school, we sat down like a family council and my husband talked to the children and said, "Okay, Mommy's going back to school. Before she commits herself, we have to have some kind of understanding and
agreement about what our lives are going to be like, because she's not going to be home that much now," and the kids committed themselves. They said, "Hey, we'll support Mom." Every once in a while we reaffirm that commitment.

While Mildred reports that the verbal encouragement which she received is not always backed up with concrete actions, she maintains that this symbolic commitment on the part of her family to a reapportionment of household tasks freed her psychologically to relinquish both her family-first orientation, and her previously high domestic standards.

The kids, they've been great about helping, but they don't do the in-depth cleaning like I do. Unfortunately, the house has suffered. I used to keep a beautiful home, but unfortunately now it's the last priority. There are times that I used to worry about it, but now if I get it done, I get it done, if I don't, tomorrow's another day ... and the same thing with food .... Because my work is very absorbing, so when I work, I don't have time to think of anything else. Nine to five is my job, and then I come home and it's either meetings or school work.

For some of the women in the sample, returning to school involves not only such a reapportionment of household tasks and responsibilities, but also a fundamental rebalancing of roles and relationships within the family. Laura, for example, reports that her return to school precipitated both a total reversal of the previous division of labor, and a significant realignment in the relationships between herself, her husband and her 9 year old son.

My husband does a lot of the cooking now, almost all of the housekeeping, and still is productive at what he does. He cares about those things in a way that I don't care about them. I don't mind if the dishes aren't done, the floors aren't clean .. He does all those things. I used to do them before I returned to school.
My son has also taken on a lot more responsibility. He has to get himself up; he has to get his own breakfast; he has to make his own lunch for school .... He found that hard — that he has a lot more responsibility than most kids in his class do ... When I first started school, P. (her son) didn't understand that his life was going to change so much. He saw me less; he had to do more for himself; he had to develop a relationship with my husband, which he had never really had had to develop because he was often gone for months at a time while making films. But they've developed a very strong relationship during the past year because they've been forced to.

The above case illustrations demonstrate that for the women in the sample, returning to school either precipitated major shifts in the traditional division of domestic labor (as was the case for the middle-class female respondents), or generated considerable tension around even minimal rebalancing of roles and relationships within the family (as was the case for the working-class female respondents). In contrast, the male respondents did not report any significant change in the pre-existing division of labor within the home as a result of returning to school. The men who had quasi-equalitarian household arrangements before returning to school, as was the case with two of the men in the study, continued in this pattern as did those male respondents whose families maintained a traditional division of domestic labor. Moreover there were no consistent ethnic or racial variations from this pattern.

The data presented in this section indicate that returning to school transforms the nature of family life in differential ways for the men and women in the study. Pursuing a degree for the male respondents, which was usually undertaken to upgrade jobs and expand opportunities in the occupational sphere, is inherently
consonant with the central position of occupational concerns in the male life structure, and thus does not necessarily entail a rebalancing of roles and relationships within the family. For women, on the other hand, the decision to return to school entails a substantial commitment to her own self-development, that may fundamentally conflict with her traditional role as the provider for her family's physical, social and emotional needs. In becoming more agentic and occupationally focused, the female respondents found themselves increasingly unavailable to fulfill these needs -- which led in some cases to intense marital conflict or marital breakup, and in others to a major rebalancing of roles and relationships within the home. Whether a woman's quest for an autonomous identity, centered on her own educational and work accomplishments, led to one outcome or the other seemed to depend primarily on the class affiliation of the respondent and her spouse. The female respondents for whom returning to school involved class as well as sex-role transition, experienced considerably more stress in the marital relationship, and considerably less cooperation from their spouses than did those for whom the decision to pursue a college degree involved a revision of traditional sex-role patterns alone.

Changes in peer relationships. The notion that returning to school may alienate the individual from his or her class or ethnic group is further supported by the responses of the adults to questions about changes in peer relationships. The majority of the
respondents, and significantly, those who are working class (13 out of 20) acknowledged that returning to school had alienated them from their usual social networks. Jack, for example, reports that since he returned to school, his working class friends treat him "like a man on the other side of the fence":

I've lost touch with some of the men I've worked with for many years. I still go to the union meetings. Some of the men are still working. A few of them seem to treat me differently. They refer to me as a man who's on the other side of the fence, because I've returned to academia, and they consider quite wrongly so in my point of view, that anybody who's in academia is contrary to their beliefs.

Sometimes this sense of being in class transition is expressed in shifts in values and political awareness. For example, Celia states that while her economic situation is still the same as that of the majority of her peers in the Hispanic community, there is a psychological distance between her and her previous social network because of the political awareness that she has developed as a student:

Sometimes it is hard for me to relate to them because they are not seeing certain things yet. My situation is the same economically, but I have certain goals now that my friends don't have .... I'm having problems relating to people who are in my situation -- people who are divorced, low-income Puerto Ricans. You don't find many people who are aware politically.

Most of my friends still see problems in terms of the immediate situation ... For example, let's say someone is a drug addict or alcoholic or cheating on welfare, I try to analyze this politically. They don't see that yet.

Two other respondents echo this sense of social isolation that ensues from being in class transition:
George: I wouldn't say I had any close friends ... even before I went to school I felt uneasy with people in my "working class." I'd go to a party and I just couldn't deal with these people because of their shallow views. I just couldn't converse with them and if I did converse with a few, some of my liberal ideas were ammunition for a heated debate .... I'm not trying to sound like I'm an outcast or elitist ... I just feel uncomfortable. Being my age and being in the status I'm in, I cannot cultivate friends outside my class. There is a caste system out there. People think there isn't, but there is. So I just accept it, and bury myself in my books.

Lydia: They're (her friends) all just having babies .... I am really not on a level with the people I work with. I have a few girlfriends who are divorced, etc., but they have no desire to go back to school. They don't understand why I'm doing it, what I'm fighting for.

Thus, the transition around returning to school not only created a higher level of discord in the marital relationships of the working-class adults, but also precipitated disjunctions between the individual and his or her social network, class or ethnic group.

Conclusions. In this final section, we have explored the amplification effect of a particular developmental transition -- the transition around returning to school. The interviews suggest that this idiosyncratic life transition, which was shared by all of the adults in the study, precipitated dramatic changes in the inner-psychological lives of the participants, involving a revaluation of self, a revision of life goals and aspirations (primarily for the women in the sample), and a reconceptualization of the self in relation to others. In addition, returning to school altered the interpersonal world of the majority of the participants, transforming familial and peer relationships, and in some cases propelling the individual
into class transition and thus leading to a sense of alienation from family, community, and/or ethnic group.

Since the transition around returning to school involved such substantive and interactive changes in both the inner-psychological and cultural-sociological dimensions of the respondents' lives, it might best be described as an adult developmental crisis, which must be distinguished from the more routine, expectable turning points of adult life. For many of the respondents, this crisis grew out of disjunctions among the various dimensions of their experience, and in most cases involved an attempt to achieve better synchronization among these dimensions. However, because of the complex nature of adult development, which involves changes along four dimensions of an individual's experience (the inner-biological, individual-psychological, cultural-sociological and outer-physical), such a resynchronization must at best be only temporary. For the resolution of adult developmental crisis often necessitates structural changes in the individual's life, which in turn precipitate new disjunctions and asynchronies that can only be resolved through further changes. From the data presented in this section, we have seen that the transition around returning to school, which grew out of a moment of particular discordance among the biological, psychological and cultural levels of the adults' lives, in turn created further disjunctions among these dimensions -- which were largely unexpected and unpredictable.

On the basis of these data, we can conclude that an adult developmental crisis, such as that involving the transition around
returning to school, does not conform to an invariant or predictable pattern, but rather involves a spiral of unpredictable and interlocking changes with their own unique and idiosyncratic momentum. The only consistent patterns that could be traced through the data on the way in which the adults in this study experienced the transition around returning to school, were related not to chronological age or life stage of the participants, but to their gender, class affiliation, and to a lesser extent, racial identification.
A major purpose of this study was to explore the nature and causality of adult developmental transitions for a small number of working- and lower-middle-class adults. In so doing, I hoped to assess the extent to which current theories of adult development, formulated through research among a population that is predominantly male, white and middle-class, are applicable to a population that is primarily female, minority and/or working- or lower-middle-class. The study was shaped by a theoretical orientation which can best be described as "dialectical." A dialectical perspective assumes that adult developmental transitions must be conceptualized as resulting from a complex spiral of mutually interacting influences including individual-biological and psychological changes, as well as historical, social and cultural changes. It was hypothesized that social factors such as gender, social class, and cohort status would be as, if not more, important than chronological age or stage-related inner-psychological shifts in precipitating adult life changes. The research design was of necessity exploratory and qualitative because of the relative weight of each of these variables, and the way they interact to precipitate adult developmental transitions has been largely unexplored. The goal of the study was to use the limited data base not to make population generalizations, or to prove definitive causal connections, but to draw some conclusions on a more abstract theoretical level that might point toward revisions.
of existing theories of adult development and to develop ideas for further research.

The contribution of this study is thus largely theoretical in nature. This theoretical focus is, I believe, justified by the current state of the field of adult development, where exploratory studies must continue in order to prevent a premature foreclosure of paradigms. Such a concern with theory, and specifically with formulating a dialectical theory of adult development, does not necessarily entail a rejection of empirical methodology. Indeed, as Baltes, Reese and Lipsitt (1980) point out, the theoretical work in adult development is fast reaching a level of complexity and sophistication which increasingly demands empirical validation of both a qualitative and quantitative nature.

This chapter will summarize both the empirical and theoretical contributions of this study, both of which must be considered in the light of the study's methodological limitations, and will suggest directions for more systematic, empirical research.

Limitations of the Study

The methodological limitations of the study are clear. First, the nature and size of the sample make it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the developmental rhythms of women, minority and/or working- and lower-middle-class adults. Both the non-random selection of the subjects and the possible bias introduced by my pre-existing relationship with some of the interviewees limit the generalizability
of the findings, as does the fact that the subjects were enrolled in a non-traditional degree program, and were therefore by definition probably not representative of working- and lower-middle-class adults in general.

In addition, there were limitations to the process of data collection and analysis. Since I did not want to influence the research participants with my theoretical preconceptions and since I was concerned with gathering varied empirical data about what constitutes an adult turning point, the interview questions dealing with adult turning points were designed to be general and open-ended, which created some variation in interpretation by interviewees. In retrospect, it is clear that in my concern with allowing the research participants the freedom of their own reflections and interpretations, I may not have clarified certain questions as well as I might have, or probed sufficiently into certain areas of the participants' experiences.

One area which would have benefitted from further exploration is the way in which external events reverberate in the inner-psychological lives of the individuals. It is clear from the data that major turning points and transitions which may have been precipitated by external work-related, family-based or socio-economic events, involved an inner-psychological dimension that not all respondents fully developed in the interview. Inner-psychological experiences of loss and separation, dependence and autonomy, self-reliance and sense of competence usually accompanied the most significant adult turning points and transitions. In fact, the interviews indicate that the greater the
external change, the more extensive its reverberations in the individual consciousness. However, changes in the inner-psychological dimension which accompanied external changes were often more difficult for the respondents to discuss fully in the interview. Often such inner-psychological shifts had to be inferred from the interviews, using much the same process that one would use in looking for defensive elaborations or anxiety signs in a clinical interview. More direct probing of the psychological dimension with adults who found it difficult to discuss this aspect of their experience, might have yielded more reliable and complete data.

Another fundamental methodological limitation of the study involved the retrospective nature of the data elicited. Research participants were selected who were in the midst of an idiosyncratic life transition -- returning to school in adulthood. They were asked to reflect on the precipitating factors for that transition, and to describe the other major transitions of their adult lives. This approach is inherently problematic since there is no way of knowing whether the respondents might have conceptualized their life patterns or defined their major transitions differently at another point in their adult development. Berger (1963) has suggested that the scattered data of one's biography is continually reorganized as the individual moves from one social world to another, and experiences concomitant changes in world view. Thus, the retrospective, biographical approach to adult development has inherent epistemological limitations. However, while it risks replicating the subjects'
distortions about their own lives, such a subjective-phenomenological approach to the study of adult developmental transitions seems appropriate given the contradictions and inconsistencies in current studies about the precipitating factors for developmental growth and change during adulthood.

The lack of any systematic form of interjudge reliability testing in the thematic analysis of the data constituted a further limitation of the study.

**Summary of the Research Findings**

Despite these methodological limitations and inadequacies, this in-depth study of the adult development of a small number of working- and lower-middle-class adults yielded some significant research findings with theoretical relevance. The interviews indicate that the participants in the study did undergo fundamental growth and change during adulthood. However, these changes were not directly a function of age or of predictable stage-related inner-psychological shifts, but rather of pivotal events in the spheres of family, work, and the social world. When asked to describe the major turning points of their adult lives, very few of the respondents replied in terms of change in chronological age or age-related inner-psychological shifts. It wasn't the general, expected life changes such as changes in chronological age or predictable shifts in family and work roles that precipitated developmental crises for the adults in this study; rather, major developmental transitions were catalyzed by the impact on
individual lives of unexpected and idiosyncratic events, usually in the socio-cultural, economic, or familial realm, which left the individual without meaningful work or social roles.

Such pivotal events often precipitated a spiral of changes not only by altering the external life structures of the participants in crucial ways, but also by creating disjunctions between the inner-psychological and external-sociological dimensions of the participants' lives. Indeed, it is clear from this study that adult developmental transitions result in large part from the dialectical tension between these two dimensions of the individual's existence. The individual exists with his or her own set of psychological dynamics and internalized images of self and other. Social, political and economic events created tensions, contradictions or disjunctions between the individual and his or her social world. They set the individual into intensive dialogue with the social environs -- dialogues which often precipitated major developmental crises, involving not only changes in the individual's external life structure, but also a realignment of the social world within the psyche -- of the internalized images of self and other that cause us to be who we are. The most significant adult developmental shifts, such as returning to school, seemed to evolve through the participants' attempts to synchronize their individual development with the progression of social, economic and historical change. But while the transition around returning to school represented an attempt to resolve contradictions among the
various dimensions of the participants' experience, it in turn created new disjunctions between the individual and his or her social world, often leading to a chain of unpredictable and unexpected changes.

Thus, for this predominantly working- and lower-middle-class sample, adult development might best be described as an interlocking spiral of changes in the inner-psychological and external-sociological realms, rather than as an orderly sequence of predictable age-linked stages. Such a developmental spiral was far from predictable and invariant for the adults in this sample. Rather, such sequences of internal and external changes seemed to depend on the particular resources, social roles, occupational opportunities, and possibilities for community and political involvements available to the individual throughout his or her life course.

Moreover, the majority of the adults in this study, did not talk about inner-psychological changes as separate from external events. One subject spoke for many when he described the relative weight of internal and external factors in precipitating adult developmental transitions as follows:

One reacts on the other .... But I think that external changes triggered the inner changes .... The individual's experiences, the society, the culture, the environment that s/he lives in is the determining factor.

The crucial importance of external and specifically of socio-political and economic, as well as work and family-based events, in precipitating developmental transitions for the adults in this study indicates that the search for predictable, age-specific stages with an inner-psychological causation on the part of adult developmental researchers
may be misguided.

Thus, this study indicates that adult turning points may be more socially regulated than universally age specific. Among the factors that contribute to the social construction of adult developmental transitions are gender, social class, and cohort status. The data suggest that there are significant differences in the developmental trajectories of the two genders. The major turning points of adulthood for the women in the sample seemed to result from a confluence of events, and usually involved crucial shifts in family-based roles and relationships as well as pivotal changes in work or the broader social world. The majority of the women in the sample showed a life pattern characterized by a period of family centeredness in early adulthood, followed by a period of personal expansion and identity search, usually involving significant work and/or political and community involvements. Although the majority of adult turning points and transitions for the women in the sample did indeed revolve around family-based events, the most significant adult turning points were often those which involved such transformative experiences in the social world.

In contrast to the women in the sample whose major developmental shifts coincided with crucial events in the family life cycle, the men in the sample experienced major adult developmental transitions in terms of fluctuations in their work or professional lives. As was the case for the female respondents, the most significant turning points for the male respondents, that is, those that involved profound
inner transformations as well as major shifts in life structure, were most often those with a political or social dimension. Furthermore, the career shifts which marked the major developmental transitions for the men in the sample, were themselves inextricably intertwined with social, economic, and historical trends.

Contrary to Levinson (1978), whose recent investigations have shown that the basic sequence of adult developmental stages is the same for both men and women, this study suggests that the two genders develop differentially during adulthood, and that the developmental models based on the male experience do not necessarily provide a basis for the study of female adult development. The close correspondence between female adult development and cycles of family development which emerged from this study indicates that the future studies should further investigate the ways in which women's individual developmental rhythms are intermeshed with those of the family life cycle. This study also indicates that female adult development may not be as narrowly family focused as previous studies have suggested (Lowenthal, et al, 1975; Rossi, 1979). The particular points at which women's developmental transitions dovetail with or diverge from those of the family life cycle, and the particular historical circumstances under which either of these patterns is likely to occur are other areas for future research.

In addition, future studies on female adult development must examine the impact of different patterns in the timing of family and work cycles on the psychological development of the adult female. How
do the developmental rhythms of women who postpone marriage and childrearing until their thirties or forties compare with those of women, like the majority of female respondents in this sample, who experienced a period of family centeredness in early adulthood before expanding their developmental possibilities through work and/or political and community involvements? How do such differential patterns of timing affect the ways in which the complex strands of intimacy, identity and autonomy are interwoven for women (and men) at different points in the life cycle? And finally what are the central developmental tasks for women at different periods in the life cycle, and how do they differ from the central developmental tasks faced by men? Moreover, the fact that some of the subjects had a spouse who was pursuing a degree at the time of the interview, and, more importantly, that the quality of the marriages of the male respondents seemed to be linked to the extent to which their adult development overlapped with that of their spouse, indicate that future studies should examine the ways in which the adult development of couples is interconnected.

Cohort membership emerged as another crucial determinant of adult developmental transitions for this working- and lower-middle-class sample. The ways in which the developmental progression of the individual was interwoven with social and historical changes varied considerably depending on the cohort membership of the subjects. Certain historical changes, and particularly the social and political movements of the 1960's which led to expanded educational and career
opportunities for women, minorities and working-class adults, played a key role in shaping the life patterns and structuring the developmental transitions for the majority of the adults in the study. However, the lives of the younger members of the sample, in particular, bear the imprint of the period of social and political turmoil in which they came to maturity. What also distinguishes this younger group of subjects from those in the sample who were over 35, was the level of awareness about the extent to which their individual development was intertwined with the shifting social and historical context.

These research findings suggest, then, that the comparative study of developmental transitions among different cohorts represents a viable method for investigating the relationship between individual developmental change and social change, and particularly for assessing those aspects of adult development that may be universal and age-specific, and those that may be socially and historically constructed. It also seems important to further investigate intercohort differences in the developmental rhythms of adults, and especially to identify and assess the ways in which factors such as socio-economic status, race and/or gender differences cause adults to respond differently to social and historical events.

There are indications in the data that social class, as well as gender and cohort status, affects not only the fundamental nature and timing of adult developmental transitions, but also the ways in which adults experience and discuss these transitions. Here my conclusions are especially speculative since the study was not designed
to make systematic interclass comparisons. However, even the limited class differences among the adults in this sample yielded some intriguing findings with implications for future research. Significantly, the only respondents who emphasized inner-psychological changes as precipitants of adult developmental transitions were those who were middle class either in terms of family of origin or current class status. Moreover, among those subjects who either had been, or currently were members of the middle class there was a sense that adult transitions should be precipitated by inner-psychological changes instead of by external events. As one respondent, a downwardly mobile woman with middle-class origins, comments:

There were changes caused by external things, such as moving here, going on welfare. I think from now on the changes in my life will be dictated by me, not by externals in that having learned some other skills, I now know that I can go out and get a job .... I have control over my life, over what I do, and where I go.

This sketchy, but interesting trend in the data may be interpreted in several ways. First, it is possible that the opportunity to experience adult transitions and turning points that are motivated by inner-psychological shifts rather than external events may be a middle-class based phenomena rarely experienced by working-class adults in this society. It is also possible that middle- and upper-middle class adults may tend to conceptualize their development in terms of inner-psychological shifts because their socialization and class culture have perpetuated the illusion of individual control over the social world. Working- and lower-middle-class adults, on the other hand, may be more likely, because of the real economic constraints on
their lives, to experience and acknowledge the impact of external socio-economic events on their individual development. Moreover, working- and lower-middle-class adults may not be socialized in the language of self-reflection and psychological change, and may thus more readily identify and discuss the external rather than the inner-psychological components of adult developmental transitions. While it is impossible to draw definitive conclusions from this study about the ways in which social class affects the nature, timing, and inner experience of adult developmental transitions, it is clear that the impact of social class, class culture and/or class consciousness on the ways in which adults experience and describe their developmental transitions is a crucial area for further research.

Gender, cohort status and/or social class emerged as more significant determinants of the variations in the developmental transitions of the majority of adults in this study than did racial factors. Perhaps one of the reasons why race did not emerge as a more salient category in determining the developmental transitions of the adults in this sample was that this was an upwardly mobile group of minority adults. One sees only hints in these data of the most flagrant ways in which race can affect the life patterns of minority adults. One subject, for example, maintained that her early adulthood had followed
The growth of adult education programs for low-income minority adults is an historical phenomenon which enabled many of the subjects in this study to reverse or escape such patterns altogether.

There are, however, some themes in the data which indicate that the impact of racial factors on adult transitions and turning points is a crucial area for further research. It seems significant that the minority subjects comprised the largest number of adults in the sample who connected their adult developmental transitions with both socio-political and inner-biological factors. The life patterns of both Hakim and Terry illustrate that inner-biological events may create particular discordance in the lives of the minority subjects and that such inner-biological events have a social dimension that they may not have for the other respondents. Both Hakim's drug addiction, and Terry's unwanted and unnecessary hysterectomy were biological events that resulted in a certain sense from social oppression, directly related to the respondents' racial, and probably to a lesser degree, class status.

Moreover, it seems significant that eight of the 13 subjects who described the major precipitants of adult developmental transitions in terms of social, economic and/or political events were Black or Puerto Rican. The minority adults in the sample tended to exhibit a more heightened awareness of the ways in which their developmental
rhythms were interwoven with socio-political changes, and this awareness was particularly developed among the younger age cohort. The latter point indicates that future studies should further investigate the differential impact of socio-cultural events on different cohorts, with attention to interracial variations as well as intercohort variations in the ways in which individual developmental shifts are intertwined with social and political change.

Finally, it is possible that race, like class and gender is a pervasive category which permeates all aspects of the individual's life patterns in ways that this study was not designed to elicit.

Theoretical Conclusions

The above summarized research findings provide a basis for returning to the theoretical questions posed at the beginning of the study about the applicability of recent theories of adult development, to a population which is predominantly minority, female and/or working class. This study has provided some initial answers to these questions. However, given the exploratory nature of the study and the size of the sample, the answers must of necessity be tentative, and more in the nature of speculations than definitive statements.

On the basis of the research findings in this study, I would tentatively conclude that theories which define adult development as an age-related unfolding of characteristics internal to the individual such as those by Gould (1978), Levinson (1978), and Vaillant (1977) are not necessarily applicable to women and/or working- and lower-middle-
class adults. Far more useful for an understanding of the life patterns of this population are theories which focus on the social, historical and interpersonal contexts in which adult life changes take place (Neugarten, 1968; Neugarten and Datan, 1973; Riegel, 1975, 1976, 1979), or studies which explore the shaping influence of gender, social class and/or cohort status on the adult life course (Lowenthal et al, 1975; Neugarten, 1968, 1973; Rossi, 1979, 1980; Rubin, 1979).

For women, adult developmental tasks such as identity formation and career choice and ascendancy do not necessarily occur in a linear, predictable and age-specific progression, but must be synchronized with marriage and child-rearing. The increasingly complex and variable ways in which women are combining work and family commitments over the course of the adult life cycle leads to a conception of female adult development which is less linked to chronological age and more to shifts in roles in the spheres of both work and family.

Age-linked developmental models may be similarly inappropriate for working- and lower-middle-class adults whose developmental possibilities are more dependent on shifts in the economy than is the case for the middle class. The wide range of personal and professional options, the dazzling array of career lines and the smorgasbord of personal growth options available to the professional middle class provides the social fabric out of which adult developmental transitions are shaped for this population. The majority of working- and lower-middle-class adults, on the other hand, experience considerable limitations in educational and economic opportunities, which may
restrict rather than enhance their possibilities for growth and change throughout the life cycle. Class, according to Sennett and Cobb (1972), is above all "a system of limiting freedom" (p. 28).

Perhaps one of the major ways in which class limits the freedom of its members is by defining or restricting the possibilities for growth and change throughout the life cycle. The interviews with the 20 adults in this study support previous research findings such as those by Lowenthal et al. (1975) that the majority of working- and lower-middle-class adults may experience the feelings of frustration and the impulses towards growth associated with adult turning points and transitions. However, their opportunities for growth and change during adulthood are circumscribed by their class position. One respondent summed up the developmental possibilities of many working- and lower-middle-class adults as follows:

Not many men have the opportunity to change and to have that change influence their lives. They're stuck with whatever they're doing because of the lack of education ... or lack of preparation to be able to change jobs. Again, I guess, it only comes through the opportunity ... if you've had the opportunity to seek out a different purpose, a different job, a different goal. It's kind of sad for those who don't have the opportunity ... who are stuck with whatever they're doing because they have to support a family or whatever. These periods of frustration come and what can they do about it? Nothing.

This study explores the ways in which social and historical changes, and specifically the expansion of adult education programs and the increased economic opportunities created for working- and lower-middle-class women and minority adults during the late 1960's and early 1980's, afforded a select group of working- and lower-
middle-class adults the opportunity to expand their developmental possibilities and avoid the developmental arrest and/or stagnation that previous studies have described as the developmental norm for this population (Levinson, 1978; Lowenthal et al, 1975). This study indicates that, with working- and lower-middle-class adults, in particular, we cannot forget the threads that interweave individual development with historical and social change.

In addition to assessing the applicability of current theories of adult development to a population not well represented in the literature, this study also raises more general theoretical questions about the applicability of developmental psychology to adulthood. This study suggests that the developmental patterns of adults are too varied, and the precipitating influences for adult turning points and transitions too complex for adult development to be reduced to a universal, chronological age-specific schema. Attempts to develop such predictable, linear patterns of adult development by Levinson (1978) and others may represent fundamentally misguided attempts to apply certain models of developmental theory to the study of adult life. Certain underlying and often unarticulated assumptions of developmental theory -- that development evolves in an orderly and continuous progression, that it unfolds through a predetermined sequence of stages, that biological maturation is accompanied by a predictable set of corresponding psychological changes -- may indeed
be fundamentally inappropriate to the study of the adult life course.¹ What is needed is a theory which posits the historical and social context of adult lives as as valid a frame of reference for the study of growth and development during adulthood, as is the individual's biological maturation or psychological changes. What is also needed is a developmental theory with a fundamentally different concept of the social than that found in the mechanistic models of Levinson and others. At best, most existing theories of adult development relegate society to another "factor" or "variable" which impinges on individual development from the outside. The ways in which the social world functions as a totality, shaping all aspects of individual development and being transformed by it in turn, is largely misunderstood.

The task for future researchers in this area is not only to study sequences of adult developmental changes in order to determine which of these are socially and historically constructed and which are primarily developmental -- that is tied to biological maturation and corresponding psychological changes (Neugarten & Datan, 1973) -- but to further investigate the complex interactions and contradictions among the various dimensions of adult lives, and to explore the ways in which developmental change in adulthood may result from such interactions and contradictions. This study indicates that only a

¹These assumptions underlie the majority of the predominant developmental theories including Erikson's modified psychoanalytic theory, Piaget's cognitive-developmental approach, and Sears' social learning model (Maier, 1978).
dialectical theory -- one that ascribes adult developmental changes to the interaction among various dimensions of an individual's experience including the inner-psychological as well as the cultural-sociological -- can provide us with an adequate framework to further investigate the historically differentiated shaping of individual development and its interconnections with processes of social and cultural change.
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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

A 1. Could you tell me as much as possible about your decision to return to school?
A 2. Why did you decide to return to school when you did? (was it for self or others?)
A 3. Were there significant others who encouraged you to return to school?
A 4. Were there any changes in your life that influenced your decision to return to school?
A 5. Did you like what you were doing before you returned to school?
A 6. Did you have any goals for yourself before you returned to school?
A 7. Have these goals changed since you returned to school?
A 8. Has returning to school affected the way you feel about yourself?
A 9. Do you think others treat you differently since you returned to school?
A 10. Has returning to school caused you to reevaluate or reconceptualize your past experiences? If so, in what ways has this occurred?
A 11. What has it been like for you being a student? Has the experience been different than you expected?

I'd like to ask you some questions about your family.

B 1. Were there any major changes in your family when you decided to return to school? Was your decision to return to school related to these changes?
B 2. How did your family respond to your decision to return to school?
B 3. Did your relationship with your spouse or children change when you returned to school?

B 4. How have you managed marriage, childrearing and career at various points in your life? Has this changed since you returned to school?

B 5. During most of the time you were growing up would you say your family was working class, middle class, or upper class? Which class do you identify with now? Has your class identification changed during your adult years? Since you returned to school?

Now I'd like to ask you some questions about your adult years.

C 1. Could you describe the major turning points in your life since you graduated from high school? What were the major conflicts which you faced during each turning point?

C 2. In general, would you say that these turning points were precipitated by external events (i.e. social and political movements, changes in the family, etc.), by changes in your inner life or both?

C 3. Do you think there are definite and predictable stages that people go through once they reach adulthood? If so, how would you describe these stages?

C 4. Have there been major changes in your life in recent years? What are the central issues, concerns, and conflicts in your life now? Have these changed significantly in recent years?

C 5. Would you say that your life has been similar to the lives of most of your friends and acquaintances? If not, in what ways has it been different?
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