Themes, Methodology, and Using a Life Course Perspective in Public Health

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Section A

Themes Over the Life Course, Part 1
“Types” of Themes

- Individual differences
- Varieties of contexts
- Time patterns
- Cross-level processes
Individual Differences: Agency

- Individual development shaped by both opportunity structure ...
  - Educational system
  - Gender role norms
  - Availability of health care

- And individual agency: choices, seeking opportunity, active responses to situations
  - Planfulness
  - Self-efficacy
Resilience: positive adaptation despite adversity
  - Why do some “at-risk” individuals do well?
  - Important information for programs and policy—promote resilience, don’t wait to fix problems
Varieties of Contexts: Time

- People’s lives are shaped by the historical *period* in which they live
Varieties of Contexts: Time

- And their *cohort*—the year in which they were born
  - Determines age at which they experience a given historical event
  - “Generations”: Baby Boomers, Gen X, Greatest Generation
Age, Period, and Cohort

The Intersection of Age, Period, and Cohort
Varieties of Contexts: Place and Culture

- Place (nation state, region, neighborhood) may matter in its own right, not just as an indicator of culture

- Culture as a toolbox—which we ignore at our peril
Varieties of Contexts: Linked Lives

- People’s lives are affected by the lives of others in their social network, especially their families
  - Effects of unemployment of father on kids via family dynamics
  - Parent’s ill health and need for care affects adult child
  - Context of health behavior
Varieties of Contexts: Social Inequality

- Social inequality reflects social hierarchies, not individual attainment
  - Social groups ranked by dominance
  - Groups definitions may vary
    - Race/ethnicity
    - Culture
    - Income
  - Characteristic of societies
Varieties of Contexts: Social Inequality

- Inequality as “fundamental cause” of disease (and health)