

Human Development Worldwide

Welcome to *Human Development: A Cultural Approach*.

This book covers the entire human journey from conception through death. Throughout, the book highlights the amazing cultural diversity of humanity and how the course of an individual's journey depends crucially on the culture or cultures in which it takes place. You'll learn about:

- human origins and the birth of culture about 40,000 years ago when we went from one way of life as a species to diverse ways of life among different cultural groups.
- genes and prenatal development, including how conception takes place and the explosion and development from a single cell to billions of cells when a baby is born nine months later.
- birth and the newborn, including cultural beliefs about how to ensure a safe birth, and the remarkable abilities of a newborn baby.
- Infancy, that amazing year when we go from bursting into the world to beginning to walk, talk, and love.
- toddlerhood, the second and third years of life, when new synapses in the brain are produced at the astonishing rate of 2 million per second and we become fluent speakers of our native language as the social world expands to include peers and friends.
- early childhood, when children in many countries enter a school setting for the first time and gain a firm understanding of their cultures moral standards that will often endure through adulthood.
- middle childhood, for most people the happiest and most carefree time of life, but also a time when children in some countries must go to work out of necessity to help their struggling families.
- adolescence, the life stage of dramatic changes in the body as sexual maturity is reached, and for people in developed countries, a time when media use becomes a large part of their lives. For example: eight hours a day for adolescents in the United States.
- emerging adulthood, the new stage of life in developed countries from age 18 to 29, when people focus on gaining experience in education work and relationships so that they can make the enduring choices in love and work that will form the structure of their adult lives.
- young adulthood, when people face the challenge of developing a career while also, for most, experiencing the joy and the demands of raising young children.
- middle adulthood, which is a time when aging results in higher rates of physical difficulties, but most people reach the peak of their achievements in work and experience a strong rise in their enjoyment of their relationships with their partner and children.
- late adulthood, the final years of life, a time when the aging of the brain results in challenges and attention and memory, but which is nevertheless the time of greatest enjoyment of life since middle

childhood when the responsibilities of work have receded and life often brings rewards in family relationships, community ties, and religious beliefs.

- and finally, death and afterlife beliefs, including the ways that people in all cultures mark death with distinctive rituals and the marvelous array of beliefs that cultures have about life after death.

Human Development: A Cultural Approach will show that we all share a common humanity. None of us can walk or talk in the early months of life. All of us experienced puberty and reached physical and sexual maturity in the second decade of life. All of us are subject to physical aging from young adulthood onward. And we are all mortal. Yet, the culture where we experience our development influences everything from who lives in the household with us during our childhood, to how much education we receive, to the gender expectations that shape us—not only as girls and boys, but as women and men. And even how long we are likely to live.

In the course of this book, we hope that you gain not only a broader and deeper understanding of human development worldwide, but a richer understanding of your own development—whatever your culture might be.