Exploring the life course: LTI-Y method development

The following chapter describes the period of ethnographic fieldwork and pilot testing that Ryan Brown conducted between the July 2, 2002 and June 30, 2003 in Western North Carolina among American Indian and Anglo youths. The research conducted during this one year ethnographic and pilot stage laid the groundwork for the development of the Life Trajectory Interview for Youth (LTI-Y), and generated many of the insights necessary to make the LTI-Y an intuitive, easy-to-use measure for youth in Western North Carolina. This period of pilot research occurred in four major stages, all of which partially overlapped with each other (both in terms of time and participants shared across stages of research). These stages included ethnographic life history interviews (preparatory stage), as well as focus groups and pilot card sort interviews (Stages I-III). In general, ethnographic life history interviews familiarized the primary investigator with local perspectives regarding the life course, while focus groups served to elaborate and expound these insights, and direct them into more formal domains of investigation for use in the final LTI-Y measure. Finally, pilot card sorts helped finalize and test domains, and confirm and refine items within domains. See Figure 1 for a rough outline of this phase of research, and how various elements contributed to the finalization of the LTI-Y.

Figure 1. LTI-Y ethnography and pilot research, schematic

- Ethnographic life history interviews (n = 21)
- Focus groups (N = 16 / n = 60)
- Pilot card sort interviews (n = 150)
- Final card sort measure / life course inventory (n = 350)

Local life course perspectives and vocabulary, range of life course options
Generate items, extract and refine domains
Extract and test dimensions, finalize domains and items

12 months 18 months

In total, 132 youth between the ages of 15-25 were involved in pilot research. Of the 132 total participants, 46 were Cherokee (31 female, 15 male), 82 were Anglo (46 female, 36 male).

1 Pilot card sorts were different from the LTI-Y final card sort measure, as participants were asked to narrate the results of their sorting procedures, and/or react informally to the measure during and after the interview.
and 6 were “other” (2 African American male, 1 African American female, 1 Hispanic male, 1 Filipino female, 1 Greek female). In the “preparation stage,” semi-structured ethnographic life history interviews involved 21 participants, who helped inform Brown of the general diversity and content of life course pathways and perspectives among youths in the area. The next three stages of research each involved focus groups and one or more versions of a pilot card sort. Stage I (“Life course architecture”) focused on delineating the most important life course events for youths in the local area (as well as the timing of these events). This stage of research contributed directly to finalizing the LTI-Y domain of “life course milestones,” and also contributed indirectly to the development of “life course barriers.” Stage II (“The good life”) focused on material and social goods that local participants considered important for “being happy and satisfied” in life; this stage of research led directly to the finalization of the LTI-Y domain “material goods” and also contributed to the finalization of “social affordances.” Finally, Stage III of research (“Barriers and enablers”) led directly to the finalization of the LTI-Y domain “life course barriers,” and also helped finalize the domain of “social affordances.” During these three stages of focus groups and pilot card sort interviews, 60 unique participants completed sixteen focus groups (broken down into 3 different stages); some respondents participated in more than one focus group. Meanwhile, 94 unique participants completed 150 pilot card sort interviews (of four different types); again, some respondents completed more than one pilot card sort interview. See Table 1 for a full breakdown of research stages, including interviewers, timing, and content of each stage.

### Table 1. Pilot research overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of research</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Topical focus</th>
<th>n (participants)</th>
<th>Time course</th>
<th>Investigators*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Ethnographic life history interviews</td>
<td>Life course trajectories, local vocabulary, major life goals, range of variation</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>07/02/02…08/09/02</td>
<td>RAB, (RW), (WS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage I: Life course architecture</td>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>Major life course architecture: expected life span, gender/ethnic-specific life events, life event timing, salience / prioritization</td>
<td>22 (7 focus groups)</td>
<td>08/13/02…10/24/02</td>
<td>RAB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Card sort interviews (X2)</td>
<td>Positive and negative life events, life event difficulty, timing, importance, ability to “do without” certain events</td>
<td>16 (Round A) 56 (Round B)</td>
<td>10/09/02…03/25/03</td>
<td>RAB, GC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 As noted elsewhere, the GSMS population is predominantly composed of Anglo and Cherokee participants, with African Americans composing the third-largest group in the sample, and even so representing only 6% of the total sample of 1420 (less than 80 individuals). As such, the LTI-Y was developed and piloted for use primarily with Cherokee and Anglo youth, and an attempt was not made to be inclusive of other ethnicities or cultures during the pilot method development stage. This research project was predominantly quantitative in scope (although incorporating a high degree of qualitative research as well); given the difficulty of recruiting participants in the GSMS area, the possibility of recruiting a representative sample of African American participants was not feasible.
Focus groups

Needs and wants (social and material), prioritization of wants, community / sub-cultural specialization

37 (7 focus groups) 10/01/02…10/16/03 RAB

Stage II: “The good life”

Card sort interviews

“Top 10” social and material desires, rank-order priority, difficulty rating, level of accomplishment, “folk taxonomies,” community vs. personal

46 10/09/02…06/11/03 RAB, GC

Focus groups

Life course revision and individual / community specialization of life course trajectories, free lists of life course enablers and barriers

54 (12 focus groups) 02/20/03…05/27/03 RAB, GC

Stage III: Barriers & enablers

Card sort interviews

Relative impact of life course barriers, “helping capacity” of enablers, community relevance, community vs. personal

32 06/04/03…06/30/03 RAB, GC

*RAB = Ryan A. Brown (primary investigator)
GC = Gabe Cyr (Brown’s field assistant)
RW = Rebecca Woodard (GSMS field staff)
WS = Wanda Smith (GSMS field staff)

Names in parentheses indicate limited peripheral assistance, rather than full participation

Rather than following a formal sampling strategy (more appropriate to exact quantitative data for hypothesis testing), pilot research during this period acted as a semi-structured and exploratory mechanism, used to generate ideas and insights helpful for constructing the final LTI-Y life course measure. Brown recruited participants directly through his own contacts in the field (e.g. sample-aged friends, contacts made while “hanging out” at local pool halls, athletic facilities, etc.). He also initiated contact with relevant community leaders (e.g. church leaders, directors of community recreational facilities). Throughout this recruitment process, the help of GSMS office staff (Lisa Crisp, Shelda Calhoun, Wanda Burns, and Rebecca Woodard) was both instrumental and crucial; office staff both recruited local youths directly and facilitated contact with other community leaders. Moreover, our project hired field interviewer and long-time western North Carolina resident Gabe Cyr in January of 2003, who also directly recruited participants (and used her own relationships with community leaders to do so) for focus groups and one-on-one interviews. Given that well over 100 youths were involved in this stage of research, and that travel times within the research area were sometimes more than 3 hours (one-way), it is important to emphasize that utilizing a sample size this large, diverse, and geographically dispersed depended heavily on the individuals listed above for recruitment and maintenance throughout 12 months of interviews. The GSMS field staff was particularly helpful in helping to make initial community and individual contacts, while Ryan Brown and Gabe Cyr performed a large portion of the primary recruitment and sample maintenance.
Preparation stage: ethnographic life history interviews

The goal of the preparation stage, which involved only ethnographic life history interviews (no focus groups or pilot card sorts), was to familiarize the primary investigator with the diversity and content of local life pathways. The primary investigator, Ryan Brown, was a 27 year-old male at the beginning of the pilot phase, and was thus slightly older than the study participants. Furthermore, although spending a good portion of his childhood (roughly 12 out of his first 18 years) in an Appalachian mountain town in Virginia, he had followed a life course pathway (PhD research) that was considerable different from the life pathways chosen by many individuals from rural Appalachia, including those in this study. Thus, while the content of interviews was often familiar (and even caused nostalgic echoes for his home town), this step was necessary to provide a base for “ethnographic resonance” during later, more concrete research processes in the pilot phase (focus groups and card sorts). Furthermore, the Cherokee context was entirely new to Brown, and required considerable ethnographic familiarization before even considering the construction of a measure that would be appropriate for Cherokee participants.

Brown led all 21 ethnographic/life history interviews; 9 participants were Cherokee (5 female, 4 male), and 12 were Anglo (8 female, 4 male). Participants were between 16-22 years, with a mean age of 19 years. All Cherokee participants (except one, who lived off the reservation in Swain County) resided on the Qualla Boundary of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indian. Anglo subjects came from the following counties: Jackson (4), Yancey (5), Graham (1), and Haywood (2). Jackson County is the geographical center of the GSMS study area, with several towns but no cities. Haywood County is similar in its level of development and population density, but closer to the city of Asheville. Yancey and Graham counties are considerably more rural. While Brown led all interviews, GSMS field interviewers were also usually present during interviews with Cherokee participants. This was considered a necessary step to build rapport in the Cherokee area for the primary investigator; accompanying GSMS field interviewers had gained entry and achieved familiarity in Cherokee over a 10 year period, and effectively “passed the torch” of trust and rapport to the primary investigator via their physical presence (and occasional contributed questions) during the ethnographic field interviews.

During each interview, Brown asked participants to list and describe the most important events in their lives, as well as important turning points along the way (i.e. life course transitions). To expound upon this and look toward the future, they were also asked to list and explain their most important life goals, as well as the activities, events, people, and material items that made them feel good about themselves and their lives on a daily basis. Furthermore, they were asked to list and explain the kinds of things that they feel could get in their way on the path towards future life goals. Next, they were asked to compare themselves to someone they feel has very different life goals and a different strategy towards life, and to explain the differences between themselves and this person (preferably a real person, although if this was not possible an imaginary individual was allowed to fill this cognitive space). Finally, participants

\(^3\)To ease access into the Cherokee community, six out of the nine Cherokee participants sampled for these early ethnographic life history interviews were actually GSMS participants, and four of these GSMS participants eventually completed the LTI-Y interview. However, the time of separation between the initial ethnographic interviews and the LTI-Y interview was at least 24 months, and no GSMS participants were utilized for any other stage of method development or LTI-Y piloting.
were asked to expound upon this by talking as much as possible about different social groups, both in high school and beyond, and how these social groups differ in terms of life goals and life strategies.

These interviews generally took between 1 ½ - 2 hours (minimum 45 minutes, maximum 4 hours), and involved considerable detail about participants’ life course pathways and perspectives. Interviews were designed to cover a wide range of life goals, life strategies/lifestyles, and processes/personal characteristics that might block the achievement of life goals. An additional goal was to explore any specificity in these topics by gender, ethnicity (Cherokee vs. Anglo), or geographical region (i.e. rural vs. urban). These interviews were also used as a “springboard” (both in terms of recruitment, format, and vocabulary) for formulating and conducting the next stage of research, life events focus groups.

Brown coded all interviews using NVivo qualitative data coding software, creating coding categories based on themes volunteered by individual participants as well as the overall goals of the study and prior theoretical orientation. These coding categories (along with brief descriptions and explanations) can be found in Appendix 1. Other than coding with NVivo (which was more to familiarize the investigator with interview content than anything), no formal data was extracted from this stage of research. Rather, these interviews were used as an ethnographic “sounding board” for later focus groups, preparing the investigator to speak in locally recognizable ways about the life course, and also to recognize ethnographic resonance between individual narratives and items or dynamics elicited during focus groups.

Nevertheless, certain “new” themes (not familiar to the primary investigator from his experiences in Appalachia) echoed in participants’ interviews. These included often intense expressions of local pride (being from “the mountains”). These expressions of being “native” to the mountains sometimes found accord (and sometimes conflict) with expressions of Cherokee identity. For example, one registered Cherokee, who had decided to live away from the reservation, specifically rejected her Cherokee identity, stating:

> Indians are just a different type of people. They have different goals, and just a different way of life... They have no drive to better themselves. They want to seclude themselves, and they don’t want to do branch out... They’re just mean. A lot of Indians are mean; they don’t like white people; if I had wanted to go to Cherokee school, I couldn’t, and like me, having Indian in me—it’s hard. It’s just awful. It’s like being half-black or something.

Moreover, many Cherokee narratives, when they did show divergence from traditional tropes of “mountain identity,” took on urban themes of local discrimination. One participant explained, “This place is kind of like the ‘hood, you know? It is hard to get out of.” For some individuals, local pride and mountain roots were pitted against other “cliques” or identity styles among peers. One participant, the progeny of a multi-generation Appalachian family, found a unique solution in the combined identity of “prepneck,” a combination of the high school “prep” (popular, well-dressed, generally well off, and physically beautiful) with the locally savvy and rooted “redneck.” This individual was careful to describe his allegiance with the identity and lifeways of his “redneck” side, describing how “I love to go up and hear the creek run in the mountains,” but also careful to show off his very large collection of high-priced, brand-name t-shirts and shoes. He struck this balance in other parts of his narratives, describing the decreased sophistication of local humor by saying, “You can really tell the difference between a redneck joke and a preppie joke,” but at the same time, but at the same time being careful to note that if he had to, he would “side” with rednecks over “preps.”
While it would be possible to go on at considerable length discussing the intricacies of pilot participants’ various life ways, the main theme of these interviews was clear; participants expressed (and combined) a wide variety of strategies in their life plans and methods of constructing an identity though which to guide such plans. The commonality of themes did suggest that it would be possible to construct a measure of the life course that would make intuitive to most individuals in the area; for example, individuals tended to differ more on their particular approach to certain life course milestones (such as having kids) more than they showed an utterly different narrative content. However, this phase of research did suggest the potential absence of a unified “cultural model” of the life course that would be analogous to previous “cultural consensus” research. In other words, while generally speaking a similar language of the life course, participants eloquently described many different pathways through life, and differed dramatically in their personal endorsement of such pathways (or combinations of pathways). As it turns out, this insight was confirmed in later phases of pilot research, whereby card sort measures felt very intuitive to participants, but produced a considerable degree of variance in response patterns. This may indeed be partially due to the developmental stage of participants, who are mostly in the throes of identity formation (especially those in younger GSMS cohorts).

Stage I: Life course architecture

As indicated above, Stage I of pilot research contributed directly do the finalization of the LTI-Y domain “life course milestones,” and indirectly to the development of “life course barriers,” via discussions of negative life events. With Brown now somewhat familiar with local life course options and trajectories from ethnographic interviews, the next important step was to explore group consensus (and disagreement) about the most important life events and experiences for the local population, and to examine any gender or ethnic specificity in item nominations. The logic behind tackling this dimension of the life course first was that it would provide a kind of architectural “framework” on which to hang later insights and data regarding more subtle complexities (i.e. living the good life, what happens when the life course gets disrupted, life course trade-offs, etc.). This was particularly important, because generally the same population was used for (or at least shared across) Stages II and III of pilot data collection. In other words, starting with this most general and basic “most important events” stage allowed the principal investigator to gradually step participants through more complex thought processes regarding the life course in later stages of pilot research.

Any study of the life course would do well to remain a fluid and narrative perspective whenever possible, as this most closely approximates the fluidity and constant adaptation of individual life course pathways and concepts through time {Bruner, 1987 #1874; Bruner, 1990 #390}. Nonetheless, the demands of quantitative analysis and limitation of current widely-used statistical tools also make it necessary to create individual items and scales for analysis designed to demonstrate life course pathways among large group of individuals, even (especially) when using person-centered pathways designed to illuminate particular trajectories {Zhao, 2000 #2079; Magnusson, 1998 #1984; Cairns, 1995 #1887}. Thus, keeping the fluidity and variability of individual life course trajectories in mind, the task at this point of research was to elicit a generally accepted list of items representing the most important things to achieve in life (whether material, social, spiritual, or otherwise). These items were originally referred to as “life events” during piloting and method development, but later came to be known as “life course milestones”
in the LTI-Y final measure. Importantly, initial investigations in this area were intentionally value-neutral, and designed to capture the full range of salient life course experiences (both positive and negative). As a result, focus groups (and early card sorts) considered a high number of positive and negative life events. As such a large part of the first “milestones” card sort was dedicated to obtaining generalized consensus about which life events were generally positive, and which were mostly considered negative. Given the complexity of this process, as well as the high number of negative life events volunteered by focus groups, the research team decided to delay the development, explication, and refinement of life course barriers (including negative life events) until a later stage of pilot research (Stage III), and instead to focus primarily on positive life events which would generally constitute the LTI-Y domain of “life course milestones.”

Stage I focus groups

As with all stages of research, Stage I began with a series of focus group, hereafter referred to as “life events focus groups” (described in more detail below). Building upon the insights and understandings gleaned from the initial 21 ethnographic interviews, Brown conducted seven life events focus groups with a total of 22 participants. Four were Cherokee groups, with the following demographic composition:

- 2 Cherokee males (17, 19 years); 2 Cherokee females (17, 17 years)
- 2 Cherokee males (22, 23 years)
- 2 Cherokee males (21, 18 years)
- 4 Cherokee females (18, 17, 16, 16 years)

Three groups were non-Cherokee (all Anglo, except for 1 African American participant), with the following composition:

- 4 Anglo females from Graham County (20, 18, 18, 18 years)
- 2 Anglo males from Jackson County (18, 16 years)
- 3 Anglo (17, 17, 17 years), 1 African American (15 years) females from Jackson County

Brown (who served as the group facilitator during all of these focus groups) first asked groups to estimate an average life span for females and males (separately) in their respective communities of origin/residence. He then drew a large horizontal line on a wide scroll of paper (which was pinned onto the wall), with a line at the beginning and end of the sheet representing the (group-nominated) average male and female life span. Next, he asked the group to list the most important life events for the gender represented by the group\(^4\). This proceeded until the group exhausted the free listing / nomination process. At that point, he wrote each life event one-by-one onto an adhesive note, and pasted them onto the life course chart for the group’s observation and consideration. Brown then asked the group to provide an ideal age for each life event (i.e. “What is the best possible age for this to occur in life?”), along with a minimum (i.e. “Any earlier would be too early…” ) and maximum (i.e. “Any later would be too late…” ) age. When the ideal age differed from the average age, he asked the group to provide both the ideal

\(^4\) The single mixed-sex group was given a choice. In response, the two men in the group wanted to talk about women and the two women wanted to talk about men. A coin toss resulted in men being the first topic of discussion.
and average ages; this process was designed to elicit group knowledge about any life events for which individuals in the local area consistently failed to meet the generally accepted target age of achievement. Brown specified the minimum age as the age at which most people in the community feel like the event could happen, but any earlier would be judged as strange, odd, or in the serious minority. Meanwhile, he specified the maximum age as the age at which the event should have occurred, by the judgment of most people in the community, and anyone achieving the event at a later point in the life would represent a strange occurrence in the eyes of the community. As the group completed the age nomination process for each life event, Brown pasted each life event onto the large scroll of paper, arranged by (group-nominated) ideal age of achievement.

Stage I Focus Groups: major components
1. Estimate life span of males / females
2. Suggest major life events for males / females (open-ended)
3. Assign minimum, ideal (and/or average), and maximum ages for life event
4. Repeat steps 1-3 for opposite gender

After the group finished this task for its own gender, the facilitator then asked the group to perform the same task for the opposite gender. In this case, groups were allowed to see the life events listed for its own gender, and to pick and choose from these while coming up with new life events for the opposite gender. Together, the seven groups nominated 317 life events (male and female events combined), many of which essentially duplicated each other in meaning (if not by exact wording). The principal investigator compiled a large table of all the nominated life events (as well as data concerning which group nominated the event, and whether the group specified it as a male-only, female-only, or unisex event). Picking only the events that were nominated separately by two or more groups (for a particular gender), the investigator then combined events by similarity of meaning and content, resulting in a list of roughly 35 events. Our research team preserved any gender and/or ethnicity-specific in group nominations of life events, resulting in slightly different sets of events for Cherokee males, Cherokee females, Anglo males, and Anglo females). See Appendix 2 for a full list of items, as well as any gender or ethnic-specificity of items. We then transferred these gender and ethnic specific sets of life events onto cards for the first life events card sort procedure.

Generally, life events focus groups reinforced our general hypothesis that life events can be transformative with regard to individual behavior, and that mapping the architecture of life events with regards to local perceptions would prove to be a worthwhile task with regards to explaining behavioral trajectories and behavioral change. For example, one Cherokee focus group conducted with two Cherokee males (aged 22 and 23) described an oft-repeated theme in the local area about the life-changing effects of having children, with regards to risk-taking (“PI” refers to the primary investigator, Ryan Brown; “male” refers to either of the Cherokee males involved in the focus group session):

Male: Some of them it changes them right then some of them will be on the good side, but a little on the wild side but having a kid completely changes them and men can even be like that they can be on the border line; that’s how I was cause I was jumpin’ off bridges, I was mostly on the bad side then I had a kid, and it took a year or so but then it completely changed me and before that there ain’t no telling what I woulda done, I guarantee you I’d probably be in jail—but we didn’t get into big trouble, just misdemeanor stuff.
Male: The times he got in real big trouble I wasn’t around.

Male: the two big times I got in trouble I was about gone. It wasn’t nothin’ mean, well it was kinda mean--I threw a damn dead possum in McDonald’s….

Male: it didn’t take me that long, but it was the second my little girl was born I changed completely the day she was born, but you still have some of that wild edge in you, you don’t do it, but you’d love to go out and do somethin’ again, but then you turn around and there’s your little baby and you think, “Nah, I’ll stay home.”

PI: so it takes bout a year for that feeling to go away?

Male: Yeah it takes about a year before you quit thinkin’ ‘bout all the stuff you used to do.

Male: Sometimes it don’t change….

PI: Sometimes you get wild again later on?

Male: Yeah like Ken, he’s out cruisin’…

PI: Do you think that is an expected thing for men that they get wild one more time later in life? Or that’s just some people?

Male: Some people, ‘cause I’ve been in trouble since I had my little girl, but it ain’t stuff like we used to do we used to go out and try to find trouble. When we was younger we’d go out and we’d say…before we’d leave we’d already have set in our minds what we were gonna do…let’s get dirty and jump in the pool, get mud in their pool, stuff like that… then it seems like when you try to change, trouble comes to you.

Stage I card sort (Round A)

The first life event card sort task was quite broad and inclusive in scope. As noted above, up to 35 items were considered by participants (depending on the ethnicity and gender of the participants), and both positive and negative items were included in the card sort (see Appendix 2 for a full list of items). Furthermore, participants were asked to assess these cards along a variety of dimensions, including difficulty to achieve (positive items), and difficulty to avoid (negative items). Overall, the high degree of choice and openness in the task yielded a matrix of data that was quite heterogeneous in form across participants (i.e. different participants chose different items as positive and negative), and somewhat difficult to interpret. However, it represented a good “first pass” at a card sort procedure, and a good test of what items needed to remain in the list of life course milestones, as well as which dimensions and decision-making tasks worked well for most participants (see Appendix 3 for the full procedure).

Brown performed the first card sort task with 16 subjects (8 Cherokee; 4 males, 4 females / 8 Anglo; 3 males, 5 females). Subjects ranged in age from 15-22 years, with a mean age of 17. Seven of the 8 Anglo individuals resided in Cherokee country, with varying degrees of distance from local towns. The eighth came from Clay County. This was not a complete or perfect sample of geographical diversity in Western North Carolina. However, experience in focus groups revealed that community differences in perceptions of the lifecourse were located

\[5\] Data for one of the Cherokee females had to be thrown out, do to a misunderstanding of the card sort task.
not so much in the *content* of the lifecourse (i.e. individual life events), but more in community and individual differences regarding the *valuation* and *prioritization* of these life events. Furthermore, it was found that many of these differences occurred along the cultural “fault lines” of Cherokee living on the reservation vs. whites living off the reservation, a demographic comparison that could easily be made within this sample of 16 participants.

A large number of life event cards were used with this population, ranging from 30-35 cards (depending on the ethnicity and gender of the subject, see Appendix 2 for full list). These life events were selected based on the results of focus groups, with most life events that were mentioned ≥ 2 times for that particular gender and ethnicity included in the list. This stage of the card sort procedure was eventually used to filter out those life events that were either (1) perceived as mostly negative; or (2) perceived as generally positive but received a very low ranking from most individuals. Subjects received 2 identical stacks of life event cards. They were then asked to perform the following procedures (a full set of instructions can be found in Appendix 3):

**Stage I (Round A) card sort: major components**

1. Separate items into positive / negative
2. Rank positive items from most to least important / desirable
3. Rank negative items from most to least negative
4. Rank positive items from most to least difficult to achieve
5. Rank negative items form most to least difficult to avoid
6. Assign minimum / ideal / maximum ages to each item

The following table represents the results from asking participant to sort positive life event cards according to their perceived value/desirability/importance (these dimensions were considered roughly equivalent for the purposes of this early card sort) according to the community represented by each participant. The second column shows the number of subjects who coded each life event as a positive life goal. Some life events are gender-specific, such as “Find a husband” or ethnicity-specific, such as “Receive per capita,” leading to inherently lower numbers of subjects who code these life events as positive life goal. The third column shows the average “raw” (i.e. not a function of how many life events were chosen as positive, or the number of cards the subject had to choose from, which fluctuated from 30-35, based on ethnicity and gender) rank of these life events in the sorting procedure, and is not filtered for gender or ethnicity. This is because the goal of this initial pilot phase of research was to obtain a set of life event cards that could be used for both men and women, and for Cherokee and Anglos. Life events rankings were examined by gender and ethnicity, to determine whether any important gender or ethnicity-specific life events were “slipping through the cracks,” but no such life events were found. This does not mean that there were no gender or ethnic patterns in the ranking of life events, just that these were not dramatic enough to warrant creating a different set of life event cards (with the exception of receiving one’s per capita money, which whites do not experience, and which later did not “make the cut” for the eventual set of 12 milestones in the LT1-Y).

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6 The maximum number here is 15, as one subject’s data was excluded (due to an apparent misunderstanding of the task).
Table 2. Stage I (Round A) card sort: life events judged as positive by ≥ 1 subject, with mean “raw” rank for value/importance (low score = more important)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life event</th>
<th>n (subjects) coding event as positive</th>
<th>Mean rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school graduation/GED</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to college / tech school</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find good/true friends</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start dating</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start driving/driver’s license</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receive per capita/inheritance</td>
<td>8 (Cherokee only)</td>
<td>7.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finish college / tech school</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find financial/material security</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find career/career track</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get first job</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settle down/be more responsible</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get first car</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find a husband</td>
<td>5 (female only)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be a father/raise kids</td>
<td>7 (male only)</td>
<td>11.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have and raise 1st kid</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get first house</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move away from home</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have grandkids</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puberty/adolescence</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get married</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lose virginity</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be popular/athletic success</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have and raise 2nd kid</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deal with peer pressure</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking/partying</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have and raise 3rd kid</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use drugs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have and raise 4th kid</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical aging</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get arrested/go to prison</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stage I card sort (Round B)

The next task was to choose a smaller set of cards for the second life event card sort task, and to generate a series of tasks that could be replicated in the final card sort procedure. These tasks included: excluding all cards considered expendable (items one could “do without”), ranking cards by difficulty, ranking cards by importance, assigning minimum / ideal / maximum ages to life events, and ordering events by chronological order in life. Fifty-six participants completed this second round of the card sort, with the following demographic composition: 38 Anglo (18 female, 20 male), 18 Cherokee (12 female, 6 male). Participants were between 15 and
24 years of age (mean age = 19), and had lived in the Western North Carolina area for an average of 18 years (range = 9 – 23 years). All Cherokee except one female (who lived in Haynesville, a remote town on the southwestern tip of the State) lived on the Qualla Boundary Cherokee reservation. Two (out of 12 total) Cherokee females were married at the time of interview (one was engaged), while one Cherokee male (out of 6 total) was married. One Anglo female (out of 18 total) was married (three engaged), while one Anglo male (out of 20 total) was engaged to be married. Four Cherokee females had biological children at the time of interview, as did one Cherokee male, three Anglo females, and one white male.

Data analysis suggested general consensus but community differences for age ranges of events, as well as some degree of consistency in ranking events by burden and importance, and considerable personal heterogeneity in the number and type of cards excluded. Basically, these extracted dimensions seemed to “work” in a broad sense, and the last task was to combine domains and exclude a few cards to yield our final list of 12 life course milestones. As far as the feasibility of life course dimensions tested in this second iteration of the life events (milestones) card sort, all dimensions of measurement were found to produce reasonable variance and to be generally understood by participants. As a result, all dimensions were retained with the exception of the chronological ordering of life events (and this was only excluded because the ordering of ideal ages for life events was felt to be a reasonable proxy of chronological ordering).

The following section describes item selection and procedure for the second round of the life events card sort. Based on the rankings and positive/negative endorsements obtained in the first life events card sort, we generated a set of 15 cards that incorporated the top-ranking items and those rated most consistently as positive (rather than negative) life events. In some cases, this involved combining multiple items into one; i.e. “Go to college or tech school” and “Finish college or tech school” were combined into “Get college or tech school degree.” In other cases, this involved generating a gender-matched counterpart (i.e. “Find a husband” was matched with the card “Find a wife”). All concepts used in generating this new set of cards received an average raw rank of 13 or above (i.e. had a mean rank between 1 and 13), and were ranked as positive life goals by ≥ 13 out of 15 participants (for items with no gender or ethnic specificity).

Meanwhile, for the male-specific event, “Be a father/raise kids” 7 out of 7 males rated this as positive; for the female-specific event “Find a husband,” 5 out of 8 females rated this as positive; and for the Cherokee-specific event “Receive per capita,” 8 out of 8 Cherokee rated this as positive. See Figure 2 (below) for a full list of life events included in the Round B card sort:

The card sort interview exacted the following major dimensions of data, all of which asked participants to provide their best estimation of average community opinion (a full set of instructions can be found in Appendix 4):

Stage I (Round B) card sort: major components

1. “Proper” chronological order of events in life course
2. Minimum, ideal, and maximum age for achieving each event
3. Minimum set of events for a “basic life” (exclusion procedure)
4. Difficulty of achieving / maintaining each item (ranked 1-15)

---

7 “Get inheritance” was inserted as a parallel item for “Receive per capita” for Cherokee, with the full expectation that these two forms of “inheritance” would not be viewed in the same way. This card was later dropped and replaced by the card, “Find faith / religion,” based on the report of several participants that the per capita/inheritance card did not seem to fit with the rest, and also based on several comments indicating that a card relating to religion was noticeably absent from the set.
5. Importance of each life event (ranked 1-15)

Figure 2. Stage I (Round B) sample cards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Find good friends / Feel accepted
High school graduation or GED
Start driving / Driver's license

Data analysis and finalization of an LTI-Y domain: “life course milestones”

Data analysis of the Round B card sort provided the primary source of data for the finalization of this stage of research (Life Course Architecture) into a domain of data collection for the LTI-Y. Brown and Worthman performed a variety of analyses designed to probe the utility of card sort dimensions, salience of card sort items, and consensus/variance regarding dimensions of life course architecture. Basically, the dimensions used in Round of the life events card sort seemed to “work” in a broad sense. Most importantly, responses were generally coherent and “believable” (based on the primary investigator’s ethnographic understandings of the area), indicating that the task was generally well understood by most participants. Furthermore, there was a reasonable degree of consensus, complimented by some degree of variance among individuals for participant responses regarding (a) proper age of achievement, (b) burden/difficulty of achieving individual events, (c) life event importance (if included), and (d) item inclusion/exclusion. Chronological ordering of life events was eventually dropped from the LTI-Y, as it was considered too similar to asking participants for the minimum, maximum, and ideal ages of achievement for each item, and thereby not deserving of the additional participant burden created by adding yet one more dimension to the LTI-Y procedure.

Generally, participants showed the greatest variance in number/type of items included/excluded, hinting that this might be a fruitful dimension for the exploration of individual, ethnic, and gender differences in the construction of life course models. Indeed, this has proven to be the case in the larger LTI-Y sample (n=350). It seems that the dichotomous decision-making task involved in card exclusion differentiates individuals and groups better than many of the other ranking tasks involved in the card sort processes in this study. As with results obtained from the final LTI-Y card sort, ethnic differences (Anglo vs. Cherokee) in event ranking for importance, burden, and exclusion were generally more pronounced than sex differences.

This data analytic process was also designed to test the utility of individual items used in Round B of the life events card sort. Individual items were examined to determine whether there were particular items that were: (a) treated very similarly to other items, and could effectively be combined; (b) were consistently misunderstood, and needed to be rephrased or discarded; or (c) were consistently excluded by most participants or consistently ranked as very low salience, also indicating that they might be discarded. This last task yielded a final list of 12 life course
milesstones, based primarily on the ranked salience of items (with the top-ranked and most included items tending to stay, and others tended to be discarded). However, if an item generated highly variable responses, or was rated consistently as particularly difficult, it was sometimes included even if it did not receive a salience or inclusion rating in the “top 12.”

Figure 3. Generation of LTI-Y domain: Life course milestones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1: Round A life events</th>
<th>Stage 1: Round B life events</th>
<th>LTI-Y: Life course milestones</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school graduation/GED</td>
<td>Find good friends / feel accepted</td>
<td>1. Driver’s license</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to college / tech school</td>
<td>High school graduation or GED</td>
<td>2. Get college, technical, or vocational degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find good friends</td>
<td>Start driving / Driver’s license</td>
<td>3. Get first car or truck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start dating</td>
<td>Financial security</td>
<td>4. Get first house (or trailer, modular home, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start driving/drive’s license</td>
<td>First / temporary job</td>
<td>5. Get permanent job / career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receive per capita/inheritance</td>
<td>Permanent job / Career</td>
<td>6. Have and raise kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finish college / tech school</td>
<td>Get a car / truck</td>
<td>7. Have financial security (savings, investments etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find financial/material security</td>
<td>Have and raise kid(s)</td>
<td>8. High school graduation or GED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find career/career track</td>
<td>Settle down / Be more responsible</td>
<td>9. Marriage or live together with someone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get first job</td>
<td>Get a house</td>
<td>10. Move out of parents’ house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settle down / be more respo nsible</td>
<td>Move away from home</td>
<td>11. Settle down / be more responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get first car</td>
<td>Get college or technical degree</td>
<td>12. Start first job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find a husband</td>
<td>Find husband OR find wife</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be a father/raise kids</td>
<td>Find boyfriend OR find girlfriend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have and raise 1\textsuperscript{st} kid</td>
<td>Get per capita OR Get inheritance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get first house</td>
<td>Find faith / religion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move away from home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have grandkids</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puberty/adolescence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get married</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lose virginity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be popular/athletic success</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have and raise 2\textsuperscript{nd} kid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deal with peer pressure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking/partying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have and raise 3\textsuperscript{rd} kid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use drugs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have and raise 4\textsuperscript{th} kid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical aging</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get arrested / go to prison</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As noted above, one of the key decisions made regarding this phase of data collection was to consider positive and negative life events separately, and to create an LTI-Y domain of separate major positive life events named “life course milestones” for final GSMS data collection with the sub-sample of 350. Several insights were obtained during the more open-ended pilot stage that could not effectively be integrated into official LTI-Y data collection (but were certainly kept in mind during construction of the final measure). Focus group responses and individual narratives obtained during card sorts indicated that participants tend to take a chronological, life course perspective to thinking about individual life events, keeping in mind events that generally needed to occur before other events (i.e. high school before college, to take a very simple example), enabled the accomplishment of other events (financial stability easing the transition into marriage and/or childbearing), or might even block the achievement of other events (i.e. having kids too early might delay or prohibit getting a college degree). Moreover, the general fluidity, on-the-ground practicality, and complexity of life course strategizing laid out by participants in groups and 1-on-1 interviews strongly indicated that individual life events are not
thought of individually, but as fluid and integrated parts of a constantly changing trajectory through life.

This logical and practical approach sometimes rendered decision-making about which event was more important (or even more burdensome) than the next difficult, as it required a decontextualized, item-based framework of thought. As such, ranking individual items as discreet units presented some what of a cognitive burden, in that it forced a cognitive “break” from this more fluid way of thinking about the life course in context. Nonetheless, this was the only method our research team could use to obtain a classic matrix of data interpretable by current statistical methods and theoretical perspectives (which are generally item-based, and use the fluidity of narratives to compliment and frame an item-based approach). Moreover the exclusion procedure (where participants only retained a “minimal model” of the most important items) was maintained as a somewhat open-ended decision-making process that gave participants a chance to “clump” life course milestones.

Stage II: “The good life”

Stage II focus groups

Procedural overview and method

Having laid out the more general architecture of the life course, the next task was to explore social and material elements of “the good life” for local participants. In other words, assuming that the “basics” of the life course could be achieved, what are some of the more intricate complexities that might yield happiness and satisfaction across the life course? To this end, we designed and performed a second round of focus group sessions and card sorts to assess this additional domain of “working cultural logic,” which we initially referred to as social and material goods. It is important to note that, while material goods remained as a final domain of the LTI-Y, “social goods” was eventually combined with “enablers” (items generated in Stage III of pilot research, and representing the range of items and processes that assist general life course achievement) to form the LTI-Y domain “social affordances.” The route to finalizing the domain of social affordances was more lengthy and convoluted (and drew from more disparate sources of data) than the finalization of the material goods domain, and thus material goods will be discussed here, while the finalization of the LTI-Y domain of “social affordances” (partially involving social goods) will be described in the section regarding Stage III of pilot data collection (“Barriers and Enablers”).

The “good life” focus groups were performed with four Anglo and three Cherokee groups, including 37 participants, with the following demographic composition: 18 Anglo (9 female, 9 male), 19 Cherokee (15 female, 4 male). The four Anglo groups were composed as follows:

- Four females from Graham county (18, 18, 20, and 23 years)
- One male from Jackson county (16 years) and two females from Cherokee county (both 17 years)
- Six males from Clay county (17, 16, 16, 16, 16, and 16 years)
- Three females (18, 18, and 21 years) and two males (19, 21 years) from Macon county

Three Cherokee groups were composed as follows:
One Cherokee male (19 years) and two Cherokee females (17, 16 years)
Three Cherokee males (21, 20, and 20 years) and eight Cherokee females (21, 20, 18, 17, 16, 15, 15, 15 years)
Five Cherokee females (17, 16, 16, 16, and 16 years)

As with the previous stage of research (life course architecture), we approached this phase of pilot data collection from a very open stance, with the goal of suppressing any initial assumptions made by the research team (particularly the principal investigator, who ran all of the focus groups and also conducted most of the card sort interviews). Nonetheless, within the first two focus groups, it became apparent that our preconceived notions about the existence of clearly separable “material” and “social” domains were not shared by most participants in everyday thinking about “the good life.” Although it was possible for group participants to stick to “only social” or “only material” elements of “the good life” for short periods of time during focus group sessions, this generally required a high degree of scaffolding by the primary investigator (i.e. continuous specific prompts such as, “What is another kind of club people like to belong to?”). Furthermore, it was not long before participants would wander from social to material, or material to social. For example, a discussion of important social clubs would segue into a discussion of “car clubs” (a particularly prevalent kind of peer group in the study area), and how important it was to have the properly “tricked out” automobile to be popular or even to feel good about oneself. This would then lead to a discussion of various kinds of desirable vehicles and other popular forms of transportation. Over time, the awkwardness of trying to enforce a social/material separation of item nominations forced an adjustment of the focus group procedure, whereby both material and social elements of “the good life” were discussed at once by the group.

The following excerpt of a focus group conducted in Macon County with a mixed group of two males (aged 19-21) and three females (aged 18-21) illustrates how a discussion of social status immediately makes its way to material objects (“PI” refers to the primary investigator, Ryan Brown; “male” / “female” refer to individual male and female focus group participants):

Female: I think that [town name] itself is a lot of good appearances and so a lot of time it’s how big your house is, it’s like ‘Do you know so-and-so? Well, isn’t he the guy with the big old house?’ And even like cars if you are cruisin’ around town everyone wants the bigger sound system, the bigger tires--

Female: --the tough exhaust--

Female: --the blaring music and--

PI: What is that, like a loud exhaust system?

Female: Yeah, just anything to make yours different or faster

PI: Chrome rims?

Male: Yeah, chrome rims too.

Earlier in the discussion, the group also clearly illustrates how social esteem, community respect, and being “known” as a local are intimately tied to socioeconomic livelihood in the area:
Female: Around here it is basically families that like me, let’s say I couldn’t afford tires on my auto, I got family that works at some place and I can go get tires, and actually it’s really a kind of like a close knit community in a lot of ways, because there are a lot of people, foreigners from Florida and honest to goodness there are places you could go and if your tag plate says North Carolina, and if your tag plate says Florida, you get a different price, no joke.

Female: Yeah, just because of this being a small town.

I: There’s no price written up on the wall, or there is a price written up for everybody who is not local and then you get a discount.

Male: And another thing, if you are well known, or have like that trust built up you can get what you need if you don’t have the money that day.

I: You can go on credit.

Female: Yeah, it’s based on trust, a lot of it.

Female: Something about [town name] that I’ve noticed is that small businesses tend to buy from other small businesses. They keep each other going and there is a lot of loyalty that way.

PI: Buy locally, buy supplies locally. So, would you put something like family connections or community connections under that?

Female: Yeah, just because of this being a small town.

Female: You can’t get a job if they don’t know you.

In their final adjusted form, Stage II “good life” focus groups proceeded in two major steps. During the first 30-45 minutes, the principal investigator asked participants to list everything that they could think of that was necessary for people to live a “basic life.” This was designed partially as an easy, rapport building exercise, but also because of a theoretical interest in separating levels of necessity and desire. In the finalization of the LTI-Y data collection protocol, needs were generally blended with wants, while certain extremely basic needs (e.g. “food,” “clothing,” “place to live”) were dropped from the procedure. Given that this research was being conducted in the highly developed U.S., participants tended to perceive such basic needs (in their simplest form) as both ubiquitous and banale; even given the relative impoverishment of this Appalachian region, participants did not see such needs as particularly hard to come by for most people. As a result, despite the fact that basic material needs have formed an essential and productive component of cultural consensus research in less developed regions {Dressler, 1997 #1757; Dressler, 1998 #1470; McDade, 2001 #1578}, they did not seem to show enough variance to treat as a potential variable in our sample.

Stage II (“The good life”) focus groups: major components
1. Freelist nomination of life course “needs” (open-ended)
2. Freelist nomination of life course “wants” (open-ended)
3. Rate each need 1-10 (priority / importance / how essential)
4. Rate each want 1-10 (priority / importance / desirability)
As stated above, the PI kept the floor as open as possible during Stage II focus groups, and reminded participants that they could suggest such things as: material items, social relationships, activities, membership in organizations, social values, and emotional states. After participants felt they had listed as many “needs” as they possibly could, they were then asked to move onto all the things that they felt people wanted to live “the good life.” Again, the floor was kept completely open to all manner of suggestions, from the emotional benefits of altruism to the latest and greatest Nintendo game.

After participants exhausted the initial freelisting process, the PI then asked participants to go through each need and want (needs and wants were treated separately), and to rate its importance on a scale of 1-10. First, needs were rated on this scale, and then the group moved onto rating wants. This process elicited additional dialog and commentary regarding categories of material and social-emotional needs and wants, as well as discourse about gender, age, ethnic, and community differences in the prioritization of desire for such material and social goods. Often, it also elicited additional suggestions of important needs and wants that group participants had “left out” during the initial freelisting process. As with all focus groups, the PI wrote down ongoing results on a large easel; an example of this “written output” can be seen below (focus group discussion was also recorded and transcribed).

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8 In three earlier group sessions, participants were asked to list material possessions, social activities, and values/emotions separately. It was found that this was awkward for participants, as they easily flowed from such topics as social activities to their emotional benefits, or from certain kinds of possessions to the social relationships they fostered. As a result, it was decided to separate the freelisting task only into two levels, needs and wants. It was generally found that groups moved to less overtly “tangible” topic (such as social values and qualities of the community) towards the end of the session, and were more comfortable talking about basic material items at the beginning. This was a natural progression, although the investigator provided many prompts along the way.

9 In the first three groups, as events were rated, they were written onto sticky notes and pasted on a nearby vertical scale, to allow ready comparison and relative ranking by the group. This practice was found very useful for expanding the range of the scale used, and to avoid the typical problems of positive skew in unipolar scales. However, it was discontinued for reasons of time and space (most facilities did not have room for a large additional piece of paper to be posted and viewed).

10 Transcripts of all focus group sessions will be coded by theme in NVivo, and combined with qualitative information from ethnographic interviews.
The result of each group session was a large freelist of items. The combined group results yielded 539 separate suggestions of needs and wants, with the following breakdown: 76 material needs, 43 social-emotional needs, 208 material wants, 212 social-emotional wants. These were coded along with group demographics, and classified by the investigators into material needs/wants and social-emotional needs/wants. Thus, group decision-making (during the focus groups) determined whether each item was a “need” or a “want,” while investigators subjectively categorized items into material and social sub-groups, for use in a pilot card sort procedure. The principal investigator examined all items together, and combined those that seemed to capture very similar concepts or items. He then selected (1) needs (material and social, n = 12); (2) material wants (n=24); and (3) social wants (n = 24) for the pilot card sort procedure. For needs, the top six social needs and top six material needs (in terms of group ratings of importance) remained for use in the card sort, while all others nominations were dropped (kept items also had to be nominated separately by two or more focus groups). Similarly, all material and social wants included in the card sort were nominated by at least two focus groups, and in this case were also in the “top 24” of group rankings for importance / desirability. As there seemed to be considerable variability and diversity in group nominations of items, the idea was to be as inclusive as possible at this stage, and to recruit a large number of participants for the card sort, in order to narrow down the eventual list of items for the final LTI-Y measure.
Stage II card sort

Procedural overview

Having formed a list of the “most important” needs and wants from the focus groups, the next task was to run a card sort procedure to test relevant dimensions and further explore items for this domain, using the derived categories and items of needs and wants (material and social) listed above. Forty-six participants completed this card sort procedure, with the following demographic composition: 25 female / 21 male; 14 Cherokee / 29 white / 3 “other” (1 Greek, 1 Jewish, 1 African-American). The procedure itself was fairly complicated; it was partially designed to test participants’ “outer limits,” in terms of the number and complexity of dimensions that they could handle at a time. Furthermore, we designed this procedure to test three potential alternative/additional data collection procedures to methods used to date (described below and depicted in Table 3).

At this stage of research, we experimented with an alternative to the exclusion procedure previously used to create “minimal models”; investigators asked participants to pick the “top 10” material and social items. Participants actually expressed a fair degree of frustration in response to this “top 10” procedure. Many participants, for example, perseverated over “those last three cards,” unable to make a final decision and regarding all three as essential. In other words, this degree of constrained choice did not seem to mesh well with participants’ organic “working logic” of the life course, forcing unnatural choices and cutting decisions upon a more fluid thought process. Instead, the exclusion procedure, in which participants were allowed to exclude between one and all cards, seemed to coexist more naturally and easily with local cultural logic regarding the life course. As a result, the investigators decided to retain the original “exclusion” procedure piloted with life events rather than to adopt the more constrained “top 10” approach from this Stage II “good life” card sort. Moreover, we found that participants tended to use the logic of needs vs. wants to classify, categorize, and process the items in this card sort, lending support to previous card sort dimensions focusing on participants’ dichotomous decision-making regarding the inclusion/exclusion of items in models pertaining to the self and community (even though an exclusion procedure was not used in its classic sense).

We also used this card sort to experiment with another alternative method of data collection, this one concerning the assessment of participant perceptions regarding the difficulty or burden of obtaining (and maintaining) items. Whereas Round B of the life events cards sort in Stage I used a difficulty ranking scheme, this card sort procedure asked participants to rate the difficulty of achieving each item on a scale of 1-10. This effectively treated each item as independent of the rest; for example, a participant might rate every item as “1” or 10,” whereas in the life events card sort only one item could receive a “1,” one item could receive a “2,” etc.. Data analysis revealed that this rating procedure (which asked participants to rate all relevant cards on a scale of 1-10) tended to produce generally unsatisfactory variance, with participants either mostly using the middle of the scale (i.e. selecting 5 or 6 very frequently), or tending to use only each end (i.e. selecting either 1 or 10 very frequently). As a result, we decided that a ranking procedure to assess difficulty of achievement (which continuously grounded participants in dichotomous or trichotomous comparisons between smaller sets of cards), was superior to the 1-10 rating scheme of difficulty. It seemed that the rating protocol that we experimented with at this stage effectively “disembodied” items from a common reference point, which seemed to lead to considerable interpretive flux with time, and was not grounded against multiple items simultaneously in the same way that the ranking method is.
The final “experiment” that we initiated in the Stage II “Good life” pilot card sorts concerned the ability of participants to cognitively distinguish between (a) their own (personal) preferences, concerns, and ideas about the life course, and (b) these preferences, concerns, and ideas among the community in general. In past research on cultural models, community consensus has generally been obtained from the aggregate of individual responses, and an individual’s cultural “competence” inferred from his personal approximation of inferred community consensus. However, we were also interested in participants’ individual perceptions of community standards and ideals, and how close they personally felt that the approximated such community standards. To this end, we asked participants to essentially complete Stage II card sorts twice, once according to their perceptions of community opinion, and once according to their personal priorities and ideals. Out of the three “experimental” procedures tested at this stage, this was the only one for which we obtained results that we felt were satisfying enough to retain the procedure. Nonetheless, this still required some “tweaking”; in multidimensional scaling analyses, responses for “your community” showed considerable heterogeneity, sometimes approximating the geographical heterogeneity shown by personal responses. Thus, we decided that these responses ran the risk of being too close to (and therefore redundant with) data collected at the personal, individual level of analysis. As a result, the research team decided to replace the reference point “your community” with the group “average Americans,” hoping to broaden the frame of reference to perceptions of much more generalized expectations.

Table 3. Stage II card sort experimental procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Experimental” procedure</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Accepted / rejected</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Top 10” selection of material / social wants [as potential replacement for open-ended exclusion task]</td>
<td>Forced-choice decision making would reveal critical trade-off logic</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
<td>Participant burden and discomfort, apparent lack of fit between procedure and “real life” decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty rating (1-10) [as potential replacement for difficulty ranking]</td>
<td>Item independence for difficulty / burden assessment</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
<td>Stereotyped/habitual participant responses, disconnected ratings (lack of “real world” grounding), full range of scale not used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self vs. community</td>
<td>Assess consensus and variation in perceptions of community, individual perceptions of approximation to community</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
<td>Reasonable evidence of differentiating self from community, acceptable with shifted (widened) frame of group reference to ensure separation from self.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedure

Stage II (“the good life”) card sort: major components (for full instructions, see Appendix 6)
1. Taxonomy of needs (n=12); pile sort of 2-3 groups
2. Rank needs by importance (1-12)
3. Rate each need 1-10 by difficulty of achieving  
4. Pick top 10 material wants from stack of 24 items  
5. Pick top 10 social wants from a stack of 24 items  
6. Combine top 10 material and social wants into stack of 20; rank 1-20 by desirability  
7. Rate these 20 wants 1-10 according to difficulty of achieving  
8. Mark all 20 items by personal achievement status: [currently achieved / will achieve / will not achieve]  
9. Taxonomy of wants (n=20); pile sort of 2-4 groups  
10. Repeat steps 4-9 for personal priorities and desires (previously was done for perceptions of community opinion)  

To begin the card sort, participants were given a stack of twelve social and material needs (e.g. “place to live,” “health care,” “friends”; full list of items in Appendix 5). We then asked participants to sort these 12 needs into two piles, based on the similarity of items, and to assign a name to each categorical stack. We hoped that some sort of community consensus based on the “ad hoc categories” {Barsalou, 1983 #3582} created in this sorting procedure might emerge. Interestingly enough, the most common kind of sub-categorization elicited by this procedure was for participants to sort items according to the “real” basics, and those things that one might be able to do without in life (despite the fact the focus groups categorized all the items as “needs”). Meanwhile, some participants classified items according to their modal age of achievement, whether access to items could be conferred by the self or needed the willing participation of social others, and even the physical size of items. However, the strong and early emergence of item sub-categorization regarding which items were “really” necessary to live provided additional support for an emerging insight; that is, it was gradually becoming apparent than an important dimension to investigate in the card sort would be participant perceptions of whether an item could be “done without” in life.

After participants sorted material/social needs into two sub-categories, they were then given another stack of needs cards and asked to order all 12 cards from most important / most necessary to least important / necessary. When this ordering process was completed, participants were asked to rate (not rank) each item on a scale of 1-10 according to how difficult each item is to achieve (according to average members of the community). Thus, the card sort procedure for these 12 needs items yielded a non-unique rating between 1-10 for difficulty of achievement, and a unique ranking from 1-12 representing level of “essentiality” for survival and getting by in life.

After the needs card sort, participants were given a stack of 24 material wants, and told to select the “top 10” material wants (e.g. “big / nice house,” “fancy / expensive car or truck,” “lots of property”; full list of items in Appendix 5) according to the average member of their community11. Participants performed the same process for the 24 “social wants” (e.g. “close / best friends,” “higher education,” “fun / excitement”; full list of items in Appendix 5). Then, we asked them to combine the two stacks of “top 10” cards into a single stack of 20. Material and social wants were as follows (copied verbatim from cards):

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11 Later, the referential group “your community” was dropped in favor of “average American,” as quantitative analysis of the pilot data revealed that participants generally tended to give very similar answers for themselves and for the perceived priorities of community members. The greater level of abstraction yielded by the reference group “average Americans” was designed to elicit more universal and agreed-upon (and less locally specific) cultural models.
After picking a “top 10” list of material and social wants (for the average member of the community), participants were asked to rank all 20 cards from 1-20, based on their importance for being happy and satisfied in life. When this sorting / ranking process was completed, participants were then asked to rate each item from 1-10, again based on their best approximation of average community opinion for “difficulty to achieve.” Next, participants were asked to mark each of these “top 20” items with a check mark (indicating current personal ownership / achievement), a plus sign (indicating projected future achievement), or a minus sign (indicating a personal future prognosis of no ownership / achievement). Subsequently, participants were asked to form between 2-4 stacks of these 20 cards, representing sub-categories of wants for “the good life”\textsuperscript{12}. Finally, this entire procedure (picking a material and social “top 10,” combining and ranking them, rating all 20 cards for difficulty to achieve, marking each card for personal ownership / achievement) was completed a second time. This time participants were asked to respond according only to their own priorities and desires, and not to think at all about the priorities and opinions of members of their community.

**Data analysis and finalization of an LTI-Y domain: “material goods”**

As mentioned above, further pilot research led to the rethinking of our initial theoretical framework regarding a separate domain of “social goods,” and this will be described at further length below. Generally, data analysis of Stage II card sorts was used primarily for the rejection of the experimental dimensions of a “top 10” sorting procedure and a difficulty rating procedure (dropped in favor of their initial formulations as “exclusion” and difficulty ranking, used in Round B of the life events card sort). Nevertheless, “top 10” selection, as well as salience ranking within the “top 10” social wants proved useful to help formulate the final domain of social affordances (discussed at further length below). Worthman and Brown also used the “top 10” and salience ranking data concerning material goods to finalize a final dimension of material goods for use in the LTI-Y with the sub-sample of 350 GSMS participants.

As with Stage I (life course architecture), we obtained some insights at this stage of research which we could not fully integrate into the final form of data collection with the LTI-Y. Primarily, this had to do with the initial insight during focus groups that participants do not separate material and social domains in their conceptualization of “the good life.” To some extent, this was part of the reason that we allowed a few material items into the eventual LTI-Y domain of “social affordances.” Nevertheless, we clearly separated material and social domains in the LTI-Y, partially because a combination of social and material items yielded an extremely long list of items, and participant burden for ranking items climbs rapidly with the addition of items. This was also because we maintained a separate theoretical interest in those items that could be obtained relatively free of direct material cost, and those that required direct material resources. In any case, the Stage II card sorts did combine material and social wants, and it was extremely interesting to observe a high degree of individual variance in the relative prioritization of material and social goods in this card sort (some participants who ranked all the material items first, some who ranked all the social items first). Unfortunately, the relative ranking of material

\textsuperscript{12} After five participants, this sub-categorizing procedure was dropped, as sub-categories of wants were found to be even more heterogeneous than participants’ sub-categories of needs. Furthermore, this sub-categorization / pile sort procedure added another degree of burden to an already burdensome procedure for participants, and the negligible added value led the investigators to decide to drop it altogether.
and social items in the achievement of “the good life” was not replicated fully in the LTI-Y, although there remain ways to make this comparison (i.e. number of items included in social affordances vs. material goods, relative placement of material items in the social affordances card sort).

Figure 5. Generation of LTI-Y domain: Material goods

Stage II “material wants”
- Big/nice house (with yard, deck, etc.)
- Rims, tires, system, raised/lowered, etc. (vehicle accessories)
- Fancy appliances (dishwasher, nice fridge, etc.)
- Pool / hot tub
- Home help (maids, gardener, etc.)
- Fancy / expensive car or truck
- Lots of property
- 4-wheelers, boats, jet-skis, bikes, etc. (recreational vehicles)
- Computer with internet
- Tattoos / piercings
- Big screen TV / DVD with surround sound
- Nintendo / X-box / Game Cube
- Phone / cell phone
- Nice clothes (Tommy, Aeropostale, CarHart, Gap, etc.)
- Jewelry (diamonds, gold, silver, etc.)
- Cosmetics / beauty salon / nails, etc.
- Home stereo system (CD, sub-woofers)
- Guns / hunting and fishing equipment
- Dogs / pets
- Investments (stocks, bonds, savings)
- Own a business
- Vacation / travel
- Lake or beach house (vacation home)
- Cosmetic surgery / gold teeth

LTI-Y: Material goods
1. 4-wheelers, boats, jet-skis, bikes, etc. (recreational vehicles)
2. Big / nice house (pool, yard, deck, etc.)
3. Computer with internet connection
4. Dogs / pets
5. Expensive sports / hobby equipment (athletic, music, hunting, etc.)
6. Fancy car or truck (with modifications & accessories)
7. Good cell phone and calling plan
8. Home entertainment center (big screen, surround sound, etc.)
9. Investments (stocks, bonds, savings)
10. Jewelry (diamonds, gold, silver, etc.)
11. Lake or beach house (vacation home)
12. Nice clothes (Tommy, Aeropostale, Gap CarHart, etc.)
13. Own a business
14. Own property / have good land
15. Vacation and travel

Stage III: Barriers and enablers

With the major architecture and elements of the “good life” in place, the next phase of life course research called on participants to accomplish two major tasks: (1) reflect (in groups and alone) on these major pieces of the life course, and add/subtract from this repertoire of events, discussing any caveats; (2) suggest (freelist) any processes, dynamics, or personality characteristics that might help (life course enablers) or hinder (life course barriers) life course achievement in any way. Goal (1) relied heavily on focus group sessions vet previous results from focus groups and card sorts in front of additional group sessions. This helped test the face validity of life events items elicited at Stage I. Additionally, it involved presenting averaged results from Stage I card sorts concerning nominations of minimum, maximum, and ideal ages for life events, to test whether these average ratings of item ages made sense to groups (if not,
this would have caused us to question the utility of the minimum/maximum/ideal age nomination component of the life events card sort).

Although not a strict test of validity for Stage I results, these groups provided a kind of “pass/fail” device; if participants greeted results primarily with consternation and frustration, this would have provided an indicator that the card sorts were missing something crucial, or that participants generally misunderstood or misinterpreted card sort instructions. Although there was much heated and productive discussion of life course alternatives, as well as community, gender, and individual variability in the pursuit of these alternative, participants generally perceived results obtained from the card sort to prevent either (a) modal models from the area, or (b) an average result obtained by combining results from two or more alternative perspectives on the life course (i.e. a college and “non-college” life course track). In this process of life course “editing” and discussion, another major goal was to capture any elements of major life course architecture or “the good life” that our team might have missed in previous stages (I and II) of pilot research. Within individual focus groups, group consensus led the PI to add or subtract a few life course milestones from the chart, but this was not consistent enough across groups to present a formal source of data, or to suggest the need to add or subtract items from the domain of life course milestones.

Beyond its utility as a validity test for the emerging LTI-Y domain of life course milestones, this stage of research was primarily concerned with goal (2) above; eliciting suggestions of events, processes, and personality characteristics that might generally help or hinder life course achievement. In focus groups, this involved freelistng items that were then tested in a barriers/enablers card sort procedure. Thus, the final phase (Stage III) of focus groups and card sorts aimed more generally to elicit expanded and more complex life course logics from participants than had been discussed previously, and also to generate items and local understandings of events, dynamics, or personal characteristics that could help and hinder life course achievement. As noted earlier, initial (Stage I) focus groups and Stage I (Round A) card sorts elicited several items that were generally perceived as negative, and potentially hindering of generalized life course success. However, it was necessary to initiate a separate process of item generation, to test whether these “negative life events” were actually perceived to block life course success (or just represent the “flipside” of life course success). Furthermore, at this point the domain of “social goods” and “enablers” were still conceived of as separate; social goods were thought of as desired social “end points,” while “enablers” were thought of as conduits and modes of assistance (mostly social) for general life course success. However, analysis of the items generated by Stage II (good life) and Stage III (life course revision) focus groups, along with Stage II and Stage III card sorts, revealed such an overlap of items between social goods and enablers that they were combined into one category termed “social affordances,” meant to capture both the fact that these items were seen as desired end points of their own accord, but also as fortuitous conduits to other sorts of desired end points.

**Stage III focus groups**

Stage III focus groups were completed with 12 individual groups, comprised of 54 participants (28 male / 26 female; 23 Cherokee / 31 Anglo). Four focus groups were carried out with Anglo participants from the most rural “Western” section of the GSMS study area, four
were carried out on the Cherokee reservation, and four were carried out in the relatively more populous “Northeastern” GSMS study area (near the city of Asheville).

Stage III (“Barriers and enablers”) focus groups: major components

1. Approve / reject 15 highest ranked life events / suggest new events / modify ideal ages
2. Freelist life course enablers
3. Freelist life course barriers

To initiate these focus groups, participants were shown the 15 most highly ranked life course milestones (along with their rated ideal ages) for both males and females (based on aggregate data from Round 2 life events card sorts). They were then asked, as a group, whether they would prefer to add or subtract any life course milestones from this general schema, or whether they thought is appropriate to alter any of the ideal ages assigned to each event. This proved to be an extremely effective prompt for group dialog, leading to a high level of conflict (and sometimes concordance), and actually leading to the elicitation and description of alternate life course strategies and sophisticated life course decision-making logics (including trade-offs among different events and groups of events). Cultural and gender differences were also described, as were perceptions of life course particularities for the specific region (as opposed to the U.S. in general).

The following excerpt from a focus group conducted in Buncombe County, involving four males (aged 19-21) and one female (aged 19) illustrates the level of sophistication with which groups described (and contested) alternate life course pathways and social pressures, in this case with regard to gender:

Male: I think guys in general are asked more of…and I am not saying that girls don’t have any responsibilities, but if a guy is being asked at 16, “Buy your own car, do this, do that, get a job, you’re a guy you gotta look out for yourself,” whereas the girls are being nurtured a little more they might have more time to focus on school where guys are worried about bills and…

PI: [looking towards female] You look like you maybe don’t agree.

Female: I don’t know, kind of…

Male: I’m not saying all women, I’m just saying on average.

Male: I’m gonna agree with him, I know so many girls that live with their parents, go to college full time, and brag about how they are knocking out these great grades and shit and I’m like “Man, I gotta pay for my bills, I gotta go to work for 40 hours a week go to school…

Female: I work 2 jobs, I go to school full time.

Male: You are rare, you have to admit you are rare.

Female: I guess. I was raised by a guy, so I guess I got the guy thing maybe [laughs]…

Male: Think of all the girls that you work with and think of how most of them either their boyfriends or their parents take care of them .

Female: Most of the people I work with, they have their jobs, they go to school and they live somewhere with their boyfriend or with one of their friends, but all the girls that I know do that and bitch about how their boyfriends don’t help them pay the bills, never have any money and
they are taking care of like and they feel like they are taking care of them and I know multiple girls who say that so I don’t know, maybe I am just a rarity, I also know a lot of girls who their parents let them do whatever they want—“Ah, here quit your job, you need that time off to spend and I’ll send you a few hundred dollars a month”—so, I don’t know.

When the group had finished discussing various possible life course revisions (addition and subtraction of items, as well as the combination or reordering of milestones), they were asked to begin free listing anything that came to mind that might (a) help or (b) hinder the progress of life course success and achievement. As in previous focus groups, the floor was kept open to any type of suggestion by participants (i.e. not confined to solely social or material items). This free listing prompt generally elicited a good number of responses, some of which were actually “crossover” items that could function either as support or as life course barriers, depending on the context; it was fascinating to see how many times a traditional element of social support was actively conceived as a potential affordance as well as a potential barrier. For example, friends were seen in one focus group as a potentially invaluable source of support in dire circumstances, but a large, distributed friendship network was also seen as a potential burden, in terms of distraction, unwanted interruptions, and extracted favors. These two extremes were reiterated for having a romantic partner, which was seen as both the potential source of greatest joy and help, and also the potential source of greatest hindrance, distraction, and life course derailment.
This echoed a classical result concerning the bidirectional nature of social support (potentially positive and potentially burdensome as well) [CITES!!!]; in fact, it was startling how explicit and knowledgeable participants (some of whom were 16 years old) were about the potential upsides and pitfalls of social support (especially peer relationships and romantic relationships). The following excerpt from a focus group session in Clay County involving six males, all aged between 16-17 years old (“PI” refers to the principal investigator, Ryan Brown; “male” refers to any one of the six males involved in the focus group):

PI: What else goes up here? What else can get in your way?

Male: Sometimes friends can get in your way, like you think they are your friends and then they turn out to be--

Male: --stab you in the back, back stabbers…. 

PI: How does this work? You are saying people may stab you in the back. Is it people who are taking advantage of you, or when do friends--

Male: It’s like friends like your friends want you to go one way with them but that is not really your dream, it is their dream.
PI: Oh, so people who manipulate you…friends betray each other, what else do you--

Male: --Friends are…they are friends one minute and then they go around and…I dunno, they mess up on you.

PI: You are saying a lot of your girlfriends--

Male: --stab you in the back…so what else, friends get in your way, they manipulate you, they push you into things you don’t want to do, they stab you in the back….

Male: Sometimes girlfriends can mess with your freedom ‘cause girlfriends they want you to be with them all the time, you don’t lose your girlfriend but then you end up going away from your friends and then you leave your friends behind….

Male: They try to pull you away; it is just their nature. It’s more like a competition between them.

In total, the twelve Stage III (life course revision) focus groups yielded 176 separate nominations for enablers and 159 separate nominations for barriers. As with previous card selection processes, choosing a set of items for Stage III card sorts involved the primary investigator combining like items, and choosing those items with the greatest number of individual nominations by focus groups. Similar to previous card sort designs, our research team erred on the side of inclusiveness, preferring to let card sort results inform which barriers and enablers to include in the final LTI-Y measure.

Stage III card sort

This was the final pilot card sort, and also the most simple and straightforward. It was completed by 32 participants (16 female / 16 male; 11 Cherokee / 20 white / 1 African American). Of the Anglo participants, 10 were from the more rural Western region of the GSMS study area, while another 10 were from the relatively more populous Northeastern region of the study area (near the city of Asheville). To generate items for this card sort, the free listed item nominations from the Stage III card sort were filtered (retaining only those items mentioned by two or more separate focus groups) and clumped, generating a list of 36 total life course barriers (e.g. “have kids early,” “lack of jobs,” “bad reputation”; full of items in Appendix 7) and 24 total life course enablers (e.g. “strong family support,” “financial planning,” “helping others”; full list of items in Appendix 7).

Stage III (“Barriers and enablers”) card sort: major components (full instructions, see Appendix 8)

1. Select 20 (out of 36) barriers most relevant to community
2. Rank from highest to lowest relevance
3. Rate on continuous scale, level of potential destructive impact (to average community member)
4. Repeat steps 1-3, but only considering personal life course
5. Select 15 (out of 24) enablers most relevant to community
6. Rank from highest to lowest relevance
7. Rate on continuous scale, level of potential helpfulness (to average community member)
8. Repeat steps 5-8, but only considering personal life course

To initiate the barriers/enablers card sort, participants were required first to select 20 out of the 36 barriers that they felt were most relevant to their community of residence and/or origin (as described above, this language was eventually changes from “average member of your community” to “average American” for the final version of the LTI-Y). Participants then ranked these 20 selected “high relevance” barriers from highest to lowest relevance\(^\text{13}\). Then, participants used a continuous scale (ranging from “not a big deal” to “very serious problem”) on the back of these 20 “high community relevance” cards to estimate the potential negative destructive impact of each barrier card. This process was then repeated, but participants were asked this time to give answers from their own perspective, and according to the perception of barriers that might be relevant (or potentially destructive) within their own lives, rather than in the community at large.

Moving on to life course enablers (later to become “social affordances”), participants were again asked to imagine their communities of origin and/or residence, and this time to select the 15 (out of 24 total) life course enablers they felt were the most relevant and applicable to most people from their home communities. They then ranked these “high relevance” life course enablers from 1-15, based on level of community relevance (as above, a presorting procedure was originally enforced and then gave way to a more organic tolerance for participants’ particular cognitive styles of ranking). Once this ranking procedure was completed, participants ranked each “enabler” for its potential degree to aid life course achievement, on a continuous scale ranging from “doesn’t matter much” to “extremely important and helpful.” As with life course barriers, participants then repeated this process, with the sole difference that they focused only on personal their personal needs and desires, as well as their particular life course trajectories.

Data analysis and finalization of LTI-Y domains: “barriers” and “social affordances”

This final phase of research provided a kind of “convergent validity” and productive logic for two additional domains of the LTI-Y. As outlined earlier, Stage I focus groups and (Round A) card sorts included a variety of life events considered by most participants to be negative, rather than positive forms of life course achievement. Early method development “tabled” these negative life events in favor of developing a positive “life course milestones” domain for the LTI-Y, leaving these negative life events “orphaned.” However, the explication of life course barriers during Stage III focus groups and card sorts created a “sounding board” of items that might hinder life course achievement, and allowed comparison with the negative life events elicited at Stage I. Indeed, analysis of the pilot data revealed a considerable degree of overlap between negative life events elicited during Stage I focus groups and life course barriers nominated during Stage III research, allowing the combination of “orphaned” Stage I results with new nominations of life course barriers to finalize a common domain of 20 life course barriers.

\(^{13}\) Initially, before ranking, participants were asked to form three groups of card; one with the highest relevance, one with medium relevance, and one with the lowest relevance, and then rank these piles separately. However, it was found that participants tended to either dislike this prior sorting process, or to do it on their own and in their own way, sometimes without prompting. The lesson learned here was that each participant has their own “cognitive style” and behavioral method for matching this cognitive style, something that we decided to preserve (and admit any accompanying error variance) rather than to force a presorting process that was often frustrating (and seeming counterproductive) for participants.
The second process of discovery involving Stage III focus groups and card sorts was somewhat more convoluted, and required several rounds of data analysis. This involved the combination of two domains originally thought of as separate; “social goods” (nominated by participants in Stage II) and “life course enablers” (nominated by participants in Stage III). We originally conceptualized “social goods” as desirable social “end points,” or aspects of social “achievement,” while we conceptualized “life course enablers” as (largely social) means to the end of general life course achievement. However, there was so much overlap between the items nominated (and ranked as high salience) by participants for both of these domains that it became apparent that participants were likely thinking of these two domains as one and the same. In other words, participants seemed to view desirable social states or properties as simultaneously presenting convenient ways to achieve desirable life course events and items. As a result, we decided to create one combined domain representing both “social goods” and “life course enablers,” which we named “social affordances.”
Figure 8. Generation of LTI-Y domain: Social affordances

**Stage III “enablers”**
- Being honest and responsible
- Financial planning
- Determination / motivation / drive
- Plan ahead / have goals
- Lots of experiences and knowledge
- Common sense / think for yourself
- Having a passion or focus
- Helping others
- High self-esteem / secure in yourself
- Good boyfriend/girlfriend or husband/wife
- Community connections and support
- Compliments / encouragement
- Money and finances
- Respect your elders / know your cultural roots
- Strong family support
- Religious community and prayer
- Good parenting / your parents
- Role models / mentors / special adult friends
- Good education and good schools
- Government or Tribal programs (medical assistance, etc.)
- Good job opportunities
- Free time / partying
- Good health and good health care
- Look attractive / wear nice clothes

**Stage II “social goods”**
- Self-esteem / respect
- Cruising / car shows / 4-wheeler / racing
- Clubbing / bands / concerts
- Eating out
- Attractive husband/wife (or girlfriend/boyfriend)
- Church / religion / church fellowship
- Support groups / counsellors
- Close / best friends
- Lots of friends / popularity
- Family support / family time
- Husband/wife (or girlfriend/boyfriend) with good morals
- Sports teams / events / clubs
- Help others in the community
- Safe / clean community
- Good name / reputation in the community
- Political power and connections
- Know your cultural and family roots
- Lots of life experiences
- Higher education
- Health / fitness / stress-relief
- Time to yourself
- Polite / honest / good morals
- Drinking / partying / hanging out
- Fun / excitement

**LTI-Y: Social affordances**
- Being honest, responsible, polite
- Close / best friends
- Common sense / think for yourself
- Community connections and support
- Determination, motivation, drive
- Fun / excitement
- Good / supportive / attractive husband/wife
- Government (or Tribal) programs
- Hanging out with friends / partying
- Having a passion or focus in life
- Health, fitness, and stress relief
- High self-esteem / secure in yourself
- Higher education
- Lots of life experiences
- Money and finances
- Plan ahead and have goals
- Respect your elders / know your cultural and family roots
- Status and power in the community
- Strong family support / family time
- Support from church, faith, & prayer

**Stage III focus groups:**
- 319 “enabler” nominations

Combine similar, pick 24 most frequently nominated

Combine similar, retain “most helpful” (enablers), most “important” (social goods)
Appendix 1. Ethnographic life history themes / coding scheme

Simple themes: (straightforward, generally discussed in a common way across participants, and therefore not needing a hierarchical branching structure)

1. **Cliquettes**: Descriptions of high school and post-high school peer groups and typologies of individuals, with their own perspectives on the life course and expected sets of material items, social goals, etc.

2. **Comparison with others**: Section where I either asked individuals to compare themselves with others that are quite different from them, or this happened naturally in the flow of the conversation.

3. **Coping strategies**: Passages describing specific personal coping strategies, often creative ones that involve some degree of complex identity manufacturing or positioning, along with a series of behaviors that may be different in different setting, or combine elements from several different social groups.

4. **Domestic abuse**: Sections referring to any kind of domestic abuse, whether coming from the parents, perpetrated by the individual, received from a spouse, observed, etc.

5. **Economic pressures**: Node for individual interviews, referring to any mention of economic pressures.

6. **Economic strategies**: Refers to employment, plans for employment, money-making schemes, or any other kind of financial planning and strategizing to help make ends meet in a relationship, family, or even as a single individual.

7. **Fighting**: Passages referring to a history of physical conflict with other individuals, and/or the temptation to engage in such behavior, and/or desistance from such behavior and the cognitive/decision-making processes involved.

8. **Future goals**: Sections where individuals talk about achieving significant goals in the near or far future.

9. **Goal blocking**: Descriptions of a variety of agents, from the social to the chance, that could intercede to block someone form their own personal goals in life, or might intercede in the lives of others to the same effect. These events could range from drinking to membership in the wrong crowd to having a bad accident.

10. **Interview dynamics**: Sections written by me describing general feelings about the dynamics of the interview, including social context and certain events that may have interrupted or aided the interview process, as well as personal emotions, etc.

11. **Parental relationships**: Passages describing positive or negative relationships with parents, impressions of parenting styles for self and others, and whether they believe these styles work or not.

12. **Religion**: Comments having to do with parental or ego religion and its role in life experience.
13. **School drop-out:** Dialog in interviews concerning reasons for quitting school, whether high school or college.

14. **School quality:** Comments referring to the quality of teachers, teaching, administration, management, facilities, etc. in middle schools, high schools, and colleges.

15. **School transition:** Comments referring to a successful school transition, including turning points in coping with school, as well as difficult points that were overcome (usually refers to making the transition to college).

16. **Social goods:** Sections referring to the desire of some sort of moral or social standing in the community, or passages directly referring to social values in the community and individual positionality vis-a-vis these values.

17. **Social support:** Passages describing the positive effect of having a supportive social group, whether this is at the level of family, peer, school/classroom, or even working group.

18. **Traditional healing:** Passages referring to sweat lodges, witch doctors, traditional medicine, or any other method of accomplishing desired health goals that is not explicitly Western/biomedical.

19. **Turning points:** Major transition points, in life, in terms of a change in the way of dealing with/coping with life, or planning life, etc. These may be very introspective, or in some cases more "mechanistic" and less well thought-out.

**Complex / elaborated themes:** (necessitating hierarchical branching structures, due to the diversity or complexity of the way they were discussed by participants)

1. **Substance use:** Passages referring to the use of mind-altering substances and their effects, whether personal or in general.
   a. **Peer pressure:** Sections describing the role or peer pressure and social groups in the creation, maintenance, or cessation of substance use.
   b. **Rehab:** Passages referring specifically to the experience of rehab, the events leading up to the decision to partake in rehab, life after rehab, etc.

2. **Male-female relations:** For individual interviews, refers to mention of spousal meeting, relationship, conflict or any of my observations on same topic, as well as any mention of dating at any age (may or may not lead to marriage).
   a. **Competition:** Comments about competition in dating, usually referring to men competing with men and women with women, but sometimes referring to efforts to attract and/or manipulate the opposite sex in the mating game.
   b. **Spousal conflict:** Specific information about tension or direct conflict between spouses, as it is played out in the interview or described by the interviewee.

3. **Children/childcare:** Sections of the interview in which individuals talk about the desire for kids or the current burden of having children, and coping strategies surrounding this burden.
   a. **Early pregnancy:** Sections where individuals talk about the risks of early pregnancy, or about their own early pregnancies and how they happen, their downstream effects, etc.
   b. **Children as settlers:** Those passages, usually contained in interviews with Cherokee, referring to children as a source of stability in the lives of parents, in terms of requiring some degree of "settling down," reinforcing abstinence from substances, etc.
c. **Family planning:** General variable referring decision-making surrounding pregnancy risk, including birth control, abstinence, abortion, control (or lack thereof) of sexual behavior, multiple partners, etc.

4. **Community:** Passages having to do with one's relationship with the community, either in negative or positive terms, and either through collective groups of individuals or more formalized institutions.
   a. **Alienation-tension:** Descriptions of feeling isolated from majority culture, whether this refers to a high school group or a wider community reference group. Also refers to sections where individual feels tension with a community (i.e., overt judging or doubting of individual decisions in life, or pressure to "get on with it" in terms of getting married, etc.).
   b. **Apple effect:** Comments by Cherokee participants referring to the tendency of individuals on the reservation to tend to want to keep others "down," in the sense of limiting their mobility and criticizing them for being "white on the inside" if outwardly-mobile aspirations or behavior is exhibited.
   c. **Native identity:** Comments referring to a pro-Cherokee or pro-Native American identity, either by reference to others who do not have an identity, or simply in a straightforward positive sense. May also refer to passages comparing one to others, where others are labeled "more Native."
   d. **Outsiders:** Any conversation about those who come from outside the community to change things, and how this can be upsetting to everyday life in mundane ways or more serious ways as well.
   e. **Pressure:** Generally refers to positive community pressure, in a goal-focused way where the participant's goals match those of the community, and such pressure is perceived more as support than as a negative thing to be overcome or ignored.

5. **Material desires:** Passages describing specific desires (or a lack of desire) for certain classes of material items, whether in a straightforward manner or by way of comparison with others.
   a. **Vehicles:** Comments referring to the desire for any kind of vehicles, land or water-born (although usually land), or using vehicles as a metaphor for life, etc.
   b. **Clothing:** Comments referring to the desire for or competition over clothing items.

6. **Sports:** Sections referring to the importance of athletics in defining personality, directing life tracks, shaping identity processes, etc.
   a. **Body image:** Comments referring to beauty ethics or body image, mostly having to do with the desire for a "buff" or "small" body, either among women or men.
Appendix 2. Cards / items used in 1st round of life events card sort (verbatim)

- Go to college
  - Female: “Go to college or tech school”
  - Male: “Go to college / tech school”

- Popularity / athleticism
  - Female: “Be popular”
  - Male: “Athletic success”

- Dating
  - Female: “Begin dating / find boyfriend”
  - Male: “Begin dating”

- Domestic conflict
  - Female: “Deal with domestic abuse”
  - Male: “Fight with wife”

- Divorce
  - Male/female: “Divorce”

- Fatherhood
  - Male only: “Be a father / raise kids”

- Alcoholism
  - Male/female: “Drinking / partying”

- Career
  - Female: “Find career track”
  - Male: “Find career”

- Money
  - Female: “Financial and material security”
  - Male: “Find financial security”

- Friends
  - Female: “Find true friends”
  - Male: “Find good friends”

- Finish college
  - Female: “Finish college or tech school”
  - Male: “Finish college / tech school”

- Vehicle
  - Male/female: “Get first car”

- Job
  - Female: “First job”
  - Male: “Get first job”

- Marriage
  - Male/female: “Get married”

- Pericap / inheritance
  - Male/female, Cherokee: “Get per capita”
  - Male/female, White/other: “Get inheritance”

- 1st child
  - Female: “Have and raise 1st kid”
  - Male: “Have 1st kid”

- 2nd child
  - Female: “Have and raise 2nd kid”
  - Male: “Have 2nd kid”

- 3rd child
  - Female: “Have and raise 3rd kid”
  - Male: “Have 3rd kid”
- **4th child**
  - Female: “Have and raise 4th kid”
  - Male: “Have 4th kid”
- **Grandchild**
  - Male/female: “Have grandkids”
- **High school**
  - Male/female: “High school graduation / GED”
- **Sex**
  - Male/female: “Lose virginity” / “First sex” (used for both sexes after November 1, as virginity was not equally processed as a personal state by males and females)
- **Parental conflict**
  - Male/female: “Fight with parents”
- **Moving away**
  - Male/female: “Move away from home”
- **Aging**
  - Male/female: “Physical aging”
- **Puberty**
  - Male/female: “Puberty / adolescence”
- **Retire**
  - Male/female: “Retirement”
- **Settle**
  - Male/female: “Settle down / be more responsible”
- **Peer conflict**
  - Female: “Fight with friends”
  - Male: “1st ‘real fight’” [physical]
- **Driving**
  - Female: “Get driver’s license”
  - Male: “Start driving / driver’s license”
- **Drugs**
  - Male/female: “Use drugs”
- **House**
  - Female: “Get first house”
  - Male: “Buy first house”
- **Peer pressure**
  - Male only: “Deal with peer pressure”
- **Car accident**
  - Male only: “1st car wreck”
- **Trouble with the law**
  - Male only: “Get arrested / go to prison”
- **Husband**
  - Female only: “Find a husband”
Appendix 3. Instructions for Stage I card sort (Round A)

1. Sort the first stack of cards into positive and negative life events, or those perceived as positive life goals vs. those which may happen in life but are better off avoided, in the opinion of most people in the community.

2. The positive stack was usually somewhat larger than the negative stack (i.e. 20 or more cards), so participants were asked to further split this stack of positive life goals into 2 stacks\(^\text{14}\), with the first stack representing those life events considered most desirable, essential, and important by the community, and the second stack representing those events that may still be considered positive, but are not necessarily essential or as important as the life events in the first stack.

3. Participants were then asked to sort these 2 piles of positive life events, placing the life event considered the most essential, desirable, and important by the community at the top of the stack, with the rest of the cards sorted according to descending importance.

4. The stack of negative life events was sorted with the most negative (i.e. considered most stressful, most disruptive to the rest of the life course, and the one which most people would try the hardest to avoid) life event on the top, and the rest of the negative life events sorted in order of decreasing negativity.

5. Participants then switched to the second stack of cards, and were again asked to sort the cards into positive and negative life events\(^\text{15}\).

6. Again, the positive stack was sorted into 2 piles, this time based on the perceived difficulty or burden of achieving these life goals. Thus, the first stack represented those life events perceived by the community as requiring the most effort, the most sacrifices, and the most stress to achieve, with the second stack representing life goals or achievements that may still require some effort, but were considered to be more “automatic” and involving less stress and sacrifice.

7. Participants were then asked to sort these two piles of positive life events, with the most difficult life events at the top of each stack.

8. The remaining stack of negative life event cards was sorted with the life events considered most difficult to avoid (or most difficult to remove oneself from/cope with if they occurred) at the top of the stack, and the rest of the cards sorted in decreasing order based on this criterion.

9. Participants were asked to fill out a survey measure, providing the average/ideal, minimum, and maximum ages for a selected series of life events used in the card sort task.

\(^\text{14}\) Three stacks were used in earlier interviews, but it became apparent that participants most often did not use 1 out of the 3 stacks in their sorting process. Thus, for this number of cards, it became apparent that more cognitive utility was provided by sorting into 2 subgroups instead of 3.

\(^\text{15}\) More often than not, the stack of negative life event cards differed between the stacks of cards (for each subject), even though the sorting instructions were identical. Thus, it was decided that sorting events according to valence (positive vs. negative) was informative for this stage but fairly cognitively labile, and was excluded from further cardsort procedures.
Appendix 4. Instructions for Stage I card sort (Round B)

Chronological order of life events
1. Participants were presented with three sets of 15 cards. It was explained that each stack is identical, and contains 15 life events that people from their community have indicated are the most important events in a man’s/woman’s life. They were then told to begin sorting through the cards, and reminded that they will have ample opportunity to suggest new cards, reject certain cards, and to ask questions about the meanings of individual cards.
2. The participant was told to focus on his/her community, and to try to represent average community opinion during the procedure (across ages, and across different social groups). Keeping this in mind, she was then asked to lay the cards out in chronological order, according to the order most people think life events are supposed to proceed.
3. Once the cards are laid out in order, the participants was asked to think about whether there are any important life events that are not represented by the set of cards, or if any cards seemed out of place or do not apply for their community, in terms of the model of an ideal life.

Life event timing
4. To collect data on the perceived ideal timing of each life event, participants were given the following instructions: “Each community has its own ideas about what the ideal age is to achieve each of these life events. For example, a lot of people think it is ideal if you can get your driver’s license at 16. I want you to write this ideal age in the middle of the top part of each card. For some life events, it may be difficult to decide what this ideal age is. In this case, please do your best to make a guess. It is O.K. to indicate an age range, if you have too much trouble deciding on a specific age.”
5. “Communities also tend to have ideas about the minimum age for each of these life events. For example, a lot of people would probably think it was quite strange if you had a serious boyfriend at age 10. I want you to think about the minimum age as the age at which it would really be considered strange if this life event occurred any earlier. For example, it might be considered strange but acceptable to graduate high school at age 16, but any earlier and you might be considered a freak! Please write this minimum age in the upper left hand corner of the card.”
6. “Finally, people in the community tend to think of the latest age that it is acceptable to achieve a life event. For example, a lot of people might think it is strange if you make it to 30 and have not had a job yet. I want you to think of this the maximum age, as the age at which it is considered the absolutely latest acceptable age for a life event to occur. Please write this maximum age in the upper right hand corner of the card.”

7. Cards would then appear in the sequence originally decided by the participant, along with assigned ages (see Figure 1). At this point, the participant was given the option to rearrange any cards he/she would like to. For example, after viewing the ideal ages given for graduating high school and starting to drive, the participant might opt to interchange the two cards.

“Bare bones”/basic life
8. At this point, the participant was given the following instructions: “Now, I would like you to take away what your community feels is the least important of the life events in front of you. In other words, what would most people say the average man/woman could do without, compared to the rest of the cards? I want you to keep doing this, each time taking away what you feel most people would say is the least important life event left, until all that is left on the table is really the ‘bare bones’ of a life, according to most people. In other words, I want you to take cards away one at a time until all that is left is a basic, no frills life. It is completely up to you when to stop taking away cards.”
Life event difficulty
9. At this point in the interview, the first stack of cards is now finished. The participant was then asked to begin sorting through the second stack of cards, and to think about his/her community, and the average person’s opinion about how difficult each of these life events is to achieve, and which involves the most stress, the most pitfalls, and may even be a life event that many people aspire to but few achieve. He/she was told to place this event first in the stack, while the last card should be a life event that most people feel is pretty automatic, and should almost happen on its own unless someone really does something wrong. The cards in between these were placed in order of difficulty, from most difficult to least difficult.

Life event importance
10. The participant was then asked to sort the third stack of life event cards by perceptions of community feelings regarding the importance of individual life events. In other words, the card that most people feel is the most important, the one that a man/woman can absolutely not do without, should be the first card in the stack, while the last card should describe a life event that most people feel is the least important. The cards between these were placed in order, from most to least important.
Appendix 5. List of items used in Stage II (“The good life”) card sort

**Material / social needs (n = 12)**
- Vehicle / transportation
- Job / income
- Place to live
- Basic utilities / appliances
- Clothes
- Food
- Health care
- High school education or GED
- Parents / family
- Good personality
- Friends
- Community connections

**Material wants (n = 24)**
- Big/nice house (with yard, deck, etc.)
- Rims, tires, system, raised/lowered, etc. (vehicle accessories)
- Fancy appliances (dishwasher, nice fridge, etc.)
- Pool / hot tub
- Home help (maids, gardener, etc.)
- Fancy / expensive car or truck
- Lots of property
- 4-wheelers, boats, jet-skis, bikes, etc. (recreational vehicles)
- Computer with internet
- Tattoos / piercings
- Big screen TV / DVD with surround sound
- Nintendo / X-box / Game Cube
- Phone / cell phone
- Nice clothes (Tommy, Aeropostale, CarHartt, Gap, etc.)
- Jewelry (diamonds, gold, silver, etc.)
- Cosmetics / beauty salon / nails, etc.
- Home stereo system (CD, sub-woofers)
- Guns / hunting and fishing equipment
- Dogs / pets
- Investments (stocks, bonds, savings)
- Own a business
- Vacation / travel
- Lake or beach house (vacation home)
- Cosmetic surgery / gold teeth

**Social wants (n = 24)**
- Self-esteem / respect
- Cruising / car shows 4-wheeling / racing
- Clubbing / bands / concerts
- Eating out
- Attractive husband/wife (or girlfriend/boyfriend)
- Church / religion / church fellowship
- Support groups / counselors
• Close / best friends
• Lots of friends / popularity
• Family support / family time
• Husband/wife (or girlfriend/boyfriend) with good morals
• Sports teams / events / clubs
• Help others in the community
• Safe / clean community
• Good name / reputation in the community
• Political power and connections
• Know your cultural and family roots
• Lots of life experiences
• Higher education
• Health / fitness / stress-relief
• Time to yourself
• Polite / honest / good morals
• Drinking / partying / hanging out
• Fun / excitement
Appendix 6. Stage II (“the good life”) card sort: instructions

Introduction

This document describes methods for conducting the “Stage II” or “Goods and Values” cardsort for the “Transition to Adulthood” phase of the Great Smoky Mountains Study. This cardsort is designed to extract latent cultural models or “working cultural logic” for the domains of material and social goods among Cherokee and Anglo adolescents/young adults in the mountains of Western North Carolina. It consists of two primary “layers”:

1. A community layer, whereby participants are asked to represent the perceived “average” opinions from their communities (across all age groups).
2. A personal layer, whereby participants are asked to present their own opinions and priorities regarding social and material goods and values.

Furthermore, the procedure employs three major data domains:

1. Needs, encompassing both social and material goods that participants in a series of focus groups indicated where highly important to live a basic, pared down, “no frills” life.
2. Material wants, including all manner of material items that participants indicated were important in their home community to live “the good life.”
3. Social wants, encompassing social relationships, social activities, values, emotional benefits, and community characteristics considered important to life “the good life,” and to be happy and fulfilled on a day-to-day basis (again indicated by participants in a series of focus groups involving both Cherokee and Anglos).

Perceived community models are assessed for the needs domain, and both personal and community models are extracted for material and social wants. These community/personal layers represent parallel lines of data that can be used later for comparison and calculation of personal position and strategizing within the broader (perceived) cultural frame. Furthermore, assessments of personal approximation (or perceived chances of future approximation) of community and personal models of “the good life” can be ascertained from the data. Such positionality and matching (or mismatching) of personal and cultural models has been shown to relate significantly various health outcomes, such as coronary artery disease and depression, in a variety of communities, from rural African American communities in Alabama to middle class males in Sao Paolo, Brazil.

Procedure

1. Explain to the participant that she will be looking at a variety of cards that represent social and material “things,” which people from the local community have suggested are important for either living a “basic life” (in the case of needs) or for living “the good life” (in the case of wants). Tell her that she will be sorting these stacks in a variety of ways. At first, she will be doing her best to represent average community opinions from her community, across all age groups. Ensure her that later, she will have ample opportunity to indicate what items are most important to her individually.

Needs

2. Hand the participant the green stack of cards, and inform her that within are 12 cards representing the most important items, both social and material, that community members have indicated are absolutely necessary to get by in life and to live a “no frills” and straightforward life, not the ideal by any means, but simply the basics.
3. Tell the participant to think about her community, and to try to imagine how most people think about these items (across all age groups and subcultural groups, representing as best the can the
4. After the participant is finished sorting the cards by order of priority, ask her to number the cards anywhere on the top of the card from 1-12. Then, ask her to examine the layout of cards and tell you whether, to the best of her estimation, there are any cards that are missing. In other words, are there any social or material items that are highly essential for getting by in life that have not been included in the stack? Furthermore, ask whether there are any cards that are in the stack that do not belong, are poorly worded, or simply are not necessary for living a basic life. Make a note of any comments along these lines.

5. Tell the participant that people in the community have a general idea about how difficult it is to acquire and maintain these basic essentials. Inform her that her next task will be to examine each card, and, using a scale from 1-10 (with “1” the least difficult/stressful and “10” the most), indicate how difficult most people think it is to “get” and “hold on to” each item. In other words, how much of a stress/burden is it to get basic utilities and appliances, or to have a place to live? Let the participant use multiple criteria here, and in other cases in which she is asked to rate item difficulty. In other words, some judgments may involve economic criteria (i.e. how much of a financial stress is it to get and maintain a vehicle or other transportation?), while others may involve deciding how much emotional and social stress is involved (i.e. how stressful/difficult is it to maintain a group of friends?). Tell her to write this difficulty rating anywhere on the bottom of the card.

6. Now, inform the participant that her next job is to sort the cards into two piles, according to how most people in her community think about “what fits together.” Tell her that she may use any criteria she likes in this sorting process, but that you will ask her to describe what these criteria are after she is done sorting. Furthermore, she may put any number of cards in either stack (as long as it is more than one). After she is done sorting the piles, ask her to label one pile “#1” and one pile #2” and to describe the piles in order (she can write this on the first card of each stack). Write down the descriptions of the piles on the data entry sheet, along with which pile is “#1” and “#2.”

Wants: Community Layer
Card Selection

7. Put these two stacks aside (you will not use them again for the duration of the session), and hand the participant the first stack of grey cards. Explain that these represent 24 material items that participants in a variety of focus groups have indicated are the most important for living “the good life.” Tell her to, again thinking about people in her home community (including people across all age groups), pick the “top 10” cards according how important most people think these items are for feeling like they have “made it” in life / “everything is falling in place” / they have everything they need to “have fun and feel happy on a daily basis.” (In other words, this is a measure of community models of achievement and status.) Give the participant ample opportunity to ask about the meaning of individual cards. When she is done sorting, ask her if there are any items that should be in the stack but are currently missing. Make a note of any suggestions. Also, ask if any cards are poorly worded or unclear, and make a not of any suggestions for changing/combining/deleting individual cards. When she is done, tell the
participant to put this stack aside and hand you the unused cards. Label this unused stack “Community, not used” and put it aside. (You will not use these cards for the remainder of the session).

8. Hand the participant the first yellow stack of cards, and inform her that this stack represents the 24 most important suggestions that participants in focus groups consistently indicated were crucial social activities, social relationships, and emotional components of living “the good life,” and staying happy and fulfilled on a daily basis. Tell her that her job is to, once again thinking about all the age groups in her community, pull out the 10 most important cards according to the “majority” or “average” opinion. Again, provide ample time and opportunity for questions about individual cards, or suggestions for additional cards, deleting cards, or changing the wording on current cards, making notes of any comments. When she is done selecting the “top 10,” social/emotional goods cards, tell her to hand you the unused cards. Label these “Community, not used” and put them aside. (You will not use these cards for the remainder of the session.)

Importance ranking (1-20)

9. Have the participant combine the “top 10” grey (material goods) and top 10 yellow (social/emotional goods) cards. Tell her that the next task will involve using both stacks together. Then, inform her that her next task is to put these cards in order from 1-20, based on how important the average member of her community thinks each item is for “living the good life.” Again, empathize with the difficulty of the task, acknowledging that it is challenging to rank items that, on the face of it, seem so different. As before, let the participant know that she may use multiple criteria to sort these cards, and that she should use her intuitive sense of people’s priorities. Again, let her know there is no one “correct” answer, and not to agonize about the placement of individual cards. Encourage her to mix grey and yellow cards, indicating that some of each stack will be high priority and some of each stack will be low priority. At points throughout the sorting procedure, make sure the participant is still using the criterion of importance or desirability to rank the cards, and is not, for example, simply putting cards next to each other that seem to “belong together.” After she is done ranking the cards 1-20, have the participant label each card with its rank anywhere on the top of the card.

Difficulty rating (1-10)

10. Inform the participant that the next task will be familiar from the previous procedure that used the green “needs” cards, and that she should again think about average community opinions regarding how difficult each card is to achieve and maintain. Again, inform the participant that she may use multiple criteria to rate difficulty (on a scale of 1-10). For example, the material goods may involve rating the financial burden and stress involved, while the social relationships and activities may involve thinking about the stressfulness and emotional tribulations involved in obtaining and maintaining, for example, a group of close friends. At this point, reinforce the importance of “fuzzy logic” in rating the difficulty of each item, encouraging participants not to over-analyze each item. (This is a crucial balance; encouraging participants to think seriously about each item, but not to get so analytical that it is impossible to proceed. This is why it is important to encourage “intuitive” or “emotional” thinking, and to reinforce the idea that the participant’s first reaction to a card is often the “right” reaction.) Make sure the participant writes each difficulty rating (between 1-10) on the bottom of each card.

Individual achievement (scale on back)

11. Now, tell the participant that it is time to “switch frames” for a second, and to think about her individual life, and which of these items she has or will probably get in the future. Inform her that
the back of each cards has a series of statements, with an empty box by each statement. Tell her to mark “already have it,” if she currently has the item in question and also expects it to persist in her life. The rest of the choices should be self-explanatory, and only apply if the participant does not currently have the item in question. They refer to levels of perceived likelihood that the participant will have the item in question in her possession in the foreseeable future. Again, if the participant seems to get stuck, inform her that this is her best estimate, and that she is not expected to see directly in the future, but just to indicate her initial reaction the statements.

Sorting

12. Once she is done with this process, have the participant sort these cards (the 20 combined grey and yellow) into 3-4 piles, based on the cards that most people in her community think belong together. Again, let her know that she can use any criteria she likes to sort the cards, but that she will need to explain the rationale behind the sorted piles to you after the task is done. Explain to her again that she may have any number of cards in any of the stacks, as long as there are more than two cards in any stack. Then, have her label the stacks “#1, #2, #3” (possibly #4 as well), and to explain the stacks in order. Write down a synopsis of each description in the space given on the data entry sheet. Put these 3-4 stacks aside, making sure to keep them separate for later coding of individual cards.

Wants: Personal layer

13. Now, inform the participant that the rest of the procedure will involve rating items according to her own opinions and her own life. Have the participant complete the same process for the other grey and yellow stacks, with one crucial difference. In this case, the participant will be selecting the top 10 material items and top 10 social items according to her own desires and perception of what things are crucial for her to be happy, feel successful, and feel fulfilled in life. (After picking the top 10 from each stack, you can remove the unused cards and label them “Personal, not used.”) These also may include items that provide a crucial sense of identity and “being who she is.” Rating these cards from 1-20 will also involve putting first the card that she finds most essential to her for “living the good life.” Moreover, she will rate each card by its perceived difficulty (1-20) for her to achieve and maintain, giving her own situation in life, and the personal and social resources she can bring to bear on achieving certain items and relationships. If she has already achieved the item, ask her to rate (1-10) how difficult or stressful it was to procure the item/relationship/emotional state and how difficult she thinks it will be to maintain this in the future. As with the community layer, this personal layer of data will have to involve “fuzzy thinking” and multiple criteria when deciding the importance (1-20) and difficulty (1-10) rating for each card. Remind the participant of this, and to use emotional or intuitive criteria when she feels hung up on the position or rating of any card. Make sure the participant turns over each card and rates her own achievement/perceived future achievement of each card. This crucial difference with this “personal layer” of data collection is that you will not ask the participant to sort the “top 20” cards into piles when she is done. After the rating of achievement/perceived future achievement, she has completed the task.
Appendix 7. Stage III (“Barriers and enablers”) card sort items

**Life course barriers (n = 36):**
- Have kids early
- Get married or settle down early
- Fights / gossip / being picked on
- Addiction (drugs, alcohol, etc.)
- Jail / prison / trouble with the law
- No transportation
- Illness / accident / disability
- Obsessed with money and material things
- Death in the family
- Fight with parents
- Family holds you back / discourages you
- Parents divorce
- Bad parenting (your parents)
- Stress / time pressure
- Early serious job (age 16 or below)
- Friends: betray you or distract you
- Divorce / break-up / heartbreak
- Debt / high bills
- Lack of money / poverty
- Hang with the wrong crowd
- Lack of jobs
- Drop out of school
- Bad school environment
- College pressures
- Partying too much
- Depression / anxiety / mental illness
- No common sense
- Single-minded / obsessed
- No motivation / lazy
- Low self-esteem
- Being angry / reactive
- Always going for the thrill
- Conflict with community
- Bad reputation
- Discrimination / being a minority
- Community holds you back

**Life course enablers (n = 24)**
- Being honest and responsible
- Financial planning
- Determination / motivation / drive
- Plan ahead / have goals
- Lots of experiences and knowledge
- Common sense / think for yourself
- Having a passion or focus
- Helping others
- High self-esteem / secure in yourself
- Good boyfriend/girlfriend or husband/wife
• Community connections and support
• Compliments / encouragement
• Money and finances
• Respect your elders / know your cultural roots
• Strong family support
• Religious community and prayer
• Good parenting (your parents)
• Role models / mentors / special adult friends
• Good education and good schools
• Government or Tribal programs (medical assistance, etc.)
• Good job opportunities
• Free time / partying
• Good health and good health care
• Look attractive / wear nice clothes
Appendix 8. Stage III ("Barriers and enablers") card sort: full instructions

This task is designed to measure cultural and individual models of individual characteristics, social properties, and occurrences that either (1) delay or block the achievement of life goals or (2) assist an individual in achieving such life goals. The task uses two stacks of cards, derived from the results of 12 focus group sessions: (1) **Lifecourse barriers**: a stack of 36 yellow cards representing various items that youth in Western North Carolina believe can block or delay the achievement of important life events and goals, (2) **Lifecourse enablers**: a stack of 24 green cards representing various characteristics and occurrences that Western North Carolina view as potentially assisting an individual in her achievement of such goals.

Data collection during this task consists of two primary stages (similar to the previous cardsort, which tapped individual and cultural models of important social and material goods). These two primary stages are: (1) **Community**, in which the participant is asked to select and sort 20 lifecourse barrier (yellow) cards and 15 lifecourse enabler (green) cards that apply most to her particular community, (2) **Personal**, in which the participant selects and sorts 15-20 lifecourse barrier (yellow) and 15 lifecourse enabler (green) cards that apply most to that particular individual.

**Community Layer, Lifecourse Barriers**

1. Hand the participant the stack of 36 yellow lifecourse barrier cards. Explain to her that these cards represent the results of several focus groups and interviews in her area, and that we have selected the items most frequently mentioned as things that could block or delay the achievement of major goals in life. Tell her that her task is to, as best she can, represent her community (or the “average person in her community”), and to pick 20 cards out of the stack that apply most to the majority of people in her community. In other words, these 20 cards should be things that most people are at the highest risk for, and/or happen to the most people in the community. Another way of explaining this is to ask her to pick the 20 cards that are the most relevant to people in her community. (As before, tell the participant to focus on women in her community if she is female, and to focus on men if he is male).

2. Take the 16 cards not used by the participant and put them aside. Tell her that her next task is to sort the pile of 20 cards into 3 piles: (1) 7 cards that are most relevant to the community, the top 7 cards that most people in her community are at the highest risk for, (2) 7 cards with “medium relevance,” (3) The bottom 6 cards, those 6 that some people may encounter, but are not as relevant or do not apply to her community as much as the previous two stacks. When the participant is finished creating these 3 piles, have her place the cards in each pile in order of community relevance. Thus, the end result of this process should be a pile of 7, 7, and 6 cards, each placed in order of relevance. Have the participant label the cards in order, from 1-20.

3. Next, show the participant the scale on the backs of these cards:

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16 As in previous cardsorts and focus groups, “community” can be as broadly or narrowly defined as the participant likes. We simply ask that any individual considers the group of people that has/had had the most heavy impact on the participant's life, both in terms of past rearing experience and current pressure/judgement.
Explain that her task is now to rate each item according to how seriously it disrupts the lifecourse for any particular individual (in other words, how much of a problem each card presents for the average community member). Tell her that she may mark anywhere along this line for any card. Again, the idea is to think about how many life events may be blocked by each card, or how seriously it may delay the achievement of life goals.

**Personal Layer, Lifecourse Barriers**

4. Repeat steps 1-2 (above) for the individual layer of data collection. In this case, the participant must pick and sort between 15-20 yellow lifecourse barrier cards (in the community layer, she was required to pick exactly 20) that apply the most to herself. These 15-20 cards can be items of events that the subject has dealt with in the past, is dealing with in the present, or anticipates having to deal with in the future. She must then sort these 15-20 cards into 3 piles (as before), with each pile having between 5-7 cards. These cards should be sorted by personal relevance in each pile, and then numbered.

5. Repeat step 3 (above), asking the participant to rate each card in terms of its impact on her particular lifecourse. If the event has already happened, it should be rated by how seriously it has delayed or blocked life goals, or how much it is anticipated in the future. If the card is current or anticipated in the future, it should be rated on perceptions of current or future disruption of life goals and events.

**Community Layer, Lifecourse Enablers**

6. Hand the participant the stack of 24 green lifecourse enabler cards. Explain to the participant that such cards represent the result of several interviews and focus groups in her area, and consist of 24 personal characteristics and events that youth in the area consider to “help you on your way” in life or to “bolster you up while you try to achieve things.” Tell her that her task is to represent the average man/woman (depending on participant gender) in her community, across all age ranges, and to pick 15 cards that most people in the community are most concerned with and have access to (or, the 15 on “most people’s radar screen.”)

7. Have her sort this set of 15 cards into 3 piles of 5: (1) The top 5 cards most relevant to men/women in her community, those on the top of most people’s list, (2) The middle 5, (3) The last 5 cards, those that may be relevant in the community but not as relevant as the first 2 piles. Have her sort each pile of 5 cards by community relevance (in order of how much they apply to her community). Then, she should number the cards from 1-15.

8. Show the participant the scale on the back of the card:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not a big deal</th>
<th>Very serious problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Tell her that her task is to rate each card by how much it helps the average person “stay on track” in life (in other words, how much each card helps people recover from bad things or even simply achieve one’s goals at a reasonable time and with a high degree of satisfaction). As before, she may mark anywhere along this line.

**Personal Layer, Lifecourse Enablers**

9. Repeat steps 6-7 (above) for the individual layer of data collection. In this case, the participant is asked to choose 15 cards out of the 24 that are most relevant to her specifically. These may be things she already has and have helped her in the past, or things she anticipates having or encountering in the future. As before, she should sort the 15 into 3 piles of 5, and then order each pile by personal relevance, labeling the cards from 1-15.

10. Repeat step 8 (above), this time asking the participant to rate each card by how helpful it was, is, or will be in helping her stay on track in life, either by recovering from bad events or simply by helping her get from day to day and make steps towards achieving major life goals.