The concept “executive function,” which broadly refers to the psychological processes involved in the conscious control of action and thought, occupies a central place in the study of cognition and cognitive development. However, while adequate as a working definition, this understanding is vague and imprecise. In this chapter, we examine contemporary approaches to executive function development that operate as behavioral descriptions, and as biological or psychological explanations. We argue that, in order to avoid reductionism to a single level of explanation, a relational perspective is necessary. This perspective emphasizes that description and multiple explanatory levels of analysis are complementary features of a complete explanation. Thus, any complete explanation may entail all levels, but no level represents a competing alternative to other levels. Within this context, we explore the advantages of this approach for executive function research, and conclude with suggestions uniting the levels into an integrated system of explanation.

New research on children's executive functioning and self-regulation has begun to reveal important connections to their developing social understanding (or “theories of mind”) and emotional competence.
The exact nature of the relations between these aspects of children's social and emotional development is, however, far from being fully understood. Considerable disagreement has emerged, for instance, over the question of whether executive functioning facilitates social-emotional understanding, or vice versa. Recent studies linking the development of children's social understanding with aspects of their interpersonal relationships also raise concerns about the particular role that social interaction plays in the development of executive function. Three key questions currently drive this debate: Does social interaction play a role in the development of executive function or, more generally, self-regulation? If it does play a role, what forms of social interaction facilitate the development of executive function? Do different patterns of interpersonal experience differentially affect the development of self-regulation and social understanding? In this book, the contributors address these questions and explore other emerging theoretical and empirical links between self-regulation, social interaction, and children's psycho-social competence. It will be a valuable resource for student and professional researchers interested in executive function, emotion, and social development.

Reconceptualizing Lifespan Development through a Hindu Perspective
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This chapter presents insights from the Hindu life stages and lifespan constructs to argue for a dialectic synthesis and integration rather than an oppositional stance between the “one-size-fits-all” and the “one-theory-for-every-culture” relativistic perspective. The dialectical nature of the Hindu lifespan constructs that integrate structural and content dimensions (e.g., individualism in collectivism) and dynamic concepts of developmental processes in the Hindu worldview (e.g., karma, dharma) illustrate a way to bridge developmental and cultural psychology. The “synthesis” perspective, highlighted in the Hindu worldview, offers alternate stances towards life, as well as coping strategies and techniques that are not only becoming prevalent globally, but appear to have practical utility in dealing with life circumstances and represent survival of the test of time in a pluralistic and dynamic India.
Correlations between an understanding of self and other in psychological terms, often referred to as “theory of mind,” and the control of action, often labeled “executive functions,” have been reported and debated. We suggest that claims about such relations rest on a prior assumption that these are two separate, coherent domains and children have stable, measurable abilities in these areas. Examining relevant research, however, indicates variability in a number of ways, suggesting that both social understanding and executive skills are substantiated and develop within the flow of interaction with people and objects. According to our alternative approach to social cognitive development, social understanding develops within social interaction as children learn to talk about situations of shared understanding. We suggest that executive function and social understanding may be interdependent and emerge through the same processes within social interaction.

International interest is growing concerning using strength-based models of adolescent development to understand how mutually influential relations between individuals and their key settings may be a basis for positive, healthy development. Bidirectional relations models are linked to relational developmental systems (RDS) metatheory, with a focus on the positive youth development (PYD) model, the most used in international PYD-related research and programs. A three-
nation, counterfactual, comparative, longitudinal study is described to understand if Compassion International programs enhance thriving of the world’s poorest youth. RDS metatheory ideas point to the need for longitudinal studies using measures reflecting reliability, validity, and invariance across people, time, and place. This research should be framed by the “specificity principle” to identify individual and setting combinations that capitalize on the strengths of youth and place young people on a thriving trajectory.