

Family Relationships and Social Support Systems

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Demography of Family Life

There has been an increase in the number of generations that are alive at the same time together with a decrease in the number of people within *any* single generation.

- This means that people will spend more years than EVER BEFORE in intergenerational family relationships but there will be FEWER family members to interact with.

The Social Support System

This is the network of friends, relatives, and organizations that provide both emotional and instrumental support.

Who can really make you laugh?

Who understands your problems?

Who would bring you groceries if you were sick?

Who would help you rake your yard?

Determining Sources of Social Support

Concentric circle diagram

Inner circle – people who are the closest and most important to you

Next circle – people who are very close and important but less so than inner

Outer circle – people who are close and important but less so than other circles

Spouses

The first person most people put on their diagram is their spouse because the marital relationship is so central to the lives of many adults.

- For most adults, marital satisfaction is found to follow a U-shaped pattern over the life course (high early in marriage, low point during mid-life, high again later in life).

Adult Children

Adult children are the second most important family source of social support for older adults

Despite some areas of conflict, older parents and adult children report frequent contact and high levels of affection and support

Siblings

Lynn White argues that adult siblings are “permanent but flexible” members of the social network system

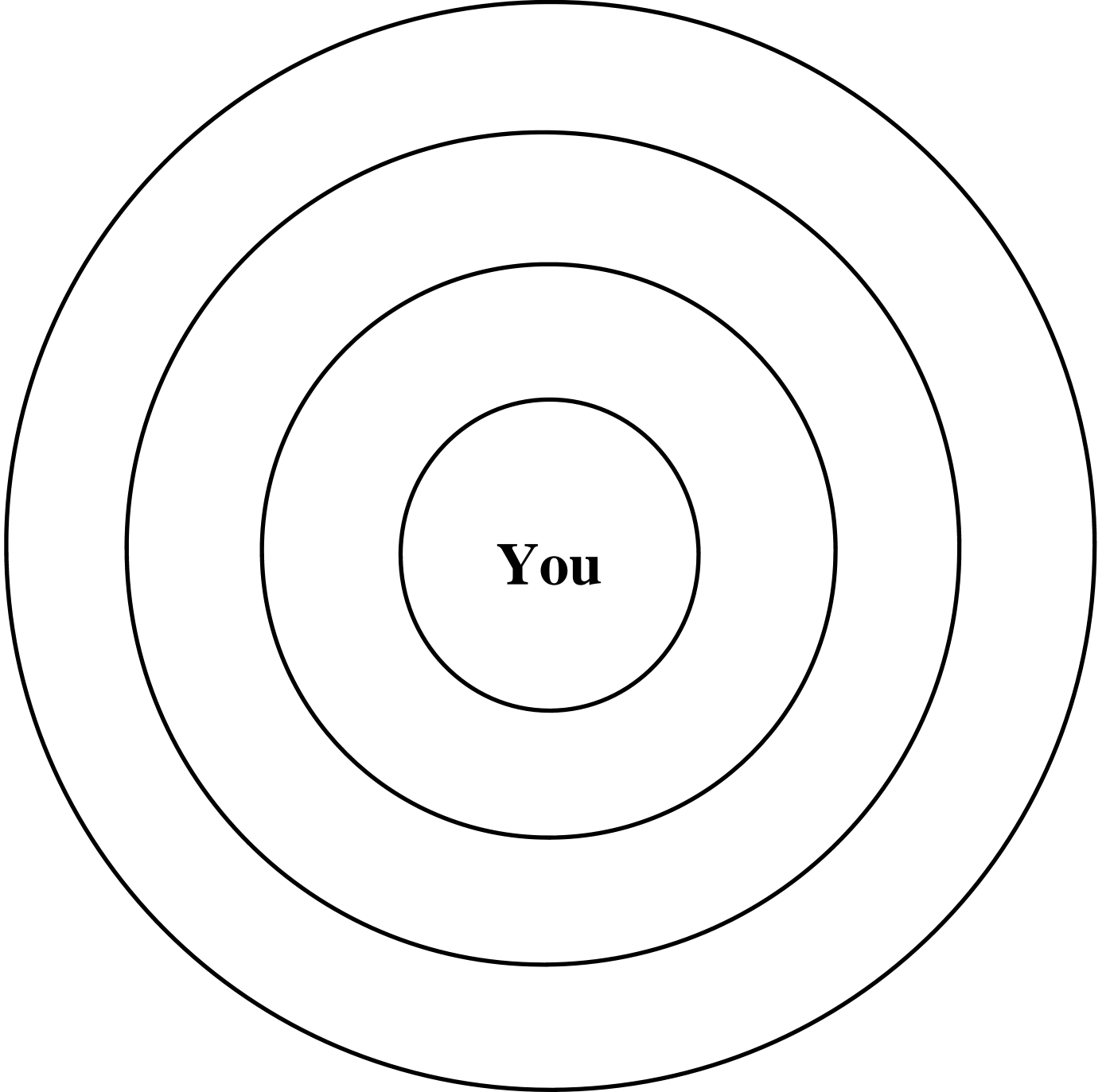
I suggest that some childhood events, like parental death, may make siblings “more permanent” and “less flexible” members of the social network later in life

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Your Social Support System