

**TABLE 3.1** A Mertonian Checklist for Studying the Practice of Life-Course Research

Serendipity <sup>1</sup>	When an unanticipated, anomalous, or strategic datum exerts pressure for the initiation of theory.
Recasting of Theory <sup>1</sup>	When new data exert pressure for the elaboration of a conceptual scheme.
Re-Focus of Theoretical Interests <sup>1</sup>	When new methods of empirical research exert pressure for new foci of theoretical interest.
Clarification of Concepts <sup>1</sup>	When empirical research exerts pressure for clear concepts.
Problem-Finding <sup>2</sup>	When a research question is so formulated that the answer to it will confirm, amplify, or revise some part of what is taken as knowledge in the field. The major ingredients of a sociological problem are an originating question, a practical and/or a theoretical rationale, and a provisional specification of the empirical materials (variables, measurements, and analytic methods) for investigation. The latter may be arrived at by accident and/or by design.
Fact-Finding <sup>2</sup>	When the observation of an empirical generalization (social fact) is a frequent prelude to the statement of a genuine sociological problem.
Some Occasions for Problem-Finding <sup>2</sup>	Specialization; corrective emphases (revisions) stemming from previously neglected data or analytic approaches; the recurrence of longstanding problems; inconsistencies and contradictions.
Social Determinants of Sociological Problems <sup>2</sup>	When historical events or conditions generate the definition of new social problems or impinge on the value commitments of sociologists and lead to the selection and specification of new problems.
Theoretical Pluralism <sup>3</sup>	When diverse theoretical orientations overlap in specific fields of study to deal with diverse aspects of sociological problems. This diversity may lead to a division of labor, cross-fertilization, or to theoretical fragmentation and mutual irrelevance.
Protoconcepts <sup>4</sup>	Early, rudimentary, particularized, and largely unexplicated ideas that influence theory because they obscure underlying conceptual similarities of diverse substantive fields by attending to the particularities of each substantive field.
Establishing the Phenomenon <sup>5</sup>	When a phenomenon is shown to exist or occur before one explains why it exists or how it has come to be.
Specified Ignorance <sup>5</sup>	The express recognition of what is not yet known but needs to be known in order to lay the foundation for still more knowledge.
Strategic Research Materials (SRMs) <sup>5</sup>	Research sites, objects or events that exhibit the phenomenon to be explained or interpreted to such advantage and in such accessible form to enable the investigation of previously intractable or new problems.