

Child Development

PSY 356
Dr. Schuetze

Why Study Developmental Psychology? Reason #1: Raising Children

➤ Knowledge of child development can help parents and teachers meet the challenges of rearing and educating children



- For example, researchers have identified effective approaches that parents and other caregivers can successfully use in helping children manage anger and other negative emotions

Why Study Developmental Psychology? Reason #2: Choosing Social Policies

➤ Knowledge of child development permits informed decisions about social-policy questions that affect children

- For example, psychological research on children's responses to leading interview questions can help courts obtain more accurate testimonies from preschool children



Why Study Developmental Psychology? Reason #3: Understanding Human Nature

- Child-development research provides important insights into some of the most intriguing questions regarding human nature (such as the existence of innate concepts and the relationship between early and later experiences)



- Recent investigations of development among children adopted from inadequate orphanages in Romania supports the principle that the timing of experiences often influences their effects

Child Development

How children change and grow from conception through age 12

- Physically
- Cognitively
- Socioemotionally

Stages of Development

- Infants/Toddlers - birth through age 3
- Early childhood - ages 3 to 7
- Middle childhood - ages 7 to 12

Process versus Product Approach

- Product: Age-specific developmental milestones
- Process: Explanation of how developmental change occurs

Example of Process versus Product Approach

Year	Sitting	Walking
1933	7 months	15 months
1967	5 1/2 months	12 months

Historical Foundations: Early Philosophers



- Provided enduring insights about critical issues in childrearing, even though their methods were unscientific
- Both Plato and Aristotle believed that the long-term welfare of society depended on children's being raised properly, but they differed in their approaches

Historical Foundations: Plato vs. Aristotle

- **Plato** emphasized self-control and discipline
 - **Aristotle** was concerned with fitting child rearing to the needs of the individual child
- **Plato** believed that children are born with innate knowledge
 - **Aristotle** believed that knowledge comes from experience

Historical Attitudes towards Children

- Ancient Egypt/Greece
 - Toys/games
 - Infanticide
 - Sexual Exploitation
- Other Early Civilizations
- Only basic care
 - "When training is premature, nothing is gained other than a great deal of work. Keep babies quiet, and do not stimulate them. Only after behavior emerges from inside can proper guidance begin." 1st century B.C. Chinese text

Historical Foundations: Later Philosophers

- The English philosopher **John Locke**, like Aristotle, saw the child as a *tabula rasa* and advocated first instilling discipline, then gradually increasing the child's freedom
- **Jean-Jacques Rousseau**, the French philosopher, argued that parents and society should give the child maximum freedom from the beginning

Historical Foundations: Research-Based Approach

- Emerged in the nineteenth century, in part as a result of two converging forces
 - **Social reform movements** established a legacy of research conducted for the benefit of children and provided some of the earliest descriptions of the adverse effects that harsh environments can have on child development
 - **Charles Darwin's theory of evolution** inspired research in child development in order to gain insights into the nature of the human species

Historical Foundations: Formal Field of Inquiry

- Child development emerged as a formal field of inquiry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries
- **Sigmund Freud** and **John Watson** formulated influential theories of development during this period



Historical Foundations: Freud and Watson

- **Freud** concluded that biological drives, especially sexual ones, exerted a crucial influence on development
- **Watson** argued that children's behavior arises largely from the rewards and punishments that follow particular behaviors
- Although the research methods on which these theories were based were limited, the theories were better grounded in research and inspired more sophisticated thinking than their predecessors

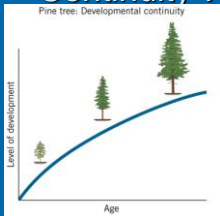
Themes in Developmental Psychology

- Idiographic vs. Normative Development
- Early vs. Later Experiences
- Continuity vs. Discontinuity
- The Active vs. Passive Child
- Nature vs. Nurture

Developmental Themes

- Development proceeds:
 - a. Through stages so that the individual changes rather abruptly into a different kind of person than she/he was in an earlier stage.
 - b. In a variety of ways – some stage-like and some gradual or continuous.
 - c. Continuously – in small increments without abrupt changes or distinct stages.

Continuity vs. Discontinuity



Continuous development:
Age-related changes occur gradually

Discontinuous development:
Age-related changes include occasional large shifts so that children of different ages seem qualitatively different



Developmental Themes

- Children are basically
 - a. Active beings who are the prime determiners of their own abilities and traits.
 - b. Passive beings whose characteristics are molded either by social influences (parents, other significant people, and outside events) or by biological changes beyond their control.

Passive versus Active Child

- The child is either passively shaped by external forces in the environment or plays an active role in their own development.

Developmental Themes

- Biological influences (heredity and maturational forces) and environmental influences (culture, parenting styles, learning experiences) are thought to contribute to development. Overall,
 - a. Biological factors contribute far more than environmental factors
 - b. Biological factors contribute somewhat more than environmental factors
 - c. Biological and environmental factors are equally important.
 - d. Environmental factors contribute somewhat more than biological factors.
 - e. Environmental factors contribute far more than biological factors.

Nature versus Nurture

- What is the relative importance of biological and environmental factors in development?

Nature and Nurture

- The single most basic question about child development is how nature and nurture interact to shape the developmental process
 - **Nature** refers to our biological endowment, especially the genes we receive from our parents
 - **Nurture** refers to the wide range of environments, both physical and social, that influence our development



Nature and Nurture

- Developmentalists now recognize that every characteristic we possess is created through the joint workings of nature and nurture



- Accordingly, they ask how nature and nurture work together to shape development

Ethological Theory

- Ethology: study of how the evolution of a species influences the behavior and development of that species.
 - Natural selection (Darwin)

Morning Sickness as an Adaptation

- Might there be some adaptive value to pregnancy sickness? (e.g., Flaxman & Sherman, 2000; Profet, 1992).

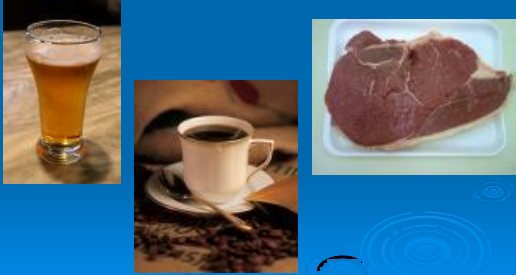


Symptoms: nausea, vomiting, food aversions



- It corresponds to the time in prenatal development when the embryo is most susceptible to effects of teratogens

Modern women acquire aversions to foods that are high in toxins (e.g., meat, coffee, alcohol)



Morning Sickness

- Reduction in incidence of spontaneous abortions for women who experience pregnancy sickness

Species-specific innate behaviors

- Stereotyped in form
- Present without relevant experience that could have allowed it to be learned
- Universal for the species
- Relatively unchanged as a result of learning

Critical Period

- Relatively short period of time in which learning can occur.
- Must have certain experiences in order for normal development to occur.
- Permanent and irreversible effect.
- Sensitive Period: time that is optimal for certain capacities to emerge - especially responsive to environmental stimulation.

Imprinting



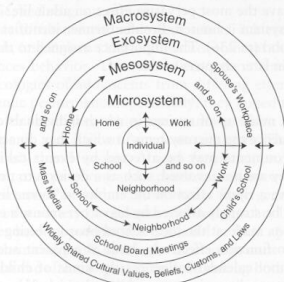
Systems Theory

- All developmental influences are equally important.
- Development is determined through interaction of all influences.
- Focus on process rather than product.

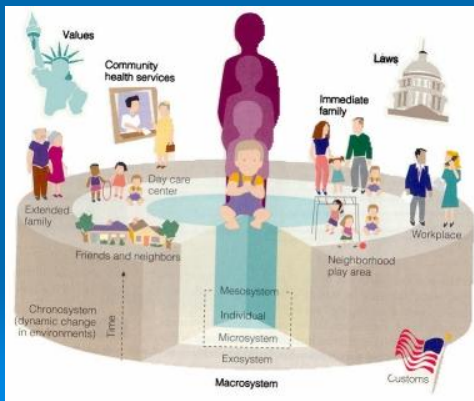
4 Levels of System Functioning

- Microsystem: Immediate surroundings (e.g., family)
- Mesosystem: The interrelationships between microsystems
- Exosystem: Not directly experienced, but influential
- Macrosystem: Larger social class and culture
- Chronosystem: Changes across time

Figure 2.1 ♦ Topological Model of the Environment: A Schematic Diagram of the Levels of the Environment in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory



Note: Arrows across rings indicate reciprocal interactions at all levels.



Bronfenbrenner: Developmental Issues

- We are born with NEITHER negative or positive tendencies
- Person & Environment are BOTH in a state of flux
- Nature & Nurture are BOTH influential
- Can have qualitative and quantitative change
