Unit 5: Life Span Psychology

Definition of Development
• *Development*—a definite pattern of movement or change that begins at conception and continues through one's life span

Developmental Processes
• Development is a series of processes that occur simultaneously
• Major areas include:
  – Biological
  – Cognitive
  – Physical
  – Social and emotional development

Critical Periods
• Throughout development, we encounter critical or sensitive periods
• *Critical periods* are times when certain internal and external influences have a major effect on development
  – at other periods the same influences will have little to no effect
  – if a woman contracts rubella during the first 3 months of pregnancy, the effects range from death of the fetus to deafness
    • rubella contracted in the last 3 months of pregnancy will have little to no effect because the critical period for body part formation has passed

Prenatal Influences
• Fetuses are susceptible to environmental influences even within the mother's womb
• *Teratogens*—environmental agents that can cause abnormalities
• These teratogens affect cell division

  • The danger to the embryo is greatest during the first 2-8 weeks of pregnancy
    – This is the embryonic stage
    – Major organs and body parts are forming at this stage

Teratogens: Alcohol
• *Alcohol* can have a profound effect on the developing fetus
• Mothers who use alcohol during pregnancy can give birth to a child with fetal alcohol syndrome (facial deformities, heart defects, stunted growth and cognitive impairments)
• Small amounts of alcohol can cause neurological problems.

Teratogens: Smoking
• *Smoking* during pregnancy:
  – restricts oxygen to the fetus
  – slows breathing
  – increased heartbeat
  – an increased risk of miscarriages
• Babies can have a low birth weight which can cause other developmental problems

Other Prenatal Issues
• Differences in good nutrition and health explain why the infant death rate is twice that for African Americans than whites
  – a higher percentage of African Americans live in poverty and it is harder to eat a healthy diet and see a physician
• A mother's age can have an impact on birth complications
• Nutritional care during pregnancy can affect the developing fetus
**Nutrition and Obesity**

- Only about 1% of children and adults following the recommended dietary guidelines
- Fat and sugar are consumed in excess amounts in the US
- What the child eats is determined largely by his or her home environment
- Minorities and socioeconomically-deprived children are especially problematic
- Body fat can be determined by a child’s body mass index (BMI)
- Cardiac-respiratory problems and obesity at all-time highs

**Perspectives on Gender Roles**

- Gender plays different roles within each developmental dimension
- These gender roles vary greatly from culture to culture
- These roles can be seen in the different perspectives on psychology:
  - *biopsychological (neuropsychological) theory*
    - children learn biological differences between the sexes
    - women have larger corpus collosums than men
    - may affect how the right and left hemispheres communicate and coordinate tasks
  - *psychodynamic theory*
    - Freud considered general development as a competition
    - young boys compete with the fathers for their mother’s attention (same with girls and their mothers)
    - children they cannot compete with the same-sexed parent and comes to identify with them instead
    - this cannot be empirically tested
  - *sociocultural (or social-cognitive theory)*
    - boys are encouraged to play rough, girls are not
    - gender-schema theory states we internalize messages about gender into cognitive rules about how each gender should behave (e.g. boys can play cops and robbers but it’s not something girls do)

**Kohlberg’s Moral Development**

- Lawrence Kohlberg is most known for his six stages of moral development. These stages are divided into three levels of morality.

**Level 1: Preconventional Level**

- This level involves the individual responding to the world around them and understanding right and wrong; intent in moral decisions is not yet based on convention
  - *Stage 1: Punishment and Obedience* (infancy and early childhood)
    - this stage involves the individual performing certain behaviors simply to avoid being punished
  - *Stage 2: Reciprocity* (early to middle childhood)
    - this is the "what’s in it for me" stage; children will perform certain behaviors if there is a payoff for them

**Level 2: Conventional Level**

- This level is where the individual starts to define parameters to their morality
  - *Stage 3: Good Child* (middle to later childhood)
    - during this stage, children will behavior based on what they think will please others; intent is important; children can actually do the wrong thing for the right reasons (e.g. to please their parents)
  - *Stage 4: Law and Order* (adolescence)
    - individuals understand the parameters of the law and rules, and know that operating within them is the correct thing to do


- **Level 3: Postconventional Level**
  - This level sees the individual consistently applying moral guidelines and dealing them with more abstract and higher-level reasoning
    - **Stage 5: Social Contract** (young to middle adulthood)
      - individuals behave the way they would like others to behavior toward them; individuals are willing to give up certain behaviors to preserve the rights of others with the expectation that others will do the same
    - **Stage 6: Universal Ethical Principles** (middle to late adulthood)
      - this stage involves a universal application of moral principles that are not dependent on situational factors.

**Kohlberg v. Gilligan**

- Carol Gilligan explains that:
  - boys score higher than girls on tests of moral development because boys base their judgments on abstract concepts of justice
  - girls base their judgments on criteria about other people and the importance of maintaining personal relationship
- This is supported by research on rescuers of Jews during the holocaust in that two groups emerged:
  - those that helped because of deeply rooted moral values
  - those who identified with the emotionally
- Research also suggests that women are more prone to suffer from depression because they are more relationship-oriented than men

**Jean Piaget**

- Jean Piaget’s theories are central to understanding cognitive development
- He believed a child’s cognitive development is a result of an individual’s interface with the physical maturity, the world around him or her and social experiences
- Children actively move through orderly and predictable stages of cognitive development
- Piaget believed that all children naturally are inspired to learn, think and comprehend
- Children see the world quite differently than adults do
- Children order their thinking into schemas or schemes
- All learning entails either assimilation or accommodation

- All children will systematically experience each state of cognitive development
- Children will progress through these states in order, although some may overlap
- Piaget believed that cognitive development could not be accelerated

**Stage 1: Sensorimotor**

- This occurs from birth to age 2
- Infants take in the world through their sensory systems
- Behavior is based on their physical responses to the environment
- They learn their reflexes have an impact on the world around them
- The infant moves from reflexive actions to representational or symbolic thought
- Infants are totally egocentric--everything revolves around them
- The hallmark of this stage is completion of object permanence--the idea that objects exist independent of perception
Object Permanence

- Infants begin to understand object permanence from birth to 1 month by tracking objects with their eyes—if the object is hidden, the infant loses interest
- From 4-8 months they will reach of partially covered objects
- From 8 to 18 months, they will search for hidden objects but will lose will not search for it in new locations
- From 18 to 24 months, the child has achieved object permanence; they can imagine movements without seeing them

Stage 2: Preoperational

- This stage last from years 2 to 7
- Symbolic thought and imagination occur during this stage
- Children constantly ask "why" to understand their world
- Intuitive reason and representational thought develop
- Children continue making language errors but ability increases rapidly, mastering many new words daily
- Independent and cooperative play develop
- Children love to recite nursery rhymes, sing songs and hear stories at this stage
- Transductive reasoning occurs—making a causal connection between experiences even when a connection may not exist
- The child at this stage believes non-living objects have lifelike qualities—called animism
- Children at this stage can only focus on one piece of information at a time—called centration
- Children at this stage also practice causal reasoning—the belief their thoughts can cause actions

Stage 3: Concrete Operations

- This occurs from years 7 through 11
- Children can consider multiple dimensions to information
- They can solve simple problems
- They begin to question their thinking (metacognition)
- The world is understood through trial-and-error
- Moral judgments become more subjective
- Inductive reasoning, reversibility, seriation, and transitive inference occur at this stage

Conservation

- The hallmark ability is conservation—the understanding that, although the shape of something changes, its basic proportions remain the same
- Conservation occurs with numbers, length, volume of liquid and characteristics of matter

Stage 4: Formal Operations

- This occurs from age 12 through adulthood
- Abstract reason and complex problem-solving are the hallmarks of this stage
- Hypothetical-deductive reasoning occurs at this stage—entails a logical and systematic plain to determine the correct solution

Equilibrium

- The individual seeks a sense of equilibrium, or stage of balance
- Disequilibrium occurs when there is a conflict; this is also known as cognitive dissonance
- The individual starts with a stage of balance, takes in a new thought which creates a conflict, and returns to a state of equilibrium through the use of assimilation or accommodation
- Assimilation occurs when new information easily fits into an existing schema to form a new cognitive structure
- Accommodation occurs when new information does not fit into an existing scheme which then must be adjusted to fit the new data
Lev Vygotsky

- Believed that learning does not happen in a vacuum and that all children seek stimulation
- All children desire to learn and are active learners
- Children learn best when they are interested in learning
- His major contribution is the *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*

**Zone of Proximal Development**

- Vygotsky believed children will achieve greater cognitive gains when they receive instruction in their ZPD
- Children learn best from another child who has just mastered that skill
- This not only helps the learner, but the child who is the teacher by reinforcing the skill
- Learning, then, works best in a social setting
- Group projects, small groups or pairs help achieve optimal learning
- Silent classrooms are not appropriate learning environments
- Children should converse about their learning
- Dialogue not only provides the highest level of value from the ZPD, it serves as language practice as well
- Children should verbalize steps of action and problem solving as they perform them
- There is an interrelation between thought and language
- Teachers should ask students how they arrived at their solutions
- Learning builds upon learning--adding toys, skills and concepts that increase in difficulty assists scaffolding

**Private Speech**

- Vygotsky believed that initially language and thought emerge as two separate abilities
- The two begin to merge around the age of three
- Language becomes both external and internal
- Internal language involves *private speech*, or self talk
- Private speech helps children organize, control and guide their behaviors, allowing for self-regulation
- All higher levels of functioning are directed by private speech

**Noam Chomsky**

- Chomsky based his theory around an innate, biological mechanism that allows for language acquisition
- He called this the *Language Acquisition Device (LAD)*
- This is an internal, neurologically hard-wired device that allows individuals to intuitively understand grammar

**Freud's Psychosexual Development**

- Sigmund Freud believed we all had certain drives and instincts which guide our behavior
- These include:
  - *eros*: the life instinct which seeks to preserve the species; tied to the libido
  - *libido*: our sexual energy
  - *thanatos*: our desire to return to the womb; manifested in aggressive and destructive behavior
• Freud believed that everyone progressed through five stages of *psychosexual development*
  • These stages are:
    – *oral stage* (0-1 years): achieves libidinal satisfaction from oral activities such as eating and sucking
    – *anal stage* (1-3 years): autonomy is developed through bladder and bowel control
    – *phallic stage* (3-6 years): the child comes to develop a sexual attachment to the opposite sexed parent and to see the same sexed parent as a rival for those affections
      - *Oedipus Complex*: boys want to possess the mother and see their father as a sexual rival
      - *Electra Complex*: girls want to possess the father and see their mother as a sexual rival
    – *latency period* (6-puberty): a period of sexual rest for both sexes where sex-role identities develop
    – *genital stage* (puberty on): a reawakening of sexual urges and a desire for heterosexual relationships
  
• Freud believed that the mind or our personality was made up of three constructs:
  – the *id*: the child within us; the primitive, unconscious part of our mind that seeks expression of wishes and emotions (called the *pleasure principle*)
  – the *ego*: uses the reality principle to satisfy the id and superego safely and effectively in the real world; the mediator that develops with experience and is the rational part of our mind
  – the *superego*: society’s values and morals; our conscience; the parent within us which is guided by the *idealistic principle*

• Individuals constantly strive to present their best self and reduce anxiety
• Freud called this preserving *ego integrity*
• To do this, individuals employ a variety of *defense mechanisms*
• The two main defense mechanisms in psychosexual development are:
  – *fixation*: becoming stuck at a specific stage of psychosexual development because it is safer for ego integrity
  – *regression*: returning to an earlier stage of psychosexual development

### Erikson’s Psychosocial Development
• Erik Erikson believed that individuals went through eight crises throughout their lives in which a positive or negative resolution to the crisis occurred
• These are called the “Eight Ages of Man,” and make up Erikson’s eight stages of *psychosocial development*

- *trust versus mistrust* (0 - 1): the infant develops a sense of trust in the world if his or her needs are met
- *autonomy versus doubt* (1 - 3): the toddler develops a sense of independence through bladder and bowel control (coincides with Freud’s anal stage; Anna Freud was Erikson’s therapist during his psychological training)
- *initiative versus guilt* (3 - 5 1/2): the child learns to initiate actions, especially during play, indicating a move to cognitive, not just physical independence
- *industry versus inferiority* (5 1/2 - 12): the child competes against his or her peers in producing acceptable work in school
- *identity versus role-confusion* (adolescence): the teenager develops a sense of identity, strives for more self-understanding and establishes goals for the future
- *intimacy versus isolation* (young adulthood): a feeling of belonging either with a close group of friends or through marriage
- *generativity versus stagnation* (middle adulthood): generativity is Erikson’s term for a concern for future generations; in this stage adults assist their growing children or the community to make the world a better place for them in the future
- *integrity versus despair* (later adulthood): the individual looks back over their life and assesses whether is was a positive or negative existence