Chapter One: 
Introduction

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The Life-Span Perspective

- The Importance of Studying Life-Span Development
- Characteristics of the Life-Span Perspective
- Development: Pattern of change that begins at conception and continues through life span

Importance of Studying Life-Span Development

- Experiences influence development
  - Maximum human life span unchanged – 122
  - Life expectancy: Average number of years a person is expected to live when born in a particular year has changed
  - Developmental change occurs during adulthood as well as childhood

Importance of Studying Life-Span Development

- Characteristics of the Life-Span Perspective
  - Lifelong
  - Multidimensional
  - Multidirectional
  - Plastic
  - Multidisciplinary
  - Contextual
  - Growth
  - Maintenance
  - Regulation of loss

Importance of Studying Life-Span Development

- WHAT INFLUENCES CAN YOU THINK OF?

Importance of Studying Life-Span Development

- Development is contextual
  - Normative age-graded influences
    - Shared by a particular age group
  - Normative history-graded influences
    - Shared by a specific generation
  - Nonnormative life events
    - Unique to the individual
Importance of Studying Life-Span Development

• Some contemporary concerns:
  – Health and well-being
  – Parenting and education

• Sociocultural contexts and diversity
  – Culture
  – Ethnicity
  – Socioeconomic status
  – Gender

Social policy: Laws, regulations, and government programs that influence citizens’ welfare
  – U.S. family policies overwhelmingly treatment oriented

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Nature of Development

• Development period — time frame in one’s life characterized by certain events
  – Interplay of biological, cognitive, and sociological processes
  – Each period has its own stresses, ups and downs, and concerns
  – Variations in capabilities of same age individuals occur in all periods of development

Nature of Development

• Periods of development
  – Prenatal Period
  – Infancy
  – Early childhood
  – Middle and late childhood
  – Adolescence
  – Early adulthood
  – Middle adulthood
  – Late adulthood
Nature of Development

- Conceptions of age
  - **Chronological age**: Number of years elapsed since person’s birth
  - **Biological age**: In terms of biological health
  - **Psychological age**: One’s adaptive capacities
  - **Social age**: Social roles and expectations related to one’s age

Developmental issues

- Nature and nurture
  - Inheritance or environment?
- Stability and change
  - Traits and characteristics: capacity for change?
- Continuity and discontinuity
  - Gradual or abrupt changes in development?

Theories of Development

- **Theory**: Interrelated set of ideas that helps to explain data, make predictions
- **Hypotheses**: Assertions or predictions, often derived from theories that can be tested

Psychoanalytic theories

- Development is primarily unconscious, heavy with emotion
- Behavior is surface characteristic of development
- Analyze symbolic meanings of behavior and deep inner workings of the mind for true meaning of development
- Early childhood experiences stressed (ages 1-5)

Freud’s theory

- Id, ego, and superego create personality
- Defense mechanisms and repression
- Anxiety and defense mechanisms
- Five stages of psychosexual development
- Criticisms: overemphasized sexual instincts, unconscious is more important today
Theories of Development

- Erikson’s psychosocial theory
  - Primary motive for human behavior is social; desire to affiliate with others
  - Developmental changes throughout life span
  - Experiences at all ages are important
  - Criticisms: stages have positive/negative poles, crisis in each stage needs resolution

Erikson’s Eight Life-Span Stages

- Cognitive theories
  - Emphasize conscious thoughts
  - Three major theories
    - Piaget’s cognitive development
    - Vygotsky’s sociocultural cognitive theory
    - Information processing theory

Theories of Development

- Piaget’s cognitive developmental theory
  - Children actively construct their knowledge
  - Each of the four stages
    - Age-related
    - Has a distinct way of thinking
    - Has different way of understanding the world
    - Child’s cognition is “qualitatively” different

Figure 1.12 - Piaget’s Four Stages of Cognitive Development
Theories of Development

• Vygotsky’s sociocultural cognitive theory
  – Children actively construct their knowledge
  – Culture and social interaction guide cognitive development
    • Learning to use inventions of society
    • Learning from social interactions with more skilled adults and peers
    • Interaction creates tools to adapt to culture

• Information-Processing theory
  – Brain is compared to computer’s hardware
  – Cognition is viewed as computer software
  – Individuals acquire increasingly complex information
    – Thinking: perceive, encode, represent, store, and retrieve information
    – Good strategies: important to development

• Behavioral and social cognitive theories
  – Behaviorism: Scientific studies can only be based on direct observations and measures
  – Development is observable behavior
    • Learned from experiences/environment
    • Development does not occur in stages; advocates continuity

• Skinner’s operant conditioning
  – Consequences, rewards and punishment, shape behavior
    • No emphasis on thoughts, feelings
  – Development is pattern of behavioral changes
    • Modifying environment produces change
    • Changes determined by consistency experiences, rewards or punishments

• Bandura’s social cognitive theory
  – Behavior, environment, and cognition are key to development
  – Behavior is learned through observation and imitating (modeling)
  – Behavior of others is cognitively evaluated, strategies created for successful learning
Theories of Development

• Ethological theory
  – Emphasis on biology and evolution, sensitive periods of development, and careful observations
  – Lorenz: *Imprinting*
    • Animals’ rapid, innate learning process involving “attachment”
    • Critical period is early in life

• Ethological theory
  – Bowlby
  • Used ideas of Lorenz
  • “Attachment” determines development
  • Positive and secure, negative and insecure
  • Sensitive period is in infancy
  • Promotes good social relationships

Theories of Development

• Ecological theory
  – Bronfenbrenner’s view that development influenced by five environmental system
    • Microsystem
    • Mesosystem
    • Exosystem
    • Macrosystem
    • Chronosystem

Figure 1.14 - Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory

Theories of Development

• Eclectic theoretical approach
  – Life-span development is complex
  – Each theory has contribution to understanding development
    • Selects from best features of each
  – A mistake to rely on only one theory

Research in Life-Span Development

• Methods for collecting data
  – Observation:
    • Laboratory
    • Naturalistic observation
      – Cultural concerns
  – Survey and interview
    • Self-report, clear and unbiased questions
Research in Life-Span Development

• Methods for collecting data
  – Standardized test
  – Case study
    • Focus on aspects of individual’s life
    • Unique, cannot be duplicated
  – Physiological measures
    • Blood tests, MRI

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Research in Life-Span Development

• Methods for collecting data
  – Descriptive research:
    • Observe and record
  – Correlational research:
    • Prediction based on strength of relationship
    • Correlation coefficient (+1.00 to -1.00)

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Figure 1.19 - Possible Explanations for Correlational Data

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Research in Life-Span Development

• Methods for collecting data
  – Experimental research
    • Causality and effect
    • Dependent (Y) and independent (X) variables
    • Control and experimental groups
    • Random assignment of subjects
    • Manipulation of independent (X) variable

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Figure 1.18 - Principles of Experimental Research

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Research in Life-Span Development

• Time Span of Research
  – Cross-sectional approach
    • Compares different age groups at the same time on a variety of dependent variables
  – Longitudinal approach
    • Studies same group over long period of time
    • Cohort effects: time of birth, generation, era
Research in Life-Span Development

• Research Journals
  – Learning about journal process is beneficial
  – Scholarly and academic information published
  – Articles evaluated before publishing
  – Some journals more prestigious than others
  – Organization of article
    • Abstract, introduction, method, results, discussion, references

Research in Life-Span Development

• Conducting ethical research
  – APA guidelines address
    • Informed consent, confidentiality
    • Debriefing, deception
  – Minimizing bias (gender, culture, ethnicity)
    • Ethnic gloss — overgeneralizing about ethnic group(s)

The End