

Chapter 2

Foundational Theories in Human Development

OUTLINE

2.1 Foundational Theories in Human Development

- 2.1a *Theories that focus on biological processes*
- 2.1b *Theories that focus on cognitive processes*
- 2.1c *Theories that focus on emotional or social processes*
- 2.1d *Theories that focus on the environment of development*
- 2.1e *Comparing developmental theories*

Summary

Self-Quiz

Terms and Concepts

“Children more than ever, need opportunities to be in their bodies in the world—jumping rope, bicycling, stream hopping, and fort building. It’s this engagement between limbs of the body and bones of the earth where true balance and centeredness emerge.”

David Sobel

Have you ever read an advice column and thought that the advice was great? Have you ever read one where the advice was not so great? You probably liked the advice column that most aligns with your own personal theories regarding human behavior, emotions, thinking, and social settings. What causes two people to fall in love? Why are some people easily successful in school while others struggle? Do video games cause aggression? What makes someone a good boss? All of these questions focus on human behavior, emotions, thinking, and social settings. Believe it or not, different theories in human development would answer each of these questions somewhat differently. In this chapter, you will become familiar with some of the theories in human development. As you read, ask yourself, which theories best align with your own personal theory regarding human development?

2.1 Foundational Theories in Human Development

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

1. Understand the major theories that focus on biological processes
2. Understand the major theories that focus on cognitive processes
3. Understand the major theories that focus on emotional and social processes
4. Understand the major theories that focus on the environment
5. Understand the similarities and differences between the major developmental theories

As discussed in the previous chapter, theories are important because they help us to understand our observations. A good theory is a testable theory that can either be supported or not supported by research. A basic foundation in developmental theories is vital in order to have a common starting point for all of our future chapters. We will return to some of these theories in future chapters, if they are still relevant. In other chapters, we will introduce you to new, groundbreaking theories that are shaping the coming century of developmental research.

The theories in this chapter are classified by broad categories based upon whether their emphasis is on biological processes, cognitive processes, socio-emotional processes, or the environment. However, you must keep in mind that such classifications have their shortcomings. Most of these theories cover multiple aspects of development; we simply grouped them upon where most of the theory focused. You may find the theories that share your basic assumptions about human nature more favorable to you than those that differ with you on those assumptions or on any of the other philosophical issues discussed in the first chapter. Enjoy!

2.1a Theories That Focus on Biological Processes

Some theories emphasize the importance of biological processes on development. These theories may emphasize genetics, the process of maturation, or evolution; nevertheless, they all still understand the importance of the environment for development as well. This section will discuss some of the more commonly known theories of human development that emphasize the influence of biological processes.

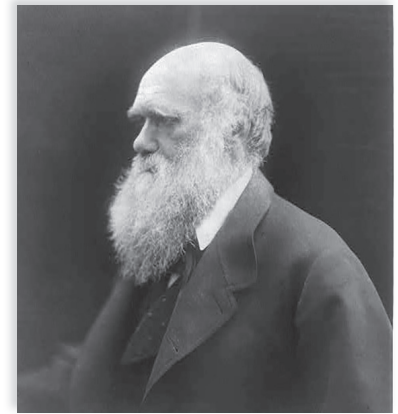
Evolutionary Theory

Charles Darwin (1809–1882) is largely credited as the founder of **evolutionary theory**. Although many contributed to and shared his thoughts, he was the most thorough in presenting and documenting his theory (Desmond & Moore, 1991; Hergenhahn & Henley, 2014). In terms of human development, key concepts in evolutionary theory would include the ideas of adaptation and fitness. **Fitness** would be seen as how well an individual is suited for his or her environment and the ability to survive and reproduce. Adaptation is traditionally posed in terms of **adaptive features**. “Adaptive features are those features that are conducive to survival in a given environment, *whatever* those features may be” (Hergenhahn & Henley, 2014, p. 275). In purely Darwinian terms, adaptation does not imply progress, improvement, or anything of the like. In Darwin’s view, evolution lacks strategy or direction. This tends to run counter to what most of us think of when we use the terms adaptation or evolution. Evolutionary theory has been highly influential in the field of sociobiology—commonly referred to as evolutionary psychology (Hergenhahn & Henley, 2014).

Ethology

Ethology is the field of inquiry that studies the biological bases of behavior patterns in animals and humans. Several basic concepts that are used to explain behavior are briefly discussed here.

Ethology focuses on learning about the innate basis of behavior and the genetic factors that influence developmental changes (Crain, 2017; Hergenhahn & Henley, 2014). Ethologists remind us of our animal origins. They believe that many of our behavior patterns are innate and are linked to past ancestral traits. Several researchers have stressed the role of genetic programming in the functioning of human behavior patterns. For example, Noam Chomsky (1957, 1965, 1968, and 1975) believes that the demonstrated ability of human infants to learn any particular language points to an inborn language-generating mechanism. He asserts that the human brain has evolved neuropsychological patterns that facilitate the learning and use of language, and this distinguishes us from lower animals (we will return to Chomsky’s language theory later in the book).



“Portrait of Charles Darwin,” by Julia Margaret Cameron, circa 1870, Library of Congress

*After Charles Darwin published **On the Origin of Species** in 1857, scientists began to use animal studies to gain insight into human physiology and behavior.*

Evolutionary theory

Those theories of developmental change that are founded on Darwin’s theory of evolution; these theories stress the role of biological factors in the individual’s adaptation to the environment

Fitness

How well an individual is suited for his or her environment and the ability to survive and reproduce

Adaptive features

Those features that are conducive to survival in a given environment, whatever those features may be

Ethology

The field of inquiry that studies the biological bases of behavior patterns in animals and humans



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Genes are passed down through each generation, which enables the survival of genetic material.



What is ethology?

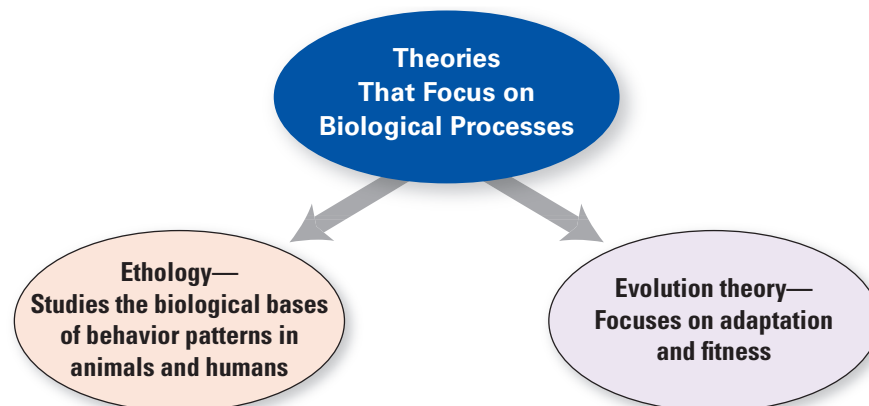
Several researchers have suggested that certain human behavior patterns and features have undergone evolutionary adaptation and have endured because of their survival value. For example, Lorenz (1965) proposed that physical features in the young of many animal species stimulate mothering behaviors in the adults. Crying may serve this same purpose. Another researcher has confirmed Lorenz's findings in humans. Hess (1962) reports that the pupils of adult women enlarge significantly when they are shown pictures of babies. Pupillary dilation is a reflex that indicates interest in and curiosity about an object. Hess concludes that women, unlike men, may have a biological predisposition to respond to babies in ways that help to ensure the babies' survival.

Why do people get tattoos and piercings? Some researchers believe it is for an evolutionary reason (Carmen, Guitar, & Dillon, 2012). By making oneself unique, it is thought to make you more visible in a crowded world; hence, allowing for more opportunities to produce offspring. The authors of this research highlight how the evolutionary need for reproduction overshadows the potential health and financial costs of such body ornamentation.

Some developmentalists suggest that there are other critical (or sensitive) periods in areas of human development, such as language, attachment, and brain development. For example, brain development begins shortly after conception and is considered a sensitive period through early childhood (Ryan, Lane, & Powers, 2017). Sadly, the largest category of children who are abused or neglected are those between birth and 4 years old. Ryan and colleagues (2017) found that the earlier practitioners could intervene and provide therapy, the better the subsequent outcomes. This is because the earlier the brain is helped back onto a more optimal developmental pathway, the less opportunity for less optimal pathways to take root.

Figure 2–1 summarizes the two biological process theories discussed in this chapter.

Figure 2–1 Theories Focusing on Biological Processes



Implications

Evolutionary theory and ethology have proved helpful in filling out our understanding of the causes of developmental changes. Although these approaches raise many interesting issues for contemplation, critics point to a number of problems with each approach. Traditionally, some of the researchers who emphasized a biological approach to understanding development would neglect the influence of the environment. Further, as mentioned in Chapter 1, both the biological and environmental approaches to human development have neglected the role of the individual (Overton, 2015).

PAUSE & Process

- ◆ How do you think evolutionary theory would explain mating behavior in humans?
 - ◆ What is an area of human development for which you believe there may be a sensitive period?
-

2.1b *Theories That Focus on Cognitive Processes*

There are many theories that focus on cognitive processes in development. However, one of the best-organized and most comprehensive explanations of how human beings acquire their thought processes and problem-solving abilities was proposed by Jean Piaget (1896–1980). We will discuss the foundation of Piaget’s cognitive development theory in this section, laying the groundwork to discuss his stages in detail later in the book. Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896–1934) provided the framework for a social-historical theory of cognitive development before his life was cut short by tuberculosis at age 38. We will also be laying the foundation of his theory in this section. Finally, a number of theories fall under the blanket term “information-processing theory.” Because the general assumptions and tenets of information-processing theory will be important when we learn about memory, problem-solving, and other cognitive processes later in the book, we will introduce some of its core concepts here. However, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the idea of embodied cognition has thrown much of what we know about information-processing into question (Wilson & Golonka, 2013). This is an issue that we will address as we learn about cognitive development in future chapters.

Piaget’s Cognitive Development Theory

Piaget’s training was in biology, although he devoted most of his life to child psychology. His intent was to learn as much as he could about how intellect developed. Ultimately, he wished to explain how human knowledge was acquired, used, and limited in scope (Crain, 2017; Dixon, 2003).

Piaget based much of his theory of cognitive development on observations of, and interviews with, children (Crain, 2017; Dixon, 2003). He also intently observed his own children to learn about the mental development of infants. Although he began publishing his findings and thoughts in 1921, his work went largely unnoticed in the United States until the 1960s (although Vygotsky knew of Piaget's work and critiqued it). His works have probably stimulated more research and educational programming for children than those of any other theorist in this area of development (Beilin, 1994).

Basic Concepts Several concepts are central to Piaget's thoughts about the development of the intellect. **Cognition** and cognitive development are terms that refer to the way in which people come to know and understand the world. A variety of related processes—perception, problem-solving, judgment, and reasoning, for example—are involved in how people organize their mental life.

Cognitive development also refers to the changes that take place as people acquire a general understanding of the world. Piaget proposed that individuals go through a series of four stages of cognitive development throughout infancy, childhood, and adolescence (Beilin, 1994; Crain, 2017; Wadsworth, 2004). These lead to more complex and sophisticated ways of understanding the world. The ages at which people proceed through these stages are somewhat variable, though the sequence of the stages is invariable (i.e., you must go through the stages in order and not skip any stages).

A **schema** (or scheme) is a building block in cognitive development. This term refers to any consistent, reliable pattern or plan of interaction with the environment. Schemas are usually goal-oriented strategies that help the person to achieve some type of intended result from his or her behavior (Wadsworth, 2004).

Piaget Proposed Two Types of Schemas: Sensorimotor and Cognitive

Sensorimotor schemas are formed during the years of infancy and early childhood. These are the first rudimentary ideas about how the world functions and how the young child may operate or act to make things happen. Sensorimotor schemas have a strong base in early reflexes and motor behavior. Sucking is an early sensorimotor schema, for example. This motor act is used by babies to define and understand their world as well as to receive nourishment. It satisfies some goal and can be initiated by babies even when they are not hungry.

Cognitive schemas are derived in part from sensorimotor schemas. Cognitive schemas refer to ideas or patterns that are based largely on the individual's experiences in operating upon the environment. They differ from sensorimotor schemas in having a strong basis in mental imagery. They reflect the person's ability to use symbolism and abstract reasoning or thinking. Cognitive schemas begin to be formed in early childhood, and are continually formed throughout life. Mathematical processes, for example, are a type of cognitive schema. Once you master the mathematical operation of addition, you are then able to perform the operation using imagery rather than needing to have concrete objects before you. Visualizing objects or symbols becomes automatic through trial-and-error learning and practice.

Piaget proposed that individuals use two processes to modify schemas (Dixon, 2003; Wadsworth, 2004). Assimilation is the process by which people acquire new knowledge or information and match it with or incorporate it into

Cognition

Those processes, such as perception, thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving, by which one comes to know and understand the world

Schema

Any consistent, reliable pattern or plan of interaction with the environment

their existing schemas. Accommodation refers to the process of altering existing schemas in order to bring about congruence with reality. For example, infants modify or change a sucking schema by learning that they can suck not only on a nipple but also on thumbs. An infant who attempts to suck on someone else's thumb may find that this is not allowed. The sucking schema may then be restricted to nipples and the infant's own thumb. This illustrates how accommodation or experiences with reality modify an existing schema. The sucking schema is modified as an infant discovers what can be sucked on and what cannot. The processes of assimilation and accommodation function throughout life to provide the means for changing and modifying schemas.

Central to Piaget's theory is the idea that mental life is devoted to active organization of one's personal understanding of the environment (Crain, 2017; Dixon, 2003; Wadsworth, 2004). Progression through the stages of cognitive development does not occur automatically, either from biological maturation or from genetic programming. Rather, people progress cognitively as they learn to organize their understanding of the world in more complex ways. Experience in interacting with the environment is the cornerstone for producing changes as people grow older. Because of this factor, each person has their own unique interpretation of the environment. In essence, Piaget believed that we derive our own singular understanding of the world based on our personal experiences. It is these individual meanings that we attach to what we observe that give rise to the emotional reactions we experience (Burns, 1980).

Vygotsky's Social-Historical Theory of Cognitive Development

Vygotsky lived in Russia during the Communist Revolution and at a time when Marxist theory was a topic of active discussion. In fact, Vygotsky built his theory of development utilizing some of the key concepts of Marxism (Crain, 2017). This means that although Vygotsky valued both biological and environmental forces in development, he tended to spend more energy focusing on the environmental forces. Specifically, he appreciated the importance of social processes in guiding development and the value of culturally based psychological tools in cognitive processes (Crain, 2017; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch & Tulviste, 1994). Finally, Vygotsky believed that one absolutely must consider the social-historical context in which a human is developing in order to study cognitive development.

You may be wondering what on earth culturally based, psychological tools are. They are not nearly as esoteric as they sound. In fact, you use some every day. Speech, writing, our number system, and memory aids are all psychological tools that we use to mediate our behavior in the world. Vygotsky felt that although intrinsic maturational processes are enough to motivate cognitive growth the first few years of life, these cultural systems are necessary to maintain cognitive growth after that (Crain, 2017). Therefore, one of the main ideas to take away from social-historical theory is that one must understand the historical and social context of development if thinking is to be understood. We will be returning to Vygotsky's theory when we learn about language development.

As interesting as the above discussion of Vygotsky's theory is, it is not what most people in the US think about when they think about Vygotsky. Instead, they are most familiar with his impact on the educational system. Vygotsky proposed the idea of the zone of proximal development. The **zone of proximal development**

Zone of proximal development

The range between what a child can accomplish alone and what can be accomplished with assistance

is the range between what a child can accomplish alone and what they can accomplish with assistance. For example, a child may be able to “read” only a picture book on his or her own, but with some help sounding out words, the child could read a beginning Dr. Seuss book.

Another important term to Vygotsky and modern education is **scaffolding**, developed by psychologist Jerome Bruner. Scaffolding provides a framework to assist a child learning a new skill initially through small steps. Initially, the parent or teacher provides a lot of support and assistance, then incrementally reduces the assistance as the child can complete more of the skill or task independently. For example, let’s say that a child wants to learn to make a salad. Initially, the parent would probably gather and prepare all of the necessary ingredients and simply have the child toss everything into the salad bowl. Over time, maybe the child can gather the ingredients, the parent will do the necessary washing/cutting/cooking, and the child will combine the ingredients in the bowl. Ultimately, the child will take over the task in its entirety, having been guided through the process time and again by the parent via a scaffolding process.



Teaching a child a new skill through small steps is referred to as scaffolding.

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Information-Processing Theory

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, information-processing theory is actually an overarching term for a group of theories. We will learn about the specifics of memory, language, and problem-solving development across the life span. All we seek to do in this section is provide you with the general framework all information-processing theories share. Below are the general assumptions in information-processing theory (Siegler, 1998):

1. The term **information-processing** is synonymous with thinking. Thinking can be defined as how information is represented, processed, and applied in reference to memory constraints at any given age.
2. Information-processing researchers seek to understand the specific mechanisms that allow for cognitive development.
3. Cognitive development is guided by constant self-modification in thinking.
4. Although we can understand adult thinking by studying children, we can also understand child thinking by studying adults.

Scaffolding

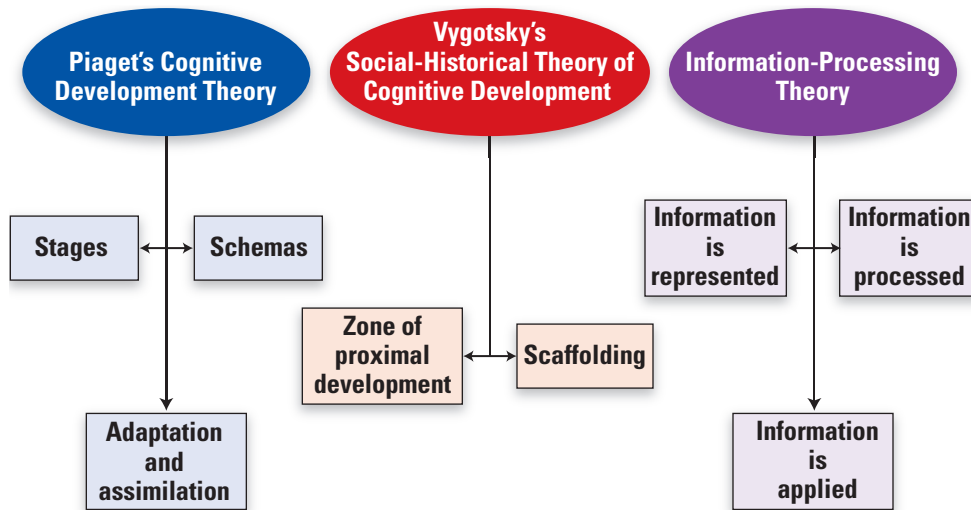
Provides a framework to assist a child learning a new skill initially through small steps

Information-processing

How information is represented, processed, and applied in reference to memory constraints at any given age

Future chapters will further illuminate the complexity of topics studied within information-processing theory. We will learn about types of memory, cognitive processes, and age-related changes in both of these areas.

Figure 2–2 summarizes the three cognitive process theories we’ve discussed.

Figure 2–2 Theories That Focus on Cognitive Processes

Implications

Theories that focus on cognitive processes in development share much in common yet have some marked differences. All of these theories seek to understand how thinking develops across the life span. Piaget sees cognitive development as discontinuous, or occurring in stages. Vygotsky emphasizes the importance of the social and historical context in cognitive development. Information-processing theories view cognitive development as a continuous, self-modifying process.

The most important impact all of these theories have had in the United States would be upon education. For example, the sequence of learning in a curriculum, what topics should be covered at each grade level, how children's intelligence should be measured, how children learn best and through what types of teaching methods, and what information should be taught to children, have all been developed based on research with these theories. Beyond education, these theories have also impacted parenting advice and psychotherapy approaches.

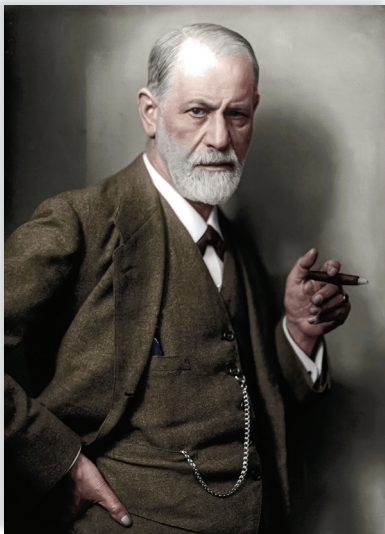
PAUSE & Process

- ◆ What is one main concept from Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories?
- ◆ What is one main difference between Piaget's theory and information-processing theory?

2.1c Theories That Focus on Emotional or Social Processes

The theories discussed in this section address important issues regarding the nature of human beings. As such, they have had a significant impact on both researchers and practitioners in the field of human development. Psychodynamic and psychosocial theories laid the foundation for many contemporary methods of psychotherapy, for example, and parents and educators have applied these theories to child-rearing. We will also explore the main ideas in humanistic psychology. In future chapters, we will highlight positive psychology, attachment theory, and socioemotional selectivity theory.

Psychodynamic Theories



"Sigmund Freud by Max Halberstadt (cropped)," by Max Halberstadt, circa 1921, via Wikimedia

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), an Austrian physician, proposed the progressive development of the personality in distinct but related stages of psychosexual development.

Few individuals had more influence on modern psychology than Sigmund Freud. To much of the public, in fact, “psychology” is synonymous with “Freudian psychoanalytic theory.” Though Freud’s ideas about human personality development are still controversial, they are widely known and drawn upon by mental health professionals.

Freud was a physician who spent most of his life in Vienna, Austria. As a young doctor working in France in the late 1800s, Freud became interested in people’s emotional disorders. He began experimenting with hypnosis as a means to study emotions. He also was interested in the role and function of dreams as emotional expression. As a result of his investigations, Freud proposed a theory of personality development that he expounded on in various books and professional articles in the early 1900s (Crain, 2017).

Freud’s theory centers on how the individual progresses through a series of stages during childhood and adolescence that shape adult personality (Crain, 2017). **Personality** in Freudian theory refers to inner behavior that represents the true inner self as well as to outward actions manifesting that inner self. Personality also refers to the collection of emotional traits that are unique to the person.



What is personality?

Personality

The inner behavior that represents the true inner self as well as outward actions manifesting that inner self

Freud used the term psychosexual in referring to the stages of personality development. He derived the characteristics and nature of these stages through a process called psychoanalysis, which involved using hypnosis and by asking people to recall their experiences when growing up. The majority of people Freud studied would today be diagnosed as emotionally ill. From his studies of these patients, Freud came to believe that events from a person’s past determined that person’s behavior in the present.

Another theme in Freud's writings about personality development relates to the basic nature of human beings. Freud believed strongly that children's behavior was rooted in basic animalistic instincts that came to be controlled as they matured. These instincts, which he thought were irrational in content, became channeled into appropriate, acceptable behavior patterns as the individual grew up.

Basic Concepts Freud was convinced that much human behavior is influenced by the unconscious mind, especially by the conflict between instinctual drives and social constraints against their expression. Basic personality structures are involved in mediating this conflict. Because the conflict is unbearable, people block off their awareness of their basic drives by repressing them in the unconscious part of their minds. Defense mechanisms are used to ward off the anxiety generated by conflict. But the drives do not disappear; they seek expression in some manner. Freud and others proposed that repressed drives are often expressed as physical symptoms, which the person finds to be more acceptable than the direct expression of forbidden emotions. Freud believed that the role of a psychoanalytic therapist was to help patients release these repressed emotions—to bring into the conscious (aware) mind what had been delegated into the unconscious (unaware) mind.

Early experience plays a prominent role in Freudian theory. The periods of infancy and early childhood are thought to be crucial for development in the later years of life. Interactions with parents during these years are especially important, according to Freud, in determining how healthy a person's personality development is in these years.

Freud thought that an individual's personality structure included three components (see Figure 2–3). The first component of the personality is the **id**, which contains the person's life force. The id is composed of the drives that seek gratification of elemental needs for food, water, sex, and warmth, and contains the emotions basic to all human beings, such as anger, joy, love, and fear. The id is unconscious and operates according to the **pleasure principle**—that is, it is attracted to those things that are enjoyable and repelled by those things that produce discomfort. The id is largely illogical and very mysterious. Dreams are the best means for learning how a person's id functions, according to this theory. The id wishes to satisfy its needs, and does not care how it does so. If it is hungry, it doesn't care if the person buys the food or steals the food, as long as the food is obtained and eaten.

The second component of personality is the **ego**, which is responsible for contact with day-to-day reality. The ego emerges slowly and becomes noticeable only after a child's first birthday. This part of the personality is guided by the **reality principle**—that is, the ego analyzes reality in relation to past experiences, alternatives, and options for action. It also predicts probable outcomes of behavior choices. Although the ego operates fairly independently of the id, it also guides the expression of basic impulses that arise from the id.

Id

The drives that seek gratification of elemental needs for food, water, sex, and warmth

Pleasure principle

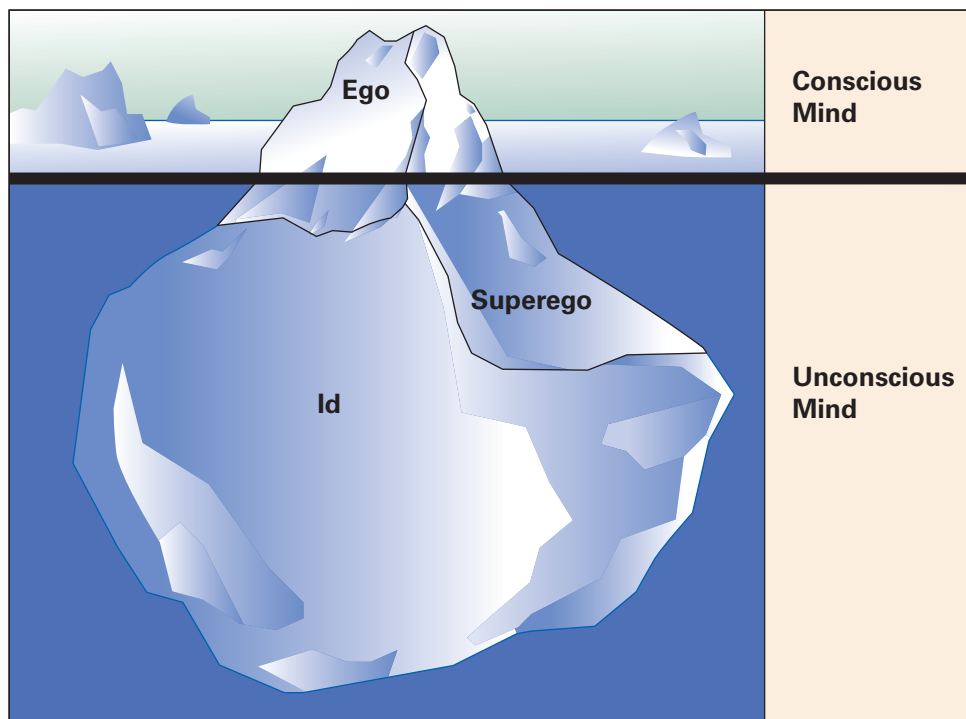
Attraction to those things which are enjoyable and repelled by those things that produce discomfort

Ego

The rational part of our psyche that tries to balance the needs of the id and superego

Reality principle

According to Freud, the tendency to behave in ways that are consistent with reality

Figure 2–3 The Iceberg Metaphor of the Mind

The third part of the personality is the **superego**. This structure functions to control and override the id's attempts to express basic drives in ways that are socially unacceptable. It is similar to the traditional notion of conscience in that it contains information and decision-making processes that produce guilt when the person transgresses its standards. The superego is often likened to an internalized judge or parent figure guiding the person's behavior according to social and moral ideals. That is why the superego is said to operate according to the **perfection principle**.

The interaction of these three structures as they seek to express themselves in an individual constitutes personality, according to Freud.

Superego

Functions to control and override the id's attempts to express basic drives in ways that are socially unacceptable

Perfection principle

An internalized judge or parent figure guiding the person's behavior according to social and moral ideals

Fixation

Occurs when attempts to satisfy needs at a certain stage of personality development are continually frustrated

Stages of Development Freud described the progression of personality development through stages. These are experienced in the growing years of infancy, childhood, and adolescence. The role of sexual feelings or emotions is prominent in all the stages. Freud believed that much behavior in the early years of life was dominated by the struggle to bring the id under control of the other personality structures. Because the id operates on the pleasure principle, this means that children participate in behaviors that are sexually satisfying to them and only learn with time to control their expression.

As the person experiences each stage of development, the general sexual energy, or libido, becomes concentrated in a specific body region called an erogenous zone. Through the years of infancy and childhood, the principal erogenous zone shifts to different body locations. The sequence of the shift from one body area to another is determined by the maturation of the body as well as by experiences.

Freud also concluded that development can be retarded by **fixation**. A fixation occurs when attempts to satisfy needs at a certain stage of personality development

are continually frustrated. When tensions are experienced later in life, the person will revert to behaviors that were effective in managing frustrations at an earlier time in life.

It is important to remember that Freudian theory has generated much interest in the developmental processes involved in personality changes. Freud emphasized the influences of the unconscious mind and early experience on later development. These are outstanding contributions to our understanding of developmental changes across the human life span.

Neo-Freudian Theories

Freud had many disciples who built upon his psychodynamic theory, making changes where they saw fit (Hergenhahn & Henley, 2014). Alfred Adler (1870–1937) is one such theorist. Like many neo-Freudians, Adler thought that Freud overemphasized the biological aspects of human nature and underemphasized the psychosocial aspects. He was interested in how a person reflects upon their past and uses those reflections to direct development in the future and other aspects of goal-directed behavior. The ideas of inferiority and striving for superiority run throughout his work. Adler is also well-known for his theories on birth order and sibling relationships (Corey, 1991; Fadiman & Frager, 1976).

Carl Jung (1875–1961) altered Freud's theory on the personality structure to include elements such as the collective unconscious, the persona, and the shadow. Beyond that, much of popular culture's ideas about a midlife crisis come from Jung's theory, and he discussed aging and late adulthood development. Additionally, he discussed the importance of archetypes and religiosity when facing death. Besides psychodynamic theory, Eastern philosophy was highly influential to Jung's ideas (Crain, 2017; Fadiman & Frager, 1976; Jung, 1964).

Erikson's Psychosocial Theory

Most modern development theories focus on the development of children. They offer extensive abstract explanations of how heredity and environment interact to influence the changes that take place during infancy, childhood, and adolescence. Our society considers the changes that occur during these periods to be the most significant life changes. Therefore, few developmental theories explain or interpret the changes that occur after adolescence. In fact, it is only within the last few decades that developmentalists have become convinced that changes do occur during adulthood.

The psychosocial theory of Erik Erikson (1950, 1964, 1982; see also Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986) is a notable exception to this cultural belief. His approach is an exception also to the notion that individual development happens only under the influence of psychological and biological forces.

Erikson's theory recognizes that changes occur throughout the life span. His explanation of psychosocial development builds upon Freud's theory. Erikson expanded upon the ideas that Freud first presented, but differed from Freud in major ways about how changes are experienced, the forces that motivate changes, and the process by which changes are experienced.

Erikson's concept of development emphasizes the individual experiencing a "series of childhoods"—or changes—throughout life. Psychosocial changes occur as an evolutionary process, meaning one based on a sequence of stages involving

biological, social, and psychological events that take place during life. A person enters each stage of psychosocial development with the goal of developing the specific skills and competencies considered appropriate for that time in life. Erikson sees the person as having a *dynamic* rather than a *static* personality. Thus an individual constantly experiences the reshaping and revising of personality configuration over the life span (Maier, 1965).

Each stage of psychosocial development has its own theme, which Erikson terms a **psychosocial crisis**. A psychosocial crisis is a central problem that the person is expected to master in order to make healthy progress to the next stage. Changes are enhanced or retarded by the way the person confronts and handles the central crisis of each particular stage of psychosocial development. If the person successfully deals with the crisis, they will experience “normal,” healthy changes that lead toward happiness and personal fulfillment. If, however, the person has overwhelming difficulties in accomplishing what is expected at a particular stage, the result will be a failure to establish healthy changes not only at that particular stage but at future stages as well. As you can see by Table 2–1, Erikson’s theory incorporates epigenesis—the notion that development occurs in a stepwise manner.

Table 2–1 Erikson’s Timetable of Developmental Stages

Stage	Psychosocial Crisis	Significant Other	Theme	Period of Life Span
I.	Trust vs. Mistrust	Maternal person	To get; to give in return	Birth–18 months
II.	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Paternal person	To hold on; to let go	18 months–3 years
III.	Initiative vs. Guilt	Family	To make; to make like	3–6 years
IV.	Industry vs. Inferiority	School	To make things; to make things together	6–12 years
V.	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Peers	To be oneself; to share being oneself	13–18 years
VI.	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Partners	To lose and find oneself in another	18–24 years
VII.	Generativity vs. Self-absorption	Life partner	To make be; to take care of	24–54 years
VIII.	Integrity vs. Despair	Humankind	To be, through having been; to face not being	54 years–death

Psychosocial crisis

A central problem that the person is expected to master in order to make healthy progress to the next stage

Significant others

Those people who are singularly important at each particular stage of a person’s psychosocial development

Erikson’s theory strongly refutes the idea that changes are triggered simply by some preset biological programming. Changes occur through interaction with social and psychological events as well as from biological programming. As the person grows older, he or she is influenced by an increasing number of people. Changes are fostered by interactions and relationships within the family context first, and then within an ever-expanding social radius (friends, the school environment, and so on). **Significant others** are those who are singularly important at each particular stage of a person’s psychosocial development. These others influence the person’s changes positively or negatively. Readiness to progress to a subsequent stage occurs when she or he is ready or has completed the requirements at a particular stage.

The psychosocial crisis at each stage of Erikson's theory is thought to challenge the person to acquire a corresponding psychosocial sense or attitude. Each psychosocial sense is an attitude or general feeling resulting from how adequately the person meets the crisis.

Erikson describes eight stages of psychosocial development that extend from birth until death. There are two opposing attitudes that are possible at each stage. Experiences lead the person to feel one attitude in the pair more predominantly than the other. Erikson acknowledges that it is unrealistic to expect no negative experiences at any stage. The desirable outcome is to resolve the overall developmental challenge of each stage so that more healthy than unhealthy attitudes are acquired over the life course.

It is this successful resolution that enables the person to progress in psychosocial development. In the early years of childhood, for example, children are thought to experience a psychosocial stage where they have the opportunity to develop a sense of autonomy (positive) or a sense of shame and doubt (negative). Healthy development, of course, requires the child to achieve a sense of autonomy. At each of the eight stages of psychosocial development over the life span, healthy progress depends on acquiring the positive rather than the negative sense in the pair of attitudes possible for that stage.

Erikson's theory is basically optimistic in that it provides for the possibility of redemption at each stage if unhealthy attitudes were acquired at earlier stages. Someone who failed to develop a healthy psychosocial sense at one stage is not condemned to an unhealthy path of change for the rest of their life. But failure or difficulty in meeting the developmental challenge of one stage does slow down healthy progress in the next stages. Still, Erikson believed that a person could transform negative attitudes acquired at one stage into positive attitudes later in life.

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is an extension of Freudian theory. Erikson's theory stresses (1) the discontinuity of psychosocial development over the life span; (2) the resolution of a central psychosocial crisis at each stage of the life span; (3) the establishment of an associated psychosocial attitude at each of his stages; and (4) the important influence "significant others" have on the individual's psychosocial development at each stage. Table 2–2 compares the concepts in Freudian and Eriksonian theories.

Table 2–2 A Comparison of Concepts in Freudian and Eriksonian Theories

Concept	Freud	Erikson
Development	All behavior and change are determined by instinctual drives. Psychic energy propels change.	Changes occur as an evolutionary process according to a sequence of biological, social, and cultural events.
Dynamics of Change	Individual experiences a series of stages marked by certain characteristics.	Individual resolves psychosocial crises while progressing through a series of related stages.
Factors Influencing Changes	The unconscious mind; libidinal energy; the id, ego, and superego; nature of instinctual drives.	Experiencing the sequence of epigenetic stages; significant others.
Socialization	Maturing ego and superego gain increasing control over the id.	Establishment of identity; intrusive behavior; increasing radius of significant others.

Humanistic Theory

Humanistic psychology describes the human experience differently than other theories (Crain, 2017; Hergenhahn & Henley, 2014). Some people consider this approach to be diametrically opposed to behavioral theory (discussed later in this chapter). Humanistic theory views the individual as a dynamic force who seeks self-fulfillment over the course of life. Continuity of change is therefore an ever-present reality in human beings. The individual seeks their own destiny by setting goals, attempting to meet inner-self needs, and expressing creative energies. Humanistic theory denies the exclusive influence of either the environment or unconscious drives. Self-understanding and fulfillment—the ultimate goals of life span changes in this view—result from a conscious choice. Individuals willfully seek to maximize their experiences. Maslow and Roger are two humanistic theorists.

Maslow's Concepts

Abraham Maslow (1970) is probably the most prominent humanistic psychologist. Maslow's approach stresses that people are motivated to make changes in order to achieve their personal full potential. He called this the drive to **self-actualization**.

This state in the personal developmental path is at the pinnacle of a **needs hierarchy** common to all humans (see Figure 2–4). Maslow proposed that people have to satisfy certain basic needs before they can attempt to realize self-actualization. The needs he describes are ranked in terms of priority. The most essential needs, those addressed first, relate to basic survival. These include the creature comforts of having food, warmth, shelter, safety, and so on. After these basic needs are satisfied, individuals then seek love and social contact with others. Once these needs have been satisfied, the individual turns to self-worth and self-esteem needs. These particular needs are satisfied by interactions with others that produce the conviction that the person is valued by peers, colleagues, and others. After all these needs have been fulfilled, the individual addresses the need for self-actualization. As the person experiments and learns to express his own unique nature, he may achieve self-fulfillment.

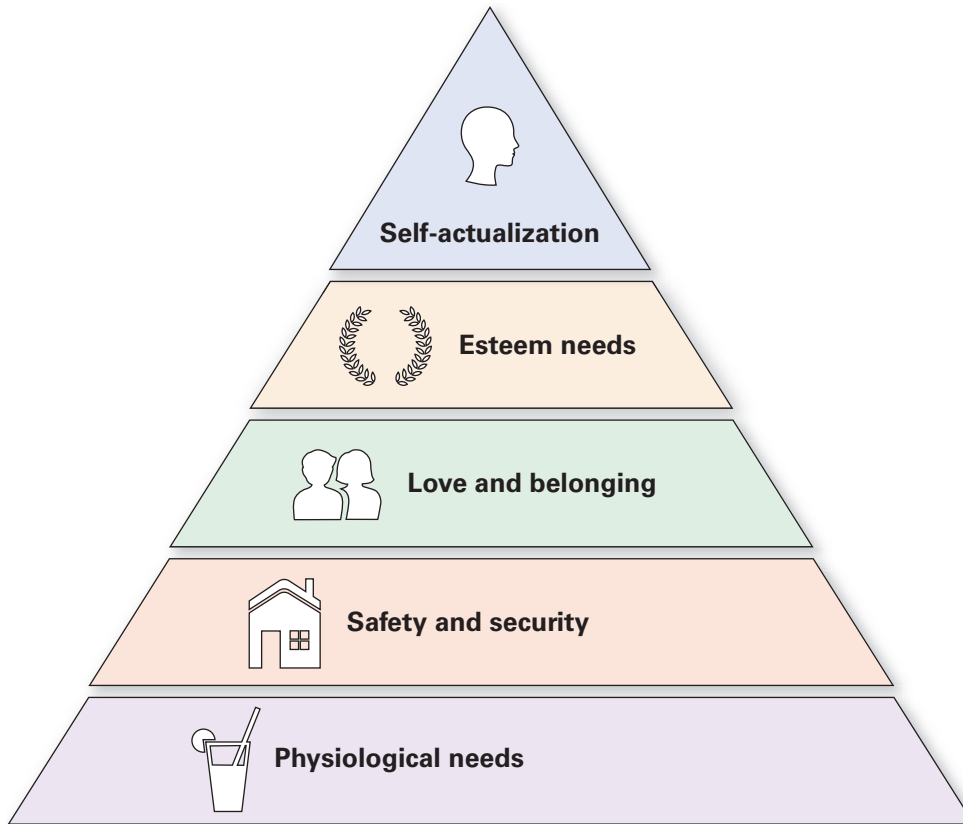
Self-actualization

A person's drive to achieve their personal full potential

Needs hierarchy

A person's need to satisfy certain basic needs before they attempt to realize self-actualization

Maslow and others (Shaffer, 1978) believe that the process of achieving self-actualization is not usually begun until people reach middle or even late adulthood. Earlier in life, people tend to focus on fulfilling the lower-ranked needs. Adolescents, for example, are developmentally unready to do what is necessary to fulfill their self-actualization needs because the need for belongingness is typically addressed at this time in life. Early adulthood is the developmentally appropriate time for addressing self-esteem needs.

Figure 2–4 Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Source: Adapted Getty Images

Making the changes in our thoughts and behaviors that lead us to be all that we can be is what life is all about, according to Maslow. Self-actualization can be a near-mystical experience. According to Maslow, the self-actualizing person has **peak experiences**. These are feelings of great joy, ecstasy, and cosmic identification with the whole universe.

Rogers's Concepts

Carl Rogers is another humanistic psychologist. In contrast to Freud, Rogers (1961) believed that human behavior is driven by impulses that are basically healthy and positive. Rogers's concept of human nature is similar to Maslow's.

Unlike Maslow, though, Rogers was a practicing psychotherapist. His humanistic orientation led him to promote a style of interaction with clients termed **client-centered therapy**. Rogers's approach is less formalized than Maslow's; it has no stages. Rogers shared Maslow's conviction that reaching one's personal potential is the ultimate goal of developmental changes, but he saw the need for some people to turn to others for assistance in working through their problems. He created a style of psychotherapy that differed greatly from psychoanalysis. It stresses the attitude of the therapist. Rogers promoted a therapeutic attitude of **positive regard** toward clients. Positive regard is characterized as being warm, genuine, and giving total attention and acceptance to the client. Rogers felt that such an attitude would help the client to become more self-accepting and to achieve the greatest degree of personal growth possible (Shaffer, 1978).

Peak experiences

The feeling of great joy, ecstasy, and cosmic identification with the whole universe

Client-centered therapy

Also known as person-centered therapy, it is a nondirective approach to therapy based upon humanistic theory. This approach believes that the client has the necessary inner resources to cope with their problems

Positive regard

Characterized as being warm, genuine, and giving total attention and acceptance to the client

Implications

Freud's psychodynamic theory of psychosexual development has generated much fruitful debate about the nature of humankind and the manner in which individual personality development occurs. However, there are difficulties with this theory that cast doubt on its validity in explaining personality development.

First, it is hard for scientists to test the concepts, principles, and propositions of Freud's theory. For instance, researchers have a hard time operationally defining some of Freud's key concepts, such as id, ego, or superego. Remember from the first section that any good theory must be a testable theory, and so far, it has been extremely difficult to test psychodynamic theory. However, new advances in neuroscience are making the testing of the unconscious mind more feasible (Galatzer-Levy & Cohler, 1993).

Second, psychodynamic theory may be biased in several ways. First of all, the theory is criticized as culture-bound and therefore limited in its application. Freud derived his concepts and principles from adults reminiscing about their past. Errors in memory are quite likely under these circumstances. It should be noted here as well that Freud drew his ideas about personality development from people who were emotionally maladjusted. His theory may better explain unhealthy personality development than normal development. Beyond being culturally biased, psychodynamic theory has been accused of being gender biased (Crain, 2017; Hergenhahn & Henley, 2014).

Third, the theory is imprecise about the nature of personality development, making it difficult to predict how people will change over time. However, it did in many ways begin the psychological study of personality and development. Additionally, psychodynamic theory has great appeal because it is such a broad-based explanation of personality development. Despite its shortcomings, Freud's psychodynamic theory has done much to increase awareness of the importance of early life experiences on later development.

Erikson's psychosocial theory attempted to extend psychodynamic concepts and stages beyond adolescence. Psychosocial theory is also significant for its emphasis on the normal rather than the abnormal aspects of developmental changes. Erikson was optimistic about human nature. His psychosocial theory allows for the possibility of later resolution of problems and tasks left unresolved at a previous stage of development. His theory also acknowledges the impact of significant others who influence the individual's psychosocial changes for better or worse throughout life. Psychosocial theory is used extensively in the fields of psychology and education as a teaching device. It helps students to understand the course of human development from a social-psychological perspective.

One of the main criticisms of Erikson's theory is its vagueness (Crain, 2017). Its explanation of the role of maturation in adulthood, for instance, is neither clear nor specific. The theory does not fully mesh with Freud's ideas and concepts on some points. Finally, this theory has generated only limited research either substantiating or refuting it.

Humanistic explanations of development offer an important alternative to learning theory and psychosocial explanations. This approach encourages an examination and appreciation of individual differences in the course of developmental changes. It stresses that certain goals cannot be accomplished until certain fundamental needs are addressed. The humanistic approach has influenced educational programs for children.

Critics judge this approach to be as imprecise as psychoanalytic theory and equally difficult to test empirically. They regard concepts such as self-actualization, peak experiences, self-fulfillment, and positive regard skeptically. They insist on the need for objective measurement of both concepts and therapeutic outcomes.

PAUSE & Process

- ◆ What is one main difference between psychodynamic theory and psychosocial theory?
- ◆ Explain Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

2.1d *Theories That Focus on the Environment of Development*

Reflecting back on the philosophical issues discussed in the first chapter, the theories discussed in this section have two main assumptions. First, humans are born as blank slates that will be shaped by their environments. Second, empiricism (or learning by experience) is far more important in shaping human development than nativism. Although the degree of rigidity on these issues varies across the theories in this section, these basic assumptions are crucial in these theories.

Behavioral Theory

Behavioral theory is sometimes referred to as learning theory. The two terms will be used interchangeably in this text. Behavioral theory stresses the role of an individual's interactions with the environment in shaping developmental changes. Learning is thought to take place in several ways. Behavior is modified or changed as a result of experiences and interactions with factors external to the individual.

There are two major ways learning is believed to occur in behavioral theory: **classical conditioning** and **operant conditioning**. Ivan Pavlov is the name associated with classical conditioning. He was a Russian physiologist who won the Nobel Prize in 1904 for his studies of the digestive system. Pavlov became involved in learning research unintentionally when he was using dogs as subjects in studying the digestive process. Whenever he placed meat powder on their tongues to stimulate salivation, the salivation reflex was automatically performed by the dogs. Then, Pavlov noticed that the salivation reflex was also initiated when the dogs heard their caretaker approach at mealtime, when they saw or smelled food, and when they heard noises associated with their meal preparation. The dogs had learned to respond to a new stimulus that had come to replace the original stimulus. This process of pairing a new stimulus with one that automatically produces a particular response is called classical conditioning. Figure 2–5 shows a drawing of an apparatus similar to the one used by Pavlov. After this serendipitous finding with his dog subjects, Pavlov proceeded to investigate the development of classical conditioning techniques as a learning theory of behavior.

Classical conditioning

The pairing of a neutral stimulus with an unconditioned stimulus in order to achieve a desired response

Operant conditioning

The use of reinforcers and punishers to control behavior

Figure 2–5 Pavlov’s Conditioning Apparatus

An apparatus similar to that used by Pavlov to study classical conditioning in dogs.



Source: Adapted from *An Introduction to Psychology*, by R. N. Haber and A. H. Fried, 1975, New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. Copyright © 1975 by Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

You may be thinking that although all this talk of dogs and meat and salivation is fascinating, what on earth does it have to do with human beings? Well, you have been classically conditioned and you probably don't even realize it. Put simply, classical conditioning builds new reactions built on pre-existing reflexes. Let's work through an example.

What would you feel if someone poked you with a needle? You would probably flinch or cringe and withdraw from the needle. You didn't need to learn this response; it was a reflex with which you were born. Now imagine that every time that you were poked with this needle you heard a particular sound. Eventually, just that sound alone would be enough to cause you to flinch or cringe in anticipation of the needle poke—that is, you would be classically conditioned to respond to a previously neutral stimulus in a way you responded to the original stimulus. If you don't believe this, imagine—right now—the sound of the dentist's drill (made you cringe). The first time you heard a dentist's drill, that sound meant nothing to you. However, because it has been paired with pain over and over again, just the sound of the drill is enough to cause a cringe reaction. The same can be said of food poisoning/food aversion or the smell of perfume/cologne your ex-girlfriend or ex-boyfriend wore. All of us have been classically conditioned at some point in life, and this conditioning impacted our development.

Okay, so that's classical conditioning. Let us now turn our attention to operant conditioning. Behaviorism received a great deal of attention in the 1950s and 1960s owing to the works of psychologist B. F. Skinner (1957). His contributions focus on the role and function of the consequences of behavior to learning. There are two broad categories of consequences to behavior: reinforcements and punishments.

Reinforcers are meant to increase the behavior they follow, whereas **punishers** are meant to decrease the behaviors they follow. In general, reinforcers are more powerful in shaping behavior long-term. If you ever received praise (a reinforcer) for a good grade, or grounding (a punisher) for a bad grade, you have been operantly conditioned.

Behavioral theories are not developmental in nature. A reinforcer is supposed to increase the rewarded behavior regardless of age. The only thing that may change is what we find reinforcing or punishing. Behavioral theories also neglect to appreciate genetics, a person's agency, and the dynamic nature of human development.

Social Cognitive Theory

This theory is sometimes referred to as social learning theory. In some textbooks, it would have been discussed under behavioral theories, in other texts it would be discussed under cognitive theories. We will honor this theory with its own subsection, but please realize that not everyone will agree with our choice.

Social cognitive theory is an extension and application of behavioral theory. You see, hard-core behavioral theory thought that all human behavior could be explained via external circumstances—that there was no need to consider a person's thinking. At the same time, the environment that directed a person's development had to be experienced firsthand. Social cognitive theory turned both of these assertions on their head. First, social cognitive theory recognized the importance of cognition. Second, social cognitive theory recognized that we could learn by observing the impact of the environment on others.

One of the proponents of this approach is psychologist Albert Bandura (1977). He agrees with Skinner that social learning occurs by reinforcers and punishers, but differs from Skinner in proposing that **observational learning** also shapes or changes social behavior (Bandura & Walters, 1963). **Modeling** and imitation are key ideas in social cognitive theory. Bandura believes that many kinds of behavior are acquired by watching the behavior of another person, and then coming to model one's own behavior on that of the others.

Research into this style of learning investigates how children learn to express such social behaviors as sharing, cooperation, and aggression by imitating role models in their environment. Role models include both real people and characters on television shows or video games. Research reveals that when children see a model being rewarded for aggressive behavior, for instance, they are more likely to demonstrate that same kind of aggressive behavior in their own play.

Social cognitive theory also explains how people acquire social values and attitudes as well as occupation skills in adulthood. Social roles are learned by modeling. Children imitate behaviors they observe in adults and in other children they perceive as role models. Some aspects of human development are not so efficiently explained in social learning terms, however, as we will see throughout the book. Despite these limitations, social learning theory has significance in explaining how at least some of our different types of behavior are shaped and how learning occurs over the life span.



A child playing dress-up to imitate a mother is an example of modeling and imitation.

Reinforcers

Are meant to increase the behavior they follow

Punishers

Are meant to decrease the behaviors they follow

Observational learning

Learning that occurs through observing others

Modeling

The process by which behavior is acquired and modified through observing and replicating the behavior of others

PAUSE & Process

- Give an example of a time when your parents or caregivers used operant conditioning to modify or control your behavior.
 - Can you think of a time when you learned through modeling or observational learning?
-

2.1e Comparing Developmental Theories

Four broad categories of theories have been discussed in this chapter (see Figure 2–6). Always remember that theories are not facts, but can change and are not all-inclusive. Theories provide a springboard for exploration, discussion, and debate about the many issues involved in explaining a complex process in a complex organism—developmental changes in human beings.

Some of you may feel confused and frustrated by the variety of developmental theories presented here. You may find it helpful to remember that each theory addresses different aspects of human functioning. As yet, we have no grand unifying theory of human development that explains everything in an integrated, concise manner. However, the Process-Relational Paradigm and relational-developmental-systems metatheory discussed throughout the first chapter is working towards that day. We will highlight some of this work in future chapters, including some of the new theories emerging from this paradigm and metatheory.

Theories that focus on biological processes view us with at least some preprogramming in our genes that will guide our development. Reflecting back on the philosophical issues in the first section, these theories would be seen as largely nativistic in their approach. They also tend to focus on the universal aspects of development.

Theories that focus on cognitive processes typically view humans as having a positive human nature. These theories also emphasize the active nature of knowledge acquisition. Some cognitive theories see development as continuous (e.g., information-processing theories), whereas others see development as discontinuous (e.g., Piaget's theory of cognitive development). Piaget's theory of cognitive development and information-processing theories tend to focus on the universal aspects of development, and Vygotsky's social-historical theory emphasized the importance of context.

Theories that focus on emotional and social processes vary considerably in their stance of the philosophical issues. Freud's psychodynamic theory viewed humans as animalistic and instinct driven—hence, a negative view of human nature. Conversely, humanistic theory views human nature in a positive light. Most of these theories appreciate the biological propensities with which we are born, as well as the influence of our experiences and environment. Psychodynamic and psychosocial theory both view human development within a discontinuous or stage-like framework.

Theories that focus on the environment or context of development tend to view human nature from the *tabula rasa* perspective. These theories also tend to

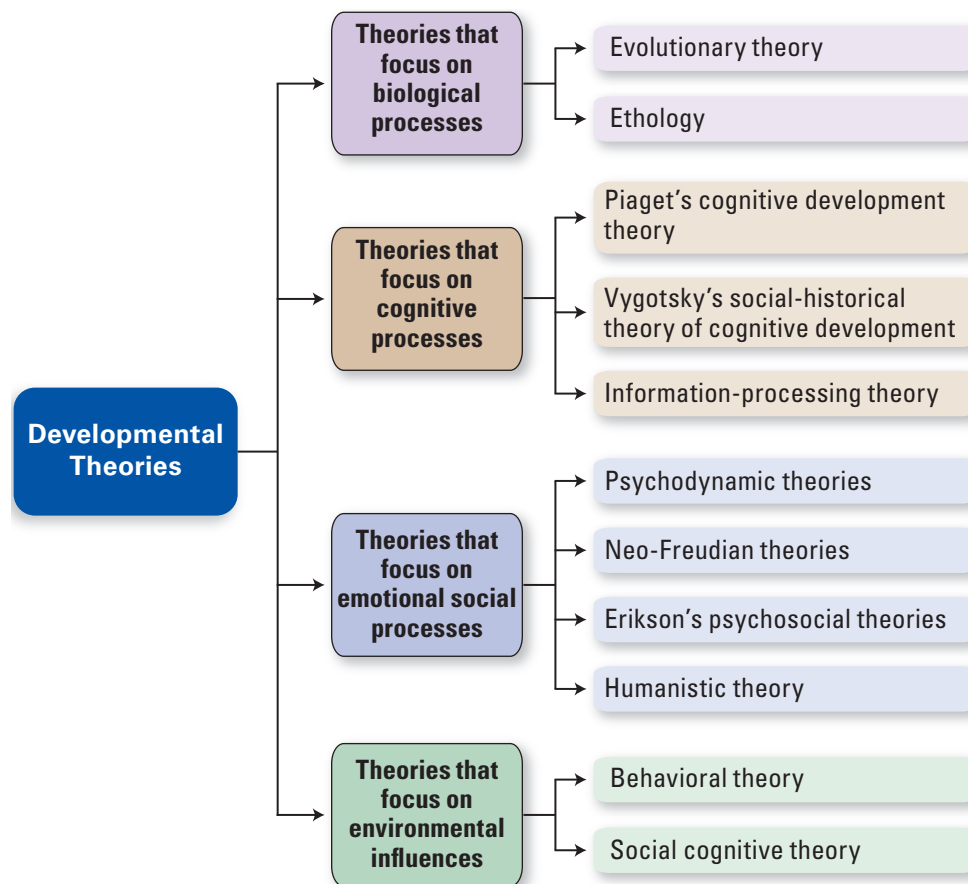
emphasize the empirical view of human development. Behavioral theories would view learning as largely passive in nature.

Although we did not discuss all of the philosophical issues for all of the theories, we did cover the ones most pertinent to each theoretical approach. You may be thinking, “What does all this mean for me? How can I, a student, apply this information?” Perhaps the most useful approach is to study and consider the many different theories and then construct your own explanation of developmental change. Most developmentalists do just this. They investigate the varied models and concepts and choose those they think best apply to each particular issue. This approach is termed **theoretical eclecticism**.

Theoretical eclecticism

The approach of investigating the varied models and concepts and choosing the best to apply to a particular issue

Figure 2–6 Comparison of Developmental Theories



PAUSE & Process

- ◆ What is one important similarity between Piaget's cognitive development theory and Freud's psychodynamic theory?
- ◆ What is one important difference between sociobiological theory and behavioral theory?

SUMMARY

1. Every theory must be tested and retested. Theories also must be modified based upon the results of research studies.
2. Theories provide a comprehensive framework from which to conduct research. A theory must be testable.
3. Theories tend to focus on one aspect of human development: biological, cognitive, emotional and social, or environmental/contextual. They also differ on their stances on the historical and philosophical issues.
4. There is no one theory that explains every aspect of human development.
5. It can be helpful to select the most useful aspects of a variety of theories for addressing a particular question about developmental changes. This approach is known as theoretical eclecticism.

SELF-QUIZ

1. What theories discussed in this chapter focus upon biological processes?
2. What theories discussed in this chapter focus upon cognitive processes?
3. What theories discussed in this chapter focus upon emotional and social processes?
4. What theories discussed in this chapter focus upon the environment of development?
5. What is ethology?
6. What is cognition?
7. What is a schema (or scheme)?
8. What is personality?
9. What are the three components of Freud's personality structure?
10. What are two main ways learning is believed to occur in behavioral theory?

TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Adaptive features	43	Perfection principle	52
Classical conditioning	59	Personality	50
Client-centered therapy	57	Pleasure principle	51
Cognition	46	Positive regard	57
Ego	51	Psychosocial crisis	54
Ethology	43	Punishers	61
Evolutionary theory	43	Reality principle	51
Fitness	43	Reinforcers	61
Fixation	52	Scaffolding	48
Id	51	Schema	46
Information-processing	48	Self-actualization	56
Modeling	61	Significant others	54
Needs hierarchy	56	Superego	52
Observational learning	61	Theoretical eclecticism	63
Operant conditioning	59	Zone of proximal development	47
Peak experiences	57		