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CHILD PSYCHOLOGY

Terry Faw

Gary S. Belkin

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Child Psychology

Adapted from *Schaum's Outline of Theory and Problems of Child Psychology*.

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Preface

Child development is one of the most exciting and relevant areas of psychology. It is a scientific study, yet it focuses on topics that each of us is personally and intimately aware of: our own family background and its influences, our relationships with siblings and peers, our developmental strengths and deficiencies. It also helps us understand how our physical growth, language, thinking, personality, and adjustment problems evolved during the course of our lives. In short, the study of child development enables us to explain (or, at least, clarify) many of the mysteries that together comprise that perennially confounding question, "How did I become what I am?"

This book is directed not only to students enrolled in a child or developmental psychology course but also to teachers, parents, and professional psychologists whose daily activities are focused on the education, development, and well-being of children. For all these readers, it provides a clear understanding of the facts, principles, and theoretical explanations found in the leading texts. The material is neatly organized under a series of subheadings to facilitate study and review, whether the volume is used alone or in conjunction with a course text. A glossary provides an easy reference source for unfamiliar terms.

Interspersed in the text are examples drawn from research

literature and from the authors' own experience. These examples not only clarify the principles of child development, they also relate these principles to practical problems of child psychology encountered by clinical and counseling psychologists and by parents who must continually make decisions about the best way to interact with their ever-changing children.

For flexibility of study the book is divided into six parts. Part One presents a discussion of issues and methods in child psychology while Parts Two through Six each examines a different period in the development of the child. Within each of those parts is a chapter relevant to the various facets of psychological functioning—cognition, social interactions, and so on. Readers who wish to obtain a picture of the developing child from all perspectives should read Parts Two through Six sequentially. Readers who wish to focus their attention on a particular facet of development—such as cognition or social development—can do so by reading the chapter relevant to the topic in each of the last five parts of the book. Finally, concentration on a particular period of development can be achieved by reading only that relevant part of the book.

Terry Faw
Gary S. Belkin

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PART I: Introduction

As a discipline, child psychology is in some respects similar to other branches of psychology and in some respects different. Perhaps what distinguishes it most is its emphasis on development—those changes that take place in a human being over time. Wordsworth said, "The child is father to the man," implying that our adult personalities and behavior are strongly influenced by our childhood experiences. So too is our learning about the world and our ability to manipulate our environment.

Developmental psychologists are interested in how and when our various behavior patterns emerge and why these patterns change over the course of the life span. In other words, their goal is to understand how a person becomes what he or she is and what factors contribute to this process.

Depending on the goals of a particular psychologist and on his or her point of view, the subject of development can be approached in several ways. Chapter 1 of this book is an introduction to the major schools of thought that have influenced child psychologists and the assumptions they make about human development. Chapter 2 is a review of some of the basic experimental and observational tools that child and developmental psychologists use in their studies of human growth.

CHAPTER 1

Issues in Child Psychology

The discipline of psychology explores a vast number of processes that govern the functioning of the human organism. These processes include motor behavior, perception, cognition, learning, language development, and social processes, to name but a few. While many psychologists explore the functioning of these processes when they are fully developed, developmental psychologists focus on changes that occur in those processes from conception through childhood, childhood through adolescence, adolescence to maturity, and during the adult years into the years of old age. These are called developmental stages.

This chapter begins by looking at different viewpoints about the human organism, its growth and development. It then outlines the main theories of development: maturational, behavioral (learning), cognitive, humanistic, psychoanalytic, Adlerian (Individual), and Eriksonian.

The Nature of the Human Organism

One of the issues that dominates debates concerning human development focuses on the nature of the human organism and the role each individual plays in his or her own development. Two viewpoints in this debate predominate; one holds that the human organism is active, while the other sees humans as essentially passive reactors to their environment.

The Active Viewpoint

Some philosophers and psychologists view humans as active participants in their own development. These theorists maintain that the child brings to the environment his or her own program for development and uses the environment to facilitate the implementation of that program.

Psychologists who hold that humans are active participants in their development tend to seek an understanding of the characteristics that the individual brings to the developmental process and the ways in which those characteristics will influence development in a given environment. Those psychologists tend to explore the developmental patterns shared by individuals reared in vastly different environments.

Jean Piaget (1896–1980) emphasized the active participation of humans in their own development. Piaget held that human development results from the individual's attempts to maintain a state of equilibrium with his or her environment, to function effectively within that environment, and to reduce uncertainties in the environment. Children who are not able to use their capacities to fulfill those objectives reorganize their psychological processes so that they can adapt more effectively to the world in which they live.

Developmental psycholinguists, who emphasize the active role played by the child in the acquisition knowledge about

language, often describe the patterns of language development common to children who speak different languages or whose language stimulation varies dramatically. They have discovered that children from different environments all begin to speak at about the same age. Furthermore, all children initially construct sentences in a similar way, despite the fact that they are from societies that speak different languages, such as Russian and English.

The Passive Viewpoint

Some philosophers and psychologists view humans as passive beings whose development is shaped primarily by environmental forces outside their control and their own bodies. Psychologists who adhere to this position tend to seek an understanding of the environmental conditions that cause a child to behave in a particular way.

These conditions may be internal (such as biological needs for food, water, companionship, and so on) or they may be external (such as previously experienced rewards and punishments). Those theorists who hold the passive viewpoint tend to emphasize the study of differences in the pattern of development for individuals exposed to different environmental influences.

The philosopher John Locke, writing in the late seventeenth century, was an early advocate of the viewpoint that humans play a passive role in their own development. For Locke, the child was born a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate. Development consisted of environmental experiences imprinting knowledge onto that slate. The child was like an empty container into which the forces of the environment—in the form of parents, schools, and social institutions—poured the knowledge and customs of the adult world.

Learning theory is a more current position that reflects the viewpoint that humans are passive participants in their own

development. An early example of the learning theory perspective is found in the writings of John B. Watson (1878-1958), who once suggested that if he were given a group of children and the ability to manipulate their environment, he could develop adults who would be able to perform any role in society. In this statement, Watson emphasized the omnipotence of environmental agents in shaping the development of the child. Similar beliefs have been expressed by B. F. Skinner, a contemporary psychologist.

The Nature of Development

Two issues often debated concern the nature of the changes that occur in development and the factors that influence the end product of those changes. The two factors most often debated are the relative influences of heredity and environment.

Change: Continuous or Discontinuous?

Developmental Continuity

Some psychologists maintain that the psychological processes that mediate human functioning do not undergo fundamental changes during their development but instead change gradually in their efficiency or functioning capacity. A graph that reflects continuous development appears in Figure 1.1.

When children first begin to speak, they utter only short sentences of two or three words. Later, the sentences become longer and the structure becomes more complex. Psychologists who believe that development is continuous suggest that these changes reflect gradual increases in the child's ability to remember words and to use them in sentences. It is postulated that no fundamental change has occurred in the child's knowledge of language.

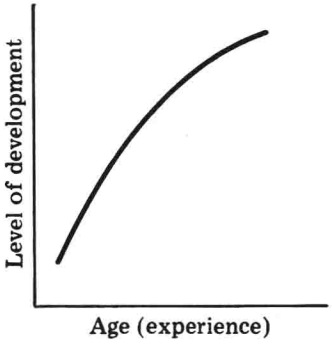

Fig. 1.1

Developmental Discontinuity

Other psychologists maintain that the changes we observe in development reflect fundamental changes in the psychological processes that mediate human functioning. These individuals see development as movement through a series of qualitatively unique stages, in which the evolution of one stage may depend upon the characteristics of preceding stages.

Figure 1.2 depicts the developmental process as it would be viewed by a stage theorist. When these stages are superimposed on one another, they produce a graph that is depicted in Figure 1.3. Note that at a given moment an individual may be functioning predominantly within one stage of development but retain some remnants of functioning from an earlier stage, and at the same time be beginning to evolve the characteristics of a later developmental stage.

Roger Brown, a contemporary psychologist, and his colleagues have proposed that in the process of language acquisition, the child progresses systematically through a series of five stages. Each stage of development is characterized by the acquisition of a new set of rules and skills, allowing the child to produce sentences exhibiting new forms and higher levels of

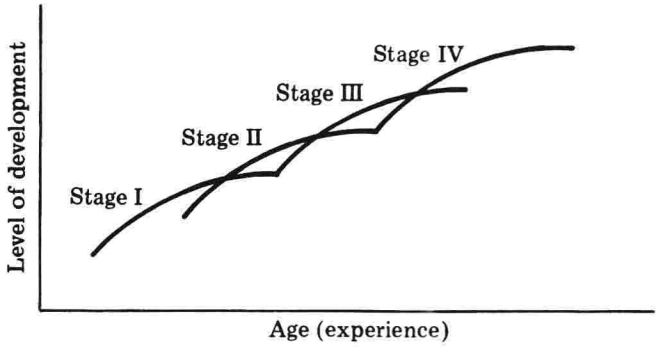

Fig. 1.2

A detailed description of this model of language acquisition may be found in Chapter 14.

Likewise, Jean Piaget maintained that cognitive development progresses through a series of stages. Each stage, Piaget discovered, is characterized by the acquisition of a unique set of cognitive processes that allow the child to think in identifiable ways. In the first stage the child's knowledge is restricted to that which can be gained by direct sensory and motor contact with the world around him or her. Subsequently, the child can form

Fig. 1.3

internal representations of his or her experiences, and can think not only about present activity but about past activity as well.

Later, the child acquires an understanding of logical operations, which makes it possible for the child to solve concrete problems that theretofore could not be solved. Finally, the adolescent develops a unique set of logical operations, which allows him or her to think abstractly. (For a more detailed account of this developmental theory, see the section on theories of development below, as well as Chapters 8, 12, 17, and 21.)

Change: Nature vs. Nurture

Historically, a debate among psychologists centered on the relative importance of heredity (nature) and the environment (nurture) in determining patterns of human development. About a century ago, when psychology was under the strong influence of Darwin's evolutionary theory, it was believed that the primary influence on development was heredity.

This view was challenged in the early part of the century by environmentalists, led by John B. Watson (see discussion below), who believed that proper training can make any child into any type of adult. This notion of the importance of experiential factors had great appeal in a democracy, the credo of which was that anyone could work hard and rise on the socioeconomic ladder. The environmentalist view dominated American psychology for several decades.

Today, it is no longer argued whether one or the other of those factors is more important in determining developmental patterns. Instead, it is commonly agreed that environmental and hereditary factors interact with one another to influence development.

Heredity certainly influences development. Characteristics such as skin color, height and weight tendencies, and hair or eye color, which are all passed on from parents, may affect behavior.