

Theories of Human Development

Stages of Development

It is easy to see life as a series of stages, which people pass through. Babies look and behave very differently from young children, but adolescents are very different children. Infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age can be seen as different stages in life.

In past centuries Europeans often saw the human life-span as being like the four seasons of the year. Infancy and childhood were like spring, full of new beginnings and possibilities. Adolescence and early adulthood were like summer – the most exciting and best time of our lives. Adulthood was autumn, a time of harvest and fulfillment. Old age was a winter – a time of decline and death! Shakespeare saw the male life cycle as having seven stages. He runs through them in a famous speech in a play *As You Like It*, Act 2: scene 7.

1. Infancy
2. The school boy
3. The lover
4. The soldier (or warrior)
5. The justice (or judge)
6. The shrunken, impaired old man
7. Last of all, ‘second childishness and mere oblivion’

These theories of life stages were picked up by **Charlotte Buhler** (1933). According to her theory, biological stages of development create a basis for understanding our lives. There are five stages of biological development as listed over leaf.

Charlotte Buhler's Stages of Development

- 0-15 years Progressive growth but no reproduction ability.
- 15-25 years Progressive growth but with the onset of reproduction ability.
- 25-45 or 50 years Stationary growth with reproduction ability.
- 45-50-65-70 years Beginning decline with loss of reproduction ability in women.
- 65-70 years- Death Biological decline.

Buhler's view of life can be seen as a trajectory. A shell fired from a gun has a trajectory. If it is fired in the air, it will curve upwards, along and then downwards. Life can be seen as a pattern where the biological forces of growth and decline interfere to create an inevitable physical pattern of development. Buhler believed that biology provided the framework for psychological development. The five biological stages gave rise to people's understanding of themselves. People would begin to form life goals and ambitions between 15 and 25. They would attempt to achieve these goals between 25 and 45. Between 45 and 65 people would assess their success. After 65, people would experience a sense of fulfillment, or a resignation to fate or of failure. In this perspective, life can be understood in terms of a biological clock, which is ticking away, your ambitions and views change as your body changes.

Arnold Gesell also worked within the perspective of biologically determined development. Gesell introduced the notion that human development could be measured in terms of biological maturation. Maturation is the genetically programmed 'unfolding' of abilities and behaviour.

Gesell's main work was carried out from the 1930s to 1950s and he is responsible for mapping out milestones of development in physical, language, adaptive, personal and social skills. This became known as normative development or measurement.

Any child that did not meet the milestone development map became labeled as 'abnormal'. Nowadays, this is thought to be inappropriate by many people, particularly those working in the field of learning disability. The measurement was a comparison between children in age bands, not linked to any criteria. He devised his scale of normative measurement by observing and filming thousands of children over years using building blocks, bells and wooden cups. This is why you may come across phrases such as 'can build a tower of six or more blocks at the age of 2 years'. Today, normative measurement is used to indicate general trends in development rather than to distinguish which child is 'normal' and which 'abnormal'. Gesell's work was biased towards physical or motor development.

Gesell's study of language development was based almost entirely on counting the words in a child's vocabulary, as well as the different phrases used and the different types of sentences. Although Gesell's work

is still used today it is interpreted differently, we no longer label children solely based on normative measurements.

Guhler's and Gasell's views are rarely used without criticism, but the idea that biology determines people's lives is still quite common. Many people still ignore the interaction of social and environmental factors with genetic maturational effects or argue that they are of limited significance. People who believe in 'genetic determinism' are likely to understand life in terms of fixed patterns of growth and decline. (cited in (editor) Niel Moonie published by Heinermann (2000) Advanced Health and Social Care p 311

Freud and Erikson's Stages of Development

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) developed a stage theory of human development, but Freud emphasized the interaction of biological drives with social environment. Freud's theory emphasizes the power of early experience to influence the adult personality.

Freud's theories are usually called psychodynamic theories. 'Psycho' means mind or spirit and 'dynamic' energy or the expression of energy. Freud believed that people were born with a dynamic 'life energy' or 'libido', which initially motivates a baby to feed and grow and later motivates sexual reproduction. Freud's theory explains that people are born with biological instincts in much the same way that animals such as dogs and cats are. Our instincts exist in the unconscious mind – we do not usually understand our unconscious. As we grow, we have to learn to control our 'instincts' in order to be accepted and fit in with other people.

Freud believed that society is only possible if people can ‘control themselves’. If everybody did whatever he or she just felt like, life would be short and violent and civilization would not be possible. Because people have to learn how to control their unconscious drives (or instincts) children go through stages of psychosexual development. These stages result in the development of a mature mind, which contains the mechanisms that control adult personality and behaviour.

Freud’s Stages of Psychosexual Development

- **The Oral Stage:** Drive energy motivates the infant to feed, activities involving lips, sucking, biting, create pleasure for the baby,

Weaning represents a difficult stage which may influence the future personality of the child.

- **The Anal Stage:** Young children have to learn to control their muscles and in particular the control of the anal muscles.

Toilet training represents a first time a child has to control their own body in order to meet the demands of society. The child’s experiences during toilet training may influence later development.

- **The Phallic Stage:** Freud shocked Europeans a century ago by insisting that children had sexual feelings towards their parents. Freud believed that girls were sexually attracted to their fathers and boys were sexually attracted to their mothers.

These attractions are called the *Electra* and *Oedipus* complexes: named after characters in ancient Greek

mythology who experienced these attractions. Freud believed that as children develop they have to give up the opposite sex parent as a 'love object' and learn to identify with the same sex parent. He believed children's experience of 'letting go' of their love may have permanent effects on their later personality.

- **Latency:** After the age of 5 or 6, most children have resolved the *Electra* and *Oedipus* complexes (Freud believed that this was usually stronger and more definite in boys, i.e., girls often continue with a sexual attachment to their father!).

Children are not biologically ready to reproduce so their sexuality is latent or waiting to express itself.

- **Genital:** With the onset of puberty adolescents become fully sexual and 'life drive' is focused on sexual activity.

Freud's Mental Mechanisms

Freud believed that we are born with an *id*. The 'id' is part of our unconscious mind that is hidden from the conscious understanding. The 'id' is like a dynamo that generates mental energy. The energy motivates human action and behaviour.

When a young child learns to control, its own body during toilet training the ego develops. The 'ego' is a mental system, which contains personal learning about physical and social reality. The 'ego' has the job of deciding how to channel drive energy from the unconscious into behaviour which will produce satisfactory outcomes in the real world.

The 'ego' is both unconscious (unknown to self) and conscious (a person can understand some of their own actions and motivation).

The super ego develops from the ego when the child gives up their opposite sex parent as a 'love object'. The 'super ego' contains the social and moral values of the parent that has been 'lost' as a potential partner. Freud believes that throughout life a person has to find a way to release drive energy that is compatible with the demands of society and with the demands of the super ego.

Sometimes people may feel sandwiched between the demands of their biology and social pressures. Typically today's world often creates pressure to 'achieve a good career' and please parental values by 'doing well'. For some people, the desire to enjoy their sexuality and perhaps have children may conflict with the pressure to achieve. The way people cope with these pressures will be strongly influenced by childhood experiences on the Oral, Anal and Phallic stages according to Freudian theory.

Ericson's Stages of Development

Erik Erikson (1902-1994) based his theories on Freud's psychodynamic ideas. Erikson's first three stages of development are similar to Freud's and are developed from Freud's theory. The major difference between Freud's and Erikson's theory is that Erikson believed that people continue to develop and change throughout life. Freud only explained how early experience might influence adult life. Erikson believed that the events of adolescence and beyond were equally important, to understanding people's personality and behaviour,

Ericson originally stated eight periods of developmental crisis, and that an individual would have to pass through each crisis in life. These crises, were linked to an unfolding maturational process and would be common to people of all cultures because they were 'psychosexual' in origin rather than linked to issues of lifestyle or culture.

How an individual succeeded or failed in adapting to each crisis would influence how their sense of self and personality developed. The early stages of development provide a foundation for later development. Each stage is described in terms of the positive or the negative outcomes that may happen following the developmental stage. Many people achieve an in-between outcome.

Erikson's eight life stages:

1. *Basic trust versus mistrust*
2. *Self-control versus shame and doubt*
3. *Initiative versus guilt*
4. *Competence versus inferiority*
5. *Identity versus role confusion*
6. *Intimacy versus isolation*
7. *Generativity versus stagnation*
8. *Ego-integrity versus dispare*

The explanation for these stages is as follows:

- **Basic trust versus mistrust (1)**

Birth to eighteen months. Infants have to learn a sense of basic trust or learn to mistrust the world. if children receive good quality care this may help them to develop personalities which include a sense of hope and

safety. If not, they may develop a personality dominated by a sense of insecurity and anxiety.

- **Self control versus shame and doubt (2)**

Eighteen months to three years. Children have to develop a sense of self-control or a sense of shame and doubt may predominate. They may develop a sense of willpower and control over their own bodies. If this sense of self control does not develop, then the children may feel that they cannot control events.

- **Initiative versus guilt (3)**

3 to 7 years. Children have to develop a sense of initiative, which will provide a sense of purpose in life. A sense of guilt may otherwise dominate the individual's personality and lead to a feeling of lack of self-worth.

- **Competence versus inferiority (4)**

Perhaps 6 to 15 years. The individual has to develop a sense of competence, or risk the personality being dominated by feelings of inferiority and failure.

- **Identity versus role confusion (5)**

Perhaps 13 to 21 years. Adolescents or young adults need to develop a sense of personal identity or risk a sense of role confusion, with a fragmented or unclear sense of self.

- **Intimacy versus isolation (6)**

Perhaps 18 to 30 years. Young adults have to develop a capability for intimacy, love and the ability to share and commit their feelings to others. The alternative personality outcome is isolation and an inability to make close, meaningful friendships.

- **Generativity versus stagnation (7)**

Perhaps 30s to 60s or 70s. Mature adults have to develop a sense of being generative, leading to concern for others and concern for the future well-being of others. The alternative is to become inward-looking and self-indulgent.

- **Ego-integrity versus despair (8)**

Later life. Older adults have to develop a sense of wholeness or integrity within their understanding of themselves. This might lead to a sense of meaning to life or even to what could be called 'wisdom'. The alternative is a lack of meaning in life and a sense of despair.

Both Freud's and Erikson's views of a human development are based on the notion that human biology creates a 'life trajectory' where stages of crises are inevitable. Both Freud and Erikson accept that individual social experiences will interact with biology to create an individual personality. The psychodynamic view of development emphasizes the importance of individual experience and the interaction of biological stages and the environment. The relationship between children and parents is seen as a key influence on the development of personality. Personal development is understood in terms of definable stages.

The idea that human development fits eight stages (or five stages) of coping with crises of change does not make intuitive sense to everyone. While there may be some important ideas about emotional development in psychodynamic theory, some authors claim that the theories are both too rigid to provide a full understanding of development. Many people fail to identify with the idea of the developmental crises. Many people seem to experience change as a smooth sequence of gradual adjustment. Psychodynamic theory provides an interesting way of interpreting past life experience – but it is possible to question whether people in the future will experience the biological pressures that Erikson originally identified in the middle of the last century. Castells (1997) argues that science now gives people not only the power to live longer, but also the power to delay reproduction and the effects of aging. Sexuality can be decoupled from reproduction so that sexual behaviour becomes a form of recreational pastime rather than linked to a biological time clock for reproduction! As technology gives people the power to intervene in their own biological nature, notions of biologically controlled stages of development may become increasingly dated, at least with respect to adult life.

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(Extracts taken from Neil Moonie (ed) Advanced Health and Social Care Heinerman Educational Publishers (2000) p 309-314)

