

Theories of psychological development

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Developmental psychology is the scientific study of human changes across their life span. It is important to study psychological development to understand how and why people go through certain changes throughout their life. There are many different areas of psychological development. Two main areas are perceptual development and emotional development. They both have theories that can be related, but before you can understand the relations, you must first understand the two theories.

The theory of perceptual development was created by an American Psychologist named Eleanor Gibson. It states that perceptual development is the process of an infant exploring its constantly changing environment and deciding what to do and how to act with the newly found information. Affordance exploration is also a key feature of perceptual development. Gibson believed that affordances are visual clues to the functions of an object. An example could be a person climbing a ladder.

The infant could examine how the ladder needs to have a stable base and lean against a certain object to keep from falling down. When affordances are found, differentiation starts to occur. Gibson's definition of differentiation is basically the ability to discriminate different environments. If you look back at the ladder example, the infant uses affordances to see the ladder needs support to stay upright. Then the infant uses differentiation to see a person is more safe standing in the middle step of a ladder than the top step.

As the infant experiences more and ages, it becomes better at differentiation. Emotional development is based around a theory called the

attachment theory which was created by a British psychiatrist named John Bowlby. The attachment theory is the act of developing an affectional bond with someone who is considered a caregiver (Bowlby's definition was " a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings"). It is crucial for a child's behavior in the present and future to have an attachment relationship with a caregiver.

Bowlby stated that for an attachment to be strong, four characteristics need to be present: proximity maintenance (the desire to be in the presence of the caregiver), safe haven (returning to the caregiver when feeling unsafe), secure base (considering the caregiver as a source of security) and separation distress (feeling anxious when the caregiver is not present for an extended period of time). Bowlby believed that strong attachment relationships develop after the caregiver and child become closer.

Mary Ainsworth (a previous student of Bowlby) was an American Psychologist who believed that there are three types of attachments: secure, avoidant and resistant. A secure attachment is formed when the caregiver is used as a safe home and the infant feels less safe when the caregiver is absent than when they are present. An avoidant attachment is basically the opposite of a secure attachment. It is when the caregiver is considered a stranger by the child and they try to avoid the caregiver as much as possible to feel safer. A resistant attachment is a lot more complex than the other types of attachments.

It occurs when the caregiver is unresponsive to the child's needs making them feel unsure what they want or need which makes them feel unable to

count on their caregiver. There are some relationships between the theory of perceptual development and the attachment theory. According to the two theories, both require a responsible caregiver for a child to have a proper and healthy development to be able to experience affordances and to have the right caregiver provide the environment to do it in. Also, your caregiver could be responsible for a child not learning certain affordances which could affect them in their future life.

Another way to look at it is if a caregiver never provided the chance for the child to experience affordances related to a job that requires experience in, say, the construction industry, then they will struggle psychologically in the future to earn that job or any job that they may want. Perceptual and emotional development are both very important to a child's psychological development. It is important to understand the two main theories behind them to learn what is required for a child to develop healthy and normally to live the life that they want to live.