

# Case study: developmental theories



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This paper will compare and contrast three developmental theories we have learned about throughout this class: social learning theory, psychoanalytic theory, and the psychosocial theory. Developmental theories are beneficial to understand the behavior of a child, and though some may seem very different, they can share many similarities. These theories help people to understand the advances in childhood and the different stages they occur in. These three theories will help parents have an idea of what to expect during the different stages throughout their child's life. We will discuss the key concepts of each of these theories and how they help in the cognitive, physical, and emotional development of children. Also, having a better understanding of your child's development will help you identify and help them reach their full potential in each stage.

First, we will discuss the social learning theory which was developed by Albert Bandura, an American psychologist. Other theorists feel that the environment acts upon the child and is the driving force of child development. Bandura on the other hand felt that a child can act upon the environment just as much as the environment can act upon the child; he called this reciprocal determinism (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2008). For example, if a child acts out at school, because he/she doesn't like it, they can make things harder on the teachers, which in turn make the school system seek changes.

One of the key concepts of the social leaning theory would be observational learning. It states how children learn from observing or imitating others from their parents, teachers, or just someone they admire. Children are always observing people and modeling their behavior after them, positive or

negative. According to this theory, imitation of models is the most important element in how children learn a language, deal with aggression, develop a moral sense, and learn gender-appropriate behaviors (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2008). We need to set good examples for our children so they can follow by example. A child watches the people around them and uses the information gained as a model for their own actions and behavior. As a parent if you deal with problems with aggression your child will do the same. Parents and teachers also help in creating a set of morals for children. We have all heard the phrase “ monkey see, monkey do!”

Through feedback on their behavior, children gradually form standards for judging their actions and become more selective in choosing models who exemplify those standards; gaining a sense of self-efficacy (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2008). Self-efficacy allows a child to set goals and solve their own problems and understanding the consequences of the choices they make.

The key concepts of Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory are that people are able to learn from one another, via observation, imitation, and modeling. The theory has often been called a bridge between behaviorist and cognitive learning theories because it encompasses attention, memory, and motivation (Learning Theories, 2010). The social learning theory has the potential to allow parents to model a child in the right direction.

Next, we have the psychoanalytic theory. Psychoanalytic theory originated with the work of Sigmund Freud. Freud believed that childhood experiences and unconscious desires were able to influence behavior (Davis & Clifton, 1995). He was able to break down his theory into a series of psychosexual

stages that would assist in the development and the lifelong influences it could have on a child's personality and behavior. Freud theorized that a person's personality was made up of the id., the ego, and the superego.

The id, Freud said was developed during infancy. Newborns are governed by the id, the seat of unconscious instinctual drives; it seeks immediate gratification under the pleasure principle (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2008). It is related to the wants and needs of a person. They do this without thinking about consequences just wanting to be satisfied by their wants and needs. When a child is born he or she cries in order to let the parents know they have needs or wants, and nothing else matters to them besides having them met. When an infant sees something they want, they just take it without thinking of the fallout.

The ego is known as the rational part of a person's brain and is categorized under the reality principle. The easiest way to explain the ego is that it wants to make decisions that make the id and superego happy. It makes realistic decisions and helps offset the pleasure principle in an acceptable manner to the outside world. The ego gradually develops during the first year or so of a person's life (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2008).

The superego is developed around the age of 5 or 6, contains the conscience; it incorporates socially approved "should" and "should not" into a child's value system (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2008). The superego balances both the id and ego and is what results in the feelings of guilt and remorse if the wrong decisions are made. It is what allows children to think through the consequences of their actions.

Freud theorized the personality is formed through unconscious conflicts between inborn urges by the id and the requirements of civilized life; these conflicts would occur in 5 stages of psychosexual development (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2008). This development is when pleasure moves from one body part to another to include: the mouth, the anus, and genitals. Each stage symbolizes a change in development.

The first stage is the oral stage, which is the main function of newborns. They use their mouths for eating, teething, and making noises. Next, we have the anal stage, this is the time when the child learns about their bodies waste and this is when parents will start the process of potty training. The phallic stage or the genital stage is where the child becomes infatuated with the parent of opposite sex, and is noticing the differences between males and females. During this stage Freud also states that girls go through what is called penis envy. This is where they wish they had a penis based on the fact they felt it carried power. If you think about the time when this study was ran, this could easily be believable. During that time, women didn't have the rights they do today and it would be easy for them to see men on a higher level than themselves. The latency stage is the time when a child puts their time and energy into things like hobbies and school. They call this the stage of calmness in a child's life. Lastly, we have the genital stage, this is when their sexual drive reemerges but this time, and it is directed toward the appropriate people.

Each stage represents a different change in a person's life. Though Freud's theories have been highly controversial as he feels the reason a person doesn't remember having these feelings during the phallic stage is because

they have been repressed and are a part of our subconscious. Through his theory, Freud was able to make us more aware of the importance of unconscious thoughts, feelings, and motivations; the role of childhood experiences in forming personality; the ambivalence of emotional responses, especially responses to parents; the role of mental representations of the self and other in the establishment of intimate relationships; and the path of normal development for the immature, dependent state to a mature, interdependent one (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2008).

Lastly, we have the psychosocial theory. Erikson believed that childhood is very important in personality development. He accepted many of Freud's theories, including the id, ego, and superego, and Freud's theory of infantile sexuality. But Erikson rejected Freud's attempt to describe personality solely on the basis of sexuality, and, unlike Freud, felt that personality continued to develop beyond five years of age (Cherry, 2010). Erikson's eight-stage theory of psychosocial development describes growth and change throughout the lifespan, focusing on social interaction and conflicts that arise during different stages of development. He felt that each stage of development needed not only a positive trait but also a negative one. We read about basic trust and basic mistrust which states that people need to hold some trust in the world and the people in it, but also need to have some mistrust to protect them from danger (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2008). If we trusted everyone and everything we would constantly be let down. I have put together a chart to show each of the eight stages and what virtue is gained from each as shown in our book (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2008).

## **Erik Erikson's 8 Stages of Psychosocial Development**

Ages

Basic Conflict

Virtue

Birth to 12 to 18 months

Trust vs. Mistrust

Hope

12-18 months

to 3years

Autonomy vs.

Shame/Doubt

Will

3 to 6 years

Initiative vs.

Guilt

Purpose

6-puberty

Industry vs. Inferiority

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Skill

Puberty

Identity vs.

Role Confusion

Fidelity

Young Adulthood

Intimacy vs.

Isolation

Love

Middle Adulthood

Generatively vs. Stagnation

Care

Late Adulthood

Ego Integrity vs. Despair

Wisdom

Each of the eight stages shows what a person gains throughout each stage in their lives from birth all the way through adulthood.



Social learning theory, psychoanalytic theory, and the psychosocial theory all three plays a vital role in the development of children. Social learning theory offers the facts of how children learn from modeling and imitating others. They learn cognitive and social skills from watching other people. Unlike other theorists Bandura felt a child can act upon the environment as much as the environment can act up the child. The psychoanalytic theory is what makes up our personality. Through the development of our id, ego and superego we learn to control our impulses and understand the consequences of our actions. The psychosocial theory stated that our personality developed over a lifespan unlike that of Freud who believed it was developed in early childhood only. All three theories offer a different insight into our minds and how we develop socially, mentally and physically in our environment. After comparing and contrasting the three developmental theories you will have a full understanding of how each theory plays a role in the development of people from infancy to adulthood. Understanding how the human brain works and in what stages allows people to help their children reach their full potential in life.