

## The Life Span Perspective

Name

Professor

Course

Date



### **The Life Span Perspective**

It is hardly surprising that multiple disciplines continually explore the human life span; the sheer trajectory of development, no matter the processes involved, is inherently of the utmost value in comprehending influences and forces shaping human identity and behaviors. This being the reality, it is equally to be expected that different disciplines would promote varying theories emphasizing the import of each as particularly significant. There is validity to many life span theories, simply because the subject itself is so expansive and open to interpretation, but the most relevant seem to be those that actually acknowledge the multifaceted nature of human development. In the following, the life span perspective of human development will be presented, followed by two pertinent theories reinforcing its complex nature and a brief discussion of the two elements of heredity and environment.

Regarding human development, the life span perspective is completely reflective of its name. This is an approach that seeks to comprehend how human beings evolve, and measure how various forces bring about the changes creating the evolution, or development. The perspective is founded on a central proposition; development is continuous in human beings, and from infancy into advanced age (Aldwin, Park, & Spiro, 2007, p. 76). At every stage in life, human beings develop behaviors and thought processes varying from those held, and in a virtually limitless number of ways and gradations. No single stage, then, is inherently more valuable in the study, just as the perspective often relies on insights gained from specific age-group focuses. In plain terms, and to reiterate, it is a perspective based on assessing the entirety of the human life

span.

Several other criteria are typically within the life span perspective, with perhaps the most critical being the recognition that development is intrinsically variable; even identical circumstances, occurring at identical life stages, will yield differing types of development. This in turn goes to life span development as necessarily pluralistic, in that multiple disciplines apply. The perspective also goes beyond the individual span to comprehend that it exists within a broader context, and that evolutionary, cultural, and socio-historic elements contribute to the development being assessed (Aldwin, Park, & Spiro, p. 76). All of this combines to define the life span perspective as essentially expansive, and in place to recognize all potential factors going to development.

### **Two Theories**

Psychoanalytic Theory in life span development is, in a word, as complex as the subject itself. In Freud, for example, the life span is not so much a process of development as it is a perpetual struggle between the self and the external world. Freud sees the psyche as driven by primal urges which must be adapted if the individual is to conform to a social structure. The struggle is then actually internal, as the individual mind seeks to reconcile opposing impulses (Nevid, 2014, p. 408). Consequently, prior experience largely dictates development, as the psyche builds upon experiences from infancy and childhood which powerfully influence how later experience is processed. Erik Erikson, somewhat conversely, places a different emphasis on psychology as the basis for development. With Erikson there is always a core of “selfhood” or identity which seeks to achieve a synthesis with the external world (Elliot, 2002, p. 71).

With Cognitive Theory, Piaget holds to the view that intellectual processes develop in stages, as the mind adjusts to external and changing realities. It is very much about development occurring through interaction; in Piaget, for example, assimilation is an early cognitive stage in which a child repeats behaviors because they are acting based on past experience with the stimuli. The stage of accommodation occurs when there is experimentation with the environment and objects within it; if the child is unsure of what is expected, they then seek to explore possibilities (Plotnik, Kouyoumdjian, 2013, p. 388). The emphasis here is then clearly on thought as dictating development.

### **Heredity and Environment**

The exponential nature of heredity and environment is such that it is virtually impossible to assign greater force to either. To begin with, science consistently expands knowledge regarding heredity, and how genes carry traits influencing, or dictating, behaviors. This is important in development chiefly because of the nature of many genetic forces as predispositions; the individual is strongly influenced to act in certain ways, and the behavior then reflects the relationship between the hereditary impetus and the external reality. There is limitless degree, but it is nonetheless certain that heredity, or those biological traits passed on generationally, affect human development.

When the factor of environment is added to this, the possibilities for individual development are literally inestimable. Simply, any number of heredity dispositions or realities may be influenced by any number of elements within the broad arena of environment, and generate varying types of development. The very tall child may develop a withdrawn personality as the family environment reacts negatively to the

height; an addictive personality may be encouraged by an abusive home life, just as the same hereditary disposition may alternately be more resistant to addiction because of the environment. These are powerful forces individually and, inextricably interactive, they then powerfully influence development all the more.

### **Conclusion**

As the above indicates, life span development is an extraordinarily complex subject, and one subject to multiple theories accounting for the processes of it. No single discipline, in fact, may serve to fully reflect its impact and meaning. As Psychoanalytic Theory offers valuable insights into basic human drives, Cognitive Theory is equally valid in emphasizing the intellectual experiences generating development. Beneath or within all of this are the twin “engines” of heredity and environment. If anything may be truly known about the life span perspective of human development, then, it is that it is a subject of inexhaustible dimensions and possibilities.



## References

Aldwin, C. M., Park, C. L., & Spiro, A. (2007). *Handbook of Health, Psychology, and Aging*. New York: Guilford Press.

Elliott, A. (2002). *Psychoanalytic Theory: An Introduction*. Durham: Duk University Press.

Nevid, J. (2014). *Essentials of Psychology: Concepts and Applications*. Belmont: Cengage Learning.

Plotnik, R., & Kouyoumdjian, H. (2013). *Introduction to Psychology*. Belmont: Cengage Learning.