Theories for Child Development: What are they and why should you care?

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Covering: Lifespan Developmental Theory, Psychoanalytic Theory, Erikson, Behavioral and Social Learning, Piaget, Info-processing, Evolution, Ecological Theory, Vygotsky, Dynamic Systems

Know: What is the theory? How is it similar and/or different from other theories? How can the theory be applied to child development? What are some strengths and weaknesses of the theories?

Lifespan Developmental Theory

- Not in text, but should be!!!
- Human development is comprised of 6 basic ideas:
  1. Human development is lifelong
  2. Human development is continuous and discontinuous
  3. Human development is embedded in a changing socio-historical context
     - Normative influences
     - History-graded influences
     - Non-normative influences
  4. Human development has gains and losses throughout the lifespan (multidirectional)
  5. Human development is plastic
  6. Human development is multidisciplinary

Applied Example: Physical Health

Psychoanalytic Theory - Freud

- What do we know about Freud and this theory?
  - Intrinsic struggle between id, ego, and superego
- How does it apply to infant/child development?
  - Focuses mostly on the manifestation of disorders as seen from individual case studies
Psychoanalytic Theory

Psychosexual Stages (see Table 1.1 text) - discontinuous
- Oral (birth-1yr)
- Anal (1-3yr)
- Phallic (3-6yr)
- Latency (6-11yr)
- Genital (Adolescence)
- Applied Example: OCD

Theory uniqueness: focuses on individual cases, it is kind of unique, states that behavioral manifestations are a result of internal struggles (id, ego, superego). Emphasizes role of early experiences on child development and the mediating role of parents.
- Problem with theory: hard to empirically verify, focuses on stage development (discontinuous)

Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Theory of Development

- Considered a neo-Freudian
- The ego as a positive force in development
- Each stage of development there is a CONFLICT and hopefully, a successful resolution (VIRTUE)
  - Applied Ex: Industry vs. Inferiority – 6-11yrs, Virtue: Skill
  - If the conflict is not resolved, it is carried on throughout development and can manifest into disorders or maladjustment
- See table 1.2 in Text. We will discuss each stage in-depth throughout the semester
- Unique: moves beyond Freud's negativity of the role of the ego.
- Moves beyond purely focusing on psychosexual development.
- Problem: some problems verifying empirically, focuses on conflict, focuses on internal, personality development, focuses on stage development (discontinuous)

Behaviorism and Social Learning

- Focus on response to stimuli
- Observable behavior (different from previous theories)
- Classical Conditioning
- Operant Conditioning
- How do these apply to child development?
- Applied Ex: Little Albert and Phobias
Classical Conditioning

- Where a previously neutral stimulus becomes a conditioned stimulus
- Ex: Little Albert
- Help explain the development of phobias

Watson and Little Albert - Case for Classical Conditioning

[Little] Albert, eleven months of age, was afraid of nothing "under the sun" except a loud sound made by striking a steel bar. This made him cry. By striking the bar at the same time that Albert touched a white rat, the fear transferred to the white rat. After seven combined stimulations, rat and sound, Albert not only became greatly disturbed at the sight of a rat, but this fear had spread to include a white rabbit, cotton, wool, a fur coat, a dog, a Santa Claus mask, and the experimenter's hair. It did not transfer to his wooden blocks and other objects very dissimilar to the rat [Mary Cover Jones, "A Laboratory Study of Fear, The Case of Peter," Pedagogical Seminary, 1924, 31, pp. 308-309].

Neutral stimuli paired with a loud noise (a naturally aversive stimuli). After several trials, the infant responds negatively to the once neutral stimulus even when the loud noise is not present. Watson was able to generalize the fear to ANY furry being (i.e., dog, mouse, Santa Claus)
“Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in, and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select—a doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief, and, yes, even into a beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations and race of his ancestors.” [Watson, 1924, p. 10]

Operant Conditioning
- Learned behaviors via reinforcement or punishment
- Applied Ex: What is a behavior we would like to increase or decrease in children? How might we do that via operant conditioning?

Social Learning Theory - Bandura
- Children learn by watching, imitating or modeling others. Also known as observational learning (response to external stimuli)
- Theory has more of an emphasis on cognition than behaviorist theory
- Applied Ex: Aggression in Children
BoBo Doll Experiment:
Children learn aggression by modeling others. Does this extend beyond humans to video games?

Uniqueness of behavioral theories:
- Has contributed MUCH to Behavioral Modification therapies (useful for disorders such as phobias, anxiety, depression, behavioral disorders in children).
- Focuses on observable behaviors and views development as more continuous, rather than stage-like.

Problem with the theory:
- Focuses too much on external environment (esp. behaviorism). View children as passive recipients of their world, rather than active participants.