Life-Span Development

1. Life-Span Theory (6 tenets)
2. Other Life-Span Theoretical Considerations
3. Age periods

Why Study the Life Span?

- Research?
- Applied?
- Personal?
- Career?
- All-encompassing theory/research =
  - Positives and Negatives...

Tenets of Life-Span Theory

(Names: Paul Baltes; K. Warner Schaie)

1. Lifelong
2. Multidimensional
3. Multidirectional
4. Multidisciplinary
5. Plasticity
6. Contextual
1. Development is a Lifelong Process
   - Examples →
     - Biological
     - Social-emotional
     - Cognitive

2. Development is Multidimensional
   - i.e., biological, cognitive, and socioemotional dimensions are all involved..
   - Ex:

3. Development is Multidirectional
   - ‘gains and losses’
   - Losses do not necessarily mean ‘bad’
   - There are gains and losses at every age period, however there are, relatively more gains earlier on in life.
   - Direction of causality might be bi- or multidirectional (ex: diabetes and depression link)
   - Examples:
     - Biological
     - Cognitive
     - Socioemotional
4. Development is Multidisciplinary
   - We cannot all be experts in every area of human development --- interdisciplinary research, training, education, etc.
   - Ex: MCO - Interdisciplinary Gerontology
   - Ex: Research

5. Development has Plasticity
   - Plasticity = Plasticity often translates into...POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE
   - Although we are plastic throughout life...
   - Examples:
     - Biological
     - Cognitive
     - Socioemotional

6. Development is Contextual
   - We cannot view any aspect of human life in isolation
   - We are embedded in a constantly changing historical, cultural context
   - Examples:
     - Bio
     - Cognitive
     - Socioemotional
6. Development is Contextual

- Because we are embedded in a changing environment...we always need to consider
- 1. Normative age-graded influences
   - definition and example
- 2. Normative history-graded influences
   - definition and example
- 3. Nonnormative life events
   - definition and example

- Many older persons become wiser with age, yet perform more poorly on cognitive speed tests. This supports the life-span perspective notion that development is:  
  A) multidirectional.  
  B) multidimensional.  
  C) lifelong.  
  D) plastic.

- Parents in the United States are more likely to rear their children to be independent than are parents in Japan. This research finding supports Baltes’ assertion that development is:  
  A) contextual.  
  B) multidirectional.  
  C) multidimensional.  
  D) plastic.

- Some dimensions of development may expand and others shrink as individuals develop. This statement supports Baltes’ assertion that development is:  
  A) contextual.  
  B) multidirectional.  
  C) multidimensional.  
  D) plastic.

- Research has shown that the reasoning abilities of older adults can be improved through retraining. This is an example of how development is:  
  A) contextual.  
  B) multidirectional.  
  C) multidimensional.  
  D) plastic.

- In many cultures, people retire from their careers in their fifties or sixties. This is an example of a:  
  A) normative age-graded influence.  
  B) normative history-graded influence.  
  C) non-normative life event.  
  D) non-normative socio-emotional event.

- When Ben was thirteen, his father was killed in a car accident. This is an example of a:  
  A) normative age-graded influence.  
  B) normative history-graded influence.  
  C) non-normative life event.  
  D) non-normative socio-emotional event.

- The onset of puberty is an example of a:  
  A) normative age-graded influence.  
  B) normative history-graded influence.  
  C) non-normative life event.  
  D) non-normative socio-emotional event.

- The AIDS epidemic in the United States would be an example of a:  
  A) normative age-graded influence.  
  B) normative history-graded influence.  
  C) non-normative life event.  
  D) storm-and-stress event.
Periods of Development

- Infancy
- Early childhood
- Middle and late childhood
- Adolescence
- Early adulthood
- Middle adulthood
- Late adulthood (young-old, old, old-old)

Conceptions of Age

- Chronological age
- Biological age
- Psychological age
- Social age

- Be able to apply in examples!!

Chronological Age

- Def – Age you are in years from birth
- The most basic and widely used determinant of an ‘older adult’
- Age 65 to get Social Security, Age 50 to be a member of AARP
- Often break down into sub-groups
  - Young-old (65-74)
  - Middle-old (75-84)
  - Oldest-old (85 or older)
- Problems with this definition
  - People who are the same chronological age may be VERY different functionally, socially, and psychologically, etc.
Chronological Age

Functional Age

• **Def:** Age based on what physical activities an older adult can do on a day-to-day basis.
• **Ex:** Get around in the community, bath, dress, prepare meals, handle finances, use the phone, etc.

Biological Age

• **Def:** Changes in the structure and functioning of the human organism through time
• Affected by genetics and environment
• **Ex:** Cataracts, type 2 diabetes, reaction time, grip strength, skin elasticity, etc.
Social Age

- What are considered “normal” social roles for an older adult?
- Social age for an older adult might be determined by the taking on or relinquishing of culturally acceptable social roles for older adults.

Psychological Age

- The behavioral capacities people use to adapt to changing environmental demands
  - Memory, motivation, learning ability, adaptation and coping with daily stressors, etc, maturity.

Other Developmental Issues

- Nature and Nurture
- Stability and Change
- Continuity and Discontinuity
Other Developmental Theories

Personality
- Freud – psychoanalytic theory
- Erikson’s theory on psychosocial development

Cognitive
- Piaget
- Vygotsky*
- Information-processing

Behavioral and Social Cognitive
- Pavlov’s classical conditioning
- Skinners operant conditioning
- Social cognitive theory

Other Developmental Theories
- Ethological Theory (Lorenz)
- Sociocultural Theories
- Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner)*
  - Be familiar with different levels
  - Why is this theory so important to life-span theory?
Be familiar with all levels and what might be included in all levels.

Why is this important?

Can you apply to an area of research? Class Activity...