A developmental theory provides a framework of ideas that permits a cohesive view of development, produces new hypotheses to test, generates discoveries, and offers practical guidance. This chapter describes and evaluates five broad theories—psychoanalytic theory, behaviorism, cognitive theory, sociocultural theory, and universal theory (humanism and evolutionary theory)—that will be used throughout the book to present information and to provide a framework for interpreting events and issues in human development. Because each theory emphasizes a different aspect of development and is, in itself, too restricted to explain the diverse ways in which development occurs, the theories may be said to complement one another.

Three of the theories presented—psychoanalytic theories, behaviorism, and cognitive theories—are “grand theories” that are comprehensive in scope but inadequate in the face of more recent research findings. Three newer theories of development—sociocultural, humanistic, and evolutionary—are also discussed.

Each theory has contributed to our understanding of development. Psychoanalytic theory has helped to focus attention on the importance of early experiences and potential conflicts in daily life. Behaviorism has increased awareness of the ways in which the environment influences development. Cognitive theory has broadened our understanding of how thinking influences behavior. Sociocultural theory has reminded us that development is embedded in a rich and multifaceted cultural context; and universal theory has called attention to the fact that all humans are basically alike.

Most developmentalists today have adopted an eclectic perspective. In other words, they apply insights gleaned from various theoretical views rather than limiting themselves to only one school of thought.

What Have You Learned?

The “What Have You Learned?” questions at the end of the text chapter are reprinted here for your convenience in checking students’ understanding of the chapter contents.

1. How can a theory be practical?
2. How do theories differ from facts?
3. What is the basic idea of psychoanalytic theory?
4. What is Freud’s theory of infantile sexuality?
5. What body parts are connected to the oral, anal, and phallic stages?
6. In what ways does Erikson’s theory differ from Freud’s?
7. What is the basic idea of behaviorism?
8. Why is behaviorism considered “in opposition” to psychoanalytic theory?
9. How do classical and operant conditioning differ?
10. What reinforcers are emphasized by social learning theory?
11. What is the basic idea of cognitive theory?
12. How are Piaget’s stages similar to, and different from, Freud’s stages?
13. In what ways are assimilation and accommodation similar?
14. How does the information-processing approach differ from Piaget’s approach to cognition?
15. What might information-processing theorists study to understand how babies learn to talk?
16. What are the underlying differences between the newer theories and the grand theories?
17. How is “apprenticeship in thinking” an example of sociocultural theory?
18. What do mentors do when mentees are in their zone of proximal development?
19. Is there a contradiction between humanism and the ideas of major religions? Explain.
20. How does Maslow’s hierarchy of needs differ from Erikson’s stages?
21. How does evolutionary psychology explain human instincts?
22. Why is the evolutionary theory of sexual infidelity controversial?
23. What does the idea of selective adaptation imply about the nature–nurture controversy?
24. What is the key criticism and key contribution of psychoanalytic theory?
25. What is the key criticism and key contribution of behaviorism?
26. What is the key criticism and key contribution of cognitive theory?
27. What is the key criticism and key contribution of sociocultural theory?
28. What is the key criticism and key contribution of universal theories?
29. What are the advantages and disadvantages of an eclectic perspective?

Chapter Guide

I. What Theories Do

**Instructional Objective:** To introduce students to developmental theory in general.

- “On Your Own” Activities: Developmental Fact or Myth?; Portfolio Assignment
- AV: Transitions Throughout the Life Span, Program 1: The Developing Person
- “On Your Own” Activities: The “Lifeline”; Major Developmental Theories: Discover Your Bias

1. A developmental theory is a statement of principles and generalizations that provides a coherent framework for understanding how and why people change as they grow older.

2. Developmental theories produce hypotheses, generate discoveries, and offer practical guidance.

3. Five developmental theories are discussed in this chapter: psychoanalytic, behaviorist, cognitive, sociocultural, and universal. Each theory interprets human development from a distinct perspective, and each provides guidance for understanding how human experiences and behaviors change over time.
II. Grand Theories

**Instructional Objective:** To describe the basic concepts of the grand theories of development: psychoanalytic theory, behaviorism, and cognitive theory.

- Classroom Activity: “Development” as a Social Construction
- AV: Young Dr. Freud; Freud: The Hidden Nature of Man; Sigmund Freud; Erik Erikson: A Life’s Work
- “On Your Own” Activity: Freud’s Influence on Psychology and American Culture

1. **Psychoanalytic theory** interprets human development in terms of inner drives and motives, many of which are irrational and unconscious.

2. According to Sigmund Freud, development in the first six years progresses through three stages; at each stage, sexual interest and pleasure are focused on a particular part of the body—the mouth during infancy (the *oral stage*), the anus during early childhood (the *anal stage*), and the genitalia later in the preschool years (the *phallic stage*). Following a period of sexual *latency*, the adolescent enters the fourth stage, the *genital stage*, which lasts throughout adulthood.

3. Freud believed that each stage has its own potential conflicts and that how the child experiences and resolves the conflicts, especially during the first three stages, determines personality patterns throughout life.

4. According to Freud, the personality has three parts: the *id* (unconscious drives), the *superego* (the conscience), and the *ego* (the conscious self).

5. In his theory of human development, Erik Erikson proposed eight developmental stages, each of which is characterized by a particular challenging *developmental crisis*. Erikson emphasized each person’s relationship to the social environment and the importance of family and cultural influences in determining how well prepared individuals are to meet these crises. Erikson’s stages are lifelong.

- AV: Learning; Pavlov: The Conditioned Reflex; B. F. Skinner on Behaviorism; B. F. Skinner and Behavior Change: Research, Practice, and Promise; Childhood Aggression; The Power of Positive Reinforcement; Observational Learning; Learning: Observational and Cognitive Approaches
- Classroom Activities: Freud and Watson; Using a Token Economy to Bring Behaviorism to Life (and Increase Class Participation); Observational Learning
- Teaching Tips: Rehearsal, Reinforcement, and Learning Students’ Names; Basic Terminology of Behaviorism

6. Instead of advancing a stage theory of development, proponents of **behaviorism** (also called *learning theory*) have formulated laws of behavior that operate at every age. The basis of all varieties of behaviorism is the idea that psychology should focus on the objective and scientific study of behavior.

7. According to behaviorism, **conditioning** is the process by which responses become linked to particular stimuli. As demonstrated by the Russian scientist Ivan Pavlov, *classical conditioning* (also called *respondent conditioning*) involves learning by association: The organism comes to associate a neutral stimulus with a meaningful one.

8. **Operant conditioning** (also called *instrumental conditioning*), proposed by B. F. Skinner, the individual learns that a particular action produces a particular consequence.

9. Any consequence that follows a behavior and makes the person (or animal) likely to repeat that behavior is called *reinforcement*.

10. **Social learning theory** emphasizes the ways in which people learn new behaviors by observing and imitating, or *modeling*, the behavior of other people they consider admirable, powerful, nurturing, or similar. Modeling is most likely to occur when the observer is uncertain or inexperienced. Social learning is connected to perceptions and interpretations of experience, and to *self-efficacy*.

11. (text and Thinking Critically) Both behaviorism and psychoanalytic theory have led to hypotheses that were examined in thousands of experiments. For example, in the 1950s, researcher Harry Harlow investigated the origins of attachment in infant
monkeys. These studies, which demonstrated that infant monkeys clung more often to “surrogate” mothers that provided contact comfort, disproved behaviorism’s view that reinforcement was most important and psychoanalytic theory’s concept of the mother satisfying the infant’s oral needs.

AV: Piaget’s Developmental Theory: How Young Children Learn to Think; Jean Piaget: Memory and Intelligence; Cognitive Development
Teaching Tip: Developmental Stages of Family and Friends
Classroom Activity: Classroom Debate: “Resolved: Cognitive Development Is Most Accurately Characterized as a Continuous Process Rather Than as Occurring in a Sequence of Stages”
“On Your Own” Activity: The Active Search for Knowledge

12. **Cognitive theory** focuses on the structure and development of thought processes and their effect on attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. An offshoot of cognitive theory is the concept of **information processing**, which focuses on the step-by-step process of intellectual development.

13. Jean Piaget viewed cognitive development as a process that follows a universal sequence of age-related periods: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational.

14. According to Piaget, each person strives for **cognitive equilibrium**—that is, a state of mental balance achieved through the development of mental concepts that explain his or her experiences. **Cognitive disequilibrium** (a state of imbalance) promotes a search for knowledge as the person modifies old concepts and constructs better ones to fit new experiences.

15. According to Piaget, people adapt to new experiences either by reinterpreting them to fit into, or **assimilate** with, old ideas. Some new experiences force people to revamp old ideas so that they can **accommodate** new experiences.

16. Each grand theory has a different focus: emotions (psychoanalytic theory), actions (behaviorism), and thoughts (cognitive theory). Each also reaches different conclusions.

### III. Newer Theories

**Instructional Objective:** To highlight the basic themes of the newer theories: sociocultural theory, humanism, and evolutionary theory.

AV: I’m Normal, You’re Weird: Understanding Other Cultures; Culture; Introduction to Culture and Diversity; Social-Cultural Diversity; Contexts of Development; The Latino Family; Street Children of Africa; Vygotsky’s Developmental Theory: An Introduction; Play: A Vygotskian Approach; Learning in Context: Probing the Theories of Piaget and Vygotsky

Internet Activity: High-Quality Preschool Education: What Would Vygotsky Say?

1. **Sociocultural theory** seeks to explain human development in terms of the guidance, support, and structure provided by cultures and societies. Rather than considering the individual in isolation, sociocultural theorists focus on the dynamic interaction between developing persons and the surrounding social and cultural forces.

2. Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, a major pioneer of the sociocultural perspective, believed that the development of cognitive competencies results from social interaction between children and more skilled members of the community in what has been called an **apprenticeship in thinking**. The basis of this apprenticeship is guided participation, in which a skilled tutor or mentor engages the learner in joint activities.

3. In sociocultural theory, a child’s social partners progressively challenge the child’s ever-shifting abilities and motivation. To do so, the mentor draws the child into the **zone of proximal development**, which is the range of skills that the child can exercise only with assistance.
4. The universal perspective centers on the shared impulses and common needs of all of humanity. One universal theory is **humanism**. Maslow believed that all humans have five basic needs, which he arranged in a hierarchy, beginning with survival and ending with self-actualization. Rogers believed that each person deserves respect, appreciation, and *unconditional positive regard*.

5. The recent application of evolutionary theory to human development emphasizes two long-standing and biologically based needs: survival and reproduction. Current humans react in ways that helped survival and reproduction millions of years ago because of *selective adaptation*, a process essential to evolutionary theory.

6. One controversial idea stemming from evolutionary theory is that women and men are selected for different patterns of mating and sexual behavior. According to this argument, women benefit by seeking a soul mate, while men need women to be sexually faithful. Critics of this idea contend that a sexist upbringing rather than genes accounts for these differences.

**IV. What Theories Contribute**

*Instructional Objective:* To help students understand the goal of developmental theory and that all the major theories of human development work together to provide the most complete explanation of human development.

1. The five theories complement one another, as each emphasizes a somewhat different aspect of development.
   - (a) Psychoanalytic theory has drawn attention to the importance of early-childhood experiences.
   - (b) Behaviorism has highlighted the effect of the immediate environment on learning.
   - (c) Cognitive theory has led to a greater understanding of how intellectual processes and thinking affect every aspect of development.
   - (d) Sociocultural theory has reminded us that development is embedded in a rich and multifaceted cultural context.
   - (e) Universal theories emphasize that human differences are less significant than what all humans share.

2. Each theory has faced criticism: psychoanalytic theory, for being too subjective; behaviorism, for being too mechanistic; cognitive theory, for undervaluing emotions; sociocultural theory, for neglecting individuals; and universal theory, for slighting cultural, gender, and economic variations.

3. Today, most developmentalists have an *eclectic perspective*. Instead of limiting themselves to only one school of thought, they apply insights drawn from various theoretical views.