

SIXTH EDITION

THEORIES *of* DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY



Patricia H. Miller

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San Francisco State University



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PREFACE



Sergey Nivens
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“What is your theory of psychological development?” As an undergraduate, I faced that very essay question on my final exam in an introductory child psychology class. Drawing on all the theories I had ever heard of, I modestly generated a 6 (age) \times 20 (developmental tasks) matrix that covered all of development. My interest in theories was launched. Perhaps if I had been given a multiple-choice test this book would not have been written.

In all six editions of this book, I have tried to show the “big picture” of psychological development. Sometimes students are frustrated by fact-laden textbooks that do not provide frameworks in which to fit the facts. It is often not clear, for example, why a Swiss philosopher would be interested in children’s numerical judgments after a row of objects is spread out or why it is noteworthy that infants cry when their mothers leave the room. This book provides frameworks for understanding and perceiving the significance of the research findings in developmental psychology.

Theories of Developmental Psychology can be used as a primary or supplementary text in undergraduate or graduate courses or as a resource book for instructors. In addition, it can provide perspectives on children’s behavior for those who interact with children in any capacity. I hope that both developmental psychologists and readers from other disciplines will find something of interest in these pages.

I have used a parallel structure in the various chapters in order to help the reader compare the theories. Each chapter includes sections on four central issues of development, mechanisms of development, applications (e.g., to education or atypical development), strengths and weaknesses, and contemporary research. The section on contemporary research in each chapter shows how the theory is active today and how changes in the field of developmental psychology have changed what it draws from each theory. Where relevant, I provide biographies of major theorists, to show the connection between a theorist’s culture, family background, and interests, and that person’s theory. I have tried to convey what is exciting about each of the theories. The theories included are those that in my view are of most interest

to developmental psychologists and professionals in related disciplines. Many important theories were necessarily excluded because of length restrictions. And some of the “theories” included are not formal theories, but are perspectives that function as theories by identifying what to study, what questions to ask, and how to answer these questions.

Much has happened in the discipline of developmental psychology since the first edition in 1983. Each revision reflects these changes. In this sixth edition, I have continued to show how each theory has changed in its emphasis, its data base, and its influence on developmental psychology since the previous edition. A major change in this newest edition is a greatly expanded chapter on biological approaches, growing out of what originally was a chapter on ethology. This change reflects a major trend in the field toward biological perspectives. Exciting recent research in developmental neuroscience and genetics (Gene X Environment interactions and epigenetics) has had a major impact on both developmental psychology and psychology more generally. Evolutionary approaches, which continue to capture developmentalists’ attention, are included as well. These biological perspectives also appear briefly in the sections on contemporary research in some of the other chapters. The biological chapter now appears earlier in the book; this chapter and the Vygotsky/culture chapter just before it together provide two major foundations of development.

[Chapter 9](#) also is reorganized. That chapter, formerly titled “Contemporary Minitheories and Emerging Approaches,” is now titled “Theories Today: Themes and Perspectives.” The chapter is now organized around current themes in developmental psychology and how several theoretical approaches are addressing them. The chapter also now serves as a description of the “state-of-the-art” in developmental theorizing today.

The theories and empirical findings were updated throughout. Some particularly notable changes are the following: Reflecting a changing world, with its more diverse population, significant immigration, and increased globalization, several chapters address topics such as immigrant families, ethnic identity, social change and cultural evolution after modernization, and cultural differences in family processes. In the information processing chapter, sections on connectionist models, Bayesian models, statistical learning, and embodied cognition are expanded, to reflect the considerable interest in these approaches today. Throughout, when relevant, chapters include theoretical perspectives on atypical development, such as autism spectrum disorders, psychopathology, bullying, and altered stress regulation systems.

I want to thank a number of people who used the fifth edition and generously agreed to make suggestions for the current edition. The new sections on genetics and

neuroscience greatly benefitted from Luke Hyde's feedback on an earlier draft. I also want to thank Sarah Berger, Thomas Finn, and Kimberly Morgan-Smith at Worth Publishers, who expertly guided the sixth edition. Finally, I am grateful to John Flavell, who guided my meanderings into theories when I was a graduate student and continued to be a source of inspiration throughout his career.

Patricia H. Miller
2015

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction



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Never trust an experimental result until it has been confirmed by theory.

—SIR ARTHUR EDDINGTON

Give us theories, theories, always theories.

—JAMES MARK BALDWIN

We have theories of development because observers of human behavior have been intrigued by what they saw children and adults do. A 3-year-old predicts that a crayon box holds crayons; then, after it is opened to reveal candles, he asserts that he always believed that it held candles. A 5-year-old claims that spreading out a row of buttons increases the number of buttons. A school-age child uses a good strategy to successfully solve an addition problem, but shortly thereafter, she uses a less reliable strategy on the same problem. An adolescent selects an identity without seriously exploring other possible identities. An adult reports a dream that seems to be a thinly disguised attempt to deal with childhood anxieties.

Developmental theorists try to make sense out of observations such as these and, by doing so, construct a story of the human journey from infancy through childhood or adulthood. Some of the theories we will explore are grand, encompassing theories, often associated with a particular person, for example, Piaget's, Freud's, Erikson's, and Vygotsky's theories. Other theories are minitheories that often can be traced back to a grand theory but are limited to a particular territory within