

Lifespan Perspective

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Psychologists who study human development have adopted the lifespan perspective, which maintains that important changes occur during every period of development and that these changes must be interpreted in terms of the culture and context in which they occur (Boyd and Bee, 2009). Prior to this understanding, the subject of development was limited to childhood. This view has shifted because it is evident adults continue to experience major life changes and there has been a significant increase in age expectancy. Therefore, all stages of life are equally important. Lifespan development begins at the time of conception and continues up until the moment of death. In 2009, Boyd and Bee postulated that the lifespan perspective is characterized by plasticity, interdisciplinary research, and a multi-contextual view of the nature of development. Boyd and Bee also identified a number of key issues that play an essential role in lifespan development.

Boyd and Bee (2009), refer to eight stages of development and three domains of change. The stages of development include: prenatal, infancy, early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, middle adulthood and late adulthood. They also refer to three domains of change: physical, social, and cognitive. The physical domain encompasses change that occurs biologically. The cognitive domain consists of changes in thinking, problem-solving, memory, and other intellectual skills. The social domain involves change in variables that are associated with the relationship of an individual to others. The aforementioned stages and domains are categorized to simplify and facilitate discussion around development, but in reality they are fluid and strongly interrelated (Boyd and Bee, 2009).

The lifespan perspective of Boyd and Bee (2009) emphasizes the importance of plasticity, involves information from a variety of disciplines, and considers the multiple context in which development occurs. The term plasticity suggests that the ability to change is not restricted to any period of life, instead people of all ages are able to react and adapt to their environment. Thus, people of any age are able to learn and change their behavior. Additionally, interdisciplinary research highlights the importance of each discipline and promotes their collaboration in the conceptualize human development. Lastly, the multi-contextual view of development comes from the understanding that there are many overlapping groups in people's lives. Therefore, there are many interrelated contexts in which individual development occurs. These three main points set by Boyd and Bee distinguish their perspective on lifespan development.

Boyd and Bee (2009) identified several issues that pertain to all of the domains and periods of development. Historically, developmentalists have debated nature versus nurture. In struggling with this important issue psychologists have moved away from either approach and have acquired a more subtle way of looking at both influences and how they impact lifespan development. Another key issue is continuity-discontinuity, which proposes the question whether age-related change is primarily a matter of amount (continuity) or changes in type (discontinuity). Changes in the amount of a behavior would be a quantitative change and a changes in type of behavior would be qualitative. Additionally, there are three kinds of change when considering one's lifespan. Normative age-graded changes are experienced by everyone. Normative history-graded changes are common to individuals who have similar cultural and historical experiences. Non-normative changes are a result of unique, unshared events. Most recently, there has also been an increased awareness in the importance of understanding the

unique context of the individual, which includes individual variables and the settings with which development occurs.

Lifespan perspective is the name psychologists have given to the psychological and cognitive changes that occur throughout a person's life. Contrary to theories of development in the past, the lifespan perspective emphasizes the importance all developmental stages and the interconnectivity between domains of change. Boyd and Bee (2009) further explain the lifespan perspective is characterized by plasticity, interdisciplinary research, and a multi-contextual view on the nature of development. Additionally, there are identified concepts embedded within the lifespan perspective, which contribute to the development of biological and environmental factors and the presence or absence of stages. These concepts include: nature versus nurture, continuity-discontinuity, the types of change people experience, and understanding the uniqueness of the individual's context. Boyd and Bee provide a perspective which dissects and examines each component of human development, yet illustrates the connectivity of the lifespan.

Reference:

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