Syllabus

HDSP 413: Theories of Human Development
Winter 2012
Annenberg Hall
T 2:00-5:00 PM
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course is an intensive overview of some of the most influential theories of human development articulated in the Western tradition of behavioral and social science. The emphasis is upon especially broad theories whose ramifications cut across understandings of many different aspects of human development, including cognition and intelligence, social and emotional development, and the individual’s integration into society. We will also sample representative research projects that have been stimulated by these theories. We begin the course with a consideration of human nature as the ultimate context for understanding human development. As a species-specific set of evolved adaptations, human nature speaks to what human beings across different cultures tend to share by virtue of adaptation to a set of common ecological challenges. The most well-known example of just such a universal developmental adaptation is attachment in infancy. Both attachment theory and temperament theory consider the emotional underpinnings of human development, and both also speak to individual differences in human adaptation. Basic temperament differences ultimately morph into measurable and consequential differences in personality traits, through complex gene by environment interactions. Traits themselves form a first layer of human personality, spelling out how the person approaches the world from the standpoint of a social actor. With development, two more layers of personality eventually form: personal goals and values (the person as motivated agent) and identity-defining life narratives (the person as autobiographical author). After surveying perspectives on personality development, we will move to the cognitive-developmental realm, where we will briefly feature Piaget’s classic stage theory, offshoots from it (e.g., Kohlberg’s theory of moral development), and classic family rivals (e.g., Vygotsky). We will then consider more recent theories of cognitive development that focus on how children understand self and other (e.g., intentionality theories, “theory of mind” theory, multiple intelligences). If evolved human nature provides the ultimate context for understanding human development, the factors of culture, class, gender, and time contextualize development in more immediate and nuanced ways. We will, therefore, end the course by examining developmental perspectives that take into explicit account these contextual variables, as seen in cultural, social-ecological, and life-course theories of development.

REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to do all the reading before the assigned class date and to participate vigorously in class discussion. Each student will make at least one oral presentation in class in which he or she will be responsible for setting the class agenda or
leading a discussion around a particular topic or reading in class. In addition, a written paper (suggested length 15-20 pages) is due on the last day of class (March 7). The paper should address a current controversy or issue in the study of human development and link human development theories to the student’s current intellectual agenda. A written proposal for the paper is due on the fifth class meeting date (February 7). We will endeavor to integrate as many of the paper topics as possible into class discussions. The grade for the class is based 50% on class participation and 50% on the final paper.

READINGS

Readings consist of one book (which should be purchased) and a number of articles and chapters, which may be accessed through Blackboard


COURSE SCHEDULE

January 10: Orientation to the course; theories of human development in the behavioral and social sciences; metaphors of development in modern society.


January 17: Human nature and evolutionary theory: The example of attachment.

Newman & Newman, Chpt. 2.


**January 24:** From human nature to individual differences: How personality traits develop across the human life course. The person as a social actor.


**January 31:** More on personality development. Identity and the life narrative in adolescence and adulthood. The person as autobiographical author.


**February 7:** Cognitive developmental stage theory: Piaget and the structuralists. **Paper topics due.**

Newman & Newman, Chpt. 4.


**February 14:** Beyond Piaget: Vygotsky, Gardner, the child’s understanding of self and other, and theory of mind.


**February 21:** Developmental time and history: Life course theories, societal change and human development.

Newman & Newman, Chpts. 6-7.


February 28: The developing person in the contexts of social class and culture.


March 7: Selected topics and class projects.  **Papers due.**