

Developmental Theory and Human Motivation

*Course Number: V05.0140

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*This course is 4 points and is offered every fall and may be periodically offered in summer as well.

*There are no prerequisites for this course.

Course Description:

This course will provide an overview of child development through the study of basic readings on developmental theory. The course will be comprised of two interactive lectures each week, based on the readings that will introduce and summarize specific developmental theories. Students will be assigned films for home viewing which will allow for further exploration of the themes addressed in class. The course will examine established theories of child and adolescent development as well as more complex interpersonal constructs, such as family systems, peer relations, and gender identity. Students will gain an understanding of the various biological, psychological, and interpersonal factors that motivate complex human behaviors. Through lecture presentations and discussions, this course will provide students with an introduction to developmental concepts that they can apply to a deeper understanding of interpersonal relationships and the forces that inform and motivate human behavior.

Course Aims:

Knowledge

Students will learn key aspects of:

1. Theories of child development; and
2. The functional application of these theories.

Skills

Students will be able to:

1. Apply basic developmental concepts to the assessment of psychological motivation; and
2. Utilize developmental theory to better understand human behavior in general.

Attitudes

Students will develop:

1. An understanding of the complexity of the processes that motivate people to behave the way they do; and
2. An appreciation of the fact that no one theory explains all behavior.

Course Syllabus:

This course provides an overview of child development with the ultimate goal of advancing our understanding of human motivation. This course is appropriate for any humanities or social science student, since the primary goal of the class is to demonstrate a method of organizing and then analyzing a variety of human behaviors. The course encourages students to develop a sense of humility in studying human motivation and an appreciation of the multiplicity of motivations that drive interpersonal interaction. The lectures and readings will introduce various developmental theories, which will be further explored during in-class discussion. Students will also be required to watch one film at home each week, which will provide a cinematic depiction of these various theories at play.

The course examines established theories of child and adolescent development (e.g., Freud's Drive Theory, Erikson's Life Stages Model, Mahler's Theory of Separation/Individuation, Bowlby's Attachment Theory, etc.) as well as more complex interpersonal constructs, such as family systems, peer relations, and gender identity. This investigation will allow for an improved understanding of the various biological, psychological, and interpersonal factors that motivate complex human behaviors. The focus of the class will be on the practical application of developmental theory to an understanding of why people behave the way they do.

Many of the assigned films address development directly, such as Michael Apted's "Up" documentary series (1964, 1970, 1977, 1985, 1992, 1999, 2006), which follows the same group of children from age 7 through age 49 in seven year intervals; or Michael Cuesta's "12 and Holding" (2005), which examines the developmental impact of a preadolescent's death on his brother and a group of close friends. Other theatrical films illustrate either cross-sectional phenomena (e.g., infancy, childhood, and adolescence as portrayed in "The Squid and the Whale"), specific developmental theories (e.g., Freud, Piaget, and attachment theory as portrayed in "The Royal Tenenbaums"), or organizing interpersonal principles (e.g. family systems, peer relations, and sexuality as portrayed in "The Conformist"). The films will serve, in conjunction with the lectures and assigned readings, as stimuli for discussion. Ultimately, in a final paper, students will be asked to create their own theories of child development.

Through lecture presentations and weekly discussions, this course provides students with a wide-ranging introduction to developmental concepts that they can apply to a deeper understanding of interpersonal relationships and the developmental forces that inform and motivate human behavior. The course will meet twice weekly, using a combined approach of lecture and discussion. Homework assignments will include readings from basic textbooks and primary sources and the viewing of relevant films.

The textbooks for the course will be: (1) *Child Psychology: a Contemporary Viewpoint* by E. Mavis Hetherington, Ross D. Parke, Virginia Otis Locke & Mary Gauvain, 6th ed., 2006; and (2) *Theories of Development: Concepts and Applications*, by William Crain, 5th ed. 2005. Readings will otherwise be comprised of primary sources drawn from the developmental literature. Each week a film will also be assigned for viewing outside of class.

Date: Course Topic

Class 1

Introduction – This class will focus on providing an historical context for the various theories to be presented. Beginning with Freud, who was the first modern developmentalist to stress the importance of the way past experience shapes current behavior, two schools of thought developed. The first, ego psychology, focused on the way the mind utilizes and processes various experiences; and the second, object relations theory, focused on the importance of interpersonal relationships and the way people conceptualize them. These two schools, then, were enriched by more modern research into inborn patterns of animal behavior, attachment theory, and general systems theory.

Reading:

Hetherington et al, pages 2 – 20

Class 2

Continuity in Development – This class will focus on the question of what aspects of development are continuous and the degree to which current experience has an influence on the course of life.

Reading:

Fraley, R.C., and Roberts, B.W., Patterns of Continuity: A Dynamic Model for Conceptualizing the Stability of Individual Differences and Psychological Constructs across the Life Course. *Psychological Review*, Vol. 12, No.1, pp 60 – 74 (2005)

Film:

“Seven Up” and “7 Plus Seven” (d. Michael Apted, 1964 and 1970, GB) These are documentary films that chronicle the lives of a group of children first seen at age 7 and again at age 14. These same children are ultimately followed, every seven years, through age 49.

Week 2

Early Theories/Building a Theory – These classes will focus on the factors one must consider in trying to build a theory of human development.

Reading:

Crain, Chapter 1

Film:

“Nobody Knows” (d. Hirokazu Kore-eda 2004, Japan) This is a film about a group of young children who are abandoned by their mother and left to fend for themselves in a large Japanese city. Their ongoing but unrealistic attachment to

their mother, and their hope for her return, informs their behavior and interactions with one another.

Week 3

Ethological Approaches – These classes will focus on how the study of inborn patterns of animal behavior across species has enriched our understanding of human behavior. Phenomena such as natural selection, instinctual behavior, sensitive periods, imprinting, and territoriality will be addressed.

Reading:

Crain, pages 33 - 44;
Hetherington et al, pages 44 – 70; 621 – 639

Film:

“**The Bad Seed**” (d. Mervyn LeRoy, 1956, US) – This film focuses on the question of whether or not children are born “bad.” The interaction between biology and the environment, and the perceived dichotomy between these two forces, is well illustrated in this film.

Week 4

Attachment Theory – These classes will address the ethological underpinnings of attachment theory and the use of this theory to explain a wide variety of human behaviors.

Reading:

Crain, pages 44 – 65;
Hetherington et al, Chapter 6

Film:

“**At Close Range**” (d. James Foley, 1985, US) – This film focuses on the ambivalent attachment of a son to a father who has only been intermittently available, and who has been quite cruel. This film illustrates the subtleties of attachment theory.

Week 5

Piaget/ Vygotsky/Cognitive Development – These classes will address major theories of cognitive development.

Reading:

Crain, Chapter 6;Chapter 10
Hetherington et al, pages 316 – 363

Film:

“The Squid and the Whale” (d. Noah Baumbach, 2005, US) This film examines the response of an adolescent and a pre-adolescent to their parents’ divorce. The ways in which they respond to the situation are determined, to some extent, by the different ways they process information. One uses formal operations while the other uses concrete operations. Vygotsky’s theories are also relevant in the analysis of the effects of the parents’ attempts to influence the way the children understand the divorce.

Week 6 **Initial paper proposals due.**

Kohlberg/Moral Development – These classes focus on the factors that influence moral development.

Reading:

Crain, Chapter 7;
Hetherington et al, pages 590 – 621

Film:

“River’s Edge” (d. Tim Hunter, 1986, US) This film, based on a true story, depicts the way a group of disenfranchised teenagers respond to being informed that one of their friends has murdered his girlfriend. Each of them has a different set of moral imperatives.

Week 7 **Freud** – Although many of Freud’s ideas are no longer well accepted, his theories and language continue to exert a huge influence on psychology, literature, art, and culture in general. It is important, therefore, that students be conversant with general aspects of his work. These classes will present a wide ranging introduction to his ideas.

Reading:

Crain, Chapter 11

Film:

“Rebel Without a Cause” (d. Nicholas Ray, 1955, US) This film, produced in the heyday of psychoanalytic thought, addresses the oedipal implications of a boy’s relationship to his parents and how that plays out in a peer context.

Week 8 **Midterm Examination** – a short answer test that addresses the developmental theories that have been discussed up to this point in the class.

Anna Freud/Defense Mechanisms – Anna Freud, Sigmund’s daughter, was a well respected psychoanalyst. One of her major contributions was the elucidation of defense mechanisms, the psychic processes people use to maintain psychological balance in the face of life’s vicissitudes. More modern ideas of defense mechanisms conceive of them as part of a larger homeostatic process related to the maintenance of psychic organization and efficiency.

Reading:

Anna Freud, The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense: The Writings of Anna Freud, Vol. 2. International Universities Press; Revised edition (June 1967)

Lichtenberg, J. & Slap, J. On the Defensive Organization. International Journal of Psychoanalysis, Vol. 52, pp 451 – 457 (1971)

Film:

“Heavenly Creatures” (d. Peter Jackson, 1994, New Zealand) Jackson, who later went on to direct The Lord of the Rings trilogy, directed this film, based on a true story, of two girls who are caught up in a fantasy life that ultimately leads them to murder one of the girls’ mothers. The story will offer the opportunity to discuss the function and adequacy of various defense mechanisms.

Week 9

Margaret Mahler/Daniel Stern – Mahler, and later her student, Stern, focused on examining the effect of experiences during the first three years of life. Mahler focused on how the child learns to separate from the parents. Stern focused on how the child learns to develop intimate relationships by utilizing various shared affective and cognitive experiences to develop empathy.

Reading:

Crain Chapter 13

Film:

“The Royal Tenenbaums” (d. Wes Anderson, 2001, US) This film addresses multigenerational issues of separation and individuation, intimacy, and empathy in a very complicated family.

Week 10

Eric Erikson/Life Stage Theory – Erikson was one of the first developmental theoreticians to recognize that development continues into adulthood and even old age. He developed a theory of life stages that identifies the core struggles associated with each of these life stages.

Reading:

Crain Chapter 12

Film:

“Mean Streets” (d. Martin Scorsese 1973, US) In this film, Scorsese addresses the conflicts associated with the transition from adolescence to young adulthood (intimacy vs. isolation), and from young adulthood to adulthood (generativity vs. stagnation).

Week 11

Family Systems – Earlier theories of development and psychopathology tended to place the locus of activity in the individual. More contemporary theories tend to place the individual within a biopsychosocial milieu. Family systems theory examines the family dynamics that often underlie individual behaviors.

Reading:

Hetherington et al, Chapter 11

Film:

“The Conformist” (d. Bernardo Bertolucci 1970, Italy, France, Germany) – In this film, Bertolucci examines the personal and political implications for the protagonist of growing up in a family in which he was both neglected and exposed to a great deal of highly dysfunctional behavior.

Week 12

Rough draft of final paper is due.

Peer Relations – These classes will examine the relative importance of peer relationships on the course of development.

Reading:

Hetherington et al, Chapter 12

Film:

“12 and Holding” (d. Michael Cuesta 2005, US) This film examines the effect of the death of a 12 year old boy on his brother and a group of friends.

Week 13

Gender/Sexuality – These classes will address current theories related to the development of gender identity and sexual orientation.

Reading:

Hetherington et al, Chapter 13

Film:

“Ma Vie en Rose” (d. Alain Berliner 1997, Belgium) This film is about a young boy who cannot wait to grow up to be a woman. His parents are forced to contend with their own discomfort and the lack of understanding from their new neighbors. They eventually send their son to a psychiatrist in the hopes of fixing whatever is wrong with him, but in the end come to accept him as he is.

Week 14 **Film and Development – a real example.**

Films of Sadie Benning (with Sadie screening and discussing) Sadie Benning is a well-known and very highly regarded artist who began making relatively autobiographical videos at the age of 15. Over the last 20 years she has produced a highly personal body of work that addresses issues of psychological, emotional, and sexual development. She is a highly sought-after speaker who has graciously consented to screen and discuss some of her films for this class.

Week 15 **Final Paper and Final Test**

Examinations and Grades:

Grading will be as follows: Midterm Examination – 20%; Final Examination – 35%; Final Paper – 35%; Class participation – 10%.

Course Meetings:

The course will meet for two 75 minute lectures per week, which will incorporate discussion and viewing of relevant film clips as indicated.