

## Chapter 8 Summary

- Since ancient times, many of the world's thinkers considered human development a result of the interaction between environment and natural individual predispositions. Contemporary theories of human development emphasize the meaning of both individual and cultural factors of socialization. However, many classical developmental theories were ethnocentric and failed to take into account the richness of human diversity.

- In the interdependent families commonly found in rural traditional societies, the family structure is characterized by interdependency on both dimensions: between parents and their children and among children themselves. In independent families—the typical middle-class nuclear family in most European and North American countries—the family structure is characterized by independence on both dimensions.

- The developing child is seen as an individual with inborn dispositions and skill potential. The child's environment is a part of a larger cultural system. Both the environment and the individual are seen as open and interchanging systems. The power of the culturally regulated environment comes from the coordinated action of the three elements of the niche. They relate to each other, to outside forces, and to the developing individual.

- According to Erikson, a developing individual moves through a series of psychological crises. Each crisis, or conflict, grows primarily out of a need to adapt to the social environment and develop a sense of competence. Once a crisis is resolved, the individual moves further. This theory, with some amendments, is applicable in a wide variety of cultural settings. However, Erikson has been criticized for mixing objective description with subjective prescription. Specifically, the virtues he uses to define the healthy individual are clearly in accordance with Western, Judeo-Christian ethics, values, and social institutions.

- Studies suggest that the stage sequence (preoperational, operational, abstract thinking) and reasoning styles described by Piaget appear to be, with some limitations, universal across cultures. The limitations refer to the methodology and some procedures used by Piaget and his colleagues that are viewed as ethnocentric. Moreover, the Piaget theory explains how children

deal with conservation of volume, weight, and amount. However, everyday thinking and the ability to make practical decisions in particular cultural settings are not well explained by this theory.

- According to Kohlberg, there are six stages of moral development in which children and adults are able to make several types of moral judgments. In brief, people go from lower stages of reasoning, where they prefer to avoid punishment for wrongdoing, to the higher stages, where they choose social contract and then universal principles to guide moral actions. This theory may be applied to different cultural settings. Yet, the methodology used in the cross-cultural studies on moral development was based on hypothetical stories about moral choices that were related mainly to U.S. subjects. Another point of criticism is that the developmental stages are closely linked to values of Western liberalism and individualism based on moral choice, values which are not shared universally around the world.

- Cross-culturally, human development is understood as taking place in stages. Specialists refer to particular cultural norms and biological, behavioral, and physiological changes, which are identified cross-culturally with a particular life stage. Most books on human development distinguish several common stages within the life span: prenatal period, infancy, childhood (divided into early and middle childhood), adolescence, and adulthood, which is also divided into three stages: early adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood.

- During the prenatal period, the developing embryo in the mother's womb can be exposed to either favorable or unfavorable conditions. One's access to resources and professional prenatal care along with a stressful social and psychological environment are crucial factors affecting the unborn child's development. Attitudes about pregnancy, abortion, and childbirth vary from culture to culture and are linked to local traditions and laws.

- Each culture provides a particular set of norms regarding parent-child relationships. Cross-culturally, the child's thinking is wishful. Each child's developmental niche includes social practices, values, and demands conveyed to him or her from parents and care-givers.

- Adolescence is viewed not only as a developmental stage but also as a cultural phenomenon rooted in social and economic conditions.

Many non-industrialized cultures encourage their members to assume adult roles as quickly as possible, almost skipping the adolescence stage. Adolescence marks the beginning of sexual maturation. Despite their ability to make ethical judgments and their tremendous cognitive reserves, adolescents do not have the vision or wisdom often found at a more mature age.

- In all cultures, adulthood represents maturity, responsibility, and accountability. This period is divided into stages of early, middle, and late adulthood. Early adulthood is usually linked to formative processes and middle adulthood is associated with accomplishments. In adulthood, individuals generally form their sense of identity, which is the view of themselves as individuals and members of society. The fact that transitions into adult roles have become somewhat delayed in many societies has led to the recognition of a new period of life, called *emerging adulthood*, that extends from the late teens to the mid-twenties and is characterized by self-focused exploration of possibilities in love, work, and worldviews.

- In many countries, the late adulthood period begins with retirement, when a person formally quits his or her job or gives up his or her major responsibilities. Late adulthood is linked to the physiological process of aging. Life expectancy, general socioeconomic conditions, individual psychological and physiological characteristics, and societal attitudes toward the elderly comprise the individual's final developmental niche.

## Key Terms

**Adolescence** The period from 11–12 to 19–20 years. The child has reached sexual maturity but has not yet taken on the rights and responsibilities of the adult status.

**Adulthood** The period from 20 years onward. The individual has achieved the adult status prescribed by norms and laws of a particular society.

**Childhood** The time from 2 to 11–12 years. The child acquires language and learns about the most important social skills.

**Identity** The view of oneself as an individual and a member of society.

**Infancy** The period from birth to two years when the child acquires initial motor, cognitive, and social skills.

**Late Adulthood** The period of physical wearing and decline.

**Human Development** The changes in physical, psychological, and social behavior as experienced by individuals across the life span from conception to death.

**Persistence Model** The theoretical view that suggests that adults acquire attitudes and behaviors early in life and tend not to change them later.

**Openness Model** The theoretical view that suggests that adults change their attitudes and behavior to adjust to changing situations.

**Prenatal Period** The time between conception and birth, which lasts approximately 38 weeks.

**Socialization** The process by which the individual becomes a member of a particular culture and takes on its values, beliefs, and behaviors.

**Temperament** Personality traits (presumably of a genetic basis) present in infancy.