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Life-Span Developmental Psychology

Personality and Socialization

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CHAPTER 1 - History of Developmental Psychology: Socialization and Personality Development through the Life Span

ROBERT J. HAVIGHURST

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ABSTRACT

There was no explicit developmental psychology of personality through the life span before the middle of the twentieth century. Prior to 1940, psychologists studying personality generally confined themselves to a limited segment of the life span. The period from 1850 to 1920 saw a good deal of empirical study of child and adolescent development, but almost no attention to adulthood and later maturity. After 1930, a small number of leaders emerged with an interest in life-span development: Charlotte BÅ¼hler, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Erik Erikson, and Hans Thoma. Also, the University of Chicago Committee on Human Development directed its resources into the study of personality development in middle and old age.

Theories of personality which did not prove useful for understanding life-span development were constitutional types, nineteenth century evolutionary theory (G. S. Hall), and psychoanalytic theory. Since 1930, several longitudinal studies of personality development have been producing useful data and theories. Other useful sources are biographies, autobiographies, and systematic case studies. The development of life-span theory probably requires: an organismic theory of personality, which assumes an active organism interacting with the social and physical environment; attention to physical vigor and health as a causal factor; study of career changes and other crises of middle age; and study of the perceptions of aging by the self and the wider community.

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