

In this first decade of the twenty-first century, American society has clearly adopted the goal that greater opportunities should be available for all its members to develop their potential more fully. To achieve this goal, it will be essential that we know as much as possible about human development—how we change from the helplessness of infancy to the competence of adulthood to the wisdom of old age.

Perhaps the human saga is not written as clearly as we would like. As Thomas Jefferson once noted, although the human condition is not open to complete scrutiny, it is, nevertheless, susceptible to considerable improvement. Clues providing insights into the riddle of human development are beginning to multiply. Genetic discoveries are occurring at a rate that can only be described as breathtaking.

As the population of our nation continues to change, we have become more sensitive to the influence that culture exerts on development. We recognize that children learn in many different ways; we see how different cultures view developmental stages such as adolescence and old age from different perspectives; we understand more about how society changes us, but also how we can influence society.

Basic Themes of Human Development across the Lifespan

Reflecting the exciting changes that are taking place in our knowledge of human development, we have woven our narrative around several integrating themes: the biopsychosocial model, the cultural context of development, the roles of age and gender, and applications to daily living. We return to these themes in each chapter as a means of making more meaningful the basic knowledge of human development.

The Biopsychosocial Approach

The *biopsychosocial approach* will help you to integrate the wealth of information that you will find in the pages to come. By thinking of lifespan development as the product of the interaction of biological, psychological, and social forces, you will better appreciate the complexity of development. For example, biological influences on development range from the role of genes in

development to adult health concerns; psychological influences include all aspects of cognitive and personality development; social influences refer to such powerful forces as family, school, peers, and the media. The biopsychosocial approach helps to explain how the interaction of these forces is the key to understanding human development.

Contextual Influences on Development

Our goal in urging you to adopt a sociocultural perspective is to help you develop a greater understanding of those who seem “different.” If you adopt this perspective, you will come to realize that different people have different worldviews that decisively influence their thinking. People from different cultures do not always think like each other and, as we will stress, these differences are assets. Recognizing how diverse people are in their thinking and behavior will help you to identify and comprehend variations in how individuals are raised, how they think, and how they become functioning members of their culture.

In various places throughout the book, we will be discussing the four major tenets of the contextual model: the relative plasticity of life; the historical embeddedness of all development; the diversity of development; and the bidirectionality of the causes of all human behavior. Since we feel so strongly about the importance of these factors, you will find a discussion of sociocultural issues in each chapter. We also open several sections of the book with a sociocultural perspective on the issues to be discussed.

The Roles of Age and Gender

Inasmuch as this book is organized chronologically, we will be explaining the influence of age in every chapter. In some ways, the effects of age are quite apparent and in other ways its effects are subtle and complex. As concerns about gender equity have received more publicity, the stereotypes about males and females have slowly eroded. If people are treated according to stereotypic characteristics, then their potential is immediately limited. Although gender stereotyping is only one part of the gender story, it illustrates the importance of the relationship between gender and development. For example, children at an early age construct social categories from the world around them, attach certain characteristics to

these categories, and label the categories. This process may be positive because it helps to organize the world; it may also be negative if the characteristics associated with the category are limiting—"girls just can't do math." We'll examine how this theme plays out, both positively and negatively, throughout the lifespan.

Applications to Daily Living

The study of lifespan development is an exciting, rapidly changing, and highly relevant subject that can shed light on the developmental changes that you witness in yourself and see in your friends and family members of all ages. To help you put the theories and research of this book into a meaningful framework, we have written several **An Applied View** boxes for each chapter. These range from the appeal of street gangs for some children, to the role of television in a child's life, to an adolescent's search for identity, to problems that the adult children of alcoholics encounter.

We have also included boxes that ask you to interact with the text's material. Called **An Informed View**, these boxes are intended to help you think about and act on topics we have just discussed in the chapter. In these activities, you are invited to reflect on what your knowledge and your experience tell you about these matters. We do not present answers in these boxes. Rather, we hope you apply your best judgment to the issues we raise.

Major Changes in the Fifth Edition

Thanks to suggestions from students who used the fourth edition of our text and the insightful comments of reviewers, we have made the following substantial changes in the fifth edition:

- An innovation from the previous edition is the changing of **What's Your View** boxes to **An Informed View**. These new boxes, which appear once or more in each chapter, not only ask students to take a side on a "hot" developmental issue but also suggest further readings that should help to provide a better basis for the formation of that stance. In some cases, these boxes will contain a World Wide Web icon that will prompt you to visit the text's web site for additional information. As a result, students are encouraged to think more critically about the major issues in the field today, and not just jump to a snap judgment.
- In addition to appearing at the end of the text in the glossary, definitions of key terms now appear within the margins of the text. This enhancement makes it easier for students to identify important terms and study them in preparation for exams.
- We have continued to add new examples of the biopsychosocial approach in this edition.

- Because we believe that the quotations that appear in each chapter in our book set the tone for that chapter, we have provided one as an opening, along with a vignette about human development, in each chapter.
- Earlier in this preface we mentioned that development is a lifelong process, which implies that lifespan psychology books must constantly change to accommodate fresh insights into the developmental process. To meet this challenge, we have made the following key changes in our chapters:

Chapter 1. Lifespan Psychology: An Introduction

We have reshaped major sections of chapter 1: new approaches to the meaning and characteristics of lifespan psychology, completely changed our analysis of the views of lifespan psychology, and refocused the importance of biopsychosocial interactions.

Chapter 2. Theories of Development: Interpreting the Lifespan

We have changed chapter 2 to reflect the latest direction in the field. For example, we have used developmental contextualism as an illustration of the growing importance of systems analysis to understand development. How the various human systems interact is now recognized as a most promising technique to unlock developmental secrets.

Chapter 3. The Biological Basis of Development

The ART section (Assisted Reproductive Techniques) was completely redone to reflect current research. Also, cloning was discussed. The Human Genome Project was almost totally rewritten to keep up with the startling news about the mapping of the human genome. This section received highly favorable reviews.

Chapter 4. Pregnancy and Birth

The major changes in this chapter are a reorganization of topics, a much-expanded version of maternal influences on prenatal development, and a new approach to prematurity (identification of categories, etc.).

Chapter 5. Physical and Cognitive Development in Infancy

We rewrote major sections of this chapter. For example, we expanded our discussion of brain development in infancy. We also reworked the section on perceptual development—visual and auditory. Although we maintained a strong position in Piagetian thought, we noticeably enlarged our treatment of information processing in infancy.