

Big Questions of Developmental Psychology

How did developmental psychologists understand something as incredibly complicated as children and our development? We 'break' the child into parts by studying very specific things in very specific contexts. This is an underlying philosophy of science called "reductionism." Sometimes all of this reductionism can make it feel like our results are not really about children, but are about answering an inane small question about a particular variation of a particular task with a particular group of kids at a particular time. But all of these particular studies are about answering big questions. How we answer these questions is part of a theory. Different developmental psychologists ask these questions differently, but almost all of us come to the similar questions. Consider how all the studies and topics we discuss this semester help answer these questions and support or refute different developmental theories.

Nature vs. Nurture: Is it nature or nurture? Or is the question, itself, misleading?

Individual Differences: How come we begin life as babies, who are so similar to one another, and yet we grow into such distinct adults?

Social Context: How do we come to understand ourselves and our relationships with others? Is our social learning experience different from the way we learn about the physical world?

Passive vs. Active Child: Are children passive recipients of experience, or do we actively construct the way we develop?

Quantitative Change vs. Qualitative Stages: Are we almost different people at different phases of our lives, or are we always about the same with more experience to go by?