

The Life-Course Anthony Giddens

- **Life-cycle** suggests biology
- **Life-course** is sociological, implying the instability of apparently fixed life stages, e.g. childhood has changed significantly over time from children as 'young adults' to children as 'innocents', deserving separate treatment, clothing, etc.
- Similarly, teenage, youth and so on are all social creations, not fixed biological stages

Theories of Child Development

G.H. Mead and Symbolic Interactionism

- Children learn by imitating others
- Imaginative games act out adult roles and enable 'taking the role of the other'
- Children gain a sense of themselves as a separate agent 'Me' by seeing themselves through the eyes of others
- Through organized games they learn to play 'according to the rules'
- At the same time they grasp the idea of a 'generalized other' – the general values of their culture

Jean Piaget and Cognitive Development

Children's ability to understand their world moves through developmental stages:

Sensorimotor stage

Preoperational stage

Concrete operational stage

Formal operational stage

- Sensorimotor: learning by touching and moving things. Gradually distinguish separate objects and people, and understand that these exist separate from themselves
- Preoperational: become able to use language in a symbolic way. An egocentric view of the world, unable to see things from different points of view. Poor grasp of causality, speed, weight, number

Chapter 8 Brief Guideline

- Concrete operational: master abstract, logical notions; recognise false reasoning; capable of arithmetic; can see world from different points of view
- Formal operational: able to grasp abstract and hypothetical ideas; developed theory building and testing skills

Gender Socialization

Three Dimensions:

- Social Interactionist
- Cognitive
- Unconscious

Social Interactionist Dimensions

- Children imitate adult roles in their play
- In taking gender-appropriate roles children practise 'doing gender'
- In embracing the 'generalized other' they embrace the gender order of their society
- Children police one another into taking gender-appropriate roles
- Children's toys and books offer gender roles to follow
- Children actively take part in their own socialization and resist encouragement to subvert gender expectations

Cognitive Dimensions

- **Sensorimotor stage**: handled differently by males and females and become aware of the different smells and texture of the adults in their world
- **Preoperational stage**: become able to use language which genders the world and become aware of themselves as a boy or a girl
- **Concrete operational stage**: fully able to grasp gender as an abstract ordering principle. Able to view selves as gendered and see adults of different genders view world differently
- **Formal operational stage**: able to critically interrogate notion of gender. Able to make conscious choice about positioning themselves in gendered social world

Chapter 8 Brief Guideline

Unconscious Dimensions

- The unconscious is driven by fantasy representations of the world
- Gender identity and difference has conscious dimensions but is also enmeshed in unconscious fantasies
- **Freud:** the early recognition of anatomical difference is transformed into powerful fantasies about the father which are central to gender difference
- **Chodorow:** separation from the early close relationship with the mother is achieved differently by girls and boys and is central to gender difference

Greying of Societies

- Population of most countries is ageing as a result of declining birth and death rates
- 65+ age group will reach 25% of global population by 2050 with consequences for government policies
- Ageing has biological, psychological and social dimensions
- Theories of ageing include functionalism, age stratification theory and political economy approaches
- Social inequalities in society are still evident in later life, especially in relation to gender with older women tending to be amongst the poorest
- Ageism – discrimination on the grounds of age – is now widely recognised but also widely practised.

Death, Dying and Bereavement

Sociological studies look at the social organization of death and dying (Walter 1999)

- Elias (1985) sees death hidden behind the scenes in modern societies leading to the 'loneliness of the dying' in hospitals
- Bauman argues that modern people's life strategy involves the deconstruction of mortality into smaller, more manageable 'health hazards'
- The hospice movement and new mourning rituals perhaps show that people are trying to construct better ways of handling death and dying.