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Section C

Theories of Early Child Development
Biological-Based Theories

- Emphasize inherited biological factors and processes

- Major theories
  - Ethological theories
  - Attachment theory
  - Neurodevelopmental approaches

- Contributions
  - Biological influences on development
  - Importance of early years for later development
Ethological Theories

- Evolutionary perspective of development (Darwin)
- Work of zoologist, Lorenz, on duck imprinting most identified with perspective
Attachment Theory

- Developed by Bowlby, based on ethological principles

- Stresses importance of early relationship between child and caregiver for development

- All children thought to form attachments to caregiver regardless of quality of care received

- Contemporary research focuses on quality of early attachments formed and how they affect subsequent relationships over the life course
Neurodevelopmental Approaches

- Highlight relation of brain development to behavior and cognition

- Emphasize importance of early years when the brain is maximally sensitive to environment

- Early experiences play a crucial role in how the brain wires itself, and they influence later behavior

- Research is largely based on animal models
Psychoanalytic Theories

- Emphasize unconscious internal drives and interactions with others

- Early major theories
  - Freud’s Psychosexual Theory
  - Erikson’s Psychosocial Theory

- Contributions
  - Highlight individual’s unique life history
  - Early research on emotional and social development
Environment-Based Theories

- Emphasize role of external world/environment as major determinant of individual’s behavior
  - Changes in behavior are associated with changes in environment
  - The individual’s role in shaping behavior is seen as relatively passive

- Major theories
  - Classic Conditioning Theory
  - Operant Conditioning Theory
  - Social Learning Theory

- Contributions
  - Major applied impact in clinical settings
Social Learning Theory

- Developed by Bandura on principles of conditioning and reinforcement, but expanded the view of how children acquire new responses

- Based on the theory that individuals are greatly influenced by observing and imitating/modeling others
  - Receive vicarious reinforcement
  - Learn new behaviors
Cognition-Based Theories

- Emphasize role of cognition and information processing and children’s strive for greater understanding of world around them

- Major theories
  - Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development
  - Information Processing Theory

- Contributions
  - Major applied impact in educational settings