

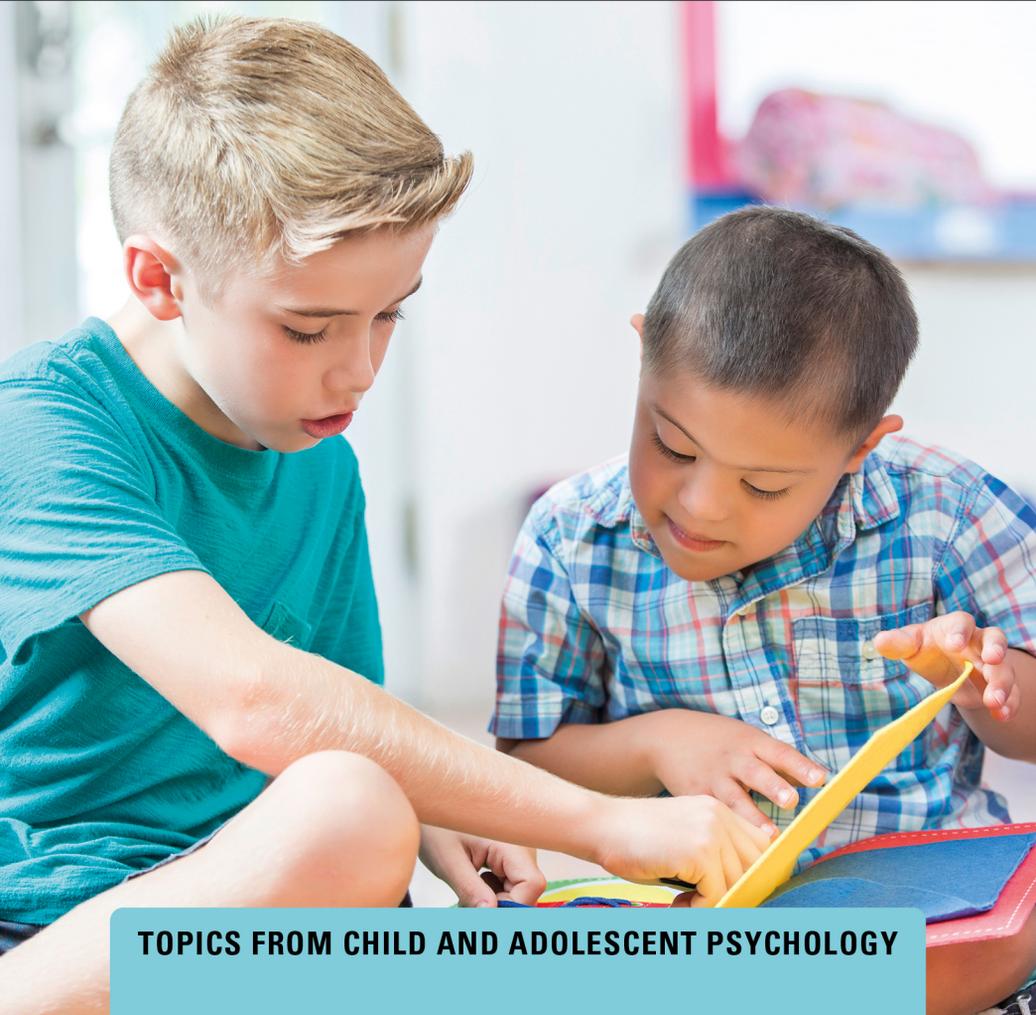


Stephen von Tetzchner



# Typical and Atypical Child and Adolescent Development 1

Theory and Methodology



**TOPICS FROM CHILD AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHOLOGY**

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# Typical and Atypical Child and Adolescent Development I

## Theory and Methodology

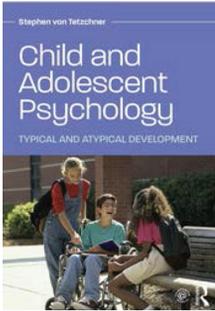
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This concise guide offers an accessible introduction to the key theoretical perspectives and methodologies in developmental psychology. It integrates insights from typical and atypical development to reveal fundamental aspects of human growth and development, and common developmental disorders.

The topic books in this series draw on international research in the field and are informed by biological, social and cultural perspectives, offering explanations of developmental phenomena with a focus on how children and adolescents at different ages actually think, feel and act. In this succinct volume, Stephen von Tetzchner outlines the main theoretical perspectives including psychodynamic psychology, behaviorism, logical constructivism, social constructivism, evolutionary psychology, ethological psychology, ecological psychology, information processing and critical developmental psychology. He provides a guide to methods of gaining knowledge about children and introduces child and adolescent disorders.

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**Stephen von Tetzchner** is Professor of Developmental Psychology at the Department of Psychology, University of Oslo, Norway.



The content of this topic book is taken from Stephen von Tetzchner's core textbook *Child and Adolescent Psychology: Typical and Atypical Development*. The comprehensive volume offers a complete overview of child and adolescent development. For more information, visit [www.routledge.com/9781138823396](http://www.routledge.com/9781138823396)

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## Topics from Child and Adolescent Psychology Series

Stephen von Tetzchner

The **Topics from Child and Adolescent Psychology Series** offers concise guides on key aspects of child and adolescent development. They are formed from selected chapters from Stephen von Tetzchner's comprehensive textbook *Child and Adolescent Psychology: Typical and Atypical Development* and are intended to be accessible introductions for students of relevant modules on developmental psychology courses, as well as for professionals working in the fields of child development, developmental disabilities and special education. The topic books explain the key aspects of human development by integrating insights from typical and atypical development to cement understanding of the processes involved and the work with children who have developmental disorders. They examine sensory, physical and cognitive disabilities and the main emotional and behavioral disorders of childhood and adolescence, as well as the developmental consequences of these disabilities and disorders.

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# Typical and Atypical Child and Adolescent Development I

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Theory and Methodology

Stephen von Tetzchner

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# Introduction

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This volume represents four pillars in the study of child **development** and the developmental way of thinking: **Concepts**, theories, methods and categorization of **developmental disorders**. They constitute basic tools for understanding typical and **atypical development** in general and within the various developmental **domains** presented in the other topic books (and the complete textbook).

*Part I Developmental Psychology* presents basic concepts and models, recurrent or core issues, and applications of the developmental way of thinking. Concepts are needed for describing children's abilities and how they function in various domains, while models are used for explaining how different factors influence development. Many of the concepts may be found in the Glossary. This part emphasizes the historical roots of developmental psychology and the present trend towards greater cultural variety and globalization in developmental scientific thinking.

The core issues are discussed in most of the volumes. They include nature and nurture, that is, how influences from genes and environment interact in development, and the question of **continuity** or **discontinuity** in abilities and skills through development. The presence of sensitive or **critical periods** in development, for example the ease of learning language in the early compared with later years, is important both for understanding the significance of the child's experiences in different phases of development and as a theoretical basis for early **childhood** intervention. Observing a child's developmental achievements and challenges in different phases of development is important, but, in the developmental way of thinking, attention is given rather to the underlying processes that may promote or hinder mental growth. Only if these processes are understood may it be possible to reduce the **risk** of negative developmental outcomes.

Development from the **germinal period** to adulthood involves complex processes and, hence, requires complex explanatory models. There is rarely a direct one-to-one relation between a biological or environmental factor and a developmental outcome (**main effect**). It is **interaction effects** that characterize child and adolescent development, meaning that the effect of one factor on development usually is moderated by one or several other factors. For example, children's early **temperament** may influence how they react to the newness or stress and cope in various situations. The early models of child development assumed that the influence was one-sided, that the child's development was influenced by positive and negative features of the environment. However, in the 1970s, researchers became aware of how children also influence their environment. In modern developmental psychology, development is perceived as a *transactional process*, with mutual influences between the child and the environment over time.

Important for the application of the developmental way of thinking is the *dynamic systems model*, where imbalances in functioning lead to developmental change and the emergence of new skills and abilities. Many children develop *vulnerabilities* or grow up in environments that represent *risks* for deviant development. On the other hand, there are environments that seem to protect vulnerable children and children who seem to be *resilient* to severe environmental risks. Small developmental obstacles sometimes develop into *cascades*, that is, sequences of problems which increase in scope and magnitude. This emphasizes that developmental risks may be cumulative. It is a general aim of developmental psychology to uncover the processes that may lead to positive or negative developmental outcomes. Central in clinical child psychology is **developmental psychopathology**, which seeks to reveal and influence the processes that can give rise to mental health problems in children and adolescents and uncover factors that can promote or inhibit the development of anxiety, depression and other psychological disorders.

Theories are intellectual tools for making sense of observations of children and adolescents, of their actions and reactions, social and mental functioning, early and later social relations, and how they adapt and cope in their environments. *Part II Theoretical Perspectives* presents the basic ideas and historical contexts of the main theoretical perspectives on child and adolescent development. Each of these perspectives constitutes its own universe of related ideas and assumptions, which may be closer or farther away from the ideas and assumptions

of the other theoretical universes. There are many similarities across the perspectives, but they differ in their emphasis on developmental domains and their explanations of developmental phenomena. The mental psychological structures that are a core feature of **psychodynamic theories** are very different from the **attachment** process and mental **working models** described by ethological theory. Both address different aspects of development than **logical constructivism** with a focus on **cognitive structure**.

Comparisons of the theoretical perspectives give insights into the issues and challenges involved in explaining the physical, mental and social changes from **infancy** to adulthood and the factors that may govern these processes. Knowledge of one theory is never enough. A comprehensive understanding of child and adolescent development must rest on thorough knowledge of the different theories, their agreements and disagreements – sometimes fierce – about both descriptions and explanations of developmental phenomena.

More detailed elements of the theories related to specific domains are presented in the other topic books. For example, psychodynamic theories of personality are presented in Book 6, *Emotions, Temperament, Personality, Moral, Prosocial and Antisocial Development*, Piaget's logical constructivist theory on **perception** is presented in Book 3, *Perceptual and Motor Development*, and his cognitive theory in Book 4, *Cognition, Intelligence and Learning*.

Insights into child and adolescent development build on systematic knowledge of how children and adolescents at different ages think and how they act and react in different activities and contexts. *Part III Methods of Gaining Knowledge about Children* presents a wide range of methods for gathering information about children, including different forms of observations, **experiments**, interviews, **checklists** and **tests**. Qualitative and quantitative methodologies complement each other, and it is the research questions that decide which methods are best suited. **Quantitative methods** are used when there are behaviors, test scores, emotional expressions or other things that can be counted or measured, typically based on research questions starting with *who*, *where*, *when*, *what* or *how many*. Results are presented with numbers and statistical calculations. **Qualitative methods** are typically used when describing processes, with research questions starting with *how* or *why*. Results are described with words, and analysis involves text rather than numbers. For example, studies of parent-child conversations may apply quantitative analysis when counting

words and sentence lengths, and qualitative analysis for investigating children's and adults' contributions in early dialogues. The choice of methods used depends also on area of interest. Both natural observations of children in their everyday environments and experimental studies have their place in developmental research. Infancy is a phase of great interest to researchers because it represents the beginning of many abilities and skills, such as **self-regulation**, self-propelled mobility and **communication**. However, it is not easy to instruct infants, and researchers would not get many answers just by asking them about their thoughts or feelings. Adapted methods based on **habituation**, visual exploration or neurological measures have given many new insights into perceptual and cognitive processing in infancy, but interpretation of the results of the studies can be challenging.

Reliable and valid methods are important in research, but they are equally important in clinical work. **Assessment** to gain knowledge about the thoughts and feelings of children and adolescents is a foundation of clinical work. The methods used depend on the age and assumed functioning of the child or adolescent. An assessment may, for example, seek to reveal a child's cognitive, linguistic and social functioning compared with peers, how he copes with emotional and stressful situations, and his relationships and interactions with peers and adults. Clinicians get information from conversations with the parents, the child and teachers and use systematic observation and standardized tests and checklists to investigate the child's performance in different developmental domains. The reason for an assessment is always a referral, and the aim is to find out if the child is in need of educational or psychological intervention, and what kinds of interventions will best support the child, the family and the school.

Atypical development includes all forms of unusual or deviant development, and there are many degrees of atypical development. Atypical development does not necessarily imply abnormality, but some children and adolescents have characteristics that fulfill the diagnostic criteria for one or several disorders, such as hearing impairment, **autism spectrum disorder** or anxiety. *Part IV Child and Adolescent Disorders* describes the characteristics of the most common disorders of childhood, based on the most recent editions of the two major classification systems: *The International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems* (ICD-11) and *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5). The typical trajectories and developmental variation are described in the other topic books, together with

their developmental consequences. For example, the development of self-propelled mobility gives children new ways of exploring the environment and thereby changes the whole psychological landscape of children, and, as part of motor development, Book 3, *Perceptual and Motor Development*, describes consequences of motor impairments on different aspects of development. The social functioning of children with autism spectrum disorder is discussed in relation to the development of **mind understanding** (Book 4, *Cognition, Intelligence and Learning*), while reactive attachment disorder and disinhibited engagement disorder are included in the presentation of attachment and development of early relations.

Atypical development reflects general processes, and knowledge about atypical development is therefore essential for understanding development in general. In addition, knowledge of typical and atypical developmental processes as bases for various disorders is important for understanding these disorders and for introducing appropriate intervention measures when needed.

The basic concepts and models, theoretical approaches, methods for research and assessment, and categories of disorders presented in this book constitute a basis for the study of child and adolescent psychology and a developmental way of thinking. However, a comprehensive understanding requires further study of the issues related to the various domains of child and adolescent development. The topic books and the complete textbook comprise all the main developmental domains of child and adolescent psychology.

Part I

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# Developmental Psychology

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# Psychology and Development

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Psychology is concerned with human beings' (and animals') understanding of the physical and social environment, and the bases for their actions, feelings and experiences, as well as their participation in greater and smaller social networks and in society. Developmental psychology is concerned with how all this comes about, how children gradually change socially, mentally and behaviorally, the underlying processes and the factors that may influence these changes, for example how children's understanding of the world and thinking changes over time, what makes children develop different abilities, how children form relationships with parents and peers, why boys and girls tend to play in different ways and come to have different interests and behavior, why some children are socially active and extrovert while others are more shy and careful, and how emotional expressivity differs between **cultures**. Developmental psychology also includes the developmental courses of children with sensory and physical disabilities, as well as the **vulnerability** and risk factors that underlie the emergence of **learning disorders** and emotional and **behavioral disorders** in childhood and **adolescence**, and factors that may prevent the development of such disorders.

Development can be defined as an age-related process involving changes in the structure and functioning of human beings and animals as a result of interaction between biological structures, psychological states and ecological factors. While the organism adapts to its environment, the environment must also have properties that allow the organism to develop. At the core of the developmental process lies *transformation*: something new emerges, less becomes more, simplicity turns into complexity, limited skills evolve into advanced mastery (Overton, 2015). In all species, development toward adulthood

implies a greater degree of **autonomy** and independence from the parent, and in human beings and many other species also increasing social affiliation (Keller, 2016). The main characteristic of development is change, but in most areas there is both change and continuity. The individual develops new ways of understanding and mastering the world, but always building on past experiences and remaining the same individual (Nelson, 2007).

Development involves characteristics and abilities that are *common to all human beings*. Some are shared by humans and many other species, such as the ability to see, hear and walk, while others, such as talking and reflecting on the past and future, distinguish human beings. In addition, development entails processes that contribute to **individual differences**, in particular traits and abilities. Some changes are *quantifiable*, such as children's physical growth or the number of words they say. Changes in areas such as reasoning ability, social **adaptation** and moral formation are not quite as easy to quantify. They represent *qualitative* differences. The particular objective of developmental theories is to explain the emergence of new abilities and **qualitative changes**, both common and individual differences, and change as well as continuity (Kagan, 2008a; Spencer & Perone, 2008; see Part II Theoretical Perspectives, this volume).

With age, children engage in a growing number of activities and social relationships. They acquire the knowledge and values of their society and adapt to the physical and social cultural landscape, a process known as **enculturation**. Some children grow up in a conglomerate of different cultures, and their development reflects the multicultural background (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Josephs & Valsiner, 2007).

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## The Historical Roots of Developmental Psychology

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Psychology is a relatively young scientific discipline. Its origins are often dated to 1879, the year in which Wilhelm Wundt opened the first psychological laboratory in Leipzig. This marked the transition from largely informal observations to a more systematic methodology in the study of human **perception**, thinking, feeling and action. Nonetheless, most key issues in psychology are deeply rooted in philosophy and medicine, and many of its main topics can be traced back to ancient reflections on human nature. Until the late nineteenth century,



Ellen Key

child development was primarily an educational field, and literature on children mostly dealt with upbringing and education (e.g., Herbart, 1841; Rousseau, 1763). A few researchers, such as Tiedemann (1787) and Darwin (1877), described their children's development in detail, while Preyer published the first textbook with a general perspective on development in 1882. In 1900, Ellen Key proclaimed the twentieth century as *The Century of the Child*. It was equally to be the century of developmental psychology.

Developmental psychology encompasses widely different traditions that have moved toward and away from each other throughout history and influenced one another in varying degrees (see Part II Theoretical Perspectives, this volume). The theories reflect the knowledge that was acquired, but also the spirit of the age and the overall development of the society. Many attempts have been made to unite different perspectives, but there is still disagreement about basic developmental issues, such as the organization and biological bases of **cognition** (see Book 4, *Cognition, Intelligence and Learning*, Part I). Attempts at syntheses that integrate views from several directions and take into account the critique of others persist into the twenty-first century. Present day “developmental science” crosses disciplinary boundaries and integrates perspectives from developmental psychology with anthropology, sociology, linguistics, medicine and technology (Witherington, 2014; Zelazo, 2013).

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## Globalization

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Globalization has become an integral part of modern societal development and has also impacted the development of scientific thinking (Valsiner, 2012). Early in the history of developmental psychology, Western European psychology was dominant, and, after World War II, American psychology assumed a leading role (Jensen, 2012). At the same time, theories were developed in other countries that did not always receive international attention. Vygotsky's influential book *Thought and Language*, for example, was first translated into English in 1962, 28 years after the author's death. Today the debate on development continues in Russia, but only a minor number of publications are translated into English (see Karpov, 2005; Vassilieva, 2010).

Cross-cultural studies are important for understanding the relationship between nature and nurture in development (see Bornstein, 2010; Nielsen & Haun, 2016). Similarly, cross-cultural discussions of scientific ideas are crucial to the advancement of developmental theories. For example, one-third of the world's children live in India and China, but, as neither country engages in much systematic theoretical work, India and China have little influence on international research in developmental psychology. In China, this is partly owing to the fact that psychology as a field, and individual-oriented psychology in particular, has essentially been an alien concept to the Chinese, a the group, rather than the individual, represent the natural unit in Chinese culture (Tardif & Miao, 2000). Moreover, during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), many psychology departments at universities were shut down (Blowers et al., 2009; Bond, 2010; Miao & Wang, 2003). In India, the British colonial powers had a considerable impact. Many of the studies involved children from upper-middle-class urban families, and generalization to other social classes



### Development is global

is uncertain (Saraswathi & Dutta, 2010). Today, both countries are establishing traditions with a stronger basis in their own values and cultures. Also in Africa, psychology has been an article of import, but the number of studies founded on African ecologies and perceptions of reality is steadily growing. Here, too, an important discussion concerns the relationship between a universal and a local cultural understanding of developmental processes (Marfo, 2011; Nsamenang & Lo-Oh, 2010).

While globalization and English as the *lingua franca* of academia contribute to more equality in the development of theories across national borders, they also highlight the differences between countries and contribute to the establishment of unique cultural scientific identities. In the age of globalization, developmental perspectives with an origin in African, Asian and other cultures will emerge and find their position in international developmental psychology, both locally and globally. The coming years will show how these perspectives position themselves.