See also Gross motor skills

Further Reading

Fixation
An intense psychological association with a past event or series of events that triggers certain feelings or behaviors in a person when confronted with similar events or series of events.

Sigmund Freud theorized that the developmental stages of infancy and early childhood chart our lives in ways that are difficult to change. He believed that most adult neuroses could be attributed to a fixation developed during one of these stages of early life. Freud was especially concerned about how these stages were related to sexual development in later life, and in this he was, and continues to be, quite controversial. In his time, it was considered by many to be outlandish that an infant sucking on her mother’s breast was experiencing sexual gratification, yet Freud classified it as such and composed a theory of psychosexual development.

Freud’s theory of psychosexual development suggests that children pass through several stages in their earliest years. These stages are the oral stage, the anal stage, the phallic stage, the latency stage, and genital stage. During each stage, children learn to gratify themselves (Freud would say sexually) via distinct patterns of behavior. During the oral stage, for instance, children learn that the highest level of physical gratification occurs through oral stimulation. (They feed by sucking, they routinely place objects in their mouths, etc.) It was Freud’s view that during any one of these stages a person could become fixated—that is, they could be so gratified or, on the other hand, so unfulfilled, that they are marked for life by this fixation. Someone who has a fixation at the oral stage of development, for instance, might suck his or her thumb, eat or drink excessively, chew pencils, or smoke cigarettes. Adults fixated during this period of development are also thought to be inclined toward clinging, dependent relationships. Those fixated during the anal phase of psychosexual development are typically thought of as being overly controlling and obsessed with neatness or cleanliness.

Freud also considered regression closely linked to fixation. In his famous Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, he spoke of human development as a journey into new territory, much like an early migration of primitive peoples into new territory. He states that as people migrated into new, unexplored territory, certain members of the party might stop along the way at a place that offered them the prospect of a good life. These stopping points would be analogous to the fixations people develop in early life, attaching themselves to a period of safety and security before the entire journey of life is fully accomplished.

Further Reading

John Hurley Flavell
1928-
American developmental and cognitive psychologist known for his studies of role-taking in children.

John Hurley Flavell is a founder of social cognitive developmental psychology. His research on “role-taking,” the cognitive skills that children require in order to understand and accept the roles of others, was a major contribution to developmental psychology. Flavell was one of the first psychologists to study the ways in which children think about their thinking processes and the human mind. He is the author of more than 120 books and articles and was an advisory editor of the journal Cognitive Psychology. In 1984, Flavell received the Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award of the American Psychological Association (APA). He is the Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Professor in the School of Humanities and Sciences at Stanford University.

Flavell was born in 1928 in Rockland, Massachusetts, the son of Paul I. and Anne O’Brien Flavell. His father was a civil engineer who was unemployed for a long period during the Great Depression. Thus, Flavell and his two sisters experienced economic hardship during childhood. After graduating from high school in 1945, Flavell joined the Army for two years. He then attended Northeastern University in Boston and graduated in 1951. Because of financial considerations, Flavell chose to enter the psychology graduate program at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, rather than Harvard University. He earned his M.A. degree the following year and his Ph.D. in 1955. Flavell’s training at Clark stressed psychoanalysis and the developmental psychology of Heinz Werner. In 1954, Flavell married Eleanor R. Wood, who
would share his research interests throughout much of his career. The couple have two children.

**Introduces Piaget into American psychology**

Flavell’s first position was as a clinical psychologist at a Veterans Administration Hospital in Colorado. However he left there a year later to accept a position at the University of Rochester in New York, first as a clinical associate and then as an assistant professor of psychology. He was promoted to associate professor in 1960. Although Flavell first undertook to write a book on theories of developmental psychology, he soon switched to a major study of the work of Jean Piaget, publishing *The Developmental Psychology of Jean Piaget* in 1963. This was the first major work in English on the research and theories of Piaget and marked the start of the modern science of cognitive development. That same year, Flavell traveled to Paris for additional studies at the Sorbonne.

Flavell’s research at Rochester focused on children’s understanding of the roles of others and on children’s communication skills and developing memory skills. He first evaluated the skills needed for role-taking, the understanding of what another person sees, knows, needs, and intends to do. He found that children whose parents talk to them often about emotions and feelings develop these skills at an earlier age. In 1965, he moved to the Institute of Child Development at the University of Minnesota as a professor of psychology. There he continued his work on the cognitive development of children. While researching the development of memory skills in children, Flavell found that children need to understand the concept of memory before they can develop skills for utilizing and improving memory. He called this knowledge “metamemory.”

Flavell was president of the APA’s Division of Developmental Psychology in 1970. In 1976, he became a professor of psychology at Stanford University. There he continued his involvement with professional organizations. He served as president of the Society for Research in Child Development from 1979 to 1981. In 1986 Flavell was presented with the G. Stanley Hall Award of the APA.

**Studies metacognition in children**

Since his arrival at Stanford, Flavell and his long-time research associates, his wife, Ellie Flavell, and Frances L. Greene, have studied preschoolers at the Bing Nursery School on the Stanford campus. They have also studied elementary-school and college students. In recent years, Flavell has researched and developed his theory of “metacognition” or “metaconsciousness,” which is a child’s understanding about the workings of the human mind and her own thought processes. In 1995, the Flavells and Greene published *Young Children’s Knowledge About Thinking*. In their research, they have found that preschoolers understand that thinking is a human, mental activity and that it can involve things that are in the past or in the present, real or imaginary. They distinguish thinking from other activities such as talking, feeling, seeing, or knowing. However preschoolers greatly underestimate the amount that they and others think, and they have difficulty perceiving that other people think. In other words, Flavell has found that, although preschoolers know that rocks do not think, they also don’t believe that their parents think all that much.

Throughout his career, Flavell’s books have received critical acclaim for both their scholarship and their lively and entertaining prose. Flavell is on the editorial board of the *Journal of Cognition and Development* and continues to teach and advise students.

Margaret Alic

**Further Reading**


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**Forensic psychology**

The application of psychology to lawmaking, law enforcement, the examination of witnesses, and the treatment of the criminal; also known as legal psychology.

Forensic psychologists often work within the judicial system in such diverse areas as determining an inmate’s readiness for parole; evaluation of rehabilitation...