Concrete operational stage
Formal operational stage

Piaget emphasized the range of personal differences in rates of development. The speed by which a child moves through each period depends on biological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal factors.

Aaron Beck Cognitive theory, according to Aaron Beck, focuses not on what people do, but rather on how they view themselves and their world. He believed that much emotional upset and dysfunctional behavior is related to misperceptions and misinterpretations of experiences. Cognitive theory does not speak to ultimate causes of mental disorders but describes how negative thinking (cognitions) can be the first link in the chain of symptoms of mental disorders.

Two important constructs of Beck’s cognitive theory are schemas and the cognitive triad. Cognitive schemas are personal controlling beliefs that influence the way people process data about themselves and others. For example, you may believe that you are unlovable. When your partner left for work this morning, he slammed the door. The way you processed this event was: “If John slams the door, it means he is angry with me. If he is angry with me, he will reject me. If he rejects me, I will be all alone. If I am all alone, I will not survive.” In this example, your core belief led you to misinterpret the significance of the slamming door, which, in fact, was caused by a sudden gust of wind. It is thought that cognitive schemas become activated during depression, anxiety, panic attacks, and personality disorders. These distorted views of the self and the world appear to be reality to a person who is ill.

Cognitive schemas contribute to the development of Beck’s cognitive triad. Included in this process is:
1. A view of the self as inadequate
2. A negative misinterpretation of current experiences
3. A negative view of the future

When clients become caught up in this process, a number of cognitive distortions may occur (Beck & Freeman, 1990).

One type of distortion is selective abstraction, or focusing on certain information while ignoring contradictory information.

Another distortion is overgeneralization, in which the person takes information or an impression from one event and attaches it to a wide variety of situations. Using such words as “always,” “never,” “everybody,” and “nobody” indicates that the client is overgeneralizing.

People who use magnification attribute a high level of importance to insignificant events.

Through the distortion of personalization, or ideas of reference, clients believe that what occurs in the environment is related to them, even when no obvious relationship exists.

There is also a tendency for superstitious thinking, in which the person believes that some unrelated action will magically influence a course of events.

A further distortion is dichotomous thinking, an all-or-none type of reasoning that interferes with people’s realistic perception of themselves. Dichotomous thinking involves opposite and mutually exclusive categories, such as all good or all bad, celibacy or promiscuity, depression or euphoria (see Table 1.6).

Later chapters will discuss this topic in detail.

**Personality**

Personality is neither a model nor a theory of mental health nursing. It is a common concept in a variety of theories. The concept of personality can also illustrate the interconnections between the different theories.

Personality is perhaps the unique aspect of our individuality. Personality is the unique way we respond to the environment and it includes our patterns of behavior, emotion, and cognition that remain consistent from one situation to another. Temperament, or personality traits, is the behavioral disposition present at birth, such as social responsiveness, fear, irritability, or level of physical activity (e.g., some children are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distortion</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selective abstraction</td>
<td>“Even though my husband says he loves me, I don’t believe him. Look at how he never picks up his laundry.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overgeneralization</td>
<td>“Women always turn mean after you marry them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnification</td>
<td>“I know he saw the spot of coffee on my tie. Now I’ll never get the job because he thinks I’m a slob.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalization</td>
<td>“I walked into the classroom and everyone stopped talking. I know they were talking about me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superstitious thinking</td>
<td>“If I never take off my wedding ring, my husband will never leave me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dichotomous thinking</td>
<td>“Either my life has to be absolutely perfect or I will commit suicide.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>