

History of Psychological Theories: Structuralism, Functionalism, & Freud

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss the origins of psychology by looking at some important figures and key theories in the history of psychology. You will also consider how developing your self and social awareness skill can help you better understand your mind. The specific areas of focus include:

1. Structuralism



In 1879, **Wilhelm Wundt**, who is often referred to as “the father of psychology,” set up a laboratory in Leipzig, Germany, where he set out to understand the behaviors and mental processes underlying the human experience.

Wundt was considered a structuralist. **Structuralism** is a psychological theory that tries to determine the basic elements, or building blocks, of behavior and mental processes. To compare it to the studies in another field of science, structuralism is like trying to find the atoms that make up different molecules.

Structuralism is an important philosophy because it helped to advance many of the key concepts in the field of psychology, such as the understanding of the brain's structure, how neurons make up the entire brain and nervous system, and the basic personality types.

All of these concepts will be discussed more in-depth in later lessons.



TERM TO KNOW

Structuralism

Theoretical perspective that mental phenomena can be broken down into basic parts.

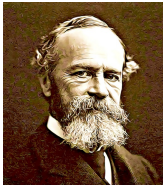


PEOPLE TO KNOW

Wilhelm Wundt

The father of psychology, Wundt was a structuralist who set up a research laboratory in Germany in 1879.

2. Functionalism



William James was a student of Wundt; he was also the first American to study psychology and bring it to the United States as a major area of study. James was a functionalist. As opposed to structuralism, which tries to break down behavior and mental processes into their parts, **functionalism** views the mental experience as more a stream, or a flow, of consciousness that can't be broken down any further.

This system of belief led to the use of animals in psychological studies as a way of studying and understanding behavior.

Functionalism also informed the current areas of study in educational and industrial psychology, both of which will be discussed in greater detail as we move further through the course.



TERM TO KNOW

Functionalism

Perspective that mental processes cannot be broken down and instead are a steady flow of consciousness



PEOPLE TO KNOW

William James

A student of Wilhelm Wundt, James was a functionalist and the first American to study psychology

3. Work of Sigmund Freud



You have probably heard the term “Freudian slip” that refers to saying something that you did not mean to say, but that you might have been thinking about. That term is derived from the name Sigmund Freud, who was an Austrian neurologist. In 1873, he began working in a hospital treating patients for what at the time was called “hysteria”, a type of disease that doctors neither knew much about nor had a cure. From there, Freud started his own form of therapy. In 1885, he set up a private practice where he treated people for nervous disorders and brain disorders.

3a. Psychodynamic Theory

Freud developed **psychodynamic theory**, which states that internal motives and unconscious forces can affect our behaviors and mental processes in daily life. In a sense, Freud's theory was created backward because he started with the clinical or treatment aspect, and then began developing the theory based on what he was seeing in his patients.

Freud described our mental life as a sort of iceberg with all of the things we're aware of at the top, above the water. However, the amount of things we perceive is very small when compared to the part of the iceberg that's under the water, or outside of our awareness. This underlying part of our mental life is unconscious.

According to psychodynamic theory, these unconscious thoughts, impulses, or desires, can influence our behaviors.



Developing your self and social awareness helps you learn more about your conscious and unconscious mind. This means you can better understand the parts of yourself that impact others.



TERM TO KNOW

Psychodynamic Theory

A psychological theory of behavior that examines the role of the unconscious and internal conflicts.

3b. Psychoanalysis

You have probably seen the famous picture of Freud talking to a person who is laying down on a couch. This image is a reference to the therapy that was developed as a result of psychodynamic theory. This therapy is called **psychoanalysis**, and its goal is to uncover the unconscious forces that are influencing and affecting us in adverse ways.

Psychoanalysis does this using a variety of methods:

- **Dream Analysis:** Freud was very involved with dream analysis, trying to discover how dreams are a language of our unconscious mind. According to Freud, dreams try to tell us, in our sleep, what is happening in our minds underneath the surface.
- **Rorschach Test:** This is another method of psychoanalysis that you may have seen in popular culture. This test involves looking at an inkblot and trying to describe what you see. What you see is supposed to provide some insight into what is going on in your unconscious mind.



TERM TO KNOW

Psychoanalysis

Freudian psychodynamic therapy that attempts to uncover unconscious conflict.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about two opposing theories at the foundation of psychology: **structuralism** and **functionalism**. Structuralism is the theoretical perspective that different mental phenomena can be broken down into their more basic parts and then studied in that way. Conversely, functionalism states that different mental processes cannot be broken down because they are a stream or a flow of consciousness.

You also learned about the **work of Sigmund Freud**, specifically **psychodynamic theory**, or the idea that the unconscious plays a role in human behavior, and **psychoanalysis**, a form of therapy derived from psychodynamic theory. Lastly, you learned that a strong self and social awareness skill can help you better understand all aspects of your thoughts.

Good luck!



TERMS TO KNOW

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Psychodynamic Theory

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Structuralism

Theoretical perspective that mental phenomena can be broken down into basic parts.



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