

Examrace

Schools of Thought

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- Wilhelm Wundt, in Germany, established the foundations of modern psychology in 1879. He wanted to study, experimentally, the conscious experience of individuals. As discussed earlier, the different schools of thought gradually emerged after psychology took this scientific turn.
- These schools were basically different ways of observation, description, understanding, and prediction of psychological phenomena; in the present context, mental processes and behavior

EARLIER SCHOOLS of THOUGHT

The earlier schools that paved the way for further developments in modern psychology were

- **STRUCTURALISM**: focused on studying the conscious experience by looking into its individual parts or elements.
- **FUNCTIONALISM**: focused on what the mind does and how it does.
- **GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY**: focused on studying the whole experience of a person rather than breaking it into individual components.
- **PSYCHODYNAMIC SCHOOL**: focuses on the unconscious forces that drive/ motivate human behavior.
- **BEHAVIORIST / BEHAVIORAL SCHOOL**: focuses on studying the behavior that is observable and overt.

PREVALENT APPROACHES / MODELS / PERSPECTIVES

At present some of the earlier approaches still exist. Psychologists belonging to these sets of theories have contributed a lot to the body of psychological knowledge and practice. Today, we can see at least six approaches or models of dealing with the psychological phenomena.

BIOLOGICAL APPROACH

- The psychological model that views behavior from the perspective of biological functioning.
- The role of brain, genes, neurotransmitters, endocrine glands etc. How the individual nerve cells are joined together, how the inheritance of certain characteristics from parents and other ancestors influences behavior, how the functioning of the body affects hopes and fears, what behaviors are due to instincts, and so on.

- Psychologists using the biological model view even more complex kinds of behaviors such as emotional responses e.g. anxiety, as having critical biological components.

PSYCHODYNAMIC APPROACH

- The approach that concentrates on the belief that behavior is motivated by the inner forces, over which individuals have little control.
- Founded by the Viennese physician Sigmund Freud in early 1900s, proponents of psychodynamic perspective give importance to the inner unconscious experiences and the forces that led that behavior.
- Freud believed that unconscious determinants of behavior had a revolutionary effect on 20th century thinking, not just in psychology but also in related fields as well.
- Although many of the basic principles of psychodynamic thinking have been highly criticized, the model grown out of Freud's work has provided a way not only for treating mental disorders but also for understanding everyday phenomena such as prejudice and aggression.

BEHAVIORIST / BEHAVIORAL APPROACH

- The psychological model that focuses on the overt observable behavior. The model emerged as a reaction to the earlier approaches that emphasized the significance of hidden, underlying, predetermined forces.
- The behaviorists suggest that observable behavior alone should be the main area of interest to psychology.

HUMANISTIC APPROACH

- The psychological model, that suggests that people are in control of their lives. It is considered as one of the most recent approaches to psychology. This approach rejected the view that predetermined, automatic, biological forces, unconscious processes or the environment determines behavior.
- On the contrary, it proposes that people themselves decide about their lives. A failure in being capable of doing so leads to psychological problems. It also stresses the idea that people, by nature, tend to move towards higher levels of maturity and maximum potential.

COGNITIVE APPROACH

The psychological model that focuses on how people know, understands, and thinks about the world. Main emphasis is on how people understand of the world, and their thinking, affects their responses; how it may lead to positive or negative psychological consequences, and even health-related outcomes.

SUBJECT MATTER of PSYCHOLOGY

- According to Wundt, the subject matter of psychology is to be immediate experience, as contrasted to mediate experience. By mediate experience Wundt meant experiences used as a way to find out about something other than the experience itself.
- This is the way in which we use experience in gaining knowledge about the world. Immediate experience is the experience as such, and the task of psychology is to study this immediate experience. The physicists are, on the other hand, interested in studying only the mediate experience, but the Wundtian psychologists study immediate experience.

Main Presumption

- All human mental experience could be understood as the combination of simple events or elements. By analyzing the basic elements of sensations and other mental experiences, the underlying structure of the mind could be unveiled
- Task of psychology is to identify the basic elements of consciousness just like physicists could break down the basic particles of matter At Wundt's Laboratory
- Studies and experiments were conducted on the fundamental elements that form the foundation of thinking, consciousness, emotions and other mental states
- Systematic, organized and objective procedures were used so that replication was possible
- The procedure used for studying the "structure of mind" was called "Introspection"; a method used to study the structure of the mind, in which subjects were asked to describe in detail what they were experiencing when exposed to a stimulus.

James Mckeen Cattell

Known for his work on individual differences and "Mental Tests".

Edward Bradford Tichener

- American psychologist, who was English by birth, but German in professional and personal temperament, who spent his most productive years in Cornell University, New York.
- He was solely concerned with studying the brain, and the unconscious, and for this he believed, we should break it down into basic elements. After that, we can construct the separate elements into a whole and understand what it does.
- He believed that we can study perception, emotions and ideas through introspection, by reducing them to their elementary parts.
- There are four elements in the sensation of taste:
 - Sweet
 - Sour
 - Salty

- Bitter
- Ideas and images are related: ideas were always accompanied by images
- The underlying process in emotions was affection Criticism
- Known as the formal founder of Structuralism

This school of thought has been criticized on various grounds i.e.

It Was Reductionism

It reduced all complex human experience to simple sensations

It Was Elementalistic

The structuralaralists sought to look at individual elements first, and then combine parts into a whole, rather than study the variety of behavior directly.

It Was Mentalistic

Structuralism studied only verbal reports of human conscious experience and awareness, ignoring the study of subjects who could not report their introspection.

FUNCTIONALISM

An approach that concentrated on what the mind does, in other words the functions of mental activity, and the role of behavior in allowing people to adapt to their environments. The functionalist psychologists start with the fact that objects are perceived and “how” they are perceived.

They asked “why” as well. This school became prominent in the 1900s. It emerged as a reaction to Structuralism.

- Founded by William James, also known as the founder of American Psychology.
- Emphasized “function” rather than “Structure” of human consciousness i.e., what the mind does
- Focused upon the way humans adapt to their environment; what roles behavior played in allowing people to better adapt to their environment
- Examined the ways in which behavior allows people to satisfy their needs
- Functionalists were especially interested in education and applied psychology

William James

- He was the leading precursor of functionalist psychology. James was a Harvard University professor, primarily trained in physiology and medicine. Psychology and philosophy fascinated him, and he treated psychology as a natural science. In 1875 he offered his first course in psychology.

- In 1890 he published “Principles of Psychology”, a two-volume book, which became a leading psychology text in the U.S.
- James wrote about the stream of consciousness, emotions, the self, habit formation, mind-body link and much more. He was also interested in will, values, religious and mystical experiences. James said: “We should study consciousness but should not reduce it into elements, content and structure”.
- Acts and functions of mental processes need to be focused upon, rather than contents of the mind. Consciousness was an ongoing stream, and was in continual interaction with the environment. Careful observation is important; Wundt’s rigorous laboratory methods are of little value.
- James believed that each individual has a uniqueness that could not be reduced to formulas or numbers

John Dewey

- Famous American educator
- One of the key founders of “Functionalism”
- Stimulus– Response phenomenon is not an automatic behavior, the goal of the person performing it has the main role in it; the stimulus and the response determine each other
- It is the function, or the goal, of the whole action that elicits response
- Dewey developed the field of ‘School Psychology’ and recommended ways for meeting student’s needs
- Teachers are strongly influenced by their psychological assumptions about children and the educational process Teachers need to understand two issues:
 - Children and adults are different; teaching/education should be in accordance with children’s developmental readiness.
 - Children are similar to adults in the sense that they perform better when they have some control over what they are to accomplish; the curriculum should be designed accordingly.

Applied Psychology Flourished Following the Emergence of Functionalism

- James Mckeen Cattell began studying ways to measure intelligence
- Psychology entered the world of business; Frederick Taylor developed ‘scientific management’
- Other functionalists: James Rowland Angell, Harvey A.Carr

James Rowland Angell

- Founded the psychology department in Chicago, the most influential of its time.
- Believed that the function of consciousness is to improve the adaptive abilities of the organism and that psychology must study how mind did these kinds of adjustments with respect to the environment.

GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY

An approach that focuses on the organization of perception and thinking in a “whole” sense rather than on the individual elements of perception.

Instead of considering the individual parts that make up thinking, gestalt psychologists concentrated on how people consider individual elements as units or wholes. They made great contributions to the understanding of the perceptual phenomena.

- This school developed as a reaction to structuralism in the early 1900s
- In contrast to the structuralist approach of breaking down conscious experience into elements, or focusing upon the structure, the Gestalt school emphasized the significance of studying any phenomenon in its overall form.
- The word gestalt means “Configuration”
- The main concept that the Gestaltists posed was that the “WHOLE” is more than the sum of its parts, and it is different from it too.
- They concentrated on how people consider individual elements together as units or wholes.
- The concept of Gestalt applies to everything, objects, ideas, thinking processes and human relationships.
- Any phenomenon in its entirety may be much greater than when it is seen in a disintegrated form.

Three German psychologists Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka and Wolfgang Kohler were regarded as the founders of gestalt school as each one of them had done significant work in his respective field.

Max Wertheimer

- The founder of Gestalt psychology, born in Prague in 1880
- Studying at the University of Frankfurt he became aware of a form of apparent motion that was called “Phi phenomenon”
- Phi phenomenon = when two lights are in close proximity to each other, flashing alternately they appear to be one light moving back and forth; therefore the whole was different from the separate parts; movement perceived whereas it never occurred

- We perceive experiences in a way that calls for the simplest explanation, even though reality may be entirely different; this is Gestalt Law of Minimum Principle. We tend to organize our experience so that it is as simple as possible.
- Explanation of phi phenomenon led to a separate school of thought i.e., Gestalt school, that had deep rooted impact on learning, ethics, and social psychology

Gestalt Laws of Organization

We organize our experiences according to certain rules, in a simple way:

Proximity: Close or nearer objects are perceived as coherent and related.

- Similarity: Tendency to perceive objects, patterns or stimuli as groups, which are similar in appearance____parts of the visual field that are similar in color, lightness, texture, shape, or any other quality
- Good Continuation: Tendency to group the stimuli into smooth and continuous patterns or parts
- Closure: It is the perceptual tendency to fill in the gaps and completing the contours; enables us to perceive the disconnected parts as the whole object.
- Figure and Ground: Our perceptual tendency to see objects with the foreground as well as the background____ the object is being recognized with respect to its background. E.g. black board and chalk. (These will be discussed in detail in the section of perception).

Kurt Koffka

- Wrote the famous “Principles of Gestalt Psychology” (1935)
- Talked about geographical versus behavioral environment: people’s behavior is determined by how they perceive the environment rather than by the nature of the environment.

Wolfgang Kohler

- Gave the concept of “insight” and “transposition”, as a result of his observations of a caged chimpanzee and experiments with chickens
- Insight = spontaneous restructuring of the situation
- Transposition = generalization of knowledge from one situation to another
- Kohler also talked about Isomorphism; changes in the brain structure yield changes in experiences

Other Major Contributions

- Gestalt approach to ethics: Truth is truth when it is complete and corresponds fully to the facts of the situation

- **Zeigarnik's Effect:** Bluma Zeigarnik's experiments; we remember interrupted tasks better. The tension caused by unfinished tasks helps us in remembering.
- **Group Dynamics:** Instead of focusing on people's individual attributes we should see them as whole persons.

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