

Historical Background of Psychology

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What is Psychology?

Psychology is the science of behavior and mental processes

- Mental processes: what the brain does when we think, remember, feel, etc.
- Behavior: outwardly observable acts of an individual, alone, or in a group.

Goals

- Describe
- Explain
- predict
- control mental processes and behavior.



Brief History of Psychology

‘Psychology has a long past, but its real history is short.’

Ebbinghaus (1908)

Psychology’s Roots:

Prescientific Psychology

Scientific Psychology

Prescientific Psychology



- Prescientific Psychology In India, the Buddha pondered how sensations and perceptions combined to form ideas.
- Socrates (469-399 BCE) & Plato (428-348 BCE):
Socrates and his student Plato believed that the mind was separate from the body, that it continued to exist after death, and that ideas were innate.



- **Aristotle (384-322 BCE):**

Aristotle suggested that the soul is not separable from the body and that knowledge (ideas) grow from experience.

- **Rene Descartes (1596-1650):**

Descartes, like Plato, believed in soul (mind) body separation but speculated on how the immaterial mind and the physical body communicated.



- Francis Bacon (1561-1626):

Bacon was one of the founders of modern science, especially the experimental method.

John Locke (1632-1704):

Locke held that the mind is a *tabula rasa* or blank sheet at birth and experience writes on it.

Scientific Psychology: Structuralism (1870's-1900)



Wilhelm Wundt—the father of psychology

- Set up the first psychology lab in 1879.
- Created the approach of structuralism
- Wanted to know what the structure of the mind was
- Used introspection
- Edward Titchener—student of Wundt, introduced experimental psychology to the USA.



Functionalism (1880's–current)

- Arose in protest to the private mental events studied by structuralists
- Focused on the process of conscious activity
- Had its roots with evolution. How is a particular behavior adaptive?
- William James: Not what mind does, but why it does it
- Became incorporated into all of psychology



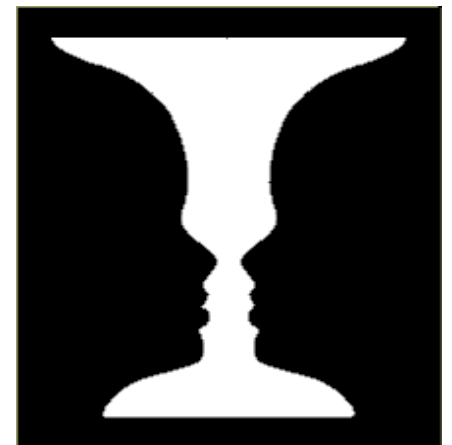
Behaviorism (1915–current)

- By 1920, Structuralism and Functionalism were replaced by Behaviorism, Gestalt Psychology & Psychoanalysis.
- J.B Watson-Founder replaced the mind and restricted to the study of behaviour
- Watson's argument- All behavior is a result of conditioning and the environment shapes behavior by reinforcing specific habits.
- Denied the existence of inborn or innate behavioural tendencies.
- Held that no specific differences between human and animal behaviour
- Behaviorists discussed psychological phenomenon in terms of stimulus and responses, giving rise to the term stimulus-response (S-R) psychology.

Gestalt Psychology



- Gestalt- German word meaning “form” or “configuration”
- Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka, Wolfgang Kohler- Gestalt Psychologist’s primary interest was perception they believed that perceptual experiences depend on the patterns formed by stimulus and on the organization of experience.
- Whole pattern of sensory activity, the relationships and organizations within this pattern.
- The whole is different from the sum of its parts because of the relationships between the parts.
- School of thought that emphasized the total experience of the individual and not just parts of the mind or behavior



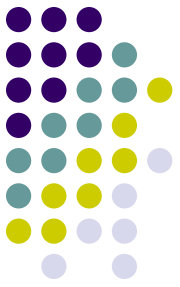
Psychoanalysis



- A theory of personality and method of psychotherapy originated by **Sigmund Freud**.
- Concept of unconsciousness, thoughts, attitudes, impulses etc that we are unaware of.
- Repressed Unconscious wishes and desires expressed in Dreams, slips of tongue & physical mannerism.
- Method of Free Association

Key features:

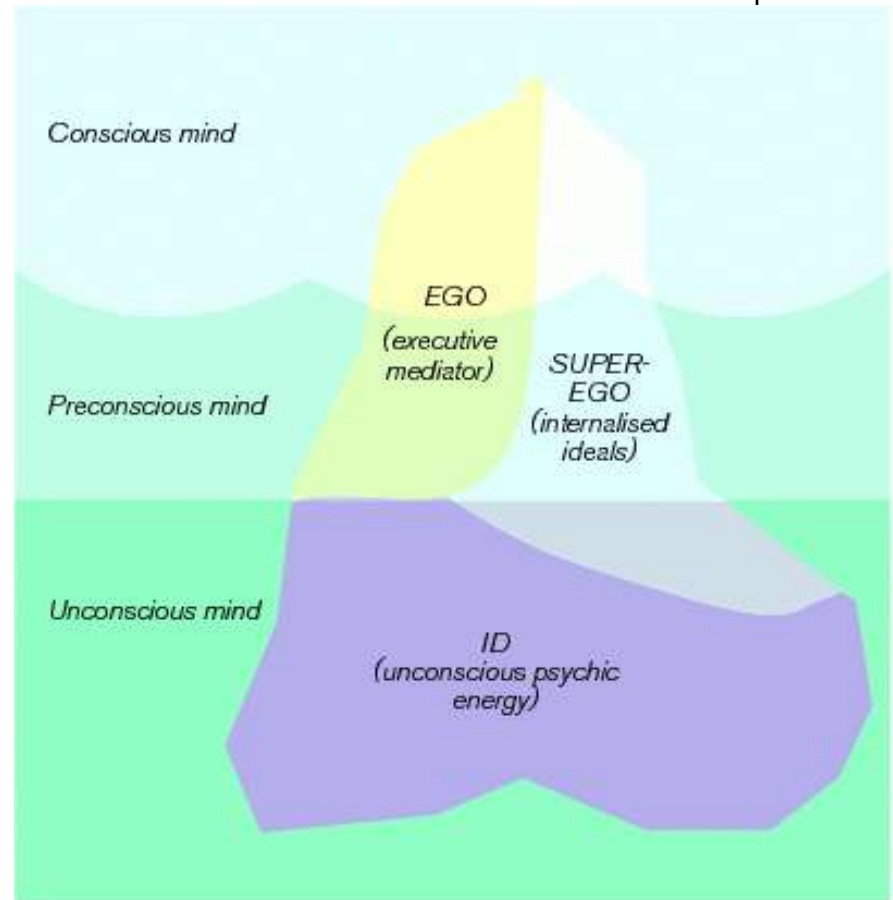
- Mind has 3 parts: conscious, unconscious and preconscious
 - conscious: thoughts and perceptions
 - preconscious: available to consciousness, e.g. memories and stored knowledge
 - unconscious: wishes and desires formed in childhood, biological urges.
Determines most of behaviour
- Personality has 3 components - id, ego & superego
 - id: unconscious, urges needing instant gratification
 - ego: develops in childhood, rational. Chooses between id and external demands
 - superego: conscience, places restrictions on behaviour





Key features:

- Freud's 'mental iceberg' view of the mind





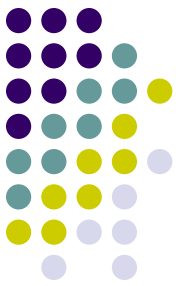
Key features:

Psychosexual stages of development

- Develop through stages in childhood
 - Oral (0–18 months)
 - Anal (18 months–3 years)
 - Phallic (3–6 years)
 - Latent (6 yrs–puberty)
 - Genital (puberty onwards)
- At each stage, libido is focused on different part of body
- Failure to progress (fixating) causes neuroses

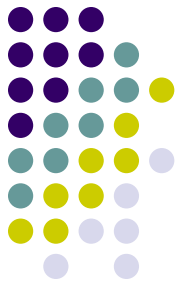
Key features:

- Ego mediates conflict between id, ego, superego
 - defence mechanisms include repression, displacement, denial, reaction formation
 - repression pushes stuff into unconscious, but it exerts influence from there, may cause problems
- Cure neuroses by bringing material from unconscious to conscious
 - free association
 - dream analysis



Evaluation:

Significant impact:



- theories of personality, motivation, development
- therapeutic techniques in clinical and counselling psychology
- captured the popular imagination, providing an accessible framework for everyday understanding

Unscientific?

- methodologically poor
- untestable (e.g. concept of denial)

Limited impact on scientific psychology