

## Psychology- Its Roots and Branches

by Manjil Saikia - Wednesday, November 02, 2011

<http://gonitsora.com/psychology/>

“Psychology is the scientific study of human mind and body.” That is a very formal definition of the discipline that now has spread itself to every part of the world and is banked upon by almost every other discipline. From deciding which people to be hired in a company, to managing sports team, from helping mentally and physically challenged people, to studying clinical aspects of mental disorders and counselling people, this discipline is one that vows to help everyone live better lives. When Wilhelm Wundt established the first Psychology laboratory in 1897 in Leipzig, Germany, it was the birth of a new discipline that broke away from philosophy and physiology. Wundt wanted to apply the methodical, experimental methods of science to the study of human consciousness. At his laboratory, Wundt spent hours exposing individuals to audio and visual stimuli and asking them to report what they perceived. In this way, he studied one component of consciousness, perception. Around this time, other German scientists began doing similar work. Herman Von Helmholtz investigated color vision, hearing, and rate of nerve conduction and Gustav Fechner studied and quantified sensory experience. The school of thought that arose from the work of Wundt and his colleagues is called **structuralism**. The basic goal of structuralists was to study consciousness by breaking it down into its components — mainly perception, sensation, and affection. Their basic method was to train their subjects in introspection, which was careful, systematic observation of one's own conscious experience. Wilhelm's student, E.B. Titchner, a strong advocate of structuralism, took psychology to the United States, but he had competition from an opposing school of thought, called **functionalism**. This movement was led by William James and John Dewey. While structuralists essentially wanted to determine “what is consciousness?”, functionalists wanted to determine “what is consciousness used for?” — in other words, they wanted to study the purpose, or function, of consciousness and basic mental processes. In 1883, G. Stanley Hall established the first psychology laboratory in the US at Johns Hopkins University, and by 1900, there were dozens of laboratories, and three psychology journals and the American Psychology Association had been founded, which is today the accepted and influential institution in the discipline of Psychology.

This was followed by other schools of thought, like **behaviourism** in and around 1913, which was pioneered by American Psychologist John B. Watson. As Watson saw it, behavior was not the result of internal mental processes, but rather the result of automatic response to stimuli from the environment. Behaviorism became focused on how conditions of the environment affect behavior and specifically, how humans learn new behavior from the environment. Another noted behaviourist was B.F. Skinner who developed an influential view that operant conditioning was the mechanism for learning. Around this time, two other schools of thought developed in Europe, one was **Gestalt psychology**, which believed that any psychological phenomenon, from perceptual processes to human personality, should be studied holistically; that is, they should not be broken down into components, but rather studied as a whole. The other school of thought was **Psychoanalysis**, headed by Sigmund Freud who revolutionised psychology through his radical and controversial views. The theory developed by Freud was quite extensive and intricate, but the main principle is that the unconscious is responsible for most thought and behavior in all

people and the disorders of the mentally ill. This powerful force, called the unconscious, was a revolutionary, new idea – it was the concept that a great deal activity within the human psyche resides completely outside of consciousness. This idea and many others were extremely controversial, at the time. Free recall and dream interpretation are the two main methods that are used in psychoanalysis to cure mental tension and imbalance. By the 1950's, a new movement began as an alternative to behaviorism and psychoanalytic theory. Instead of behaving as pawns of the environment or the powerful unconscious, humanists believed humans were inherently good and that their own mental processes played an active role in their behavior. Free will, emotions, and a subjective view of experience were important in the **humanism** movement. The most recent major school of thought to arise has been the **cognitive perspective**, which began in the 1970's. This movement is much more objective and calculating than humanism, yet it is very different than behaviorism, as it focuses extensively on mental processes. The main idea of this movement is that humans take in information from their environment through their senses and then process the information mentally. The processing of information involves organizing it, manipulating it, storing it in memory, and relating it to previously stored information. Cognitive theorists apply their ideas to language, memory, learning, dreams, perceptual systems, and mental disorders.

However, no one single approach dominates psychology. It takes into fold many other aspects before drawing any conclusions. Evolutionary contexts and cultural contexts, both are today taken into consideration before making psychological test batteries and measuring various aspects of one's psychological and personality traits. And since psychology works on the principles of objectivity and accuracy, the careful construction and conduction of these tests are necessary. Tests measuring IQ levels, aptitude, personality types etc should be highly reliable and their results should be valid. Given these conditions, no single approach can be kept to understand the human psyche. From diagnosis of clinical problems of mental retardation, to deciding which field of job is suitable for whom, psychology relies greatly on these tests that have been developed over time by various psychologists. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is the standard classification of mental disorders used by mental health professionals all over the world. Published by the American Psychology Association, this is not only used for patient diagnosis and treatment, but is also important for collecting and communicating accurate public health statistics. DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition), published in 1994 was the last major revision of the DSM. It was the culmination of a six-year effort that involved over 1000 individuals and numerous professional organizations.

In anticipation of the fact that the next major revision of the DSM (i.e., DSM-V) will not appear until May, 2013 or later, a text revision of the DSM-IV called DSM-IV-TR was published in July 2000. Most of the major changes in DSM-IV-TR were confined to the descriptive text. Changes were made to a handful of criteria sets in order to correct errors identified in DSM-IV.

Now moving on to main part that rules our lives, career. Yes, the study of psychology does provide you with a good number of options to go with and make the right choice. Check out the following psychology career profiles to learn more about some of the most popular career options.

### **1. Clinical Psychology**

If you like helping people, then a career in clinical psychology might be something to consider. Clinical psychologists work in numerous settings to assess, diagnose, treat and prevent mental disorders. As the largest subfield within psychology, this career also offers a number of sub-specialty areas including substance abuse treatment, child mental health and health psychology.

### **2. Forensic Psychology**

Forensic psychology involves applying psychology to the field of criminal investigation and the law. Forensic psychologists typically have a Ph.D. in clinical or counselling psychology and may work in various settings, including family courts, drug courts, criminal courts and private consulting. Learn more about training, typical salaries, benefits and downsides in this profile of careers in forensic psychology.

### **3. School Psychology**

If you have an interest in child development and education, you might want to consider a career in school psychology. School psychologists work within the educational system to help children with emotional, social and academic issues. The goal of school psychology is to collaborate with parents, teachers and students to promote a healthy learning environment that focuses on the needs of children.

### **4. Industrial-Organizational Psychology**

Industrial-organizational psychology focuses on workplace behavior and is one of the fastest growing specialty areas in psychology. I-O psychologists perform a variety of functions, including hiring qualified employees, conducting tests, designing products, creating training courses and performing research on different aspects of the workplace.

### **5. Cognitive Psychology**

Cognitive psychologists study internal mental processes such as attention, memory and problem solving. While many cognitive psychologists work at colleges and universities as teachers and researchers, many others find employment in a number of different areas. Cognitive psychologists often work as human factors consultants, industrial organizational managers, and other related positions.

## 6. Sports Psychology

According to the American Psychological Association, sports psychology is "the scientific study of the psychological factors that are associated with participation and performance in sport, exercise, and other types of physical activity."

Psychology is wonderful world of human emotions and behaviour. Once you get into it, you are bound to fall in love with it. It's interesting at its best. India has lately found growth in people pursuing this discipline and the demand is slowly rising. Also, many Vedantic philosophies of India has now found its way into psychology. Many attempts are being made to integrate ancient Indian Psychology with modern Western Psychology. More than 40 books have appeared in the field of Indian Psychology. There is a journal of Indian Psychology published from Andhra University which has an Institute of Yoga and Consciousness. At least five persons have developed personality inventories based on the Triguna theory (Satwa, Rajas and Tamas) of Kapila (Sankhya philosophy, 6th century B.C.).But Psychology still has a long way to go. People need to develop a complete positive attitude towards those in this discipline, rather than running away from them. And given the materialistic lifestyles we live today, a psychologist, can just help you live better.

*[This article is contributed by Ms. Kantadorshi Parashar, a Psychology undergrad from University of Delhi, India.]*

[ad#ad-2]

---

PDF generated from <http://gonitsora.com/psychology/>.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.