

The contributions of major psychologists

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The history of psychology can be seen by looking at the lives of the great psychologists and critical thinkers to have ever lived. Each of the critical thinkers in their own way contributed to the theories in psychology as we know them now. Each of the great men added a unique contribution to the field of psychology. This paper will discuss the contributions of three psychologists who were influential to the field. The psychologists include Sigmund Freud, Jean Piaget, and William James.

Sigmund Freud published his work more than a century ago, and his work continues to influence the field of psychology even in these modern times (Marcus, 2016). Freud started out as an assistant to a physician who showed him how to induce hypnosis on a patient. He then started his studies on the effects of hypnosis under a neurologist. After the studies, he opened a clinic, where he hoped to use hypnosis to cure psychological illnesses. It did not work out, and he later used what is now known as free association. Freud coined the term psychoanalysis from his work on free association psychology.

Free association is a method that is commonly used by psychiatrists (Stewart, 2013). In this method, a client is asked questions and asked to talk about anything that comes to mind, regardless of how random the thoughts are. Freud contributed to the field of psychology by discussing the benefits of using free association in psychoanalysis. According to Freud, clients can discuss their issues without being coerced to do so. Freud conducted the psychoanalysis by asking clients to lie on a comfortable sofa and share random thoughts, regardless of their appropriateness or their coherency. In his report, Freud claimed that the exercise gave clients the ability to speak openly. The exercise also prevented the most common issues that are reported in psychiatric sessions, which are the transfer of feelings or thoughts from the psychiatrist to the client, projection, and the common practice where clients block out some thoughts (Stewart,

2013). Freud contributed to the modern understanding of free association. However, this method has received criticism over the years. The main concern is that since the client is not guided, they may create associations that do not exist.

Freud also contributed to sexual theories. He wrote about sexual drives in a publication that received a lot of criticism. According to his theory, sexual drive is a large contributory factor to the psychology of a person. He also coined the psychosexual theory, where he proposed that personality starts to form from childhood and is shaped through distinct stages. Freud is known for describing how the unconscious mind works. His theories paved way for subsequent psychologists to explore the unconscious mind. Freud's work also touched on mind-based defenses, including repression and denial. It is from these theories that other works have been based on. Freud's biggest contribution is undoubtedly the psychoanalytic theory (Marcus, 2016). According to this theory, a person's personality is determined by some form of internal psychological conflict. He argued that a person's behavior is brought about by the interaction that occurs between the id, the ego, and the superego. The three components of the mind, according to the psychologist, interact at a subconscious level.

Jean Piaget is another renowned psychologist who was born in Switzerland. As a young man, he was interested in biology. As a result, he published numerous papers and attained his Ph.D at a very young age. Piaget was interested in the development of children (Kris, 2013). During his research, Piaget discovered that educators were using teaching methods that were not beneficial to children. He reported that students are more likely to perceive information that they can test or see in a practical manner. His research paved way for more research on the importance of active learning for students.

Piaget conducted extensive research on how the minds of children develop. The interesting aspect of his research is that he used information that he gathered from his own children, as he had witnessed the intellectual growth of his children from birth. Through the research, he discovered that the manner in which children process information is entirely different from that of adults. He reported his findings in the theory that he named the Theory of Cognitive Development (1936). The aim of the theory was to explain how an infant grows into a child and into an individual who can associate his memories and the environment into a definite thinking process (Kris, 2013). Piaget proposed three components of the theory that include the schemas, adaptation, and stages of development. According to the psychologist, cognitive development is a continuous process which involves the reorganization of the activity of the mind due to past experiences and the influence of biology.

Piaget described schema as the building blocks of models that describe cognitive development. Adaptation processes are related to the events that enable an individual to make transitions from one stage in life to the next (Powell & Kalina, 2009). He also described four stages of cognitive development. The works of Freud and Piaget are interrelated. Both created theories that explain the processes that are involved in cognitive development. The main distinction between their theories is that Piaget went further to associate his theory with education psychology.

Piaget hypothesized that a child can only understand what the mind is capable of comprehending and because of this reason, educators should ensure that they engage the students. Multiple principles can be derived from the theory. The principles include active learning, prioritizing intellectual capability, and the value of social interactions in learning institutions. The principles have positively influenced the field of education psychology.

The third influential psychologist is William James. James was born in 1842 in NY City. He studied chemistry but later changed to medicine. After completing his medical degree, he later pursued the fields of psychology and philosophy. Among his biggest contributions is a 1200-page book titled 'Principles of Psychology'. The book took more than ten years to complete. In the book, James described the theory of truth. The theory is commonly known as the Pragmatic Theory of Truth. James described two ways in which an individual can know that something is right. The first way is through direct experience, and the second is through an external interconnection of things that are known to be true. According to the pragmatist theory, the usefulness of an idea should be based on its capacity to be used in a practical situation and not in the truth that the idea represents. The ideas are presented in his second book which was published in 1892, two years after the first book.

James continued to publish his ideas in numerous books that are widely read. He collaborated with Carle Lange, a physician who regularly made contributions to the fields of psychology and psychiatry. The two philosophers jointly formed the famous James-Lange theory of emotion. According to the theory, when a person experiences an event, the body reacts through some form of physiological reaction to create emotions. The theory proposes that emotions are mediated by a physiological action. This theory impacted on psychology by creating a foundation that other experts in the field have used to base other theories.

James also commented on the idea of free will and the theory of evolution. James' biggest strength perhaps his openness to scientific areas as he was well read in biology, medicine, and physiology. His theories spanned a wide range of topics. Also, he was able to describe religion and documented what he termed as the four main religious experiences. James

remains among the most widely-read psychologists to have ever lived, and his work is a reflection of his wide knowledge.

Human behavior is constantly changing. For example, the behavior that was considered normal half a century ago might not be considered normal today. The ideas that the three philosophers described above brought forward helped shape psychiatry and psychology as we know it today. The psychologists created a foundation that was used by subsequent psychologists to create theories and explain situations that affected people during their time. Due to the contextual basis of human behavior, most of the theories that were proposed by the most influential philosophers of the last century might not be applicable in the next fifty years.

It is no doubt that Sigmund Freud contributed to the field of psychology in a great way. However, his ideas received a lot of criticism. The psychosexual theory has controversial ideas that do not apply to human behavior in this age. The theory will not apply in the year 2066 too. The main controversial part of the theory is the Oedipus complex and the Elektra complex. The two theories are impractical in today's application of psychoanalysis.

Piaget proposed a timeless theory of education psychology. The theory of education by Piaget will continue to be relevant. The theory was adopted by educators worldwide after research showed that students are likely to learn more when they are actively engaged. An effective learning experience occurs when the teacher and the students are communicating, and one that also involves active participation and tools for practical exercises. Researchers report that this approach, which is a reflection of the cognitive development theory, has optimal results (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Most of the aspects of the cognitive development theory that are used in education psychology will be applicable in the next 50 years.

The work of William James is also timeless and will be relevant in the next half-century. The ideas that are represented in his books are commonly used by psychologists and psychiatrists. James is associated with the theory of pragmatism and his ideas in religion. The description of religious experiences might not be relevant in today's society or in one fifty years to come. The philosophy of pragmatism might be applicable in the contemporary society (Elkjaer & Simpson, 2011). The philosophy is applicable in the studies of organizational behavior, which is concerned with the practices of organizational structures. Pragmatism philosophy is borrowed from the original contributions of James.

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