

The early history of clinical psychology and the emergence of child psychology an...

[Psychology](#)



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Abstract

Research into the beginning of clinical psychology and how child psychology emerged are a focus of this paper. Historical origins and backgrounds of the key figures advancing these fields will be reported. The foundations of Clinical and Child psychology will be advanced. Theories of child development will be inspected. Child welfare and reform will be examined. Recent research in child psychology, as well as historical methods still in use, will be prepared.

I. The Beginning of Clinical and Child Psychology

Lightner Witmer is known as the founder of Clinical psychology. He also laid the groundwork for child psychology through his clinical work with children addressing academic issues (Routh, 1996). G. Stanley Hall had an influence on nineteenth century children through his inception of the Child Study Movement and research development (Brooks-Gunn & Johnson, 2006). The psychosexual stages of development were Sigmund Freud's theory on child development and he is also credited with psychoanalysis, a technique used in a clinical setting (Garcia, 1995). Anna Freud took her father's theories and ideas and updated them in her own work with children. She also established the Hampstead War Nurseries and Hampstead Child Therapy Course and Clinic (Solnit, 1997).

II. Historical Origins of Clinical Psychology

Clinical psychology was established in 1896, when Lightner Witmer opened the first psychological clinic. Clinical psychology is a well-known field today,

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despite its historical insignificance at the time of its birth. In the late 1800s, Experimental psychology was emphasized and Clinical psychology had few interested followers (Routh, 1996). In 1917, the Association of Clinical Psychology was formed.

During the years before the 1940s, psychotherapy was only performed by psychiatrists. The sole purpose of a clinical psychologist was to assess patients and their mental problems. After World War II, however, the need for Clinical psychologists grew. Clinical psychologists were requested by the government to treat soldiers that had return with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

A. Foundation and Definition of Clinical Psychology

Clinical psychology is the use of psychology to treat patients by assessing mental problems and applying psychotherapy as a means of treatment. Clinical psychology uses a variety of therapy techniques in a combination, depending on a patient's specific need, and is performed in a clinic setting. Psychoanalysis, behavior therapy, and group therapy are some methods used for combination treatment. The American Psychological Association gives a more detailed definition of clinical psychology:

“ The field of Clinical Psychology integrates science, theory, and practice to understand, predict, and alleviate maladjustment, disability, and discomfort as well as to promote human adaptation, adjustment, and personal development. Clinical Psychology focuses on the intellectual, emotional, biological, psychological, social, and behavioral aspects of human

functioning across the life span, in varying cultures, and at all socioeconomic levels" (Division 12, Society of Clinical Psychology, 2006).

B. Development of Psychoanalysis and Clinical Psychology

Psychoanalysis was developed in the 1890s by Sigmund Freud.

Psychoanalysis is a form of psychotherapy that seeks to help the afflicted person work through repressed issues from past times in their lives. " We guided the patient's attention directly to the traumatic scene during which the symptom had arisen, tried to find therein the psychic conflict and to free the repressed effect. We thus discovered the procedure characteristic of the psychic processes of the neuroses which I later named *regression* " (Freud, 1914).

III. The Emergence of Child Psychology and Counseling

The emergence of child psychology almost coincides with the founding of clinical psychology. Some interest in child development and welfare preceded this emergence; however clinical methods and techniques for treating children developed with the first psychological clinic (McReynolds, 1987).

A. Charles Darwin

Charles Darwin's theories, explaining the phenomenon of a species developing over time from common origins, through natural and sexual selection, are important to the modern understanding of evolution as the

main theory of the life sciences, important in biology and other disciplines such as anthropology, psychology and philosophy.

1. Historical Background

Charles Darwin (Feb. 12, 1809 – Apr. 19, 1882) was the son of Doctor Robert Darwin and Susannah Darwin. At age 16, he became an apprentice doctor helping his father treat patients. In the fall of 1825, Darwin attended the University of Edinburgh, but once he saw the obscenity of surgical procedures, he decided to leave the university. Later, he joined the Plinian Society, a student group interested in natural history (Browne, 1995).

After many different ventures in life, Darwin found himself investigating how species spread, during the spring of 1865. He began writing a book he titles *Natural Selection*. In 1872, Darwin published his last major work, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. This book detailed his theories on the evolution of human psychology. He described his ideas that the human mind and cultures were developed by natural and sexual selection (Darwin, 1872).

2. Research in Child Development and Theories of Development

Darwin studied his oldest son's growth and development during his infant years, thereby establishing the first documented case study in child development. He published one of the first works on the development of children, entitled *A Biographical Sketch of an Infant*, in 1877. Darwin believed, through his evolution theory, that human behavior is understood by knowing its origins, including the early development stages.

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In Darwin's study of his infant son, he further confirmed his beliefs that emotions are intertwined with development. Darwin states:

" An infant understands to a certain extent, and as I believe at a very early period, the meaning or feelings of those who tend him, by the expression of their features" (pp. 293-294).

Darwin further states:

" I believe in no fixed law of development, causing all the inhabitants of a country to change abruptly, or simultaneously, or to an equal degree. The processes of modification must be extremely slow. The variability of each species is quite independent of that of all others" (p. 314)

Also called developmental psychology, child psychology explores topics such as language development, personality development, and social, emotional, and intellectual growth. " The theory of evolution by natural selection - what we mean by ' Darwinism' - is the theory which links humanity to the rest of living nature and living nature to the rest of the conditions of existence on earth" (Young, 2005).

B. G. Stanley Hall

Granville Stanley Hall was a psychologist who focused mainly on child development and evolutionary theory. He was the first president of the American Psychology Association. Hall's career was largely based on Darwin's Theory of Evolution. Using Darwin's theories, he was prompted to

further research child development and further study his theory of inherited behaviors.

1. Historical Background

In 1867, Hall graduated from Williams College. He acquired his psychology doctorate at Harvard University. He then started his career as an English and philosophy teacher. In 1882, Hall became a Professor of Psychology and Pedagogics for Johns Hopkins University. While there, he started the first American psychology laboratory.

Hall founded the *American Journal of Psychology* in 1887. By 1892, he was the first president of the American Psychological Association. Hall used child psychology as a means to understand child development.

2. Research in Child Development

The ideas of Charles Darwin and Ernst Haeckel caused Hall to closely examine child development. Hall believed that behavior was inherited.

Hall's theory of 'Storm and Distress' refer to adolescence. The three main aspects of this theory are conflict with parents, mood disruptions, and risky behavior.

3. Child Study Movement

Hall's promotion of the child study movement was influential. He introduced the questionnaires for teachers and parents that were used to study child development.

Hall is considered the founder of the child study movement which was prompted by his work entitled *The Contents of Children's Minds*. He further fostered the movement with his work entitled *Adolescence*, in which he describes his theory that a child repeats the life history of a race.

4. Child Welfare Movement

Hall's aid in the development of the child study movement, along with various newly formed child welfare agencies, contributed in changing laws that pertained to the abuse and delinquency of children. Hall's pioneering of the child study movement ultimately led to the reform of child welfare.

C. Lightner Witmer

Lightner Witmer (1867-1956) is considered to have invented the term 'clinical psychology'. In 1896, he co-founded the first Psychological Clinic at the University of Pennsylvania.

1. Historical Background

Lightner Witmer earned his doctorate in Leipzig, Germany. He then returned to the University of Pennsylvania, where he had previously attended the graduate psychology program. He assumed responsibility for James Cattell's laboratory.

2. Research in Child Development

Witmer, along with G. Stanley Hall, had an important role in child psychology. Witmer used an idiographic clinical model. Idiographic is

defined as “ attempts to understand a particular event or individual” (Fagan & Wise, 1994, p. 28).

Within the role of child study, Witmer views children as feeble-minded and largely beyond the help of the kind of intervention he favored, but others had remediable difficulties (Routh, 1996). Witmer pioneered the psychological interest of ‘ mentally retarded’ children, that is, children who are retained and regressed in terms of school placement. This research led to further studies of children with learning disabilities.

3. The Psychological Clinic

In 1908, Witmer published the first issues of his journal entitled *The Psychological Clinic* . It was the first journal of clinical psychology. The main article, ‘ Clinical psychology’, detailed his work for the previous ten years. In 1935, *The Psychological Clinic* published its last issue, which gave reports on clinical psychology and statuses in the United States.

4. Theories of Practice

Witmer’s clinical method was to perform case studies using experiments. His emphasis on children’s academic problems has been even more influential in the development of the field of school psychology than it was in the clinical area (Routh, 1996). Witmer recommended that psychologists determine a child’s condition before and at the end of treatment and that they document the methods used (Duchan, 2006).

D. Sigmund Freud

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Sigmund Freud elaborated on the theory that the mind is a complex energy-system, the structural investigation of which is proper evidence of psychology (Thornton, 2006).

1. Historical Background

While little is known about Freud's early life, it is now known that his interest in the inner workings of the mind began with his own issues. Freud had suffered “ numerous psychosomatic disorders as well as exaggerated fears of dying and other phobias” (Corey, 2001).

3. Theories in Counseling

Psychoanalysis, which studies the unconscious mind, involved researching methods such as free association, investigating Freudian slips, and dream interpretations. An important theory of psychoanalysis is the development of defense mechanisms. Freud believed that defense mechanisms are developed by the ego to protect against anxiety.

Using the techniques of psychoanalysis, Freud provided a means to study the meanings of dreams, Freudian slips, and forgetfulness. He developed the three structures of personality: the id, the ego, and the superego. The id is part of the unconscious that controls drives and impulses. The ego controls perception and cognition of reality. The superego forms the conscience and controls the ego.

During his research of psychoanalysis, Freud theorized about the unconscious and conscious mind. The goal of his psychoanalysis was to

bring out unconscious feelings and thoughts. Freud believed that allowing a patient to say whatever came their mind would bring the regressed issues into the conscious mind to be dealt with.

4. Psychosexual Development

Freud had a theory, which he named the Oedipus complex, that people desire incest and repress such a desire. He believed that as humans develop, they are fixated on objects throughout the development stages.

Freud theorized that there are five stages of developing:

- Oral stage: 0-18 months old; an infant's pleasure centers around the mouth, through eating or drinking excessively
- Anal stage: 18-36 months old; learning to control feces and using bowel movements as libidinal energy
- Phallic stage: 3-6 years old; libidinal energy shifts to genital; Oedipus or Electra complexes develop
- Latency stage: 6 years to puberty; no sexual feelings at all
- Genital stage: puberty years and on; libidinal energy focused again on genitals; child develops opposite sex relationships

E. Anna Freud

Anna Freud, daughter of Sigmund Freud, made numerous contributions on how the consciousness works. She continued her father's studies. She is the founder of child psychoanalysis, using her father's theories of treatment and development for children.

1. Historical Background

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As an elementary school teacher, Anna Freud became drawn to child psychology. In 1947, she founded the Hampstead Child Therapy Course and Clinic in London.

2. Child Analysis and Development

Freud concentrated on her theories that the ego was important. She developed many techniques of assessment and treatment of disorders in children.

3. The Home Setting

Anna Freud's developmental theory emphasizes the interactions and interdependencies between maturation and environment in steps, named a developmental line. Freud believed that a child's development relied mostly on the parent-home atmosphere.

5. Child Care Center

The Hampstead War Nursery provided foster care to children and allowed Anna Freud to observe the impact of the stress of parent deprivation on children. Three books resulted from her studies at the Nursery: *Young Children in Wartime* (1942), *Infants without Families*, and *War and Children* (1943).

IV. Modern Advances

Today, Child Psychology is a large field with many specializations. It has come a long way since its humble beginnings in the 1800s. It is interesting

to note that some methods used today were originally in use in the 19th and 20th centuries. Other methods have roots in the past yet have been customized to protect the overall welfare of children.

VI. Summary

The historical origins of Clinical and Child Psychology have been examined. The theories, biographies, and influences on child psychology by some of the major contributors in this field have been advanced. Current research methods and techniques regarding child psychology and counseling have been reported as well as historical methods still currently in use.

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