

Until the end of the 19th century, mental patients were generally mistreated and abused. Doctors did not know the cause of their illness and often treated them with what look like torture machines today. Freud helped unlock these machines and patients' minds as well.

Sigmund Freud

Freud didn't invent psychiatry and most psychiatrists are not Freudians. But his insights about the mind and mental illness helped define our modern world.

For most of history, mental illness or “madness” was thought to be caused by forces outside the brain. Doctors in 18th century England thought “lunacy” was caused by moral failings, a criminal mind, or injury to the brain. The mentally ill were often locked up in “hospitals” where they were brutally treated. The name of the oldest mental hospital in the world (Bedlam) became a word to describe a “state of extreme confusion and disorder.” By the middle of the 19th century, new hospitals in England began to treat the mentally ill more humanely. More importantly, they began to consider mental illness a disease of the mind, not the body. But it wasn't until Dr. Sigmund Freud started using his “talking therapy” that modern psychology began to emerge.

Invention of the Freudian Slip and More

A short history of the life and times of Dr. Sigmund Freud and the invention of modern psychology

The world we know today began to take shape in the late 19th century. Many of the ideas we now take for granted were created over 100 years ago:

- Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species* in 1859 and introduced the idea of evolution by natural selection.
- Thomas Edison invented the light bulb and the phonograph.
- Louis Pasteur made the first vaccine against rabies and popularized the idea that germs caused many illnesses.

This was a time of rethinking of old ideas, not just in science, but also in art. Artists such as Monet, Cezanne, and Van Gogh broke from realism and explored their personal visions of reality.

Sigmund Freud and others took a scientific approach to understanding mental illness. Freud lived most of his life in Vienna, Austria. At the turn of the century, Vienna was a hotbed for new ideas. However, anti-Semitism weighed on the young Jewish doctor who would soon revolutionize the world of mental health.

As a young man, Freud was trained as a research scientist, but became a medical doctor in order to support his family. Early on, Freud was interested in what was then called “**nervous disorders**.” The symptoms of one



Vincent van Gogh: *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear* (1889). Van Gogh, one of the world’s finest painters, suffered from depression and famously severed his lower ear and gave it to a prostitute. He sought assistance from doctors but they were not able to help him. In 1890, at age 37, he committed suicide.

of these disorders (called hysteria) included fainting, paralysis, tics, and other unexplained body actions. It was clear that these movements were not caused by a physical condition. But no one was sure what to do about it.

Freud thought that hysteria was brought on by “**repressed memories**” of traumatic events generally from childhood. These were things that were just too horrible to remember (often sexual abuse). Even though people could not remember the events, their body reacted to them in some manner. Freud thought

that by bringing these memories out, the patient might be cured.

At first Freud experimented with hypnosis, but found that it did not offer a permanent cure. He decided to try “talk therapy” instead. This became known as “**psychotherapy**.”

In 1892 Freud asked patients to lie down on a couch for the first time. He experimented with a number of techniques to help patients bring up repressed memories. Ultimately, he decided that patients had to be allowed to explore their inner thoughts with a minimum of interference. Once patients were able to identify their repressed memories, they were often cured of their strange behaviours. This technique of “**free association**” continues to be used today by many therapists.

Freud continued to explore how the mind works and how to cure its illnesses. He offered many insights that have been adopted and adapted by therapists for a hundred years. In 1938 Freud fled from Vienna to London when the Nazis took over Austria and started rounding up Jews for extermination. Freud died of cancer in 1939.

Some of Freud’s theories and techniques have been challenged. But many of his ideas continue to help frame today’s approach to psychology.

The Unconscious Mind

People are often motivated by thoughts and feelings they are not fully aware of. These are stored in the unconscious mind, but still influence our behaviour. According to Freud,

becoming aware of these thoughts is key to mental health.

The Ego, the Id, and the Super-Ego

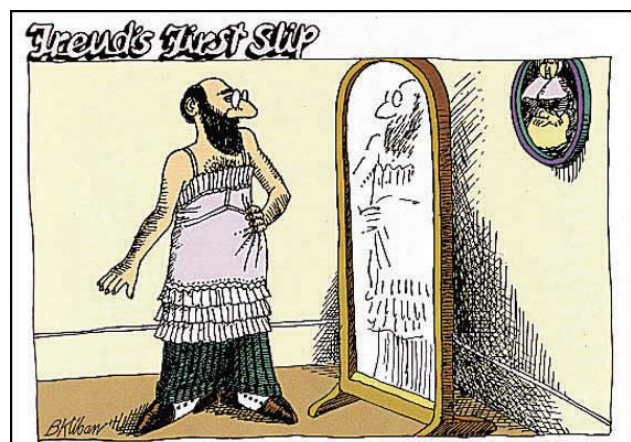
Freud defined “**ego**” as one of three functions of the mind. According to Freud, our ego is the rational part of our mind. It’s where we reason and use common sense.

Our “**id**” is our unconscious self. It includes basic drives for sex, food, and survival. We are not aware of our id, but it has strong control over us.

Our “**super-ego**” is what keeps control of our id. This part of the mind includes our sense of morality, right and wrong, and our conscience. Our super-ego prevents us from stealing something we want or makes us say we’re sorry when we hurt someone. According to Freud, achieving a proper balance between these three aspects of the mind is necessary to good mental health.

Freudian Slip

Freud believed that verbal mistakes often related to unconscious desires. “A Freudian slip is like saying one thing and meaning your mother,” for instance.



Sigmund Freud | Key Terms

anti-Semitism	Hostility toward and discrimination against Jews.
bedlam	The name of an insane asylum in London dating back from the Middle Ages. Also at word to describe a situation that is in uproar and confusion.
free association	The expression of one's inner thoughts (unconscious mind) without censoring. Often used in psychiatric therapy.
humanely	Behavior that is marked by compassion, sympathy, or consideration for humans and animals.
psychotherapy	Treatment of mental or emotional problems through counseling by a trained mental health practitioner. Freud originally referred to this technique as "talk therapy."
repressed memories	These are memories of traumatic events generally from childhood that are not in the conscious mind. Repressed memories may influence a person's mental state at a later time. Psychotherapy seeks to bring repressed memories out in the open so that they can be dealt with.
traumatic	An injury to the body or mind that leads to severe damage.

Discussion Points

1. Sigmund Freud led the development of modern psychotherapy. His ideas grew from research in the 19th century. Can you think of other things we now take for granted that had their beginnings in the 19th century?
2. A Freudian slip is when a person means to say one thing but says another which reveals some unconscious aspect of the mind. Example: Calling your girlfriend "Mom." This might indicate that you want to be taken care of. Can you think of any other examples of a Freudian slip?