

William McDougall's Instinct Theory

The Most Systematic Classification of Human Instincts (1908)

McDOUGALL'S FRAMEWORK

McDougall proposed that instincts are purposive (goal-directed) forces that drive all behavior.
Each instinct has THREE components: (1) perception of stimulus, (2) emotional arousal, and (3) impulse toward action.

Three Components of Every Instinct

1. PERCEPTION

Recognition of specific stimulus

2. EMOTION

Feeling aroused by stimulus

3. ACTION IMPULSE

Drive toward specific behavior

The 18 Basic Instincts and Their Corresponding Emotions

INSTINCT	CORRESPONDING EMOTION	PURPOSE/FUNCTION
Flight	Fear	Escape from danger
Repulsion	Disgust	Avoid harmful substances
Curiosity	Wonder	Explore and understand
Pugnacity (Fighting)	Anger	Defend self and resources
Self-Abasement	Subjection/Submission	Submit to authority
Self-Assertion	Elation	Dominate and lead
Parental	Tender Emotion	Care for offspring
Reproduction (Sex)	Lust	Mating and reproduction
Gregariousness	Loneliness	Seek company/belonging
Acquisition	Possessiveness	Gather and keep resources
Construction	Creativity	Build and create
Appeal (Cry for Help)	Distress	Seek aid from others
Food-Seeking	Appetite/Hunger	Obtain nourishment

*Note: McDougall later added more instincts including laughter, comfort-seeking, rest/sleep, and migration.
His original 1908 list contained 18 basic instincts, demonstrating the systematic but expanding nature of instinct classification.*

💡 McDougall's Unique Contribution

Unlike others, McDougall emphasized that instincts are purposive (goal-directed) rather than mechanistic.
Each instinct-emotion pair drives behavior toward specific adaptive goals, making his theory the most systematic formulation of instinct theory before its eventual decline due to circular reasoning and over-classification.