

STRUCTURALIST School of Thought

SUMAIRA ASLAM

Structuralism

- ▶ Before the arrival of the Structuralists, psychology was already being considered as the study of consciousness. This meant that the entire scope of psychology encompasses the study of man's consciousness. The distinguishing feature of the Structuralists was that they added further to the definition of psychology being the study of consciousness; psychology to them was concerned with the study of the structure of consciousness. Therefore, Structuralists are philosophers/psychologist who defined psychology as the study of consciousness. Further, Structuralists also tried to solve the enigma of a definition of consciousness. It was imperative to give a definition of consciousness in order to substantiate the view point of psychology being the study of structure of consciousness. Therefore Structuralists put forward

Wilhelm Wundt

- ▶ Wilhelm Wundt was born in 1832 and died in 1920. Thinking of man evolved with the passage of time as his surroundings change. Earth shaking events like the industrial revolution had caused man to shift towards empiricism. As a result of the work of Russians, Sechenov and Pavlov on discovering laws of learning by conditioning, through experimentation; the contributions of Darwin discovering the relationship between psychology and physical sciences; and Fechner discovering physical ways to measure psychological experiences, psychology was defined as the study of consciousness. Psychology had finally ceased to be a merely speculative science and was gradually becoming an experimental science based on facts and logical conclusions which were drawn through carefully conducted experiments and profound observations.

- ▶ But most of the credit goes to Wilhelm Wundt who recognized that psychologists must adopt a scientific outlook and adopt experimentation as the methodology, if psychology is to expand and flourish. As mentioned earlier, by this time, events like the French revolution and the Industrial revolution had changed the outlook of man. Man had become more logical in his approach and tried to find reasons for everything. Therefore, based on these grounds, Wundt based his proposition that since speculation could not be the mode of scientific investigation any more; therefore, psychology also has to adopt the new mode of investigation if it has to become a science.

- ▶ Wilhelm Wundt is known for establishing the first psychology laboratory at Leipzig, Germany, in the year 1879. This was one of the greatest leaps in the transition of speculative outlook to the scientific outlook, facilitated by Wundt.
- ▶ Wundt defined psychology as the study of consciousness. He further argued, that if consciousness exist, which actually does, then it must have a structure. To elaborate his viewpoint further, he went on to explain the structure of consciousness. According to him, consciousness could be studied by three things:



- ▶ **Experimentation:**

- ▶ Experimentation was the most important mode of scientific investigation which according to Wundt was the need of hour for psychology to develop. Psychologists therefore, needed to conduct experiments which revealed the true nature of consciousness. In this regard, Pavlov was known for his experiments that he conducted on dogs to discover the process of learning.



▶ **Introspection:**

- ▶ Although Wundt believed that psychologists should adopt a scientific outlook, he did not reject introspection as a method of gaining knowledge, because he regarded introspection as a mean of looking into and understanding the structure of consciousness.

► **Looking at the past history of man that has shaped his consciousness:**

Another method of studying the structure of consciousness is by looking at the past history of man. Darwin was the first one to give rise to the nature versus nurture controversy. According to him, it was the environment that shaped the thinking of man, or the way he is brought up. Therefore, according to Wundt, looking into the past of individuals gave insight into the consciousness of the individuals.

- ▶ Wundt himself also conducted some experiments and based upon them he proposed that consciousness is a process which has three compartments:
- ▶ Ideas
- ▶ Feelings
- ▶ Emotions

- ▶ He then went on to elaborate hallucinations, hypnotic states and dreams. According to him, all of these abnormal activities of the consciousness are caused due to the break down of attention. Because of his elaboration of various parts of consciousness, he is classified as a structuralist today.

Edward Bradford Titchner

- ▶ Edward Bradford Titchner was born in 1867 and died in 1927. He was an English man and pupil of Wundt.
- ▶ He studied in Germany, and worked all his life in America.

► **Contents of consciousness**

This means that Titchner explained what consciousness is actually composed of. He then went on to elaborate the contents of consciousness.

► **Combination of these contents**

The second contribution of Titchner is that he described the combination of contents of consciousness which means that, which contents get together to result in an activity.

► **Connections between the contents**

The third contribution of Titchner is that he explained the connection between the contents of consciousness which means that consciousness is a product of contents being related with each other and working together.

- ▶ Unlike Wundt, who gave three methods to study consciousness, the subject matter of psychology, Titchner argued that since the only way psychology could be studied was introspection which he defined as systematic and controlled self observation.

Elements of Consciousness

▶ Titchener proposed 3 elementary states of consciousness:

▶ **Sensations:**

basic elements of perception - sights, sounds, tastes, smells etc. Evoked by physical objects in the environment

▶ **Images:**

elements of ideas - reflects experiences not actually present at that time, e.g. memory of a sight.

▶ **Affections:**

feelings - the elements of emotion: love, hate, anger, sadness etc.

Criticisms and the Decline of Structuralism

- ▶ • Over the years his approach using introspection became more rigid and limited.
- ▶ • By today's scientific standards, the experimental methods used to study the structures of the mind were too subjective; the use of introspection led to a lack of reliability in results.
- ▶ • Other critics argue that structuralism was too concerned with internal behavior, which is not directly observable and cannot be accurately measured.
- ▶ • Because introspection itself is a conscious process it must interfere with the consciousness it aims to observe
- ▶ • Eventually the idea of introspection became extinct after Titchner's death.