

# Chapter 5: Structuralism

PSY 495: History & Systems

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## Edward Bradford Titchener (1867-1927)

### ■ Theoretical Orientation

- Although he tried to pass himself off as a loyal follower of Wundt, his conceptualization of psychology drastically differed from Wundt's
- Theoretical Orientation
  - Dualist, associationist
  - Emphasized images and became a phenomenologist later in life
  - Positivist
  - Subject matter of psychology
    - Psychology is the science of the mind
      - Mind = sum total of mental processes occurring during the lifetime of the individual

## Edward Bradford Titchener (1867-1927)

- Consciousness = Sum total of mental processes occurring at any given time
- Mind has the power to organize elements voluntarily
- But rejected Wundt's idea of distinguishing between mediate and immediate experiences
- Titchener argues that there is only one experience that can be viewed on two different levels

## Edward Bradford Titchener

## Edward Bradford Titchener (1867-1927)

- Stimulus error
  - Committed when the introspector pays attention to physical properties of the stimulus rather than the psychological sensations
- Psychology is a natural science
  - Goal is description
- Conceptions about conscious experience
  - Consciousness is always changing
    - But can be studied in more situations than allowed by Wundt

## Edward Bradford Titchener (1867-1927)

- Introspection
  - Method by which study can be done
  - Special training and appropriate conditions can make introspection just as precise as observations of physical events
- Criterion of truth

- The legitimate subject matter of psychology is mental events
- Can only be discovered through introspection
- **Strategy**
  - Analyze concrete mental experience into its simplest components

## Edward Bradford Titchener (1867-1927)

- Discover how these components combine and the laws that govern combination
- Connect them with physical/bodily conditions
- **Shaped American Psychology**
  - Taught at Cornell in his Oxford master's gown because "It confers the right to be dogmatic."

## Edward Bradford Titchener (1867-1927) Cont.

- **Books:**
  - *An Outline of Psychology (1896)*
  - *Primer of Psychology (1898)*
  - *Experimental Psychology: A Manual of Laboratory Practices (4 volumes between 1901-1905)*
- While he denied women admission into his experimental group, he did admit the first female graduate students, many of whom went on to become influential in American psychology

## Edward Bradford Titchener (1867-1927) Cont.

- **Structuralism**
  - Aim of structural psychology was to analyze the structure of the mind, to find the elementary processes of consciousness and to isolate the constituents in the given conscious formation
  - Science begins with observation
    - For Titchener, observation = introspection
      - Introspection
        - Not informal
        - Not speculation
        - Rigorous and precise kind of observation needing training to perform
    - Subjects called reagents
      - They are like mechanical recording instruments

## Edward Bradford Titchener (1867-1927) Cont.

- Subject matter of psychology is conscious experience
  - Dependant upon the person experiencing it
  - Content of consciousness
    - Sensations
      - Most prevalent
      - Basic components of patterns of sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feels

- Listed > 44,000 sensations
- Images
  - Elements of ideas
  - Occur in mental processes that represent events that are not present

## Edward Bradford Titchener (1867-1927) Cont.

- Affections
  - Elements of emotions that combine to create experiences such as happiness and sadness
- Sensations and images have 4 common attributes
  - Quality
    - Distinguishes every element from every other element
  - Intensity
    - Strength, weakness, loudness, or brightness
  - Duration
    - Course over time
  - Clarity
    - How well attended to the element is

## Edward Bradford Titchener (1867-1927) Cont.

- Affections have the first 3
- Feelings only vary along one dimension:
  - Pleasant to unpleasant
- Felt that he had refined and improved introspection so that the results from his laboratory were superior to those found in other labs
- He recognized individual differences in mental processes
- Principles of Synthesis
  - Once components isolated, this is the next step
  - But, he was mostly concerned with analysis, not synthesis

## Edward Bradford Titchener (1867-1927) Cont.

- Context theory of meaning
  - Elementary mental events are devoid of meaning
  - Yet perceptions of the world have meaning
  - Meaning results from the constellation of mental events
  - Context generates meaning
  - Combines atomistic and holistic views
    - So, where does Titchener fall on this scale?

## Edward Bradford Titchener (1867-1927) Cont.

- **Psychophysiology**
- **Causality is a myth**

## Edward Bradford Titchener (1867-1927) Cont.

- Criticisms of Structuralism
  - Use of introspection to get at conscious experience necessarily alters the experience being studied
  - Titchener had difficulty defining what he meant by the introspective method
  - Questions about precisely what the introspectors were trained to observe
  - Titchener's introspection is actually retrospection
  - Idea of unconsciousness threw a monkey wrench
  - Structuralism is artificial and sterile
  - Structuralist definition of psychology came under attack

## Edward Bradford Titchener (1867-1927) Cont.

- Contributions of Structuralism
  - Titchener's efforts contributed to the rapid growth of the science of psychology in North America
  - Trained many important students who assumed leading roles in American Psychology
  - Established an elite organization of researchers
  - Wrote publications through Cornell that disseminated important research findings and theoretical speculations to psychologists
  - Offered a clear-cut conception of psychology
  - Influenced the scope of psychology
  - Ignored applied areas
  - Introspection, broadly defined as giving of a verbal report based on experience, is still used as a basic methodology of psychology today
  - Target of criticism

## References

- Kendler, H. H. (1987). *Historical foundations of modern psychology*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
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- Schultz, D. P., & Schultz, S. E. (2004). *A history of modern psychology* (8<sup>th</sup> edition). Ft. Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Publishers.