

Ted talk– consciousness assignment

[Psychology](#)



How do we perceive the smell of a rose or the color purple and why do we perceive them differently? The answers to these questions and more lay within the unexplored world of the conscious mind. As far as consciousness science has come in the past decade, there is still no one who knows exactly how or why it works. Explaining it exactly would be as difficult as trying to understand the properties of a black hole. It cannot be dissected. Little to no tests can be performed on it. It is still a very abstract concept to us.

This is why we have many different theories attempting to explain how consciousness works. The first theory is called the Fundamental Theory. There are certain things in this universe that everything can be broken down into; they are the building blocks of the world around us. Mass, time, space, and Newton's laws are a few. So consciousness must break down into one of these categories as well, except it doesn't. No matter how many studies are done on the brain, neuroscience are not finding a solid link to consciousness, which makes figuring out how it works pretty difficult.

David Chalmers, a professor of Philosophy and director of the Center for Consciousness at Australian National University, and Professor of Philosophy ND co-director of the Center for Mind, Brain, and Consciousness at New York University suggests, " If you can't explain consciousness in terms of the existing fundamentals-space, time, mass, charge?? then as a matter of logic, you need to expand the list. The natural thing to do is to postulate consciousness itself as something fundamental, a fundamental building block of nature" (Chalmers, " How do you Explain Consciousness?). By making consciousness a fundamental of nature it will be easier to study, but before we can study it we need a set of laws to accompany it, like Newton's laws

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with physics. With the Fundamental Theory, rather than relying entirely on the brain's physical processes to understand how the conscious mind operates, the laws of consciousness would serve as a connector that describes how "experience depends on underlying physical processes" (Chalmers, 'The Puzzle of Conscious Experience').

Being such a subjective topic, consciousness is very difficult to study and as a result we have an extreme lack of data on it, but in order to gain more information we have to start somewhere. David Chalmers hypothesizes that the first law of consciousness should relate to awareness. Awareness is defined as being the process by which information in the brain is made globally available to monitor processes such as speed and bodily action, so it can be said that where there is awareness there is consciousness and vice versa (Chalmers, "The Puzzle of Conscious Experience").

Once these laws are developed and studied further, they may well evolve into the fundamental laws of consciousness. The next theory scientists are considering is called the Reductionism Theory. The gist of this theory is that your conscious mind is a direct product of your brain (Thompson). So the physical processing that your brain is doing right now is creating the inner-monologue everyone hears throughout the day. But "how?" you ask?

Well basically, the neurons inside your brain are exchanging thousands upon thousands of electric signals and picking out significant patterns from this huge jumble of information being taken in by our senses (Johnson). For example, when you smell a rose your nose physically smells the rose and relays to your brain, "hey this is what a rose smells like." Soon, your brain

will learn to recognize the pattern of signals and therefore recognize the smell. A good way to think of the Reductionism Theory is to think of your unconscious mind like a pilot on an airplane.

When the pilot Sets the plane to auto-pilot, he is present but not in direct control of the plane. When turbulence occurs, the pilot tunes in and assumes control until the situation is resolved. Your conscious mind works the same way. Even though you are not directly aware or conscious 24/7, your conscious mind assumes control of your brain when there is a problem that needs solving (Homeroom). Such as when you encounter the smell of a rose. The last theory of consciousness I am going to talk about is the Evolution Theory.

As evolution states, we all started as tiny, micro-organic cells that over lions of years evolved into the intelligent form we are today. The Evolution Theory states simply that our conscious mind evolved with us. This theory explains that as creatures evolved they developed more and more complex survival methods, like ducking when confronted with a looming object (Johnson). As the creature encounters different obstacles, it adds to the list of self-preserving tricks it has stored away in the brain.

With this list of tricks the brain not only monitors the environment passively, but also attempts to explore new information that will help increase its chance of survival (Ions). It is a shining example of “ survival of the fittest” According to Dan Detente, an expert on the conscious mind, your consciousness is simply a collection of learned habits and behaviors

developed for dealing with processes the brain physically is not well enough equipped to handle.

The brain itself recognizes the information it is receiving, and the conscious mind turns it into something that can be used for self-preservation.

Consciousness science has made huge strides in the last decade toward discovering the truth about what makes our conscious mind work. “

Eventually, with the development of rigorous approaches we will crack this honeymoon” (Block). Though we currently do not have enough research to fully understand consciousness, we are adding information to the list every day.