

# Structuralism vs functionalism



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Structuralism was introduced to the United States by Titchener, with his own twist on Wundt's structure of psychology. It is the study of the fundamentals of consciousness: sensation and perception, memory, attention, emotion, cognition, learning, and language. Structuralism focuses on breaking down mental processes into the most crucial components, or basic terms.

Titchener hoped “ to analyze consciousness into its component parts and determine its structure” (Schultz, D. P. & Schultz, S. E.

, 2008, p. 123).

To accomplish this, a method called introspection is used, where a description of the participant's sensations are reported. Introspection brought criticism.

Introspection was believed to be too subjective and someone's own description of their personal thoughts and feelings should not be critiqued. That would take away from basic terms being used to describe a situation, as some people may use more elaborate words in their depiction. Structuralism was later criticized, primarily by behaviorists, maintaining that the theory dealt mainly with our internal conduct.

It was disputed that this was not a recognizable factor of consciousness and therefore could not be measured precisely.

Functionalism was born as a retort to structuralism, introduced by the work of William James implementing Darwinian theories, such as how beings adjust to their surroundings. James believed that the Structuralism approach was not broad enough. Functionalism is concerned with how the mind

functions, and consequently also used the technique of introspection. “

Functionalists studied the mind not from the standpoint of its composition-its mental elements of structure-but rather as a conglomerate or accumulation of functions and processes that lead to practical consequences in the real world” (Schultz, D. P.

& Schultz, S. E. , 2008, p. 143). Functionalism emphasized individual differences and aimed to answer the question of what is accomplished by mental processes, or mental functions.

However, since the definition of function was not exact, that question could not be answered. While neither Structuralism nor Functionalism was able to answer the questions, they both wanted psychology to become scientific.

Structuralism sought to discover what happens when an organism does something; Functionalism wanted to know how and why the organism does what it does. Using introspection to search for the answers to these questions was not scientific enough, and they both failed.

Searching for the elements of conscious experience, as in Structuralism, did not obtain the original goal; it relied too much on the deliberation of one’s own thoughts. The experimental tactics used in structuralism would not work with standards of current time because the experiments were too subjective, making the results seem unreliable.

Functionalism, believing that mental processes could be explained by understanding the adaptive purpose and function of behavior as opposed to its analysis and description, did not have accuracy in the definition of the

term function to carry out its hypothesis. They both failed and were almost completely phased out.

Functionalism “ never really died, it became part of the mainstream psychology” (Oxford Companion, 2006). The importance of looking at process rather than structure is a common attribute of modern psychology.

This writer believes that both theories are equally important. In essence, they feed off of each other. If one wants to know what is accomplished by the elements of consciousness, as in Functionalism, then one has to be aware of what the elements are, as in Structuralism.

Without one, would the other have been born? Structuralism was the founding of Scientific Psychology and prompted Experimental Psychology. Since our consciousness is continually changing and interacting with the environment, Functionalism becomes important in the scheme of life.