

What contribution has Titchener's structuralism made to psychology, and what criticisms have been made of his work?

Titchener described his system of structuralism as analyzing the elements of the mind. Titchener came up with three mental components he believed to constitute conscious experience. He proposed that sensations, images, and affections make up the conscious human experience. Introspection was structuralism's primary technique. Titchener believed that introspection is how a person looks inwards at their mental processes. He claimed that people gain insight into how they work as they do this. It is a self-observation of one's consciousness.

Introspective reports involving cognitive processes such as reasoning are still used in psychology today. Researchers in psychophysics still ask subjects to report whether a second tone sounds louder or softer than the first. Self-reports are requested from people exposed to unusual environments, such as weightlessness for space flight. Clinical reports from patients, and responses on personality tests and attitude scales, are introspective in nature. Other contributions include new research methods of observation and experimentation; these led to other schools of thought. Another contribution of Titchener's structuralism was its service as a target of criticism. Structuralism provided strong, established beliefs against which newly developing movements in psychology could array their forces. These newer schools of thought owed their existence to their progressive reformulation of the structuralist position. Because advances in science require something to oppose, Titchener's structuralism was that idea that was opposed. This is how it benefited psychology and moved far beyond the initial boundaries of his system. Many critics viewed Titchener's structuralism as artificially attempting to analyze conscious processes into elements. Introspection was criticized way before Titchener reformed his way of methodology.

Critics claimed that introspection was a form of retrospection because some time elapsed between the experience and the reporting of it.

Another attack on Titchener's method of introspection was how the researcher was trained to do it. Critics were questioning the process of how a researcher becomes an introspector. They also felt that experience does not come to us in individual sensations, images, or affective states but as a united whole. The structuralist definition was also attacked and questioned. Psychology started to move forward, which included specialties, and Titchener's structuralism chose to exclude them because Titchener felt that they didn't fit the view of the structuralist's psychology. Last was that his conception of the field needed to be expanded to embrace new work being done.