

# Introduction of significant theories in psychology

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# Theoretical Framework

- **A theoretical framework consists of concepts and, together with their definitions and reference to relevant scholarly literature, existing theory that is used for your particular study.** The theoretical framework must demonstrate an understanding of theories and concepts that are relevant to the topic of your research paper and that relate to the broader areas of knowledge being considered.
- **The theoretical framework is most often not something readily found within the literature.** You must review course readings and pertinent research studies for theories and analytic models that are relevant to the research problem you are investigating. The selection of a theory should depend on its appropriateness, ease of application, and explanatory power.

- **The theoretical framework strengthens the study in the following ways:**
- An explicit statement of theoretical assumptions permits the reader to evaluate them critically.
- The theoretical framework connects the researcher to existing knowledge. Guided by a relevant theory, you are given a basis for your hypotheses and choice of research methods.
- Articulating the theoretical assumptions of a research study forces you to address questions of why and how. It permits you to intellectually transition from simply describing a phenomenon you have observed to generalizing about various aspects of that phenomenon.
- Having a theory helps you identify the limits to those generalizations. A theoretical framework specifies which key variables influence a phenomenon of interest and highlights the need to examine how those key variables might differ and under what circumstances.

# I. Developing the Framework

- Here are some strategies to develop of an effective theoretical framework:
- **Examine your thesis title and research problem.** The research problem anchors your entire study and forms the basis from which you construct your theoretical framework.
- **Brainstorm about what you consider to be the key variables in your research.** Answer the question, "What factors contribute to the presumed effect?"
- **Review related literature** to find how scholars have addressed your research question.
- **List the constructs and variables** that might be relevant to your study. Group these variables into independent and dependent categories.
- **Review key social science theories** that are introduced to you in your course readings and choose the theory that can best explain the relationships between the key variables in your study [note the Writing Tip on this page].
- **Discuss the assumptions or propositions** of this theory and point out their relevance to your research.
- **A theoretical framework is used to limit the scope of the relevant data** by focusing on specific variables and defining the specific viewpoint [framework] that the researcher will take in analyzing and interpreting the data to be gathered. It also facilitates the understanding of concepts and variables according to given definitions and builds new knowledge by validating or challenging theoretical assumptions.

## II. Purpose

- **Think of theories as the conceptual basis for understanding, analyzing, and designing ways to investigate relationships within social systems.** To that end, the following roles served by a theory can help guide the development of your framework.
- Means by which new research data can be interpreted and coded for future use,
- Response to new problems that have no previously identified solutions strategy,
- Means for identifying and defining research problems,
- Means for prescribing or evaluating solutions to research problems,
- Ways of discerning certain facts among the accumulated knowledge that are important and which facts are not,
- Means of giving old data new interpretations and new meaning,
- Means by which to identify important new issues and prescribe the most critical research questions that need to be answered to maximize understanding of the issue,
- Means of providing members of a professional discipline with a common language and a frame of reference for defining the boundaries of their profession, and
- Means to guide and inform research so that it can, in turn, guide research efforts and improve professional practice.

- **Clearly describe the framework, concepts, models, or specific theories that underpin your study.** This includes noting who the key theorists are in the field who have conducted research on the problem you are investigating and, when necessary, the historical context that supports the formulation of that theory. This latter element is particularly important if the theory is relatively unknown or it is borrowed from another discipline.
- **Position your theoretical framework within a broader context of related frameworks, concepts, models, or theories.** As noted in the example above, there will likely be several concepts, theories, or models that can be used to help develop a framework for understanding the research problem. Therefore, note why the theory you've chosen is the appropriate one.
- **The present tense is used when writing about theory.** Although the past tense can be used to describe the history of a theory or the role of key theorists, the construction of your theoretical framework is happening now.
- **You should make your theoretical assumptions as explicit as possible.** Later, your discussion of methodology should be linked back to this theoretical framework.
- **Don't just take what the theory says as a given!** Reality is never accurately represented in such a simplistic way; if you imply that it can be, you fundamentally distort a reader's ability to understand the findings that emerge. Given this, always note the limitations of the theoretical framework you've chosen [i.e., what parts of the research problem require further investigation because the theory inadequately explains a certain phenomena].

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# Basic Theories of Psychology

- Suppose we are interested to explore child psychopathology
- **Psychodynamic Theories**
- Psychodynamic theories focus on how a child's instinctual mind interacts with his or her social environment and the important people in it to produce many characteristics and behaviors. A child's mind is viewed as a dynamic and active force. It has certain characteristics, many of which are innate, that drive the child to act in certain ways. In addition, components of the mind interact with each other; the results of these interactions influence how a child thinks, feels, and behaves.
- In this section we explore the psychodynamic theories of two men who have significantly influenced how we think about human development: Sigmund Freud and Carl Rogers. Although many of their views of human nature are fundamentally different, their theories have many basic similarities.



- The human mind emerges at birth with certain instincts, and a variety of conflicts develop when our instinctual drives contact the demands of society.
- Freud postulated two instincts—a life instinct and a death instinct. The sexual drive is the primary drive associated with the life instinct, and the aggressive drive is the primary drive associated with the death instinct.
- The ego attempts to balance the instinctual demands of the id with the introjected societal demands of the superego.

- Rogers viewed the primary human instinct as the actualizing tendency: an innate drive to develop ourselves fully. Another instinct is the need for the love of others. Conflicts arise when those from whom a child seeks love provide it only when the child acts in certain ways.
- The mind has several levels, and the unconscious mind, or that part of the mind that is never open to inspection, is particularly important. Material in the unconscious exerts a continuing influence on a person, even though the person is unaware of it.

- Early experience is particularly important in a person's life.
- Although Freud's and Rogers's therapeutic strategies differ significantly, both are designed to help a person understand unconscious material, integrate it into his or her life, and express it in ways that cause the person less anguish.
- Psychodynamic theories broaden our perspective on child psychopathology by suggesting that some causes of problem behavior may be unconscious.

# Behavioral Theories

- Behavioral theories differ fundamentally from psychodynamic theories in many ways. Rather than focusing on the interplay of unseen dynamic forces of the mind, they focus on observable behaviors; rather than arguing that a person's unconscious has important influences on his or her behaviors, they state that forces in the environment and outside the person have the primary influence.

- When explaining behaviors, behaviorists focus on their current antecedents and consequences rather than on unseen mental processes or how the behaviors might have developed initially.
- Behaviors are shaped by the environment. The classical conditioning paradigm suggests that some behaviors are elicited by environmental stimuli; the operant conditioning paradigm suggests that a person engages in a variety of behaviors with some being strengthened and others being weakened through responses from the environment.

- Humans are not automatons. People choose their behaviors, but these choices are shaped by the environment rather than by unseen forces such as a sense of responsibility.
- Behavioral therapy based on operant conditioning requires careful analysis of the reinforcements and punishments for a behavior and changes to those reinforcements and punishments.
- Reciprocal inhibition, a therapy based on classical conditioning, pairs relaxation with a stimulus that evokes anxiety, thereby weakening the connection between the stimulus and the anxiety.
- Behavioral theories have been influential in helping us understand that the development and exacerbation of many disorders are influenced by learning

# Cognitive Theories

- Cognitive theories focus on how our thoughts influence our emotions and behaviors. Behaviors are seen as resulting mainly from thoughts and belief systems rather than emerging from unconscious drives or being shaped by the environment. In this section we focus on the cognitive theories of two psychologists, Aaron Beck and Albert Ellis, and the cognitive therapies based on these theories. Although the theories of both men have many fundamental similarities, they differ in some important ways.

- Schemata are belief systems that develop during a person's life and assist in the organization of a person's experiences and the responses that he or she makes in novel situations.
- Schemata can bias a person's perception of others or of events. These biased perceptions influence how a person responds to others or to events.
- Cognitive theorists argue that our thoughts are at the foundation of our emotions and our behaviors.
- Ellis's ABC model suggests that an event activates (A) one or more beliefs (B) that then lead to emotional and behavioral consequences (C).
- Catastrophizing refers to irrational thinking that dramatically inflates the anticipated negative consequences of an event.



- Musturbation refers to people's tendency to have many "musts" in their lives that create strong negative beliefs when they are not met.
- Automatic thoughts are fleeting and arise spontaneously during certain events. They can influence how a person responds to events emotionally and behaviorally.
- Cognitive therapy involves examination of a person's thoughts, connection of thoughts to emotions and behaviors, and changing of irrational or problematic thoughts.
- Cognitive therapy is effective with children having a wide range of problems; it has illuminated the strong influence thoughts have in all of our lives.

# Attachment Theory

In 1950 John Bowlby, a British psychiatrist, was invited by the World Health Organization to report on the mental health of the many London children who had been made homeless by the war. The report asserted that disruptions in relationships with primary caregivers, especially during the first three years of life, put children at greatly increased risk for mental illness and behavior problems (Bowlby, 1951).

- ❑ All infants are prepared at birth to attach to a primary caregiver, and they do so given an appropriate parent–child relationship.
- ❑ Attachment develops over the first year of an infant’s life and is in place by the time the infant can move away from a primary caregiver.
- ❑ Attachment has important implications for a developing infant’s ability to regulate emotion.
- ❑ Three styles of attachment have been identified in most children: secure attachment and two forms of insecure attachment—*anxious/resistant attachment* and *avoidant attachment*.
- ❑ Children develop an internal working model of relationships based on their attachment to a primary caregiver. A child’s internal working model influences the child’s behaviors in future relationships.
- ❑ Therapies based on attachment theory attempt to repair a child’s attachment by improving parenting behaviors or giving a developing child a person who can provide consistent and warm caregiving.

# Family Systems Theories

- ❑ Family systems theory and family therapy differ in many fundamental ways from the other theories and therapies described in this chapter (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998). Rather than hypothesizing that human behavior is influenced primarily by cognitions, inner drives, or environmental influences, the focus of family systems theory is on how the functioning of a family prods individuals in the family to develop specific patterns of behaviors.
- ❑ These patterns are then maintained because they serve an important function for the family, even though they may be detrimental to the individuals. The early development of family systems theory

Family systems theories focus on how individuals' behaviors are influenced by the functions they serve within a family.

- The family, rather than the individual, is the basic unit of analysis in family systems theories.
- Homeostasis is the force that encourages families and other systems to stay the same. All families experience homeostasis.
- The changing needs of family members as they develop require that the family system change and adapt, which runs counter to the force of homeostasis. Successful families can balance the need to adapt and the desire to stay the same.
- Family theorists employ circular rather than linear reasoning when analyzing problem behavior.

The therapeutic process, which usually involves the whole family, involves changing family behaviors so that problematic individual behaviors can change.

- Family systems theories provide insight into how problem behaviors are influenced by the contexts in which they occur, rather than only by issues within an individual.