

Psychology as a science

Extra material

Psychological Theories

Psychologist formulate theories to in order to explain psychological phenomena:

- *Summarize, simplify and explain* psychological phenomena like memory, emotion and group behaviour
- *Make predictions* about the possible relationships between psychological phenomena and/or variables like learning strategy – test results, emotional state – accuracy of memories and group identity – behaviour
- *Enable application* to real-life issues e.g. educational instructions, therapy to overcome disturbing emotions and group-therapy programmes

Psychological theory is *statement about possible relationships between psychological phenomena or variables*

- Psychological theories are based on certain *assumptions*
- Psychological theories include *concepts*

Psychological theories are

- *principles* and **not** *laws* like theories in physics
- *probable* and **not** *certain* like theories in physics
- always open to some degree of *probability* and *improbability*

Example of A Psychological Theory

Social identity theory aka SIT by Henry Tajfel and John Turner (1979)

- People define themselves by their group membership, and to achieve a positive definition of themselves, people favour their *ingroup* (the group where they belong) in relation to *outgroups* (the groups they do not belong)
 - Individuals exaggerate the virtues of their own group to boost their self-esteem that can lead to *ingroup favouritism*
 - Individuals see the outgroups easily as competitors and possibly even a threat that can lead to *intergroup discrimination*
- SIT in a nutshell: favouring the ingroup in the expense of the outgroup

Example of An Empirical Study in Psychology

Tajfel et al. (1971) – Minimal characteristics groups experiment

- **AIM:** To test the social identity theory (SIT); would schoolboys placed in random groups based on arbitrary task display *ingroup favouritism* and *intergroup discrimination*?
 - *Hypothesis:* Schoolboys placed in random groups based on arbitrary task display *ingroup favouritism* and *intergroup discrimination*. (This was the **precise and testable statement** of this study that predicted what happened to the psychological phenomena under research.)
- **PROCEDURE:** 48 schoolboys were arbitrarily categorized based on their artistic preferences. Participants were shown pictures of modern paintings by Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee. Kandinsky group and Klee group were formed. After random group formation, schoolboys were made to allocate rewards and penalties to other participants.

- **RESULTS:** When schoolboys were required to make an intergroup choice, they favoured their ingroup in relation to the outgroup (more rewards to the ingroup, more penalties for the outgroup). When schoolboys were required to make a choice between two members of the same group, they made decisions to maximize fairness (equal amount of rewards and penalties). Hypothesis was supported with empirical evidence.
- **CONCLUSION:** Intergroup discrimination can be created by merely being randomly assigned to a group. When we are aware that an outgroup exists, we will favour our ingroup and discriminate the outgroup.

Role of empirical studies in IB Psychology

IB Psychology emphasizes the importance of empirical evidence. Students of IB Psychology need to learn how psychological knowledge is formed through empirical studies and how this knowledge contributes to psychological concepts and theories. In addition to psychological vocabulary and most common theories in psychology, students of IB Psychology need to meticulously memorize dozens of studies in terms of their *aims*, *procedures* and *results* for the IB Psychology Final Exams. This laborious project results in excellent understanding of psychology as a science and superb critical thinking skills that can be applied to other sciences and everyday life as well.

The national syllabus of Finnish upper secondary school, to which pre-IB Psychology course is based on, focuses more on psychological content, concepts and theories and their application to real-life issues, examples and situations. Psychological research and empirical evidence are important in the national syllabus as well, but not nearly as pronounced as in the IB Psychology syllabus. Both educational programmes are equally good but are structured in a different way and serve a slightly different purpose.