**Theoretical Constructs**

A construct is an idea, concept, or abstraction, which has multiple referents that in psychology are known as measurable variables. A construct does not exist as a material entity. A construct is cast in a psychological theory. Note how theory provides a conceptual framework to study a particular topic.

Constructs are specified in a theory to describe, explain, and predict a wide range of empirical findings.

**Methods of Measurement (of Psychological Constructs)**

Variables represent the constructs under study. However no one variable can fully define a construct.

Measurement allows us to answer the question: Do hypothetical constructs reflect objective reality?

Look at the following problems in which behaviors are discussed in a vague manner. Try to imagine at least two possible ways to operationalize the behavior, setting the stage for more effective problem solving. Remember to address observable behavior, precision, and measurement where you can.

1. Jack and Ed are roommates. Jack is tidy and Ed is not. After coming home from a hard afternoon at the library, Jack finds the living room in its usual shambles; Ed’s clothes are strewn over the couch, floor, and tables. When Ed emerges from the messy kitchen, where is has been eating nachos next to a pile of dirty dishes, Jack explodes, “I can’t stand living this way!” He runs from the room. What are two ways we could operationalize the problem (“living this way”) to help the roommates get back on track?
2. Joe was having problems with his supervisor at work. Although he was doing his work on time and seemed to get along with everyone, the supervisor rarely gave him feedback of any kind. The supervisor seemed to look at him strangely at times. Sometimes Joe thought the supervisor might be talking about him and laughing behind his back. Joe asked for an appointment and then challenged the supervisor, “Why don’t you like me?” What are two ways we could operationalize Joe’s concerns to help him have a more productive relationship with his supervisor.

*Apply*

Next, come up with an operational definition of any concept within the field of psychological research that is interesting to you. Come up with **two different operational definitions** for your concept. Be prepared to share your definitions with the class so we can discuss how you decided to define and measure their psychological concept and what challenges you faced in writing a clear definition.