IB Psychology: Cognitive Processing 🡪 Schema Theory

Understanding ‘schema’; schema theory framework

Please make sure you have a subfolder started in your Cognitive folder – ‘Schema Theory’

Memory models are useful for testing against, but models don’t elaborate on processes that impact memory. **Schema theory** attempts to explain how we organize information about the world, events, people and ourselves. A ‘schema’ is a structure that enables us to organize information in memory. Simply, schemas help our world to be more predictable. Schema theory is a really testable, applicable idea that helps us understand:

* why memories can become distorted/conditions that allow for this
* how we organize information into different kinds of schemas

A main assumption behind schema theory is our experiences in the social world are not necessarily new. When we recall information from memory, schema theorists argue that it is determined/impacted/altered by previous knowledge. This means that what we know ‘now’ is only understood in terms of what we already know.

But, schema theory links also with reliability of memory, mainly because when schemas can be wrong/faulty/flawed/distorted – you can likely recall a time you have argued with someone about who is ‘right’ in recalling a memory. Whether we like it or not, our basic knowledge structures can be wrong, regardless of our confidence about them. Schemas can become distorted, or ‘wrong’, when settings are unexpected and when faulty activation is triggered.

**Early research**

Sir Frederick Bartlett worked on understanding schema at the time where behaviourists were at work explaining behavior in terms of the observable. In this regard, Bartlett (1932) was a pioneer in this field of understanding how information is organized mentally. His work is certainly dated, but it is important in its own way and certainly foundationally in the study of how we organize and recall our memories.



**Visit the course site 🡪 Paper 1 🡪 Cog 🡪 Schema Theory page. Download ‘Schema Reading’. Read p70-71. Define the following briefly:**

Script:

Self-schema:

Social schema:

Practice: write a short script for how to get to the Basel airport. Use only the lines provided.

*Leave classroom, turn right, head down stairs and exit building.* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* Identify a self-schema you hold.
* What is one social schema that YOU feel affects your thinking?

Outline of schema theory 🡪 read the bottom of p70 carefully. Create the briefest notes possible on the **5 basic functions** of schemas (what they do for us).

* Organize info
* Increase ..
* Generate ..
* Regulate ..
* Ensure ..

Read p71. ‘The effect of schemas on memory (Bartlett, 1932). This is an old study and not one that you will rely on heavily when talking about schema theory or reliability of memory. But, it is a hallmark study you should know about when studying this topic.

Take any notes you wish to.