

Constructs and Concepts in Literature and Civilization Research

The following scheme gives us an idea on the meaning of the moderating and mediating variables:



1- Measurable Constructs and Concepts

Measurement refers to careful, deliberate observations of the real world and is the essence of empirical research. While some constructs in social science research, such as a person's age, weight, or a firm's size, may be easy to measure, other constructs, such as creativity, prejudice, or alienation, may be considerably harder to measure.

1-1 Conceptualization

Conceptualization is the mental process by which fuzzy and imprecise constructs /concepts and their constituent components are defined in concrete and precise terms. For instance, we often use the word "prejudice" and the word conjures a certain image in our mind; however, we may struggle if we were asked to define exactly what the term meant. For instance, If women earn less than men for the same job, is that gender prejudice?

The conceptualization process is all the more important because of the imprecision, vagueness, and ambiguity of many social science constructs

One important decision in conceptualizing constructs is specifying whether they are unidimensional and multidimensional. Unidimensional constructs are those that are expected to have a single underlying dimension. These constructs can be measured using a single measure or test. Examples include simple constructs such as a person's weight, wind speed, and probably even complex constructs like self-esteem (if we conceptualize self-esteem as consisting of a single dimension, which of course, may be a unrealistic assumption). Multidimensional constructs consist of two or more underlying dimensions. For instance, if we conceptualize a person's academic aptitude as consisting of two dimensions – mathematical and verbal ability – then academic aptitude is a multidimensional construct.

1-2 Operationalization

Once a theoretical construct is defined, exactly how do we measure it? Operationalization refers to the process of developing **indicators** or items for measuring these constructs. For instance, if an unobservable theoretical construct such as socioeconomic status is defined as the level of family income, it can be operationalized using an indicator that asks respondents the question: what is your annual family income?

Given the high level of subjectivity and imprecision inherent in social science constructs, we tend to measure most of those constructs (except a few demographic constructs such as age, gender, education, and income) using multiple indicators. This process allows us to examine the closeness amongst these indicators as an assessment of their accuracy (reliability).

Indicators operate at the empirical level, in contrast to constructs, which are conceptualized at the theoretical level. The combination of indicators at the empirical level representing a given construct is called a variable.

In psychology, rating scales can be :**The Big Five Personality Dimensions.**

Openness to experience	Fantasy	Aesthetics	Feelings	Actions	Ideas	Values
Conscientiousness	Competence	Order	Dutifulness	Achievement /Striving	Self-discipline	Deliberation
Extroversion	Warmth	Gregariousness	Assertiveness	Activity	Excitement seeking	Positive emotions
Agreeableness	Trust	Straight-forwardness	Altruism	Compliance	Modesty	Tender mindedness
Neuroticism	Worry	Anger	Discouragement	Self-consciousness	Impulsivity	Vulnerability

We can see that a researcher can use properties like fantasy and feelings as indicators of an individual openness to experience.

An example of scales that can be used in political studies is the Binary scale: **Likert scale**, designed by Rensis Likert. Binary scales are nominal scales consisting of binary items that assume one of two possible values, such as yes or no, true or false, and so on. For example, a typical binary scale for the “political activism” construct may consist of the six binary items shown below. Each item in this scale is a binary item, and the total number of “yes” indicated by a respondent (a value from 0 to 6) can be used as an overall measure of that person’s political activism.

Have you ever written a letter to a public official	Yes	No
Have you ever signed a political petition	Yes	No
Have you ever donated money to a political cause	Yes	No
Have you ever donated money to a candidate running for public office	Yes	No
Have you ever written a political letter to the editor of a newspaper or magazine	Yes	No
Have you ever persuaded someone to change his/her voting plans	Yes	No

Thus, to conduct research in civilization and literature, we need to operationalize constructs and concepts

Exercise:

1-Read the following examples then try to extract the concepts and the construct in the above examples and Operationalize them.

- A discussion of a work's characters: are they realistic, symbolic, historically-based?
- A comparison/contrast of the choices different authors or characters make in a work
- A reading of a work based on an outside philosophical perspective (Ex. how would a Freudian read Hamlet?)
- A study of the sources or historical events that occasioned a particular work (Ex. comparing G.B. Shaw's Pygmalion with the original Greek myth of Pygmalion)
- An analysis of a specific image occurring in several works (Ex. the use of moon imagery in certain plays, poems, novels)
- A "deconstruction" of a particular work (Ex. unfolding an underlying racist worldview in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness)
- A reading from a political perspective (Ex. how would a Marxist read William Blake's "London"?)

- A study of the social, political, or economic context in which a work was written — how does the context influence the work?
- Cold War US culture, foreign policy; involvement in Vietnam
- Conservative movements in US History, 1934-2005
- Conservatism and US Foreign Policy, 1934-2004
- Arab Spring: Causes and Outcomes.
- British Imperialism and Immigration to UK after 1945.