

Theory and Causal Variables

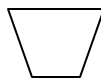
Students often misunderstand what the purpose of a theory is in social science. A theory is simply a tool that scholars use to make sense of a complicated world.

The world is full of things that need to be explained, but the world is also full of possible causes for the things we want to explain. It all becomes very confusing, which is why social scientists use theory to help identify potential causes for phenomena.

In the social sciences we believe that we can identify the key causes to an outcome, such as war, and once we have explained one war we can create a theory of war to use to understand other wars.

Because we are looking for *key causes* we are prioritizing some causes over others—basically we are looking for the causes that, if you were to remove them, would stop the weird thing you want to explain from happening.

Which of these misshapen *Word art* shapes made the weird thing happen?



**Weird thing
I want to
understand!**

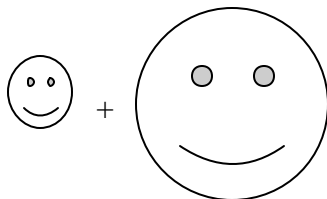
In the universe above, which of the misshapen *Word art* shapes caused the weird thing to happen? Their sheer number is overwhelming! A theory will help us! Let's use your best friend's bad relationship as an example.

Your best friend and her boyfriend have a horrible relationship. They are both great people so it's difficult to understand why. There are many possibilities—she works a lot; he has a stressful art career; she loves heavy metal and he loves Peter Gabriel; etc, etc.

Incompatible Head Size Theory helps us solve this problem.

Weird thing I want to understand = best friend's horrible relationship

Theory tells us the cause of bad relationships = different head sizes



causes

**Bad
relationships**