**Building and Testing Theory**

Let’s take a closer look at how theories are developed, refined, and tested.

Since there is no single theory of communication, there is no single view of the foundation of theory. However, there are four basic building blocks of theories, meaning each theory defines itself by taking a position in each of these four areas of: Views on Human Nature, Ways of Knowing, The Purpose of Theory, and, The Focus of Theorizing. Those building blocks are explained in more detail below:

*Views on Human Nature*: Each theory is based on an assumption about human nature. This is the most basic assumption that a theorist makes and concerns whether the theorist assumes that humans have, or don’t have free will. This building block is concerned with Ontology.

* Determinism: Assumes that human behaviour is governed by forces beyond individual control: usually by biology or the environment.
* Free Will: The belief that humans have free will and that they make choices about how to act.

*Ways of Knowing:* This is an assumption that the theorist makes about how we know what we know. Do we ‘discover truth,’ or, do we ‘create meaning.’ This building block is concerned with Epistemology.

* Discovering Truth: The belief that there is a singular truth, that objectivism exists.
* Creating Meaning: The belief that there is no objective truth.

*The Purpose of Theory:* Why does the theory exist? This building block is concerned with whether the purpose of theory is it to generate universal laws, or to articulate rules and identify patterns.

* Universal Laws: The belief that there are universal laws of human behaviour.
* Situated Rules: The belief that there are no laws that explain human communication across all time and circumstances.

*The Focus of Theorizing:* This concerns the focus, or content of the theory. This building block is concerned with the theorist’s stance on the issue of focus.

* Behavioural Focus: A focus on observable behaviours that assumes meanings, motives, and other subjective phenomena either don’t exist, or are irrelevant.
* Meanings: The belief that the crux of human activity is meaning, not behaviours themselves.

When it comes to testing theories, one first needs a hypothesis, or research question. Then, one can choose to undertake either a qualitative or quantitative analysis (or a mix methods approach). Additionally, one can take a critical analysis approach to research which aims to make a real difference in the lives of human beings.

We’ll look at how we test theories more closely in the next activities.

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**Watch Kitchen Stories**

View the film *Kitchen Stories*.

Hamer, B., Bergmark, J., & Hairier, B. (2003). Kitchen Stories [Motion picture]. *Norway/Sweden: BOB Film Sweden AB*.

You can access a copy of this film using the [Criterion on Demand Web site](https://ezproxy.tru.ca/login?url=https://media3.criterionpic.com/display/006/wwk770?kw=*&md=781&submit=1) (once on web site: click title, play button will be at bottom of next screen)

While viewing the film, use the four basic building blocks of theories to describe the beliefs that the researcher holds at the start of the film and how those blocks change throughout the film. Use the table below ([Microsoft Word format](https://moodle.tru.ca/pluginfile.php/691243/mod_label/intro/CMNS%201161_Activity%202.7.docx)) to complete your answers:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Building Blocks | Theory at the Start of the Film | Theory at the End of the Film |
| Views on human nature |   |   |
| Ways of knowing |   |   |
| The purpose of theory |   |   |
| The focus of theorizing |   |   |