OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Defining terms

Whenever we have to investigate some aspect of behavior that is vague or may have multiple meanings, we may want to define such terms or concepts in ways that are precise, measurable, and concrete. Such definitions are called operational definitions. Below are some hypotheses that are being researched. Identify which terms in each hypothesis should be operationally defined, and then give an example of how each of these terms might be defined so that the hypotheses can be more clearly tested.

a. Memory improves with regular exercise.

b. Proper nutrition aids alertness in the classroom.

c. People who are talking on car phones do not drive safely.

d. Frustration causes aggression

e. Lack of sleep impairs ones judgment.

f. People in love perceive each other more positively than others perceive them.

g. Participating in team sports builds character.

h. Anxiety interferes with logical thinking.

i. Loving parents produce children who grow up to be honest adults.

j. Smoking on the part of mothers produces more hyperactive children.

k. Tall people are likely to be extroverts.

l. Religious people are friendlier than non-religious people.

Answers: All ambiguous terms need to be specified as observable, measurable, or clear concepts; e.g., "Memory" in (a.) becomes "scores on a 20 item recall test of memory", and "regular exercise" becomes " at least 30 minutes of aerobic activity five or more times per week".