

Evaluating psychology using the scientific method

You are learning how to...	In the context of...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critically evaluate psychological theories • Assess the extent to which psychology is scientific 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Psychodynamic theories of offending

What is science?

In the context of the debate about whether psychology (or any approach to psychology) is scientific, science can mean several things. It is possible to distinguish between science as a **type of knowledge** and science as a **method for obtaining knowledge**. If you wish to use an approach's scientific status as a way of evaluating it, you need to distinguish between these two aspects.

As a type of knowledge, scientific theories must...

- Be based on empirical evidence
- Be logically constructed and internally consistent
- Be capable of being proven wrong, so they can be modified as the evidence dictates

As a method for obtaining knowledge, scientific research must...

- Test hypotheses derived from theory
- Be empirical (i.e. gathered through the senses)
- Be objective (i.e. researchers must agree on what they have observed) and unbiased
- Use rigorous, repeatable methods
- Be conducted in a systematic way
- Be open to public scrutiny of methods and data

Evaluating psychodynamic theories

Students often evaluate psychodynamic theories very sloppily. Frequently they make statements like 'there is no evidence for Freud's theories' or 'psychodynamic theories are unscientific'. This is poor evaluation in the first case because it's simply not true and in the second place because without any further elaboration this is an unsubstantiated and rather sweeping statement. When evaluating any theory:

- Explain the nature of your criticism.
- Don't make sweeping statements, especially if they aren't true.
- Play the ball, not the man.

Write an evaluation of the psychodynamic approach to offending, using the criteria above. Make sure that each of your points is fully explained and elaborated.