Chapter 1:
Human Inquiry and Science
How Do We Know What is True About the Social World?

1. Direct experience
2. Authority
3. Direct, personal inquiry
4. Tradition
These Approaches Problematic

1. Inaccurate or Selective Observation
2. Overgeneralization
3. Illogical Reasoning
Methodology

• The science of finding out

• To combat problems
  – Use a research design
  – Observe carefully & deliberately
  – Decide on number to sample beforehand
  – Present & discuss w/ colleagues
Theory, not Philosophy or Belief

• Social scientific theory investigates what is, not what ought to be

• Cannot settle debates on values
  – Example: Is Christianity better than Islam?
  – Capitalism better than Socialism
  – Must decide on the criteria – what are the measures?
Social Regularities

• Sociologists seek to find regularities in social life
• Represent probabilistic patterns
• Aggregates, Not Individuals
  – Social patterns, collective actions, not persons
• Social scientific theories explain systems in which people operate
Variables & Attributes

• Variables – logical groupings of attributes
• Attributes – characteristics or qualities that describe an object
  – Examples of attributes: woman, young, teacher
  – Corresponding variables: gender, age, occupation
• Theories describe the relationships we expect among variables; idea of causation
  – Example: education (high or low) predisposes a person to prejudice (high or low)
Independent & Dependent Variables

• Example of education and prejudice

• Independent variable is presumed to cause or determine a dependent variable

• Note: any given variable might be treated as independent in one part of an analysis and dependent in another part of it
Variations in Social Research: Idiographic and Nomothetic

- Idiographic = exploring the complexities of one case; from “id”

- Nomothetic = exploring a class of situations, rather than one event
Variations in Social Research: Inductive and Deductive theory

• Inductive
  – From the particular to the general
  – From observations to discovery of a pattern

• Deductive
  – From the general to the particular
  – Posits the pattern and tests it
Variations in Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Data

• Numerical and nonnumerical data

• Quantitative
  – Aggregating and summarizing easier
  – Statistical analysis easier

• Qualitative
  – Richness of data
  – Idiographic explanations

• Both have advantages & disadvantages
Agency vs. Determinism

• Or Agency versus Structure
• Or Free Will versus Determinism
• Or Cause & Effect versus Personal Choice