

# 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