

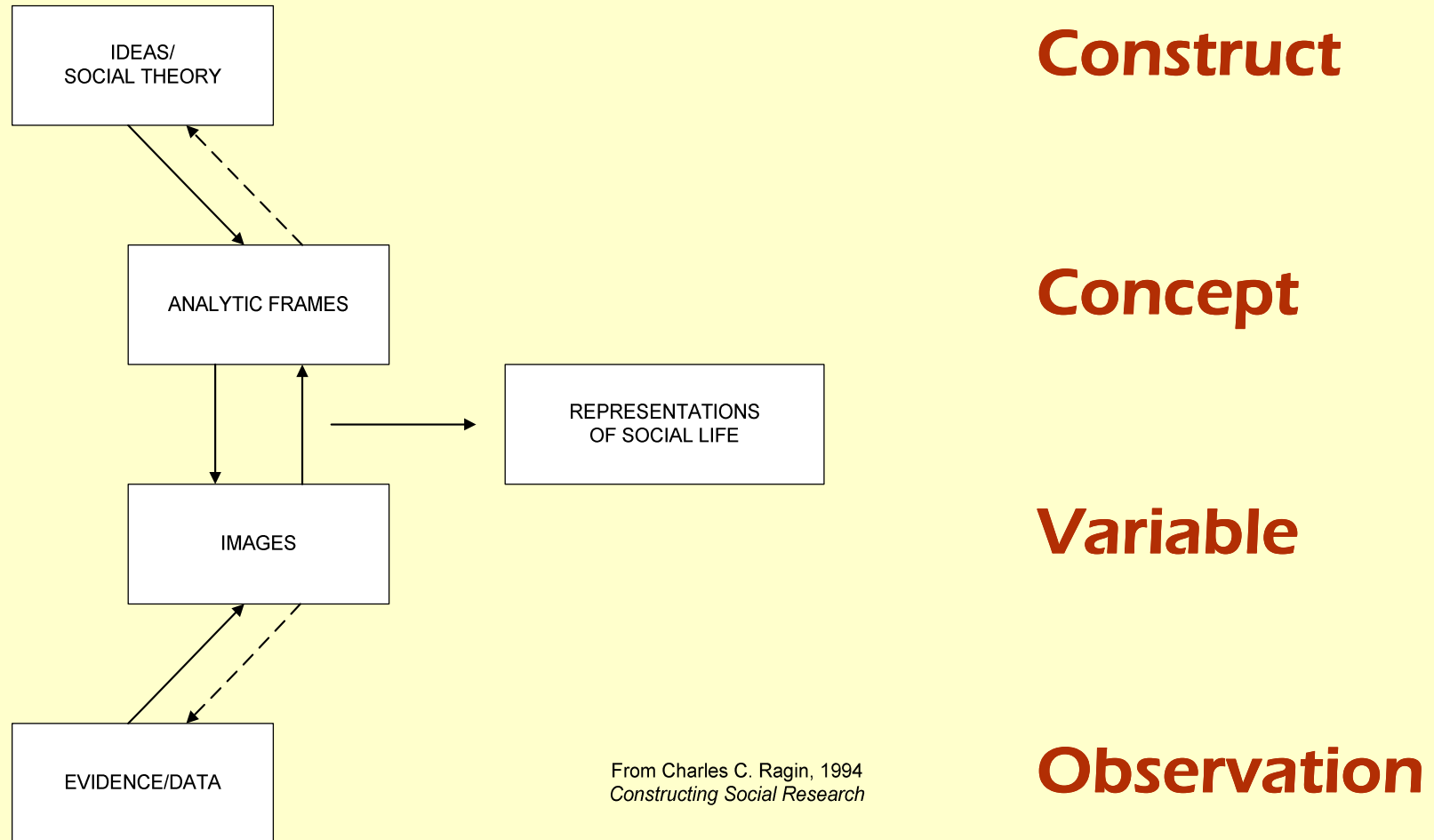
# **Research in Social Problems**

**SOCIOLOGY 403: SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

**HOW**  
**can we study**  
**Social Problems?**

**SOCIOLOGY 403: SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

# Theory and Data



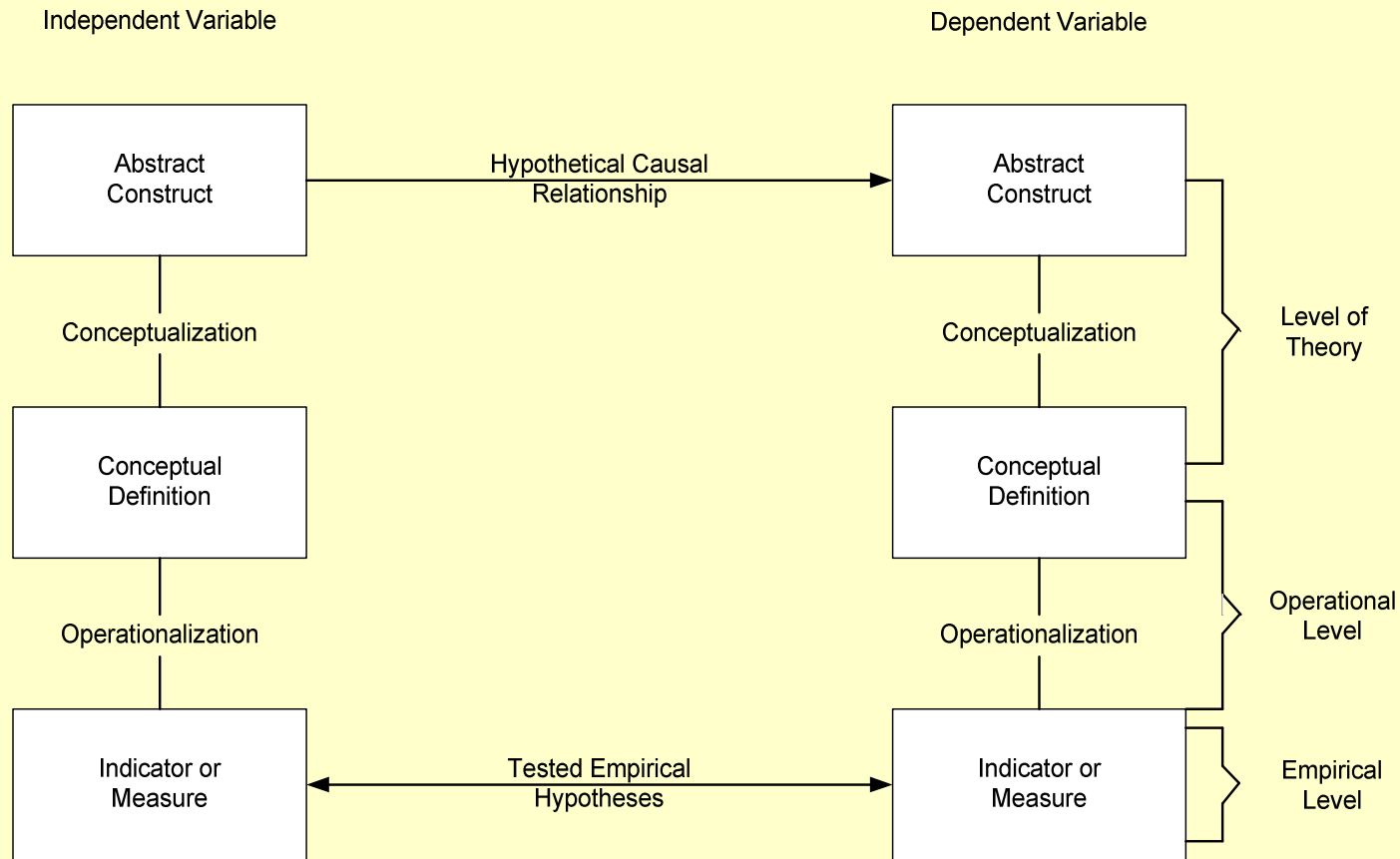
# **The Measurement Process**

**How do we link theory and data?**

**Conceptualization = defining the meaning of a construct**

**Operationalization = specifying a way to measure a concept**

# Conceptualization and Operationalization



From: Neuman, W.L., (2004)

# **Collecting Data**

## **Surveys**

- **Convert ideas, attitudes, perceptions and behavior into numbers**
- **Performed using face-to-face/telephone interviews or mailed/internet questionnaires**
- **Sampling (choosing subjects) must be done carefully to ensure that responses from the sample represent the population**

# Collecting Data

## Participant Observation

- Directly watching and recording activities of a particular group
- Researcher may be *participant* in group
- Multidimensional – researcher examines many aspects of group behavior
- Ethnography is a common way of doing observational research

# Collecting Data

## Secondary Sources and Documents

- *Non-reactive* measures
- Existing statistics, e.g. Census data
- Documents, photos, videos,  
e.g. content analysis
- Other artifacts, e.g. garbage, professional papers



# Collecting Data

## Experiments

- Draws conclusions about social behavior based on group comparisons
  - *Control vs. treatment* groups
  - Variables measured pre- and post-treatment
  - Classic experiments are uncommon in sociology; however, some sociologists try to recreate the logic of experiments in the field

# Comparing Research Designs

| Method             | Examples  | Advantages   | Limitations  |
|--------------------|---|--|--|
| Survey             | Questionnaires;<br>Interviews   | Yields information about specific issues                           | Can be expensive and time-consuming  |
| Observation        | Ethnography   | Yields detailed information about specific groups or organizations | Involves months if not years of labor-intensive data gathering                   |
| Experiment         | Deliberate manipulation of people's social behavior                       | Yields direct measures of people's behavior                        | Ethical limitations on the degree to which subjects' behavior can be manipulated |
| Secondary Analysis | Analysis of census or health data;<br>Analysis of films or TV commercials | Cost-efficiency  | Limited to data collected for some other purpose                                 |

Source: Schaefer, p. 41

# **The Measurement Process**

**How do we know a measure is trustworthy?**

**Two Criteria:**

**Reliability = consistency, dependability,  
repeatability**

**Validity = accuracy in measurement,  
truthfulness in representing the construct  
you defined**

# **Criminal Justice as a Social Problem**

**Which is a bigger problem,**

**CRIME?**

**or**

**CRIMINAL JUSTICE?**