THEORY IN
SOCIAL SCIENCE
RESEARCH
THEORY

What is a theory?

What role does theory play in research?

What are the elements of a good theory?

What is meant by explanation?
THEORY

“A theory is a system of interconnected abstractions or ideas that condenses and organizes knowledge about the social world. It is a compact way to think of the social world.”

-Neuman, p. 24
Discussion Points

- Concept
- Variable
- Deductive Process
- Causal Theory
- Inductive Process
- Grounded Theory
Measurement in the Abstract

Construct

Concept

Variable

Observation

From Charles C. Ragin, 1994
Constructing Social Research
Discussion Points

- Concept
- Variable
- Deductive Process
- Causal Theory
- Inductive Process
- Grounded Theory
Measurement in the Abstract

IDEAS/SOCIAL THEORY

ANALYTIC FRAMES

IMAGES

REPRESENTATIONS OF SOCIAL LIFE

EVIDENCE/DATA

Construct

Concept

Variable

Observation

From Charles C. Ragin, 1994
Constructing Social Research
Discussion Points

- Deductive Process
- Causal Theory
- Inductive Process
- Grounded Theory
Modeling Theory

Figure 1: Tinto’s (1975) Theoretical Model of College Withdrawal

Linear Model

\[ y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \ldots + \beta_k x_k + \varepsilon_i; \]

where:

- \( y \) = dependent variable
- \( x \) = independent (predictor) variables
- \( \beta \) = regression coefficient
- \( k \) = total no. of independent variables
- \( \varepsilon_i \) = residual error term
Methodological Frameworks in the Social Sciences

- Positivism
- Interpretivism
- Critical Theory
Unifying Tendencies in Methods

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<tr>
<th><strong>Positivists</strong></th>
<th><strong>Interpretivists</strong></th>
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<td>(1) Think deductively</td>
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<td>(2) Use causal theory</td>
<td>(2) Use grounded theory</td>
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<td>(3) Use quantitative data</td>
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