Theory and Research

Theory functions three ways in research:

1. Theories prevent our being taken in by flukes.
2. Theories make sense of observed patterns in ways that can suggest other possibilities.
3. Theories can direct research efforts, pointing toward likely discoveries through empirical observation.
Question

Which of the following do theories seek to provide?

A. personal experience
B. discovery
C. correlations
D. logical explanations
Answer: D

- Theories seek to provide logical explanations.
Paradigms

- A model or framework for observation and understanding, which shapes both what we see and how we understand it.
- The conflict paradigm causes us to see social behavior one way, the interactionist paradigm causes us to see it differently.
- We can see new ways of seeing and explaining things when we step outside our paradigm.
Social Science Paradigms: Macrotheory

- **Macrotheory** deals with large, aggregate entities of society or whole societies.
  - Struggle between economic classes, international relations
Social Science Paradigms: Microtheory

- Microtheory deals with issues at the level of individuals and small groups.
  - Dating behavior, jury deliberations, student faculty interactions
Social Science Paradigms: Social Darwinism

- Comte’s view that science would replace religion and metaphysics by basing knowledge on observations.
- Comte coined *positivism*, in contrast to what he regarded as negative elements in the Enlightenment.
Social Science Paradigms: Conflict

- Marx suggested social behavior could be seen as the process of conflict:
  - Attempt to dominate others.
  - Attempt to avoid domination.
Social Science Paradigms: Symbolic Interactionism

- Interactions revolve around individuals reaching understanding through language and other systems.
- Can lend insights into the nature of interactions in ordinary social life.
Social Science Paradigms: Ethnomethodology

- People are continuously trying to make sense of the life they experience.
- One technique is to break the rules and violate people’s expectations.
Social Science Paradigms: Structural Functionalism

- A social entity, such as an organization, can be viewed as an organism.
- A social system is made up of parts, each of which contributes to the functioning of the whole.
- This view looks for the “functions” served by the various components of society.
Social Science Paradigms: Feminism

- Focuses on gender differences and how they relate to the rest of social organization.
- Draws attention to the oppression of women in many societies, and sheds light on all kinds of oppression.
Question

- ____________ are fundamental frames of reference.
  A. perspectives
  B. theories
  C. paradigms
  D. methods
Answer: C

- **Paradigms** are fundamental frames of reference.
Question

- ________________ can lend insights into the nature of interactions in ordinary social life.
  A. symbolic interactionism
  B. conflict theory
  C. structural functionalism
  D. feminist theory
  E. none of these choices
Answer: A

- **Symbolic interactionism** can lend insights into the nature of interactions in ordinary social life.
In the mid-1970s, civil rights activists and social scientists began the codification of a paradigm based on a commitment to racial justice.

The concept of interest convergence suggests that laws will only be changed to benefit African Americans if those changes further the interests of whites.
Asch Experiment

- Purpose was to see whether subjects were swayed by pressure to go along with an incorrect answer.
- Initial experiments, found that a little over 1/3 of subjects were.
Elements of Social Theory

- **Theories** are systematic sets of interrelated statements intended to explain some aspect of social life.
- A paradigm offers a way of looking, a theory aims at explaining what we see.
- In social research, **observation** refers to seeing, hearing, and—less commonly—touching.
Elements of Social Theory

- Social scientists use **fact** to refer to a phenomenon that has been observed.
- Scientists organize many facts under “rules” called **laws**.
- A **variable** is a special kind of concept.
- **Axioms** or **postulates** are assertions, taken to be true, on which a theory is grounded.
Elements of Social Theory

- **Propositions** are specific conclusions, derived from the axiomatic groundwork, about the relationships among concepts.

- A **hypothesis** is a specified testable expectation about empirical reality that follows from a more general proposition.

- **Research** is designed to test hypotheses.
Question

- __________ is/are systematic sets of interrelated statements intended to explain some aspect of social life.
  
  A. answers
  B. knowledge
  C. practicality
  D. theories
  E. truth
Answer: D

- **Theories** are systematic sets of interrelated statements intended to explain some aspect of social life.
There are three main elements in the traditional model of science:

- **Theory**
- **Operationalization** - Developing operational definitions, or specifying the exact operations involved in measuring a variable.
- **Observation** - Looking at the world and making measurements of what is seen.
Operational Definition

- The concrete and specific definition of something in terms of the operations by which observations are to be categorized.
The Traditional Image of Science

- The deductive model of scientific inquiry begins with a sometimes vague or general question, which is subjected to a process of specification, resulting in hypotheses that can be tested through empirical observations.
Null Hypothesis

- In connection with hypothesis testing and tests of statistical significance, that hypothesis that suggests there is no relationship among the variables under study.
- You may conclude that the variables are related after having statistically rejected the null hypothesis.
1. Deductive Method

a. Hypothesis

b. Observations

c. Accept or reject hypothesis?

2. Inductive Method

a. Observations

b. Finding a pattern

c. Tentative conclusion
Linking Social Scientific Theory and Research

1. Deduction - Deriving expectations or hypotheses from theories.
2. Induction - Developing generalizations from specific observations.
Deductive Theory Construction

1. Pick a topic.
2. Specify a range: Will your theory apply to all of human social life, only certain ages?
3. Identify major concerns and variables.
4. Find out what is known about the relationships among the variables.
5. Reason from those propositions to the topic you are interested in.
Inductive Theory Construction

- social scientists construct a theory through the inductive method by observing aspects of social life and seeking to discover patterns that point to relatively universal principles.
- Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) used the term *grounded theory* for this method.
- Field research, direct observation of events in progress, is frequently used to develop theories through observation.