Some socially constructed categories

✓ Colors (number of colors in languages varies from 2-12)
✓ Animals: food, pets, endangered, vermin
✓ Time: weeks, linear, cyclical, clock time, time as commodity
✓ Races: white, black, Asian, American Indian, etc.
✓ Sexes: man, woman, etc.
✓ Moral/legal/medical labels: Criminal, sinner, mentally ill; juvenile delinquent, super predator; gifted, sexual predator,
✓ Social problems (e.g., domestic violence, stalking, sexual harassment, acquaintance rape)
The nature of social research

- There are many ways of knowing about the world
- Personal experience and common sense knowledge enable us to get things done in everyday life
- Personal experience and common sense knowledge cannot be reliably generalized
- Social research is empirical & probabilistic
  - Empirical research: research that operates from the ideological position that questions about human behavior can be answered only through controlled, systematic observations of the real world (p. 82)
  - Probabilistic: capable of identifying only those forces that have a high likelihood, but not a certainty, of influencing human action (p. 82)

Sociologist considers own behavior indicative of larger trends (from *The Onion*)

Boston—According to the findings of a paper published Monday in *The American Journal of Sociology*, the behaviors and experiences of Boston sociologist Dr. Steven Piers are indicative of a host of wider societal trends.

“My observations indicate that the typical married American man has had increasing difficulty relating to his spouse over the last two and a half years, ever since she starting taking those yoga classes,” wrote Piers, 56, in his *Interpersonal Connections Within The Marriage Paradigm: A Study in Causality*.

In the paper, Piers asserted that the most pressing issue for American men is maintaining healthy sexual relations with their wives.

“Back in 1999, American men’s frustration derived mostly from the infrequency of sex,” the paper read. “Recently, however, that trend has shifted as husbands report a decreasing interest in intimacy, particularly if there is a Celtics game or a new *NYPD Blue* on TV. While many men cite increased job responsibilities and stress as possible catalysts, many more blame the affair their wives had with some textile salesman during a training conference in Seattle.”