The Social Construction of Reality/
The Art of Social Research

Feb. 1, 2008
http://www.public.iastate.edu/~soc.134

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)

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/medical labels: Criminal, sinner, mentally ill; juvenile delinquent, super predator; gifted, sexual predator,
- Social problems (e.g., domestic violence, stalking, sexual harassment, acquaintance rape)

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 been increasing difficulty relating to the opposite sex. In the last two years," Piers wrote in his Interpersonal Connections Within The Marriage Paradigm: A Study in Casuality, "the traditional American man's role of the head of the household has been increasingly threatened by the growing presence of the woman."

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

"This is not new. American men's frustration derived mainly 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 on or a new NYPD Blue on TV. While many men cite increased job responsibilities and stress as possible catalysts, many more blame the effort their wives had with some textile salesman during a training conference in Seattle."