"I'm a social scientist, Michael. That means I can't explain electricity or anything like that, but if you ever want to know about people I'm your man."
Social Science vs. Everyday Reasoning

• 1. **Wide (Imprecise) Concepts**

• 2. **Overgeneralization**
  – Availability
    • Which is more dangerous to fly or to drive?
    • Which is the bigger health problem in the world: AIDS or malaria?
      Are the homeless more likely to be mentally ill or just people down on their luck?

• 3. **Selective and Inaccurate Observation**

• A. **Selectivity**
  • Sensitivity due to desires
  • Sensitivity to due to awareness
Social Science vs. Everyday Reasoning

• Yes, everyone is Hungarian!
A Simple Model for Illustration of Judgment Error

B. Inaccuracy
Inaccurate observation based on error in judgment

- A typical trait can be a bad indicator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom</th>
<th>Homeless</th>
<th>Not Homeless</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substance Abuse</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Substance Abuse</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Simple Model for Illustration of Judgment Error

A non-typical trait can be a good indicator
SA=Substance Abuse PTSD=Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom</th>
<th>Homeless</th>
<th>Not Homeless</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA &amp; PTSD</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Either or both SA &amp; PTSD absent</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social Science vs. Everyday Reasoning (cont.)

4. *Illogical Reasoning*

1. What is more likely:
   - 1. That your sociology professor becomes homeless in the future?
   - 2. That one day, your sociology professor is caught selling grades. He is promptly fired. To cope with shame and failure develops a serious drinking problem. His wife files for divorce, he must move out and becomes homeless.
   
     *Scenario thinking*

2. You go to all the shelters and find that most people there are long-term homeless and only very few are short-term homeless.
   - All homeless are in shelters.
   - Therefore, most homeless are homeless for an extended period of time.
A Simple Model

- Suppose there are 100 people in a shelter.
  - 95 are there for 365 days (95%)
  - 5 are there for a single day (5%)

Each and every day

In a year there will be
95 long-term homeless in that shelter
and 365*5=1825

Every year, 95% of the homeless are short term homeless (1825/1920=.95)
and 5% are long-term (95/1920=.05).
Experiment

• Here are three numbers:
  • 2, 4, 6

• The game:
• The three numbers were generated by a rule.
• You can guess at the rule by submitting three number sequences and I will tell you if they conform to the rule by simply saying ‘yes’ or ‘no.’
• Once you are certain you know the rule raise your hand.
Confirmation bias

Looking for only confirmatory evidence.

5. **Resistance to Change**

Reasons:

- Ego

"I know that most men, including those at ease with problems of the greatest complexity, can seldom accept the simplest and most obvious truth if it be such as would oblige them to admit the falsity of conclusions which they have proudly taught to others, and which they have woven, thread by thread, into the fabrics of their life". Leo Tolstoy

But also other social reasons:

- Tradition
- Authority
- Need for Meaning or Why Proving a Theory Wrong is Rarely Sufficient to Get People to Change Their Minds
The Tasks of Social Research

1. Systematically Observing Social Phenomenon
2. Discovering Social Regularities
3. Building Social Theories
4. Testing Social theories
Types of Social Research

1. **Descriptive research.**
   - Researchers define what they are studying and describe the social phenomena of interest.
   - Dominates
     - Systematically observing and discovering social regularities
   - Martha Burt's study:
     - Families with children 18.1%
       - Of which children 12.2%
     - Married parents 0.8%
     - Single parents 5.1
     - Childless groups 8.1%
       - Of which married couples 2.2%
     - Alone 73.8%
Types of Social Research

2. *Exploratory research.*
   - Researchers seek to find out how people get along in the setting(s) under question, what meanings they give to their actions, and what issues concern them.
   - Dominates building theories, measuring, observing regularities,
   - David A. Snow and Leon Anderson, Down on their Luck
   - A sample of 800 tracked for a 2 year period in Austin Texas and 168 were intensively observed and interviewed
   - They observe different subgroups:
     - recently dislocated
     - straddlers (in between homelessness and the domiciled)
     - outsiders (long-term homeless)
     - the mentally ill
   - How they cope and keep their dignity
     - Distancing
     - Embracement
     - Fictive story telling
Types of Social Research

3. **Explanatory research.**
   - Researchers focus on the causes and/or effects of a phenomenon.
   - E.g.: Christopher Jencks' The Homeless
   - Dominates
   - Testing theories, measuring, observing regularities

A. **Evaluation research.**
   - Researchers give special attention to the impact of particular policies or programs. A version of explanatory research
   - Dominates
   - Testing theories, measuring, observing regularities, but with a practical (policy) aim. What to do.
Some theories/causal explanations of homelessness:

- Deinstitutionalization and ending involuntary commitment
- Crack epidemic of the 1980s
- The destruction of Skid Row (Single Room Occupancy) housing
- Increase in long-term joblessness
- Government program cuts (putting 5 year limit on welfare)
- Healthcare becoming less affordable
- Domestic Violence Awareness
- Increased number of shelters!!
- Increase in divorce rates and the disintegration of family and friendship networks
What is Good Theory Like?

1. Logical
2. Deterministic
3. General
4. Specific
5. Parsimonious
6. Empirically Falsifiable
7. Intersubjective
8. Open to Modification
Validity

1. Measurement validity
   - Do we measure right?

2. Generalizability
   - Sample generalizability --- sample $\rightarrow$ population
   - Cross population generalizability --- population $\rightarrow$ population

3. Causal validity
   - Is the causal explanation valid?