**Introduction to the Social Sciences**

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| * The social sciences are a broad field of study that uses research and analysis to explain human behaviour.
* Human behaviour is anything that humans do that is observable and measureable (i.e. what humans say, do, think, buy, avoid, support, demonstrate against, etc.)
* Disciplines: economics, political science, family studies, anthropology, psychology, sociology, etc.
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 True or False?

Examine the statements listed below. Which statements do you think are true and which do you think are false? How do you think your opinion compares with that of your friends and family members?

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| Statements | True ✓ | False ✓ |
| 1. Men have always been dominant over women.
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| 1. Violent crime is on the rise in Canada.
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| 1. In terms of close personal relationships, opposites attract.
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| 1. Primitive societies have very little technology.
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| 1. Poverty is decreasing in Canada.
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| 1. Children of divorced parents tend to have more problems in school.
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| 1. Homeless people want to be on the street.
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| 1. Capital punishment deters murderers.
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| 9. Young people from working-class backgrounds are more likely to commit crimes than those from middle-class backgrounds.  |  |  |

The Social Science Perspective

Actually, every one of the statements is false.

This may be surprising to you, but that is what social scientists mean when they say that most of what you hear about human behaviour is just not true. Research in the different social sciences has proven that all of the “common sense” ideas listed above are simply not true. Just because you may have had a personal experience in which one or more of these statements were true, is not enough to make them universally true. For example, you might know a street person who chooses to be homeless, or you might read an interview about such a person in the newspaper, but study after study shows that the large majority of homeless persons would rather be living in safe, clean housing.

Social science attempts to prove, using the scientific method whether an opinion is reasonable or not.

Testing Our Intuition

Intuition is believing something to be true because a person’s emotions and logic support it. Intuition is not proof of fact. The work of social scientists is to prove or disprove what we believe to be true.

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| According to your intuition, would introducing the death penalty into a society decrease the murder rate? |

Scientific Method

Social science attempts to prove, using the scientific method whether an opinion is reasonable or not.

Throughout this course, we will use a social science lens to explore and challenge the myths we have encountered in society, in our circle of friends and in our families. The social scientific way of seeing the world will offer us new perspectives on things we thought we knew – it will give us insights into the world around us and will make us question many of the things and ideas we have taken for granted.

Anthropology, Psychology, Sociology

Anthropology

* The study of human origins and cultures
* Physical anthropologists: study and infer patterns (create theories) from fragments of physical evidence (i.e. bones, tools, charcoal). By digging up bones and artifacts, they can get a rough idea of what humans looked like and the tools they used thousands of years ago.
* Cultural anthropologists: study past and present day cultures, they are interested in the whole society and how a culture operates within society

Psychology

* The study of the mind and behavior to discover patterns in the human personality (how humans think, act and feel)
* Psychology is the profession (clinical psychology), scholarly discipline (academic psychology), and science (research psychology) concerned with the behavior of humans and animals, and related mental and physiologic processes.
* It requires a background in science to determine how the brain is ‘wired’ chemically (i.e. looking at chemical imbalances that cause mental illness)

Sociology

* Sociology, broadly, is the study of society
* It examines behaviour between humans and the social structures (i.e. groups and communities), social categories (age, sex, class, race, etc.), and social institutions (politics, religion, education, etc.) humans have developed

The Social Sciences

Pretend🡪 The headline “Girl Missing After Grad” is splashed across the front page of the morning newspaper. A student has gone missing after the local high school’s graduation dance. The police know very little about what happened and most of the article is guesswork about the incident. Was the young woman kidnapped from a late-night party? Did she run away from home? The article also lists the disappearances of other teens, which may or may not be related to this case.

There is much more behind this story than what we see in the newspaper. In fact, the police need knowledge from the social sciences to solve this case. Knowledge from the study of anthropology gives police department’s background information about different cultures and the significance of human behaviour over time. The forensic investigation of crime scenes closely parallels the work of anthropologists.

Police officers’ training often involves the work of sociologists when the police look at issues such as race relations and violence against women. This type of information might be included in a training manual or given in workshops for all new recruits.

An understanding of psychology is a part of all police work. The police department might even have a psychologist on staff to help with tasks such as determining the personality profile of a possible criminal.

Whether connected to law enforcement or not, social scientists read articles like the one about the missing girl differently than most people do. They see other information between the lines. What might their thoughts be when reading such an article?

A Social Scientist’s Questions

Anthropology is the study of the lives and cultures of human beings alive or dead. An anthropologist examining this case might wonder about the teen culture and the larger culture of which this woman is a part. As well, the anthropologist would consider the graduation dance or “formal” tradition at the girl’s high school.

An anthropologist might ask questions like:

* What are the cultural factors that may have contributed to this woman’s disappearance? (i.e. cultural norms in treatment of males and females)
* What experiences of violence were there among the teen group in her town and among her friends?
* Are there any relevant cultural factors in her background that need to be addressed?

Sociology is the study of human social life, groups and societies. A sociologist looking at this case might wonder about the social conditions of the young woman, her family and the school where the formal was held.

Some of the questions a sociologist might ask might include:

* Have there been any recent incidents of stalking or assault in the area?
* Did the school have a safety policy for dances, and was it being followed?
* What was her economic background? Could she afford to attend the formal?
* Were there any factors, such as her cultural background, religion, sexual orientation, or economic status that might have seriously affected her relationship with other students?

Psychology is the study of behaviour and mental processes. A psychologist might wonder about the personal lives of the young woman and the people around her. The questions that interest the psychologist are the questions the police ask as they try to uncover the exact circumstances surrounding a person’s disappearance and the mental and physical state the person was last seen in.

The questions might include:

* Was she suicidal at any time in her past?
* Is there a history of family or partner abuse?
* Was she on any medication?
* Was she in a close relationship? Was it positive or negative?
* Does she have any close friends who could be interviewed?
* Has she ever run away?

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| Brampton TeenExercise1. As a social scientist, what questions would you ask about this case?
2. What social issues were involved in the case that needs to be addressed?
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