

# Investigating the Social World

Week 3: In Search for Rigour

## Lecture 3: Finding Rigour



# Wrapping up the loose ends

- ▶ Varieties of "theory" in social research: They contrast each other but also (logically and intellectually) related to each other
  - Theory as paradigm and approach (Geddes 2003)
  - Theory for interpretation, explanation and emancipation (Cornelissen et al 2021)
  - Theory as propositions, generalization, vocabulary and critique (Martin 2015)
  - **Last week:** Theory of ways to seeing, explaining and envisioning
- ▶ Key takeaway messages and tasks: "Cultural competence" for social researchers
  - Explain your analytical decisions as a researcher (and yet no need to be apologetic)
  - Recognize and appreciate the (theoretical) contribution of others
  - Search for the common ground for fruitful collaborations; avoid dogmatic feud and hunger game

## Critical Race Theory: A Brief History

How a complicated and expansive academic theory developed during the 1980s has become a hot-button political issue 40 years later.

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Thousands gathered in Washington on Aug. 28, 2020, to commemorate the historic March on Washington and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech on that date in 1963. Jason Andrew for The New York Times

<https://www.nytimes.com/article/what-is-critical-race-theory.html>

# CRT as a way of seeing



Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw (Columbia and UCLA)

CRT is **a way of seeing**, attending to, accounting for, tracing and analyzing **the ways** that race is produced, **the ways** that racial inequality is facilitated, and **the ways** that our history has created these inequalities that now can be almost effortlessly reproduced unless we attend to the existence of these inequalities.

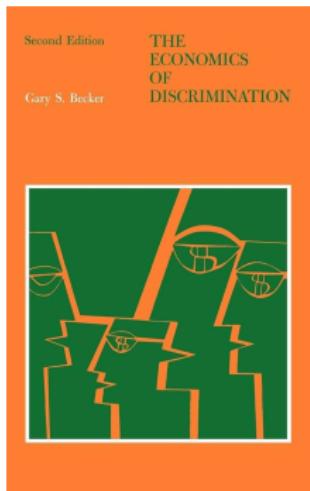
## CRT as a way of envisioning



Dr OiYan Poon (CAF Co-Lab)

"The founders of CRT critiqued liberal ideologies, and that they called on research scholars to seek out and understand the roots of why racial disparities are so persistent, and **to systematically dismantle racism.**"

# “The statistical theory of racism and sexism”



- ▶ **Statistical discrimination:** Based on stereotypes that occur when decision makers use aggregate group characteristics to evaluate performance
- ▶ **Taste-based discrimination:** Based on prior established prejudice or dislike (and thus triggering avoidance)

## Going back to business: Where we are now

- ▶ Recap: To **produce valid knowledge claims** (cool, but how?)

## Going back to business: Where we are now

- ▶ Recap: To **produce valid knowledge claims** (cool, but how?)
- ▶ Last week: "**Theory comes to rescue**" (!)
- ▶ Coming weeks: "**Empirics comes to rescue**" (!?)
  - How do social researchers use theory and data in their work?
  - Why should we use numbers to understand the social world?
  - How can we put our research in a broader theoretical and social contexts?

What makes your research “rigorous?”

# What makes your research “rigorous?”



Hi Claude! Could you please use a few words to explain what makes a social sciences research "rigorous?"

A rigorous social sciences research project systematically applies appropriate methodological frameworks, maintains transparent documentation of data collection and analysis procedures, acknowledges potential biases and limitations, and draws conclusions that are properly scoped to what the evidence can support. The research should be replicable by other scholars using the same methods and data.

Would you be interested in discussing specific methodological approaches that contribute to research rigor in social data science and quantitative political research?

Copy Retry



Claude can make mistakes. Please double-check responses.

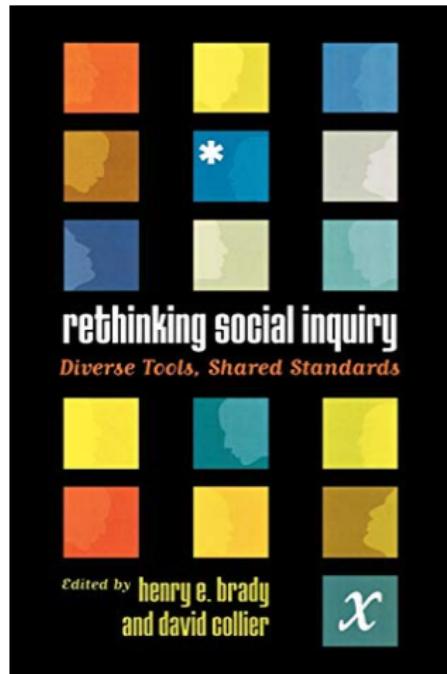
Model in use: Claude 3.5 Sonnet

Gary King / Robert O. Keohane / Sidney Verba

# Designing Social Inquiry



Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research



- ▶ Why we should pay attention to empirics
- ▶ How theory and empirics can be aligned
- ▶ Epistemology, methodology and theory-empirics alignment (next week)

# Why empirics: Trade-off of theory-building

## ► Theory as a way of seeing

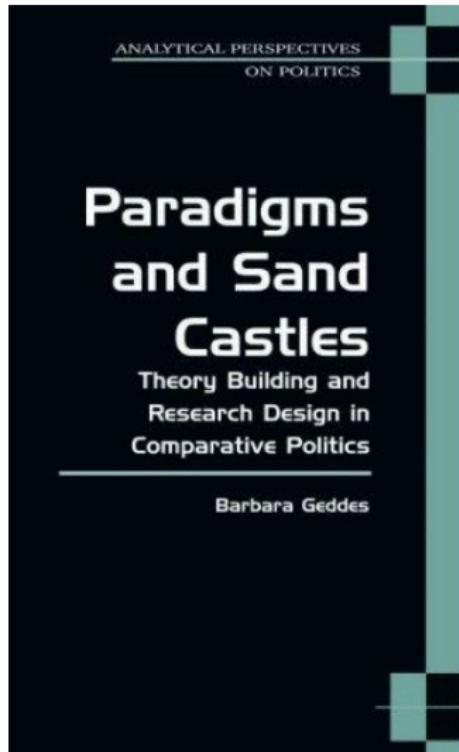
- Pros: Generate ideas and concepts to reveal nuances of the social world
- Cons: "Everyone is right" – a collection of opinions and (analytical) perspectives?

## ► Theory as a way of explaining

- Pros: Lay out a specific and parsimonious process and mechanisms through which the social world "works"
- Cons: "Everyone loses" – domination and loss of complexities

What do you think? Do you have a preference here?

# Why empirics: The “sandcastle” pitfall



“ ‘My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!’  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”

from Percy Bysshe Shelley,  
“Ozymandias”

# How theory aligns with empirics

- ▶ Induction: Seeking possibilities
- ▶ Deduction: Seeking confirmation
- ▶ Abduction: Seeking improvement (enrichment)

► **Induction:** Seeking possibilities

- Producing broad claims based on our observations showing systematic patterns
- Using (non-exhaustive) observations to inform theory-building possibilities
- Prone to any unfair or unwarranted rejections with only an (or a few) "exception" or "outlier"

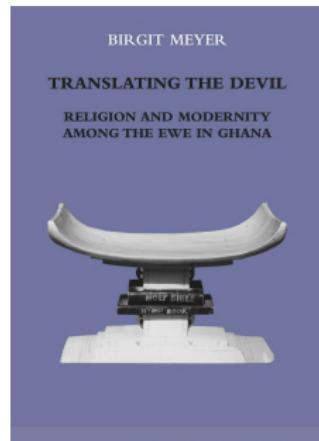
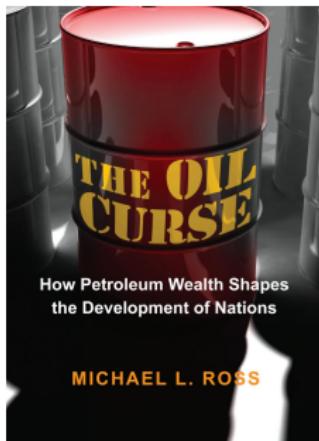
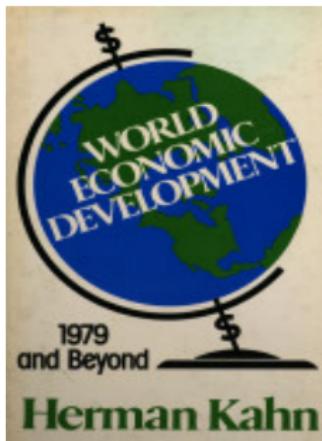
► Deduction: Seeking confirmation

► Abduction: Seeking improvement

- ▶ Induction: Seeking possibilities
- ▶ **Deduction:** Seeking confirmation
  - Evaluating theoretical claims by using data to "test" the hypotheses based from these claims
  - Ideal if attempting to adjudicate competing theoretical claims; often in line with positivism
  - Rejecting hypotheses does not necessarily rule out the theory (but it does reduce our faith in the theory, however)
- ▶ Abduction: Seeking improvement

- ▶ Induction: Seeking possibilities
- ▶ Deduction: Seeking confirmation
- ▶ **Abduction:** Seeking improvement
  - Starting by (surprisingly) finding that a hypothesis does NOT work well and may trigger the need for new data and interpretations/explanations
  - Can be seen as a sequential integration of deductive-inductive processes
  - Common for the task of theoretical refinement (or improvement)

# Examples: Three tales of “culture” and development



- ▶ Research question?
- ▶ Theoretical claims or arguments?
- ▶ Empirical strategy (and epistemology)?
- ▶ Contribution and significance?

# Induction: “World Economic Development” (Khan 1979)

- ▶ **Research question:** Why did NICs in East Asia achieve high economic growth rates between the 1950s and 1990s?
- ▶ **Theoretical claims or arguments:** These countries were economically successful because of their "Asian values"
- ▶ **Empirical strategy:** (Descriptive) case studies mostly
- ▶ **Significance and contribution**
  - No longer popular (or accepted) due to the lack of empirical support and conceptual setbacks (circular and essentialist)
  - Critically reflecting on the relationship between culture and development for explanatory purpose

## Deduction: “The Oil Curse” (Ross 2012)

- ▶ **Research question:** Why are women in the Middle East politically marginalized?
- ▶ **Theoretical claims or arguments:** Petroleum perpetuates patriarchy because oil creates a specific industrial structure that reduces women's participation in the labor market
- ▶ **Empirical strategy:** (Inferential) multiple regression to test the following hypotheses:
  - A rise in the value of oil production will reduce female participation in the labor force
  - A rise in the value of oil production will reduce female political influence
- ▶ **Significance and contribution:** Pushing us to think away from only using Islam as the explanation

## Abduction: “Translating the Devil” (Meyer 1999)

- ▶ **Research question:** How have Christian beliefs been accepted by local people in former European colonies in Africa?
- ▶ **Theoretical claims or arguments:** Locals "appropriated" Christian beliefs and transformed Peki Ewe through the (re)imagination of the notion of devil
- ▶ **Empirical strategy:** Using archival research (in Germany and the UK) and ethnography (in Ghana) were employed to document various lived experiences as an outsider from Europe
- ▶ **Significant and contribution:** Enrich Weber's theoretical framework by considering a more complicated, nuanced process of religious conversion with the focus on the agency of local communities

## Concluding remarks

- ▶ Alignment between theory-empirics provide the source of rigor in social research
- ▶ Bolster (the credibility of) theory through the establishment theory-empirics alignment and *high-quality* evidence
  - Why is it a good idea to use "numbers" to study the social world (even if you do not know quants)?
  - Why is causality important? Is causality always a must?
  - How can we generalize our insights beyond a case?
- ▶ Bring epistemology into the discussion: **How rigid are these epistemology-methodology links?**
  - **Positivism:** Theory as explanation; quantitative
  - **Constructivism** Theory as interpretation; qualitative

## Discussion: Two worlds of development studies (really?)

- ▶ Do you agree with the binary distinction between positivism and constructivism?
- ▶ Does your research fall into one of these epistemological stances? How do you define your epistemological stance?
- ▶ Do you agree with the alignment between epistemological positions and the choice of methods?
- ▶ Is such alignment always the case? Can we be somewhere in between? How do we know when a research work is rigorous?



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## World Development

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/worlddev](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/worlddev)



# What does it mean to be poor? Investigating the qualitative-quantitative divide in Mozambique



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### ABSTRACT

Motivated by the siloed nature of much poverty research, as well as the challenge of finding inclusive operational definitions of poverty, this study reflects on the merits of seeking to reconcile economic (quantitative) and anthropological (qualitative) analytical approaches. Drawing on detailed evidence from Mozambique, we highlight fundamental philosophical tensions in poverty research along three main axes: social ontology (what is the form of social reality?); (b) epistemology (what can be known about poverty?); and (c) aetiology (how is poverty produced?). We argue the quantitative tradition is rooted in an atomistic view of the social world, which is allied to an etic epistemology in which causes and effects are treated as analytically separable. Anthropological work in Mozambique is anchored in an emic perspective, where the diverse forms of poverty are revealed through investigation of their generative mechanisms. This provides a view of poverty as a relational process of social marginalization and directs attention to the diversity of lived-experiences, as well as structural factors that limit individuals' agency. In clarifying their distinct philosophical commitments, we contend that a forced empirical marriage of the two approaches may be unhelpful. Instead, we recommend the virtues of each approach are leveraged toward genuine mutual dialogue.

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	Economics	Politics	Sociology	Social Anthropology
What is reality?	One reality exists; reality is <i>independent</i> of our thoughts; what is observable is real	One reality exists. reality is <i>independent</i> of our thoughts	One reality exists; reality is <i>independent</i> of our thoughts, but much of reality is unobservable	There are <i>different</i> realities associated with different standpoints and cultures
Goal of enquiry?	Acquisition of a <i>single</i> truth -- a universal, general law	We can establish truths or <i>generalizations</i> about human beings	Truth needs to be understood in terms of <i>practical adequacy</i>	<i>Interpretation</i> of local meanings; there is <i>no universal truth</i>
How are the researcher (you) and the "researched" related?	The researcher is <i>objective</i> and is <i>independent</i> of the "researched"	The researcher is <i>subjective</i> and is <i>not independent</i> of the "researched"	The researcher is <i>subjective</i> and is <i>not independent</i> of the "researched"	The researcher is <i>subjective</i> and is <i>not independent</i> of the "researched"



Thank you!



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