

The 3 Approaches in SS

PSS, ISS, CSS



Recap

- 1) Is there only one way to do research in SS? Is this the same in Math and NS?
- 2) What is the difference in aim of the 3 different approaches?
- 3) What is the difference in their views on ontology, i.e. in their belief about social reality?
- 4) What are some of the research methods that are associated with each approach?
- 5) Must researchers use only one approach in their research?
- 6) Must topics be studied from only one approach?
- 7) How does their ontology affect their epistemology?
- 8) What are some common criticisms for each approach?
- 9) What are some common features across all 3 approaches?



Examples – which approach?

Collective Trauma at Buffalo Creek (Kai Erikson, Sociology / Psychology)

- *Thesis:*
- Once integrated into a network of communality, individuals can no longer relate to one another as separate entities; community takes over the individual permanently. Thus, while disasters generally cause trauma, when the individual loses his community to a collective disaster, the psychological/social damage involved is more severe and permanent.
- *Evidence raised:*
- Different means of data collection used on different survivors, over different time-points. These included personal interviews, letters to attorneys, psychiatric evaluations and mail questionnaires. Sources analyzed to understand survivors' pre- and post-disaster emotions, general attitudes towards life, fellow survivors and their community.
- Accounts from similar time-points interpreted collectively, compared with accounts from other time-points.



Examples – which approach?

Obedience to Authority (Stanley Milgram, Psychology)

- *Thesis:*
- “Ordinary people, without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process. Moreover, even when the destructive effects of their work become patently clear, and they are asked to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of morality, relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority.”
- Evidence raised:
- In 1961, Milgram carried out this experiment and obtained the following result:
- "Teachers" (people being studied) were given a list of word pairs which he was to teach the learner. If the “learner” (a paid actor) was not able to learn correctly, he would receive a shock administered by the “teacher”, with the voltage increasing with each wrong answer. The “teachers” were led to believe that for each wrong answer, the learner was receiving actual shocks. In reality, there were no shocks.
- 65 percent (26 out of 40) of experimental participants administered the experiment's final 450-volt shock, though many were quite uncomfortable in doing so; everyone paused at some point and questioned the experiment, some even saying they would return the check for the money they were paid. No participant steadfastly refused to give further shocks before the 300-volt level.

Examples – which approach?

Conflict Theory in The Communist Manifesto (Karl Marx, Sociology)

- *Thesis:* Society functions so that each individual participant and its groups struggle to maximize their benefits, which inevitably contributes to social change such as changes in politics and revolutions. In Marx's case, he used this theory to explain conflict between social classes, proletarian versus bourgeoisie, and to call for a revolution to overthrow the bourgeoisie.
- *Evidence raised:* Marx raised examples to support the following claims:
- The class struggle under capitalism is between those who own the means of production, the ruling class (bourgeoisie), and those who labor for a wage, the working class (proletariat). Though the bourgeoisie has played a progressive role in destroying feudalism, it has also brought about the conditions for its own impending downfall by creating a contradiction within capitalism between the forces of production and the relations of production.
- It is not true that people will not perform labor in a communist society because they have no incentive to work.
- Capitalism has its faults.
- These policies should be implemented to bring about a stateless and classless society: abolition of both land ownership and of the right to inheritance, a progressive income tax, universal education, centralisation of the means of communication and transport under state management, and the expansion of the means of production owned by the state.



Examples – which approach?

Social Epidemics / The Tipping Point (Malcolm Gladwell, Sociology / History)

- *Thesis:*
- Ideas, products, behavior (and any mechanism of change in society) spread just like viruses do. When a trend “takes off” and shows a dramatic increase in popularity (an “epidemic”), the “one dramatic moment in an epidemic when everything can change all at once is the Tipping Point”.
- *Evidence raised:*
- Supports his argument by providing many examples to defend these assertions that suggest virus-like patterns of growth:
- The law of the few: Just like viruses, the number of people who ‘get the ball rolling’ are few (the 80/20 principles). These include: Connectors, Mavens and Salesmen.
- The stickiness factor: like viruses, ideas that are persistently sticky will do well and grow to the point that they will catch on. Sticky ideas are those that are attention-grabbing, memorable, etc.
- The power of context: like viruses, ideas are very much dependent on the environmental context in which transmission occurs. Some situations will cause an idea to really thrive, while others will impede the idea.



Examples – which approach?

Freakonomics (Stephen Levitt, Economics)

- *Thesis:* It is the increase in abortion after 1973 that led to the decreased crime in the United States in the 1990s.
- *Evidence raised:*
- *Timing:*
- 1. Roe v. Wade legalized abortion in 1973 (in five states it had ready been legalized by 1970);
- 2. Crime rates began declining nationally in 1991, 18 years after Roe (earlier in the five states that had legalized abortion prior to 1973).
- *Socio-economic reality of abortion-seekers:*
- 1. Women most likely to get an abortion are more likely to give birth to boys who go on to become criminals;
- 2. There was an average of 1.6 million abortions per year by 1980 – this would have brought about a significant decrease in number of criminals.
- Strong economy, increased use of capital punishment innovative policing strategies, tougher gun control laws, and aging of the population did not bring about lower crime rates.
- What did bring about lower crime rates: increased reliance on prisons (accounts for 30% drop in crime), increased number of police (accounts for 10% drop), changes in illegal drug markets (accounts for 15% drop) and the **legalization of abortion** (accounts for remaining drop).



Examples – which approach?

- The Color of Class on the Copper Mines (Michael Burawoy, Sociology)
- *Thesis*: The organization of production and the labor hierarchy on the factory floor parallels the broader economy as well as the political power structure. In the Anglo American Mining Corporation in Zambia, whites were consistently promoted over black Zambian managers because of the influence of white expatriate supervisors in Post-colonial South Africa.
- *Evidence raised*:
 - Burawoy took on a position at the Anglo American Mining Corporation in Zambia where he covertly researched the breaking points of race and class. Using the extended case method, he amassed data through sustained participant-observation to suggest that although on the surface, it appeared that the post-colonial administration in Zambia was bringing about agrarian reforms to help poor black miners, South Africa's influences prevented the advancement of blacks in Zambia.
 - South Africa's hegemonic status in the region frames the regional workplace and impels the uneven processes that workers respond to and challenge. The expectations of workers about post-Apartheid South Africa and its promises are underpinned by capitalism's historical geography in the region. Concentrations of material wealth and institutional power reside in South Africa, the site from (and through) which capital flows. Transnational corporations headquartered in South Africa were conduits for unequal regional development that benefited South Africa and the colonial metropole.

Examples – which approach?

- Epidemics of Accusations (Michael Shermer, History)
- *Thesis*: “Witch crazes” and mass accusations are fuelled by positive feedback loops involving many contributing factors. The phenomenon self-organizes, reaches criticality, switches to a negative feedback loop, and collapses.
- *Evidence raised*:
 - Theological explanations (that witches really did exist) of the medieval witch hunts are not valid as belief in witches existed for many centuries prior.
 - Various other studies suggest that the witch hunts occurred due to scapegoating, decline in magic and rise of large-scale organized religions, suppression of midwives and adolescents high on illusionary substances.
 - Other examples of manic accusations such as “Satanic Panic” and “Recovered Memory movement” were seen to have a similar cycle of rise and decline as the medieval witch hunts.
 - Cycles begin with rumors and accusations. The more people believe in them, the more accusations are made, and the more the society lives in fear of such ‘evil-doers’. Eventually everyone becomes suspicious of one-another and starts realizing that it is not possible that everyone be guilty. Skeptics overthrow accusers with counterevidence, which is now more believable as people come to the realization. Accusers become the accused, the craze declines and life returns to normal.



Examples – which approach?

- Cognitive Dissonance (Leon Festinger, Psychology)
- *Thesis*: Contradicting cognitions serve as a driving force that compels the mind to act to reduce the dissonance created. Given two contradictory cognitions, the individual can reduce the dissonance through changing or adding cognitions, or altering their importance.
- *Evidence raised*: In 1959, Festinger carried out this experiment and concluded with the following finding:
- 71 male psychology students were split into three groups. All three groups were made to perform boring and tedious tasks for an hour. On the completion of the tasks, the three groups were given different treatment. Two groups were told to introduce the activity they had just gone through as fun and interesting to another person. The conversation was recorded. The subjects were then paid \$1 or \$20. The control group did not go through this stage. At the end of the experiment, all subjects were interviewed.
- It was discovered that subjects in the \$1 and \$20 groups rated the activity more highly than the control group. Of the two groups, the \$1 group rated the activity more favourably. Festinger explained that introducing the activity favourably to another person created dissonance in the subjects, who then change their opinion towards the activity to reduce this dissonance. Between the \$1 and \$20 groups, the more money received by the latter resulted in less dissonance, thus the change in opinion is less.

Which approach?

- Brene Brown on Vulnerability (Ted Talk)
- Questions to keep in mind while watching:
- Is there a hypothesis? What is it?
- What methodology does she use?
- What approach does she belong to?



Dubious & Embryonic

Draft of an IS (DED)

On Brene Brown on Vulnerability



To what extent can her claims be considered to be knowledge?

- Focus: examining her methodology
- Criteria: objective vs subjective, absolutely certain vs reasonably certain, eternal vs temporary, falsifiability & scientific, theories of justification (Foundationalism, Coherentism, Reliabilism)
 - + NOTE: DON'T DO ALL
- Methodology: Mix of Quantitative vs Qualitative
 - + Qualitative – focus group discussions, interviews; looking at variables/indicators that are non-quantifiable like feelings
 - + Quantitative – stats on addiction, medication, obesity; looking out for patterns in the data, arriving at rules/covering laws



Is her methodology justified?

- Empiricist thus can be said to be foundationalist, but also open to all the attacks on the empiricist
- Coheres with existing scientific understanding of physiology and psychology (?) – but also thus open to attacks on coherentists
- Able to tell us what to do (go and be wholehearted and start believing that you're enough) – but also open to attacks on reliabilists



Objective vs Subjective

- Less objective than fields like Economics which measure tangible variables like GDP; feelings aren't measurable in the same way
- Mitigated by 1000s of interviews and focus group discussions – law of large numbers
- But is her methodology inherently theory laden such that she asks questions and records them down in language that already presupposes her theory? (for example, prompting people with questions like, “How does that make you feel? Vulnerable?”)



Falsifiability & Scientific

- Falsifiability as a criterion for a claim to be scientific – if it is not possible to falsify the claim, then it is not scientific
- Doesn't seem obviously falsifiable
- Can always just say that you're not being vulnerable enough (if the falsifying result is that you've tried to be vulnerable and believe you're enough but that doesn't make you happier)
- But is this enough to render her claims not to be knowledge?
- Seems to equate knowledge to scientific claims
- But are knowledge claims only limited to scientific claims?

