Literature Review

Department of Government
London School of Economics and Political Science

1 Scientific "Literatures"

1 Scientific "Literatures"

What is a literature?

- Definition: A accumulated body of written work that collectively constitutes knowledge in a specific field of study.
    - Basically: *what we know and don't know*
    - In philosophy, sometimes "the canon"

What is a literature?

- Definition: A accumulated body of written work that collectively constitutes knowledge in a specific field of study.
  - Basically: *what we know and don't know*
  - In philosophy, sometimes "the canon"

- All research builds on "the literature"

What is a literature?

- Definition: A accumulated body of written work that collectively constitutes knowledge in a specific field of study.
    - Basically: *what we know and don't know*
    - In philosophy, sometimes "the canon"

- All research builds on "the literature"

- All research should contribute to "the literature"

What is a literature?

What is a literature?

- How do we decide what individual pieces of research fall within "the literature"?

What is a literature?

- How do we decide what individual pieces of research fall within "the literature"?

- Any literature is amorphous and ultimately individually and socially constructed

What is a literature?

- How do we decide what individual pieces of research fall within "the literature"?

- Any literature is amorphous and ultimately individually and socially constructed
  - "The literature" is what is relevant to your research

What is a literature?

- How do we decide what individual pieces of research fall within "the literature"?

- Any literature is amorphous and ultimately individually and socially constructed
  - "The literature" is what is relevant to your research
  - Others may disagree with your definition of what research is relevant versus irrelevant

Organizing Literature

There are a few broad ways that we might identify "a literature":

1. Research using shared concepts
2. Research using shared theory
3. Research using shared data sources
4. Research using shared methods of analysis
5. Research by the same author(s)/team(s)

I. Concepts

- Studies on a common concept, e.g.:
    - Trust
    - Negative advertising
    - Economic growth
    - Democratization
    - Justice
    - etc.

I. Concepts

- Studies on a common concept, e.g.:
    - Trust
    - Negative advertising
    - Economic growth
    - Democratization
    - Justice
    - etc.

- Individual studies may have little in common except for the concept at focus in the study

II. Theory

- Studies working from a given theoretical perspective, e.g.:
    - Rational choice
    - Marxism
    - Feminism

II. Theory

- Studies working from a given theoretical perspective, e.g.:
  - Rational choice
  - Marxism
  - Feminism
  - Epigenetics
  - Prospect theory
  - Theory of Planned Behaviour

II. Theory

- Studies working from a given theoretical perspective, e.g.:
  - Rational choice
  - Marxism
  - Feminism
  - Epigenetics
  - Prospect theory
  - Theory of Planned Behaviour

- Individual studies may have little in common except for the broad theory stance

III. Data

- Studies working with a particular type or source of data, e.g.:
    - Area Studies
        - British Politics
        - African Politics
    - The 2015 British Election Study
    - The Comparative Manifesto Dataset

III. Data

- Studies working with a particular type or source of data, e.g.:
  - Area Studies
    - British Politics
    - African Politics
  - The 2015 British Election Study
  - The Comparative Manifesto Dataset

- Individual studies may have little *substantively* in common

IV. Methods

- Studies working with particular methods, e.g.:
  - Ethnography
  - Text analysis
  - Experimentation
  - Elite interviewing
  - Surveys

IV. Methods

- Studies working with particular methods, e.g.:
  - Ethnography
  - Text analysis
  - Experimentation
  - Elite interviewing
  - Surveys

- Individual studies may have little in common except empirics
  - Often norms or "best practices" in the application of particular methods, regardless of research context

V. Authors

- Studies conducted by a given author or network of authors, e.g.:

V. Authors

- Studies conducted by a given author or network of authors, e.g.:
    - Kahneman and Tversky

V. Authors

- Studies conducted by a given author or network of authors, e.g.:
  - Kahneman and Tversky
  - Mansbridge

V. Authors

- Studies conducted by a given author or network of authors, e.g.:
  - Kahneman and Tversky
  - Mansbridge
  - LIGO collaboration

V. Authors

- Studies conducted by a given author or network of authors, e.g.:
  - Kahneman and Tversky
  - Mansbridge
  - LIGO collaboration
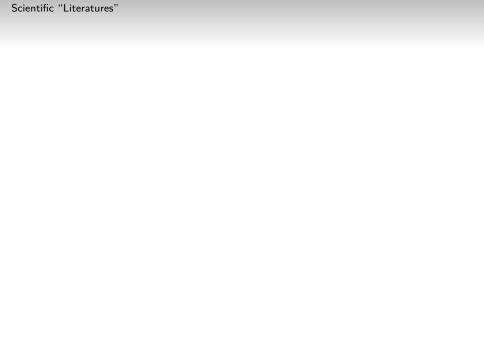 - The Sidanius Lab

V. Authors

- Studies conducted by a given author or network of authors, e.g.:
    - Kahneman and Tversky
    - Mansbridge
    - LIGO collaboration
    - The Sidanius Lab
    - "The Michigan School"

V. Authors

- Studies conducted by a given author or network of authors, e.g.:
    - Kahneman and Tversky
    - Mansbridge
    - LIGO collaboration
    - The Sidanius Lab
    - "The Michigan School"

- Often an author or team will produce multiple works on a theme over time, using common concepts, theory, methods, and data

V. Authors

- Studies conducted by a given author or network of authors, e.g.:
    - Kahneman and Tversky
    - Mansbridge
    - LIGO collaboration
    - The Sidanius Lab
    - "The Michigan School"
- Often an author or team will produce multiple works on a theme over time, using common concepts, theory, methods, and data
- Rivalries!

Putting it all together

- Think of these organizing frameworks like a Venn Diagram, where each feature can overlap

- A literature is the subset of the complete diagram that is relevant to a particular piece of research

Finding Literature

Question: How do you find literature?

Finding Literature

- Library or Google Scholar search

- Talk to faculty members and peers

- Research syntheses

- Journals
  - Generalist
  - Subfield

- Citation networks

Citation Networks

- A citation network is the set of unidirectional connections formed by "co-citation" (i.e. one piece of research citing another piece of research)

Citation Networks

- A citation network is the set of unidirectional connections formed by "co-citation" (i.e. one piece of research citing another piece of research)

- Citations reflect:

Citation Networks

- A citation network is the set of unidirectional connections formed by "co-citation" (i.e. one piece of research citing another piece of research)

- Citations reflect:
    - Authors' positioning a piece of research within a literature

Citation Networks

- A citation network is the set of unidirectional connections formed by "co-citation" (i.e. one piece of research citing another piece of research)

- Citations reflect:
  - Authors' positioning a piece of research within a literature
  - "Positive" citation to research they wish to expand upon, elaborate, or praise

Citation Networks

- A citation network is the set of unidirectional connections formed by "co-citation" (i.e. one piece of research citing another piece of research)

- Citations reflect:
    - Authors' positioning a piece of research within a literature
    - "Positive" citation to research they wish to expand upon, elaborate, or praise
    - "Negative" citation to research they wish to criticize

Citation Networks

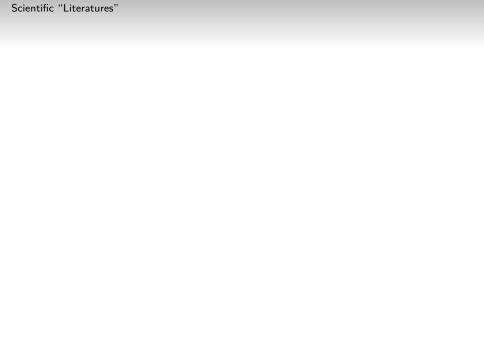Problems with using citation networks to understand a literature include:

Citation Networks

Problems with using citation networks to understand a literature include:

- Limited numbers of citations (can't cite everything!)

Citation Networks

Problems with using citation networks to understand a literature include:

- Limited numbers of citations (can't cite everything!)

- Positive/negative citation ambiguity
  - "Network centrality" only reflect volume of use, not quality

Citation Networks

Problems with using citation networks to understand a literature include:

- Limited numbers of citations (can't cite everything!)

- Positive/negative citation ambiguity
  - "Network centrality" only reflect volume of use, not quality

- Intentional omission of relevant research

Citation Networks

Problems with using citation networks to
understand a literature include:

- Limited numbers of citations (can't cite
  everything!)

- Positive/negative citation ambiguity
    - "Network centrality" only reflect volume
      of use, not quality

- Intentional omission of relevant research

- Self-citation

Citation Networks

Problems with using citation networks to understand a literature include:

- Limited numbers of citations (can't cite everything!)

- Positive/negative citation ambiguity

  - "Network centrality" only reflect volume of use, not quality

- Intentional omission of relevant research

- Self-citation

- *Forward* citation search can be difficult

Research Synthesis

- Definition: A research synthesis is a formal review of existing literature that accumulates evidence from multiple studies.

Research Synthesis

- Definition: A research synthesis is a formal review of existing literature that accumulates evidence from multiple studies.
    - *Qualitative* literature review
    - *Quantitative* literature review (meta-analysis)

Research Synthesis

- Definition: A research synthesis is a formal review of existing literature that accumulates evidence from multiple studies.
    - *Qualitative* literature review
    - *Quantitative* literature review (meta-analysis)

- Serves two functions:
    - Summary of existing knowledge
    - Identification of limitations or gaps

Qualitative Review

- A narrative summary of a body of research, organized around a concept, a theory, a method, a data source, or an author
  - Usually covers a specific period of time
  - May focus on studies from a particular context, or particular perspective

Qualitative Review

- A narrative summary of a body of research, organized around a concept, a theory, a method, a data source, or an author
  - Usually covers a specific period of time
  - May focus on studies from a particular context, or particular perspective
- Structure and content is flexible
  - May merely summarize
  - May be "critical"

Quantitative Review

- A numerical summary of a body of research, organized around a specific statistic of interest (e.g., a prevalence, a correlation, a causal effect)
    - Also called "meta-analysis"
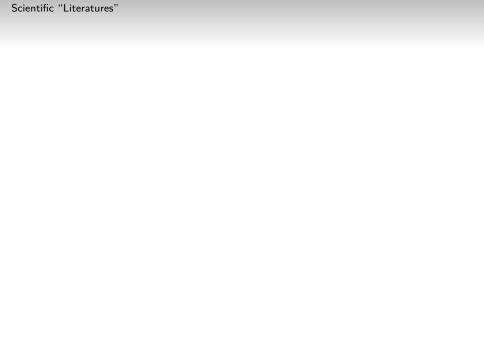
Quantitative Review

- A numerical summary of a body of research, organized around a specific statistic of interest (e.g., a prevalence, a correlation, a causal effect)
  - Also called "meta-analysis"

- Structure and content is not flexible

Quantitative Review

- A numerical summary of a body of research, organized around a specific statistic of interest (e.g., a prevalence, a correlation, a causal effect)
  - Also called "meta-analysis"

- Structure and content is not flexible

- Provides a specific inference with the intent to guide new research or inform policy

Quantitative Review

Structure is nearly always the same:

1. A body of existing studies is gathered using inclusion/exclusion criteria
2. Statistic of interest is derived for each study
3. Statistics are mathematically aggregated (by some form of weighted averaging)
4. Patterns are examined across between-study sources of variation
5. An overall estimate is produced
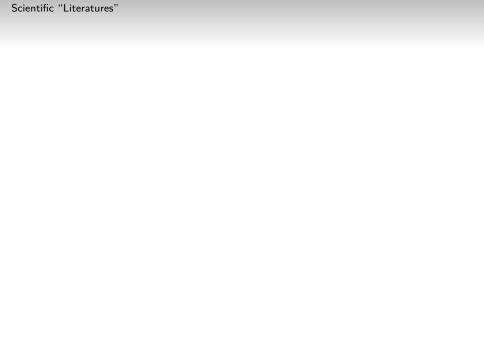
Qualitative versus Quantitative Synthesis

- Remember: All quantitative synthesis is also qualitative

- Solely qualitative synthesis will tend to be more holistic

- Solely quantitative synthesis will tend to provide less critical engagement with specific aspects of individual studies

- Quantitative synthesis typically makes evidence selection criteria more explicit

Evaluating Research

In groups of 3, try to generate a set of criteria that you can use to decide whether to believe a given piece of research.

You have 6 minutes.

Your Research

Your Research

1 All research should start from a literature

Your Research

1. All research should start from a literature
2. Identify which literature or literatures you want to address

Your Research

1. All research should start from a literature
2. Identify which literature or literatures you want to address
3. Develop a critical literature review of existing evidence
   - Identify ways you could contribute new knowledge

How does research add to a literature?

How does research add to a literature?

1. Answering unanswered questions

How does research add to a literature?

1. Answering unanswered questions

2. Applying theory to new cases

How does research add to a literature?

1. Answering unanswered questions

2. Applying theory to new cases

3. Elaborating more specific implications of theories

How does research add to a literature?

1. Answering unanswered questions

2. Applying theory to new cases

3. Elaborating more specific implications of theories

4. Developing new measures of concepts

How does research add to a literature?

1. Answering unanswered questions

2. Applying theory to new cases

3. Elaborating more specific implications of theories

4. Developing new measures of concepts

5. Developing new or better concept definitions

How does research add to a literature?

1. Answering unanswered questions

2. Applying theory to new cases

3. Elaborating more specific implications of theories

4. Developing new measures of concepts

5. Developing new or better concept definitions

6. New, improved, and/or alternative methodology

How does research add to a literature?

1. Answering unanswered questions

2. Applying theory to new cases

3. Elaborating more specific implications of theories

4. Developing new measures of concepts

5. Developing new or better concept definitions

6. New, improved, and/or alternative methodology

7. Studying alternative units of analysis

Your Research

1. All research should start from a literature
2. Identify which literature or literatures you want to address
3. Develop a critical literature review of existing evidence
   - Identify ways you could contribute new knowledge

Your Research

1. All research should start from a literature
2. Identify which literature or literatures you want to address
3. Develop a critical literature review of existing evidence
   - Identify ways you could contribute new knowledge
4. Develop theory and design empirical methods using and/or improving existing theory and methods
   - Focus on improving **one** thing

Questions?