SOCIOMETRY 350H1F:
NEW TOPICS IN SOCIOLOGY:
Analyzing and Interpreting Evidence in Sociology

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Fall, 2023

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Web Site: Quercus.
Time: Thursdays 1-4 pm.
T.A.s Rachel Meiorin (rachel.meiorin@mail.UTORONTO.CA)

Overview
A critical overview of the credibility of accepted empirical evidence in sociology, and requirements for more credible evidence. Topics include a series of research case histories, including race and gender inequality, the gender pay gap, the consequences of both marriage and divorce, the prevalence and patterns of emotional well-being, the specification of intersectionality in research, misinterpretation of older evidence, the resolution of conflicting evidence, and the historical decline in the role of evidence in shaping beliefs.

Enrolment Restrictions
This course is offered for Sociology majors and specialists only.

Description
In this course we consider the state of evidence in sociology, in academia, and in public discourse. The premise motivating this course is that the notion of evidence as guidance is in question, and that the competition for apparent truths makes choice of information especially difficult in the 21st century.

As opposed to courses that emphasize theory, this course focuses on evidence and what we accept as credible evidence. In the early stages, we will consider the tensions between experience, and beliefs, on the one hand, and research evidence on the other. A central question is why we accept certain findings and reject others. We will consider a number of case histories, as a way to raise fundamental questions about acceptable evidence – or even what constitutes evidence. Most of our examples involve conflicting findings, and why those conflicts exist. It is not enough in this course just to enumerate conflicting results and conclude findings are inconsistent: according to the perspective I take in this course, some findings are more credible than others, and should be weighted accordingly.

Case histories include research on the effects of maternal employment on children, the gender wage gap, earlier work on race and sex stratification, contrasting views of the prevalence of
suffering, including mental disorder, domestic violence, and sexual assault, the gender-specific
effects of marriage, the decline in education among males, the effects of divorce on children,
and the effect of working on women’s mental health. We also consider the misinterpretation of
theory in research articles, using intersectionality as an example, the logic of comparison groups
and generalizability, and historical forces that may contribute to the “decline of evidence”.

There are a number of reasons for taking this course, but one should be pointed out at the
outset: much of what we consider here may surprise you, or even contradict what you may feel
are accepted truths at this point. If you leave the class less certain of these truths, then I will
judge this class to be a success.

**Classes**

Each class is scheduled to be three hours. In many classes, not all, we will use the final hour for
specific purposes: group discussion of the points made in that class and the readings for that
week, individual presentations on selected readings by students (see below), or background
material necessary to understand the readings involved.

My role in this class is to encourage you to go deeper in your understanding of the nuances and
essential details of research, as opposed to broad (and often misleading) strokes. I encourage
open discussion in the classroom on all issues: nothing should be out of bounds in terms of your
comments, questions, or criticisms. In response, I hope I can be helpful, but I will also be
specific about the problems facing modern research in social science.

**Required Work**

**Term Work**

There are no tests in this class. You *will* have a choice in terms of required work during the
semester.

To complete the class, you must complete three different required pieces of work, in addition to
posting online questions (discussed below):

1. A short comment paper online focusing on discussions in class based on readings and
topics within the last two weeks of class;
2. A live presentation in class of your critique of the evidence at issue in specific readings
assigned in up to four prior weeks (this can be replaced by request with a second
commentary paper);
3. A final commentary paper *or presentation* critiquing evidence claimed in an online source,
including use of research articles which question this claim.

Each paper/presentation should focus on one reading, or one study discussed online. You will
comment on the merits and problems of the evidence in that reading or online, in order to argue
for an overall conclusion: this research was an important contribution, or has fatal flaws. Part of
what you can consider in each case is the outline of a research proposal for improving the state
of the evidence on that question.
Over the semester, you should post two discussion questions on topics to be discussed in class, on different weeks, before 9 am of the day of the scheduled class on that topic.

Each paper should be 800-1000 words single-spaced: this is about 2 to 2.5 single spaced pages. There is no specific format, other than single-spacing and the number of words. If you choose a presentation, you must accompany this with a Power Point which outlines clearly your arguments in some detail, in lieu of a paper.

You can only submit at most one piece of work in any week of the class. This does not include posted questions, which can be submitted in any week.

Papers should be analytical, not descriptive. The word “analytical” is broader then “critical”: it refers to analyzing both the weaknesses and the strengths of the reading. You will be focusing on the research aspects of this reading, not the theory per se. Of course, how a theory is translated by the research is also essential, and a common focus of discussion. You can use the paper to argue with my presentation in class as well. In general, that means you will schedule submitting papers either the week or two weeks after that reading is considered.

**Distribution of Grades for Required Work.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Weights</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. One posted comment paper</td>
<td>By beginning of class up to the second week following the topic is discussed in class.</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. An in-class presentation on an assigned reading and class discussion that week.</td>
<td>Within four weeks of the week a reading is assigned and discussed.</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>3. A final paper that critiques evidential claims presented online.</td>
<td>November 30th</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Two submitted questions for discussion</td>
<td>Before class on a scheduled topic</td>
<td>15% in total across all questions submitted.</td>
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<td>5. Class Attendance: minimum of 10 of 12 classes.</td>
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<td>10%</td>
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**Please note:** You will sign up online for dates to submit papers or present in class.

**Quercus**

Quercus will be used in this course primarily for three purposes: 1) I will post required readings there; 2) You will post comments about readings on the discussion board; 3) I will post most lecture Power Point materials there.
**Reading**

Readings are listed by topic in the reading list. All readings will either be posted on Quercus or on reserve at the library.

Class slides will also be posted online. They are quite detailed, but not detailed enough to understand without attending class.

**Class Schedule**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Section / Topic</th>
<th>Papers</th>
<th>Presentations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 7</td>
<td>1. Evidence vs. Experience</td>
<td>Merton</td>
<td>Wheaton and Louie</td>
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<td>September 14</td>
<td>2. Gender Wage Gap</td>
<td>Gould</td>
<td>Blau and Kahn 2017 Venable</td>
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<td>September 21</td>
<td>3. Positionality in Early Research on Gender and Race Inequality?</td>
<td>Holmes</td>
<td>Hekman Featherman and Hauser</td>
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<td>September 28</td>
<td>4. Why Methods Make a Difference</td>
<td>Wheaton</td>
<td>Simon</td>
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<td>October 5</td>
<td>5. Estimating the Prevalence of Suffering</td>
<td>Wheaton</td>
<td>Koss</td>
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<td>October 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chan</td>
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<td>October 12</td>
<td>6. Uncomfortable Findings</td>
<td>Kaczorowski</td>
<td>Buchmann and DiPrete</td>
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<td>October 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hopcroft and McLaughlin / Hopcroft and Bradley</td>
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<td>October 19</td>
<td>7. Intersectionality</td>
<td>Wheaton</td>
<td>Erving and Vaughan-Smith Bauer</td>
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<td>October 26</td>
<td>8. Logic of Comparison</td>
<td>Louie and Upenieks</td>
<td>Joly and Wheaton</td>
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<td>October 26</td>
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<td>Blackstone</td>
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<td>November 2</td>
<td>9. Resolving Conflicting Evidence</td>
<td>Wallerstein and Kelly</td>
<td>Peterson and Zill</td>
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<td>November 2</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Forehand</td>
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<td>November 9</td>
<td>Reading Week</td>
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<td>November 16</td>
<td>10. Causality</td>
<td>Wheaton</td>
<td>Young Brady</td>
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<td>November 23</td>
<td>11. Forgotten Ideas</td>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>Wheaton Akbar</td>
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<td>November 30</td>
<td>12. The Decline of Evidence</td>
<td>Faludi</td>
<td>Repetti Menaghan and Parcel</td>
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**Student Accommodations**

Please see me if you have a disability or other need that requires accommodation or classroom modification. I will be glad to help you in whatever way I can.

**Missed Deadlines**

**Medical Issues:** (NOTE: Because of Covid-19, students do NOT need to submit the usual documentation, i.e., medical notes or the Verification of Illness forms).

Students who are late in submitting an assignment for medical reasons, need to email the instructor (not the TA), and also declare their absence on the system (ACORN) on the day of the test or assignment due date.

Students who are late in submitting an assignment for other reasons, such as family or other personal reasons, should request their College Registrar to email the instructor.

The submitted papers in this course are subject to late penalties. If you submit a paper within three days of the deadline, your grade will be reduced by 10%. If you submit this paper between 4 and 7 days after the deadline, the grade will be reduced by 15%. After one week, the paper the grade will be reduced by 25% but will be accepted up to two weeks after the deadline. After that point, papers will not be accepted and your grade on that portion of the course will be zero.

**Academic Integrity**

Students are expected to know and adhere to the University’s principles of academic integrity. Any act of plagiarism or other unethical behavior will be addressed in accordance with University guidelines. Students should be aware that turning in an old paper, or large parts thereof, for credit in a second course, is considered an academic offense. Please see the "Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters" [here](http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm) for specific information on academic integrity at the U of T.

**Appointments**

I encourage you to email or phone me using the number on the first page and arrange an appointment at any time. I am in my office on most days. We can arrange specific office or Zoom appointments, depending on your preference.

I will designate special office hours in the weeks before dated assignments are due – to be announced later.

**Re-marking**

If you have questions about your grade on any paper, or the presentation, you should contact the T.A. or me within two weeks of your receipt of the assignment. Note that your grade after re-marking can remain the same, or increase, or decrease.
**Understanding the Reading List**

Please read this carefully. The readings on the reading list are *not* all assigned. In fact, no one reading is necessarily assigned. However, I cover most of the readings in lectures and you have to read some readings in order to complete the work for the course.

I encourage reading core readings each week, so that when you come to class you have an idea of what the issues are for that day, and what the tensions between different arguments may be. Readings in blue denote “core readings.”
1. THE TENSION BETWEEN EXPERIENCE AND EVIDENCE


2. HISTORY OF THE GENDER WAGE GAP

Gould, Elise, Jessica Schieder, and Kathleen Geier. "What is the gender pay gap and is it real?: The complete guide to how women are paid less than men and why it can’t be explained away." (2016). Economic Policy Institute, Washington DC.


3. POSITIONALITY, STANDPOINT, AND “EARLY” RESEARCH ON RACE AND GENDER INEQUALITY


4. **WHY METHODS MAKE A DIFFERENCE**


5. **ESTIMATING THE PREVALENCE OF SUFFERING.**


### 6. UNCOMFORTABLE FINDINGS


### 7. THE SPECIFICATION OF INTERSECTIONALITY


8. THE LOGIC OF COMPARISON


9. RESOLVING CONFLICTING EVIDENCE


Wallerstein and Kelly: Judith Wallerstein and divorce: how one woman changed the way we think about breakups. (slate.com)


10. THE ROLE OF CAUSALITY


11. PLAGIARISM or FORGOTTEN IDEAS?


Collins, Patricia Hill. 2015. Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas. *Annual Review of Sociology* 41:1,1-20


Barbara F. Reskin , Shelley Coverman, Sex and Race in the Determinants of Psychophysical Distress: A Reappraisal of the Sex-Role Hypothesis, Social Forces, Volume 63, Issue 4, June 1985, Pages 1038–1059, [https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/63.4.1038](https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/63.4.1038)

12. THE DECLINE OF EVIDENCE

*No readings for this week. Readings from Week 9 can be considered for comments. Lecture only.*