

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

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Time: Thursdays 1-4 pm.
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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 than “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.:

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

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

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

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"

(<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.”

TOPICS/READING LIST BY WEEK

NB: Please note the following. These readings are NOT all assigned. Core readings that are assigned are shown in blue; other readings are available for students to use in their commentary papers.

1. THE TENSION BETWEEN EXPERIENCE AND EVIDENCE

Robert K. Merton. 1948. The Bearing of Empirical Research upon the Development of Social Theory. *American Sociological Review*, Oct., 1948, Vol. 13, No. 5 (Oct., 1948), pp. 505-512.

Nickerson, Raymond S. "Confirmation bias: A ubiquitous phenomenon in many guises." *Review of general psychology* 2, no. 2 (1998): 175-220.

Gove, Walter R., Michael Hughes, and Michael R. Geerken. "Playing dumb: A form of impression management with undesirable side effects." *Social Psychology Quarterly* (1980): 89-102.

Blair Wheaton and Patricia Louie. 2016. "A New Perspective on Maternal Employment and Child Mental Health: A Cautionary Tale Involving Assumptions and Questions, Concepts and Measures." Presented at the American Sociological Association meetings in Seattle Washington August 2016.

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.

Blau, Francine D., and Lawrence M. Kahn. "The gender wage gap: Extent, trends, and explanations." *Journal of economic literature* 55, no. 3 (2017): 789-865.

Blau, Francine D., and Lawrence M. Kahn. "The gender pay gap: Have women gone as far as they can?." In *Inequality in the United States: A Reader*, pp. 345-362. Routledge, 2011.

Venable, Denise. "The wage gap myth." *National Center for Policy Analysis*, April 12 (2002):

Jarrell, Stephen B., and Tom D. Stanley. "Declining bias and gender wage discrimination? A meta-regression analysis." *Journal of Human Resources* 39, no. 3 (2004): 828-838.

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

Holmes, Andrew Gary Darwin. 2020. "Researcher Positionality - A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research - A New Researcher Guide". *International Journal of Education* 8, #4: 1-10.

Hekman, S. (1997). Truth and method: Feminist standpoint theory revisited. *Journal of women in culture and society*, 22(2), 341-365.

Sacco, J. M., Scheu, C. R., Ryan, A. M., & Schmitt, N. (2003). An investigation of race and sex similarity effects in interviews: A multilevel approach to relational demography. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(5), 852–865. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.852>

Massey, Douglas S. "American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass." *American journal of sociology* 96, no. 2 (1990): 329-357.

Featherman, David L., and Robert M. Hauser. "Sexual Inequalities and Socioeconomic Achievement in the U.S., 1962-1973." *American Sociological Review* 41, no. 3 (1976): 462–83. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2094254>.

David L. Featherman and Robert M. Hauser. Changes in the Socioeconomic Stratification of the Races, 1962-73. *American Journal of Sociology* 1976 82:3, 621-651

Hughey, Matthew W. "Superposition strategies: How and why White people say contradictory things about race." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119, no. 9 (2022): e2116306119.

Marini, Margaret Mooney. "Sex differences in the process of occupational attainment: A closer look." *Social science research* 9, no. 4 (1980): 307-361.

4. WHY METHODS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Wheaton, Blair. "When methods make a difference." *Current Sociology* 51, no. 5 (2003): 543-571.

Bernard Jessie. *The Future of Marriage*. Yale University Press; New Haven, CT: 1972. [Pages to be assigned.](#)

Simon, Robin W. "Revisiting the relationships among gender, marital status, and mental health." *American journal of sociology* 107, no. 4 (2002): 1065-1096.

5. ESTIMATING THE PREVALENCE OF SUFFERING.

Blair Wheaton. 2011. "The Science and Politics of the Estimated Prevalence of Suffering." Presented at the American Sociological Association Meetings August, 2010.

Kessler, Ronald C., Beth E. Molnar, Irene D. Feurer, and Mark Appelbaum. "Patterns and mental health predictors of domestic violence in the United States: results from the National Comorbidity Survey." *International journal of law and psychiatry* (2001).

Tjaden, Patricia, and Nancy Thoennes. "Prevalence and consequences of male-to-female and female-to-male intimate partner violence as measured by the National Violence Against Women Survey." *Violence against women* 6, no. 2 (2000): 142-161.

Straus, Murray A., and Richard J. Gelles. "Societal change and change in family violence from 1975 to 1985 as revealed by two national surveys." In *Domestic Violence*, pp. 63-77. Routledge, 2017.

Koss, Mary P., Christine A. Gidycz, and Nadine Wisniewski. "The scope of rape: incidence and prevalence of sexual aggression and victimization in a national sample of higher education students." *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology* 55, no. 2 (1987): 162.

Chan, Ko Ling. "Gender differences in self-reports of intimate partner violence: A review." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 16, no. 2 (2011): 167-175.

Archer, John. "Sex differences in physically aggressive acts between heterosexual partners: A meta-analytic review." *Aggression and violent behavior* 7, no. 4 (2002): 313-351.

6. UNCOMFORTABLE FINDINGS

Chan, Ko Ling. "Gender differences in self-reports of intimate partner violence: A review." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 16, no. 2 (2011): 167-175.

Archer, John. "Sex differences in physically aggressive acts between heterosexual partners: A meta-analytic review." *Aggression and violent behavior* 7, no. 4 (2002): 313-351.

Janusz Kaczorowski. 1989. "The good, the average and the ugly; a socio-economic dimension of physical attractiveness." McGill University, Montreal MA thesis 1989

~~Patricia Louie and Blair Wheaton. 2021. "Race, Skin Tone, and Health". Unpublished Draft~~

Buchmann, Claudia, and Thomas A. DiPrete. "The growing female advantage in college completion: The role of family background and academic achievement." *American sociological review* 71, no. 4 (2006): 515-541.

Hopcroft, Rosemary L., and Julie McLaughlin. "Why is the sex gap in feelings of depression wider in high gender equity countries? The effect of children on the psychological well-being of men and women." *Social Science Research* 41, no. 3 (2012): 501-513.

Rosemary L. Hopcroft , and Dana Burr Bradley. 2007. The Sex Difference in Depression Across 29 Countries, *Social Forces*, Volume 85, Issue 4, June 2007, Pages 1483–1507, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2007.0071>

Olympia L K Campbell *, David Bann 1 , Praveetha Patalay. 2021 "The gender gap in adolescent mental health: A cross-national investigation of 566,829 adolescents across 73 countries " *SSM - Population Health* 13 (2021) 10074/

7. THE SPECIFICATION OF INTERSECTIONALITY

Blair Wheaton. 2023. "Quantitative Perspectives on Intersectional Understandings of Mental Health Disparities." Presented at the American Sociological Association meetings in Philadelphia, PA, August 11- 15.

Choo, Hae Yeon, and Myra Marx Ferree. "Practicing intersectionality in sociological research: A critical analysis of inclusions, interactions, and institutions in the study of inequalities." *Sociological theory* 28, no. 2 (2010): 129-149.

Erving, Christy L., and Monisola Vaughan Smith. "Disrupting monolithic thinking about Black women and their mental health: Does stress exposure explain intersectional ethnic, nativity, and socioeconomic differences?." *Social Problems* (2021).

Hancock, Ange-Marie. "When multiplication doesn't equal quick addition: Examining intersectionality as a research paradigm." *Perspectives on politics* 5, no. 1 (2007): 63-79.

Bauer, Greta R., Siobhan M. Churchill, Mayuri Mahendran, Chantel Walwyn, Daniel Lizotte, and Alma Angelica Villa-Rueda. "Intersectionality in quantitative research: a systematic review of its emergence and applications of theory and methods." *SSM-population health* 14 (2021): 100798.

8. THE LOGIC OF COMPARISON

Erving, Christy L., and Monisola Vaughan Smith. "Disrupting monolithic thinking about Black women and their mental health: Does stress exposure explain intersectional ethnic, nativity, and socioeconomic differences?." *Social Problems* (2021).

Roxburgh, Susan. "Gender differences in work and well-being: Effects of exposure and vulnerability." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* (1996): 265-277.

Louie, Patricia, and Laura Upenieks. "Vicarious Discrimination, Psychosocial Resources, and Mental Health among Black Americans." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (June 2022): 187–209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01902725221079279>.

Marie-Pier Joly and Blair Wheaton. "Human rights in countries of origin and the mental health of migrants to Canada." *Social Science and Medicine Population Health* 11: 1-10.

Lacey, Krim K., Regina Parnell, Dawne M. Mouzon, Niki Matusko, Doreen Head, Jamie M. Abelson, and James S. Jackson. "The mental health of US Black women: the roles of social context and severe intimate partner violence." *BMJ open* 5, no. 10 (2015): e008415.

Amy Blackstone. 2012. *Principles of Sociological Inquiry*. Open Textbook Library, Saylor Foundation. [Principles of Sociological Inquiry – Qualitative and Quantitative Methods - Open Textbook Library \(umn.edu\)](#) *Pages to be assigned*.

9. RESOLVING CONFLICTING EVIDENCE

Amy Blackstone. 2012. *Principles of Sociological Inquiry*. Open Textbook Library, Saylor Foundation. [Principles of Sociological Inquiry – Qualitative and Quantitative Methods - Open Textbook Library \(umn.edu\)](#) *Pages to be assigned*.

Wallerstein, J. S., & Kelly, J. B. (1980). *Surviving The Breakup: How Children And Parents Cope With Divorce*. New York: Basic Books. *Pages to be Assigned*.

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

Peterson, James L., and Nicholas Zill. "Marital disruption, parent-child relationships, and behavior problems in children." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (1986): 295-307.

Forehand, Rex. "Parental divorce and adolescent maladjustment: Scientific inquiry vs public information." *Behaviour research and therapy* (1992).

Faludi, Susan. *Backlash : the Undeclared War against American Women*. New York :Three Rivers Press, 2006. *Pages to be Assigned*.

Repetti, R. L., Matthews, K. A., & Waldron, I. (1989). Employment and women's health: Effects of paid employment on women's mental and physical health. *American Psychologist*, 44(11), 1394–1401. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.44.11.1394>

Menaghan, Elizabeth G., and Toby L. Parcel. "Parental employment and family life: Research in the 1980s." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (1990): 1079-1098.

10. THE ROLE OF CAUSALITY

Blair Wheaton and Marisa Young. 2021. Chapter 6 in **Generalizing the Regression Model: Techniques for Longitudinal and Contextual Analysis**. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Pearl, Judea. "Causal inference in statistics: a gentle introduction." (2001).

Lerner, Daniel. "Cause and effect." (1965). New York, Free Press.

Brady, Henry E. *Causation and explanation in social science*. 2011. The Oxford Handbook of Political Science. (ed Robert Goodin).

Marini, Margaret Mooney, and Burton Singer. "Causality in the social sciences." *Sociological methodology* 18 (1988): 347-409.

11. PLAGIARISM or FORGOTTEN IDEAS?

Akbar 2018. Defining Plagiarism: A Literature Review *Ethical Lingua Journal of Language Teaching and Literature* ISSN 2355-3448 (Print) ISSN 2540-9190 (Online) Volume 5, Number 1, February 2018 pp. 31 – 38.

John Robert Warren, Socioeconomic Status and Health across the Life Course: A Test of the Social Causation and Health Selection Hypotheses, *Social Forces*, Volume 87, Issue 4, June 2009, Pages 2125–2153, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.0.0219>.

Wheaton, Blair. "The Sociogenesis of Psychological Disorder: Reexamining the Causal Issues with Longitudinal Data." *American Sociological Review*, vol. 43, no. 3, 1978, pp. 383–403. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2094497>. Accessed 31 Aug. 2023.

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

Kessler, Ronald C., and Harold W. Neighbors. "A New Perspective on the Relationships Among Race, Social Class, and Psychological Distress." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1986, pp. 107–15. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2136310>. Accessed 31 Aug. 2023.

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>

12. THE DECLINE OF EVIDENCE

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