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Literature Review

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SBS 200, Spring 2018

Literature Review

By now, you have read academic articles and created your own argument in response to them. You have also analyzed media coverage and thought critically about how to become a well-informed consumer of media. In this project, you will combine all the skills you have been learning in this class by formulating a research question, finding relevant scholarly literature, and writing a literature review.

Learning goals

This assignment helps achieve the following course learning goals:

1. You will find, read, critique, and cite scholarly literature.
2. You will use a variety of strategies to prewrite, revise, and edit your written work
3. You will continue to provide feedback on others' work, and use feedback to improve your writing.
4. You will develop a research question and create a scholarly literature review
5. You will present your work in both written and oral formats

Assignment structure

Part 1: Develop a research question

In many social science disciplines, research typically begins with a research question that the author plans to answer. Please develop a research question that is interesting to you and meets these guidelines:

- *Social scientific* in nature: concerns human society and interactions of individuals within it. **Because this is an SBS class, your question must fall within one or more social scientific disciplines.**
- *Theoretically driven*: investigates a phenomenon or process, rather simply describing one example or event
- Asks *how* or *why* a process or phenomenon happens
- Cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no”
- Requires *empirical research*--that is, the collection and analysis of data--rather than moral/philosophical explanations or “common sense” appeals.
- Has not already been answered—or at least, you cannot easily find the answer.

For example, say that you are interested in the division of household labor, or how families allocate housework. You might begin by asking, “Do heterosexual spouses divide household labor equally?” However, as you read scholarly research, you will

quickly find that this is not a strong research question. Why? Because it has a yes/no answer that has already been discovered. (We consistently find that in heterosexual couples, women perform a much greater share of household labor than their male partners.)

Your reading, however, might lead you to modify the question. You might ask, “How does division of household labor differ between same-sex and heterosexual couples?” This question does not have a clear yes/no answer, and your search of the scholarly literature will probably reveal that it has not been studied extensively so far. We don’t already know the answer.

For this paper, we won’t be collecting the original data needed to answer your research question. You might choose to do that later, for an undergraduate research or capstone project. However, you may find it helpful to think about what data you would need and how you would gather it. This exercise will help you strengthen your research question.

Part 2: Locate scholarly literature

For your project, you will need to find 10 scholarly sources relevant to your research question. Scholarly sources, for the purposes of this assignment, include only articles in peer-reviewed journals and books published by academic presses. They do not include news or magazine articles, books published by non-academic presses, or other popular media. On Thursday, April 5 we will meet again with Sarah Dahlen, our librarian, for training on how to find scholarly literature.

You might wonder how to find scholarly literature about a question that hasn’t been answered. But if you examine literature reviews in the articles we’ve read, you will see that the authors cite others who have conducted relevant research about closely related topics. The literature they cite provides context for their own research; helps them develop hypotheses; and makes it possible to extend, support, refute, or otherwise engage with previous scholarship.

For example, on pages 725-727, Armstrong and Crage cite others who have studied commemorability, mnemonic capacity, resonance, and amenability to institutionalization. However, none of these other authors studied why we commemorate one event and not another. Instead, Armstrong and Crage synthesize studies about related topics to help them understand their own research results.

Returning to our example research question, then, you might locate literature on the division of household labor in heterosexual relationships. You might also find research

that compares heterosexual and same-sex relationships on other qualities. Try to focus your literature search as narrowly as possible. Papers on the history of same-sex marriage or on heteronormativity in the media, for example, would probably not be relevant to this research question.

Part 3: Literature review

Now that you have your sources, what do you do with them? You will need to compose a literature review, much like the ones included in the articles we have read. Your literature review is *not* a sequence of summaries, and its purpose is *not* to explain each source in detail. Instead, your task is to discuss the status of our current knowledge relevant to your research question. Your literature review should synthesize and integrate the research you have read.

If we return to Armstrong and Crage's article, for example, we can see that they *do not* devote a paragraph to an in-depth summary of Halbwachs, another paragraph to Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz, and so on, nor do they try to explain every detail of each cited source. Instead, they focus only on the aspects of each source that are relevant to their research, and they explain what we learn from looking at all the sources together.

To create a literature review, you will need to read each of your sources carefully and take good notes. Review the handout on summaries, from earlier in the chapter, for questions that your notes should address. We will discuss notetaking strategies in class.

Next, identify shared topics or themes across multiple sources that you read. Do some of the authors take different approaches to similar topics, and if so, what do they do differently? How do they support, refute, and/or extend one another's research? Your answers to these questions can form the basis for your literature review. Each paragraph or section of your literature review should focus on one topic or theme that is relevant to your research question and addressed by more than one of your sources. We will discuss strategies for synthesizing sources in class.

Conclude your literature review by summarizing what you have learned about your research question, and why your question is important. Note that **you should not be able to answer your research question after completing a literature review**, because you have not collected or analyzed any data.

Part 4: Student presentations

Each student will present their work during the last week of the semester. We'll discuss expectations for the presentations and conduct practice presentations in class.

Evaluation

Remember to include the elements of clear essay structure that we have discussed:

- introduction that includes a clear statement of your research question (this is analogous to your thesis) and a roadmap (briefly list the themes you will discuss in your literature review)
- topic sentences that relate each paragraph's main idea to the research question/roadmap
- logical transitions between ideas
- conclusion that summarizes your literature search and justifies your research question's importance

An excellent paper will have the following qualities:

- Clear, easy-to-follow structure (see above)
- Uses no fewer than 10 scholarly sources
- Paragraphs or sections structured around themes relevant to your research question, rather than a sequence of summaries
- Proofread, edited, and formatted according to the guidelines in the syllabus
- Full and correct APA citations of all sources, both in the text and in your references list. *Do not provide the author's full name, publication title, etc. in your text. This is NOT a citation.*

Timeline

April 3: Post your draft research question on iLearn.

April 5: Post your revised research question on iLearn. MEET AT THE LIBRARY.

April 10: Post your draft list of sources on iLearn. Include full citations of all sources, and links to sources whenever available.

April 12: Post your revised list of sources on iLearn.

April 17: Upload your draft notetaking table to iLearn. You should have completed the table for at least five sources.

April 19: Upload your finished notetaking table to iLearn.

April 24: Upload your finished synthesis table to iLearn.

April 26: Upload your first draft of the literature review in iLearn for an in-class workshop. You should have finished writing about at least one of your themes.

April 30-May 3: Individual/small group meetings TBA. Upload your second draft in iLearn before your meeting. This should be a full draft. NO CLASS THIS WEEK.

May 8-10: Student presentations.

Literature review and reflection due by class time on May 10.