Evaluating Sources

Honors Workshop
Debate Preparation
Dr. Doreen Arcus
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Why?
• To further research skills
• To enhance critical thinking
• To provide resources for examining sources of information in a variety of formats

Gathering Information: Research
• Journals v. Magazines
• Print v. Internet
• Primary v. Secondary Sources
• Quality? Peer review, rejection rate…

Magazines

Secondary reports
• Someone else reporting the results of research, i.e., a summary of the primary report of the research
• Never contains all the detail
• When in a non-peer reviewed publication like a magazine rather than a journal or other academic publication

1 picture, 1000 words?
• Implications v. Explicit statements
• How representative of attendees to the RNC were Mary Cheney and Heather Poe?
• Without stating directly, what does the photo imply about the diversity of Republican delegates?
TIME Point-Counterpoint

Two Mommies is One Too Many
By JAMES C. DOBSON

- “…Dr. Kyle Pruett of Yale Medical School… says dads are critically important simply because ‘fathers do not mother....’
- “According to educational psychologist Carol Gilligan, mothers tend to stress sympathy… while fathers accent justice....
- “But set aside the scientific findings for a minute....”

Dobson is founder & chairman of Focus on the Family

Scientific findings?

- Pruett
  - “…There is nothing in my longitudinal research or any of my writings to support such conclusions....”
- Gilligan
  - “There is nothing in my research that would lead you to draw the stated conclusions you did in the Time article. My work in no way suggests same-gender families are harmful to children or can't raise these children to be as healthy and well adjusted as those brought up in traditional households.”

Primary v. Secondary Source

At best, potential for error in “translation”
Errors of omission v. errors of commission

At worst, cherry picking, twisting, distorting

See Carol Gilligan’s reaction to J.Dobson’s secondary citation of her research on YouTube

Magazines vs. Journals?

- Advertisements
- More pic than print
- Author name
- No, limited references
- Corporate
- Editorial policy?
- Not peer review
- Few if any ads
- Mostly print (bland)
- Authors & affiliations
- Complete references
- Professional org
- Clearly stated
- Peer review

Journals online

- Research in your pajamas… Priceless
- UML online journals
- Off Campus Users Login
- UML doesn’t have it? No problem
- Interlibrary loan
  - Journal articles sent to your e-mail
  - Short turnaround
  - Longer for print materials (some articles, books)
  - FREE!

Internet v. Print

- Internet sources—info from domain name.com.gov.net.edu.org.mil
- Who is the sponsor?
  - The tilde ~
  - www.famousuniversity.edu/~smith/research
Is Googling always bad?

Like a box of chocolates…

EXAMPLE: Martin Luther King

6th item found in a Google search:

The truth about Martin Luther King: includes historical trivia, articles and pictures. A valuable resource for teachers and students alike.
http://www.martinlutherking.org - 6k - Cached - Similar

Sounds reasonable

“A valuable resource for teachers and students alike.”

Website is .org

What’s not to like?

Check the small print

- Hosted by Stormfront
- Click on the link
  - http://www.stormfront.org/forum/

Welcome to Stormfront
White Nationalist Community

Problem with bias?

- Right v. Wrong
- Balance v. One-sided
- Other examples?

Social Science

- Family Research Institute
- National Research Council
- Family Research Council
- Family Research Consortium

Can you pick out the agencies with a clear political agenda?
Family Research Council

Contributors address topics ranging from the "parenthood penalty" in America's tax laws to the ideological and philosophical roots of the day-care regime, while suggesting family-friendly solutions to the real crisis of child care: the lack of parental time with children.

http://www.frc.org

Family Research Council

The Family Research Council (FRC) champions marriage and family as the foundation of civilization, the seedbed of virtue, and the wellspring of society. FRC shapes public debate and formulates public policy that values human life and upholds the institutions of marriage and the family. Believing that God is the author of life, liberty, and the family, FRC promotes the Judeo-Christian worldview as the basis for a just, free, and stable society.

http://www.frc.org

Research???

Advocacy v. Research

Agenda v. Openness

Note ALL research is value laden
Try to keep it transparent
Try to keep it from limiting

Family Research Institute

The Gay Nineties: What the Empirical Evidence Reveals About Homosexuality
by Dr. Paul Cameron

FRI published articles

Journal article example:


A random sample of 5,182 adults from 6 U.S. metropolitan areas were questioned about incestuous sexual relationships during childhood…

Even though published in journals

Research systematically flawed

• Not randomly sampled or nationally representative
• Small n and % without standard errors
• Definition shifts depending on purpose
  • Child sexual abuse by same sex adult = homosexual
  • Prevalence of homosexuality = now engaged in relationship

Family Research Institute

“The Family Research Institute was founded in 1982 with one overriding mission: to generate empirical research on issues that threaten the traditional family.... FRI is working to produce sound, scientific data on pressing social issues — especially homosexuality — in an effort to promote traditional policies.”

One overriding mission...

By James Allen Flanery
Associated Press

The results of a study that will be released by the Family Research Institute, a conservative anti-homosexuality group, are expected to provide new fuel for the debate about the effects of same-sex parenting.

Lincoln Man: Poll Will Help Oppose Gays

Poll, by Cameron, says 49% of families with gay parents are not typical.

Lincoln, Neb. - A poll commissioned by the Family Research Institute, a conservative Christian group, on Sunday indicated that 49% of families with gay parents are not typical.

Cameron was chairman of the Com- mittee on Family Life for her organization, which has been involved in a number of campaigns against same-sex marriage and adoption.


How would you know?

• Not just what the article cited
• Who cited the article?
• Follow-up studies or critiques

What about those journals?

• Evaluating weight or impact of journal
• Science Citation Index
• Social Science Citation Index
• Journal Citation Report
• Publication lag, rejection rate
• When in doubt, ask your advisor

Other guidelines?

• Truthwintus.org—example of opposition research group
• Sourcewatch.org—Center for Media and Democracy
  – Investigate and expose public relations spin and propaganda
  – Promote media literacy and citizen journalism
Sourcewatch.org

- Research and Writing Tips
- Article guidelines
- How to research front groups
- Resources for studying propaganda
- Research using the web