## Purpose of literature review

- Motivate your research question(s)
- Provide readers with a coherent, focused summary of current state of knowledge
- Identify gaps/limitations in current state of knowledge

## Content of literature review

- A literature review addresses the following:
  - What have others said about this topic?
  - Which theories address it and what do they say?
  - Are there consistent findings, or do past studies disagree?
  - Does the body of existing research have flaws that you think you can remedy?

## Literature review → Hypotheses

- Hypotheses must be explicitly motivated
- Present in context of existing research/theories
- Effectively motivating hypotheses may require attention to multiple areas of literature
  - Ex. The paradox of declining female happiness
Electronically available information

• Incredible access to:
  – Scholarly articles
  – Books (partial)
  – Summary data
  – Media publications

• Very different situation for those w/o access to university library resources

Electronic search tools

• Locating literature (published journal articles)
• Go to http://www.library.wisc.edu/ then click on “E-Resource Gateway”

• Commonly used databases in the social sciences include:
  – ERIC (education and related fields)
  – LLBA (linguistics and language behavior abstracts)
  – NCJRS (corrections, drug and crime, juvenile justice, etc)
  – PAIS International (social, economic, and political issues)
  – PsycINFO or PsycARTICLES (psychology and related fields)
  – Social Sciences Abstracts (sociology, psychology, anthro, etc)
  – Social Work Abstracts
  – Sociological Abstracts
  – Web of Science, Social Sciences Citation Index

Example – Google Scholar

• Flexible search criteria – advanced search
• Ordered by citation counts
• Link to citing papers
• Citations in paper of interest
Use of Wikipedia

• Can be useful at early stages of research process
• Not something you probably ever want to cite in your literature review

Use of textbooks

• An excellent place to start
• Typically refer only the most widely-cited, influential studies
• Initial synthesis has already been done
• BUT textbooks themselves are typically not a good source to cite

Parsimony vs. accuracy revisited

• Same principle as for analyses
• Need to balance parsimony (focus on key works) with accuracy (coverage of important ideas/findings)
• Avoid temptation to base literature review on one or two studies
• Avoid temptation to cite everything you can find relevant to a given question
Chance for creativity

• Identifying key limitations in existing work
• Applying new ideas, new areas of work to a particular question
• Applying old/established ideas to new questions/new phenomena
• Applying established ideas/findings to new settings
• Synthesizing multiple areas of research in a new way