

All Sides Agree: Politics is Strangling Social Science

If you thought that the progressive bias in social sciences was considered a problem only by tradition-minded folk, you might be surprised to hear [the views of](#) celebrity skeptic, Michael Shermer in *Scientific American* earlier this year:

If activists—any activists, regardless of their political orientation or the rightness of their cause—get to decide by fiat what is and isn't an acceptable interpretation of the world, then science is pointless, and we should just throw the whole damn thing out.

From a more tradition-minded perspective, [Salvo](#) reported in January,

Princeton University and the left-of-center Brookings Institution released a study that reported “most scholars now agree that children raised by two biological parents in a stable marriage do better than children in other family forms across a wide range of outcomes.”

Another study ... found that states with more married parents do better on a broad range of economic indicators, including upward mobility for poor children and lower rates of child poverty. On most economic indicators, the Washington Post summarized, “the share of parents who are married in a state is a better predictor of that state's economic health than the racial composition and educational attainment of the state's residents.”

But when an academic discipline is in thrall to a political program like progressivism, realities cease to matter for many in the field. The goal becomes to close ranks to defend their thesis against reality. And politicians depend on social scientists for public policy advice. Ominously, traditional families' resistance to the policy changes fuelled by such studies attracts hostility *precisely when*

those families are more successful than others. They would not attract such hostility if they were abject failures in need of help.

The outcome of many decades of the current approach is not a pretty picture. Here are just two highlights:

– *The “replication” crisis.* If a study reports interesting results, what should happen is that other researchers try to repeat them. But that rarely happens. Replication studies are not cool and do not get funded. Instead, the conclusions of a study that supports the dominant view are often just adopted as fact and sometime emerge as policy. *Discover Mag* [reported](#) just this month,

The APA created ethics tasks forces composed of members who had interests that would incline them to back the military’s interrogation practices. Critics of the association’s policy were not consulted. The APA appears to have crafted a corrupted “consensus” by excluding those who might disagree. ... This case is a particularly disturbing example of a problem throughout the social sciences: the crafting of false consensus statements to promote ideological or political goals. False consensus does great, sometimes irreparable, damage to science.

As he says, “Rallying toward consensus usually reflects not the strength of an argument but its weakness.”

So what should you do if you are stuck in a social sciences course that sounds like propaganda for progressivism?

First, here’s what *not* to do: These days, it is dangerous to just challenge the dogma, however politely. The University of Chicago’s recent stand against the shutdown of intellectual freedom on campus is a [lone gesture](#), received with hostility. Don’t expect it to affect your campus any time soon. Best you read Greg Lukianoff’s [Unlearning Liberty](#) before you attempt to inform anyone other than yourself of fact-based positions.

But you *can* inform yourself! Much responsible information challenging dogma is free online. For example, Mark Regnerus’s [New Family Structures Study](#) and Paul McHugh’s [study](#) of dismal transgender mental

health are both free online.

Second, as we might expect from the broad base of critiques, some scholars are concerned about the problem. You may be able to find such a scholar on campus who could act as a mentor in guiding your reading. Be thankful that we are all still free to seek facts on our own.

Denyse O'Leary is a Canadian journalist, author, and blogger, and co-author of [The Spiritual Brain](#). This article was republished with permission from [MercatorNet](#).