

# Information Inequality

## the Class, Gender, and Race of Knowledge Domains

Molly King

Stanford University

March 31, 2018

# Outline

- 1 Introduction
  - Motivation
  - Research Question
- 2 Methods
  - Data
  - Domains
- 3 Results
  - Means across domains
  - Proportions correct by group
- 4 Implications
  - Model of knowledge

# Why care about information inequality?

- Differences in information capacity itself are, by definition, a dimension of 'inequality';

1. Most of us are in this room because we try to understand the origins or cures of inequality.
2. Were also all here because we like learning for the sake of knowledge, so I probably don't have to argue too much for this idea of the current value of knowledge.
3. I argue that a concept I am calling information inequality - or knowledge inequality - is important as both an outcome and cause of social inequality.
4. So, while I argue that knowledge inequality is important from both ends of the causal argument, in this research I focus on the idea that social status causes knowledge inequality.

# Why care about information inequality?

- Differences in information capacity itself are, by definition, a dimension of 'inequality';
- Differences in the amount of information people have are influenced by unequal social positions in our society; and

1. Most of us are in this room because we try to understand the origins or cures of inequality.
2. Were also all here because we like learning for the sake of knowledge, so I probably don't have to argue too much for this idea of the current value of knowledge.
3. I argue that a concept I am calling information inequality - or knowledge inequality - is important as both an outcome and cause of social inequality.
4. So, while I argue that knowledge inequality is important from both ends of the causal argument, in this research I focus on the idea that social status causes knowledge inequality.

# Why care about information inequality?

- Differences in information capacity itself are, by definition, a dimension of 'inequality';
- Differences in the amount of information people have are influenced by unequal social positions in our society; and
- Information is a potential cause of later inequality in outcomes and access to resources.

1. Most of us are in this room because we try to understand the origins or cures of inequality.
2. Were also all here because we like learning for the sake of knowledge, so I probably don't have to argue too much for this idea of the current value of knowledge.
3. I argue that a concept I am calling information inequality - or knowledge inequality - is important as both an outcome and cause of social inequality.
4. So, while I argue that knowledge inequality is important from both ends of the causal argument, in this research I focus on the idea that social status causes knowledge inequality.

# Research Question

*How does the status gap in knowledge vary by domain?*

1. The field of sociology has long studied the production of knowledge in science inequalities in knowledge careers; and information diffusion and its consequences. Many studies have evaluated information seeking behaviors and needs. But the tendency has either been to study knowledge in one specific domain (e.g., health) or to reduce knowledge across all domains to a single test score – and hence we know shockingly little about the everyday knowledge stock of Americans.
2. So I wanted to perform a wide scan analysis of knowledge inequality, looking at who has and does not have knowledge in different domains, and how those inequalities might compare to each other.

# Data

---

General Social Survey  
Pew Research Center (21)  
Kaiser Family Foundation  
Health Information National Trends Survey (8)  
Integrated Health Interview Series  
Annenberg National Health Communication Survey  
USC's Understanding America Study (3)  
Rand American Life Panel (2)  
National Financial Capability Studies (3)  
21st Century Americanism survey  
Global Views American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy  
Outlook on Life Survey  
State of the First Amendment surveys  
Chicago Council Survey of American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Poli

---

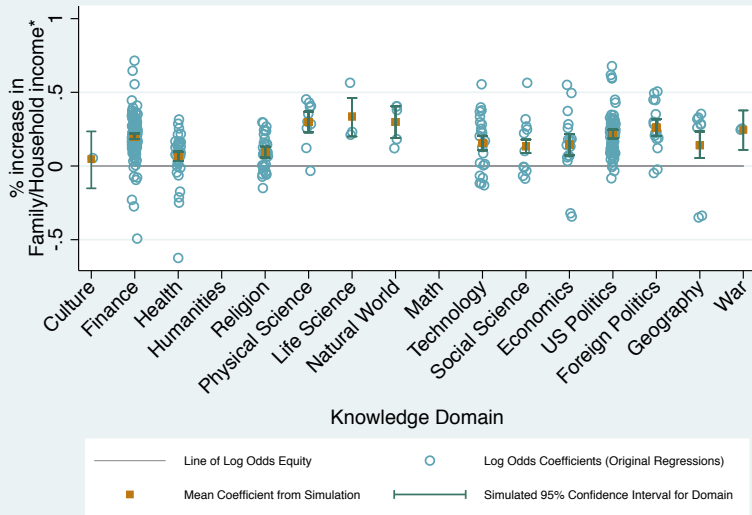
# Domains

---

history  
natural world  
physical science  
biological science  
technology  
math  
culture  
geography  
domestic politics  
foreign politics  
economics  
finance  
health  
religion  
pop culture  
war

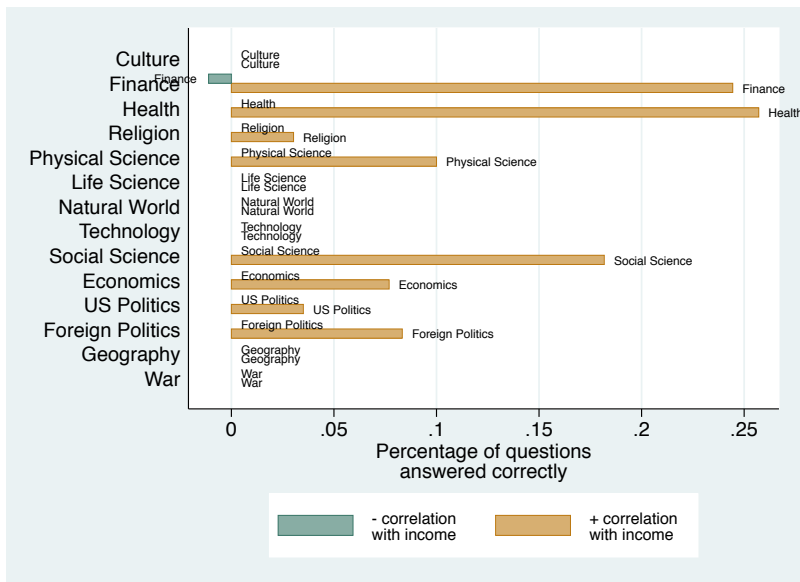
---



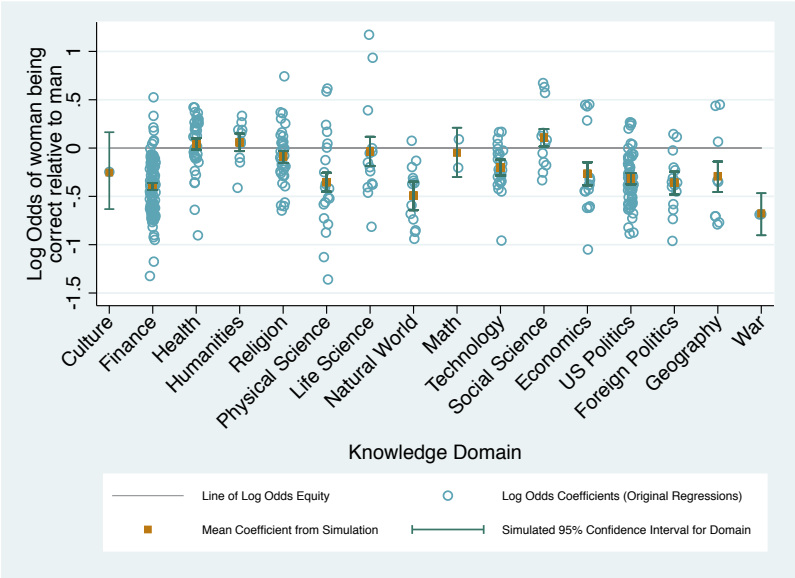


\* of being correct for every additional ln(\$1000 Family/Household income)

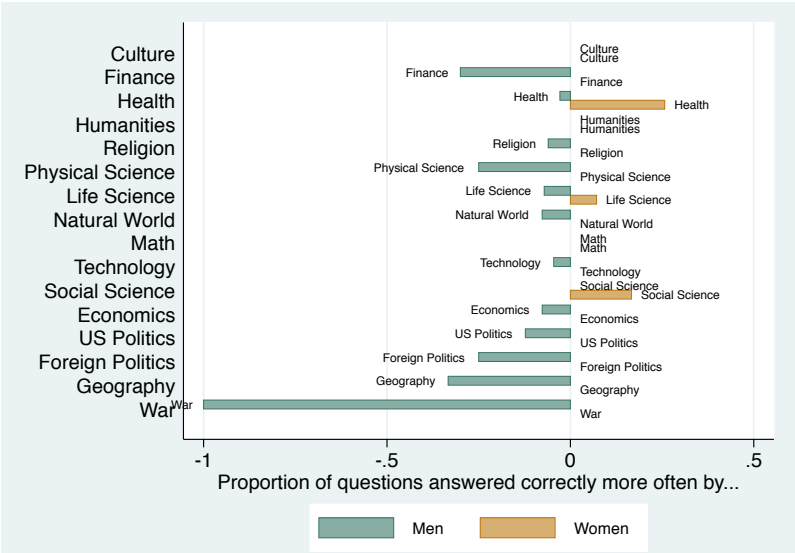
1. As a reminder, this is after controlling for education - making this a conservative test for the effect of income (since in effect we are controlling twice for class).

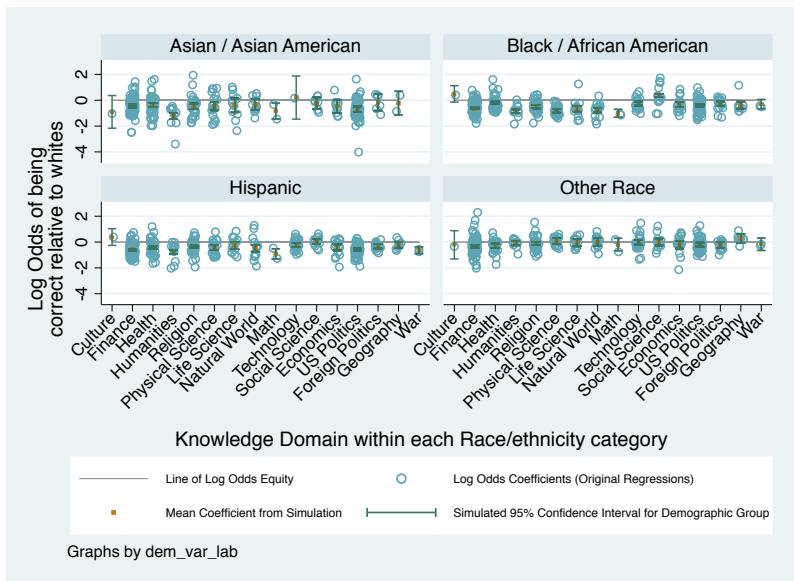


# No mean gender difference in 5/16 domains

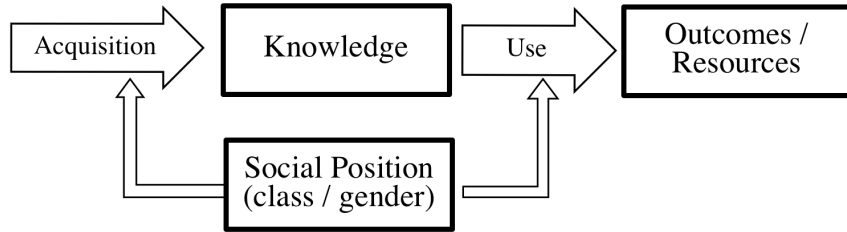


# Men answer greater proportion of questions correctly in 65% of domains





## Acquisition and use of knowledge



1. Findings are consistent with the model that implies:
2. — demographic characteristics affect the knowledge an individual has, and
3. — using knowledge to access resources.
4. Understanding the broad demographic patterns can help us move toward better understanding of the mechanisms behind them.