

Qualitative & Multi-Method Research

Newsletter of the
American Political Science Association
Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research

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Letter from the Section President

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With APSA being canceled *in extremis*, many of us were able to enjoy an unusually relaxed Labor Day weekend. However, it was very unfortunate that all the efforts that went into the preparation of panels, papers, and other events were not realized at the APSA meetings. I especially want to take this opportunity to thank several people for their leadership and hard work. David Waldner was the section's Division Chair, and organized a first-rate lineup of panels and roundtables. David Collier, Jay Seawright, Thad Dunning, Sherry Zaks, Diana Kapiszewski, and Naomi Levy organized and prepared to teach short courses that were cancelled at very short notice.

Absent the hurricane, we would of course have held our business meeting in New Orleans, and presented the section's various awards. I congratulate those who won awards this year, the citations for which can be found in the announcements at the end of this newsletter.

You received an email regarding section business and elections, which normally would also have been conducted at the business meeting, but which we have had to conduct electronically. I thank all those who have accepted to serve in various capacities for the section. Below we give the new and continuing set of officers, while members of the 2013 nominating and award committees are listed in the announcements at the end of this newsletter.

Over the years, while we have always made previous issues of the newsletter available online to everyone, we have reserved the two most recent issues for current section members. In the past, this meant a delay of about a year before the electronic versions of recent issues were posted. We are pleased to report that, thanks to APSA Connect, section members can now access contemporary issues by logging on to the Association's website.

Notwithstanding the difficulties surrounding the annual meeting, this is a promising time for qualitative and multi-method research. We now appear to be in the middle of a new and very substantial wave of writing. For example, the Cambridge University Press series "Strategies for Social Analysis" has four books in print and two more in press, and there are further volumes just out or forthcoming from Princeton, Michigan, Palgrave-Macmillan, and Routledge. These books (to-

gether with articles that have appeared in top journals) are improving and enriching how we teach and do qualitative research. Many of these books treat core topics such as multi-method research, case studies, and process tracing. Our section has been the venue for developing and road testing much of this work, with chapters and pieces of the volumes being presented at APSA panels, and seed ideas appearing in the newsletter. I want to express my deep appreciation for this new work, and I hope that it is an indication that there is much more to come!

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Symposium: Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow's *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (Routledge Press, 2012)

Filling the (Interpretive Methods) Gap: Assessing the Contribution of Schwartz- Shea and Yanow for Graduate Students

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Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow wrote *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* with three readers in mind: the graduate student, the experienced researcher, and the teacher of interpretive methods (p. 3). As a graduate student whose work falls under the interpretive umbrella, I am in the unique position to offer an “insider’s” perspective on the accessibility and utility of this volume for the first group. To that end, my goal in the following is to articulate the strengths and weaknesses of this volume not only for graduate students with an interpretivist bent—including those who are either in the process of formulating a research project, applying for funding, or in a position in which they must defend their work to faculty and evaluators who may or may not be familiar with interpretive approaches—but also for the greater graduate student community.

As a graduate student first at the University of California, Riverside, and currently at the University of California, Irvine, and as a past participant of the Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research, I have been exposed to top-notch training in a wide variety of methods and methodologies, including those that scholars often refer to as “interpretive.” However, as evidenced in my discussions with graduate students from other programs, experiences like mine are uncommon. While most political science graduate programs in the United States offer (and often require) methods training, these courses, both in number and in focus, tend to privilege certain methods and methodologies over others, usually advocating positivism over its interpretive counterpart (or, alternatively, may claim to offer instruction in “mixed” methods, yet overemphasize positivist perspectives). Interpretive approaches are

skimmed over or neglected altogether, thereby reducing their representation in the field. As such, Schwartz-Shea and Yanow’s volume serves as a much-needed resource for those graduate students who lack readily available access to interpretive methods instruction at their home universities, as it provides these students with a clear and concise manual for addressing many issues that scholars engaged in interpretive research begin to encounter at the earliest stages of their careers.

In this book, Schwartz-Shea and Yanow present, in detail, the considerations that need to be addressed when formulating an interpretive research project. While they briefly revisit the step-by-step organization of a typical research design, this is not their primary focus. Instead, Schwartz-Shea and Yanow delve into the way conceptualizations of interpretive research designs differ from positivist models. They begin this enterprise with a discussion about the articulation of a research question, highlighting the importance of abductive reasoning and the hermeneutic circle for interpretive research (pp. 30–33)—crucial information for students who learn about the inductive/deductive distinction in their earliest methods seminars, but are not exposed to the possibility of a third option. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow then address differences in concept formation, theorizing, and notions of causality, noting that, unlike research originating from the school of positivist thought, in interpretive research, concepts are not formed *a priori*, but rather emerge organically through the course of the research process (p. 39). Moreover, theorizing is understood to occur based on knowledge arising out of specific historical and cultural settings (p. 47), and causality is perceived as constitutive (p. 52). Establishing these distinctions and elaborating on their onto-epistemological foundations is important for junior scholars, not only in the formation of their research, but also, and perhaps more crucially, during the justification phase of these projects, as concept formation, theory, and causality are often some of the most contentious points of discussion when preparing a prospectus or grant proposal. Students engaging in interpretive work can draw upon the language and arguments put forth by Schwartz-Shea and Yanow to articulate a strong defense of