

Methods Clinic #6—Working with “Reviewer #2”—June 25, 2021

Compiled by Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea,
with input from Joe Soss

Resource list

...instead of looking at my work as ethnography, where the working premise is that the researcher sits, listens, has conversations, and observes, the group of faculty judging my case was asking for information on my “data sets” and “experimental methods.”

They wanted questionnaires, surveys, coded interview protocols. If there were interview transcripts, how many linear feet of printout did I have on file?

... I worried that these inquiries about my experimental protocols and linear feet of interview transcripts were a signal that my style of inquiry was not being accepted on its own terms.

The Second Self was systematic new work, pursued over six years [entailing hundreds of interviews, hours of participant-observation]. But at MIT, one way to dismiss work was to say that it was not “scientific.”

—Sherry Turkle, *The empathy diaries*
(NY: Penguin Press, 2021, 312-13 of 349)

The opening couple of sentences above might have come from any political scientist or sociologist doing “interpretive” research—but these are the words of MIT’s Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology Sherry Turkle, reflecting on her tenure review, in the mid-1980s. She adds that she had a contract for the book with Simon & Schuster, a commercial press, not an academic press. Thomas Kuhn, a senior colleague, told her, in a phone conversation, that this was a mistake.

These and related sorts of issues constitute a recurring topic in Methods Clinic sessions and beyond. How to engage people who challenge “interpretivist” research on “scientific” grounds? A manuscript reviewer, for example, might claim that the work isn’t “rigorous,” or “valid,” or “replicable.” A discussant on a conference panel or a member of the audience might ask, “But which of your variables is dependent and which, independent?”

Such challenges can come in a range of situations, including—in addition to ms. reviews or conference panels—grant submission reviews, job searches, a tenure or promotion review, or dealing with a dissertation supervisor or committee member, a course instructor, or even a colleague or classmate. Below are a few published works that successfully responded to such challenges.

Examples of published works that take steps to explain how they did what they did, and why

Cramer Walsh, Katherine. 2012. Putting inequality in its place: Rural consciousness and the power of perspective. *American Political Science Review* 106, 3: 517-32.

Fujii, Lee Ann. 2008. The power of local ties: Popular participation in the Rwandan genocide. *Security Studies* 17, 3: 568-97. DOI: 10.1080/09636410802319578.

Gusfield, Joseph R. 1996. *Contested meanings: The construction of alcohol problems*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. Esp. 102-3, 108-9.

Page, Joshua, Piehowski, Victoria, and Soss, Joe. 2019. A debt of care: Commercial bail and the gendered logic of criminal justice predation. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 5, 1: 150–72. DOI: 10.7758/RSF.2019.5.1.07

Joe says: "...there are two appendices that might be helpful to some of the workshop participants: one on methodology and method, and one on ethics. As a journal, *RSF* leans pretty strongly in a positivist direction, and we...made a conscious effort to deal with tension by *explaining* our approach to reviewers, editors, and readers—rather than altering or misrepresenting what we did in order to align with positivist expectations."

Parkinson, Sarah Elizabeth. 2013. Organizing rebellion: Rethinking high-risk mobilization and social networks in war. *American Political Science Review* 107, 3: 418-32.

Soss, Joe. 1999. Lessons of welfare: Policy design, political learning, and political action. *American Political Science Review* 93, 2: 363-80.

During the session, Joe Soss mentioned these 2 references:

"Nicholas Tampio has a [short] piece that was in PS some years ago, that he wrote after being a sort of editorial assistant at...*Political Theory*."

Writing political theory: Lessons from an apprenticeship.
PS: Political Science & Politics 38, 3 (July 2005): 391-92.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096505050079>

"Mario [Luis] Small has a nice piece in the journal *Ethnography* from 2009 that's entitled "How many cases do I need?"

"How many cases do I need?": On science and the logic of case selection in field-based research. *Ethnography* 10, 1: 5-38.

Links for researching grants

Major North American research universities have offices dedicated to providing information and support for grant applications. Others provide little to no support. The following are some places to look for funding information, keeping in mind that the National Science Foundation is not the only place to look for grants.

Dvora says: Years ago, a colleague told me his secret: read the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* (parallel to the *Chronicle for Higher Education*) to see which family foundations are funding what sorts of projects. Also, keep in mind that under US tax law, such foundations are required to expend a certain amount of money each year—so in a sense, you are doing them a favor by giving them ideas for where to spend their money. But make sure to do your footwork before you submit a proposal. The Foundation Center and its library used to be my starting point. Things have changed in the world of philanthropy, and it has now merged with another association; but they seem to be maintaining their library, now available online (although I haven't checked the extent of that).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foundation_Center

<https://www.cof.org/>

<https://fconline.foundationcenter.org/>

<https://candid.org/>

<https://tqr.nova.edu/websites/>

<https://www.tqci.com/>

Previous Methods Clinics — Winter-Spring 2021

1. Issues in interpretive research (January 22)
2. Field research, COVID, and social media (February 19)
3. Political ethnography (March 19)
4. Interviewing (April 16)
5. Documents and beyond: Doing a “close reading” (May 21)

A chat transcript (except for #5), video link (except for #1), and resource sheet for each of these are available at

<https://connect.apsanet.org/interpretationandmethod/methods-clinic/>.

Thanks to our hosts:

- the Women's Caucus in Political Science; and
- the Interpretive Methodologies and Methods Conference Group @ APSA

Time sensitive announcement

Western Political Science Association Annual Meeting

CELEBRATING OUR 75TH ANNIVERSARY

March 10 - 12, 2022

Portland, Oregon, USA

<http://www.wpsanet.org/meeting/>

Submission deadline, **September 17, 2021**

Section 9: Interpretation and Method

Section Chair: Kimala Price, San Diego State University, kprice@sdsu.edu

CfP: This section invites papers and panels that critically reflect upon the traditions, presuppositions, and methods laden within interpretive political inquiry. Papers may range from foregrounding longstanding modes of thought and their presuppositions such as with hermeneutics and critical theory or which examine the specific interpretive questions and assumptions raised by a particular political topic. Paper and panel proposals that explore the conference theme of "The Politics of Peril and Opportunity" with respect to interpretive methods are especially welcome.