

Symposium: Emerging Methodologists Workshop

Qualitative and Multi-Method Research

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Emerging Methodologists Workshop Symposium: Introduction

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The discipline of political science faces deep challenges related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. These challenges are clearly visible in the group of scholars who develop, write on, and teach research methods (Shames and Wise 2017, Barnes 2018), and qualitative and multi-method research in particular. This deficit results, in part, from a “pipeline problem” in which junior scholars from under-represented groups who are interested in and talented with such methods do not develop or write about them, and are not encouraged and actively mentored to do so. The consequent homogeneity of the group of scholars who work on these methods inhibits the emergence of new ideas and approaches and implicitly signals that those who develop and disseminate qualitative methods – i.e., those with the authority to say how research that generates and analyzes qualitative data should be conducted – must be white men.

One step toward addressing this challenge entails encouraging advanced political science graduate students and junior faculty based at U.S. institutions who are from under-represented groups to develop, publish on, and teach qualitative methods that aim at explanation, and strategies for combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The annual “Emerging Methodologists Workshop-Qualitative and Multi-Method Explanatory Research” (hereafter EMW-QMER, <http://sigla.georgetown.domains/emworkshop/>), supported by generous funding from the National Science Foundation’s Accountable Institutions and Behavior program, seeks to contribute to that end and, more broadly, to bolster existing networks, foster new networks, and build an inclusive intellectual qualitative and multi-methods

research community.

In each one-day workshop, held on the Wednesday before the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association begins, six advanced graduate students and junior faculty from under-represented groups present and receive feedback on a paper focusing on methods for collecting, generating, and analyzing qualitative data, and/or strategies for integrating qualitative and quantitative methods. Each presenter is paired with a “Methods Mentor” who works with and supports the presenter in the months preceding and following the workshop, assisting them to develop their work and move it toward peer-reviewed publication. Methods Mentors also attend the EMW-QMER.

This symposium introduces the work presented at the inaugural EMW-QMER, held in August 2023, comprising summaries of the six papers offered. This first workshop featured a fantastic set of scholars and papers examining ethics and data quality (Mitra), interviewing techniques (Morell), participant observation (Turkmen), the integration of causal effects and causal mechanisms in multi-method research (Alcocer), concept measurement (Moore), and theory reconstruction (Walton). Workshop discussion was robust, challenging, and supportive. Paper presenters are now revising their papers based on feedback from the workshop and preparing to submit them for peer review in the near future.

We are grateful to the APSA Qualitative and Multi-Method Research section for its support of this initiative, and to EMW Steering Committee members Chloe Thurston and Sheena Chestnut Greitens for their shrewd guidance and warm encouragement. We are also very thankful to the faculty who served as Methods Mentors

this year: Cathie Jo Martin, Daniel Pemstein, Benjamin Read, Ryan Saylor, Jason Seawright, and Erica Simmons.

We encourage advanced political science graduate students and junior faculty based at U.S. institutions who are writing a paper focused specifically on developing, critiquing, challenging, or enhancing a method for collecting, generating, or analyzing qualitative data,

or a technique for multi-method research, to submit a proposal for the next EMW, to take place on September 4, 2024 in Philadelphia; the call for proposals will be issued in November 2023. More information on the EMW can be found here: <http://sigla.georgetown.domains/emworkshop/>

Barnes, Tiffany D. (2018) "Strategies for Improving Gender Diversity in the Methods Community: Insights from Political Methodologists and Social Science Research." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 51(3): 580–87.

Shames, Shauna L., and Tess Wise. (2017) "Gender, Diversity, and Methods in Political Science: A Theory of Selection and Survival Biases." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50(3): 811–23.

How Do Ethical Considerations Affect Data and Findings from Field Research?

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Field research can bring real harm to participants and communities, and a significant literature now focuses on safeguarding ethics throughout the research process (Grimm et al. 2020). However, less attention has been paid to how decisions about ethical dilemmas impact data and findings. Because all stages of research are fundamentally structured by the political contexts in which they occur, ethical considerations can affect data and findings by shaping choices about participant and question selection, documentation, and publication. Below, I briefly overview the conditions under which researchers make these decisions and discuss their potential consequences.

Participant Selection

The dynamic and unpredictable nature of the field means that scholars may elect not to sample or interview certain individuals, households, or groups based on evolving assessments of risk. This can occur when research might bring harm to researchers and research partners, or when the research process is likely to reveal the existence, presence, or social networks of a vulnerable population to state or non-state actors (Fujii 2012). Such decisions can have important implications for data and findings. They may lead groups with specific characteristics to be systematically excluded, generate inconsistencies between what we learn about a population and what we aim to learn, or lead to conclusions that are beyond the range of the data. For example, during my fieldwork with migrants and refugees in Tunisia, black African migrants

faced heightened surveillance and policing because they were perceived as disproportionately undertaking risky boat journeys to Europe. To not draw attention to them in our field sites, we interviewed people from groups less vulnerable to surveillance. However, this also meant that we likely underestimated the barriers the broader population of migrants and refugees were facing. Experiences Sub-Saharan migrants were more likely to encounter, like certain repertoires of state control or racism and xenophobia, also remained underrepresented in our data.

Question Selection

In Tunisia, one of our goals was to understand how people made decisions about their journeys and navigated different policy regimes. Alongside us, journalists, humanitarian organizations, and security forces were also gathering data about the same population, but to different ends. Collecting certain information that may be used to surveil or coerce participants or communities is dangerous. In our case, the risk was acute for people aiming to travel to Europe, and asking about their goals and plans thus raised ethical questions. Researchers often avoid certain questions when the very act of hearing or answering them might cause psychological harm (Cronin-Furman and Lake 2018), and when answers can expose participants and communities to broader social and political risks (Wood 2006). However, omitting certain questions may lead to missing critical information and limit researchers' ability to draw conclusions and identify