

Application for the Editorship of Sociological Methodology

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Introduction

It has been my career-long dream to be considered for the editorship of *Sociological Methodology*. Edgar F. Borgatta, who founded the journal (prior to ASA taking it over), was my earliest graduate school mentor and Master's thesis chair. I was also a member of the first cohort of his NIH-supported Methodology Training Program, beginning in 1966. My earliest experiences as a graduate student at Wisconsin not only exposed me to Ed Borgatta, but also to George Bohrnstedt and David Heise (both former editors of *SM*), as well as to Robert Hauser, Don Treiman and others. Research methodology has been one of my areas of specialization throughout my career, having published extensively on the topic. Borgatta also originated the companion journal, *Sociological Methods & Research* (also published by SAGE), on whose editorial board I served for more than 15 years. On two occasions, I was offered the editorship of *SMR* but had to turn it down because of the lack of institutional support. Over the course of my career, I have published two books and over 50 articles and chapters specifically focused on research methodology. Among these, several were published in *SM* and *SMR*, and I have been actively involved as a reviewer for both journals. Thus, I was delighted to be nominated for consideration of the possible editorship of *SM*, and I am honored to be able to set forth this application.

The following narrative focuses on the following five areas: (1) my vision of the future potential and possibilities of the journal, including my understanding of the mission of the journal, and its present strengths and challenges; (2) my academic background, (3) my record of scholarship in general and specifically my writings on the topic of methodology; and (4) logistical issues, including a consideration of resources, the structure of the journal operation, my expectations of institutional support, and the academic environment that will host the journal. I also include an abbreviated vision statement at the end of the present narrative.

Vision Statement

As the only ASA periodical devoted entirely to research methods, *SM* plays an important role in the discipline, and it holds a coveted position among sociology journals. Not only is it considered *the top journal* in the field of sociology focusing on research methodology, it is also among the *top five* sociology journals, as measured by relative impact and article influence. In recent years, *SM* has had a very high impact factor (1.976) and among the top-ranked ASA journals, it ranks second to the *ASR* in terms of overall impact and article influence.

I have followed *SM* from its inception and have actively supported its key role among ASA journals. My library contains every *SM* volume—the earliest ones were required reading when I was a graduate student—and I have been a subscriber throughout its history. I have a clear sense of how the journal has evolved over its 45-year history and how its contents reflect the nature of the field. As the only ASA journal devoted to research methods, I agree with others (including many previous editors) that *SM*'s mission should include a focus not only on statistical methods but also on the broad array of methodological issues that face the field of sociology. I discuss this set of issues further below, but at this point I would summarize the mission of *SM* is to broadly reflect the research methods and the epistemological choices made by all members of the discipline and should welcome the publication of scholarship dealing with all aspects of research design, measurement, data collection, modeling, and data analysis. I believe *SM* has done an excellent job in representing this mission over its 45-year

history; and although it is difficult to imagine improving on this record, given the opportunity to edit the journal, I would do my very best to maintain this fine record of accomplishment and continue to make improvements where possible.

SM's privileged status among ASA journals reflects not only its high visibility and quality of the work published there, but also the widespread support it has received from the membership of ASA. At the same time, I think most people would like to see more methodological diversity in the journal, and there have been some clear efforts taken in the past to include greater breadth in coverage of research methods in the discipline. This is not always easy to achieve, given that *SM* is an annual submissions-based periodical, without a great deal of leverage in being able to devote "special issues" to selected topics. The current editor, Tim Liao, has employed some creative efforts in this direction, as illustrated by the *symposia* he developed in the three most recent volumes of *SM* on "qualitative comparative analysis" (volume 44, 2014), "marginal models for categorical data" (volume 43, 2013), and "words, narratives, analyses, agency" (volume 42, 2012). These symposia have provided rare opportunities for comment, critique, and exchange on important methodological topics, and reflect a very successful innovation in the journal's content. Without going into detail about the positive impacts these special symposia have on the field of sociological methodology, I believe this mechanism permits the editor to initiate conversations on important trends. I would propose continuing the tradition started by Prof. Liao to the extent possible, developing the option of providing discussion of special topics without taking too much away from the normal submission-based publication needs of the journal, and at the same time giving voice to diverse views on relevant issues that are important to ASA research constituencies.

In the ideal scenario, *SM* would continue to publish broadly representative articles on research design, measurement, data collection, modeling, and data analysis, across the spectrum of approaches, e.g., qualitative vs. quantitative, nomothetic vs. idiographic, etc. This of course depends on the reputation of the journal for attracting such excellent submissions, but I also believe there is a role for the editor in stimulating submissions by communicating the broad vision of the journal to the broad international community of sociological methodologists.

In addition to emphasizing methodological diversity, I would encourage a vision of looking to the future in terms of the kinds of methodological issues that will confront sociology as a field. In order to illustrate some of the areas where I believe we may usefully focus in the future, I wish to summarize a recent paper I wrote on my reflections on sociological methodology over the past 30 years. In 2014, I was asked, as the longest-serving member of the Scientific Committee of the international methodology journal, the *Bulletin of Sociological Methodology/Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique*, to write a short note on my association with the journal and my reflections on some of the trends in methodology over the past 30 years and the future. I summarize the essential points of the paper in the following paragraphs.

Big data social science. The field of sociology has become inundated with data. With the continuation of many existing sources of social monitoring data, such as the U.S. General Social Survey, the German ALLBUS, the British Social Attitudes Study, the World Values Survey, to name just a few, as well as new large-scale multi-national data projects (such as the European Social Survey and the International Social Survey Program), along with the digitization of many archival records, new demands are being placed on how we confront large-scale datasets. New approaches that merge computer science, visualization tools, and traditional statistics will be required to accommodate these growing resources, all vital for the future of sociology.

Longitudinal data. Longitudinal designs are increasingly part of our sociological arsenal, and in future years will become even more important. This includes everything from repeated cross-sectional

surveys and panel surveys to retrospective life history calendars, which go to great lengths in dating the timing of events and their duration, as well as life histories presented in the form of narratives. Longitudinal data have several advantages over one-off cross-sectional studies, and the potential importance of these designs has been recently recognized by the General Social Survey, the NSF-supported social attitude study, which is now conducting 3-wave panel studies on a routine basis. Sociologists need to better understand how to use such data, and *SM* can help in this process.

Comparative sociology. Modern sociology has its roots in the comparisons of cultures and social systems. Comparative sociology is not new, and while the use of intercultural comparisons as a research strategy is a time-worn tradition in the social sciences, the use of multinational surveys are a relatively recent development over the past 30 years, especially those using a large number of countries. The vastness of this ever-expanding international survey data base, along with the relative success of these research strategies means that the use of multinational surveys is no longer the exclusive domain of international or “area” specialists. There are many challenges involved in making comparisons across cultures and countries, and ultimately sociological methodology can make a contribution to understanding the nature of institutional and normative differences across systems.

Social networks. Individual cases are often the primary focus of sociologists, and yet individual lives are linked to one another. People inhabit multi-layered environments, or nested structures, and a growing body of knowledge is developing that involves the study of dyads, triads and larger interpersonal structures. Greater integration of social network science and sociology is needed, and innovative methodological approaches, especially with regard to the gathering and analysis of data, are necessary to advance the interplay of human development and social structures as mediated by social environments and cultural norms. *SM* has a tradition of publishing contributions from network science, involving graph theory, visualization tools, block modeling, etc., and can continue to assist sociologists to incorporate information on network structures in their theories and data.

Inferential statistics. Training in the utilization of mathematical and statistical tools in the social sciences is changing, and *SM* had helped lead the challenges to “frequentist” logics involving probabilities of inferential errors. Bayesian thinking is slowly penetrating these historical traditions, and especially as we employ large data structures, new ways of thinking will be required as a routine matter.

Survey methods. Vast amounts of survey data are produced throughout the world for many purposes in any given year, and survey data issues remain an important focus for the future of sociological methodology. By necessity, social methodologists must focus on all the methods of survey research, including methods of sampling, questionnaire design, interviewing modes of communication, non-response and measurement error.

Measurement quality. The linkage between theory and data involves a number of considerations typically discussed under the heading of measurement. Ultimately, our concerns with measurement involve issues of quality. In the case of survey data, many aspects of the information-gathering process are worthy of serious scrutiny given the potential for producing measurement error: aspects of survey questions; the cognitive mechanisms of information processing and retrieval; the motivational context of the setting that produces information; and the response framework in which the information is transmitted. But the issues of “validity claims” go well beyond the use of survey data, and tend to permeate all types of methods and require attention regardless of the particular “logic” used to make sense of the social world.

There are others areas that will challenge future methodological choices as well, and those described above point in some important directions. I would work to continue the reputation of the journal for

attracting excellent submissions through an emphasis on communicating the journal's mission to the broad international community of sociological methodologists.

Academic Background Information

I am currently (since 2002) the inaugural holder of the distinguished Tracy Winfree and Ted H. McCourtney Professorship in Sociology and Demography, and Director of the Center for Life Course and Longitudinal Studies, College of the Liberal Arts, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA. In addition, I am an Emeritus Research Professor at the Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, and Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. I believe I have the organizational and intellectual leadership qualities required to edit a major ASA journal. I have a background in academic and research administration, and in a research career spanning more than 40 years, I have been the PI (and co-PI) on more than 20 major federal research grants (R01s) from the NSF, NIA, NIMH, and NICHD. I currently have funding from the NSF of a project aimed at developing a public data archive on the quality of survey questions. In the past, I have also directed a post-doctoral (T32) NIH training program and an NIH (P30) research center grant in population health and aging at Pennsylvania State University.

I was also Chair of the Department of Sociology at the University of Michigan for two years (and Associate Chair for one year), from 1997-2000. During my time at Michigan, I directed the Survey Research Center's Summer Institute in Survey Research Techniques for 12 years, from 1983 to 1995. I was the first director of the SRC Summer Institute, and building upon the foundational efforts of Rensis Likert and Leslie Kish, I (along with my colleagues) developed a large-scale summer program specializing in all aspects of survey research, including sample design, questionnaire development and measurement, survey implementation, evaluation research, qualitative methods, and all aspects of statistical analysis, including introductory statistics, multivariate techniques, structural equation models, event history analysis, and specialized courses in longitudinal design and analysis. Over this period, and under my leadership, the SRC Summer Institute grew from a summer program involving 4-5 courses to one having more than 20 courses per summer in all aspects of survey methods. The program currently continues to function at this level.

At Michigan, I participated in a revamping of the Sociology Department curriculum in the area of methodology, and helped create (and was the first to co-teach) a course on the "logics of research methods," which stressed the pluralistic nature of research methods in sociology, including historical comparative methods, ethnographic and qualitative methods, as well as the logic of quantitative survey methods of data collection and multivariate analysis. Having begun my career as a qualitative researcher, methodological breadth and the consideration of the value of competing epistemologies has been and continues to be important to me over my career.

Some other roles I have had that may be relevant to the Committee's consideration include:

- Member, Board of Overseers, General Social Survey, from its inception in 1980 (and Chair from 1985-1989), National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago.
- Resident Scientist, National Archive of Computerized Data on Aging, Inter-University Consortium for Social and Political Research, University of Michigan, 2002-04.
- Director, Center for Population Health and Aging, National Institute on Aging (P30) Center for the Demography and Economics of Aging, 2005-2010; now the Center for Life Course and Longitudinal Studies, Director, 2010-15.

All of these activities and experiences demonstrate my record of intellectual and organizational leadership. In addition, I have been active in journal review activities, editorial boards of journals, NIH review panels, and section activities of the ASA (see the CV for details).

Record of Scholarship

My publication record is included in the attached CV, which I briefly summarize in two parts—(1) my scholarly activity in general, and (2) my publications dealing with methodology in particular. From the beginning of my career, I have believed that persons with an interest in methodology must give their work meaning by focusing on substantive problems as well as methodological issues, and *vice versa*, that is, that substantive research requires tackling pressing methodological problems as well. In terms of my substantive research, I have specialized in the integration of demographic and development perspectives in the study of human lives, particularly with respect to studying families and children, life span development and the life course, social factors in cognitive aging, and generational determinants of political and social attitudes and beliefs. In my substantive research, I have published two books and over 150 journal articles and book chapters. In 2002 I was recognized by the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) as one of the “world’s most cited authors—comprising less than one half of one percent of all publishing researchers.” One article I co-wrote with Robert Hauser on path analysis, published in the *ASR* in 1975, has been cited over 700 times.

In the area of research methodology, I have written widely on structural equation modeling, measurement, survey measurement errors, longitudinal design and analysis, and general methodological topics. I have published two books and over 50 articles and chapters in referred journals/invited collections on methodological topics. Some highlights of these publication and editorial activities are as follows:

- A book, *Margins of Error—A Study of Reliability in Survey Measurement* (John Wiley & Sons, 2007), published in the prestigious Wiley Series on Survey Methodology.
- An edited book (co-edited with Bob Belli and Frank Stafford), *Calendar and Time-Diary Methods in Life Course Research* (SAGE Publications, 2009).
- Published 5 articles in *Sociological Methodology* (1974, 1977, 1979, 1988 and 1992)
- Published 10 articles in *Sociological Methods & Research* (1973, 1975, 1977, 1980, 1991, 1993, 1997, 2014)
- Published 5 methodological articles in the *Public Opinion Quarterly* (1985, 1987, 1988, 2006)
- Edited three special issues of *Sociological Methods & Research* (1977, 1991, 2014)

Among my colleagues in Sociology at Penn State University, I am regarded as one of the most prolific and visible authors on methodological topics.

Logistics

Realizing it is premature to plan for hosting the journal at Penn State, I would nonetheless indicate there would be considerable support for such an eventuality (please see the attached letter of support from Prof. John Iceland, Department Head of Sociology). Preliminary conversations indicate there would be no difficulty providing staff support and available space. In addition, I would hope to negotiate some ASA support for a part-time managing editor. My present thinking is that if the current managing editor, who supports the journal activities under Tim Liao’s editorship, were available, it would make a great deal of sense to negotiate that person’s continued involvement in that role. Finally, I would mention the anticipated support of my colleagues at Penn State University, not only in Sociology, but in related fields. We have a strong statistics department, a population research center, and a methodology center that specializes in a range of measurement and statistical analysis topics.

Abbreviated Vision Statement

As the only ASA periodical publication devoted entirely to research methods, *SM* plays an important role in the discipline. Not only is it considered *the top journal* in the field of sociology focusing on

research methodology, it is among the *top five* sociology journals, and among ASA-sponsored journals, ranks 2nd to the *ASR* in terms of overall impact and article influence. As the only ASA journal devoted to research methods, I agree with others (including many previous editors) that *SM*'s mission should include a focus not only on statistical methods but also on the broad array of methodological issues that face the field of sociology. The mission of *SM* is to broadly reflect the research methods and the epistemological choices made by all members of the discipline and welcomes the publication of scholarship dealing all aspects research design, measurement, data collection, modeling, and data analysis. *SM* had done an excellent job in representing this mission over its 45-year history, and although it is difficult to imagine improving on this record, given the opportunity to edit the journal, I would do my very best to maintain this fine record of accomplishment, and continue to make improvements where possible. In the ideal scenario, *SM* will continue to publish broadly across the spectrum of qualitative vs. quantitative, nomothetic vs. idiographic, etc. methods.

SM enjoys a privileged status among ASA journals, as noted above, with a very high impact factor. This reflects not only its high visibility and quality of the work published there, but the widespread support it has received from the membership of ASA. At the same time, I think most people would like to see more methodological diversity in the journal, and there have been some clear efforts taken in the past to include greater breadth in coverage of research methods in the discipline. This is not always easy to achieve, given that *SM* is a submissions-based periodical, and that it is an annual publication, without a great deal of flexibility in being able to devote "special issues" to selected topics. The current editor, Tim Liao, has done some creative things in recent years that reflect efforts in this direction, as illustrated in the *symposia* he has developed in the three most recent volumes of *SM*. These symposia have provided a rare opportunity for comment, critique and exchange on important methodological topics, and reflect a very successful innovation in the journal's content. Without going into detail about the positive impacts these special symposia have on the field of sociological methodology, I believe this mechanism permits the editor to initiate conversations on important trends. I would propose continuing the tradition started by Prof. Liao to the extent possible, developing the option of providing discussion of special topics without taking too much away from the normal submission-based publication needs of the journal, and at the same time giving voice to diverse views on relevant issues that are important to ASA research constituencies.

I would work to maintain the high visibility and impact of the journal, would work to maintain methodological breadth, and continue the annual special symposia initiated by Prof. Tim Liao. I would emphasize a focus on future challenges to sociological methods, including issues surrounding 1) big data social science, 2) longitudinal design and analysis, 3) comparative sociology, 4) the demands of integrating of social network models with other data, 5) the changing approaches to inferential statistics, 6) survey methods, and 7) measurement quality. I would continue the reputation of the journal for attracting excellent submissions through communicating the journal's mission to the broad international community of sociological methodologists.

Given the stellar reputation of *SM* over its history, it is difficult to imagine improving on this record, but given the opportunity, as editor, I would do my very best to maintain this fine record of accomplishment and continue to make improvements where possible.