contribute to our understanding of politics. This is a fitting conclusion to an excellent volume that should find its way into many graduate courses on comparative politics and research methods.

Elucidating Social Science Concepts: An Interpretivist Guide. By Frederic Charles Schaffer. New York: Routledge, 2016. 118p. $135 hardback, $32.95 paper.
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— Erica S. Simmons, *University of Wisconsin–Madison*

Concepts are central to any social science work, for they help to organize and influence every stage in the research process. In *Elucidating Social Science Concepts: An Interpretivist Guide,* Frederic Schaffer makes a crucial intervention. Not only does he show us why and how concepts are critical in shaping research questions and findings, he also offers clear suggestions for scholars looking to engage thoughtfully with the concepts they use. The book adopts an interpretivist approach, yet it is a critical read for every social scientist and should be on every graduate methods syllabus. The book will encourage even those scholars most committed to positivist approaches to think carefully about the limitations of the conceptual frameworks they use. Readers cannot help but come away with a self-awareness of how concepts help to constitute social reality and how important that constitutive process is for our understandings of politics.

Schaffer begins the book by skillfully questioning the assumptions that underpin how many social scientists develop and use concepts. He then makes the case for a strategy that he calls "concept elucidation," showing clearly how it will improve not only scholarship, but also public policy. The discussion is particularly powerful because Schaffer carefully contrasts the elucidation strategy with what he calls concept "reconstruction." Often called concept formation, concept reconstruction involves tinkering "with the meanings of words to make them precise, useful tools of reflection, measurement, and comparison" (p. 5). Social scientists reconstruct concepts in this way all the time—for example, we develop definitions for democracy that allow us to describe governments as more or less democratic based on particular criteria. As Schaffer states, this kind of concept reconstruction makes it easier for us to identify and measure the phenomena that interest us in the world.

But Schaffer deftly reveals how concept reconstruction can constrain and often mislead researchers. By attempting to use concepts to faithfully describe an independently existing reality, scholars engaging in concept reconstruction can privilege their own understandings and overlook the ways in which attempts to create an "objective" stance might blind scholars to important political processes. Schaffer takes us step by step through a number of examples to show how and why concept reconstruction can lead to deeply flawed scholarship and policy. This is one of the many strengths of the book. Easily accessible examples demonstrate the dangers of concept reconstruction and the important role that concept elucidation can play in helping us to develop better understandings of the world.

A particularly useful example is Schaffer's discussion of Giovanni Sartori's approach to the concept "family" in *The Tower of Babel: On the Definition and Analysis of Concepts in the Social Sciences* (1975). Sartori offers a minimal definition of "family" as "'a social group characterized by legitimate heterosexual intercourse with a function of rearing children'" (quoted in Schaffer, p. 11). The intention is for the concept to be a useful analytical tool across contexts. But even as Sartori is reflective in his use of language, his efforts to (re)construct the concept are deeply flawed. When we approach the work with the lens of concept elucidation, we see how and why. Schaffer's critique shows us how concept reconstruction comes with three central, and related, problems (p. 12). First, by assuming an objective reality, concept reconstruction comes with a "one-sidedness" (p. 12) that privileges the semiotic worlds of researchers, "a move that blinds the scholars to actors' self-understandings" (p. 12). As Schaffer points out, people experience family in a range of ways, and many of these—for example same-sex couples or couples who choose not to have children—are left out of Sartori's definition. Second, and related, when we develop concepts like family using Sartori's guidelines, we assume a universality that might not map onto experiences in other times and places (e.g., ancient Rome where the word *familia* included servants and slaves). Finally, Schaffer shows how these attempts are deeply normative. Scholars may see concepts as "theoretical containers" meant to "sort facts" but they are also, "potentially, instruments of power insofar as they contribute to [for example] the legitimation or the de-legitimation of particular kinds of families" (p. 19).

In contrast to concept reconstruction, concept elucidation aims "to clarify the meaning and use of concepts in lived practices, not to fashion precise conceptual tools of the researcher's design" (p. 7). This is not simply a matter of coming up with a "better" definition. Drawing on Charles Taylor's (1971) work on interpretation, Schaffer's approach recognizes that "language is . . . 'constitutive' of social practices and inseparable from them" (p. 6). Our social words are inextricably intertwined with the words we use to describe them. As a result, concepts themselves need to be studied. When we try to nail down the essence of reality—in Sartori's case the essence of what family means—we are attempting to do something that divorces concepts from lived experiences. As social scientists, it is those very lived experiences that interest us; we limit our ability to understand politics when we develop criteria for concepts that are not grounded in actors' self-understandings. We may, for example, exclude the ways in

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which family can signify intimate connections without biological relationships, or the way in which the word family itself might be used differently by the same person in different contexts. Schaffer's point is that we need to pay attention to how people themselves use words if we want to begin to understand what those words might mean. But Schaffer is also very clear that the stakes are not just academic. When we reconstruct the concept of family instead of elucidating it, we may keep loved ones from the hospital bedsides of their sick partners or prevent potentially loving parents from adopting children (p. 19). The stakes are very high.

All of this makes for what appears to be a very messy approach to social science. There are no clean boundaries and there is always some element of ambiguity. But "for the conceptually informed interpretivist, such contextualized classifications are not manifestations of ambiguity or confusion to be cleaned up . . . they are situated, intersubjective understandings that shed light on how people construct, navigate, and challenge their social worlds. Such understandings matter for many of the social phenomena that both positivists and interpretivists want to explain" (p. 16). This messiness is uncomfortable and highly impractical, but Schaffer's discussion clearly shows why it is critical to the work we do.

The remainder of the book focuses on exploring three modes of elucidating concepts: what Schaffer calls grounding, locating, and exposing. Schaffer clearly explains each research practice and offers helpful guidance to scholars who might want to use them. Through illuminating examples from existing work, Schaffer shows how scholars might engage in a variety of research "tasks" (p. 44) and what role each might play in constructing a larger analysis. Also important is the way in which Schaffer himself does not avoid or dismiss the challenges that come with elucidation. To his credit, Schaffer thinks carefully through some of the dangers, pitfalls, and potential misuses of the method he so carefully elaborates. These chapters are likely to prove most directly useful to interpretive scholars, but even the most committed positivist might find the discussion provoking in important ways.

I would be curious, however, to see how Schaffer might engage more directly with a sympathetic positivist audience. If positivist scholars do read the book (and I hope they will), they may find, after being convinced of the importance of concept elucidation in Chapter 1, that they aren't sure how to think about incorporating it into their own work. What does a positivist scholar do next? This may be an impossible question to answer, as the task itself may be just that. The epistemological and ontological divides may be too great for a committed positivist to engage in concept elucidation. And yet as Schaffer states at the end of Chapter 1, elucidation "should be of interest not only to interpretivists, but also to self-aware, morally responsible positivists as well" (p. 22). I agree wholeheartedly and hope that Schaffer will carry his impressive contribution forward by directly tackling the question of *how* a self-aware positivist might proceed.

Analyzing Social Narratives. By Shaul R. Shenhav. New York: Routledge, 2015. 103p. $140.00 cloth, $32.95 paper.
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In this deceptively slim book, part of Routledge's series on interpretive methods, Shaul R. Shenhav offers a toolkit for social scientists to use in the study of narrative, which he defines broadly as "a representation of a course of events" (p. 12). He defines social narratives, his primary interest, as those "that are embraced by a group and also tell [*sic*], in one way or another, something about that group" (p. 17). The definition is intentionally and usefully broad so as not to exclude any narrative in advance; but it is also vague, because narratives can be "embraced" in many ways: Must a narrative be believed? Accepted as legitimate even if one does not believe it, if that is possible? What about narratives embraced ambivalently? Is a narrative collectively rejected therefore not a social one? This critical part of the definition is underspecified.

In any case, using the concepts of classical narratology —story, text, and narration (p. 5)—Shenhav "[adapts] its basic concepts to the social sciences" (p. 6). He borrows definitions of these concepts from the literary theorist Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (*Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* 2002 [1983]), upon whom he relies very heavily throughout the book. To Shenhav, a story is a chronological sequence of events (p. 16). A "text" consists of "'spoken or written discourse,' which undertakes the telling of events" (ibid.). Elsewhere, he defines "text" more broadly to include "visual images, gestures, and the architecture of spaces," but he never addresses these other forms, and all of his examples are of speech and writing, leaving the scope of his proposed framework unclear (p. 7). "Narration" refers to the communication of the narrative by a narrator to his or her audience (p. 16). To this triad, the author adds a fourth element: multiplicity, "the process of repetition and variation through which narratives are reproduced at [*sic*] the societal sphere" (p. 56).

The book is largely organized around this conceptual quartet. After a brief introduction highlighting the significance of stories and the importance of "being a story-listener" (p. 1), Chapter 1 introduces story, text, narration, and multiplicity. Chapters 2 through 5 treat each of them in detail. Chapter 6 addresses normative problems and questions facing researchers who study social narratives. Chapter 7 concludes the book by describing a continuum from "thin" (p. 83) to "thick" (p. 84) analysis, where thickening refers to the introduction of more elements of narrative into a study. Because of the density and breadth

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