



Seminar: Introduction to Qualitative Methods

2nd Term, Academic Year 2020-2021

Mondays, 09:00-11:00
Seminar Room 2, Badia Fiesolana

First Seminar Session: 11.01.21
Last Seminar Session: 15.03.21

Instructor: [Jeffrey T. Checkel](#)

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Office Hours: Mondays, 12:00-14:00 (Please book a time through Adele Battistini.)

Registration: Register on line at this [link](#). *Note – This seminar is for SPS researchers only.*

Contact: Adele Battistini (Adele.Battistini@eui.eu)

Form of Instruction: This class will likely be held as a combination of on-line/Zoom and in-class/hybrid sessions – dependent on developments in the Covid pandemic.

Description

This is a course about how to evaluate and conduct rigorous, epistemologically plural qualitative research. It will both introduce you to key concepts and methods – cause and case studies, positionality and ethnography, say – and show how they work in practice. Seminar sessions will be divided in two – a conceptual introduction and overview that is then followed by examples drawn from key topics and sub-fields within SPS. The goal is not for you to become methodologists, but to be smart consumers and users of qualitative methods in your own studies and reading.

The course has three parts. We begin with two sessions on foundational issues: meta-theory, theory, causation and ethics. Methods can flow from various philosophical starting points; process tracing and ethnography – for example – are distinct techniques for gathering and evaluating data that draw upon different epistemologies. The chosen epistemology, in turn, attunes the scholar to certain research questions and not others; to seeing theory's role in different ways; to differing understandings of cause; and to contrasting appreciations of ethics. Why do proponents of case studies champion their causal power while saying little about the ethics in play, while – for the ethnographer – ethics stand front and centre, but causality – if even discussed – is bounded, contextualized and local?

The bulk of the course then provides an introduction to a number of qualitative methods. Each seminar session introduces a particular technique, provides a critical net assessment, and shows how the method works in practice. The latter is accomplished by drawing upon empirical research in the social and political sciences.

Finally – in the last two sessions – we look to the future, exploring the cutting-edge for students of qualitative research: mixed methods and research transparency.

The seminar is worth 20 credits.

Format

This is a reading intensive seminar, where the bulk of your effort will be reacting to / debating each week's assigned readings. Each week, I will get us started with a 50-55 minute introduction to the topic/method at hand. The second hour will be devoted to discussion, with the class split in two; SPS Part-Time Professor [Caitlin Procter](#) will lead one of the groups.

Seminar Readings

Books to be read – mostly key sections - include the following.

- Bennett, Andrew and Jeffrey T. Checkel, Editors, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)
- Fujii, Lee Ann, *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach* (London: Routledge, 2017)
- George, Alexander and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005)
- Gerring, John, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices, Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)
- Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren MacLean and Benjamin Read, *Field Research in Political Science: Practices and Principles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)
- Mahoney, James and Kathleen Thelen, Editors, *Advances in Comparative Historical Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)
- Mosley, Layna, Editor, *Interview Research in Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013)

Seminar readings are accessible in a variety of ways.

- Books & Chapters in Books: Most books are available electronically from the EUI Library. In the reading list below, these are indicated by **(E-Book)**. (The direct hyperlink to the book is provided whenever possible.)
- Difficult-to-Access Materials: This includes articles from newsletters, EU Commission documents, and books/chapters only available in paper format. Nearly all of these will be uploaded to the seminar [Brightspace page](#).
- Journal Articles: These are easily obtained electronically through the EUI Library.

If you encounter any problems accessing seminar readings, please contact Adele Battistini.

Requirements

There are three mandatory requirements. To pass the seminar, you need to receive a passing mark in all three areas.

- 1) Seminar Discussions: Active participation in them.

→ For the discussion part of the seminar, the class will be divided in two. This will make it easier to take part as there will be ‘fewer people in the room.’ Your participation in these discussions on a regular basis is required.

2) Group Preparation of Discussion Points: Once over the course of the term.

→ Group Composition: There are 38 students. For the discussion part of the seminar, we will divide the group in two, with Checkel taking 19 researchers (Cluster #1) and Procter the other 19 (Cluster #2). Within each cluster, researchers should form eight groups with two members each, and one group with 3 members. In both Cluster #1 and #2, the 9 groups sign up as discussion leader for one of the 9 course weeks (Sessions 2-10).

→ Group Assignment: In both Cluster #1 and #2, if your group is responsible for a particular session, then you will take the lead for our discussions on that day. For this to work, please - *by 12.00/noon the Friday before our Monday seminar* - upload to Brightspace your collectively agreed responses to a given week’s discussion questions (5-7 pages, double-spaced). Your responses can certainly go beyond the questions on the syllabus, raising other issues, or weaknesses, or points of controversy.

3) Critical Review: Due on 08.03.20 (Week 9).

→ It should be 10 pages in length (double-spaced). There are two possible formats for your critical review.

Format A: Choose any topic or method covered in the syllabus and critically assess the current state of debate over, applications of, or the strengths and weaknesses of it.

With Format A, be strategic. If you are a qualitative researcher, pick a method or topic (ethics, say) that will likely play a key role in your dissertation. If you are a quantitative researcher, choose one of the more frequently used qualitative methods in your area of research, so you can better evaluate work done in that tradition. Example: You are a quantitative researcher planning to study civil wars with advanced statistical methods. For your critical review, it would then make sense to consider case-study methods, as a growing number of scholars are studying civil conflicts with them.

Format B: Start with the central research question of your thesis and your tentative theoretical argument for answering it. What qualitative methods will you need to answer that question and test/probe your theory? Here, the bulk of the review will be spent operationalizing your methods. How, exactly, will they be used? Are their particular data challenges to consider? How will you ensure the methods are used ethically?

For either format, you are required to read deeper into the relevant literature. It is not sufficient to summarize what we already have read and discussed in class!

Schedule

- Session 1 (11 January) – Philosophy of Social Science: Meta-Theory, Theory & Cause
- Session 2 (18 January) – Research Ethics
- Session 3 (25 January) – Case Studies
- Session 4 (1 February) – Comparative Historical Analysis
- Session 5 (8 February) – Process Analytics: Process Tracing & Social Practice
- Session 6 (15 February) – Textual and Discourse Analysis
- Session 7 (22 February) – Fieldwork and Ethnography
- Session 8 (1 March) – Interviewing
- Session 9 (8 March) – The Cutting Edge, Mark I: Research Transparency

- Session 10 (15 March) – The Cutting Edge, Mark II: Mixed Methods

Seminar Topics & Readings

Session 1 - Philosophy of Social Science: Meta-Theory, Theory & Cause

Nuts and Bolts

Wight, Colin, “Philosophy of Social Science and International Relations,” in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse and Beth Simmons, Editors, *Handbook of International Relations, 2nd Edition* (London: Sage Publications, 2013) – Chapter 2. ([E-Book](#))

→ Note: In the EUI e-book version, chapter 2 is included in the link for chapter1!

della Porta, Donatella and Michael Keating, Editors, *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) – Chapters 1-2. ([E-Book](#))

Hopf, Ted, “The Limits of Interpreting Evidence,” in Richard Ned Lebow and Mark Lichbach, Editors, *Theory and Evidence in Comparative Politics and International Relations* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) – Chapter 3.

Van Evera, Stephen, “Hypotheses, Laws, and Theories: A User’s Guide,” in *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997) – Chapter 1. ([E-Book](#))

Bauböck, Rainer, “Normative Political Theory and Empirical Research,” in Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating, Editors, *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) – Chapter 3. ([E-Book](#))

Hedstroem, Peter and Petri Ylikoski, “Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010): 49–67.

Applications

Johnson, James, “Consequences of Positivism: A Pragmatist Assessment,” *Comparative Political Studies* 39/2 (2006): 224-52.

Hall, Peter, “Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Politics,” in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Editors, *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) – Chapter 11. ([E-Book](#))

Discussion Questions

- What is philosophy of social science and why does it matter?
- What is positivism? What is interpretism? How do they differ?
- How do these philosophical starting points shape the questions we ask and the theories we use?
- How do philosophical starting points influence our thinking about cause, theory, data, ethics and methods?
- What is cause? (There’s a simple question - ☺.)
- How do situated understanding, causal mechanisms, cause-effect, and correlation play (differing) roles in helping us explain and understand the social world?
- What are the roles of deduction and induction in theory development?
- What are the differences among normative, problem-solving theory and critical theory?
- What is the relation between theory and method?

Session 2 - Research Ethics

Nuts and Bolts

European Commission, DG Research and Innovation, "[Ethics in Social Science and Humanities](#)" (Brussels: European Commission, October 2018).

Delamont, Sara and Paul Atkinson, "The Ethics of Ethnography," in Ron Iphofen and Martin Tolich, Editors, *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research Ethics* (London: Sage Publications, 2018) – Chapter 7. ([E-Book](#))

Applications

Wood, Elisabeth Jean, "The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones," *Qualitative Sociology* 29/3 (2006): 373-86.

Cronin-Furman, Kate and Milli Lake, "Ethics Abroad: Fieldwork in Fragile and Violent Contexts," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 51/3 (July 2018): 607-614.

Kaplan, Lennart, J. Kuhnt and J. Steinert, "Do No Harm? Field Research in the Global South: Ethical Challenges Faced by Research Staff," *World Development* 127 (March 2020). (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.104810>)

Discussion Questions

- How is the relation between epistemology and ethics?
- What are ethics and what roles do they play at different points in the research process?
- What are the ethical standards that social scientists *must* observe when producing and collecting data for their research?
- Do these standards need to be updated or modified given one's research context – elite interviews in Brussels versus fieldwork among vulnerable populations (Roma in Hungary, say)?
- Ethics do not matter for quantitative researchers. Discuss.

Session 3 - Case Studies

Context: Qualitative Methods in the Social Sciences

Emmons, Cassandra and Andrew Moravcsik, "Graduate Qualitative Methods Training in Political Science: A Disciplinary Crisis," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 53/2 (April 2020): 258-264.

Mahoney, James, "After KKV. The New Methodology of Qualitative Research," *World Politics* 62/1 (2010): 120-147.

Nuts and Bolts

George, Alexander and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005) – Chapters 1, 4-5.

Gerring, John, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices, Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) – Chapters 1-3, 5, 7-8, 11.

Applications

Blattman, Christopher, "Children and War: How 'Soft' Research Can Answer the Hard Questions in Political Science," *Perspectives on Politics* 10/2 (2012): 403-413.

Bakke, Kristin, "Copying and Learning from Outsiders? Assessing Diffusion from Transnational Insurgents in the Chechen Wars," in Jeffrey T. Checkel, Editor, *Transnational Dynamics of Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) - Chapter 2. ([E-Book](#))

Discussion Questions

- What is a case study? What kinds of questions and puzzles is it especially helpful in answering?
- Case studies are always built on a processual, mechanism-based understanding of cause. Discuss.
- What does it mean to speak of validity and transparency in case study research?
- What are the narrative, methodological and data attributes of a rigorously executed case study?
- Are quantitative techniques incompatible with case studies?

Session 4 - Comparative Historical Analysis

Nuts and Bolts

Mahoney, James and Kathleen Thelen, Editors, *Advances in Comparative Historical Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) – Chapters 1, 6, 8, 9. ([E-Book](#))

Applications

Gibson, Christopher, *Movement-driven Development: The Politics of Health and Democracy in Brazil* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019) – Chapters 1, 4. ([E-Book](#))

Discussion Questions

- Comparative historical analysis (CHA) is a method uniquely well placed to capture temporal dynamics. Discuss.
- If case studies play key roles in CHA, what are the typical within-case methods employed by these scholars?
- What role do path dependence and critical junctures play in CHA?
- How would you recognize a critical juncture if it were to walk through the door?

Session 5 - Process Analytics: Process Tracing & Social Practice

Nuts and Bolts - Positivist

Bennett, Andrew and Jeffrey T. Checkel, Editors, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) – Chapters 1, 10, Appendix. ([E-Book](#))

Mahoney, James, "Mechanisms, Bayesianism, and Process Tracing," *New Political Economy* 21/5 (2016): 493-499.

Zaks, Sherry, "Updating Bayesian(s): A Critical Evaluation of Bayesian Process Tracing," *Political Analysis* (First View, Published 27 May 2020). (<https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2020.10>).

Nuts and Bolts - Interpretive

Pouliot, Vincent, "Practice Tracing," in Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel, Editors, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) – Chapter 9. ([E-Book](#))

Norman, Ludvig, "[Interpretive Process Tracing and Causal Explanations](#)," *Qualitative & Multi-Method Research: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 13/2 (2015): 4-9.

Applications

Schwartz, Rachel and Scott Straus, "What Drives Violence against Civilians in Civil War? Evidence from Guatemala's Conflict Archives," *Journal of Peace Research* 55/2 (2018): 222–235.

Pouliot, Vincent, *International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russia Diplomacy* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010) – Chapters 3, 4. ([E-Book](#))

Discussion Questions

- What is process tracing and how does it differ from historical chronologies?
- What role do causal mechanisms and social practices play in process tracing / practice tracing?
- What makes for a rigorous application of process tracing?
- For many, formalization (Bayesianism, set theory) is the cutting edge in process tracing. What are the pluses and minuses of such efforts?

Session 6 - Textual and Discourse Analysis

Nuts and Bolts

Milliken, Jennifer, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods," *European Journal of International Relations* 5/2 (1999): 225-54.

Neumann, Iver, "Discourse Analysis," in Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash, Editors, *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) – Chapter 5. ([E-Book](#))

Hopf, Ted, "Constructivism at Home," in *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002) – Chapter 1. ([E-Book](#))

Applications

Allan, Bentley, "Recovering Discourses of National Identity," in Ted Hopf and Bentley Allan, Editors, *Making Identity Count: Building a National Identity Database* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) – Chapter 2. ([E-Book](#))

Hopf, Ted and Bentley Allan, "What Have We Learned?" in Hopf and Allan, Editors, *Making Identity Count: Building a National Identity Database* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) – Chapter 13. ([E-Book](#))

Discussion Questions

- What is discourse as a method and what types of research questions can it best answer?
- What role do social power and productive power play in discourse analysis?
- How would you recognize a good, systematic application of discourse if it were to walk through the door?

- How does one combine discourse analysis with quantitative methods?
- Discourse analysis has an agency problem. Discuss.

Session 7 - Fieldwork and Ethnography

Nuts and Bolts

Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren MacLean and Benjamin Read, *Field Research in Political Science: Practices and Principles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) – Chapters 1, 3, 4, 7. ([E-Book](#))

Geertz, Clifford, “*Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (NY: Basic Books, 1973) – Chapter 1. ([E-Book](#))

Schatz, Edward, “Introduction: Ethnographic Immersion and the Study of Politics,” in Edward Schatz, Editor, *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) – Introduction. ([E-Book](#)) ([One-User License](#))

Applications

Gusterson, Hugh, “Ethnographic Research,” in Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash, Editors, *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) – Chapter 7. ([E-Book](#))

Wood, Elisabeth Jean, “Ethnographic Research in the Shadow of Civil War,” in *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) – Chapter 2. ([E-Book](#))

Fujii, Lee Ann, “Five Stories of Accidental Ethnography: Turning Unplanned Moments in the Field into Data,” *Qualitative Research* 15/4 (2015): 525–39.

Discussion Questions

- What is ethnography and how does it differ from conducting a case study?
- What is the difference between cultural ethnography and political ethnography?
- When can you ‘stop’ your ethnographic research?
- What matters more to an ethnographer: Interviews or participant observation?
- How does a researcher decide what is ethical when she is in the field?
- Access and positionality play key – and very differing – roles in ethnography. Discuss.

Session 8 - Interviewing

Nuts and Bolts - Positivist

Mosley, Layna, Editor, *Interview Research in Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013) – Introduction, Chapters 1, 3, 9. ([E-Book](#))

Nuts and Bolts – Interpretive

Fujii, Lee Ann, *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach* (London: Routledge, 2017). ([E-Book](#))

Applications

Leech, Beth, Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki and David C. Kimball, "Lessons from the 'Lobbying and Policy Change' Project," in Layna Mosley, Editor, *Interview Research in Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013) - Chapter 11. ([E-Book](#))

Fujii, Lee Ann, "Shades of Truth and Lies: Interpreting Testimonies of War and Violence," *Journal of Peace Research* 47/2 (2010): 231–241.

Discussion Questions

- What are the main types of interview techniques?
- In what ways are positivist and interpretive interviewing different?
- How does one deal with lies and dissimulation when interviewing?
- An interviewer (her gender, nationality, the questions she asks) always affects and changes the interviewee. Discuss.

Session 9 – The Cutting Edge, Mark I: Research Transparency

Symposium, "Openness in Political Science," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 47/1 (2014): 19-83.

Symposium, "Transparency in Qualitative and Multi-Method Research," *Qualitative & Multi-Method Research: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 13/1 (Spring 2015): 2-64.

"[Journal Editors' Transparency Statement](#)," *Political Science Research and Methods* 3/3 (2015): 421.

Symposium, "Data Access and Research Transparency (DA-RT)," *Comparative Politics Newsletter: The Organized Section in Comparative Politics of the American Political Science Association* 26/1 (Spring 2016): 10-64.

Monroe, Kristen Renwick, "The Rush to Transparency: DA-RT and the Potential Dangers for Qualitative Research," *Perspectives on Politics* 16/1 (2018): 141-48.

Qualitative Transparency Deliberations → <http://www.qualtd.net/> (January 2019).

Checkel, Jeffrey T., "[Research Transparency and Open Science: Can We Have Too Much of a Good Thing?](#)" Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Political Science Association (Virtual), 10-13 September 2020.

Discussion Questions

- What are the epistemological foundations of the debate over research transparency?
- What are the pluses and minuses of using active citation and constructing a transparency index?
- There is no such thing as a free lunch in social science research: More effort devoted to research transparency means less time for theory development, ethics and the like. Discuss.

Session 10 – The Cutting Edge, Mark II: Mixed Methods

Nuts and Bolts

Lieberman, Evan, "Nested Analysis as a Mixed-Method Strategy for Comparative Research," *American Political Science Review* 99/3 (2005): 435-452.

Ahmed, Amel and Rudra Sil, "When Multi-Method Research Subverts Methodological Pluralism - Or, Why We Still Need Single-Method Research," *Perspectives on Politics* 10/4 (2012): 935-53.

Applications

Symposium, “[Bridging the Gap? Connecting Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in the Study of Civil War](#),” *Qualitative Methods: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 6/1 (2008): 13-29.

Dunning, Thad, “Improving Process Tracing: The Case of Multi-Method Research,” in Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel, Editors, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) – Chapter 8. ([E-Book](#))

Hopf, Ted, “Making Identity Count: Constructivism, Identity, and IR Theory,” in Ted Hopf and Bentley Allan, Editors, *Making Identity Count: Building a National Identity Database* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) – Chapter 1. ([E-Book](#))

Discussion Questions

- Mixed methods are all the rage, but they are not easy to execute. Discuss.
- When is it appropriate to use a mixed-method design? When is it not?
- Do experimental designs of necessity require the use of qualitative methods?
- Can one mix methods across epistemological boundaries – combining discourse analysis with, say, a process-tracing case study?