

HISTORICAL- COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

Historical-Comparative Research

An interpretivist version of H-C research

“Historical-Comparative research is an intensive examination of a limited number of cases in which social meaning and context are critical. Case studies, even of one nation, can be very important. Case studies can elaborate historical processes and specify concrete historical details.”

-Neuman, p. 298

Historical-Comparative Research

An “authentic” version of H-C research

“The distinct H-C research method combines a sensitivity to specific historical or cultural contexts with theoretical generalization. H-C researchers may use quantitative data to supplement qualitative data and analysis. The logic and goals of H-C research are closer to those of field research than to those of traditional positivist approaches.”

-Neuman, p. 299

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Topics Appropriate for H-C Research

- (1) Why did current social arrangements take a certain form in some societies and not others?
- (2) What fundamental features are common to most societies?
- (3) What are the roots of social change (e.g. revolution) in a particular context?

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Sources of Data for H-C Research

(1) Primary Sources

(2) Secondary Sources

(3) Running Records

(4) Recollections

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Oral History

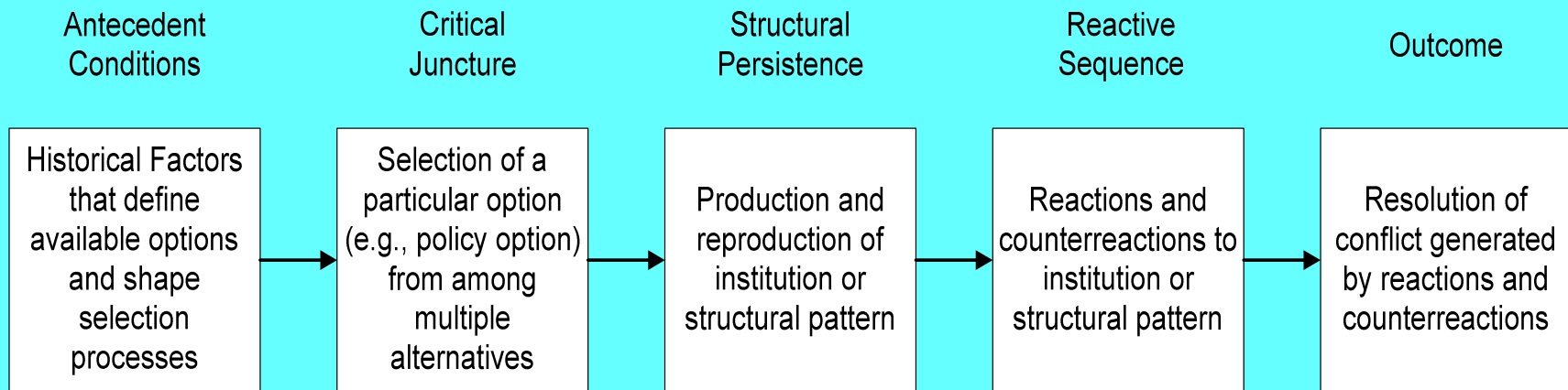
aka: life history, self-report, personal narrative, life story, oral biography, memoir, testament, in-depth interview, recorded memoir, recorded narrative, taped memories, life review

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Unique Characteristics of H-C Research

- (1) Limited or indirect evidence, interpreted by researcher
- (2) Potential for distorted reconstruction of past events
- (3) Incorporates a “learning” perspective
- (4) Emic understanding
- (5) Multi-layered (uses both micro & macro explanations)
- (6) Easily shifts between context & generalization

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Analytic Structure of Path-Dependent Explanation

From: James Mahoney. (2001). *The Legacies of Liberalism: Path Dependence and Political Regimes in Central America*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

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Path Dependence: A method used to study processes of institutionalization. A key element is that once a group, community or society starts down a developmental path, it becomes increasingly difficult to go back to the initial conditions. The decisions made are conceptualized as causal elements to the outcomes.