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The Making of World Affairs**

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STRATEGIES FOR RESEARCH in Constructivist International Relations

AUDIE KLOTZ AND CECELIA LYNCH

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Chapter One

Constructivism

The end of the Cold War shattered stable antagonisms and alliances, both in the practice of world politics and in the study of International Relations (IR). This destabilization widened the political and intellectual spaces—and increased the need—for scholars to ask questions about the cultural bases of conflict, alternative conceptions of national identity, the ethics of intervention, and many other issues. Many practitioners and researchers now accept the “constructivist” view that individuals and groups are not only shaped by their world but can also change it. People can—but do not always—set into motion new normative, cultural, economic, social, or political practices that alter conventional wisdoms and standard operating procedures.

The IR community’s embrace of constructivism built upon the work of pioneering theorists who contested the central premises of dominant structuralist (Realist, Liberal, and Marxist) frameworks by insisting that interpretations produce social reality (Ashley 1984; Wendt 1987; Wendt and Duvall 1989; Kratochwil 1989; Onuf 1989). Constructivists stress that both structural continuities and processes of change are based on agency. Agency, in turn, is influenced by social, spatial, and historical context. Rather than granting ontological priority to either structure or agency, constructivists view both as “mutually constituted.” Thus they also reject the individualism inherent in rationalist theories of choice, which take for granted the nature of actors’ interests and identities. The constructivist agenda in IR has flourished due to sustained attention to the implications

of these ontological and epistemological concerns.

Taking seriously the principle that social reality is produced through meaningful action, however, leads to its own research challenges. Perhaps due to a (misplaced) tendency to equate all work on “ideas” with constructivism, researchers often seem unsure what concepts and methods to apply. Our students and colleagues inevitably ask: How do I do constructivist research? What kinds of processes are constitutive? Where do I find appropriate evidence? We sympathize with this uncertainty, because we asked the same questions in our own early work. Back in the late 1980s, few models demonstrated how to apply meta-theoretical insights to the policy changes that interested us, specifically, global responses to racial discrimination (Klotz 1995) and the roles of peace movements (Lynch 1999a).

This book is designed for those who want to apply constructivist insights but seek guidance on the “how,” “what,” and “where” questions of empirical research. By using examples from the now numerous empirical studies that draw upon sociology, jurisprudence, philosophy, linguistics, anthropology, cultural studies, history, and other approaches, we draw attention to diverse, and sometimes implicit, methodological issues. We emphasize concepts and tools that help researchers to examine, interpret, and analyze both continuity and change. Our aim is to glean strategies for designing research projects rather than to advocate any single model or set of methods. While we presume that our readers have been introduced to the meta-theoretical debates (e.g., Ruggie 1998; Guzzini 2000; Adler 2002; Ba and Hoffmann 2003), we also include an appendix of annotated Suggested Readings for those who wish to explore constructivism’s interdisciplinary heritage.

While the constructivist label has allowed our work to find a home in the field, we also acknowledge the inherent problem of referring to all these voices as a single “-ism.” The term means many things to its various practitioners, despite the common focus on capturing processes of mutual constitution. Even the two of us define concepts and use tools differently, while researching similar questions about transnational social movements and international norms. Because boundaries remain inherently fluid, we remain

especially wary of attempts to separate “mainstream” causal analysis from “radical” postmodernism (cf., Checkel 1997; Campbell 1998a; Hopf 1998). Such divisions overlook commonalities, leading researchers to miss opportunities to learn from each other. Therefore, we embrace boundary-crossing efforts, such as critical social theory and feminism (Price and Reus-Smit 1998; Ackerly and True 2001; Locher and Prügl 2001), along with many other interjections. Indeed, we discuss some scholars who may avoid using the label themselves if, in our view, their approaches explore processes of mutual constitution.

One way to delve more productively into these differences is to contrast the methodological implications of alternative social, rationalist, materialist, and psychological ontologies rather than engage in the disciplinary war of paradigms. We find that perpetuating divisions between Realists, Liberals, and Marxists papers over commonalities across rival schools, downplays intra-paradigm differences, and does little to illuminate the constructivist ontological challenge to all three perspectives. In order to improve disciplinary understandings of nuclear proliferation, divisions between rich and poor, the nature of security, and the role of transnational actors, among other shared concerns, researchers should grapple head-on with often-vociferous disagreements rather than finding shelter in intellectual camps. Indeed, labels such as “liberal constructivist” and “realist constructivist” are gaining popularity, offering the potential for creative synergies (Risse 2002; Barkin 2003; Forum 2004).

Bridge-building requires openness to the terminologies used in alternative schools of thought. Sophisticated language expresses nuances but also risks turning into jargon. Not everyone, for example, shares our preference for the term “intersubjectivity” (which we discuss in the next section). Our goal is to demonstrate the benefits of tacking back and forth between terminologies without overly simplifying subtle theoretical points. We demonstrate how similar research problems can be explored with various methods and draw out some of the stakes involved in framing questions in different ways. Productive tensions exist that we cannot resolve here; we acknowledge these openly and offer some strategies for addressing them.

To keep the volume concise and accessible, we avoid extensive citations and often synthesize multiple works into general claims. References to “some” or “other” constructivists represent our own (contestable) readings of the growing literature. Despite our intention to be inclusive and balanced, some people and topics inevitably get more attention than others. Indeed, no one could present a comprehensive survey. Often we select examples that we have used effectively in our own teaching. Other studies may not be as explicit in their choice of methods, or they might cover a different topic than those we have chosen to highlight. Because our aim is to demonstrate the utility of methods for capturing specific constructivist insights, we primarily emphasize contributions rather than any shortcomings. We leave it to other researchers to extend these applications and demarcate their limitations.

The remainder of this chapter summarizes key themes in constructivist research and clarifies terminology used in the subsequent chapters. We set out a core vocabulary and conceptual terrain in four steps: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and validity. The next two chapters highlight six methods used in empirical work, concentrating on issues of structure in Chapter 2 and agency in Chapter 3. In such a survey, we cannot provide a thorough account of the origins and potential uses of every technique. Instead, we highlight how each tool can capture some key aspects of mutual constitution. (Citations along the way and the appendix of Suggested Readings provide references to more detailed guidelines for using these tools.) In order to assess the stakes involved in choosing between these methodologies, we then concentrate on two core issues of research design: defining concepts in Chapter 4, and selecting cases in Chapter 5. From this cumulative assessment across chapters, readers should be able to identify the particular techniques most appropriate for their own research questions.

Ontology: How Do Researchers Conceptualize What They Study?

People live within and interact through overlapping social (ethnic, national, ideological, gendered, cultural, religious, and other) group-

ings, including states. Such collectivities, including leaders within them, act in ways that create, perpetuate, and alter the environments in which they live. If people did not reinforce dominant meanings, sometimes expressed as historical “facts” or unavoidable “reality,” structures would not exist. The use of language about ethnicity, for instance, tends to encourage the pursuit of collective goals based on race or religion while often devaluing those that stress gender or class distinctions. But religious beliefs and the boundaries of membership within ethnic groups do evolve over time. And neither gender nor class is a static category. These instabilities and ambiguities offer opportunities to redefine routine practices. For instance, women, embracing multiple identities, might mobilize for equal rights within a religious or ethnic group and, as an unintended consequence, improve their economic condition.

Constructivists characterize this interactive relationship between what people do and how societies shape their actions as the “mutual constitution” of structures and agents. Yet the simultaneity of this interaction creates difficulties for capturing both the self-reinforcing nature of structures and the ways in which people sometimes overturn social order. People consciously *and* unintentionally replicate *and* challenge institutionalized routines and prevailing assumptions. We do not aspire to resolve long-standing philosophical issues at the heart of this “agent structure debate” (Forum 2006). Rather, we seek strategies for untangling various mechanisms of mutual constitution in empirical research. The first step in tackling this challenge, in our view, is to recognize that constructivist ontology relies on three components: intersubjectivity, context, and power. We elaborate on the significance of each of these core concepts before turning to their epistemological implications.

Intersubjectivity

In the constructivist view, intersubjective understandings comprise structures and agents. These norms, rules, meanings, languages, cultures, and ideologies are social phenomena that create identities and guide actions. More than one person needs to accept these social phenomena in order for them to exist, and people define themselves

in reference to them. Intersubjective understandings are more than aggregated beliefs of individuals. Money, for example, requires shared acceptance that tokens can be exchanged for goods, which in turn requires general agreement among buyers and sellers on what coins, papers, or entries into a computer spreadsheet are worth. Corporations, in turn, would not exist without the concept of profit, defined in terms of money. Domestic and international laws, such as trade regimes, also depend on such a monetary system. Rules and norms establish the habitual practices and procedures that we know as capitalism. The world economy shapes how people see the world, the goals they wish to accomplish, and the actions they take.

Particular meanings become stable over time, creating social orders that constructivists call structures or institutions. Rules and norms set expectations about how the world works, what types of behavior are legitimate, and which interests or identities are possible. World leaders generally acknowledge norms of warfare, for example, even when they dispute their application to specific situations. In denying the applicability of the prohibition against aggressive war, for instance, Iraq argued that its 1990 invasion of Kuwait sought to overturn a historical injustice by former imperial powers. That an international coalition intervened illustrates the potential pitfalls of unpersuasive justifications. When the United States framed its 2003 attack on Iraq as a case of pre-emptive self-defense rather than aggression, the United Nations did not accept this interpretation. The United States, consequently, was unable to build a coalition comparable to that of the first Persian Gulf war. Its officials subsequently sought to frame its invasion of Iraq in the context of a broader war on terrorism, an interpretation that was also unpersuasive for most countries.

Meanings, such as a particular definition of terrorism, provide the basis for social orders, but they can also be contested. Though some practices inevitably dominate others at particular moments, even the most stable structures evolve. Indeed, as we discuss further below, researchers debate which labels to use for intersubjective phenomena in part because some terms, such as “norms,” emphasize stability and imply broad acceptance whereas others, such as “representations,” privilege potentially more fluid depictions and

suggest greater contestation. For the moment, we set aside those debates and use all of these terms somewhat interchangeably, in order to concentrate on the implications of this ontological focus on contested and evolving meanings.

Context

Because intersubjective understandings vary across regions, over time, and within hierarchies, constructivists situate research questions within spatial, historical, and social contexts. To understand how shifts in meaning affect people living in particular regions and eras—and to gauge the potential for people to transform standard practices—researchers need to avoid reified, essentialized, or static notions of culture which preclude the possibility of change. For example, one might characterize contemporary capitalism as an ideology that includes a concept of money based on exchange rates, rather than gold, and the legitimacy of wage labor, rather than indentured servitude. Yet capitalism, like any ideology, manifests itself differently over time. Not surprisingly, therefore, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank propagated certain fiscal, monetary, trade, and welfare policies in the second half of the twentieth century that are now seen as less legitimate. Accepted desires and behaviors in one period or society may be derided at other times, in other places, or by people in other social settings. For instance, the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade morphed into the World Trade Organization, an idea shot down as too radical half a century earlier when proposed in the form of an International Trade Organization.

These changes need not follow a linear or teleological path. Prevailing practices, such as the current global market system and liberal financial institutions, spread unevenly across time and space. So do challenges to them, such as protests against globalization. The activities of contemporary environmental, human rights, and feminist groups may alter practices or institutions in some places but their efforts may be limited or blocked elsewhere. As a result, wage labor prevails around the globe, but not all forms of slavery or servitude have been eliminated. Similarly, protestant princes

undermined the influence of the Catholic Church but the Vatican continues to play a significant role in many regions of the world, and anti-colonial movements gained formal independence for national territories but did not necessarily achieve economic or political autonomy.

In keeping with constructivism's emphasis on intersubjectivity, evaluations of the successes or failures of these groups take into account whether people altered their thinking about their own place in the world, as well as the legitimate role of other actors, such as governments and corporations. These assessments, furthermore, will be informed by the researchers' own normative views, because analysts live in a particular spatial location and social setting within the contemporary liberal capitalist order. This relationship between researcher and interpretation underscores the discursive rather than material conception of power that underpins the analysis of meaning within particular spatial, historical, and social contexts.

Power

Because multiple meanings coexist, often in tension with one another, constructivists ask how and why certain practices prevail in particular contexts. Dominant intersubjective understandings, such as those that defined American and Soviet as enemies rather than allies during the Cold War, are characterized as powerful because they constitute people's identities and interests, as well as frame interpretations of behavior. The habitual actions that emanate from these interpretations are often referred to as "practices," and the combination of language and techniques employed to maintain them as "discourses." Despite the emphasis on dominant understandings, this is not simply a substitution of language for material resources such as nuclear warheads. All people exercise some degree of power, because their practices either reinforce or undermine meanings. For example, European peace and human rights groups contributed to the end of the Cold War by articulating continent-wide interests rather than reiterating enmity and reinscribing spheres of influence. Mikhail Gorbachev took up and modified these new articulations in ways that resulted in the

unintended (for him) break-up of the Soviet Union.

Since power operates through relationships rather than possession of capabilities, constructivists analyze processes and interactions. One might view the Cold War as an ideological conflict between capitalism and communism, which created a bipolar system through escalating military spending. Arms control treaties, such as the US-Soviet anti-ballistic missile accords and, later, the global land mines ban, altered how actors calculated the desirability of certain weapons systems, regardless of any military efficacy. The resulting asymmetrical distribution of military capabilities also produces incentives and justifications for contemporary non-state actors to use weapons and tactics that differ from those of disgruntled groups in previous eras. Actors define who they are and what they want with reference to the dominant rules and ideologies of their time.

This conception of the exercise of power as the ability to reconstruct discourses and shape practices offers researchers a framework for assessing how meanings condition identities and actions, why some dominate others, and when these patterns shift. It also broadens the scope of our analysis beyond behavior to include how people justify their actions. Granting the role of language such a fundamental place in the analysis raises epistemological issues about how to study this intersubjective reality.

Epistemology: How Do Researchers Know What They Know?

In reviewing a broad range of empirical studies, we found more overlap between epistemological positions than current debates led us to expect. Too much intellectual energy, in our view, goes into creating and maintaining boundaries between stylized camps. Caricatures of ahistoricism or relativism easily lead constructivists to lose sight of subtler issues. As an alternative, we offer the less-rigid notion of a spectrum from positivist-leaning to post-positivist positions. This heuristic resists the elevation of one philosophy of social science over another. Rather than clustering at the poles, most researchers make knowledge claims that fall at different

points along a wide range. Therefore, we use the term “empirical” loosely to refer to diverse types of evidence, and are not tied to the correspondence theory of truth that is associated with an “empiricist” epistemology.

Abiding differences along this spectrum do hold significance for empirical analyses. Even though constructivists share the same basic ontological starting point of mutual constitution, not all researchers give the same weight to structure or agency. And all talk about interpretation but use language in innumerable ways. Some offer causal explanations, while others map discourses. Shifting attention away from epistemological proclamations toward the empirical analysis of mutual constitution requires untangling two issues that define positions along our spectrum: interpretation and causality. We ask how far interpretation goes in making general inferences to get a clearer picture of the way these epistemological positions overlap or diverge.

Interpretation

The ontological premise that structure and agency are mutually constituted through intersubjective understandings leads to the rejection of the existence of objective facts distinct from the concepts that give them meaning (see Suggested Readings). All researchers engage in interpretation, both in collecting evidence and when making choices about what questions to research. But constructivists disagree about how far interpretation must go. For example, some take for granted the dominance of a liberal understanding of human rights norms in assessing democratization, while others probe the roots of such ideological hegemony. The researcher’s own acceptance or criticism of liberal values will influence—at least to some extent—both the general research agenda and the resulting analysis. Comparing any other country’s policies with South African apartheid communicates moral judgment, for instance, while using South Africa as a model of democratization downplays issues of economic inequality.

We place researchers toward the positivist end of our epistemological spectrum if they study reality in terms of stable meanings,

such as human rights norms, and believe that neither prevalent ideologies nor the researcher’s own judgments have a significant impact on the reliability of the resulting analysis. Norms, as “social facts,” exist “by virtue of all the relevant actors agreeing that they exist” (Ruggie 1998: 12; also see Suggested Readings). Codified norms, for instance, define what counts as a rights violation, leading analysts to assess the strength of those norms. In this view, theoretical frameworks, unaffected by hermeneutic issues, guide conclusions about the empirical evidence. Analysts do not need to examine whether the norms at issue cohere or “fit” best with, say, liberal notions of individual human rights (instead of, perhaps, post-colonial conceptualizations). Because scholars describe and explain characteristics, patterns, and relationships between such norms, debates center on rival theoretical frameworks and core concepts.

Those on the post-positivist side of the spectrum, in contrast, do not attribute essential properties to social facts. Dominant actors can agree on what constitutes human rights at a particular point in time, but these meanings are contested (often by marginalized actors) and inherently unstable. These researchers prefer terminology such as “representations” to connote this greater fluidity. Scholars inevitably work in a hermeneutical circle of ever-deeper and more implicit interpretations, where their own generalizations, among other issues, become complicit in prevalent interpretive frameworks. Knowledge—as truth claims rather than objective historical facts—thus becomes intertwined with power, resulting in “regimes of truth” that perpetuate particular (unequal) relationships. Liberal individualism underlies the so-called Western notion of human rights, Realism provides the dominant meta-narrative for analyzing Cold War foreign policies, and Marxism serves that role for many critics of globalization. Whereas the positivist sees social facts as relatively unproblematic, the post-positivist sees them as in need of ideological excavation.

As authors, the two of us gravitate towards opposite poles on this spectrum. But unlike those who insist on the primacy of one or the other epistemology, we treat the (in-)stability of intersubjective understandings as an empirical question. We agree that particular meanings can sometimes be treated as stable social facts, even though this

assumption may be problematic at other times. For example, any researcher might reach the empirical conclusion that international law codifies liberal human rights norms, which act as relatively stable social facts in transnational interactions. Researchers can also examine challenges to these norms. They might differ on empirical and normative grounds whether such contestation should be treated as significant or insignificant, positive or negative. Post-positivists accept enough stability in meanings to employ language, describe discourses, and theorize power. Positivist-leaning constructivists are concerned with fluidity, although they refer to “change” rather than “contestation.” Consequently, we do not judge scholarship based on the terminology that the researcher uses. Rather, we assess it according to the insights it provides about the relationships between structures and agents.

Causality

Constructivists on the positivist end of the spectrum seek to explain social phenomena in general terms. Although they reject any aspiration to identify “laws” of behavior, they do place high priority on the applicability of their explanations across a wide empirical range. Post-positivists, in turn, remain more comfortable with complexity and context-specific claims. They usually seek a (relatively) comprehensive understanding of one or a few cases, though they may draw “lessons” from them. This greater stress on uniqueness of experience is often characterized in epistemological debates as the search for understanding, an approach associated with humanistic disciplines such as history and anthropology (in contrast to economics or sociology). But this dichotomy between explanation and understanding relies on overdrawn distinctions between science and the humanities. In the past fifty years, anthropology, history, economics, and sociology, as well as political science and IR, have all had their proponents and critics of science. In the midst of these debates, constructivists offer complex, multi-causal, contextualized explanations; to do otherwise would contradict basic ontological assumptions. Differences hinge on what these claims are about, not whether claims are being made.

The main dividing line among constructivists is the putative distinction between constitutive and causal claims. Yet few clear markers differentiate the two, because the language of “causality” is quite fluid. Separating constitutive “how possible” questions from causal “why” questions mirrors the problematic distinction between explanation and understanding. Yes, causal studies do tend to speak in terms of explaining behavior, while studies of meaning talk about understanding the conditions for action. Certainly the terms are not interchangeable, but in practice there is considerable overlap. Those who say they explain behavior also interpret meaning, and those who focus on understanding language also explain action to some degree. Alternatively, separating properties from actions as a way to distinguish constitutive and causal questions understates the extent to which actions define those very properties; “how possible” questions quietly shift to “what” questions. Categorization answers “what” questions, but typology is also a key component of explanation, leaving no clear divide between “what” or “how” or “why” questions. Constructivists should not, therefore, preclude the possibility of causal answers to constitutive questions, or vice versa.

Refocusing on the ontology of mutual constitution leads us to rethink these issues in terms of structure and agency. Structural approaches, be they ideational or material, focus on the possibilities for, and constraints upon, action. The notion of conditional causality captures the effects of structure. Given a particular set of social, historical, and/or spatial conditions, people are likely to act in predictable ways (in positivist terminology) or reproduce dominant practices (in post-positivist terminology). Such analyses allow for context-dependent generalizations about behavior and language. Answers to “how possible” questions describe the conditions that comprise these contexts, regardless of whether analysts label them variables. Any claims about the strength of these preconditions rely on correlational logic until researchers propose mechanisms to explain why certain conditions lead to particular actions. Such attention to mechanisms emphasizes that processes shape the relationships between structures and agents.

Clarifying the issue of causality reveals how much alternative

constructivist claims about people's behavior are ontologically rather than epistemologically driven. People might act in particular ways because they have been conditioned to do so by language, which precludes alternative understandings of the world. Alternatively, they may consciously calculate the social and material benefits in particular situations. Those who assume instrumental rationality will examine the ranking of goals, while those who presume that action results from habit might describe the rules that define social roles. Rather than making assumptions about the basis for action, researchers should probe these as competing explanations.

We reserve for later in the chapter how to assess the validity of such alternatives. For the moment, we simply underscore that language, meaning, symbols, culture, discourse—all the intersubjective phenomena at the heart of the constructivist ontology—remain vital components of “why” analysis, because constructivists presume human intentionality. People's reasoning processes, both through instrumental calculations and moral arguments, remain empirical issues to be investigated with a range of appropriate methodological tools.

Methodology: How Do Researchers Select Their Tools?

While we have thus far made a case that epistemological differences in practice lack clear boundaries, these distinctions do persist across the social sciences. The behavioral revolution of the 1950s did not stop anthropologists from using ethnography in an effort to understand societies, and sociologists tend to make causal arguments even after their linguistic turn in the 1980s. Constructivist researchers frequently replicate these disciplinary traditions. Rather than accepting any stark division between techniques as inherently suitable for analyzing meaning or behavior, we consider the definition of core concepts as the starting point for exploring methodological choices. Only then can analysts assess which tools are best suited to capturing the processes of mutual constitution that are at the heart of the constructivist approach.

To illustrate the importance of conceptualization as a key element of methodology, we compare how two groups of constructivists

have used variants of discourse analysis to develop cross-disciplinary perspectives on “strategic culture.” The volume on the avowedly positivist end of the epistemological spectrum, *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (Katzenstein, ed. 1996), draws on sociological concepts associated with hypotheses and generalization. In contrast, *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger* (Weldes et al, eds. 1999) draws explicitly on anthropological insights.

Concepts

Constructivists see “security” as a relationship historically conditioned by culture rather than an objective characteristic determined by the distribution of military capabilities. Consequently, we favor methodologies that acknowledge contingency and context. Indeed, contributors to both *The Culture of National Security* and *Cultures of Insecurity* acknowledge the need for some type of interpretation. Across both volumes, many of the authors also select single or comparative cases with a historical perspective, seeking more complete stories based on a wider range of documentation or a reinterpretation of previous studies. However, these common research concerns get articulated through different theoretical vocabularies.

The titles alone signal each group's epistemological position. On the positivist side, “culture” and “identity,” both in the singular, and “norms” imply that meanings can be stable and knowable independent of the interpretive biases. Culture and identity, therefore, are isolated from other characteristics of social life, to be treated as variables that explain the choices states make in military policy, offering a basis for comparisons across cases. Many contributors focus on particular norms either prohibiting or encouraging strategic behavior, including patterns of conventional weapons proliferation, taboos on the use of chemical and nuclear weapons, and evolving practices of humanitarian intervention. Because communities of people often articulate shared expectations, in the process endowing them with normative force, scholars can use texts, including official (national or international) documents, to demonstrate general patterns of state compliance. These

patterns can substantiate claims that norms influence behavior. Others remain skeptical of arguments relying solely on public pronouncements and correlated patterns of behavior; they want more insight into policy-making processes, leading to greater emphasis on interviews, among other tools.

But once researchers allow for cultural change over time or space, the door opens to contending worldviews—no single or coherent culture necessarily predominates. The post-positivist vocabulary of “production” and multiple “cultures” therefore suggests fluidity, malleability, contestation, and contingency in social understandings, including dominant frameworks and the researcher’s own assumptions. Instead of identifying a stable military culture that predictably influences policies, these scholars start by assuming that such a culture is never fixed and takes a fair amount of work to perpetuate. Rather than being the outcome to be analyzed, policies signify particular notions of security. In this vein, many contributors to *Cultures of Insecurity* focus on how discourses produce dominant representations of threat in areas diverse as Asia, North America, the Middle East, cyberspace, and academia. Understanding patterns of domination within these contexts explicitly and profoundly challenges the equation of military capabilities with power.

Tools

Do these differences between sociological and anthropological variants of constructivism create an unbridgeable methodological divide? We think not. Evidence from policy discourse, such as public pronouncements, secret policy debates, and interviews, can support both positivist and post-positivist formulations of security studies. For instance, both critical theorists and problem-solvers who focus on social movements frequently rely on non-governmental archival materials and ethnographic techniques. Yet, as in the elite-oriented studies, these scholars can reach different conclusions about the nature of power and policy-making processes based on the same evidence. Concepts, rather than the tools for collecting evidence, lead to alternative interpretations.

Since any interpreter benefits from the widest array of evidence, we recommend that scholars develop proficiency in all techniques of “discourse analysis,” not simply those associated with a particular disciplinary approach. For example, studying the language of rules or norms starts with texts to show the existence (and possibly dominance) of particular intersubjective understandings. Relevant primary sources include archives of governments, intergovernmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations, letters and memoirs of key individuals, press reports, and interviews, supplemented and contextualized through secondary sources. Treaties, conventions, negotiations, and procedures also manifest actions, such as promising or threatening. Researchers should not overlook nonlinguistic dimensions of discourse. Practices, such as how people wear clothing, convey meanings that need to be interpreted through non-textual evidence. Uniforms decorated with medals and ribbons, for instance, designate individual places and social hierarchies within the military.

Not surprisingly, a wide range of tools has been developed across the social sciences and humanities to grapple with such diverse forms of evidence. Discourse analysis therefore broadly denotes methodologies that capture the creation of meanings and accompanying processes of communication. As long as words and activities are put into context, researchers can categorize, code, or count their use through many different—qualitative and quantitative—techniques. To make assessments of the relative importance of particular meanings requires some sort of comparison, across time or space, and a baseline or metric for gauging change. But many types of implicit and explicit comparisons can be used.

Ultimately, methodological choices will be influenced by the researcher’s own commitments, a factor that we cannot filter. Our readers should remember that our own philosophical and ethical worldviews—including our interest in social movements—influence the themes that we highlight in our assessments of research designs. For that, we make no apologies. But such influence does raise the question of whether analysts can apply general standards in evaluating scholarship. We turn, therefore, to the issue of validity.

Validity: How Do Researchers Evaluate Their Interpretations?

While none of us claim to offer the correct interpretation of an objective reality, constructivists agree that not every interpretation is equally supportable. Therefore scholars need some basis for selecting one analysis as somehow more reasonable or plausible than another. To a surprising degree, constructivists accept that empirical inconsistencies undermine the persuasiveness of interpretations, regardless of whether they are part of simplifying models meant to be applied across a range of cases or an analysis of multiple interactions in one particular instance. Researchers strive to gather a variety of source materials in order to check one against another (“triangulate”), rather than selecting only those that confirm prior expectations (“bias”). Familiarity with the strengths and weaknesses of a range of methodological tools enables better assessments.

Yet even this shared standard is value-laden. The selection of measures against which to gauge “accuracy” will reflect meta-theoretical assumptions that underpin the definition of core concepts (Adcock and Collier 2001; Rudolph 2005; Lynch 2006). Even more fundamentally, what counts as a coherent argument depends on many implicit social assumptions, including cosmologies about human nature and non-human agency. Some concepts also resonate better with people in particular social or historical situations, influencing what they accept as logical. What to do with these knowledge claims, such as whether to challenge the ethical implications of particular definitions of core concepts or respond to policy problems, is another question.

Generalization

Constructivists remain skeptical of strong generalizations and favor context-specific analysis, regardless of whether one speaks in the vocabulary of social science or critical theory. Within a social ontology, knowledge cannot be about accurate measures of objective facts. Yet, in one way or another, scholars do make truth claims. This leads analysts to wrestle with tensions between generalization and

detail, because we cannot achieve both simultaneously to the same degree. A simplified theoretical framework produces a more stylized empirical analysis, while total immersion into evidence makes no sense without some sort of theoretical framework. Interpretation requires at least some key concepts to guide the selection of relevant information. In turn, those concepts result from researchers trying to understand, and act within, their socially constructed world. Theory and evidence thus inform each other. The more credible claim combines the insights of studies that rely on generalization with others that stress detail.

These judgments depend on the researcher’s question and analytical goal, not the number of cases. Some scholars delve into a single case, using either change over time or perhaps theories as counterfactual foils upon which to build hypothetical alternatives. Others prefer to cover, or at least sample, as many cases as possible, often leading to the use of quantitative approaches (if they avoid overly rigid measures). There are many permutations and combinations of cases, such as paired comparisons within a broader study. Some selections highlight similarities across cases, others variation between them. These comparisons enable scholars to probe the coherence of alternative interpretations. A combination of logic and consistency in the use of evidence thus distinguishes “better” scholarship.

Standards

The very nature of the academic system, including grades and peer review of publications, means that scholars constantly judge the quality of research. Professors assign “good” work for course readings and urge students to emulate the “best” research. Such praise necessarily relies on comparison. Implicitly and explicitly, researchers evaluate descriptions and causal claims relative to competing descriptions and claims. An explanation might be logically more coherent if its core conceptual starting point was more clearly defined, for instance. And a particular historical interpretation might be more convincing if the author had been able to incorporate a broader range of archival materials, some of which appear

to contradict the main argument. Acceptance of these standards regulates our profession.

Sometimes, however, contrasting explanations lead us to recognize important differences between what, how, or why questions. For example, one might ask whether constructivist studies of security differ significantly from a traditional bureaucratic approach to foreign policy. One response is found in those contributions to *The Culture of National Security* that describe strategic cultures in countries such as China, France, Germany, and Japan. By rejecting the idea of a singular national culture that remains unchanged over time, and instead locating significant influence in the practices of military and strategic decision-making, these studies question many conventional approaches to bureaucracies, which tend to take broader societal and historical contexts for granted. Those in *Cultures of Insecurity*, in turn, reconsider the significance of the policies that these bureaucracies produce. States, or their leaders, may seek to reinforce identities, for instance, rather than aim to achieve instrumental goals. Researchers might ask, then, when the cultural context of a bureaucracy matters, and why leaders sometimes value identity-affirmation over strategic or economic benefits.

Book Overview

We hope that greater awareness that constructivists of all epistemological stripes agree on basic standards of scholarship will foster synergies across methodological proclivities. In this light, we challenge the prevailing epistemological camps to disarm in order to achieve the common goal of understanding the exercise of power and its consequences. Regardless of whether one looks at “norms” or “representations,” constructivists seek to understand how certain meanings get taken for granted or dominate while others remain unspoken or marginalized. Researchers also try to discern the consequences of prevailing assumptions and the reasons why some get challenged but others do not.

To assess the stakes involved in selecting among different methodologies, we have organized the book around four key constructivist concepts: structure, agency, identities, and interests. This format

enables us to concentrate on studies that ask similar questions but seek answers in different ways. Within each chapter, we outline various approaches, focusing on the strengths of each and some trade-offs between them, along with a few caveats about potential difficulties in their application. Across chapters, we point out key tasks for research design, such as distinguishing between process and outcome, combining levels of analysis, selecting comparisons, and differentiating constitutive from instrumental dynamics. Our goal is to highlight complementarities, not to propose one correct way to pursue research.

We start by sampling the diverse tools available. In Chapter 2, we introduce macro-historical comparison, genealogy, and participant-observation as techniques for analyzing institutionalization and structural change. Then we turn to approaches oriented toward understanding how people act within those structures. Chapter 3 covers narrative, framing, and ethnography. Of course, none of these six tools alone suffice, because constructivism seeks to understand mutual constitution of agents and structures. Therefore, we juxtapose some of these tools in Chapters 4 and 5. To explore the constitution of identities, we contrast genealogy with narrative and framing with ethnography. We then turn to static comparison versus process-tracing in the constitution of interests. Since we optimistically stress the potential for synergies throughout these chapters, our concluding reflections in Chapter 6 confront some of the persistent barriers to deeper dialogue among constructivists.