Tutorial 2.1

# More on Defining “Analytic Generalization”

An analytic generalization consists of a carefully posed theoretical statement, theory, or theoretical proposition. The generalization can take the form of a lesson learned, working hypothesis, or other principle that is believed to be applicable to other situations (not just other “like cases”). Thus, the preferred analytic generalization is posed at a conceptual level higher than that of the specific case (presumably, your interest in this higher level justified the importance of studying the chosen case in the first place).

Though not using the same terminology, other prominent works have devoted attention to analytic generalization, also distinguishing it from statistical generalization: (1) Mitchell’s (1983) contrast between logical inference and statistical inference; (2) Bromley’s (1986) discussion of case inference compared with statistical inference (pp. 290–291); and (3) Donmoyer’s (1990) schema*.* A fourth work, by Burawoy (1991, pp. 271–280; 2009), covers the extended case method—his way of describing how a generalization “extends” a narrow case to some broader significance.

The more difficult and contrary position—that the studied case should be construed as an instance, example, or sample of some larger group of cases—undesirably returns to statistical generalization (and the relationship between a sample and its population—e.g., Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000, pp. 99–103). That position dwells on the fact that a “case” seems to be an instance or example of other “like cases.” However, such a claim is inappropriate when thinking about analytic generalization, where the findings from a case study can have implications going well beyond the same kind of case and extend to a whole host of other unlike situations (see BOX 7, p. 43, in *Case Study Research and Applications*, 6th ed., for three examples). Moreover, unless a case study has included a large number of cases—typically dozens or scores if not hundreds of cases (see Tutorial 5.3)—a case study with even a modest number of cases will still face an uphill battle by invoking the sample to population analogy and its concomitant need to employ statistical analyses to assess the strength of any relationship.

Small (2009) provides two excellent examples and an insightful discussion of analytic generalization, also citing the same key works as referenced above. To him, the preferred logic represents “a different perspective and language of inquiry” (p. 18). He further notes the importance of starting with a substantive proposition (e.g., a conjectured relationship or process) rather than a numeric one (e.g., the conjectured representativeness of a case) to make analytic generalizations work.

# Briefly Annotated References for Tutorial 2.1

Bromley, D. B. (1986). The case-study method in psychology and related disciplines. Chichester, England: Wiley. Provides comprehensive guidance on case study research in psychology.

Burawoy, M. (1991). The extended case method. In M. Burawoy, A. Burton, A. A. Ferguson, K. J. Fox, J. Gamson, N. Gartrell, et al. (Eds.), Ethnography unbound: Power and resistance in the modern metropolis (pp. 271–287). Berkeley: University of California Press. Presents the extended case method for analyzing participant-observation data.

Burawoy, M. (2009). *The extended case method: Four countries, four decades, four great transformations, and one theoretical tradition*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Donmoyer, R. (1990). Generalizability and the single-case study. In E. W. Eisner & A. Peshkin (Eds.), Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate (pp. 175–200). New York: Teachers College Press. Offers a way of generalizing from single studies, not based on sampling and statistical significance.

Gomm, R., Hammersley, M., & Foster, P. (2000). Case study and generalization. In R. Gomm, M. Hammersley, & P. Foster (Eds.), Case study method (pp. 98–115). London: Sage. Highlights use of the case study method for generalizing, rather than merely studying a case for its own sake.

Mitchell, J. C. (1983). Case and situation analysis. Sociological Review, 31*,* 187–211. Emphasizes case study research as a method for preserving the unitary character of the social object being studied and discusses the challenge of generalizing from the case(s).

Small, M. L. (2009). “How many cases do I need?” On science and the logic of case selection in field-based research. Ethnography, 10, 5–38. Poses a thoughtful article on key issues in designing field-based research, including the challenge of generalizing from field situations.