

## *Introduction: Gender and Comparative Methods*

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Research methods have been a hotly debated issue in women's and gender studies since the establishment of women's studies as a field (e.g., Bernard 1975; Harding 1986; Jayaratne 1983; Millman and Kanter 1975; Oakley and Oakley 1979). Scholars of gender and politics have been and are engaged strongly with this methodological debate, given political science's focus on power and politics (e.g., Ackerly and True 2010, 2013; Bustelo and Verloo 2009; Goertz and Mazur 2008; Spierings 2012; Tickner 2005), and this section sets out to further contribute to the debate.

To contextualize this debate, it is important to realize that a large share of the methodological criticism gender scholars formulated was directed at the origin of the applied research techniques: their androcentric and positivist roots. To counter the deficiencies of this tradition, feminist scholars have been developing alternate methods and techniques ever since. Since the dominant tradition was positivist and quantitative, the emancipative response of the feminist academic movement mainly included interpretative, qualitative, and action-based forms of doing research. Those latter methods gave voice to women's experiences and allowed new issues to enter the academic domain (Harding 1997; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007; McCall 2005). Moreover, this "discursive and linguistic turn" in feminist research (Bottero 2000; Reinharz 1992) clearly distinguished it from the dominant positivist tradition by stressing, for instance, uniqueness, complexity, subjectivity, diversity, context-specificity, and fluidity. Consequently, and not surprisingly, among mainstream political and social scientists, "gender studies" and "feminist methods" has a strong connotation of postmodernism (see McCall 2005; Reinharz 1992; Spierings 2012).

More recently, however, two developments have been taking place that direct our attention to the crossover between feminist and systematic comparative methods: First, since around the 2000s, the debate on qualitative and case study methods in political science has been renewed, partly as a response to “KKV” (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994) (e.g., Beach and Pederson 2013; Brady and Collier 2010; Gerring 2007; Goertz 2006; Rihoux and Ragin 2009). This debate has led to the development of a more systematic approach to comparative case studies and medium-n studies as well as a better understanding of the differences between and complementarity of qualitative and quantitative techniques. Second, gradually, a more nuanced epistemological position has gained ground in the debate on gender and methods among gender and politics scholars. This position can be summarized briefly as follows: it is not specific methods that are androcentric, but the way in which these methods are applied and their results are interpreted that lead to severe androcentric bias (Ackerly and True 2013; Goertz and Mazur 2008; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007; Reinharz 1992; Spierings 2012). Together, these two developments push the door wide open for gender scholars to use comparative methods in their analyses of policy formation, voting behavior, representation, social movements, and more.

In order to make optimal use of these new comparative methods in studying gender and politics, as well as to prevent their androcentric or otherwise biased application, it is crucial that we reflect critically on what new methods can and cannot contribute to this field. Therefore, this Critical Perspectives section will focus on several new methods and insights in the field of political methodology and how they address questions and principles put forward in the field of gender and politics particularly. Moreover, a critical reflection on how methods and techniques are applied in this literature is needed; it is relatively easy to criticize others for producing biased research, but this criticism is far more legitimate if the standard used in the politics and gender literature is particularly stringent. This means we should not only ride our epistemological high horse, but also lead by example in discussing and applying our methodological choices: what should we practically do when we want to conduct empirical comparative research (see Harding 1986)? The four contributions to this section all address these two issues: (1) How does a particular comparative method engage with principles at the core of the gender and politics literature (e.g., androcentrism [Mazur and Spierings], hybridity and complexity

[Ciccia], intersectionality and voice [Van der Haar and Verloo], context-dependency [Spierings])? (2) In what way is this and can this method be applied to contribute to the gender and politics literature? They do so for four different innovative comparative methods, including the research phases of comparative concept formation and of comparative causal analysis.

In their contribution, Mazur and Spierings address the notion of causal concepts from a gender perspective. They show how this notion can contribute to stronger, but also more nuanced, nondogmatic, gender criticism on existing (explanatory) research, and they illustrate their argument with reflecting on the conceptualization of democracy in relation to different causal questions, such as those pertaining to democratization and democratic peace theory. Ciccia also focuses on concept formation in her discussion of the potential of fuzzy sets for typology construction. She illustrates how this approach allows nuanced description of social policies without sacrificing the (often gendered) hybridity, complexity, and normative underpinnings of, for instance, welfare regimes. Similarly, Ciccia highlights 'Qualitative Comparative Analysis' explanatory potential in developing systematic accounts of gendered causal mechanism, which are sensitive to contextual and historical contingencies. Next, van der Haar and Verloo analyze the usage of Critical Frame Analysis (CFA) in studying the discursive content of policy. More particularly, they show which elements of the original method, such as voice and intersectionality, are often dropped by the scholars applying CFA, and they formulate starting points for a further discussion on applying CFA to its full potential. Last, Spierings addresses context dependency in quantitative studies of politicians' and the public's behavior and preferences. He argues that the context dependency of microlevel relationships is not often addressed sufficiently. Focusing on case knowledge, country-disaggregated analyses, and multilevel models, he discussed different ways in which regression analyses can be conducted more satisfactorily.

Together, these contributions go beyond mere criticism of existing techniques, as they present how existing techniques fit with principles at the core of the gender and politics literature. These discussions provide important insights for scholars who want to conduct or assess comparative studies on gender and politics, including information on which technique might be suitable for specific goals in comparative research and practical guidelines for the feminist or less androcentric application of existing techniques in comparative politics.

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## CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER AND POLITICS

### Gender and Causal Concepts: Implications for Comparative Theory Building

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Clear conceptualization should be at the core of every comparative study. Gender scholars have a long history of challenging the public/private divide in conventional notions of the political and laying bare the gendered or androcentric character of established concepts such as welfare states (Sainsbury 2008), war (Goldstein 2001), work (Spierings 2015), or democracy (Paxton 2008; Walby 2009). This criticism often focuses on descriptive and normative meanings (see Goertz 2006, 3). It is descriptive where concepts seek to describe units of analysis such as countries and their levels of democracy and normative because the criticism shows how concepts legitimize androcentric practices. Comparative scholars, however, tend to go one step beyond descriptive comparisons; we seek to explain cross-national variation — for example, why certain countries are democratic, why certain welfare state policies are implemented, or why war occurs. This relates to the relatively new notions of “causal concepts” (Goertz 2006) and the “causal relationship guideline” (Goertz and Mazur 2008).

In this contribution, we develop further the use of causal concepts in comparative gendered analyses by applying it to explanatory concepts or independent variables as well. To do so, we first recapitulate the idea behind causal concepts. Next, we provide two examples where a feminist and gendered lens is applied to the conceptualization of democracy. The first focuses on democracy as a descriptive concept and the theory-building implications of gendering its core definition through Paxton’s work (2000, 2008). In the second example, we discuss how the notion of causal concepts can be used to gender democracy as an independent variable in the case of democratic peace theory and whether this reflection can help to generate more refined causal theories.

## GENDER AND CAUSALITY IN CONCEPTUALIZATION: PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES

The recent turn in qualitative-based work on causal concepts and relationships in concept formation, measurement, and theory building (Goertz 2006) provides an opportunity for nonfeminist work on methodology to dialog with gender and politics scholars who seek to gender theories and concepts. Causal concepts provide an opportunity to take into consideration the complexity of the objects we seek to explain, which might lead to a reassessment of old explanations of the phenomenon and to an identification of new ones.

Stated more generally, taking causal issues seriously is an important part of good conceptualization in the process of empirical theory building (Goertz 2006; Goertz and Mazur 2008) because operationalized concepts should reflect causality within concepts as dependent variables and between concepts in terms of how independent variables affect outcomes. Therefore, the causal relationship guideline is one of 10 guidelines identified by Goertz and Mazur (2008, 15) and applied by the contributors to the volume they coedited on specific concepts used in gender and politics analysis (see Table 1).

The causal turn in conceptualization in nonfeminist work fits the research agenda for gender and politics quite closely, particularly a “comparative politics of gender,” because the very concept of gender is a causal concept: the way in which men’s and women’s identities are socially constructed produces varying but persistent gender/sex based inequalities.<sup>1</sup> Thus, conducting comparative gender and politics research requires careful conceptualization to accurately capture the complexity of gendered processes.

When causal concepts are gendered they often become more complex and arguably more accurate and valid (causality within concepts) and can lead to a set of new hypotheses for explaining why certain gendered processes emerge (causality between concepts). Therefore, if the concept is modified (e.g., gendered), the researcher needs to discuss the implications for the empirical indicators and identify the new independent variables as hypotheses in future empirical studies (Goertz and Mazur 2008, 20–23).<sup>2</sup>

1. See, for example, the series of articles on the “Concept of Gender” in the inaugural issue of *Politics & Gender* (2005).

2. When conducting *comparative* gender and politics research, one also needs to have an awareness about the context of the concept being used and to conceptualize the concepts in such a way that they can “travel” across diverse cultural and temporal contexts (Table 1).

*Table 1.* List of guidelines for good conceptualization

<i>Guideline</i>	<i>Leading Question</i>
Context guideline	What is the theoretical, historical, cultural, geographic background context for the concept?
Traveling guideline	Does the concept travel well to other temporal or cultural areas?
Causal relationships guideline	How do causal relationships work <i>within</i> and <i>between</i> concepts?
Naming guideline	What is the accepted name of the concept? Why and how does it differ from others in its semantic field?
Negation guideline	What is the negation, absence, or opposite of the basic concept?
Zones guideline	Is there a gray zone? Is it an ideal type concept?
Dimensions guideline	What are the dimensions or defining characteristics of the concept?
Necessity guideline	Are any dimensions necessary?
Interdependence guideline	What is the interdependence between dimensions?
Operationalization guideline	How is the concept operationalized?

*Source:* Goertz and Mazur 2008.

## GENDERING AND CAUSALITY BETWEEN CONCEPTS: DEMOCRACY I

Pamela Paxton (2000, 2008) parsimoniously yet explosively, adds the requirement of women's full and real universal suffrage to the operational definition of democracy. Although women's suffrage was implied by the procedural definitions of democracy she examines, in the operationalization of the concepts, only manhood suffrage was used. Indeed, many students of democracy argued that women's suffrage was irrelevant in the era of manhood suffrage in western democracies given that it was not on the political agenda (Paxton 2008, 54).

Changing the transition dates to democracy from when adult men received the right to vote to when adult women were able to *fully* benefit from voting rights has significant descriptive impacts. Paxton examines four different studies that establish a measure of democracy based on universal manhood suffrage. In those, the transition dates for countries are, on average, 14 to 38 years later when universal female suffrage is included.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in another commonly used measure of democracy,

3. Calculated from Table 3.1 (ibid., 58).

polity's "high democracies," the average difference between when men received suffrage and women were enfranchised, was 40 years (*ibid.*, 57). In two Swiss cantons women did not receive the vote until 1990 (Banaszak 1996); universal male suffrage was established in 1848.

Using women's suffrage as the transition point also transforms our understanding of the process of the emergence of democracy. Paxton (2000) shows how Huntington's propositions about the different waves of democracy are incorrect. Including real and full suffrage to women essentially puts many of the 68 countries in later "waves" of democratization. It also shows that the process of democratization was much more gradual from 1893 to 1958; as Paxton (2008, 65) asserts, there was actually one "... long continuous democratization period from 1893 to 1958."

Finally, from the perspective of causal relationships between concepts, making women's enfranchisement a requirement for democratic status raises a new set of explanatory factors, many of which are gender-specific. Among the most salient drivers that need to be assessed for democratization, Paxton argues we should now add (international) feminist and women's movements, individual feminist activists, and women's policy agencies, as well as general public opinion rather than only elite opinion (*ibid.*, 66–67).<sup>4</sup>

## GENDERING, CAUSALITY, AND EXPLANATORY CONCEPTS: DEMOCRACY II

So far, applying the gendered causal relationship guideline to democracy has focused on democratization. Here, we take it a step further and apply the guideline to democracy as an explanatory concept. Without being able to do justice to the rich debate on democratic peace theory, which generally posits the deeper the democratic structures of a given country, the more likely it is not to engage in warfare, we focus on the classic Kantian expectation in democratic peace theory. The Kantian approach asserts that democracies will behave more peacefully because of their institutional-electoral characteristics: "democratic leaders are beholden to voters and claim that voters oppose war because of its human and

4. Sylvia Walby (2009, 179–88) undertakes a similar exercise when she includes women's and "minoritized ethnicities" presence in elected office and electoral quotas for women and minorities in a list of criteria for full democracies. Walby then argues how women's movements, women's policy agencies, and women's labor force participation should be considered as hypotheses in explaining democratic development.

financial costs,” as Tomz and Weeks (2013, 849) summarize the theoretical argument. Our question is to what extent and how the gendered criticism of measuring democracy in terms of male universal suffrage also contributes to theory generation when democracy is an independent variable.

Given the often-used operational definition of war — “armed conflicts with more than 1,000 battle-related deaths in the year” (Gleditsch et al. 2002, 616) — the human cost of warfare to the public is the number of body bags returning home. The more battle deaths, the more likely a voter knows someone who has lost a nearest and dearest, and thus the more likely that person will oppose the war and hold elected officials responsible. If this is the core causal mechanism behind the expected relationship, it seems crucial that voters can retrospectively evaluate politicians via elections. Moreover, and crucial here, this theoretical argument is not restricted to women. It can be expected to be at work if only men have the vote as well.

If the causal qualities of democracy are found in the electoral aspect, it could be argued that women’s suffrage is irrelevant for the explanatory concept, under the condition that the electoral mechanism is in place for at least a major part of civilians who bear the human costs of warfare (e.g., the lower socioeconomic strata). For testing democratic peace theory, this would legitimize considering Switzerland a full democracy before 1990. An explicit critical gender reflection on this theory of democratic peace-causal mechanism and the independent variable’s causal qualities (democracy) is necessary to make this practice valid; a priori exclusion of women’s suffrage does not.

A critical gender reflection on democracy as an explanatory causal concept might also lead to a different conclusion: that the genderedness of underlying theoretical mechanisms is not acknowledged. For instance, in explaining war, Caprioli and Boyer (2001) have argued that in our societies, on average, women are less prone to violence than men. If so, DPT’s casual mechanism discussed here might differ in strength between women and men: it can be expected that women are more opposed than men to battle deaths. If so, politicians would be even more reluctant to start a war if women have the right to vote. In other words, male and female suffrage are two different causal qualities or dimensions of the concept “democracy.” Which one has the most impact can be theorized more clearly now and should be tested empirically. However, ignoring that democracy is generally conceptualized in an androcentric way could seriously underestimate the impact of democracy on warfare.

## CONCLUSION

The notion of causal concepts more strongly connects the definition and measurement of concepts on the one hand and the causal mechanism in the theory under investigation on the other hand. As such, stipulating the exact causal mechanisms in a theory becomes more important. A critical gender perspective should therefore not only focus on descriptive or normative “stand alone” concepts, but should also assess the causal qualities of a given concept. As illustrated with Paxton’s and Walby’s efforts to gender measures of democracy, this can draw attention to new explanatory forces of the concept under consideration.

Moreover, considering female suffrage and the causal mechanisms in democratic peace theory (democracy being the independent variable) points to two important contributions to the methodological literature. First, the gender criticism of descriptive concepts cannot be translated a priori to the same concept when it is being used as an independent variable. Valid gender critique on the descriptive concept might be related to a quality (i.e., characteristic, dimension) of the independent variable that is not a causal characteristic in terms of the theoretical mechanism under study. If this is the case, changing the concept in line with the critique might actually lead to a less reliable test of the theory. Second, gendering the independent variable and taking a causal concepts perspective can be seen as part of a theory-generating process that might lead to the stipulation of more refined and gender-sensitive causal mechanisms.

In sum, a critical gender perspective and the notion of causal concepts go together well. They provide multiple ways to go beyond a mere semantic debate about the androcentric nature of concepts by focusing on how gendering concepts leads to finding new causes and refining the causal mechanisms that tie concepts to each other. As such, “gender” and “causal concepts” have important implications for comparative theory building. The next step is to empirically test these new expectations and mechanisms in future comparative studies.

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## CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER AND POLITICS

# Qualitative Comparative Analysis as a Tool for Concept Clarification, Typology Building, and Contextualized Comparisons in Gender and Feminist Research

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Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) is a method for the systematic analysis of cases. A holistic view of cases and an approach to causality emphasizing complexity are some of its core features. Over the last decades, QCA has found application in many fields of the social sciences. In spite of this, its use in feminist research has been slower, and only recently QCA has been applied to topics related to social care, the political representation of women, and reproductive politics. In spite of the comparative turn in feminist studies, researchers still privilege qualitative methods, in particular case studies, and are often skeptical of quantitative techniques (Spierings 2012). These studies show that the meaning and measurement of many gender concepts differ across countries and that the factors leading to feminist success and failure are context specific. However, case study analyses struggle to systematically account for the ways in which these forces operate in different locations.

The aim of this article is to demonstrate that QCA and related techniques contribute to enhancing comparative analysis in ways that align with core ideas in gender and feminist studies, such as the complex and context-dependent nature of gender phenomena. I begin by describing the main principles of QCA as a research strategy. The following sections draw on recent contributions in comparative social policy and politics literature to illustrate how QCA is used to deal with issues of concept clarification and measurement, policy complexity, the presence of hybrids, and the development of normative types and context-sensitive causal analysis. Finally, this article concludes by discussing promising avenues for future applications of QCA in feminist research.

## PRINCIPLES OF QCA

QCA is a research strategy that aims to combine in-depth knowledge of cases with the goal of generalization (Ragin 1987). The key features of this approach are different from (but not necessarily opposite to) those of statistical analysis. First, QCA conceives cases as holistic entities that cannot be decomposed into single variables/properties. Secondly, QCA envisions causal processes in terms of set relations or relations of implication between phenomena. It starts from maximum complexity of conditions and outcomes and uses Boolean truth tables to identify subsets of conditions that engender particular outcomes. It follows that (a) conditions often display their effect only in combinations with others (conjunctural causation); (b) a given condition may well have different effects depending on the context (contextual effects); (c) alternative sets of conditions may produce the same outcome (equifinality); (d) the conditions for the occurrence and nonoccurrence of an outcome are generally different (asymmetrical causation) (Schneider and Wagemann 2012). This vision of causality well reflects feminist understanding of sociopolitical phenomena as inherently complex, local, and historically contingent (Spierings 2012).

Since QCA was first introduced in the social sciences (Ragin 1987), the initial framework has been extended to include different techniques. While QCA originally operated only on dichotomous sets where cases could either be a member (1) or nonmember (0) (crisp set QCA), recent developments allow for any degree of membership between 0 and 1 (fuzzy set QCA). For instance, a country with a fuzzy score of 0.8 on the set of gender equality is more gender equal than gender unequal, but it still falls short of fully realizing gender equality. Closely related to QCA is the use of fuzzy-set-ideal-type analysis (hereafter FSITA) to develop typologies. This approach is common in comparative welfare state literature where typologies have played an important role in the development of the field.

## FUZZY SETS AS A TOOL FOR CONCEPT CLARIFICATION AND TYPOLOGY BUILDING

FSITA takes a deductive approach to typologies. It starts from a concept of theoretical interest, translates it into sets that then combine into a number of configurations (or ideal types), and uses fuzzy set principles to compute memberships in those configurations. This method has been used in

cross-national analysis of childcare policies. An and Peng (2015) and Szelewa and Polakowski (2008) refer to the concept of defamilialization in their typology, while Ciccina and Verloo (2012) and Ciccina and Bleijenbergh (2014) use Fraser's (1994) models of gender division of labor.

These concepts have long-standing traditions in the gender and citizenship literature, but their success has also generated conceptual confusion. Empirical analyses use different labels to identify similar models leading to poor systematization of existing knowledge, while defamilialization has been reworked by "mainstream" research in such a way as to dilute its gendered meaning. Given FSITA emphasis on theory-driven measurement, these studies have helped to draw out crucial dimensions that more closely reflect feminist debates about gender inequalities in the division of labor. For instance, indices of generosity are commonly used in cross-national analyses of leave policies in spite of the fact that they conflate aspects (time and money) that are known to have very different effects on gender equality — long leaves are detrimental for maternal employment regardless of levels of payment. FSITA can incorporate this criticism because it relies on set intersections: if a country offers low payments for parental leave, this cannot be compensated by offering long durations (Ciccina and Verloo 2012). Further misunderstandings concern the relationship between generosity and gender equality, which are often considered different aspects of leave policies. Ciccina and Verloo (2012) rely on set intersections to clarify that generosity is a necessary precondition of gender equality since equally few rights for men and women do not promote gender equality. Therefore, FSITA enhances our ability to theorize about the meaning of multiple dimensions — also those that are apparently contradictory.

Secondly, FSITA has been used in feminist welfare state research to deal with hybrid cases showing characteristics of more than one model. Their existence is well recognized in feminist literature. Borchorst and Siim (2008) observe, for instance, that Fraser's models coexist in Scandinavian countries and are the object of contention between various societal and political actors. This insight is not reflected in research practices aiming at reducing cases to a few unambiguous types. Fuzzy scores allow, instead, greater transparency and insight on the coexistence of multiple gender models. Since ideal types are based on analytical distinctions, they need not to be mutually exclusive and may coexist because of the

complexity of the social world. This is reflected in the use of partial memberships to allocate cases to configurations.

Finally, FSITA is also used to develop normative typologies. The search for policies to diminish gender inequalities is an underlying motive of feminist scholarship. In empirical analyses, benchmark cases serve to evaluate other countries' performance. For instance, Nordic countries are generally portrayed as the most gender-inclusive model of citizenship. However, these countries also show persisting gender inequalities in many areas (e.g., unpaid work, occupational segregation, glass ceilings, and the incorporation of minority ethnic and migrant women) (Borchorst and Siim 2008). This insight is lost with inductive methods (e.g., relative indices, cluster analysis), which define gender equality based on the set of cases included in the analysis. Conversely, FSITA can accommodate more utopian ideas about gender equality since ideal types are theoretical constructs with no empirical validity. Indeed, no country represents Fraser's universal caregiver model (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014), but this can still be used to measure cross-national differences and identify particular aspects of improvement, as well as to inform policy and normative debates.

### **QUALITATIVE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AS A TOOL FOR CONTEXTUALIZED CAUSAL EXPLANATION**

Studies using QCA within an explanatory framework are more easily found in the gender and politics literature. Krook (2010) and Liliefeldt (2012) use csQCA to investigate factors explaining differences in levels of descriptive political representation of women. These studies aim to move beyond deterministic explanation and incorporate suggestions from previous research about the influence of specific combinations of factors. Krook aims to assess the influence of combinations of institutional, cultural, and socioeconomic variables, while Liliefeldt seeks to account for the interaction of intra- and extra-party factors. QCA offered some substantial advantages in dealing with these questions. The exploratory nature of Liliefeldt's study required a technique that allowed for openness toward the empirical combinations of conditions leading to high/low female representation. Although she could have used interactions, she was constrained by the low number of cases considered. Moreover, higher order interactions are difficult to interpret in regression analysis, while they are more easily treated with QCA. Therefore, she used conjunctures

to highlight causal complexity and identify diverse and context-specific pathways toward similar outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

Krook (2010) further exploits this feature of QCA to adjudicate between the contrasting findings of large-N statistical analysis and cases studies. Her intuition is that many of these contradictions derive from the diversity of factors at work in different contexts. Therefore, she draws attention to the importance of avoiding one-size-fits-all reasoning. By comparing Western and sub-Saharan countries using context-specific measures of conditions and outcomes, Krook is able to identify different causal mechanisms leading to similar outcomes in the two regions. Her “unorthodox” approach explains patterns in the data that had been previously noticed but not adequately theorized. The goal of her study is to offer a more accurate account of developments within each group of countries. Indeed, QCA produces “modest” generalizations that are valid only for the specific contexts from which the original findings are drawn, or ones that are closely similar. Yet, this feature can be used to extend the geographical focus of comparative analysis by reassessing the validity of theories, concepts, and indicators developed for the Western world to other regions.

Finally, several authors suggest that QCA could advance the empirical study of intersectionality. Hancock (2013) points to fsQCA as a technique amenable to incorporate both systematic commonalities (categorical intersections) and variation (diversity within) among groups in a way that is sensitive to the historical context and the dynamic interaction within individuals, groups, and institutions. Although McCall (2005) does not refer explicitly to QCA, her intercategory approach with its focus on multigroup relations and the study of multiple configurations of inequality hints in that direction. In spite of the affinity between QCA and key principles of this theory, there is no study to date applying this method to intersectionality.<sup>2</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Qualitative comparative analysis is an important addition to statistical techniques and case studies for comparative gender studies. By

1. Multilevel modeling is also intended to deal with context-specific effects (see Spierings in this Critical Perspective section).

2. To my knowledge, only Da Roit and Weicht’s study (2013) using fsQCA to investigate the effect of various intersections of care, migration, and employment on national patterns of migrant care work could be said to fall within the domain of intersectionality, although they do not explicitly assume this framework.

formalizing case-oriented analysis, it enhances our understanding of issues related to the complexity of cases and the diversity of causal mechanisms at work in different settings. In spite of its strengths, QCA is no magic bullet. Being based on set-theoretical thinking, it is best suited to answer a particular set of questions related to associations of implications between sociopolitical phenomena (e.g., equifinality, conjunctural causation, and asymmetry), while it may be ill-equipped for detecting correlations. In this view, QCA and regression analysis could be best applied next to one another

QCA has been successfully applied in gender analysis of macro phenomena, small or medium-N studies, and cross-sectional analysis. Few studies have instead tried to incorporate time (An and Peng 2015; Szelewa and Polakowski 2008) or to explain the influence of sociopolitical actors on policy change (Engeli 2012), and none has used large-N or individual-level data in spite of increased technical developments in this area. Particularly remarkable is the lack of studies using QCA to advance comparative research on intersectionality. All these areas point in interesting directions for further QCA applications in gender and feminist research.

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## CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER AND POLITICS

### **Starting a Conversation about Critical Frame Analysis: Reflections on Dealing with Methodology in Feminist Research**

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With this article we are contributing to a conversation about Critical Frame Analysis (CFA) as a feminist research method. CFA was developed within the context of two collaborative and comparative research studies of gender equality policies in the European context, MAGEEQ ([www.mageeq.net](http://www.mageeq.net)) and QUING ([www.quing.eu](http://www.quing.eu)). Since the introduction of CFA in these projects, many scholars have used the method — some affiliated with these projects as well as others. This contribution is a first reflection on CFA and a call for more extensive reflections on methodologies developed in feminist work. We use reflection on CFA's origins, mixed with illustrations taken from research articles by authors who have been affiliated with the projects and others, and self-criticism based on two of our own studies. These reflections underpin our conclusions about the ongoing potential of CFA and the necessity and urgency of more thorough attention to methodological issues related to the use of CFA.

### **THE BEST OF TWO WORLDS: AIM AND ORIGIN OF CRITICAL FRAME ANALYSIS**

CFA was developed to analyze and address discursive power dynamics connected to policy making (Verloo 2005). The methodology is designed to disclose and study the different representations that sociopolitical actors offer about policy problems and solutions in policy documents (Verloo and Lombardo 2007). Built on insights from communication research, social movement theory, and critical policy

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studies, CFA was introduced to move beyond the methodological shortcomings of both quantitative and qualitative discursive research.

The *MAGEEQ* project (2003–2006) set out to describe and analyze comparatively and systematically how gender equality is framed as a policy problem across Europe (Verloo 2005). Existing comparative methods presented a methodological puzzle on how to move beyond either simple word counts or establishing codes before the analysis. Varieties of discourse analysis on the other hand score high on finding unexpected elements, but their results are almost impossible to compare across studies and researchers. Leaning heavily on social movement scholars, CFA started “from the general assumption that a policy (proposal) will always contain an implicit or explicit representation of a problem (diagnosis), connected to an implicit or explicit solution (prognosis) and a call for action” (Verloo 2005, 22). CFA’s answer to the methodological puzzle then is to analyze crucial dimensions of frames based on a set of sensitizing questions for diagnosis, prognosis, and call for action, rather than constructing a hierarchical set of codes (as in content analysis) or typologies of frames (as in some forms of discourse analysis). The “critical” in CFA stands for explicitly paying attention to the voice of actors (authors of texts and references in texts) and to their varying power in diagnosis, prognosis, and call for action. When CFA is applied from a feminist perspective, gender+ is central in the power dimension.

The *MAGEEQ* project applied CFA on a set of texts based on policy process analysis. Open codes (answers to sensitizing questions) were used to characterize the text, and a computer program (*KWALITAN*) was used to store and organize the codes. The codes were subjected to a round of revision within the 25-person research team. Together, the revised codes form a “supertext”: a structured and systematic summary of the analyzed text, comparable to other such supertexts. Then the codes were synthesized across texts, again in rounds of discussion, to describe frames (coherent combinations of diagnostic and prognostic codes) across policy fields and across countries. This enabled comparative analysis of frames.

The *MAGEEQ* project saw the potential of CFA predominantly in its ability to detect unexpected elements and inconsistencies because of its open coding, and its analytical capacity to expose policy inclusion and exclusion related to the different roles and voice given to actors in diagnosis and prognosis. The ability to compare was a second strong asset. The limitations of CFA were the time-costly data harmonization

and aggregation of codes and frames, as well as an acknowledgement that the comparison potential is still limited (Verloo and Lombardo 2007). *MAGEEQ*'s technical problems with the database were substantial, but the program's ability to generate supertexts from the codes was extremely helpful.

## DEVELOPING A MORE ADVANCED SYSTEM

The much larger *QUING* project (2006–2011) further developed CFA by adding several innovations: syntactic coding, a database for storing texts and codes, with added code hierarchies building options (Dombos et al. 2012). As in *MAGEEQ*, the qualitative coding was in English, and codes were stored linked to the original texts.

The paradox in the further development of CFA in *QUING* was about simplicity versus sophistication. *QUING* CFA is more detailed and electronic than *MAGEEQ* CFA but kept the open coding to capture as much meaning as possible. The electronic database and its to-be-developed tools intended to help keep under control the work of comparing 2086 texts. Within the *QUING* project, codes of the 2086 texts were synthesized to frames at text and at issue level, and a comparative analysis of frames across issues and countries was successfully made, as well as a broad analysis of voice in the texts (Krizsan et al. 2009). It proved more difficult to analyze the intersectional dimension of the texts and of the frames, and this was done by the old-school method of making separate country reports, aggregated in a final intersectionality report (Verloo et al. 2009). Similarly, explanatory analyses were conducted only for certain issues and for small-scale comparisons.<sup>1</sup> Code hierarchies were made for a limited set of code categories (mainly actors, norms, and domains) and proved to be extremely time consuming. The code hierarchies have not been used extensively so far (but see Van der Haar and Verloo 2013). After the *QUING* project, the database has been maintained and is still used by former *QUING* researchers, but it is not open to others. While the *QUING* database has been developed using Open Source software, additional finances would have been needed to offer such a database as a tool for new projects.

1. See papers at <http://www.quing.eu/content/view/19/36/> (accessed June 2, 2016).

## CFA APPLIED: POTENTIAL FOR IMPROVEMENT

Our Google Scholar search (February 10, 2015) showed frequent use of CFA in research: we found 396 citations to three key publications on the method particularly (Verloo 2005, 2007; Dombos et al. 2012), testifying that CFA is widely referred to. Roughly half of the citations found were by scholars who were not part of the MAGEEQ and QUING research teams. More than half of the research articles by non-team members refer to CFA in their methods section, usually to position their work in relation to forms of discursive analysis or to refer to Verloo's definition of the concept of frame. Our observation is that there are many single case studies that analyze country or organization policies in a restricted time frame. (All studies using CFA are referenced in the following section).

We found that studies vary in information on the data used. An appendix of texts analyzed is presented in Duarte Hidalgo (2013), Fajardo (2014) and Paterson (2011), but not in Elias (2013), Allwood (2013), or Krook and True (2012). Some scholars focus only broadly on the four overall dimensions of diagnosis, prognosis, voice, and call for action, without using CFA's intersectionality component (Fajardo 2014). Others do use this intersectionality component (Duarte Hidalgo 2013) and present details on the CFA method. It is also not uncommon to see articles saying they are "drawing on CFA" without giving further detail as to how it has been applied (Krook and True 2012). These illustrative examples testify to the high potential for improvement of the use of the CFA method: while it is rather popular to use it or refer to it, we have found no step-by-step description of its use (at times even the corpus of texts analyzed is not clarified), and there is no discussion of or reflection on the use and potential of the method.

Reflecting on two studies that we contributed to ourselves, we observe that we did not use the full potential of the method either, nor did we include a critical methodology section on the CFA method. In the study of changes in policy frames on gender and migration in 17 Dutch policy texts and debates between 1995 and 2005, Roggeband and Verloo (2007) apply CFA on MAGEEQ data, focusing on diagnosis, prognosis, voice, and call for action. The findings are explained by relating them to the context dynamics in Dutch politics. This analysis does include attention to intersectionality and voice to a certain degree, by analyzing political parties separately and relating their standpoints to the specific political constellation and climate. The paper lacks methodological reflection, however, and does not further theorize voice

through attention to the absence and dominance of particular political actors in policy making.

More recently, we conducted a cross-country analysis of categories used in policy-related texts based on the supertexts and code hierarchies from the QUING database, looking at four policy issues across three types of policy texts (policy documents, laws, and civil-society documents). In our analysis of the labels used for problem holders and target groups in gender equality documents by policy and civil society actors, we zoomed in on the gendering and intersectionalizing of these actors. The database and the code hierarchies made on actors proved to be very useful for this. Our cross-country analysis of 29 countries and at the EU level did not include any contextualization. Moreover, we also did not further analyze those who actually wrote the documents (voice) or those who are given a voice through references in the texts, and we did not specifically analyze the potential reasons or implications of the appearance of gendered+ categories across the three types of texts. While contextualization, voice analysis, and explanatory and impact analysis would have contributed positively to the quality of the analysis, unlocking the full potential of CFA, the article format is unfortunately more suited to addressing a limited set of questions. Therefore we choose to showcase CFA's potential to analyze the range and role of actors addressed by gender equality policies.

From the selected works we discussed above we may conclude that using elements from CFA already provides rich analyses. Scholars using CFA appear to choose to conduct either in-depth small-N studies or more general large-N comparative work. That is, the complexity of the method seems to force scholars to either highlight its ability to provide a deep and specifically contextualized analysis or its comparative potential. This suggests that CFA would benefit most from a rethinking of its “best of two worlds” promise.

## CONCLUSION

Concluding our observations and reflections, we argue that CFA's potential is still high: in its various forms CFA enables a systematic and analytic comparison of discursive content in policy making. That is and remains extremely valuable. To further understand the political dynamics of policy making, more is needed, especially combining CFA with contextual and process-tracing data that can explain what happens and why. Given that

comparisons over time in one case study often make it easier to collect and present context data, it may be no surprise that we found many case studies and fewer examples of (large) multicountry comparisons.

We also saw that methodological criticism or explicit amendments to the method are rare and would argue that this hampers the chances of the method to grow and develop. A first impression of the list of studies is that there are very few analyses using the data on voice (and agency), and this certainly is the case for the two examples of studies that we contributed to. This means that the critical potential is underused.

We hope that this short reflection essay encourages researchers to continue using CFA, to include more methodological information and discussion when using CFA, to add contextual analysis, and to pay attention to the voice dimension to strengthen the critical potential of CFA. We acknowledge the problem of the lack of a basic open access database that currently hinders non-QUING researchers from contributing to further developing this tool.

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## CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER AND POLITICS

### Multilevel Analysis as a Tool to Understand the Spatio-Temporality of Gender

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Gender:

“culturally specific characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity . . . a wide range of . . . social roles assigned to men and women *historically and cross-culturally*”

(Hawkesworth 2013, 36, emphasis added)

Intersectionality:

“that race, class, sexual orientation, nationality, and gender are not discrete markers of difference but rather intersection social structures of inequality experienced by individuals *in specific social locations*”

(Ewig and Ferree 2013, 442, emphasis added)

As illustrated by these definitions from the *Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics*, context dependency is a defining characteristic of gender, since gender and intersectional inequalities differ spatially and temporarily in how they are organized. It is on this issue of context dependency where gender studies scholars often collide with (the application and interpretation) of regression-based statistical analysis in debates about quantitative methods (see Spierings 2012).

In this reflection, I will briefly address where this tension comes from, focusing particularly on how (statistical) relationships vary in occurrence and strength between contexts. Next, I discuss three rather common archetypical responses to this tension that do little to resolve the issue. Subsequently, I focus on more profound solutions, including multilevel regression models, which challenge gender scholars to specify and develop their theoretical arguments on how and why relationships are context dependent. The different, bad, and better ways in which to deal with possible context dependency are illustrated by an assessment of their

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prevalence in the 32 studies applying inferential quantitative methods to explaining individual-level (e.g., voters, MPs) characteristics, as published in this journal between 2011 and 2015 (40% of all research articles published in volumes 7–11).<sup>1</sup>

## THE TENSION BETWEEN REGRESSION ANALYSIS AND CONTEXT DEPENDENCY

At the core of regression models is estimating to what extent two variables (controlled for other factors) vary together and how likely it is that this correlation holds beyond the sample of studied units (e.g., voters). This can be in tension with context dependency for two reasons.

First of all, the goal of regression analysis is to draw conclusions that are generalizable beyond the cases studied. Random sampling — assuming no sampling or response bias — assures that results can be generalized to the cases the sample was drawn from, such as the U.S. or a European population.<sup>2</sup> Our theories, however, are often formulated more generally with, for example, all industrialized Western democracies falling within a theory's scope. Generalizing results of a study beyond the population it samples from — for example, generalizing a U.S. sampled study to European countries — brings in the assumption that the core causal mechanisms are the same across contexts.

Second, the more cases that are included in the analysis, the higher the certainty (statistical significance) that the relationships found in the sample are also present in the larger population.<sup>3</sup> This makes pooling data attractive, as it increases “certainty.” In such studies it is common (and good) practice to control for different average levels on the dependent variable across countries. However, this practice does not account for different *effects* across countries — context dependency (Spierings 2012). Models based on pooled data might present the average effect across countries accurately, but they do not show whether the effect is actually the same in each country. Moreover, different sample sizes can lead to the results being dominated by the relationship in one oversampled or populous country.<sup>4</sup>

1. An overview can be obtained from the author.

2. See Note 4.

3. Technically, the denominator of the standard error of the B-coefficient includes “n.” The smaller the “s.e.,” the higher the “p-value”; thus, the more certain results hold for the population sampled.

4. That an effect holds for the sampled population does not mean it holds for all subsets of that population. For instance, if a negative relationship between being married and voting progressive

## FALSE SOLUTIONS

The tension between regression practices and context dependency is particularly relevant for gender studies, as we start from the notion that the social meaning and consequences of one's sex are different across countries and that the structural and cultural context (e.g., welfare state regimes and societal norms) shape this meaning.

The ways in which this issue is dealt with are diverse. Before turning to some real solutions, I discuss three archetypical ways of dealing with context dependency that hardly help to develop our understanding of its (gendered) dynamics, but of which derivatives and/or combination are regularly found, as illustrated with figures for the 2011–2015 volumes of this journal:

1. The simplest way to deal with the possibility of relationships being context dependent is ignoring the issue. It is surprising how many studies frame their conclusions in general terms while not reflecting on the possibility that the results might be different in other countries (or context) or between the countries studied, and for what reasons. In the 31–40% of all reviewed studies this was the case; all were single-country studies.<sup>5</sup>
2. The second archetypical solution is claiming that the case(s) studied is (are) representative or, in the case of pooled samples, that results are reliable because the cases are highly similar or because they are rather diverse — both arguments are used. However, given the differences in political systems, cultural norms, welfare state regimes, and economic structures, there is generally good reason to expect that the strength or even direction of a relationship differs between countries. Albeit, this practice is not uncommon; examples were found in 15% to 20% of the single-country studies that did not ignore the issue overall (see above) and in five of the six reviewed pooled studies.
3. The third response is the opposite of the second one: explicitly mentioning that the results are context specific and cannot be generalized. While this fits the argument that is made by some qualitative-oriented or country-specialist scholars (for instance, in the role of reviewer), these reservations are often rather empty. It does not provide a thought-through reasoning of why and

exists in a proportional sample of the U.S. (319 million inhabitants) and the Netherlands (17 million), it might be absent in the Dutch subsample given its more diverse party system. The 19:1 sample ratio will obscure this in the overall model. Similarly, among the 5% LGBT citizens, the opposite relationship might hold because newlyweds support progressive parties that made marriage possible for them. The overall results will veil this too.

5. All on American politics, none of the 10 other-country studies. Providing only case-specific background information is not considered discussing context dependency.

how the results can be expected to be different in other spatial or temporal situations, which the authors as experts in their field should be able to provide. Even though claims about “absolute context specificity” might not be expected in quantitative studies, traces of this archetype were found in 4 of the 26 single-country studies reviewed.

These three responses to potential context dependency are cosmetic or even dogmatic and tell us little about *how* the context influences the gender dynamics in a particular domain.

## THEORIZING AND MODELING CONTEXT DEPENDENCY

The “solutions” to the issue of potential context dependency above lack theoretical specification and empirical testing. Here, I will discuss three better ways of dealing with context dependency when applying regression analyses.

*Positioned statistical case study.* There can be very good reason to study data on only one country. One of those reasons is actually that one has more space to go into detailed descriptive backgrounds regarding the context and the position the country takes in the population of countries (see Seawright and Gerring 2008). For instance, if a theory about political participation is said to hold for democracies, all democracies form the population. However, results of a study on a two-party democracy can be expected to differ from those of multiparty systems. Contextualizing the results of a single-country study and thinking through the implications of the contextual situation for the causal mechanisms specified in the theory provides a fairer and more reliable test of that theory. Or, if the mechanisms in the theory do not provide enough information for a priori expectations, the author can think through how the contextual circumstances have influenced the strength of the relationship found and generate new tangible expectations for other cases, even though these cannot be tested in that particular study. Three strong examples of positioned-statistical case studies among the reviewed articles were studies on Denmark (Bækgaard and Kjeaar 2012), Sweden (Folke, Freidenvall, and Rickne 2015), and the UK (Bicquelet, Weale, and Bara 2012).

*Context-disaggregated analyses.* If multiple datasets are available, pooled analyses can always be rerun per contextual unit to test how robust the pooled relationships are. Evidently, in disaggregate analyses the number of cases is lower, leading to fewer statistically significant relationships, but

coefficients per country can be compared to the coefficients from the pooled model on their substantial significance (see Miller and van der Meulen Rodgers 2008).<sup>6</sup> Even if surveys on only a few contexts (space or time) are available, this provides a preliminary assessment of context dependency or might generate theoretical ideas on which contextual characteristics matter (e.g., Spierings and Zaslove 2015). This approach is less common; among the reviewed studies, Schwindt-Bayer (2011) is the best example.

*Multilevel-interaction models.* If surveys on at least 25 contextual units (e.g., World Value Surveys; European Social Surveys) and data on these units are present, it is possible to systematically assess whether and why gendered relationships are different by context. The disaggregation approach discussed above cannot ascribe the differences to specific characteristics of the context, such as the public childcare budget, and it cannot rule out other moderating contextual characteristics. Multilevel regression models (MLM) do allow for this. MLM allows testing how variations in strength of microlevel relationships across higher-level units correlate with differences in contextual characteristics (e.g., whether variation in the employment-political participation linkage across years, countries, or states correlates with differences in welfare expenditures), without the risk of overestimating statistical significance. Alexander (2012) and Luhiste (2015) are clear examples from the *Politics & Gender* articles reviewed.

MLM is clearly the most demanding one in terms of data and analysis as well as the most systematic one. At the same time, disaggregated models in combination with case knowledge can be particularly useful for hypothesis-generating approaches or exploring unexpected results.

## GENDER AND MULTILEVEL MODELS

Because context dependency is intrinsically part of the concept of gender, the gender studies literature can most easily embrace and push our theoretical understanding of context dependency. This can be done in multiple ways if the approaches above, MLM particularly, are embraced.

We should go beyond simply claiming that patriarchy and gender regimes take different shapes in different times and places, and start specifying the dimensions of patriarchy and theorizing and testing how they shape the gendered relationship at the individual level. For

6. Comparing coefficients across logistic models is more problematic (Mood 2010).

instance, how do different patriarchal institutions influence the impact of family formation on women's social participation (e.g., Spierings 2014). In other words, we should go beyond *claiming* context dependency and start *explaining* context dependency. This implies ruffling of old paradigmatic feathers that withhold a constructive discussion about using regression models for understanding context dependency (see Spierings 2012).

Second, while politics and gender studies tend to focus on how clearly gendered contextual variables, such as the proportion of women in Parliament (Alexander 2012), shape individual-level relationships, MLM also stimulates us to formalize, systematize, and demonstrate claims about ostensible gender-neutral structures having gendered implications for individual-level relationships. For instance, it is generally acknowledged that the type of electoral system has gendered implication for representation, but how do differences between PR and majoritarian systems influence *the impact of* individual characteristics on gender differences in political participation? MLM challenges gender scholars to further specify in what way gender neutrality is a myth.

Lastly, gender studies have a strong track record in qualitative methods, leading to vast in-depth case knowledge on gender dynamics. The field is therefor particularly suited to show how mixed-methods studies and projects can combine regression analyses with case studies in order to develop systematic theories on context dependency. For instance, disaggregated regression models can show for which countries a relationship does not hold. In-depth case knowledge can then provide explanations that are translated to more general expectations, which subsequently can be tested in multilevel models.

## CONCLUDING NOTE

In this contribution, I have reflected on two practices: (1) the gender criticism of not acknowledging spatiotemporal context dependency in quantitative studies and (2) the application of the gender-based theoretical notion of context dependency in regression models. It is my hope that combining gender studies' in-depth situational knowledge with multilevel regression models will stimulate gender scholars to further develop their arguments on which aspect of the context actually influences which microlevel relationships and stimulate multilevel

modelers in political and other social sciences to reflect on and test the internal and external generalizability of their results.

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