Representations of Social Phenomena

- Social research: one of many ways of constructing representations of social life
- Also films, novels, poetry, painting, journalistic accounts, documentary films, etc.
- Social research; a very specific kind of representation
- Not like studying molecules or ants: a mixture of researcher, subject and audience
- Thus, it is hard to avoid questions of an *interpretive* or *historical character* when conducting social research

How Social Scientific Representations (SSRs) Differ From Other Representations

1. SSRs address phenomena that are socially significant in some way

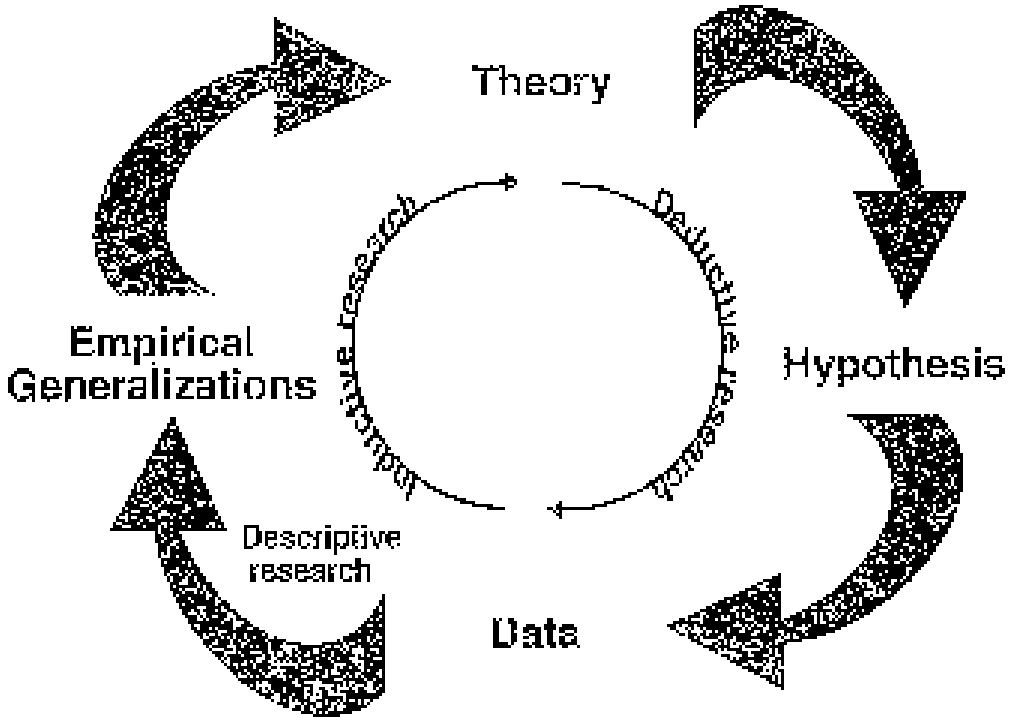
2. SSRs are **relevant to** (social) **theory**, either directly or indirectly

3. SSRs are based on or incorporate **significant amounts** of appropriate evidence, purposefully collected

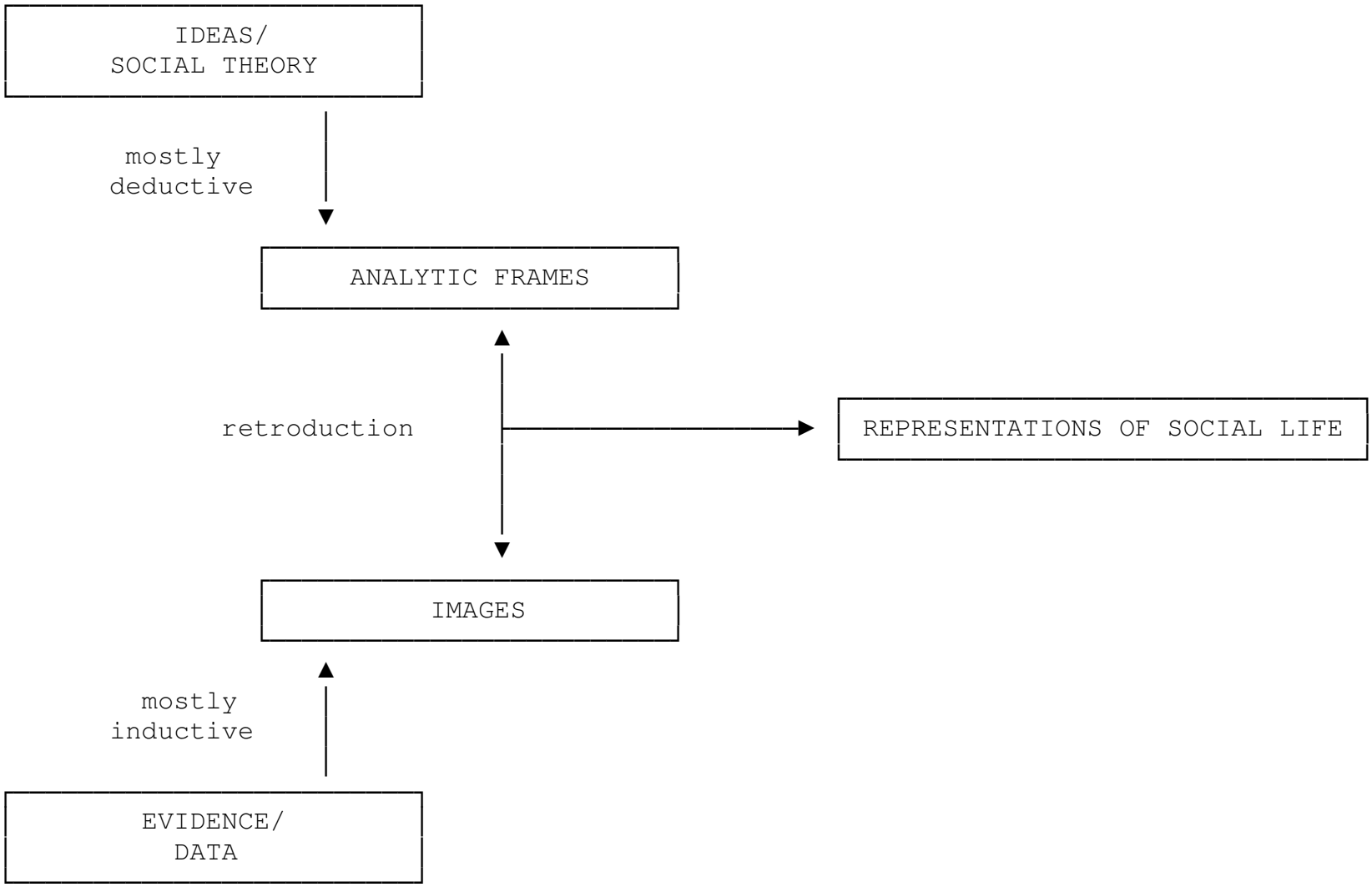
4. Conclusions of SSRs are based on some form of **systematic analysis** of the entire body of relevant evidence

Social scientific representations **better grounded in both ideas (theory) and evidence (data)** than most other kinds of representations

Conventional Model of Social Research



An Alternate Model



Two Main Approaches to Constructing Social Research

- Case-Oriented Approach—Only through close examination of individual cases do we have any chance of understanding social phenomena; most phenomena have been misrepresented or incompletely represented; this can be remedied only through intensive examination.

- Variable-Oriented Approach—Underlying truths are evident only when we look at broad patterns across many cases; individual cases are incredibly deceptive; patterns reveal underlying structures and relationship purged of the specificity of any individual case.

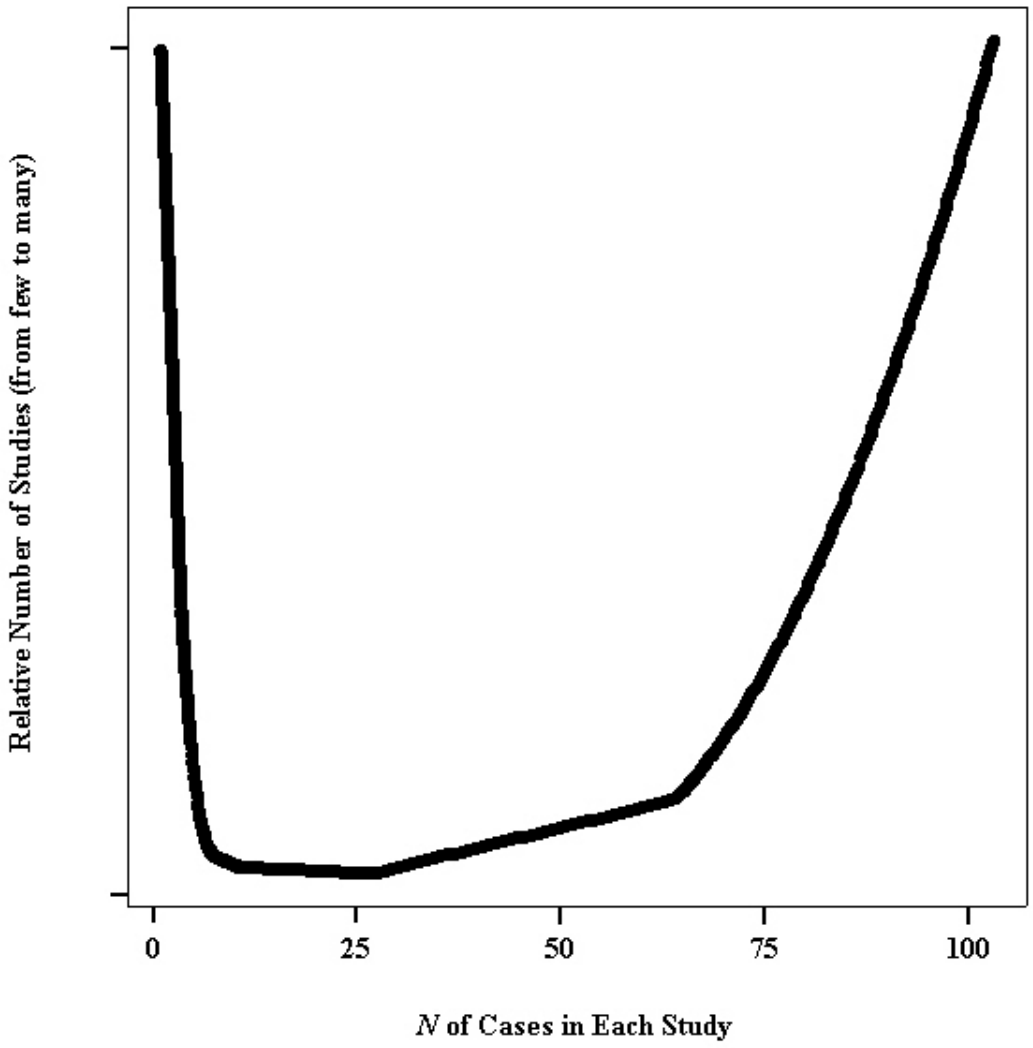
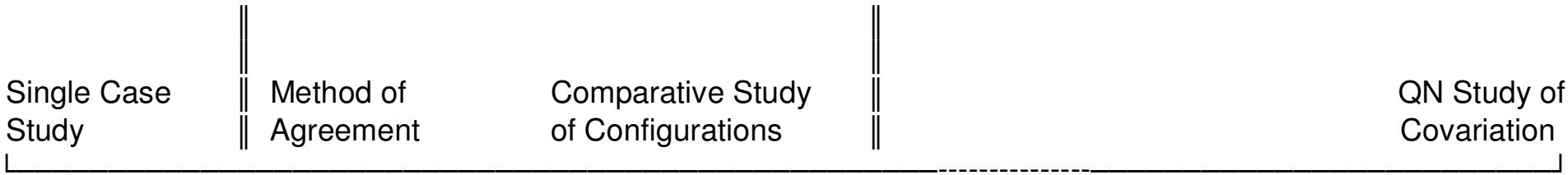


Figure 1.1 Plot of Relative Number of Studies against *N* of Cases in Each Study

The Case-Oriented / Variable-Oriented Dimension



Case-Oriented
Small-N
Qualitative
Intensive
With-in Case Analysis
Problem of Representation

Variable-Oriented
Large-N
Quantitative
Extensive
Cross-Case Analysis
Problem of Inference

Some Important Contrasts

The nature of connections; how aspects of cases are connected

The idea of “mechanisms” that make the connections possible--how accessible are they to the researcher?

The trade-off between breadth (lots of cases) and depth (knowledge of individual cases)
- involves different kinds of social scientific representations
- distinction between within-case and cross-case analysis

Other key differences between quantitative and qualitative research
- Large N versus small N
- Studying variation versus studying a process/outcome
- Dependent variable versus qualitative change
- Independent variables versus causal recipes

King/Keohane/Verba's (KKV's) Approach to Cross-Case Analysis

Text: *Designing Social Inquiry*

ACCEPTS:

(1) treating cases as "observations"—like coin tosses;

(2) the importance of having large Ns—to provide analytic/statistical leverage;

(3) the pre-eminence of deductive theory testing (theory first!); and

(4) the desirability of assessing causal effects via statistical control as a way to test theory (average treatment effect—ATE).

Brady/Collier (BC) Approach to Cross-Case Analysis

Text: *Rethinking Social Inquiry*

(1) some observations may be theoretically or substantively decisive (causal process observations), while others are simply useless repetition;

(2) to the extent that large Ns simply multiply redundant observations, their value added is minimal;

(3) theory building is just as important as theory testing, perhaps more so, and the logic of discovery is different from the logic of proof; and

(4) experimental methods alone are capable of establishing causal relationships; if evidence is non-experimental, causal process observations are the key (e.g., via process tracing or congruence).

It may be best to think of the BC strand as a response to the KKV strand. It does not offer an alternate methodological template, per se.

Neither Approach Fully Addresses the Challenge of Linking Cross-Case Analysis and Within Case Analysis

Issues:

Comparing cases directly to each other: (N*(N-1))/2
N = number of cases

Comparing cases as configurations: 2^k
k = number of relevant causal conditions

Set theoretic methods provide a better bridge between cross-case and within case analysis.

The Distinctiveness of Comparative Research:

Explanatory statements reference macro-level characteristics in accounts of individual cases or sets of cases. (Ragin 1987)

Because comparative research has this basic characteristic, the interaction between within-case analysis and cross-case analysis is very important.

It follows that the *nature* of the cross-case analysis is crucial. My basic point is that some forms of cross-case analysis "connect" to within case analysis better than other forms.