Part I

Case studies

1 Surveys

There is a case study tradition of research within all the social science disciplines, as well as in adjacent fields in the natural sciences (e.g., medicine) and the humanities (e.g., history). To be sure, this tradition is more prominently on display in some fields than in others. Nonetheless, it is essential to survey our subject – very broadly defined – as it intersects with history, psychology, social work, applied linguistics, medicine, cultural anthropology, sociology, the study of science (sociology of science, history of science, and philosophy of science), education, political science, comparative-historical research, law, and economics (business, management, and organizational research).[1]

We begin with a discursive intellectual history of these disciplines. This is followed by several bibliometric analyses focused on Google Books and Web of Science, and, finally, by a compilation of key exemplars of the case study tradition.

1.1 Intellectual histories

The case study approach to knowledge begins with the oldest discipline, *history*, which evolved from oral and written chronicles of the sort produced by Homer, Herodotus, and Thucydides. Drawing on the specific features of the case at hand these chronicles imparted general

[1] Glimpses of the history can be found in Adcock (2008), Bromley (1986: Chapter 1), Brooke (1970), Dufour and Fortin (1992), Feagin *et al.* (1991), Forrester (1996), Hamel (1993), Healy (1923), Platt (1992, 2007), Scholz and Tietje (2002: Chapter 3), and the compendium provided in David (2005).

lessons pertaining to politics, society, human nature, or the gods. In this manner, they abstracted from the particular to the general. Contemporary histories, while focused mostly on explaining particular outcomes and events, provide the building blocks for our general knowledge of the world. In this respect, they function as case studies.[2]

The clinical approach to *psychology* and *social work* rests on an in-depth exploration of specific individuals, regarded as cases. Sigmund Freud's case histories (e.g., "Anna O") were formative in establishing this tradition of investigation and reportage. Other case-based researchers in the psychodynamic tradition include Erik Erikson, Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, Carl Jung, Melanie Klein, and D.W. Winnicott.[3] There is also a long-established tradition of behavioral research in psychology, stretching back to B.F. Skinner in the early twentieth century, that focuses on individual subjects.[4]

In *applied linguistics*, cases of interest are usually composed of language learners, e.g., children or immigrants. Issues of interest include "lexis, syntax, morphology, phonology, discourse-level features, pragmatics, narrative structure, reading and writing processes, content-based language learning, social and linguistic identities, attitudes and motivation, learning strategies, and anxiety" (Duff 2007: 35).

In *medicine*, the case history (also known as medical history or anamnesis) extends back to the origins of scientific study. Today, a patient's case history generally records demographic information, personal information (e.g.: occupation, living arrangements), symptoms, history of any present illnesses, general medical history, medical history of the patient's family, medications, and specific allergies. Published

[2] See the five-volume compendium, *Oxford History of Historical Writing*.

[3] For psychology, see Bolgar (1965), Brown and Lloyd (2001), Corsini (2004), Fishman (1999), McLeod (2010), O'Neill (1968), Radley and Chamberlain (2012), Robinson (2001), Sealey (2011), Wedding and Corsini (2013). For social work, see Gilgun (1994), LeCroy (2014), Sheffield (1920), Stake (1995).

[4] Benjamin (2006), Bromley (1986), Gast and Ledford (2009), Kaarbo and Beasley (1999), Oltmanns *et al.* (2014).

case studies often focus on patients whose frailties – or resilience – are not well accounted for by medical science. These anomalies are vigilantly recorded for further study. Examples may be found in the *Journal of Medical Case Reports* and "Case Records from the Massachusetts General Hospital," a regular feature in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.[5] Epidemiologists, meanwhile, construct case histories for every epidemic, while medical historians do the same for outbreaks in the past.[6]

In *cultural anthropology*, research has traditionally focused on groups (e.g., tribes, villages, communities) or rituals (e.g., coming-of-age rituals). Forerunners of modern anthropology rested on accounts by missionaries, military expeditions, and colonists. By the end of the nineteenth century, anthropologists were conducting original fieldwork, generally targeted at "primitive" peoples throughout the world. Leading exemplars include all the founding fathers of ethnography and of the discipline that became known as cultural anthropology – Gregory Bateson, Franz Boas, Mary Douglas, E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Bronislaw Malinowski, Margaret Mead, Gerhard Friedrich Mueller, and Edward Sapir.[7]

In *sociology*, a tradition of work known as urban sociology adapted ethnographic tools developed by anthropologists to study urban areas, focusing especially on families, ethnic groups, immigrants, gangs, and poor neighborhoods. A leading role in this movement was played by the sociology department at the University of Chicago, which included

[5] Ankeny (2011, 2012, 2014), Aronson and Hauben (2006), Hunter (1991). The Oxford Case Histories series includes titles such as Neurological Case Histories, Oxford Case Histories in Cardiology, Oxford Case Histories in Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Oxford Case Histories in Neurosurgery, Oxford Case Histories in Respiratory Medicine, Oxford Case Histories in Rheumatology, and Oxford Case Histories in TIA and Stroke.

[6] Jenicek (2001), Keen and Packwood (1995), Mays and Pope (1995), Vandenbroucke (2001), Zimmer and Burke (2009).

[7] Bernard (2001), Eggan (1954), Eriksen and Nielsen (2001), Gluckman (1961), Mitchell (1983), Moore (2010), Rosenblatt (1981), Small (2009). Case studies in forensic anthropology are surveyed in Steadman (2002).

(at various times) Herbert Blumer, Ernest Burgess, Everett Hughes, George Herbert Mead, Robert Park, Robert Redfield, William Thomas, and Louis Wirth, along with their students – Howard Becker, Erving Goffman, and Anselm Strauss. Many of the first research sites to deploy this fieldwork approach were located in Chicago – hence the moniker, "Chicago school." From there, the tradition expanded to other cities in the United States and, eventually, to the rest of the world.[8]

In the study of science – i.e., *sociology of science*, *history of science*, and *philosophy of science* – cases are often comprised of key anomalies, discoveries, or disagreements among scientists (Burian 2001; Kuhn 1962/1970).

In the field of *education*, case studies have focused on modules, programs, classrooms, schools, and universities (e.g., Bassey 1999; Cousin 2005; Crossley and Vulliamy 1984; Delamont 1992; Hancock and Algozzine 2011; Simons 2009; Thomas 2011).

In *political science*, the tradition of case study research remains highly influential (Blatter and Haverland 2012; Rohlfing 2012). In international relations, case studies often focus on conflicts (including wars), crises, and international agreements.[9] In comparative politics, the units of interest are typically nations, regions, or localities, though studies may also focus on political parties, interest groups, or events such as coups or elections (Collier 1993; Nissen 1998). In public administration, case studies often focus on particular agencies, programs, or decisions (Bailey 1992; Bock 1962; Jensen and Rodgers 2001).

[8] Influential early works include Smith and White (1921), Thomas and Znaniecki (1918), Wirth (1928), and Whyte (1943/1955). For secondary accounts, see Bulmer (1984), Hammersley (1989). See also Platt (1992), which focuses more broadly on the development of sociology through the early to mid-twentieth century. For work in environmental science, see Scholz and Tietje (2002).

[9] Bennett and Elman (2007), Elman and Elman (2001), George and Bennett (2005: Appendix), Harvey and Brecher (2002), Levy (2008a), Goertz and Levy (2007), Maoz *et al.* (2004), Sprinz and Wolinsky-Nahmias (2004), Tetlock and Belkin (1996). International political economy is surveyed in Odell (2004); Lawrence *et al.* (2005).

In urban politics, studies generally focus on municipalities and machines (Nicholson-Crotty and Meier 2002).

In *comparative-historical* research, a field that encompasses both sociology and political science, the cases of interest are macro-level units such as states, religions, or societies. Alexis de Tocqueville, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber are regarded as founders of this influential cross-disciplinary genre. In the postwar years, influential studies were produced by Seymour Martin Lipset, Barrington Moore, Theda Skocpol, and Charles Tilly (Lange 2012; Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003; Mahoney and Thelen 2015).

In the *legal profession*, jurists examine the facts of a case to determine what previous cases are most-similar to it, and hence what precedents might apply. What is it a case of? Naturally, there may be multiple ways of interpreting a case, especially a complex one, and multiple precedents may apply. This is largely what legal argumentation is about, as articulated in legal briefs and judicial decisions. In its essentials, legal reasoning is very similar to what one might call case-classification in other fields. The difference is that the canny jurist only occasionally strives to establish new ground – creating new theory of the law. While scientists strive for theoretical novelty, jurists strive to maintain precedent. Innovation is disguised in the garb of the status quo (Carter and Burke 2015).

In *business*, *economics*, *management*, and *organization theory*, case studies of firms, organizations, sectors, and networks (clusters) remain central to the adjoining fields of marketing and business, as well as to the development of new institutional economics, as evidenced in work by Alfred Chandler, Ronald Coase, N.S.B. Grass, Avner Greif, Michael Porter, and Oliver Williamson.[10] Likewise, case studies of countries and

[10] Alston (2008), Benbasat *et al.* (1987), Bonoma (1985), Dul and Hak (2007), Eisenhardt (1989), Ellram (1996), Grass and Larson (1939), Hartley (1994), Jones and Zeitlin (2010), Piekkari *et al.* (2009), Woodside and Wilson (2003), Woodside (2010).

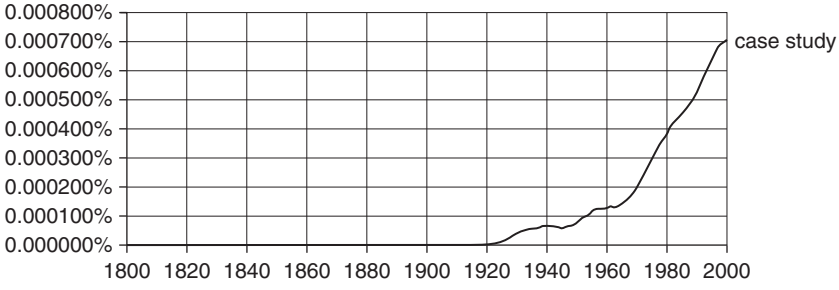

Figure 1.1 Frequency of "case study" in Google Books
Source: https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=case+study&year_start=1800&year_end=2000&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2Ccase%20study%3B%2Cc0

regions remain a staple of economic history as practiced by Stanley Engerman, Alexander Gerschenkron, Charles Kindleberger, Douglass North, Kenneth Sokoloff, and others (Cipolla 1991; Kindleberger 1990; Mokyr 2003). More recently, macro-economic work by Dani Rodrik (2003) has focused on the conjunctural quality of growth, requiring attention to country-specific trajectories. Work on the relationship between trade policy and growth often integrates in-depth case analysis with cross-national regression evidence (Srinivasan and Bhagwati 1999; Stiglitz 2002, 2005; Vreeland 2003).

1.2 Bibliometrics

To survey our topic in a more systematic fashion, several bibliometric analyses are undertaken. First, I search for mentions of "case study" in the Google Books archive, which includes millions of books published from 1500 to the present. Usage of this key term shows a striking upward trend beginning in the 1920s and accelerating in the postwar decades, as shown in Figure 1.1.

A second, more differentiated analysis is undertaken based on Web of Science. This collection of periodicals extends back to 1965 and includes over 300,000 articles published in journals across the social sciences. The latter is divided into four broadly defined disciplines: *anthropology*, including physical and cultural anthropology as well as archaeology (54 journals, with citations to a pool of 217,415 articles and books); *economics*, including business and management (214 journals, with citations to a pool of 683,034 articles and books); *political science*, including international affairs and public administration (202 journals, with citations to a pool of 559,294 articles and books); and *sociology*, including demography, cultural studies, gender studies, ethnic studies, and racial studies (286 journals, with citations to a pool of 312,060 articles and books).

To determine the most influential work, I cull the 100 most-cited publications – articles or books – in each of these disciplinary areas. Thus, in anthropology I identify the 100 most cited publications from the Web of Science pool, which includes 217,415 articles and books. These publications are then coded into one of four categories: *small-C (case study)*, *large-C*, *mixed-method* (including both small- and large-*C* analyses), and *other*. The latter is a residual category, including studies that are non-empirical (theoretical or methodological) or have no clear units of analysis. Results are contained in Table 1.1.

Among the 100 most-cited studies in these four disciplinary areas, the residual category is by far the most common, suggesting that especially influential social science studies are generally not empirical in the usual sense. Next in citations are large-*C* studies, constituting nearly one-fifth of the total. Case studies rank third in this typology, mustering 7.5% of all studies surveyed.

There is considerable variation in the prevalence of case studies across disciplines, with anthropology and political science showing more enthusiasm than economics and sociology. Mixed-method studies barely register in this analysis except for in political science, where 5% are so classified.

Table 1.1 Most-cited studies in Web of Science

	AN	EC	PS	SO	Total	Mean
Small-*C*	14	1	11	4	*30*	*7.50*
Mixed	1	0	5	1	*7*	*1.75*
Large-*C*	17	15	21	19	*72*	*18.00*
Other	68	84	63	76	*291*	*72.75*
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	*400*	*100.00*

Notes: Most-cited studies in four disciplines, 1965–2014, as reported by Web of Science. AN = anthropology (cultural and physical), archaeology. EC = economics, business, management. PS = political science, international affairs, public administration. SO = sociology, demography, cultural studies, gender studies, ethnic studies, racial studies.

Using the benchmark of journal citations, the case study format holds up well when contrasted with its large-*C* cousin, at least for some disciplines. Leaving aside studies classified as "other," case studies and mixed-method studies, considered together, are almost as numerous as large-*C* studies in anthropology and political science (though not in economics and sociology). It is worth noting that the "large-*C*" category is enormously heterogeneous, including all manner of experimental and observational data analysis. Even so, this omnibus category is only slightly more numerous than case studies/mixed-method studies within anthropology and political science.[11]

Bibliometric analyses focused on political science journals find a similar set of results. Herron and Quinn (2016) report that "case study" (and analogs) generates more hits among the very top political science journals than techniques associated with large-*C* analysis such as "probit," "instrumental variable," and "field experiment" (though not the all-purpose term "regression").

[11] Note also that this sampling procedure may subtly discriminate against case study work. If article writers are more familiar with articles than with books, as we suspect, they are more likely to cite articles than books. Given that the book format is generally preferred by case study researchers, the Web of Science citation count may under-represent the influence of case study research in the social sciences today.

1.3 Exemplars

To define a methodological subject, one needs to have a sense not only of what is typical, but also of what is exemplary. What is it that we have in mind when we describe a study as a "case study"? What are the ideal-types?

An extensive compilation of case studies is provided in Table 1.2. Although lengthy ($N = 148$), this is but a tiny sample of the case studies produced in the social sciences. Nonetheless, it helps to clarify the topic at hand, illustrating the variety and scope of this much-practiced genre.

This table contains a good deal of information on various dimensions of case study research. As such, it will be referred to repeatedly throughout the book. That is, each topic addressed in the book will select examples from the table.

Since it is not a random sample, it is important to clarify how this list of exemplars was constructed, and what sorts of biases it might reflect.

Some exemplars are quite recent and others hark back to the turn of the twentieth century, coincident with the professionalization of the core disciplines – anthropology, economics, history, political science, and sociology. I include studies that focus on one or several units (*small-C*) as well as studies that incorporate several dozen units (*medium-C*) – so long as each case is studied intensively. I also include studies that combine small- and large-*C* analyses (*multimethod*).

In selecting studies, I privilege those with demonstrable influence in a field or sub-field; those that have become touchstones in methodological discussions of the case study method; and those that provide diversity in topic, method of case selection, method of analysis, theory, or disciplinary background. Diversity implies non-redundancy: if several studies are very similar, only one is likely to be included.

Inclusion on this list does not mean that I endorse the writer's findings or even their methodological choices. It means only that a work serves as a good example of something. The purpose of an exemplar is