

**International Relations Breakout Session
Tuesday afternoon, September 1, 2009**

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Flexible Outline of Session:

Lunch – Introductions, then time on your own

- I. Cecelia gives brief overview of session and issues raised by the group**
- II. Take up issues addressed in Patrick’s plenary that carry over into our session. Possibly focus on 3, 4, and B (though causality dealt with more Wed. morning).**
- III. Issue of Generalizability (5); theory/identity nexus (A) and theory/foreign policy nexus (D)**
- IV. Move from Policy to Race and Religion (and other “new” topics?) in IR – C; the intersection of Political theory and IR (E), winding up with a discussion of the goals of interpretive research in IR (and any additional issues)**

Questions and issues not specific to IR but that may take particular forms within and for IR scholarship:

1) -- Goals of Interpretive Research:

To raise new questions, rethink ways of examining “old” questions, challenge orthodoxies and the “taken-for-granted”; not to pander to the goal of an elusive “synthesis,” provide insight into the sociology of the discipline (possibly raising new questions).

Do these goals work against the tendency to specialize according to methodological preferences?

2) -- Related to the above question, but from a different perspective, what are the implications of separating “interpretive” from other “qualitative” research?

Specifically, such a separation creates a “Self-Other” relationship. How does this matter for the “interpretive Self”? Are there degrees of Otherness possible in this relationship? If the separation is fundamentally a philosophical one (and hence, unstable), how can/do we defend it?

3) -- Causality:

To what degree do interpretivist researchers exclude themselves from pluralist understandings of causality? (E.g., in IR, there are Aristotelian, Humean, Weberian, and other conceptions of causality.) What are the implications (of exclusion from pluralist understandings of causality) for the politics and sociology of IR?

4) -- Concept Formation:

Does/should concept formation and evaluation logically precede theoretical/analytical work? How can/do interpretive conceptualizations such as intersectionality or constitutive analysis tackle concept formation and evaluation?

5) -- Generalizability: (aspects of this issue were posed by several participants)

To what extent is it possible to generalize, e.g. through observable patterns, given that phenomena are time and place specific?

How should interpretivists in IR address the “so what” questions of rationalists, if they (interpretivists) are not concerned about generalizability?

“Bounded generalizability” is a good thing – how should we establish limited generalizable claims in interpretive research (e.g., generalizability of *mechanisms* – other types)?

6) -- Evidence:

Related to question of generalizability -- what kind should interpretivists use, and under what circumstances?)

Questions and Issues More Specific to IR:

A) -- Theory/Identity nexus for IR Scholars:

To what degree is the theory/identity relationship essential for IR scholars in particular? Does it feed the idea that theoretical paradigms in IR are incommensurable? (and how does this relate to #1 and #2 above?)

B) – Interpretivism, Constructivism, and Rationalism:

Is Wendt’s argument in favor of a “pragmatic position” (that takes rationalism and constructivism as analytical tools rather than metaphysical positions) tenable? E.g., can we separate ontological issues from epistemological and methodological ones? If not, can agreement be found between constructivism and rationalism in IR?

What is the relationship between “conventional constructivism” and interpretivism? The former provides an ontological opening, but doesn’t it preclude the latter by forcing the imposition of KKV methods? (Are there other types of constructivism more compatible with interpretivism?)

Constructivism takes norms, ideas and values seriously. How does it deal with multiple understandings of power?

C) – “New” Substantive Topics in IR: Race and Religion

How has IR addressed race? What forms does race take in IR? Many scholars understand race as a cultural rather than biological construct. Do others in the group agree with this?

What aspects of the international system do changes in forms/constructions of race have the greatest impact on?

Religion in IR seems understudied and constructivism seems the perfect spot for thinking about it. How does constructivism deal with the religion?

D) – Nexus between Theory and Policy in IR:

The sub-discipline of IR has always been characterized by a strong overlap between theory and policy (both in terms of research and policy problems and methods, and the people carrying them out). What are the implications of this overlap in IR for interpretivist insights, concepts, and scholars' ability to critique the ideologies and implementation of IR and foreign policy (à la Oren and Cox)?

E) – Nexus between Political Theory and IR:

Should IR scholars who do interpretive/relational work work toward a closer relationship with political theorists? What is lost when the division between IR and Political Theory widens?