Nice results – But are they valid?

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Why should we bother?

- We cannot believe findings about *causality* unless proven “valid”
- Validity yardsticks discipline the research process
- The wrong yardstick can spoil the analysis

→ How common/separate yardsticks should be?
  - nomothetic validity
  - idiographic validity
Dimensions of nomothetic validity

• **Internal/Statistical**  
  > no alternative causes to that effect  
  – Insulation by design (randomized assignment to treatment, independence tests)

• **External**  
  > the relationship holds under different gauges and contexts  
  – Cumulation by replication and reproduction, meta-analysis

• **Construct**  
  > conceptual labels and measures are precise and overlapping  
  – Measures of same constructs correlate, measures of different constructs do not
Dimensions of idiographic validity

• **Internal/logical**
  > compelling evidence, airtight argument
    – Rival explanatory hypotheses of key cases

• **External**
  > clear domain of applicability of theories
    – detailed account of the case for evaluating similarities

• **Construct**
  > measures are proper and consistent gauges
    – triangulation, members’ checks

• **Reliability**
  > different researcher should get to the same result
    – transparency, protocols, databases
Common concerns

• Biases, ambiguities from
  – Gauges
  – Technique of induction
  – Design
### Different strategies

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOMOTHETIC</th>
<th>IDIOGRAPHIC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>value</strong> certainty</td>
<td><strong>usability</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>goal</strong> proving an if-then relationship</td>
<td><strong>applying the proper understanding</strong></td>
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<td><strong>question</strong> effect of a cause</td>
<td><strong>causes of an effect</strong></td>
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<td>&gt; the causal power of a single property</td>
<td>&gt; conjoint situated generation of an effect</td>
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<td>&gt; across contexts</td>
<td>&gt; even in a single case</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>causation</strong> covariation – mediators, moderators</td>
<td><strong>interaction with contexts, from micro to macro</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt; billiard balls</td>
<td>&gt; observable mechanism</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>falsification</strong> Not excluding all the alternative causes to the same effect (insulation/independence + counterfactual evidence)</td>
<td><strong>falsification</strong> Not excluding some key alternative interpretations (conditional/counterfactual adjudication)</td>
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...and QCA?

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Findings are valid when QCA avoids...

- **Gauges**
  - **Classification error** > *threshold setting* > external meaningful settings, recalibration

- **Induction**
  - **Ambiguous configurations** > *low S-cons* > exclusion from minimizations (>coverage outliers)
  - **Contradictory simplifying assumptions** > *closed analytical space*
    > theoretical, ontological, empirical adjudication
Findings are valid when QCA avoids...

• Design
  – «Non-causal» conditions > hp. about the actual unfolding of non-observable mechanism(s) > operationalizing triggering, enabling, hindering conditions proximate to the outcome within a meaningful population
  – «Model» underspecification > consistency/coverage outliers > add explanatory condition(s) related to the mechanism
  – «Model» overspecification > serious limited diversity > stepwise construction of the operational model based on the capacity of conditions of addressing contradictions
In a nutshell

- QCA has its own validity threats, consistent with its understanding of causality and its technique.

- What QCA can better do is to prove and detail some ex post mechanistic explanation of actual successes and failures in a population – which hold at the case level.

- Borrowing from other causal ontologies and mimicking other strategies can hinder the heuristics of QCA.
thank you

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