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DEALING WITH GROUNDED THEORY

Discussing, Learning, and Practice

Edited by Irene Psaroudakis,
Thaddeus Müller and Andrea Salvini

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To Kathy Charmaz

INTRODUCTION

THE PRACTICE OF GROUNDED THEORY METHOD: RESEARCHERS BALANCING BETWEEN CREATIVITY AND PROCEDURE

THADDEUS MÜLLER

This publication focusses on the practices of Grounded Theory Method (GTM). The authors embrace a diverse range of stances in which they try to balance creativity and procedure in their application of GTM. On the one side we see an emphasis on creativity, flexibility and openness with a focus on the agency of the researcher, while on the other side there is an emphasis on the use of procedures to reach an objective description of social reality not tainted by bias. As both elements are part of the practices of GTM, the chapters in this publication cover this wider spectrum of positions within the field of GTM.

This book is dedicated to Kathy Charmaz who passed away in the summer of 2020. Most of the authors in this book knew Kathy personally, as mentor, colleague and/or friend. For instance, she has been involved as the leading professor in the Pisa Summer School of 2016 and gave a two-days workshop in Lancaster University in 2018. We all remember how enthusiastic the students reacted towards Kathy's involved and supportive way of teaching. She was able to address issues relevant for students who came from all over the world from a wide variety of disciplines. Without any doubt her constructivist version of GTM has become one the most innovative versions of GTM in the last two decades.

Most of the publications show how GTM gains meaning in a specific research context, shaped by historical, academic, personal and political circumstances. Each time GTM is developed to fit a specific situation in order to support the social construction of new concepts that can be used to understand the field that one studies.

In this introduction we are using GTM instead of Grounded Theory because since its discovery (Glaser & Strauss 1967) it has been developed into a method to develop theory in relation to gathered data. In a period spanning over half a century GTM has been transformed by the original authors and many others in different, sometimes opposing versions. This has resulted in a vast variety of GTMS proposed, developed and discussed in hundreds of publications. It is hard to categorise these different interpretations of GTM. For instance, Denzin refers to 8 versions as where Clarke indicates that there are 6 versions (Clarke 2019; Denzin 2019). We think that this also shows its strength: that it can be adapted in different ways to any field that one studies, as will become clear in the following chapters.

This current publication consists of two main parts. In the first part the emphasis is on critical reflections on different crucial aspect of GTM, such as sensitizing concepts and abduction. Most of these articles are reflecting on essential features of GTM in a critical way and trying to shed a new light on the practice of GTM. The second part consists of case studies that focus on the practice of GTM. Most of the authors are novice researchers who refer to their Ph.D. research to explain how they applied GTM and more specifically how they analysed and coded their data. The authors describe in detail how they have been able to develop step by step core categories.

All authors have been involved in the summer school in Pisa. In fact, this book is a meeting place of senior and junior academics and we hope that this is the start of a tradition in which participants of the summer school can publish their experiences in using GTM (for more information on the summer school see the second part of the introduction: *The Summer*

School Series by Irene Psaroudakis). At the same time, we also hope that novice researchers will be able to learn from the publications in this book. Our aim is to show that GTM is more than a combination of procedures. GTM gives researchers the possibility to emerge oneself into a social world and use their field experiences to construct concepts in a creative, bold and grounded way, which can help in understanding the complexity of social life and the variety of meanings it has for us.

The first part is articulated in six papers. Chapter one focusses on turning points and abduction in GTM. Müller grounds his chapter in three cases in which he was involved as an urban ethnographer. Müller states that turning points and abduction are part of qualitative research but tend to be overlooked within the field of GTM. In general, the description of the analytic process in the literature is one of a step by step procedure which results in concepts that are more abstract and have theoretical quality. It is almost as if when one follows these procedures, one will end up with some form of explanatory concept.

In contrast to this step by step process, Müller indicates that it is common that there is at times tension and crisis, that can lead to turning points. These are moments during which the researcher realises that the procedures do not lead automatically to rigorous strong concepts because the research is stuck, which can be related to methods, concepts, dominant sociological and societal narratives that are used in the research. Turning points change methods, concepts and narratives and create a new creative space for researchers to understand the fields they study. Abduction is related to the shock that things are not as they seemed to be when one started one's fieldwork. Suddenly one gets an idea how to break the mold and create a turning point.

While the concept of turning point is a new contribution to the field of GTM, abduction is not. Still it is the first time, as far as I know, that abduction is related to a detailed description of the ethnographic practice in three different cases. Müller

shows in his chapter that an inventive approach of GTM creates space for abduction and turning points, thus gaining an in-depth insight in the complexities of the social construction of social worlds and its representations in academic and public narratives.

In chapter two Dellwing shows how qualitative researchers have been able to resist strict procedural guidelines, dictated by a positivistic (causal) scientific approach of studying social life. Those involved in qualitative studies in which researchers submerge themselves know that rigorous guidelines stemming from the pretence of hard-core objective science will inhibit an open creative attitude necessary to navigate the complex emotional embodied social world they study. Being an explorative qualitative researcher, which is essential for understanding social life in depth, cannot be directed by strict prescriptive guidelines. Otherwise the chance is high that one will only encounter and reproduce an understanding of social life that tends to confirm dominant often stigmatising and marginalising narratives.

Dellwing explains how qualitative research creates a free zone in which they can be creative and productive. He describes how Goffman acts like a jester, pretending to be serious, scientific and rigorous in order to fool those who truly embrace the objective systematic approach. Other forms of resistance are 'evasion of methods', as in many great studies in which there is hardly any explanation of how the research took place, and 'playful irony', which is Goffman's game. Grounded Theory Method is categorised by Dellwing as fitting the resistance category of 'serious discussion'. Agreeing with this, my thoughts also wonder to the jester or trickster approach of Goffman: how serious should we take *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* of Strauss and Glaser. A common perspective among senior colleagues that I have met is quite similar to what Dellwing describes as the Goffman approach: creating a new methodological language in order to create the freedom to do what one sees as the most appropriate way of doing qualitative research. The original

publication was indeed a defence against positivistic quantitative sociology that became dominant after the second world war. A common remark of senior qualitative researchers at conferences was that they did appreciate GTM, mostly as a serious formalisation of what most qualitative researchers had been doing all along, but that they would never take it too seriously. It was used to 'fool' – create a legitimate front – those who attack qualitative research as being non-scientific and at the same time it was not taken literal.

The chapter of Krzysztof T. Konecki focusses on the relation between Anselm Strauss and Kathy Charmaz in relation to GTM. In his work on GTM over a period of three decades Strauss used a symbolic interactionist perspective to develop his version of GTM. It is obvious that the first version had a strong focus on freedom and creativity or as Glaser later described: «The grounded theorist is not a theoretical serf» (Glaser 1978: 9). This is crucial for what Konecki describes as serendipity: thanks to the GTM procedures, we can encounter phenomena that we did not look for at the beginning of the research.

Konecki shows that Strauss was at cross roads in his 1987 publication on qualitative analysis. Though he does refer to abduction – he discusses marginally the crucial emotional personal reaction of astonishment and shock when confronted with new unexpected data –, at the same time he systemizes GTM by introducing the procedure of the 'coding paradigm', which contains clear indicators of social life for researchers to use in their study. Later the emphasis on procedure was further developed with Corbin by introducing the 'conditional matrix', which categorizes different contextual levels to include in one's research.

For some, for instance Glaser and Charmaz, these procedural developments were not in line with their definition of GTM, mainly because these concepts would infringe upon the flexible and open attitude so essential for avoiding 'theoretical serfdom'. Another crucial difference between Charmaz and Strauss

is the that the first rejects the idea of a discovery, because it refers to uncovering one objective reality. Konecki explains that in Charmaz's constructivist approach the self of researchers plays a crucial role; their past and present interactions help to shape the way they give meaning to the data during the analytical process. The practice of GTM is a social activity in which researchers interact with research participants and thus come to a deeper understanding of social life; the complex set of meanings they use to analyse and understand the researched social world. Therefore, a reflexive practice of the researcher is crucial in the constructivist approach. Self-analysis contributes to the research process because researchers are part of the analysed situation. Charmaz's GTM embraces the postmodern turn and departs from the objective approach embraced by Strauss which states that the theory emerges 'automatically' from the data.

The chapter of Psaroudakis focuses on the usage of sensitizing concepts at the beginning of qualitative research guided by GTM. These concepts are open in nature and not strictly defined. The gathered data will shape the meaning of sensitizing concepts. In some sense they might be seen as open codes guiding the researcher during their exploration of the studied social world. Via a process of constant comparison, the concepts are further developed and can also be renamed and transformed into for examples core categories that are used to gain a deeper understanding of the field.

The author explains how she and the research group of the University of Pisa have developed two sensitizing concepts at the beginning of their research on cremation. Based on literature review, studying documents, statistics and some explorative interviews they have chosen the following concepts: 'symbolic ambivalence', and 'identity work'. 'Symbolic ambivalence' refers according to the author to the variety of possible interpretations of symbolic contents connected with the images of the objects that characterize cremation as a process. Under the banner of

this sensitizing concept they describe an impressive variety of meanings related to ashes, fire, body, and death. For instance, ashes can be seen as the symbol of purification and liberation, as they explain in their chapter. The second concept chosen by the author is 'identity work', which is closely related to two crucial choices: the first one is related to the decision to be cremated and the second to the location of the storage of the ashes. For instance, in relation to the second issue the author explains how identity work is at stake in the following three choices: a) a specific location to store the urn in a cemetery or house of a relative or friend, b) to disperse the ashes in a specific location such as in a designed space within a cemetery and c) the dispersal into nature. Here, I have only been able to highlight some dimensions of the exploration of the symbolic field of cremation guided by the use of these two sensitizing concepts. This pre-research is in fact an example of gaining in depth familiarity with the vast symbolic field of this topic, which has hardly been studied so far. There are also hardly any studies that focus on the pre-research phase of GTM research. In fact, the author concludes by indicating that her use of sensitizing concepts has methodological implications: it triggers a whole range of relevant questions, it sensitizes the researcher for relevant issues developed during interviews and these concepts can inspire the author to develop core categories grounded in the data to be gathered.

The following chapter aims to combine a critical realist approach with an objectivist GTM. In order to do those, Looker, Vickers and Kington use 'retroductive coding': checking the data for structures or mechanism that are beyond the daily experiences of the research participants. Their case is a study on alienated pupils at a secondary school, mostly young men labelled as 'trouble makers'. The authors research aim has an emancipatory quality as well as they intend to redress the imbalance in academic progress associated with alienation. The aim of the authors is to identify a stratified social process, while at

the same giving voice to individuals or groups who experience alienation or oppressive factors.

The interviews focus on the lived experiences of the pupils, specifically on their experiences of their relationships, both positive and negative, with different teachers. The vast majority of research participants – pupils and teacher – make clear that the alienation of pupils stems from their own disruptive behaviour. The authors use interview excerpts to explain their application of a critical realist GT research design.

They show how their approach results in a deeper structural understanding of the mechanism behind alienation and educational troublemaking. Their GTM analysis resulted in coding the pupils' experience as related to 1) injustice and 2) a lack of self-worth. Retroduction, going back through all the data, has led the authors to the core category of 'powerlessness': persons who feel powerlessness do not sense they can express their agency in an accepted way and focus on doing this by undermining those who are seen as powerful.

The chapter shows how classical GT is well suited to support a critical realist philosophy, with a strong focus on social justice. The authors state that the critical realist GT methodology also addresses issues of rigour by introducing retroductive techniques for a deep analysis to identify the causal mechanisms for varying experiences of alienation in secondary school.

In the final chapter of the first part, Andrea Salvini focuses on the main theme of this book, GTM between procedure and creativity. In 'Orthodoxy and Openness in (Constructionist) Grounded Theory' he is answering two questions: 1) how is it possible to recognize a grounded inquiry process distinguished from other qualitative approaches? 2) What are the principles or criteria whose observance allows us to claim that we are doing Grounded Theory legitimately?

Salvini observes that many scholars refer to using GTM without explaining what they actually did. He states that it is important to discuss the implementation of GTM in detail, because

this is vital for understanding and evaluating the validity and rigor of the applied qualitative research. Salvini focusses on Constructivist Grounded Theory and discusses five identifying characteristics of GTM: 1) the sensitizing concepts; 2) the full involvement of the researcher 3) the iteration between data collection and analysis; 4) the systematic treatment of codes and categories; 5) theoretical saturation and abductive orientation.

Salvini discusses these five key features in detail and indicates that the documentation of these steps is an essential condition for the evaluation of the quality of the research and its findings. Salvini states that it is important to share one's detailed experience of using GTM, especially when one is implementing GTM in a ground-breaking and pioneering way. Because this can help us critical asses the research process and advance GTM.

The second part consists of five chapters in which researchers reflect on their first-hand experience with GTM. In the first chapter, Emma Gribble focusses on the use of sensitizing concepts – provisional, adaptable, open ended ideas – in relation to the Glaserian stance that one should avoid working with existing concepts and theories. Gribble describes in a detailed and transparent way her thought processes dealing with the advice of Glaser and the need to become theoretical sensitive, understanding the theoretical quality of the gathered data. She uses examples from the field of architecture to show her struggle with this dilemma. More specifically, she focuses on two pilot studies: a care home and an architecture school. Her main question is: «How do clients and building users engage with the briefing and design process in the early stages (RIBA 1-3) of architectural projects?».

Gribble explains that as an architect she became interested because of the «“secret charm of abduction” [...] the rational and the imaginative aspects of research» (Bryant & Charmaz 2007: 16). She rejects the more rigid approaches within GTM such as the coding families of Glaser and the coding paradigm

of Strauss and Corbin, and embraced the more open and flexible approach of GTM, which at the same time became a challenge, especially in relation to the analysis process.

In the beginning of the research Gribble decided to use concepts from discourse analysis as sensitizing concepts because her initial observations of the meetings indicate that argumentation, negotiation and persuasion play a crucial role. I will quote part of her work in detail to show the creativity of her enticing thought process:

Thirdly, the concept of *social goods*. When I read the following passage on social goods I got the kind of 'aha!' moment that Thornton refers to as one of potential benefits of being playful with the theoretical literature. Social goods are the stuff of politics. Politics is not just about contending political parties. At a much deeper level it is about how to distribute social goods in a society: who gets what in terms of money, status, power and acceptance on a variety of terms, all social goods. Since when we use language, social goods and their distribution are always at stake, language is always political in a deep sense. (Gee 2014: 8)

Although Gee is referring to the use of language, the same could be said of space, that to paraphrase Gee, «when we use *space*, social goods and their distribution are always at stake, *space* is always political in a deep sense».

With this chapter on her novice experience Gribble shows that sensitizing concepts, because they are data oriented and can therefore be tailor made, are very useful for first time GTM researcher to get inspired and experience the analysis process as creative adventure.

Riccardo D'Emidio uses in his chapter Charmaz's constructivist emergent GTM to overcome the conflicting theories on (anti) corruption. These theories tend to focus on explanation and prediction, and pay less attention to understanding processes

and meanings. D'Emidio uses GTM as a combination of useful procedures to understand the meanings attached to corruption and integrity from an insider's perspective, in the hope that this can improve the theoretical understanding of (anti)corruption at the micro level. The case he refers to is his Ph.D. thesis on social norms that are used as guidelines to define behaviour as corrupt within the Ghana Police Service.

D'Emidio explains in a clear and intelligent way how GTM with a focus on meaning and processes shaped the research design, which included semi structured interviews using vignettes with senior police officers, representatives of Ghanaian anti-corruption institutions and bus and taxi drivers. Vignettes were used to gain an in depth understanding of the meaning making process in relation to corruption.

The author has used four phases of research which each – following the iterative format – informed and shaped the next stage in the research. After the first explorative stage (explorative interviews and documents analysis) the author focused in stage two on categorising and defining the most prominent norms related to corrupt behaviour as sensitizing concepts and describing them in detail. This multi-layered local understanding of corruption was vital in the descriptions of the vignettes used in stage three. Each vignette was designed in a way to portray one of these social norms in relation to one form of corruption. The final stage involved focus groups which gave access to the dominant narratives on corruption.

D'Emidio concludes that constructivist GTM was helpful in his corruption research in Ghana because it created a deeper understanding of how corrupting is socially constructed by focussing on the meaning making process in which social norms play a crucial role.

In the third chapter of the second part, Szykiewicz focusses on the early beginnings of her Ph.D. study. The chapter stays close to the skin of her field experience, as it reads at times as a log book or research note book. Szykiewicz explains how

she used Constructivist GTM in her Ph.D. research which was on identity development for IT students. Szykiewicz highlights her issues with developing codes of higher level of abstraction.

Szykiewicz explains that she started to apply GTM because her supervisor advised her to do so. Soon she realised this was indeed the right choice because it fitted the topic of her Ph.D.: identity development. She was interested in the perspectives of the students and in the process of how they give meaning to their identity during Learning through Construction (LtC) courses, in which group work is essential while constructing artefacts, such as digital games and apps. Szykiewicz was drawn to Charmaz's Constructivist approach because she felt the co-construction of data and analysis between the researcher and research participant fitted her approach to gain data to answer her research question: what do students experience in the context of LtC and how are they affected by these experiences?

The coding of her first interview resulted in close to 130 open codes which she redistributed in five categories: 1. experiences prior to university; 2. studying IT at university; 3. envisioned future work; 4. best quotes; 5. topics to reconsider. In her analysis she shows how her initial interview guide became a barrier in the development of codes. She indicates that the first emerging codes did not create in depth understanding because they were too descriptive and fragmented. She decided to focus more on the dynamics within the interview, focus on the perspective of the research participants and pay less attention to the interview guide. This has resulted in conceptual and methodological transformations which she states are part and parcel of the quality of GTM. Interviewing students from another program made her develop the idea of students' identity development as a journey starting before university, shaped by participating as a student and one's vision of one's future. She developed the notion of a collective identity shaped by a range of actors involved in the social world of the university after interviewing students from other programs. Reflecting on her

research experiences she concludes that «there is no one way of doing Grounded Theory, there are multiple paths and finding the path suitable to me is what I am aiming for».

De Nardis focusses in her chapter on recent fundamental changes in the experience of religion in Italy. She explains in detail how GTM and more specifically coding took place during her research. The research data consists of 145 interviews with research participants that live all over Italy in localities ranging from villages to cities. The transcribed interviews were analyzed by using computer program NVivo 10. The open coding process resulted in 120 codes and after continuing constant comparison 4 core categories were constructed: church, faith, God and prayer.

De Nardis explains in detail what meanings the research participants attach to these four central themes. For instance, the church is seen as outdated and has lost its legitimacy for many research participants. It is not in touch with present day social problems which shape the lives of many Italians. The church is also related to abuse and misuse of power. Another example is the core category prayer. The interviews show that prayer is seen as a dialogue or conversation with God. The research participants distinguish two ways of praying. First, to gain something from God such as success or wealth, second, to enter into communication with God and experience a deep transcendent connection with God. De Nardis concludes that the application of analysis of Constructivist Grounded Theory method has generated a substantive theory of Italian religiosity showing the meanings religion has for the research participants. The interviews show that the church has lost its authoritative position and that it has several negative connotations, such as social corruption and abuse. The church is not in touch with its original qualities which characterise the beginning of Christianity: poverty, charity and humility. Still, faith and prayer are important in the experience of religion in Italy.

The chapter of Zhe Yan, based on his study on the experience of being a care worker in China, shows step by step the coding process which has led him to the central concept of his research: *sustaining the worthy self*. In his work he shows that care work in Chinese nursing home is seen as dirty work that is stigmatized. He explains that he adopted GTM as his primary methodology because of 1) the lack of research and theorizing on care work in China, and 2) his research focus on subjective experiences. The respondents show that they have *strategizing agency* in activities as categorizing their clients as morally good or bad and by defining their work as a morally good job as they help the elderly as if they are family.

Zhe Yan shows how he developed the concept *strategizing agency* in the coding process by using memos, a process of reflecting in a creative and conceptual way on data and codes. Through this chapter he depicts how he came to these crucial concepts for understanding the experience of an elderly care worker by describing in detail open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. This chapter uses thick description in representing the practice of GTM and shows strength of GTM in developing a concept that can be used beyond the field it originates from. Indeed, as Zhe Yan indicates *sustaining the worthy self* and *strategizing agency* are concepts that can be used to study other marginalized and stigmatized groups.

As this introduction evidences, the chapters cover a wide range of topics, from cremation, elderly care, to religion and corruption. In the chapters the authors have explained how they transformed GTM in order to be able to use it as a method to gain a deeper understanding of the social worlds they studied. The wide range of research experiences discussed here show the adaptability and flexibility of GTM and the crucial importance of the agency of researchers in finding creative solutions while using GTM.

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THE SUMMER SCHOOL SERIES

IRENE PSAROUDAKIS

As Müller wrote in the first part of the Introduction, this volume has to be considered as a scientific ‘outcome’ of the various editions of the *International Summer Schools on Grounded Theory and Qualitative Methods*: they are high educational courses, which over the years have experienced the development of a fruitful theoretical, methodological, and training exchange between EU-SSSI members, the research group about Symbolic Interactionism (SI), qualitative methods (QM) and Grounded Theory (GT) of the Department of Political Science – University of Pisa (I, II, and IV Edition), and the similar group of Vytautas Magnus University – Lithuania (III Edition, while the V has been postponed due to Covid-19 pandemic). We are talking about a community increased by meetings, conferences, and Schools, which is still developing by planning further events.

The final purpose of this intersectional collaboration among scholars, students, and professionals – of which the book is only an expression – is to build a real *community of practice* around the theoretical and methodological themes of SI and QM. This is the reason why students attending the Summer Schools become members of a wider scientific collective based on the continuous dialogue and comparison between knowledge and practice: an international group that, since the first European Conference of the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction in 2010, choose Pisa as a reference point in discussing (and teaching) questions about qualitative methodology, Grounded Theory, and Symbolic Interactionism. We are describing a sort of common path, developed in the Summer School series’

organization, and through their participation: for lecturers, but for students too.

The preliminary aspect is about several matters which scholars could face in their research processes. Summer School's organizers started by considering that qualitative researchers often experience problems such as getting lost after collecting and coding data, overlooking possibilities for developing their ideas, and writing their reports. The concept behind international Courses focuses on improving skills in using Grounded Theory strategies to help students (but not only) increase the incisiveness, clarity, and creativity of their works. Therefore, these learning initiatives help researchers retain GT (and QM) flexibility while furthering the conceptual depth and scope of their analysis.

We know that the qualitative (and grounded) research process is not a linear one but works as a spiral in which all steps (questions, problems, etc.) are interconnected. Our purpose was to focus on being 'happy' – and curious, as open to surprises – in doing research, even if confused by so many meanings, inputs, points of view, and info!

Therefore, we tried to emphasize some aspects, such as:

- to build a research design based on Grounded Theory;
- to identify and use sensitizing concepts at the beginning and during the research process;
- to develop and recognize robust codes, and strengthen emergent conceptual categories;
- to discover the advantages and disadvantages of the interaction between data collection and data analysis (comparative analysis);
- to deal with CAQDAS to improve analysis, presenting examples of the use of dedicated software for qualitative data analysis;
- to satisfy the attribute of scientific quality in qualitative research, constructing 'grounded' theories and processes;

- to discuss grounded results and communicate findings by integrating categories into a coherent and compelling report;
- to address the fit between GT and SI, understanding how method and perspective complete each other;
- to present epistemological and methodological dilemmas in the choice of 'which type of Grounded Theory' (Classic, Straussian, Constructivist, etc.);
- to summarize the advantages and disadvantages of applying GT to specific fields of investigation.

If these topics have composed the conceptual background, turned into practice, let us now investigate the heritage of the Pisa Summer Schools. Two elements emerge: a) their great echo in terms of attendance, and b) the international relevance of teachers.

More than 150 students (Ph.D. candidates, researchers, professors, professionals) coming from all around the world arrived in Pisa in June 2016, 2017, and 2019: they wanted to learn, to find out how to improve their research processes, and to discuss with mentors – who have been extraordinarily generous in giving advice, suggesting tricks, and directions. Their will has been to understand how 'to be open', as Charmaz underlined so many times to students. International Schools, indeed, hosted the best of internationally renowned scholars in Grounded Theory and Qualitative Research traditions, which alternated lessons, workshops, key-lectures, and free discussions.

The First Edition (2016) was opened by the fundamental lectures of Professor Kathy Charmaz – for whose memory Editors would like to dedicate this book – and Professor David Altheide. To fully cover all the aspects, both in terms of contents and teaching methodology, key-lectures were integrated by the participation of scholars in SI from European Universities and EU-SSSI: Robert Dingwall, Michael Dellwing, Emma Engdahl, Vessela Misheva, Thaddeus Müller, Andrea Salvini. More

than 70 students were involved, really interested in having the opportunity to directly hear from the founder of Constructivist Grounded Theory her research memories, precepts, and experiences.

In the Second Edition (2017), organizers confirmed this successful formula through Professors Roberto Cipriani, Anne Ryen, Michael Dellwing, Krzysztof T. Konecki, Thaddeus Müller, Andrea Salvini, and many other scholars. Considerable importance has been given to the practical and communitarian dimensions by constituting working groups and promoting the exchange of experience and good practice in this field. Reflections in standard topics in QM were enriched by different elements, such as cross-cultural research, role-taking, empathy, and interview techniques.

The Fourth Edition (2019) focused on Antony Bryant's lectures, which pursued the same methodological direction already opened by Charmaz. Michael Dellwing, Thaddeus Müller, Irene Psaroudakis, Andrea Salvini, and Vilma Žydžiunaite were also involved in teaching, sharing their personal experiences with students, assisted by the contribution of qualitative scholars coming from the United States. Organizers choose to privilege a practical point of view through particular Q&A moments, aiming to favor participants' methodological sensitivity.

This volume is a collaborative project started from the IV Edition, precisely in collective discussions, to collect original papers about research experiences, research (and pre-research) designs, results, and theoretical and methodological reflections related to the Grounded Theory perspective. Contributors have been the protagonists of different editions – as lecturers and former students; their thoughts develop here bits of advice and suggestions received in Pisa to present GT processes 'on the jobs' and restore the same *mood* experienced during the Schools.

The added value of Summer School experiences goes well beyond their conceptual contents and their learning dynamics;

it lies in the collaborative spirit and mutual exchange created, and which has never been interrupted.

This is the book's uniqueness: presenting different views and diverse levels in practicing GT, giving voice to senior and junior researchers from a wide range of countries and disciplines, and improving the joint reflection on 'how to do qualitative research, in practice', started in the classrooms of the Summer School. By designing a trajectory from concepts (theory) to research experience (practice), in the framework of SI perspective, the book would provide readers a practical tool useful for everyone interested in developing his/her research by adopting these methods. Furthermore, ready to be open to reality (to interactions and individuals).

**PART I: DISCUSSING SOME
FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS IN
GROUNDED THEORY RESEARCH**

CRISIS, ABDUCTION AND TURNING POINTS IN GROUNDED THEORY METHOD. THREE ETHNOGRAPHIC CASES ON THE PRACTICE OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH CYCLE

THADDEUS MÜLLER

Abstract

In this chapter, I focus on *turning points*. Changing one's research as a result of acquiring and analysing new data is an integral part of doing qualitative research in the tradition of Grounded Theory Method (GTM). However, *turning points*, which are drastic and dramatic transformations, deviate from the gradual abstraction process described in the GTM field. As a result, *turning points* are a blind spot in the GTM literature. In recent years, scholars have indicated that researcher makes inferences, which have a more intuitive, creative, unspecified and novel character. *Abduction* has been used to describe and understand this cognitive process, that does not follow a clearly described systematic logic path. I will see whether abduction can be used to understand and develop the concept of *turning points*. I use examples from my own research experience to develop the concept of *turning points* in relation to *abduction*. I will refer to the 'back-stage' experience of doing qualitative research during three ethnographic studies. I will focus on the emotional, intuitive and conflictual experiences of applying GTM while doing qualitative research.

Keywords: Grounded Theory Method, ethnography, induction, analysis, crisis, abduction, turning points.

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on the moments in which qualitative researchers decide to change the course of their research drastically. For this situation, I am using the concept *turning points*. Changing one's research as a result of acquiring and analysing new data is in fact an integral part of doing qualitative research in the tradition of Grounded Theory Method¹(GTM). However, *turning points*, which are drastic and dramatic transformations, deviate from the gradual abstraction process, which supposedly takes place when one applies the step by step inductive GTM. As a result, *turning points* are a blind spot in the GTM literature. I will use examples from my own research experience to develop the concept of *turning points*.

This concept developed as a result of the friction I sensed between 1) the literature in this field and more specifically the publications of Glaser & Strauss (1967), Strauss & Corbin (1990) and Charmaz (2006; 2014) and 2) my own research experiences. In fact, the concept *turning point* is grounded in the everyday experience of doing qualitative research and is therefore an example of the application of GTM. In my research for this chapter I used *turning points* as a *sensitizing concept* (Blumer 1954): a provisional, emergent and guiding concept that is refined and improved with the gathering of new data. I developed this concept while comparing it with the existing GTM literature on the qualitative research process and my research experience, more specifically three ethnographic studies which I will discuss in detail later in this chapter.

This chapter is part of a larger project on the daily practice of doing qualitative research, in which I focus on the mundane

¹ As publications on Grounded Theory are in fact about a method, and not so much about a theory, it is more appropriate to use the concept Grounded Theory Method (GTM).

experience of doing qualitative research. In most reflections on qualitative methods, there is a tendency to sanitize and rationalise the research experience (see also Fine 1993; Ferrell 1998; Johnson 1975; 1977; Müller 2013; 2018; Whiteman, Müller & Johnson 2010). Here I will refer to the 'back-stage' experience of doing qualitative research during three ethnographic studies. I will focus on the emotional, intuitive and conflictual experiences of applying GTM while doing qualitative research. An examination of the back-stage of GTM is relevant because it shows how GTM is applied in practice which is not always in line with how it is represented as a step by step inductive process leading successively to a grounded understanding of the field one studies. The visualizations of the cyclical GTM research process add to the simplification, rationalisation and sanitation of the practice of GTM, as I will explain in this publication.

In recent years, scholars have indicated that induction inspired by GTM does not lead automatically to new insights. Something else is happening too, the researcher makes inferences, which have a more intuitive, creative, unspecified and novel character. These tend to be more inspired and triggered by the data then resulting from inductive logic. Abduction has been used to describe and understand this cognitive process, that does not follow a clearly described systematic logic path (Reichertz 2019). Here I will see whether abduction can be used to understand and develop the concept of *turning points*. This chapter will be guided by the following questions:

How can we define *turning points* in qualitative research inspired by GTM?

In what circumstances do *turning points* take place?

How do *turning points* develop?

Who are involved in the social construction of *turning points*?

Is there a relationship between *abduction* and *turning points* and if so what is this relationship?

Before I will answer these questions in the conclusion, I will describe GTM in more detail, during which I will also focus on the concept of *abduction*. After this, I will discuss *turning points* and *abduction* in three cases.

2. GTM

Since the publication of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss 1967), an avalanche of books and articles have been published on Grounded Theory (e.g. Bryant 2017; Bryant & Charmaz 2019; Charmaz 2014; Clarke 2005; 2019; Denzin 2019; Dey 1999; Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss 1987; Strauss & Corbin 1990; Urquhart 2013). Within this literature there is «not a unified framework» Denzin (2019), and there is no orthodoxy. Under the banner of GTM there is a range of divergent versions of GTM. There are different readings of how many strands there are. For instance, Denzin categorizes more than ten versions: «Glaserian, Straussian, Strauss and Corbin, dimensional analysis, positivist, post-positivist, classic, informed, constructivist, critical, critical realism feminist, objectivist, postmodern, situational, computer-assisted» (Denzin 2019: 450).

In her overview of 50 years of GTM Adele Clarke speaks of five different strands (Straussian, Dimensional Analysis/GT, Situational Analysis/GT, Constructivist GT and Glaserian) which are developed over three generations (Clarke 2019: 18). However, all these different interpretations of GTM share and explain the inductive nature of doing research in which the first aim is to gain a rich description of the human lived experience in order to develop an analysis grounded and guided by the gathered data. According to Denzin the commonalities are: «flexible guidelines for data collection (and analysis), including interviewing, archival analysis, observation, and participant observation. Most importantly, the commitment is to remain close to the world being studied, while developing integrated theoretical con-

cepts grounded in data that show process, relationship, and social world connectedness» (Denzin 2019: 450).

The character of the research process of GTM is *iterative* or *cyclical*, meaning that the analysis of gathered information shapes one's understanding of the research field, and therefore how one approaches it. This means that new data can change the methods one is using, the research question and the sampling of cases. In general, these changes are part of the natural flow of GTM and they do not have a dramatic character. In GTM the newly received information can and should change one's perception of the field one is studying.

In contrast to traditional scientific quantitative research, which has a linear development starting with hypotheses, followed for instance by a questionnaire or an experiment, and resulting in a data set, GTM is in essence *flexible, open and dynamic*. Data sampling, gathering, analysis and writing go hand in hand. In positivistic research, these different phases are separated and follow each other. In fact, according to this perspective, changing one's hypotheses during the analysis of data is seen as academic misconduct.

Though some of the publications, especially the one of Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Strauss and Corbin (1998), tend to be procedural, the general stance is that the way researchers apply GTM depends on the flow of the research and the preference of the researcher. This is contrasted with scientific positivistic quantitative research. I will give an example to describe the contrast with GTM.

A colleague of mine who is an expert in quantitative methods started to do qualitative research for the first time in her career. After some interviews she came to me and she said that she had learned so many new unexpected things, that it changed her perspective on this particular research field. I con-

gratulated her and said that this was great. Still she looked troubled and said that she felt that the interview guide was not accurate any more. She felt that she had to change the questions based on what she had learned, but she said she felt uncomfortable doing that. I asked her why and she said that she felt that this was against methodological procedures. If she changed the questions, she could not compare the interviews anymore, and the research would be not valid anymore. She asked me whether this was allowed in qualitative research. I said yes, of course, you should integrate what you have learned otherwise you will not make any progress.

Some might think that GTM is easy and less rigorous than quantitative methods and analysis. This is a mistake. Though GTM is open, flexible and dynamic, it is a demanding approach in which researchers have to submerge themselves fully in the field. At the same time, they engage in reflection on the relevance of their data, the concepts they are using, their methods and their role in the research.

The GTM literature has developed a range of concepts which describe the processual nature of GTM. The most important one is *the method of constant comparison*. This method means that one has to compare the newly gathered data with previously gathered data. *Coding* and *memoing* are used to facilitate the process of constant comparison. Coding is the process of segmenting relevant data and naming it. Coding makes it easier to compare the different segments of data. The first stage is called open coding and the chosen codes stay close to the data. These are called descriptive or *in vivo* (native). Through a process in which induction, deduction and abduction are combined researchers aim to develop a core category or *conceptual category*, which «is a relevant theoretical abstraction about what is going on in the area studied» (Glaser & Strauss 1967: 23). These categories are used to structure the argumentation of the publication. *Memoing* refers to the writing of memos

on data, concept development, methods and other relevant issues. Memos can be used as building blocks while writing the publication on the research.

This process of gradual abstraction leads ideally to concepts which have strong explanatory and descriptive quality. This facet of coding is supported by what is called *theoretical sensitive coding*, an awareness of the theoretical value of data and concepts, which is developed by comparing 1) the data and 2) the concepts derived from it with the relevant literature. Awareness of the relevant literature helps to create *theoretical sensitivity*. *Theoretical sensitivity* plays also a crucial role in the formulation of a research proposal; in general researchers indicate that they will be focusing on a phenomenon in a specific field that is overlooked in the literature.

In the process of developing concepts, one focusses on relevant data within one's data set and seeks out to gather data that can help with the further development of a concept. This is called *theoretical sampling*. One stops with this process when there is a situation of *saturation*: the gathered data does not change one's findings. In general, researchers tend to continue a bit longer to be sure that they have not missed anything, until the research process becomes repetitive, boring and ineffective.

In many publications on GTM there tend to be visualisations of the research cycle. These visualisations show that researchers can change the research question, methods and research units while doing research and analysing the data (see for instance Charmaz 2006: 11; 2014: 18). In the visualisations the common denominator is that each step contributes to the continuation and the completion of the research process. In line with this representation most researchers create in their methodological account a show of normalcy; there was no crisis, tension, conflict or loss of control. In these narratives of

gradual abstraction, the researcher has full agency and is able to control the research process by making the right decisions leading to theoretical saturation and the completion of the study.

While lecturing qualitative research and GTM over thirty years in regular methods modules, during workshops and summer schools, it became clear to me that many first-time qualitative researchers, mostly Ph.D. students, embrace the logical inductive procedural model of GTM hoping that this automatically will lead to theory. In general, most of these researchers have no problem with open coding and memoing but when it comes to defining conceptual categories and creating a more profound conceptual or theoretical understanding of the field they tend to get lost in what I would like to call the black box of GTM.

I encountered similar student's experiences during the summer school on Grounded Theory and Qualitative Research in Pisa in 2019. During a presentation I sensed a strong friction between the representation of GTM and my own experience with GTM. While reflecting on this friction, out of the blue I thought of the concept 'turning points'. Though still a vague concept it somehow captured some crucial periods of my research experience which contrasted with the students' sanitized representation of their use of GTM. At that moment I sensed that turning points play a crucial role in the transformation from descriptive codes to a conceptual understanding. Later, in preparation for this article, while grounding the concept of turning points in my own research experience and going through the recent literature on GTM, it seemed to me that abduction could be the key to open the black box of GTM, as I hope to show in following pages.

2.1. Induction, deduction and abduction?

My relationship with GTM started in the late 1980s and GTM has inspired me doing qualitative research since then. My first introduction was through reading *The Discovery of Grounded*

Theory. I have to confess, it was not an easy read for me, especially because of the references to a sociological debate decades earlier I was not familiar with, being a student of Cultural Anthropology. Some bits and pieces made sense to me, because I more or less recognized them: constant comparison, memoing and coding were strategies I applied during my master's thesis study on hooligans, but I did not have the concepts to describe it: Glaser and Strauss's classic book was not part of the curriculum. What I clearly remember is that I loved the concept *Grounded Theory*, because that is what you did as a cultural anthropologist. Several passages were inspirational because that was how I felt about doing research. For instance, they referred to «creative energies» that are «required for discovering theory» (1967: 7). They state that generating theory is 'an exciting adventure' and that they want their suggestions to encourage and not to «curb anyone's creativity for generating theory» (*Ibid.*: 8). They also explain that their goal is to keep the discussion on methods and processes «open-minded, to stimulate rather than freeze thinking about the topic» (*Ibid.*: 9).

Strauss and Corbin's book was definitely easier to follow for me and I used it in my classes on qualitative methods. I did not always feel comfortable with some of the suggested procedures, but then again they also made it clear that there was no orthodoxy and that researchers should use GTM in a way which was best suited for them. Charmaz's version was in many ways the way I had understood GTM since my first reading of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. I sensed that her work described how I had implemented GTM over the years. It was rigorous and systematic, but at the same time flexible and open to a more creative, intuitive and insightful understanding of the field. This combination of structured guidance and freedom to let ideas develop in a playful intuitive way was key for me. Her explicit constructivist approach with a focus on research agency and the co-production of data were also in line with my research experience.

For many, especially for those who embrace the work of Glaser (1978; 1998) *pure* induction is the way to do GTM. They see any other form of GTM as forcing the data into existing concepts developed in the literature. In the original publication, Glaser and Straus focus on this and describe how *forcing* is done. For instance, Glaser and Strauss describe *exemplifying* as an «opportunistic use of theory that cannot occur with grounded theory». *Exemplifying* is the finding of «examples for dreamed up, speculative or logically deduced theory after the idea has occurred [...] one receives the image of proof when there is none, and the theory obtains a richness of detail that it did not earn» (*Ibid.*: 5). Early in my career I learned this practice was not uncommon in sociology:

I remember that a sociology professor told me – without being cynical – in the mid 1990's that the nice thing about qualitative research is that it is an easy way to get examples to illustrate theories. I could not believe what she told me and for someone trained in Cultural Anthropology, it sounded like blasphemy. When I asked her how she worked, she said that first she developed a theory on a certain topic, in general inspired by the civilisation process of Elias and second she would interview people or do document analysis to exemplify her theory. For me this was cutting corners, cheating. It did not make sense to me, specifically because local narratives tend to deviate from general theories. This friction is crucial for new conceptual understanding of our social world. I also thought it was not challenging (read: mind-numbing) to force data into a theory.

Though GTM tends to be known as inductive, for me this did not fit the practice of applying GTM in qualitative research. I always compared my findings with societal discourse and sociological studies to come with new ideas and insights. Exploring the field without knowledge of the relevant literature did not make any sense to me. From my first exposure to GTM, my analysis has been one of a going back and forth between induction and deduction. The abstraction process results in codes and memos, which are compared with the new data. What we

do in that process, is in fact deduction: we test or check our understanding (codes and memos) with new material and thus improve, refine and enrich it. In this inductive/deductive process of comparison, researchers also tend to go beyond mere explicit logic reasoning. They are able to see and feel connections and patterns of meanings and behaviours. They tend to get to a deeper understanding by using a cognitive elucidation, which is not easy to define, but which some call intuition, gut feeling, out of the box thinking and creative imagination. This other form of understanding helps to create new concepts which are compared to the data to refine and develop it.

In recent years, scholars have identified the problematic nature of the use of induction in the GTM literature and have opted for a third approach: abduction. The first time I encountered this concept was when I was lecturing at the summer school on GTM and qualitative research in Pisa in 2017, where several other lecturers discussed this concept. I did not embrace this concept immediately because it remained quite foreign to me. For some reason, which is unknown to me, in the process of writing this chapter, I felt there might be some similarity between what I call *turning points* and *abduction*. While working on this chapter my decision to focus on *abduction* turned out to become a *turning point*, as I will show in this chapter.

Abduction is in itself a highly contested and problematic concept (Reichertz 2019), but it seems quite relevant here, especially when we have a closer look at the three cases later on. Reichertz sheds clarity in this debate by focussing on Peirce's discussion of abduction, which goes as follows: researchers are confronted with a situation for which they cannot find an explanation based on the knowledge that is available to them. This creates a moment of surprise, which can lead to *abduction*: to invent or discover a new way of describing and explaining a phenomenon. As Reichertz, «One may achieve a discovery of this sort as a result of an intellectual process and, if this happens,

it takes place “like lightning”, and the thought process “is very little hampered by logical rules” (Peirce 1931-1935, Vol. 5: 117)» (2019: 264).

Reichertz explains that one can create circumstances, which are favourable for abduction to take place. Based on Pierce’s work Reichertz describes two strategies. The first one has to do with a confrontation with a crisis, which might discredit the researcher’s status. Fear pushes the researcher to act and make a decision. The pressure one feels results in a «self-induced emergency situation» in which «the abductive lightning struck» (2019: 265).

The second strategy is one of ‘mind wandering with no specific goal’. It is a form of meditation and daydreaming. Though these strategies seem opposite, they both share the fact that as Reichertz states «the consciously working mind, relying on logical rules, is outmaneuvered» (2019: 266).

Abduction takes place when logical reasoning based on induction and deduction does not result in conceptual progress. Abduction breaks the deadlock with a creative insightful idea, which will be tested and redefined by comparing it with the data. Abduction is the creative missing link connecting data to a deeper understanding on a more abstract level. Abduction «is the intellectual jump which adds something very new to the data, something that they do not contain and that does not already exist as a concept or theory either. This is abduction» (Reichertz 2019: 264).

Abduction does not replace deduction and induction, it actually adds a layer of imaginary intuitive intellectual creativity to it. Abduction without deduction and induction does not lead to conceptual growth and remains just an interesting challenging insight.

If the first step in the process of scientific discovery consists of finding a hypothesis by means of abduction, then the second step consists of deriving predictions from the hypothesis, which is deduction, and the third step consists of searching for facts that will 'verify' the assumptions, which is induction [...] With this definition Peirce designed a three-stage discovery procedure consisting of abduction, deduction, and induction. (Reichertz 2019: 267).

Based on Reichertz' exegeses of Peirce's work, it seems that abduction and turning points share similarities. In the following three cases, I will discuss how they are related to each other.

3. Three cases of GTM

In the following three ethnographic examples, I will focus on turning points and abduction.

The first example is my Ph.D. research titled *The Warm City*, which is based on interviews and observations in the public realm of Amsterdam (Müller 1997; 2002). The second example is a study about neighbourhood stigmatisation in Alkmaar (Van Laar & Müller 1991). The final example is on interethnic social cohesion in multicultural neighbourhoods in Arnhem and Tilburg (Müller & Fischer 2015).

3.1. Example 1: The Warm City

In preparing my application letter for my Ph.D., I started reading textbooks on urban studies. I had no idea what to choose but soon I was surprised by the dominant representation of the city as cold, anonymous, fleeting, segmented and superficial, exemplified in Wirth's *Urbanism as a Way of Life* (1938). It conflicted deeply with my experience of living in Amsterdam. For me the city was definitely not cold and I decided to use the concept of the warm city as a sensitizing concept to study urban life. I remember clearly the moment this concept came to my mind. In fact, I read *Urbanism as a Way of Life*, while I was sitting in the Vondelpark and saw how people were enjoying public life.

The contrast between Wirth's classical article and what I observed triggered the notion of the cold and the warm city.

As a cultural anthropology student, the field of urban studies was new to me. The first thing I did in my Ph.D. research was to see whether there were other studies on urban public warmth. Indeed, some studies described urban social warmth in neighbourhoods and regular hangouts, such as bars, shops, hairdressers and laundromats. In general, this was related to long-term relations between people that knew each other as family members, friends or acquaintances. I decided to focus on the public realm, the city centre – where most people do not share biographical information –, because 1) my observations were related to this realm and 2) because the academic representation of this realm tended to overlook social warmth. For instance, in *A World of Strangers* by Lofland (1974) people tend to avoid each other and try to insulate themselves. They mind their own business. Lofland was a student of Goffman whose publications on public space focused on similar issues. Both shaped the dominant method within micro sociological studies of the public realm: doing observations. I decided to follow in their footsteps and started doing observations.

After some months, I realized that I was not getting the data necessary to describe fleeting and anonymous interactions characterized by social warmth. I felt I was stuck and could not make any progress. I sensed I was doing something wrong but did not know what it was. I admired Goffman and Lofland, but I also felt that there was a tension between their work and how others and I lived in Amsterdam. While observing I could not acquire the rich description of the cultural, emotional and embodied experience of being part of the public realm of Amsterdam. I did not know how to get out of this crisis and I was not sure how to continue my Ph.D. I felt not at ease and feared that my dissertation research would not end well.

One event was crucial in redefining my research method. I was reading a book by Paul Theroux, called *Chicago Loop* (1990). It is a grim, disturbing, short novel in which a cynical self-obsessed man with a seemingly normal suburban existence is leading a double life in which he pretends to be single. In one of his sexual escapades, a woman dies during kinky sex. In the end, he commits suicide by jumping off the Sears Tower. However, none of this triggered a new perspective or idea. What did fundamentally change my mind about my research was the cold negative narrative of the people the protagonist was watching. I realized that my observations could not do that. This overstatement of the cold city in Theroux's novel made me realise that I had to look for the warm city in the *narratives* of respondents using the inner city in Amsterdam, how they give meaning to being part of the public realm.

While trying to follow in the footsteps of Goffman and Lofland, I realised what I missed in their work. Their work was based on observations without the voices of those being observed. I realised that their method of observing is a 'cold' way of doing research, which recreates the social distance and lack of emotionality that characterizes the dominant cold image of urbanity. I also had a hard time relating to the shame and fear which is present in the work of Goffman and Lofland. Being in Amsterdam was not dominated by these two negative emotions. At the same time, I realized that their work did focuss on interactions I was familiar with. They were not wrong, but looked at it in a different way than I did. This notion was confirmed during meetings I had with Lyn Lofland. She said that our work was complementary, that we studied different sides of the same coin.

I started to interview some of my friends to see whether I could get an insight into how they saw the centre of the city, the interactions they experienced, what they felt and what these interactions meant to them. In general, we talked about re-

cent experiences of being part of the public realm, such as walking in the city, hanging around in a café, watching people and partying until late. Their narratives were mostly about joy, excitement, passion and wonder. Fear and shame hardly played a role. The interviews gave entrance to a rich meaningful experience of being part of the urban public realm of Amsterdam. In the end, I interviewed 45 persons in a formal way and had many fleeting open-ended conversations. The empirical chapters are dominated by citations of my informants with different degrees of social and emotional involvement with other persons in the public realm.

The notion of the warm city slowly developed into a more theoretical explanation of the warm city. Most of my respondents were what was called in the 1990s 'new urbanites', singles and couples without children. Their home had hardly any social relevance for them. For most it was a place to get by, eat and sleep. The centre of the city was for them a complex and multi-layered range of mostly positive experiences, ranging from diversion, relaxation, excitement, awe, wonder to friendship, intimacy, passion, beauty and love.

These urbanites embodied a range of societal changes since the 1960s such as an increase in welfare, individualization and informalisation: the loosening of traditional norms and values in relation to for instance family, religion, work and sex. As a result of these changes cities transformed from industrial places to places of consumption, leisure and cultural transgression. The warm city showed the perspective of 'new urbanites', a perspective that was overlooked in urban studies.

3.1.1. Reflection

The first idea of the warm city is an example of abduction, which resulted from the tension between my life in Amsterdam and the dominant perspective in urban studies. I had to develop the initial vague notion of the warm city and I started doing this by reviewing the literature. I decided to focus on the public realm

because my initial observations were related to this realm and social warmth was overlooked in urban studies of this realm. Following the footsteps of Goffman and Lofland and using their method of observations resulted in a crisis, in which I felt at loss. Reading *Chicago Loop* triggered my second abductive insight. Next to observations, I should focus on the narratives of citizens, how they give meaning to interactions in the public realm, the centre of Amsterdam. Interviewing turned out to be the best way to describe the warm city and develop this concept. Through a deductive and inductive research process, I developed the abductive notion of the warm city into a more fully developed descriptive and theoretical concept. The development of the warm city was also closely linked to people who supported me with their ideas and knowledge, especially Lyn Lofland, my supervisor, Lodewijk Brunt, and some of Ph.D. colleagues, with whom I discussed my Ph.D. research.

3.2. Example 2: Neighborhood Stigma

In the late eighties, I was involved in research on vandalism in a suburban neighbourhood in the city of Alkmaar. The city had approached me because they had severe problems with youngsters in this neighbourhood. They told me that there were many incidents in which teenagers, mostly men, were involved in damaging and destroying private and public property. Another issue was that they also were involved in graffiti writing on buildings, such as schools and bus stops in the neighbourhood.

The research project included an evaluation of projects to prevent vandalism, such as fences around the schools and places, similar to bus stops, where youngsters could gather. The idea was that if they had a place where they could socialise they would not be tempted to commit acts of vandalism. Part of the research consisted of interviewing residents about vandalism and the teenagers about how they used the meeting place. The research had an ethnographic character and meant that my colleague researcher, Hans van Laar, and I would live in the neighbourhood. In total, the study lasted over two years.

Civil servants had told us that there were several gangs roaming round in the neighbourhood and that there had been violent incidents between two of these gangs. One atrocity story surfaced regularly in the conversations we had: one day, tens of young men had been battling with each other using baseball bats and other weapons. Another atrocity tale was that these young men terrorized a local shopping mall and had swapped babies, while moving them to different prams. In these narratives of social workers, civil servants, and police officers, the gangs were related to a social housing area where immigrants lived. In the narratives the behaviour of the young men had to do with other negative characteristic of this part of the neighbourhood, such as 'divorced parents', 'rundown gardens', 'decay', 'litter' and 'problem families'.

During our first visit to this neighbourhood my colleague and I could not help sensing that this neighbourhood looked quite tidy and we could not see many signs of vandalism. We were surprised and did not understand what was going on. We thought that we were probably biased by our experience of living in Amsterdam and that in Alkmaar people might see things differently. However, during the first months of explorative research our initial notion was confirmed over and over again. We interviewed persons who lived in the neighbourhood and spoke with several teenagers. Nobody had heard of gangs roaming around in the neighbourhood, nor of teenagers fighting each other with baseball bats. This confused us, because the professionals we had spoken to firmly believed in these 'facts'. Most of the residents we spoke said that this was a quiet neighbourhood with no problems. Some said that the problems with teenagers might be related to an area of social housing in the eastern part of this neighbourhood. However, when we spoke to some of the inhabitants in this part of the neighbourhood they also said that there were no gangs nor youth looking for trouble.

To be honest I was quite nervous that we were not able to find the gangs and I felt uncomfortable sharing this with our commissioners. The whole project did not make any sense to me, and I feared that our research would be terminated. We did our utmost to find the gangs but after three months, there was nothing left to tell our supervisors at the University of Amsterdam except that it seemed that the city of Alkmaar had overstated the frequency and severity of vandalism. For me the hunch developed that something else was going on. I was interested in how the city constructed the image of this neighbourhood as a highly problematic neighbourhood. I had no idea how this could have taken place. It mesmerized me.

During the meeting with our supervisors, the notion that the city somehow had constructed this neighbourhood as problematic developed into a turning point. Our two supervisors, Lodewijk Brunt and Jojada Verrips, had the theoretical sensitivity to relate this notion to *The Established and The Outsiders: A Sociological Enquiry into Community Problems* by Elias and Scotson (1965). This study is about an English town named *Winston Parva* and describes the process by which the established citizens of this city are constructing a stigmatizing narrative of the newcomers by emphasizing negative incidents, mostly caused by teenagers, and overlooking incidents in their own community. Inspired by this, we decided to change the angle of our research and include the representation of this neighbourhood and focus on its negative portrayal by professionals. This meant that we had to do archival work, mostly newspaper analyses, and adapt our interviews with professionals by asking questions about the representation of the neighborhood. Initially I feared the city would reject this change in the research, but during a crucial meeting, the city agreed with our suggestions without any problem.

This turning point was crucial in our research. The study of Elias and Scotson turned out to be useful in understanding how

the researched neighbourhood became stigmatised and what the role was of professionals in the stigma process. We discovered that citizens and a social worker who wanted to have more funding of the city for social projects had been lobbying for this by repeating atrocity tales, such as that of gangs attacking each other. When the city of Alkmaar realised they could get governmental funding for anti-vandalism projects they chose this neighbourhood because of its so-called problems with local youth.

In our final publication, we included a chapter on how this neighbourhood became stigmatized as a problematic neighbourhood. It turned out that the atrocity stories about gangs fighting each other were from several years before our research project started. Most of the men involved in these groups did not hang around in the neighbourhood anymore because they had a regular job, joined the army or moved away. Our conclusion was that the city used the negative portrayal of the neighbourhood to gain extra funds from the national government. We were not able to find out whether they were aware of their misrepresentation, but because we changed our angle and included a new theoretical approach we were able to describe and analyse the stigma narrative that led to their choice of the suburban neighbourhood as the area for anti-vandalism projects and the evaluation research.

In our book, we also reacted to the Elias and Scotson's study on Winston Parva. Though there were several similarities, there was one major difference. The newcomers in Winston Parva accepted the negative image of their neighbourhood, because according to Elias and Scotson they lacked social cohesion. The citizens in the studied neighbourhood in Alkmaar did not accept the negative image. They had built up a thriving community and were able to fight stigmatisation with a positive counter narrative.

3.2.1. Reflection

In this example of a conceptual, substantive and methodological turning point, there is a clear tension between the representation of the neighbourhood constructed by the professionals and our first explorative observations. During our first visit, we gained an initial abductive notion that the city had misrepresented the neighbourhood. This resulted in a crisis; I felt we did not do a good job. But after several months, it was clear that there was one conclusion: the city overstated the gravity of the problem. Because of the theoretical sensitivity of the two supervisors, they were able to suggest to use Elias and Scotson's book and focus on the social construction of the neighbourhood as an area of social problems. By implementing these changes, we were able to describe and understand the social construction of the neighbourhood. Because we compared our analysis of the neighbourhood in Alkmaar with Elias and Scotson's study we were able to further develop our abductive notion of the misrepresentation of the neighbourhood into a more complete theoretical frame. Abduction not only took place during the beginning of the research, but was also used in the creation of subcategories, such as the subthemes related to the stigma of the neighbourhood, which structured the chapter on this topic in our monograph.

3.3. Example 3: Interethnic Social Cohesion and Fear of Crime

In the beginning of the 2000s, I started a study on social cohesion and social safety in a deprived mixed neighbourhood in Arnhem. In the Netherlands, most of these neighbourhoods were being targeted by restructuring to get a different social mix of inhabitants. Restructuring consisted of several strategies, but the most significant one was the demolition of social housing and the building of middle-class housing.

In the media, multicultural neighbourhoods had become a symbol for the failure of the integration of immigrants, mostly with a Muslim background coming from countries such as Turkey and Morocco. In governmental publications, these neighbourhoods stood for a range of social problems, such as criminality, lack of social cohesion, bad housing and marginalisation. Many sociological studies confirmed this dominant negative image.

In preparation, I studied the government documents on this neighbourhood and this confirmed the negative image of a multicultural neighbourhood: poverty, low education, health issues, lack of social cohesion, high mobility, single parent households, criminality and so on. I was working for the R&D department of an Architect company and we were asked to make a social analysis of the neighborhood. I was part of a team of researchers, in which I was responsible for the qualitative research. We were able to stay for several years in this neighbourhood.

After some months, I met a man with a Dutch Moroccan background who lived with his family in a street with working class family houses with a small front and back garden. He told me the following. He had helped an older neighbour of Dutch native origin, who wanted to leave his house. Because he lived in a house of the housing co-op, he had to return it in the original state. This was a big problem for this older neighbour. He had lived several decades in this house and had changed it in a fundamental way. His children lived far away and could not help him. My Dutch Moroccan informant said that he and two other neighbours helped the older man for days returning the house into the original state.

I remember when I heard his story for the first time. I could not believe my ears. This was so in contrast with the dominant representation of these neighbourhoods. It suddenly came to my mind: this is great example of interethnic social cohesion. I

was pleasantly surprised, but I realized that in the current debate on the multicultural society this case would be seen as an outlier, an exceptional and irrelevant case.

At first, I did not know what to do. In some sense, this example of positive interethnic social cohesion was too good to be true. I continued with my research and did not focus specifically on interethnic interactions characterised by social warmth. However, I realised that the voices of immigrants were not commonly heard in the public debate on mixed neighbourhoods. The dominant voice was that of angry white citizens who felt estranged living in mixed ethnic neighbourhoods. During the next few weeks of the research, I shared the story of the Dutch Moroccan research participant in fleeting conversations with people I met in the neighbourhood. What I heard surprised me. I encountered more examples and at the same time, I realised that these positive interactions were being overlooked because the dominant focus was on social problems in mixed neighbourhoods, quite often through the eyes of upset estranged Dutch native citizens.

I decided to pay structural attention to this topic. First, I traced the older native Dutch neighbour. He confirmed the story and added another emotional layer to the first interview. For instance, the native Dutch neighbour showed his deep gratitude towards his neighbours and said that he loved living in this street, because his immigrant neighbours always had been caring and supportive.

I still wondered whether this was a one off and started to focus on positive interactions in the interviews. It turned out that many had similar experiences in which immigrants would help elderly native Dutch in different ways, by driving them to hospital, fixing the heating and sharing food. It was clear that these interactions were overlooked by societal discourse and social scientists. I decided to change the ethnographic research dras-

tically and focus on positive interactions between residents of different ethnic groups. I continued to include this in the interviews, but I also arranged mixed focus groups on this topic. The focus group method worked well because one example led to more examples shared by the other participants in the focus groups. I also convinced the city to supply a budget to film the focus groups in order to make a documentary. At the end of the project we invited the inhabitants of the neighbourhood and showed the documentary which was titled, *Talking is Golden*.

Changing the substance of the research and the methods opened a flood of new information on interethnic interaction. I encountered many narratives of immigrants supporting and helping neighbours, mostly older native Dutch neighbours. These positive stories came from native Dutch people and from immigrant families. During this part of the research, another notion surfaced: fear of crime in mixed neighbourhoods is not so much related to crime but to how different interethnic groups relate to each other. This idea was partly triggered by *Urban Danger* (Merry 1981), in which a similar thesis was developed. I checked this notion by going through the interviews and the focus groups. I discovered that the data supported my initial notion, but still I was not satisfied with the richness of the data at this specific point. I also sensed I needed some stronger 'evidence' in the heated debate on the failed multicultural society. I did not see redoing the interviews as a sensible option, but I knew that the city was doing a questionnaire on safety and social cohesion. I thought it would be easy to add questions related to interethnic social cohesion and see whether there was a patterned relation with fear of crime. Nevertheless, I was not able to convince the city of Arnhem to do that.

When the documentary, *Talking is Golden*, was shown at a meeting of inhabitants and professionals, a civil servant of one of the involved Ministries reacted by saying: I cannot believe my eyes, these neighbourhoods are known for the lack of social cohesion and what I see here defies this totally. He said it in

disbelief, and I felt like defending my research but I did not have to. The inhabitants who participated in the documentary were present at the meeting and started to defend the documentary. They said that I had done good work and that the documentary was accurate. The civil servant had direct access to policy makers within the national government and was able to get me a commission to do similar research in other mixed neighbourhoods. In the city of Tilburg, I discovered a similar pattern of positive interethnic interactions in working class family houses with a small garden at the back and the front. This was contrasted with inhabitants of a high-rise building in which no immigrants lived. These people had no daily mundane contact with immigrant families and their only source of information on immigrants was the dominant stigmatizing media narrative. They tended to observe immigrants on the square from their balcony. This «balcony perspective» (Müller 2011: 71) confirmed their negative perspective on immigrant. The city of Tilburg was helpful in organising a questionnaire in which fear of crime could be related to interethnic social cohesion. This finally resulted in a publication (with Tamar Fischer) in which we developed a theoretical understanding that 'fear of crime' is shaped by interethnic social cohesion (Müller & Fischer 2015).

3.3.1. Reflection

Here we also see how an idea (positive interethnic interactions) developed from the friction between the dominant negative representations of mixed neighbourhoods and the first explorative findings. Again, this was in itself a surprise and after checking whether this was more than an incident, I decided to focus on positive interethnic social interactions and change the methods and the theory. By implementing these changes, we were able to describe and understand interethnic social cohesion. In this process another abductive notion developed: that there was a relation between interethnic social cohesion and fear of crime, which was in line with *Urban Danger* (Merry 1981). The abductive notion of positive interethnic interactions, was developed

from the explorative phase of the research till its final publication in the *British Journal of Criminology* into a theoretical perspective on the relation between interethnic social cohesion and fear of crime.

4. Conclusion

This chapter shows that the features of the discussed developments of turning points share similarities with the description of abduction by Reichertz: 1) a moment of surprise or/and crisis, 2) there is no knowledge available which can be used to understand or explain the new situation – it actually should not be present – and 3) a notion rises that is not the result of traditional logic reasoning, but seems to arrive at once, almost haphazardly.

All the three cases show that the tension between the observations in the field and the dominant representations of the field in societal discourse and/or academia play a crucial role in the occurrence of an abductive notion. This friction triggers abduction: a creative leap of the mind. This leads to a vague, unspecified conceptual understanding of the field, which opens a possibility of a new better-developed theoretical perspective on this field.

The idea of the warm city developed from the tension between my experience of living in Amsterdam and the urban sociology literature. The idea of listening to narratives of young urbanites was triggered by the strain encountered in my first explorative research while doing observations and reading *Chicago Loop* by Paul Theroux. In the vandalism study, the idea to focus on the social construction of the neighbourhood was shaped by the friction between the first initial observations of the neighbourhood and the representation of this neighbourhood by the city of Alkmaar. Finally, the idea to focus on interethnic social cohesion and to look at its relation to fear of crime was developed as a

reaction to the friction between the first notion of the relevance of positive interethnic interactions and the dominant negative representation of interethnic interactions in societal discourse and sociology.

In all these cases, it was felt that that something was highly relevant and important to pursue.

In these cases, abduction is part of the explorative phase of qualitative research. Abduction leads to a vague important new notion of social reality, which harbours significant theoretical relevance. It goes against the grain of current understanding and conflicts with dominant thoughts shared by citizens, politicians, journalist and academics. Though it seems that abduction almost happens to the researcher, at the same time there is agency. Researchers have to value abduction as meaningful, important and worth pursuing, while at first there might not be 'evidence' to embrace abduction.

Turning points and abduction shape a process of unanticipated discovery and unexpected new insights. This process starts with abduction, after which a turning point develops; one changes one's stance towards social reality and as a result will act towards it in a different way. The abductive notion has to be developed before it will lead to a turning point. To establish this the abductive notion will become more developed via a deductive/inductive research process. Put in different words, one is trying to formulate what this abductive notion actually is and feels the need to check its relation with observed social reality by having a closer look at the data. During my Ph.D., I tried to develop the notion of the warm city in two ways: by analysing urban studies on public places and by researching interactions in public places: first with observations and later by interviews. In the Alkmaar study, the hunch that vandalism was socially constructed by civil servants was checked thoroughly by observations, interviews and documents analysis. The same happened in the Arnhem and Tilburg studies: after the first observations

of positive interethnic interactions, I looked at whether this was incidental or a common pattern of interactions overlooked by journalists and social scientists. Subsequently I related it to fear of crime.

The turning point itself is not an epiphany of some sorts. It is a conscious act of the researcher that shows agency. The researcher has to define the situation as a turning point. At the same time, in the three cases this has been part of a collective process. Others are involved. In my Ph.D., Lyn Lofland and Lodewijk Brunt played a crucial role, in the Alkmaar research Lodewijk Brunt, Jojada Verrrips, Hans van Laar, and the commissioners played an important part. In the Arnhem and Tilburg study the head of the research department, the research team and the commissioners played a crucial role in accepting the turning point.

In all the cases, there was a conceptual change instigated by recognising the invalidity of a general dominant perspective and replacing it with a local perspective. This perspective showed a different social reality than was commonly accepted as the 'truth'. The warm city describes the perspective of young urbanites on living in the city and using the public realm, the vandalism study describes the perspectives of the local inhabitants on their neighbourhood and the social construction of this area by the city, and the vandalism study on interethnic social cohesion describes the perspectives of native Dutch people and immigrants on interethnic interactions and its relation to fear of crime.

As far as I know, this article is the first publication in which abduction, as explained by Reichertz, has been analysed in relation to ethnographic research inspired by GTM. Abduction is a necessary step in developing new ideas and theories. Focussing on the back stage of doing qualitative research inspired by GTM showed that the gradual inductive development of conceptual

categories is not in line with the practice of ethnography in these three cases. It shows the importance of taking one's initial abductive notions seriously and developing them through an inductive/ deductive research cycle.

In this chapter, I focussed mostly on the explorative phase of doing qualitative research. However, abductive logic is part of the whole process of doing qualitative research. Though not discussed in detail here, abductive logic plays also an important role in the more formal process of coding. In relation to the core categories, such as the warm city, neighbourhood stigma and interethnic social cohesion, I developed a range of subcategories. The development of these categories during the coding process also requires abduction, a creative if not poetic leap of the mind. In addition, the same is true for the writing process, which creates a narrative argumentation in which ideas, themes and interlinks are developed abductively. To conclude, during qualitative research abduction is a crucial element in transforming qualitative data into a challenging novel academic narrative. By observing the backstage of ethnographic research inspired by GTM we were able to open and decipher the black box of GTM and discover that abduction forms its heart, because it moves qualitative research in bold, challenging and unanticipated directions.

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PLAYFUL RESISTANCE AND THE TROLLING OF METHOD IN QUALITATIVE STUDIES: FROM GOFFMAN, STRAUSS TO CHARMAZ AND BEYOND

MICHAEL DELLWING

Abstract

Grounded Theory came up as a form of resistance against strict, mostly objectivist methodology in the social sciences, and more specifically, as a way to locate these open methods in an academic environment that privileged these strict methodologies. In this sense, Grounded Theory was an enabler of openness and creativity in a calcified disciplinary field. It is not alone in that function. Qualitative researchers have long used four forms to resist calls for strict method: serious discussion, evasion of method, polemics, and playful irony. The classical Chicago School often opted for evasion of method; original formulations of grounded theory opted for serious discussion and reframing openness as method; at the seams, especially with Blumer, Becker, and Goffman, but also with Feyerabend and Andreski, there is also much in the way of polemics to defend open research. This chapter will discuss all four, but focus on what I consider the final form, the jester role that especially Erving Goffman gleefully relished: a tongue-in-cheek play with one's opponents' need of for earnest, serious debate. This need can be exploited to place resistance against a dominant model within it, snuck in through a pretense of earnestness. This is not a new strategy: it is common in resistances against dominant

structures. In contemporary decentralized digital cultures, one term has come into use to describe it: trolling. While the term has gained some more simplistic connotations, the more complex use in digital cultures emphasizes the playful fun inherent in the practice, and research in the field emphasizes its critical and analytical power.

Keywords: Grounded Theory, Erving Goffman, trolling, polemics, irony, play.

Interactionist sociology in general, and ethnography in particular, have always been research forms that privilege play. It is free play that has informed Chicago ethnographies and the insights generated by the studies done by the 'second Chicago School'; unsystematic, unstructured observation that, as Goffman noted, could often not be reconstructed systematically if their authors wanted to. It was precisely that openness that allowed interactionist work to gain access to a plural, conflictuous, uneven, world, one that cannot be adequately captured with strict, unitary, and orderly descriptions.

In the present, especially European qualitative scholarship has produced a number of comparatively rigid and structured works on method, with a standardized expectation that qualitative work follows strict, standardized, rigorous rules. This doubly standardized form has also been challenged (cfr., among many, Scherr & Niermann 2014), and the more classical forms of challenge can apply here as well. Grounded theory is often hailed for putting a systematic face on these open practices ethnographers, especially from the Chicago tradition, had engaged in: it comes up as a way of presenting a structured front stage for the play that can be cited, delivering justification for an open form of research in an environment that prized closed, mechanical, positivist narratives. As structures do, segments of grounded theory then fell for these facades of order, taking

these systematizations at face value, especially in introduction texts and in teaching. A frame for open and situational research multi-perspectival and diverse world thus degraded, in some of its forms, into another form of pseudo-objectivist drudgery (Bryant & Charmaz 2010; Clarke 2005; Stehr 2016). It is in the worlds of Kathy Charmaz (2006; 2014), Antony Bryant (2017) and Adele Clarke (2005) that grounded theory was reoriented back to its more open and playful, plural and diverse, multi-perspective roots.

Everett Hughes famously taught his students to produce insights through unlikely comparisons. The most well-known of these is the oft-cited story of the prostitute and the priest (or rather, psychiatrist; 1951: 320)¹. Once moral judgments are set aside, both professions show surprising structural similarities, and understanding one can be a vehicle for gaining heretofore unrealized insight into the profession of the other (Davis 2017: 137). Unlikely similarities may then seem not as unlikely at all when put under closer scrutiny, like that of research and play. More generally, *play* can serve as a means to understand creative and insightful research. 'Research as play' is not a new analogy (e.g., Pickering 1971 etc.) Pickering reports Konrad Lorenz' quote that «scientific research [is] play carried into adult life» (1971: 131), an impulse «which is so often extinguished by pedants while [the future scientist] is at school» (*Ibid.*: 132). Methods education can be part of this school Pickering derides, especially when strict methodology takes primacy over playful discovery. More specifically, however, there is a possible comparison between a form of irreverent play that carries similar divergences in everyday moral judgment as Hughes' original comparison had: between the researcher arguing against rig-

¹ While Hughes' written comparison was with the psychiatrist, he did cite the priest frequently in lectures, since much of his own research in the sociology of professions focused on the work of priests.

orous method and the internet troll, which also constitutes a form of play.

Johan Huizinga notes that «you can deny seriousness, but not play» (2002 [1949]: 3). In academia, especially in methods, it often seems the exact opposite: playful aspects are routinely denied, while a facade of seriousness is upheld as a prerequisite for doing 'clean', assiduous, valid research. That seriousness often comes in the form of a strict system of research method that prescribes data gathering steps, interpretive practices, and means to 'verify' these interpretations. Grounded theory is sometimes understood as one option *for* such a procedure, but it can also be understood as an arrow in a quiver of possible means to *resist* narratives that conflate research with 'systematic structure', and therefore one means to justify and honor play. Grounded Theory is, however, only one possible means. There are at least four forms of resistance against strict method that denies play: serious discussion, evasion of method, polemics, and playful irony. The classical Chicago School opted for evasion of method; grounded theory opted for serious discussion; at the seams, especially with Blumer, Becker, and Goffman, but also with Feyerabend and Andreski, there is much in the way of polemics. Irony, or irreverent jestering, raises play to a meta-level: While it is well possible to defend the play of open research in serious debate or polemical attacks on serious positions, which still takes them seriously as contenders, ignoring them or approaching them with the sensibility of a jester not only adds a playfulness to the defense of playfulness in methods; it might also be a more effective way of engaging in such defenses. Ironic, mischievous and tongue-in-cheek challenges to normalized structures, subtle resistances that retain a very superficial sense of pretense of keeping to them while using expectations of earnestness against these dominant structures, thus placing a trap in the argument.

This final form is, of course, not an invention of the academic debate in the 1960s and 1970s; it can be found in many subversive, rebellious challenges to normalized structures. In on-

line cultures, which are born from and formed in decentralized, counter-cultural narratives in the 1990s, this form is prevalent and well-known under the term of *trolling*. Though the term has lately seen a shift, and contemporary reports have started to use it to describe antagonistic and perhaps state-sponsored intelligence destabilization, that is not the native online cultural use of this term. Originally, it denotes exactly the form of playful challenge to an expected form of interaction where participants use the expectation that interaction should, and indeed *must* be earnest to generate amusement, but also to destabilize these dominant structures in the process. The less able a structure is to recognize playfulness and integrate fun, the more vulnerable it becomes – and the funnier the challenge is.

I want to propose to see the final form of resistance as a form of *academic trolling*. Once the term is rescued from its simplistic use in journalism, work on the structures and practices of trolling offers valuable insights into the dynamics of resistance. It is no surprise that academia utilizes the form: Any minority structure up against dominant narratives can benefit from mischievous strategies that throw off dominant expectations about structures of engagement by using them ironically, playfully, and unearnestly. Those forms of resistance might not only prove useful; they might even be a necessary element of a rich tapestry of qualitative work.

1. Method and its discontents

Much interpretive work is antagonistic to calls for strict and rigorous method. The focus of this paper is not on the content of this criticism, but on the ways in which critics organize their challenges to a normalized methodology frame that privileges rigorous method and attempts to delegitimize open, flexible, interpretive work focused on a world of meaning that cannot be researched in strictly structured ways. The North American classics of qualitative research used four basic forms to resist an idea of strict methodology which, in their context, meant the

positivistic, quantitative, structuralist sociology of the 1960s: serious discussion, evasion of method, polemical attacks, and playing the jester. Much of this opposition fell to Chicago sociologists: Joe Gusfield, in his introduction to Gary Alan Fine's book *The Second Chicago School*, recounted that it had positioned itself against the 'eastern barbarians' (Gusfield 1995), a moniker used to describe the survey research and social theory based works of Columbia and Harvard University. I want to cycle through the first three forms of resistance to then focus on the final form, a playfully ironic pretense of going along the expected structure of earnest and serious discussion, while using this pretense to place a trap within it. I will argue that we can find this form in academic scholarship as well, especially in the work of Erving Goffman.

2. The Evasion of Method

While earnest discussion may be the standard, expected form for grappling with expectations for 'rigorous method', it is not the majority of the resistance against it. Customarily, ethnographic work has simply foregone systematic arguments and earnest debate to go straight to the ethnographic report without discussing method at all. Many ethnographic texts, especially those from North American interactionist and postmodern traditions, either have no methods section at all or short, one-page references to one's participant observation (Becker 2018; Fine 2001; Prus & Sharper 1977; etc.). Many others have appendices that do not discuss method in the strict sense, but rather engage with practical, contextual problems and events in the field (Fine 1996; Newmahr 2011; Waskul 2016; etc.) These are not fringe works; they contain the core of the ethnographic tradition, its most-cited examples, and works that have influenced their respective fields for decades².

² It is important to mention, as Bethmann and Niermann note, that this is at least partially due to publisher influence: academic pub-

Howard Becker's open and method-section-free studies of Jazz musicians and marijuana users stand at the center of the sociology of deviance (2018). Erving Goffman's works (1959; 1967; 1971) are the basis of a sociology of everyday life, *Stigma* (1963) is the basis for stigma research, *Asylums* is a major basis of the sociology of psychiatry (1961). The works of Joel Best (1990; 1998; 2013) are a major foundation of the sociology of social problems. Arlie Hochschild's ethnography of flight personnel (2012) has become the core work of a sociology of emotion. Patti and Pete Adler's observations in the social circles of their own children (1998) form the classic core of peer research, Gary Alan Fine's ethnography of pen and paper role-players (1983) is one of the most cited works in Game Studies, and Staci Newmahr's ethnography of BDSM cultures (2011) has become a central work in the research of kink. We could continue this list for pages. None of these books offer anything in the way of a systematic discussion of methodology or even methods; all of these books are excellent, influential, field-defining contributions of empirical research.

In line with what Cornell West calls the '*American evasion of philosophy*' (1989), we can call this strategy the American evasion of methodology. In North American ethnography, and in ethnography beyond North America as well, this can be considered the normal form. This is not surprising: Evasion refuses deference to the dominant model. It therefore resists marking it as dominant, or as something that has to be discussed, at all; not naming it at all also prevents it from proliferating in the debate, being read as important, dominant, something to be

lishers in the US wield decidedly more influence on content as their European counterparts do, and they actively request the omission of methods or their relegation to appendices (Bethmann & Niermann 2015: 16). This is a rare occasion in which the corporate exploitation mechanism leads to positive unintended consequences (the intended consequence being, of course, the desire to not hurt sales with boring drudgery that is pointless concerning the actual insight of the study).

discussed. This move starves the debate of oxygen and might be the most effective way to fight for an open and flexible form of research. This evasion is therefore not a failure of argument: it is, on the contrary, a strong show of independence from calls for rigorous method.

3. Serious Discussion and Earnest Challenges

As common as evasion is as a strategy, it is much more orthodox to call for a serious theoretical engagement with the other side's demands for rigorous method. The logocentric discussion between positions is the native form in a profession built on writing. The rituals associated with this are, of course, showing contradictions, offering alternatives, and arguing for the viability of one or the other within the frame of given objectives of social research. As a normalized form of serious and considered discussion, this strategy remains easily accessible within the expectations of an academic audience, and, most importantly, becomes a part of the articulated public record in the field, put to writing. Theoretically, critics lay out the premises of an open and flexible form of research (Girtler 2004; Schütze 1994), emphasize the art (Bude 2005; Reichertz 2019: 5), flexibility (Strauss & Corbin 1990), and creativity (Knoblauch 2013: 13, 19; Strauss & Corbin 1990) of qualitative work. They point to the importance of an oral and practical tradition that regularly transcends and jettisons methodical structure (Gobo 2005: 5), and its status as an attitude rather than a recipe (Dellwing & Prus 2012; Reichertz 2013: 17). They outline the specific way standardization is antithetical to an interpretive paradigm's orientation towards local knowledge (Knoblauch 2013: 9, 11), as rigorous research blueprints inevitably lead to an imposition of outside meaning on local fields of knowledge, 'running roughshod' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983) over a plural and chaotic world.

Grounded theory, in its original form, has attained the important achievement of giving cover to openness where cover was

necessary: to offer a front-facing 'systematic' explanation for the open, creative, and unsystematic processes that these ethnographies were engaged in. Grounded theory has become a major part of this strategy, in which there are two strands. One strand opposes the entire practice of front-staging rigorous facades; another attempts to translate a kind of open, creative, flexible research that is not amenable to rigorous systematization to its own form of (open) systematization. Grounded theory has taken part in both versions of this strategy, where Adele Clarke is positioned most clearly on the side of arguing against the systematic form, but still within grounded theory, a side that also houses Kathy Charmaz, Antony Bryant, and the early works of Glaser and Strauss; on the other side, the more systematic forms in which grounded theory became, as Kaufmann lamented, another front for an «obsession with method for the sake of method, artificially separated from theoretical framing» (Kaufmann 1999: 18, my translation, in Stehr 2016: 48), which added «a codification of grounded theory in which the creative moments that are at the core of qualitative research are lost» (*Ibid.*, my translation).

These criticisms are widespread and will not be rehearsed or elaborated in detail here. Pointing out disagreements of this sort is the normal course of scientific debate, and there is little remarkable, structurally, about this discussion format. A serious discussion of this kind is not only a necessary element to socialize – or 'convert' – academic novices to a school that is hard to understand if it does not lay out its premises in a kind of writing that conforms to the expectations of those inside a social science education. Like introduction books, they are also necessary as a resource, as an easily citeable text for methods sections of student papers, theses, and grant proposals (Knoblauch 2013: 10), offering a justification for a practice when such justification becomes necessary. The textbook in qualitative methods is a relatively late form for this purpose; Giampietro Gobo states, somewhat sarcastically, that while «qualitative research was first done more than a century ago, the first texts

that tried to define its methodology appeared only eighty years later, in the late sixties» (2005), namely Strauss and Corbin's *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, published with the intention to provide exactly this form of citeable justification. Once calcified into education and learned through books, however, the openness grounded theory gave cover to can become invisible, especially to those cut off from the oral tradition, who *only* learn about grounded theory through textbooks. This is an old problem. This is exactly what happened and what turned parts of grounded theory into another form of mechanical obsession, as Kaufmann and Stehr both decried.

Serious and earnest challenges of this kind suffer from a dramaturgical problem: In so choosing their style and tone, they reinforce the assumptions of the structure they react to. An earnest resistance to dominant forms still pays obeisance to that dominant form, respects its status and position, and proliferates the narrative of the normality of normalized form through naming and challenging it. Grounded theory arose when it did because it had little other choice: in an environment that had become more and more thoroughly geared toward positivist and objectified social science, the camouflage of one's non-positivist methods was a means to throw the predators off their scent. In contemporary social science, many subfields, such as criminology and psychology, are still heavily dominated by objectivist and positivist frameworks. However, paying obeisance to them strengthens them, and it is therefore not surprising that these dominant structures frequently attempt to demand that resistance take a form that marks the dominant model as dominant by 'discussing' it. It is equally not surprising that challengers have no real interest to keep to this demand, unless such obedience is necessary for immediate survival in a refereed or thesis advisor. In this, the dominant model's enforcers are really not much different from an armed police officer. Like the police officer, this enforcer of a dominant form is not a self-evidently necessary role. It can be, and frequently is, broken in resistant action, and that includes academic writing.

4. Polemical Resistance

The third form of resistance that arises in the literature is polemical attack, which picks up the strand of serious challenge to the dominant model, but adds some irreverence and fun into it, thus breaking the dominant model's ritual demand of taking it 'seriously'. Herbert Blumer was a master of irreverent polemics against the positivist foundations of structuralist approaches to research and method (Blumer 1986; but also Becker 1988; Ferrell 2009; and many more): His classical statement on the principles of symbolic interaction is famously salty (1986; cfr. Tucker 1988), and his students in Chicago and Berkeley have followed in these footsteps. Howard Becker has faulted sociology for presenting itself and its work as scientific in the sense of the physical sciences, a show that relies on «fuzzy ideas and meaningless numbers» (Becker 1988: 13).

Feeling one down to physics and the 'real sciences', they tried to establish the scientific character of their empirical research by emphasizing rigorous and precise measurement. Feeling one down to philosophy and history, they tried to impress other scholars with the profundity of their general theories through the use of Germanic abstractions and complex syntax. In doing that, they too often substituted the outer look for the substance. (Becker 1988:14)

Erving Goffman also engages in open polemics against the orderly, serious way of *Doing Science*, where «[c]oncepts are devised on the run in order to get on with setting things up so that trials can be performed and the effects of controlled variation of some kind or other measure, the science of which is assured by the use of lab coats and government money» (1971: xvi). This leads him to bemoan «the melancholy fact that clinicians and chi-square scientists unwittingly reinforce each other's investment in variables that glow from within the isolated individual like a dose of radioactive salts» (1957: 323, fn. 5). Some of the polemical work Goffman thus offers already veers strongly into the realm of fun.

While polemical challenges are often denigrated in academia (but see Laclau 1999, and Gallop 2004, in defense of polemics), they serve important functions, and the directions from which this denigration emanates already points to what these functions are: the mode of polemicism refuses to show the ritual deference an entrenched, high status opponent has come to expect as a matter of course, refusing to genuflect to their status position. Polemical opposition to standard discourses on method challenges the front stage narrative that orderly method and/or theory is already established as a mode that produces valid results. Besides their refusal to adhere to the set standards of (often quantitative-like) science, its vocabulary of 'reliability', and its insistence that good science needs 'rigorous' criteria for quality, polemicists also decline to adhere to the sets of standards *of debate* that already embody the hegemonic position: They decline the demand that a deviant approach should have to seriously argue against the dominant one. They thus break the demand for deference and status recognition by utilizing ridicule. Polemical challengers not only attack the content, but also the seriousness-show that underpins the dramatization of status of the opposing side, declining to uphold the pretense of taking the other side seriously at all. Instead, they impolitely point out that the emperor has no clothes³. Polemical challenges against hegemonic positions are cutting precisely because they refuse to afford the hegemonic position these lines of ritual recognition by taking them seriously by their measures and after their rules; they are, therefore, a double resistance, not just against the content of the other side's argument, but against their powerful demands to engage with them in a pre-ordained, formal manner. Polemics are, therefore, an underrated form of academic debate: they not only serve to highlight the absurdity of the rigid positions that polemicists attack, but also to

³ To the extent that politeness, historically, is an interaction structure borne out of fear, impoliteness also entails resistance.

expose the often ridiculous air of self-evidence with which more rigid academic models present themselves, as well as the role that demands for solemn earnestness play in defending these structures. However, polemicists can still be notably earnest in their disapproval. It is this solemn earnestness that is the target of the fourth and final form or challenge that I will dedicate the rest of this paper to.

5. The Trolling of Method: Playful research

Grounded theory put up offerings to the temple of rigor to protect open, playful research from the wrath of the temple gods. The more structured forms of grounded theory, with its facade of seriousness, brought offerings to the temple of rigorous earnestness, hoping to pacify the gods of structure, asking them to allow open research to live if only it dressed in temple garb. The more open form opted to rather build a new temple. This does not exhaust the possibilities, especially if we start taking play seriously.

'Play' is a good metaphor for open research: One of the main elements of Brian Sutton-Smith's classical study of play is its emphasis on the wide-ranging applicability of the game frame. Rather than being a clearly defined field, almost anything can be usefully analyzed as play, including thought experiments, television, joking, gossip, and sex (1997: 5). Especially pragmatism, from which Grounded theory originates, has emphasized that all action is a form play, meaning that all action is undeterministic, open, and experimental. Joas takes recourse to Mead and Dewey's theories of action to show that their main examples for human action concern experimentation, play and art. «For Mead and Dewey, the capacity of invention, that is creativity, had as its precondition the self-aware employment of and disposal over the form of action known as play, the conscious "playing through" in imagination of alternative performances of action» (Joas 1990: 178). Reichertz seconds this when he states that interaction cannot be planned or controlled (Reichertz 2013:

32). As Joas says of Richard Rorty, «He pleads for an end to the spirit of seriousness and for a new spirit of flexibility, imagination, creativity and non-professionalism» (Joas 1990: 190). It is this very playfulness that makes for successful interpretation in interactionist research, and it is this playfulness that grounded theory, in its original as well as its constructivist and situational forms, arose to protect.

Research is playful in general, and it might have to be playful to generate creative, novel insights. Sociology in particular has been described as a more playful discipline. Jacobsen et. al. call sociology a «spacious playground» that offers a «golden opportunity to look beyond the restrictive confines of conventional sources» (2014: 1). Frade seconds this when he identifies the social sciences as a «free form of enquiry» (2009: 9). Coming from a symbolic interaction background, Jacobsen et. al. advocate for academics to «play with our methodological imagination» (2014: 2). Markham cautions that academic contexts tend to shy away from a characterization of research as playful (Markham 2017: 235), and notes that «play may seem a disrespectful, lazy, or nonrigorous form of activity» (*Ibid.*: 235). This, however, is a grave mistake: «what we do in the best moments of the interpretive process is just that» (*Ibid.*), and to think of research as a game does mean thinking of it as frivolous (McWilliam 2004). The need to portray method as strict, academia as serious, and the practice as a form of difficult to master craft that hinges on detailed procedural blueprints to work is a narrative, not a necessity. Joas identifies the rejection of this narrative as a «way out of the blind alley of water-tight professionalization» (Joas 1990: 190). It is a form of rebellion against the iron cage of institutional life that has permeated social science through the ideology of rigorousness, with its insistence on following blueprints of methodology.

6. Playfully ironic resistance

As different as the first three forms noted above are, they are still unified in their adherence to at least some form of earnestness: even a cutting, polemical challenge is still earnest in its righteous frustration towards orthodox forms of research. A sizeable number of scholars have avoided such earnestness, though they have done so subtly. This is the fourth strategy, a 'final form' on which this paper will focus. In this fourth form, the resistance against content remains as powerful as before, but challengers add another element: they can play with and exploit the *need* of their opponents for an earnest, serious form, and with it, the ritual deference to their opponent and the form of legitimate discussion set by the other side. They can sneak resistance against a dominant model into the argument with, as Gary Alan Fine and David Martin write about Goffman, a *pretense* of earnestness, «an apparently innocent package [that] is, in truth, a bomb» (Fine & Martin 1990: 99).

Another term for this form is trolling, a term often used in online culture. Trolling, as a form of play, is a way to not only rebel against the expectation of rigorous form in method, but also against the expectation of rigorous form in the debate *over* method. In the narrow, mass-media use of the term, trolling is often misunderstood as merely personal criticism, as «unpopular content that the author knows will not be well received» (Merritt 2012: 76), or communication that follows 'anti-civility norms' (Mannivanan 2012). Recent political debates used the term as a description of foreign (mainly Russian) intelligence actors, associated with informational warfare to foment discord in Western democracies to benefit and hurt political actors in fragile political environments (cfr. Aro 2016: 121; Bradshaw & Howard 2017). This media-digested usage, however, only retains a distant relation to its use in online culture, where trolling is neither necessarily political, nor really involves hateful provocation. What has become known as 'trolling' in contemporary online discourse can be better understood as a new iteration,

and a new name, for an old strategy in an interaction game: baiting a reaction⁴ through a facade of seriousness, to be dismantled after the other side fell for the trap by taking it seriously. Denying others a consensus, continuously feeding another's relevance system with a serious face while challenging it ironically, and exploiting official discourses need for seriousness are all major ingredients in what has been known as 'trolling' (Escartin 2015; Knutilla 2015; Merritt 2012; Phillips 2015). Mischievous challenges can lure those foolhearted enough to feel secure in their positions into traps that close when the interlocutor reveals, through persistent role-playing of the fool or through resistance, their refusal to engage in the commitment to stability that underpins a shared narrative. Trolling pierces the thin veil of stability by utilizing any person's ability «to be immensely disruptive of the world immediately at hand. He can destroy objects, himself, and other people. He can profane himself, insult and contaminate others, and interfere with their free passage» (Goffman 1967: 169).

At the heart of trolling lies not hatred, but gleeful mischief. Merritt notes that «humor [...] is critical to understanding how trolling distinguishes itself from flaming» (2012: 16) and Whitney Phillips equally identifies glee, not provocation or anger, as the 'currency' trolling generates (2015: 135). The key element is not the provocation, but rather the joy to be gained when others fall for the seemingly serious question, comment, or even praise that the troll inserts into a conversation by reacting in earnest.

Trolling, then, is a critical practice that weaponizes the earnestness of its often more established and status-high opponents against them. This weaponization first targets the earnest insistence on the self-evidence of institutionalized assumptions,

⁴ The term 'trolling' in fact originates in fishing, where it describes dragging bait behind a boat; at least, this is one of the origin stories of the term.

and then targets the 'earnestness of earnestness', the institutional requirement to frame any appeal or challenge to these status-high positions in a format of serious discourse.

This earnestness is fundamental to institutional authority and official truth. Goffman notes that structures that depend on facades to function can be easily exposed when their facade is pierced. Earnest reaction is often not naiveté; it can be coded into these structures. Goffman also noted that many facades in modern societies are highly vulnerable, requiring continuous common cause to uphold the shared fictions that underpin our institutions. Therefore, actors can easily deflate them: «As every psychotic and comic ought to know, any accurately improper move can poke through the thin sleeve of immediate reality» (Goffman 1961: 81). It is these thin structures that trolling can easily target. Trolling is a strategy that challenges official truths by exposing the thin protections around collectively upheld constructions of reality that can be destroyed through small, and easily accessible, means. As one of Escartin's interviewed subject states, «[a comment] is trolled when it imposes one's idea as if it is the truth and not an opinion anymore» (2015: 185).

And in fact, Goffman had tremendous fun poking fun at rigorous expectations. Erving Goffman was the master of the ironist rejection of temples of all kinds, a form that poisoned these offerings in order to subvert the temple priests: an ironist who reveled in tongue-in-cheek challenges to more structural-oriented approaches in the academic status quo. Goffman playfully acknowledges his awareness of the norms of earnest scholarship, but denies their validity all the same with a tongue-in-cheek (Fine & Martin 2000: 110) *pro forma* deference to them. To offer a systematized argument against systematizers may be easily recognizable and understandable to the group that is so challenged, but it reinforces the very meanings that it is attempting to conquer. Better, then, and more consistent, to package the challenge differently. Goffman offers a provocative and ironic play with academic normality, a play that he is openly enjoying.

This is nowhere more visible than in Goffman's references to his data collection, the foundation of his empirical work. At no point does Goffman introduce, defend, or structure methods of collection; on the contrary, his references to collection are playful and lack any attempt to defend his unstructured form against more structured expectations. His texts do make direct references to his data collection, but in seriously worded sentences that contain strong resistance to the earnestness of method. He describes his analyses as «based on offhandedly collecting and analyzing data» (1971: 235), and all he names to narrow this down is a reference to «a hit-or-miss basis using principles of selection mysterious to me which, furthermore, changed from year to year and which I could not recover if I wanted to» (1974: 15). His direct reference to unordered, unstructured collection fulfills the general rule of naming your method principles, though only to then *not* name any. His conclusion, mischievous and ironic, is that «[o]bviously, many of these data are of doubtful worth, and my interpretations – especially of some of them [sic!] – may certainly be questionable» (1963: 4). Goffman keeps to the form of naming the limitations of your method, only to circumvent the form through obfuscating terminology in 'some of them' and 'may' – thereby teasing more structured approaches which obfuscate their unstructured elements in their own ways.

This playful ironism comes dressed in the thinnest of garbs of earnest discussion, so thin that it quickly becomes transparent when the context and wording of these 'earnest' approaches is taken into account. Goffman's form is prone to either elicit amusement by those within the walls of his border maintenance structure, or to elicit angry, correctional rebuke by those who believe that *this is not how methods work*. In other words, he baits angry 'methods policing' as a mark of non-membership in his club. The mark of membership, on the other hand, consists of a lack in trust in the authenticity of institutional normality, making the jibe contained in these challenges not just obvious,

but funny, as they challenge quite obvious shortcomings of the structural-methodical narrative.

While his resistance to method was often only thinly clad in the structure of normalized argument, his resistance to theory is more thickly clad in this structure. At first glance, Goffman comes across as a straightforwardly defining terms, laying them out as classical works would; at first, systematists may experience a theoretical unease about the fact that these terms are not used in a consistent manner, and it is only a closer look that will uncover the shifts and ruptures between these terms. Goffman often confuses the reader by employing multiple concepts to refer to the 'same thing', and at other times uses one concept to refer to more than one 'thing' (Manning 1980: 61; cfr. Drew & Wootton 1988: 2). Greg Smith notes that «[e]ach of his books is written... as if none of the others had been. Each starts from conceptual scratch» (2006: 5). He uses the same terms in different books to describe different things, different terms to describe suspiciously similar things, and sometimes switches terms mid-stream. It is only in connection to Goffman's larger work, and with other material about him, that it becomes clear that these ruptures can also be read as a strategic move to prevent readers from writing a paper on 'Goffman's terms' (a move that, of course, failed, as not few of these papers now exist).

It is on the basis of these strategies that Dawe calls him a «sociological jester» (1973: 248). Gary Alan Fine and Daniel D. Martin even – benevolently! – classify the deep irony in *Asylums* as a form «literary terrorism» (1990: 99). Terrorism is obviously a loaded term; contained in this assessment, however, there is an analysis that Goffman's style clandestinely places an argument inside the normative, structured form of debate that, on closer inspection, turns out to only pretend to follow the rules inside this structure to hide explosive irony within it; when revealed, it can unravel the pretenses of that structure. Reading these interventions as gleeful resistance to method is not mere conjecture. Berger notes that Goffman «was probably more

than a little irked by [...] the fact that social science reserved their highest honors for systematizers» (Berger 1974: xii) and such irritation does not lend itself to repeating the task with switched-out aims. Goffman includes even more open and direct resistance to definition in live interactions on definitions. In a class Goffman taught, he switched between different terms, leading a student to interject why the term had changed; Goffman brushed her off, telling her not to be so nostalgic (Winkin 1999). Speaking of his work on everyday ritual, the maintenance of order through small acts and of deference and demeanor, Blumer wondered how «Erving had all these theories but behaved so differently from them» (Shalin 2009). More carefully, Grimshaw offered that «[w]hile he studied the arts of impression management, he sometimes seemed reluctant to practice them» (Grimshaw 1983: 148). Berger identifies him as «a rule-breaker, a frame-breaker» (Berger 1974: xvii) with a «bad boy outrageousness [...] that delighted in testing rules by testing the limits of tolerance toward the breaking of them» (Berger 1974: xvii) and Shalin adds that «his entire life, it seems to me, was an ongoing research act where he challenged the conventions to find out what the rules were and how far one can go to skirt them» (Shalin, in Shalin & Lang 2009).

In an environment in which stringent theoretical-methodological argument and earnest exposition of an academic position prevails, where the expectation was that the others' standpoint has to be either seriously engaged, indignantly refuted, or ignored, Goffman inserted a prankster sensibility into the field. While polemics may be akin to a guerilla tactic, the jester can use laughter as a resource against dominant paradigms and their absurdities.

In a sober universe of academia, such light-heartedness and humor can be challenged as heretical. Like polemics, this form also has its functions: It not only challenges the *content* and the *status* of the opposing system, but also exposes its claim to earnestness as a facade through an ironic, playful reference to it. It exploits the weak spot of the earnest presentation, its

inability to process irony and humor (and the very reason that light-heartedness can be heretical). The earnest presentation can take debate, provocation, indignant challenges and the silent treatment; however, it is unprepared for a challenge that uses cheerful jesting to poke fun at it.

7. Final thoughts: Resisting dogma

While trolling as a term arises in relation to online cultures, it is not limited to them. This strategy was and is available to academics, especially in fields that are not within the academic mainstream. When Everett Hughes offers a structural comparison between the professions of the prostitute and the psychiatrist, he can show how both follow similar structural elements of career trajectories, both hear very private secrets, and both «must both take care not to become too personally involved with clients who come to them with rather intimate problems» (Hughes 1951: 320). Once the social science researcher sets aside moral judgments and status differences, the comparison allows for deeper insight into both professions. The qualitative researcher in Europe resisting demands on rigorous, strict, and orderly method and the troll are not usually both professions, but they do share other similarities: in both cases, it is a form of resistance against a normalized argumentative structure bound in earnestness and serious presentations.

The jester role taken by Erving Goffman and other members of the second Chicago school shows that it has indeed been taken in academic writing. Goffman uses an earnest form, lightly in the case of method, more subtly in the case of theory, to place an irreverent challenge inside the form. It is a truism that the demand that political resistance go through approved channels of political influence reproduces the structures of power and subjects the petitioners to the privileges and inequalities already embodied in this system, not least the normalized forms of conflict of the educated upper classes. The equal, earnest debate that academia imagines as a path to scientific discovery sets

norms for organizing conflict deemed self-evident that were, in fact, a set of norms very much connected to a social status (Bourdieu 1998; Bourdieu, Passeron & Saint Martin 1996). Adherence to norms of academic discourse are, therefore, also reproductions of status. In other strata of social life, conflicts are more open, more direct, and more 'vulgar' – already a morally loaded term – without therefore being in the wrong in their respective contexts. Likewise, a demand that academic debate takes a specific form privileges those who already adhere to the form. In a more diverse academic environment, other forms of conflicts will arise and have already arisen: the biting polemic, the emotional plea, the artistic poetry and, also, the mischievous troll.

Trolling incapacitates the earnest responder, making them unable to counter the core of the argument: that strict, rigorous method is not necessary for the actual work Goffman does. It can be argued, as indeed I would argue, that it is precisely Goffman's evasion of method that allows his insights, unmoors them from structural frames that could otherwise hamper his insight by imposing given academic orders on them, and unleashes the creativity of Goffman's work.

Taking troll bait will leave the trolled to circle their own drain, in a ritual exercise the troll can well ignore and get on with their own work, or feed with more taunting challenges to exacerbate the poisoning. Either way, the resistance wins, as it watches a race the other side thinks both sides are engaged in. As Vessela Misheva notes, «the non-conformist has no sense of being in a race and, having an alternative goal distinct from that commonly pursued, is not interested in competing or even in responding to challenges» (2019: 63) However, this status is only visible to the other side if it is announced; by the very act of trolling, the resistance pretends to take part in a race it does not actually engage in, leaving the other side to shadow-box and hurt itself in the process.

This is a form of strategic advantage the serious challenges grounded theory has classically mounted have little access to:

Trolls can win this challenge in ways grounded theory cannot easily win in. The mischievous frame of this form of challenge also offers better protection against being reframed as a structured argument, as it happened with grounded theory, as the jester element is hard to miss by those on the 'right' side of border maintenance (though of course, it can very well still be missed). It is therefore not surprising that this form appears in academia; it is surprising, rather, that it does not appear more often and rebellions against dominant, orthodox forms do not use the power of mischievous jestering more frequently.

Finally, this not only helps pluralist work. It also relaxes teaching, not only because it allows fun into the structure in a more official capacity. Strict methods texts have a propensity of to cause existential crises among students trying to do qualitative research. Noting the lack of implementation of strict method in actual empirical work, they are left confused and helpless, a feeling that is not helped when students who earnestly believe in these methods texts are faced with steps in the blueprint that are impossible, logically absurd or otherwise unapplicable in their own context, while these same blueprints remain silent on actually existing contextual problems that they failed to foresee, since the chaotic world of meaning and situational dynamics is unforeseeable (Reichertz 2019: 16). Critics can debate the merits of these impossible expectations, they can ignore them and get on with their work, they can trail against them polemically: these are all strategies that empirically actually arise, and have their uses. They are possible responses to prescriptions that are often impossible and sometimes absurd in their pretense of order. In the fourth form, scholars like Goffman opt to find these prescriptions, and the moralism with which they're usually presented, silly. This is not only a viable and respectable reaction. It frees spaces and acknowledges that social research, like human life, is, as Jack Douglas notes, wild, chaotic, and sometimes, ravenously funny (cfr. Breuer 2010: 70). Trolling acknowledges this, and allows those who participate in the audience to acknowledge it also – and laugh, a welcome break

from the facade of earnestness of science: if you take life too seriously, it stops being funny.

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ANSELM L. STRAUSS AND KATHY CHARMAZ GROUNDED THEORY

KRZYSZTOF T. KONECKI

Abstract

Anselm Strauss was a symbolic interactionist that continued the line of Blumer and the Chicago School of sociology. He wrote a significant book on the symbolic interactionist concept of identity and transformation of identity (1959). Important achievements were also in the sociology of occupations and work. He did a great input to the sociology of medicine. He created with Barney Glaser graduate and Ph.D. course in UCSF, where Kathy Charmaz took her grounded theory classes (Charmaz & Keller 2016). She was under the influence of A. L. Strauss (1987) even if she later disagreed with him. Disagreement with mentors in Academia often means the strong influence of these teachers.

Keywords: Grounded theory, Anselm L. Strauss, Kathy Charmaz, pragmatism, Symbolic Interactionism, constructivism, qualitative methods.

1. Anselm L. Strauss's way

One of the greatest achievements of A. L. Strauss is the development of the Grounded theory methodology together with B. Glaser (Glaser & Strauss 1967) and later Julie Corbin (Corbin & Strauss 1990; Strauss 1991). This methodology was an innovative work at the time it was created. It involves the systematic construction of a medium-range theory (theory of a phenomenon, process, or a well-defined substantive area) based on systematically collected empirical data (Glaser & Strauss 1967:

1-2). Such a 'miniature theory' would therefore be a derivative of empirical data analysis (see Hammerslay 1989: 170-171; Konecki 2000). This avoids the logical method of building hypotheses about previously adopted axioms or assumptions as it did, e.g., in the theories of T. Parson or R. Merton. Theoretical diagrams emerge in systematic field research from empirical data directly related to the observed part of social reality. Hypotheses, concepts, and properties of concepts are built during empirical research, and during research, they are modified and verified. Thus, building the theory is connected with empirical research and experiencing the world by researchers.

The methodology of Grounded theory was, in the Sixties, a certain criticism but also an alternative to traditional, academic methods of building theory in social sciences ('construction from behind a desk'). Thus, constructed theories of, for example, the 'social system', functional imperatives, or 'social action' were unmatched in many comparable empirical areas. This methodology gave courage to ethnographers, researchers of many individual cases, that would not be afraid of generalization and theoretical analysis (Konecki 2000).

The methodology of Grounded theory was also an opposition to the so-called «theoretical capitalism» (as Glaser 1978: 9 writes about), which some theoreticians engage in pressing the young students of social sciences into the established paths and canons of describing social reality and verifying previously formulated theses, destroying innovation and the ability to 'discover' new theories: «The grounded theorist is not a theoretical serf» (*Ibid.*). It is recommended that he limit the pre-conceptualization of his research plans to the maximum by entering his research area. The researcher does not know whether these concepts will become part of his theory's explanatory categories (Glaser & Strauss 1967: 45). Of course, pre-conceptualization cannot be eliminated; only the researcher is encouraged to focus primarily on a detailed description of the characteristics of the collected empirical material (e.g., notes from participant observation, organizational stories, biographical narratives,

transcription of unstructured interviews, transcription of video recordings or photographs, published research reports, personal documents, auto-descriptions of lived experiences, etc.) before formulating any theoretical claim. Paradoxically, therefore, 'conceptualization' before research in Grounded theory methodology consists in recommending its maximum limitation that important problems and social phenomena in a given area would not escape the researcher's attention and that the concepts created should have full empirical references. Due to its flexibility, this methodology allows us to keep the so-called 'context of discovery' (serendipity), i.e., thanks to its procedures, we can search for and discover phenomena that we did not look for at the beginning of the research. Serendipity is also possible in field research if we are sufficiently open and sensitive to new emerging data (see Konecki 2005: 188-201).

Strauss has been developing his qualitative data analysis methodology, from a moment, regardless of B. Glaser. In the book from 1987 (*Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*), he presents qualitative data analysis procedures on the example of his consultations with students and other researchers. He mentions in it the important role of the researcher's personal experience in formulating categories and hypotheses, using for the first time the term abduction, which was used in the philosophy of pragmatism for Ch. S. Peirce (Strauss 1987: 12; see also Reichertz 2009; Strübing 2007a). This experience should be conceptualized and analyzed; it should not directly enter the theoretical framework if there is insufficient justification. Although the abduction is not only about the role of experience in formulating hypotheses and interpreting data, which simply Strauss stressed, here is a significant trace of the pragmatic way of thinking about scientific research. Abductional thinking concerns astonishment when discovering new facts, not always directly observable. Abduction introduces an explanation (theory) regarding a new experience (novelty) or an unexpected experience (anomaly) (Timmermans & Tavory 2012). The new

knowledge is introduced in the hypotheses however, new combinations of this knowledge by combining different categories can reveal hypotheses that we have not thought about before. In this work, for the first time, Strauss introduces the concept and procedure of the 'coding paradigm' of qualitative data (we have to search in the data for conditions, the interaction between actors, strategies and tactics, and the consequences of actions/events/phenomena) (Strauss 1987: 27-28).

The cooperation with Juliet Corbin (1990) was essential in his methodological achievements. In cooperation with Corbin, the coding paradigm concept was developed (1990: 96-115). The need to develop a 'central category' and its operation contexts were added, and the causal and intervening conditions were proposed. For the first time, the concept of a conditional matrix was also introduced to help develop activities at various levels, from an individual, through the interactional, organizational, social, national, and international levels. The concept of the coding paradigm and the conditional matrix have been criticized by both Glaser (1992) as contradictory to the spirit of Grounded theory and by Kathy Charmaz (2006), which develops a more pragmatic and constructivist methodology of Grounded theory. Criticism concerned the problem of using certain a priori conceptual constructs that are supposed to enforce a specific interpretation of data during coding. According to Glaser, this denies a Grounded theory's basic idea, namely discovering theory from empirical data. Although Charmaz was under the influence of Anselm Strauss, she claims that theory is rather constructed than discovered. Data are not found but constructed. The construction of the theory is based on certain assumptions, which, however, can be modified, because the construction of the theory is based on a certain dialogue with data where the researcher's self-knowledge and knowledge from data allow him/her to change often the research assumptions and reconstruct the existing knowledge (see article Miliken & Schreiber 2012: 685 who show the relationship

between the methodology of grounded theory and symbolic interactionism and pragmatism, even these are often not fully understood by researchers; see also Strübing 2004; 2007; 2007a; see also Bart 2003: 100; 2005: 196-197). Strauss and Corbin clearly showed that their theories are constructed; paradoxically, both the coding paradigm and the matrix of conditions show that the construction of theory takes place by giving a structure to the data by concepts. However, the theory's content and structure are always related to empirical data and are based on them. The construction has the character of continuous relapses from deduction to induction to modify earlier findings (reconstruct categories, change hypotheses, reconfigure theoretical schemes) if the data suggest so. The test for the theory is whether it works, whether it explains and provides interpretation for the phenomena. It is a pragmatic methodological approach that does not tell us whether the theory 'reflects' us the reality (i.e., whether it presents it in the sense of a mirror reflection) but whether it achieves what it intended to achieve, such as explaining the origin of a given phenomenon or allowed to understand it (see pragmatic approach to truth, Baert 2003: 95). Knowledge is not a representation; and it is a form of action that solves problems and changes the world, and the understanding of this world is associated with the understanding also its place in it or gives hope for change and a better world (Rorty 1982: 160-166, 175; 1999; see also Mead 1956: 43-59). Knowledge, according to pragmatism, is the result of problem-solving (Strubing 2007a: 568).

We can quote here very appropriate sentences from the work of W. James, who will explain to us the pragmatic essence of the concept of the 'truth' of some knowledge. These theses perfectly explain what want to get Strauss and Corbin with the help of grounded theories:

The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth HAPPENS to an idea. It BECOMES true, is MADE true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process

namely of its verifying itself, its veri-FICATION. Its validity is the process of its valid-ATION.

But what do the words verification and validation themselves pragmatically mean? They again signify certain practical consequences of the verified and validated idea. (James 2004: Lecture VI).

There is no deep discrepancy between theory and practice in pragmatism. The theory is always connected with practice (Rorty 1999: XXV). Such a practical meaning was given to the sociology of A. Strauss's work, and whose elaboration was possible using the abovementioned methodology of grounded theory.

2. Kathy Charmaz's way

Kathy Charmaz follows the way of Anselm Strauss, the way of pragmatism and Symbolic Interactionism.

Kathy Charmaz advises, unlike Glaser & Strauss (1967), that neither data nor theory is discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We construct our grounded theories through our past and future engagements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research workers. Constructing theories is a process that is never, however, linear. The theory is a challenge and is built on the observations of actions with problem-solving in everyday life by the subjects themselves. The theory is pragmatic in both philosophical and colloquial sense because it can solve real problems and help to understand others. This understanding of the other, which is the main idea of Symbolic Interactionism, is added value here by understanding the scientist's position in the research process. Reflexive thinking on the construction of a grounded theory is inherent in constructivist Grounded theory (Charmaz 2006: 131-132, 188).

The approach of Charmaz assumes that no theory offers either an interpretative portrait of the studied world or its exact image. The participants' hidden meanings, views based on their

own experiences, and theories are grounded in the construction of reality (Bryant & Charmaz 2014; Charmaz 2006: 10). The researcher is part of the analyzed situation, and his/her position, privileges, and perspectives and interactions influence the situation itself (Charmaz 2008: 402). The coding of the research context itself is essential here. And here is the most important departure from the idea of the original grounded theory, which tried to be still objectivistic.

Charmaz ascribes to the classical Grounded theory (and thus the work from 1967), especially to B. Glaser's version's methodology, positivist inclinations.

Positivist definitions of theory treat it as a statement of relationships between abstract concepts that cover a wide range of empirical observations. Positivists view their theoretical concepts as variables and construct operational definitions of their concepts for hypothesis testing through accurate, replicable empirical measurement (Charmaz 2006: 125-126).

The purpose of such a theory is to explain and predict. A positivist theory should be parsimonious, general, and universal. Due to the parsimonious trait, positivist theories are usually elegant in form and simple in their theses. However, according to K. Charmaz, these theories may be too narrow in scope, and at the same time, reductionist in their explanations regarding some simplified model of actions.

An alternative definition, the interpretive definition of theory, emphasizes understanding rather than explanation. According to Charmaz, interpretive theories indicate indeterminism rather than causation, prioritize patterns and connections rather than linear reasoning. This type of theory assumes the emergence and multiplicity of realities and indeterminism (indeterminacy, Charmaz 2006: 126). Facts and values are combined here and present conditional truth (truth as provisional) and social life as a process. For this reason, the interpretive theory, according to Charmaz, is consistent with the Symbolic Interactionism of G.H. Mead, who shares these assumptions (*Ibid.*: 127). Also,

Anselm Strauss (1959) showed that although transformations of identity can be patterned, their appearance is highly contextualized and unpredictable in individual biography. We interpret the meanings and actions of the participants, but they also interpret our meanings and actions.

This theoretical approach emphasizes practices and actions. Rather than explaining reality, social constructionists see multiple realities and therefore ask: What do people assume is real? How do they construct and act on their view of reality? Thus knowledge-and theories-are situated and located in particular positions, perspectives, and experiences. In brief, interpretive theory aims to:

- Conceptualize the studied phenomenon to understand it in abstract terms
- Articulate theoretical claims pertaining to scope, depth, power and relevance
- Acknowledge subjectivity in theorizing and hence the role of negotiation (dialogue, understanding)
- Offer an imaginative interpretation. (*Ibid.*: 127)

Strauss & Corbin (1990) clearly distinguish a description from theory, the theory is abstract, and empirical description differs too much from abstraction and should not be preferred (Charmaz 2006: 127). However, according to Charmaz, theorists go beyond common concepts. They should be close to the participants' interpretation. The theories should provide an interpretative framework through which we can see reality. And here, Charmaz comes close to ethnographic descriptions.

The author also contrasts the concepts of constructivist and objectivist Grounded theory. The use of Grounded theory methods and theorizing are social activities that researchers construct with other study participants at particular places and time periods. So, we interact with data and create theories about them. Moreover, we do not come from a social vacuum; we have previously acquired and/or socially inherited assumptions. We exist in certain «thought collectives» (Fleck 1935).

The constructivist approach gives priority to the phenomena studied and takes both data and their analyses as products of shared experiences, which is consistent with the research assumptions of symbolic interactionism and relationships with participants in the studied area. This is the added value of Kathy Charmaz's concept. The methodological self-consciousness of the researcher is needed here (Charmaz 2014; 2016). The researcher becomes a part of the situation of investigation and her position, perspectives, and interactions that influence the situation itself (Charmaz 2008: 402; 2016: 5). So, the researcher and analyst should be reflective on the subject and her relation to the subject. The grounded constructivist theory is entirely in the interpretive tradition, argues Charmaz, and Symbolic Interactionism. We can see here also the influence of Anselm Strauss interactionism (Charmaz 2008a).

Constructivists study how – and sometimes why – participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations. We should be close to the participants' experiences, but we should also be aware that we cannot replicate them. This approach theorizes the interpretive work that subjects are doing and recognizes that the theory created is an interpretation. The theory depends on the views of the researcher. He cannot stand outside of these views (Charmaz 2006: 130).

Constructivist grounded theorists take a reflexive position concerning the research process and its products and analyze how their theories emerged from the data. Both data and analysis are social constructs. However, constructivists try to be aware of their assumptions and understand how they influence their research, nor do they claim that their research's theoretical conclusions are objective and that they have emerged from the data themselves. The reconstruction of the research assumptions and situation should be very accurate.

3. Conclusions

The constructivist methodological approach does not accept a positivist approach to analyzing variables or searching for a single fundamental process or central category for the phenomenon under study, as does 'classical grounded theory' (Glaser 1978; 1992). Constructivism, in the version of Kathy Charmaz, assumes a hard (obdurate) reality, but constantly changing, and recognizes different local worlds and multiple realities, and explores how people influence local and further, larger social worlds. The plurality of the social worlds is essential for her (see Strauss concept of social worlds, 1978). Researchers adopting a constructivist approach want to show the complexity of individual worlds, views, actions, and experiences (Charmaz 2006: 132; 1990). We can see the influence of pragmatism here. The locality is important as it has been presented in many studies in the convention of symbolic interactionism (Clarke 2005). However, Anselm Strauss wanted to transcend local contexts in his concepts, but only to constantly return to them with the use of sensitizing concepts in analyzing situations and interactions. Kathy Charmaz has done the same but added a strong emphasis on lived experiences and the context of actions following the inspirations of Anselm Strauss (1993).

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USING SENSITIZING CONCEPTS IN GROUNDED THEORY RESEARCH: THE CASE OF CREMATION PRACTICES IN WESTERN SOCIETIES

IRENE PSAROUDAKIS

Abstract

Cremation is currently the most widespread form of managing the body after death in many countries: as such, it is an expression of profound changes in the cultural and symbolic dimensions of contemporary societies. The aim of this article is twofold: the first one is to describe some of the main trends regarding the phenomenon of cremation in Western societies and, in particular, its rapid increase as a choice; the other one is to give an account on the process of constructing a qualitative research design aimed at grasping the social and cultural dynamics that are at the basis of the increasing popularity of the choice of cremation.

Starting from the field research experience that the author carried out, this essay is mainly devoted to proposing and discussing the role of some sensitizing concepts to plan and start a qualitative research process on the practice of cremation. Academic journals usually publish the results of already-concluded empirical research; however, very few articles are devoted to the initial moments of qualitative research, particularly those connected to the construction of a conceptual framework within which the subsequent empirical steps will be developed.

Two sensitizing concepts are presented as conceptual tools that are considered useful to understand the vocabulary of mo-

tives sensitizing individuals to this choice: 'symbolic ambivalence' and 'identity work'. After discussing why these two concepts can be adopted as 'sensitizing concepts' in such an empirical endeavor, the author discusses methodological implications from these conceptual references to advance empirical processes.

Keywords: cremation, death, ashes, sensitizing concepts, symbolic ambivalence, identity work, Constructionist Grounded Theory.

1. Using sensitizing concepts to guide qualitative research processes

Cremation is one of the two most widespread forms of managing the body after death. In contrast to interment, which regards the physical placing of the body usually inside a coffin in the ground, cremation represents the transformation of the body into ashes through combustion in specific cremation facilities. At the end of the process, the ashes are gathered and placed inside a particular container, an urn, and can be subsequently preserved in different ways, following each country's legal regulations, or the ashes may be dispersed in nature. However, there is a symbolic frame underlying this difference. The different ways of disposing of the body after death reflect the social, cultural, and economic characters of every single society and take on a profound symbolic and meaningful value that is closely connected with two personal and essential dimensions: they are an expression of grief (the personal point of view) and beliefs (the collective one) regarding the link between life and death. Beliefs concerning this relation concern, on one side, the importance assigned to death as a life event, and, on the other, the idea (and the faith) whether or not some kind of life after death may exist. These are cultural dimensions to which social sciences have given particular attention, even if a large part of literature focuses on death, especially on the social significance assigned to it in different historical periods (Bryant 2003; Charmaz 1980; Kears 1989; Seale 1998). Despite this,

very little attention has been given to how the body is managed following death.

The rapid increase of cremation throughout the Western world – as statistics notes – represents an element of discontinuity for this lack of interest in social sciences, and sociology. Cremation is currently increasing in many countries (numbers tell us that cremation is preferred over burial) and is rapidly becoming more common even in those areas, such as Italy, where the conflict between an anticlerical movement and the Catholic Church has represented over time a factor that hindered the spread of cremation.

We are recently asked to start research on the incredible increase of cremation practices. The 'Società per la Cremazione' (Society for Cremation) was interested to understand the reason why more and more people are increasingly determined to choose cremation as their way to treat the body after death – not only in Pisa (our town) but in the whole Italy. Results will deepen the outcomes of previous quantitative surveys conducted by our research group¹ and collected in recent books such as *La cremazione a Pisa. Le ragioni di una scelta* (Salvini 2015), and *Donne e cremazione* (Salvini, Biancheri 2020). It is not our purpose to present the outcomes already achieved, but the conceptual and methodological processes (and frameworks) behind our next qualitative research about the same questions. This article is mainly devoted to discussing the theoretical foundations and contents of two sensitizing concepts – conceived as a product of our sociological observations on the data previously collected in the very first step of a project we developed a few years ago about death, cremation, and body treatment.

Let us start going deep into understanding our (qualitative) research design, step by step.

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We do not doubt that Grounded Theory should have been the most coherent perspective to adopt to achieve research goals, while it helps researchers build a theory being continuously 'grounded' in data, especially in case of knowledge scarcity upon the explored issue. Furthermore, this was, obviously, the case. We did know very little about cremation, not only for a biographical reason but mainly because there were few – if none – research experiences on cremation practices, and still, there is not a lot. It seems a brand new field of inquiry to explore, not only in Italy. So we started designing a research process informed by a constructionist Grounded Theory perspective, and the first step we decided to do was following Hebert Blumer's suggestions about the use of sensitizing concepts as guidelines.

Therefore, this article collects all the reflections we made as a scientific group concerning the substantive contents of two sensitizing concepts that appear to be the most appropriate in guiding the empirical efforts. So next pages are mainly devoted to proposing and discussing the role of these two sensitizing concepts to plan and start a qualitative research process about cremation practices (and cremation choice). Another value is that academic journals usually publish the results of already-concluded empirical research; however, very few articles are devoted to the initial moments of qualitative research, particularly those connected to the construction of a conceptual framework within which the subsequent empirical steps will be developed.

We identified two sensitizing concepts as an outcome of a multi-faceted data collection process – that Blumer described as the 'exploration' dynamic (Blumer 1969). We studied statistical data from different sources, interviewed several people, read historical documents and newspaper articles, and checked the scientific literature in sociological, historical, anthropological, and psychological fields. At the end of this first step in the grounded theory research, we decided not to be incredibly creative and to identify two provisional sensitizing concepts, which build on a long tradition in theoretical sociology: 'symbolic

ambivalence' and 'identity work'. We are quite satisfied with the direction we made.

Given this premise, the aim of this chapter is twofold: first, we want to describe some of the main tendencies of the cremation's phenomenon in Western societies, and significantly its rapid increase as a personal choice (referring, obviously, to identity question too); secondly, we suggest how we might provide a useful conceptual framework to understand the changes currently underway, and exceptionally to construct lines of research aimed at grasping in depth the social and cultural dynamics which lie at the base of the choice of cremation in Italy.

We focus here on the first reflections at the kick-off of our qualitative inquiry; these conceptual explorations aimed at building a small nucleus of sensitizing concepts (Blumer 1954) to inspire empirical processes based on Constructionist Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2006). The proposal in using sensitizing concepts such as 'symbolic ambivalence' and 'identity work' (Sandstrom 2003) is driven by our empirical instances and by the need of following the blumerian steps of 'exploration' and 'inspection' (Blumer 1969), and then 'to dimensionalize' (Strauss 1987) them in an empirical field.

In an interactionist perspective, sensitizing concepts are 'interpretive devices' which constitute an orientation between data collection and analysis (Bowen 2006; Charmaz 2003; van den Hoonaard 1997). These concepts represent neither working hypotheses nor precise definitions of 'definitive concepts', but they are a logical and methodological consequence of Blumer's three Symbolic Interactionism (SI) premises (van den Hoonaard 1997). Their meanings come from people we interact with during the research, as we call them co-participants in the research process: Blumer's approach is «grounded in the empirical world, and sensitizing concepts are driven from empirical instances, while at the same time they harvest empirical data for theoretical synthesis» (*Ibid.*: 13). As Blumer affirmed (1969), humans construct and signify their existence and characteristics in their everyday lives: they define objects and expe-

rience an intersubjective reality (Berger & Luckmann 1966) by using subjective and normative strategies through a symbolization process (Mead 1934). In this sense, sensitizing concepts a) are *tools* (constructs of constructs, or 'second-order' concepts, for analytical purposes) that «give the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances» (Blumer 1954: 7), b) are connected with 'observable concrete instances' (Blumer 1954; van den Hoonaard 1997: 2-3), and c) instruments offering 'ways of seeing', despite background ideas (Charmaz 2003) through which researcher can orient his own empirical experience and his research design. Somehow, they are similar to *folk* concepts. Nevertheless, while the latter are highly concrete (or too vague), in sociology, sensitizing concepts – having theoretical aims, like translating human activities (data collected) into social processes and constructing analytic frames – try to be less dependent by the empirical context. However, there are no fixed rules: Charmaz incorporates folk terms as sensitizing concepts (van den Hoonaard 1997: 27-28). Moreover, they are not abstract frameworks because, as van den Hoonaard states, empirical events have a 'concrete distinctiveness' that 'gives shape' to them. Sensitizing concepts thus allow researchers to undertake the work they need to realize a «constant comparative method» (Glaser & Strauss 1967: 105).

While inquiring in the field, the qualitative researcher maintains a proper awareness of the participants' different perspectives (with whom she/he is co-building the research experience, Charkas 2014), gaining the meanings they give to their own experiences. By the particular abductive characteristic of research dynamic, the researcher can use them as a general reference framework that is not definitive, but flowing: it can evolve, be refined, or gain relevance, conforming to the analyzed situations. Furthermore, this is the very relevant feature of sensitizing concepts, because their openness may keep the research process 'curious and open' (Charmaz 2008). More-

over, therefore, 'grounded'. Indeed, even though they focus on every qualitative analysis, we have to treat them as a tentative, as they are open to all the necessary modifications coming both from the constant comparison of the collected data, and interactions with the research participants (Corbin & Strauss 2014). We need to do not forget that, as Blumer (1969), we have to confront a reality that is '*obdurate*' and filled by all the meaningful actions (and lines of) played by humans. Sensitizing concepts may directly involve the meaning-making process of the participants (if they are '*experience-near*' concepts) or the construction of sense made by the researcher (if they are '*experience-far*' concepts). Their *openness* is different from 'vagueness', as Blumer wrote, because they cannot be vague to be empirically and theoretically useful (Blumer 1954 in van den Hoonaard 1997). According to the Grounded Theory approach, sensitizing concepts 'lay the foundation for the data', and researchers may use them as a lens to understand the meanings that individuals confer to their world of experiences. From a methodological point of view, they are instrumental in elaborating meaningful, substantive codes, and to develop them into categories (Bowen 2006; Strauss 1987; van den Hoonaard 1997).

2. Why cremation matters. The growth of cremation practices in Western societies

We underline that, according to Blumer's suggestions (1954), sensitizing concepts refer to cremation phenomenon as a meaningful process, transcending geographical differences, and going beyond daily circumstances (system of values, social structures, cultural frames, etc.), which are relevant for Western people (we are referring here to European countries, and United States). The discussion about our two concepts has no ambition in 'exhausting' the theoretical picture of cremation practice, but follows the purpose of suggesting a scientific proposal for a two-tracked conceptual line of study.

Research strategy has to be provisional and open to change, as in Grounded Theory, for different orientation of subsequent lines in empirical explorations in the same field; by this, the final objective of the investigation is to understand how individuals define their settings and their social relations to the situation (death, and cremation).

There is not enough space here to discuss a delicate and sensitive question as death is (Pсарoudakis 2020), so we focus on why cremation matters as a conceptual issue, starting from increasing these practices in Western societies. The relevance of an empirical study about the phenomenon of cremation, and particularly on the processes of meaning-making which lead individuals in deciding to have their remains cremated, is connected with consistent growth in its utilization in Western countries where interment was the most widespread practice of burial, until a few decades ago. We know that post-modernity depicted notable changes that necessarily involve individuals' symbolic dimensions, and therefore the processes of identity's construction, even if in ways that are likely to be still ambivalent: many long-lasting cultural traditions and religious precepts co-exist alongside a considerable openness towards new practices, and secular approaches to life and interactions.

Adopting the Symbolic Interactionism perspective and the Grounded Theory approach as a «theory/method package» (Charmaz 2014) constitutes a coherent choice to study the processes of change in social practices and symbolic frameworks about death, and body treatment after life.

The reason behind this choice is that, in contrast to other ways of conducting qualitative and quantitative inquiries, a 'grounded' research is not built around a predefined conceptual system: its practices of data collection and analysis are inspired by sensitizing concepts, and research dynamics are open, flexible, and modifiable in light of how the analysis develops in a continuous comparison with reality. Due to an incessant exchange between data (collection) and analysis, we can produce a theory

during the research process (Bowen 2006; Glaser & Strauss 1967): by this way, we can achieve the meaning given to cremation practice by people, and how it varies from their different definitions of the situation (Berger & Luckmann 1966). In the end, the research figures out a circular image, a sort of 'dance' among data collection, data interpretation, and theory construction, in which the researcher herself/himself is at its center.

The 'success' of cremation as a burial practice seems linked to a change in cultural sensitivities and perceptions (individuals' interpretations and symbolizations), within more expansive interstitial areas of symbolic ambivalence of meanings connected to 'social objects' involved in the event of cremation, such as ashes, fire, body, and death itself are. The choice of cremation contains – in contrast to the interment practice – an explicit deliberation expressing a defined will to have oneself cremated, a desire expressed either through enrolment in an organization for cremation managing the cremation, or through a last will. Therefore, this desire's expression involves a specific idea of identity: it is the *outcome* of an identity work, which is practically oriented towards constructing a link of continuity and reintegration of oneself before and after death. We are in front of a dual decision: the first one regards handling of the body, while the second one, as happens in cremation, is about the final disposition of the ashes. In both cases, the meaning-making processes in this decision appear particularly intense, involving individuals' cognitive, emotional, and relational resources.

The following pages are devoted firstly to arguing, openly and flexibly, the relevance of our sensitizing concepts; secondly, to underlining how 'symbolic ambivalence' and 'identity work' could be significant for data collection and analysis of a grounded research process. We will not provide definitions for these sensitizing concepts to maintain the open nature of their semantic extension, and we will propose arguments that will allow

these concepts to connect with specific empirical contexts of research, as we are going to describe.

Nowadays, the spread of this practice is experiencing a general trend towards the 'globalization' of cremation (Davis 2003); nevertheless, the choice of interment, just like the 'management' and 'control' of death and dying (and of health too, in the sense of body treatment), represents the projection of cultural characteristics and institutional, economic, and social factors blending within every single nation. This combination generates an entirely original discourse through which it becomes possible to understand the differences appearing at local, national, and international levels. Europe shows significant differences among its countries (Walter 2012), just like, as we will see shortly, the United States presents substantial diversity.

The practice of cremation is spreading in its modern expressions as a mixed result of three revolutions that have characterized the history of Europe – 1) the Scientific revolution, 2) the French revolution, and 3) the Industrial revolution – especially as a response to demands regarding a greater guarantee of public health deriving from dynamics of urbanization, and of the concentration of the most important demographic events (among which death is) into the cities.

At the end of the 18th century, cremation started to be promoted in France in the name of Enlightenment principles. It was not, in any case, before another century that the practice of cremation scattered through European countries with greater emphasis: the supporters of cremation spread out through the élite intellectual urban classes, as well as through the scientific and medical circles, and they founded Associations for Cremation all around Europe and in the United States. Italy – having become a unified nation very recently, and despite being the Catholic Church's seat – played a significant role in spreading these movements supporting cremation; there, medical conferences were held on the topic, and the first modern crematorium was built (Martin 2013). In reaction to secular, atheistic,

and anticlerical movements, the Catholic Church became further entrenched in its positions and forbade the practice. Only in 1963, in a cultural climate marked by the Second Vatican Council and by an increased openness to the time's sensibilities, the Church modified its stance, tolerating (without promoting) cremation. On the contrary, the Evangelical and Protestant Churches have generally given little relevance to the question of burial on theological and pastoral levels, and for this reason, cremation found fewer obstacles to its diffusion among these Churches. The practice has found useful and rapid diffusion in the last few decades due to the construction of crematoria and technological advances in combustion systems, which have made cremation more practical and less expensive.

Statistics show significant trends. For the Cremation Society of Great Britain – *International Cremation Statistics 1996-2020*, only in a European context, in 2019 cremation as a form of burial has been practiced mostly in Switzerland (85,79%, 2019 rates), Denmark (83,9%, 2018 rates), Sweden (82,95%, 2019 rates), UK (78,10%), and in some of the States of Eastern Europe, such as Czech Republic (79,13%) and Slovenia (83,91%) (CSGB 2020).

Among other countries, it is seen to be particularly widespread as a practice and may become predominant within a few years: in Netherlands (66,95%, 2019 rates), Germany (69%, 2019 rates), Hungary (66,9%, 2019 rates), Andorra (66%, 2018 rates), Luxembourg (65,61%, 2019 rates), and more, show a percentage over 50%. In yet other countries, this practice reached a significant level. In Italy (23,9%, 2018 rates), Ireland (22,69%, 2019 rates), Poland (24%, 2018 rates), Latvia (14,78%, 2019 rates), and Bulgaria (5,08%, 2019 rates) its use is still quite limited, even if we are observing an increasing (CSGB 2020). In Italy, where in 2019 there were 85 crematoria, cremation choice (the relationship between the number of cremations and the number of deaths) grows from 28,93% of deaths in 2018, to 30,68% in 2019. We notice a considerable increase, especially in the last years (the percent-

age had gone from 0,2% in 1970 to 18,43% around in 2013). In Great Britain, the relationship among cremations and deaths was already equivalent to 69,58% in 1990, then jumped to 76,54% in 2015 and 78,10% in 2019 (CSGB 2020). The increase in the number of cremations in the last few years was less rapid in Great Britain than in other nations, but this is due to the obvious fact that it is by now reaching a level of saturation beyond which any further increase will be limited.

Within the Scandinavian countries, the situation of Norway would appear to be peculiar, as it presents a much lower rate (39,69% in 2015, and 44,09% in 2019) than Denmark (83,9% in 2018) and Sweden (82,95% in 2019), where the rate of cremation is among the highest in the Western world. In Norway, the reasons for this singular development of cremation in respect to neighboring countries are in no way connected to Norwegian Church (which takes no stance against cremation practice). As Hadders observes (2013), the reasons have to do with the limited availability of cremation facilities (only 26) (CSGB 2017; 2020), which also present higher costs, and with the vast availability of space for cemeteries and burial based on interment.

Generally, we observe a gradual increment of cremation rates in many of the European countries in the last few years. In the United States the phenomenon of cremation has seen an incredibly substantial rate of growth as statistics prove, and cremation rates continue to rise, showing a surprising speed of growth exceeding the projected rates: in 2018, the US cremation rate was 53,1%, by 2023, the US cremation rate is projected to reach 59,4%. According to the Cremation Association of North America (CANA), between 2014 and 2019, the annual growth rate per year (that is, the difference between the yearly percentages of cremated deaths averaged over five years) is 1,52% (CANA 2020).

The percentage of cremations in US (Fig. 1) towards the number of deaths in 1998 was equal to 24%. In the following years, this rate doubled, reaching 48,6% in 2015, and 54,6%

in 2019 (but 45,2% in 2013) (CANA 2016; 2019; 2020). The projections show how the national cremation growth rate reaches its peak velocity and will begin to slow, but cremation rates will continue to grow across most US countries. Generally, there is a clustering effect, for which what was a personal preference began to be the norm in the community, giving rise to a cultural shift towards a new tradition, that is cremation. Moreover, cremation speed still grows at a rate of 5%, with no evidence of changes or reversing: this is a period of rapid increase that will peak around 60%. The annual growth rate – five year average in US (Tab. 1) was 7,2% in 2004-2009, 8,7% in 2009-2014, and 7,6% in 2014-2019.

Canada shows a slightly different situation and trajectory, but experiences a similar increasing trend (CANA 2020): in 2004, the percentage of cremations had already reached 52,4% of the total number of deaths; in 2014, the percentage was equal to 67,8%, and in 2019 it was 73,1% (Fig. 1). The annual growth rate is instead decreasing: from 8,1% (2004-2009), 7,3% (2009-2014), to 5,3% il the last years (2014-2019) (Tab. 1).

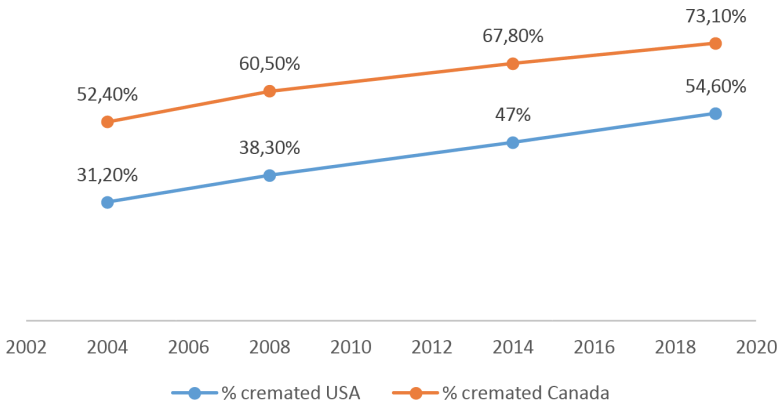


Fig. 1. Percentage of cremations – USA and Canada
Source: our data processing CANA 2020

Tab. 1. Annual Growth Rate – USA and Canada		
Annual Growth Rate – Five Year Average		
	USA % Cremated	Canada % Cremated
% Change 2004 - 2009	7,2%	8,1%
% Change 2009 - 2014	8,7%	7,3%
% Change 2014 - 2019	7,6%	5,3%
Annual Growth Rate per year over 2014-2019	1,52%	1,09%
Source: CANA 2020 (www.cremationassociation.org)		

Nevertheless, the United States shows a certain differentiation in the distribution of cremations within its states. For *CANA Annual Statistics Report 2020*, ten states in 2018 had a percentage of cremations higher than 70%: Nevada (79,8%), Washington (78%), Oregon (77,6%), Maine (76,9%), Montana (75,8%), New Hampshire (75,1%), Hawaii (73,6%), Colorado (72,2%) Vermont (71,7%), and Wyoming (70,9%). On the contrary, the states with a low percentage are Mississippi (26%), Alabama (31,4%), Kentucky (33,4%).

The growing diffusion of cremation in Europe and the United States shows how the interdependence between burial and religious persuasion, although still present in some areas (such as in Southern Europe and the Southern countries of the US), cannot be used to explain the variegated distribution of the phenomenon and the increase in sensitivity in individuals towards this possibility (Hupková 2014). The legal regulation of cremation and cremation facilities' construction are certain factors that gradually favored this spread. Nevertheless, these elements are hardly sufficient to obtain a profound idea of the transformation underway, which, according to some scholars, must be traced back to changes in ways of thinking and behavior of actors in Western societies (Prendergast, Hockey, Kellaher 2006). The processes of secularization, as well as (and even more efficaciously) the spread of differentiated forms of implicit

religiosity (Bailey 1998), translate spiritual needs and questions about the critical life events (such as death) into responses and everyday practices that are negotiated subjectively. More and more, the meaning given to one's destiny resides in the dimension of identity rather than about the continuity of some eschatological design of a divine or natural origin, or a form of friendly or generational community (such as reference to one's ancestors). The representation of one's death, because of the individualization processes and of the fragmentation of social life, reflects a substantial disconnection from the community and gives space to the construction of an '*imagined community*' (Anderson 1991) that is reinterpreted according to one's position within the networks of individualized and contingent relation (Seale 1998; Simon, Haney, Buenteo 1993).

The multiplicity of cultural traits connoting the social worlds of individuals and the frameworks of meaning where the choice of burial is deliberated, is expressed in forms of symbolic ambivalence, in which the persistence of traditional practices co-exists with the dynamics of re-negotiation of those practices in the everyday experiences (and courses of life) of individuals and groups. This circumstance leads to the construction of new practices and choices related to events – and turning points too – in the individual's life, such as death. In this frame, the symbolic ambivalence that involves the 'social objects' connected with cremation's experience constitutes an essential conceptual trait, that can be used as a starting point for gaining an adequate understanding of the phenomenon of cremation.

3. Symbolic ambivalence in ashes, fire, body, and death

Although cremation represented a conflictual 'political and symbolic ground' between secular thought and religious tradition in the past, today this conflict succeeds and 'transcends' through the weakening of the 'totalizing' nature of theological and ideological frames of reference, and of the conditions of belonging

to a (religious) community or to a social group that connects back to such references. The dynamics of secularization and implicit religiosity involve and overwhelm every form of history, including loyalty towards identifying stable symbols and rituals, whether these are religious or secular. *Symbolic ambivalence* calls up the variety of possible interpretations of symbolic contents connected with the 'images' of the objects characterizing cremation as a process – for example, ashes and fire.

Let us consider the variety of significance ashes have: this 'object' is meaningful and charged with relevant symbolic references, connected to religion in the first place. «You are dust, and to dust you shall return», we find in Genesis, 3:19; it is a passage that can be interpreted in the sense of a return to the Earth (under the Earth?), from which one was formed by the divine hand, or literally in the sense of the transformation of the material into the immaterial, of which dust, in the appearance of ashes, is the final and impalpable representation.

Here, a correct interpretation of the line is not the point on the doctrinal level, but we would like to emphasize the way that these symbolic references are reinterpreted in people's everyday life: as Davis writes (Davis 2003; Davis & Mate 2005), the ashes are like a 'canvas' where it is possible to sketch out the traits and images of one's own identity. Furthermore, it is hardly off-point to underline that in the Christian tradition, ashes represent the residual dust from the burning of the blessed olive tree, and ashes are placed on the forehead of the faithful on the first day of Lent as a symbol of human frailty, and therefore of the necessity of contrition and fasting as an adequate preparation to embrace divine salvation. Contrition and fasting constitute a first experiencing the condition of loss and death, from which the faithful will then be released through the event of the resurrection. In folk terms, 'turning to ashes' recalls the result of a destructive event, of the annihilation of a material entity, of which nothing remains but an ashen residue. This represents the image of transit from one dimension to another, but nothing remains at the end. Therefore, in standard views, ashes may

take on a symbolic meaning full of anguish, related to a sense of destruction on one side and frailty on the other. As much as a return to the original state from which we were all formed (the 'dust'), this represents the necessary provision for rehabilitating the human beings definitively from a 'slavery' condition realized in the material and social dimension ('salvation' or, in another view, 'liberation'), because ashes are connected to the anguish of the irrelevance of one's own bodily (and not just bodily) existence. However, other interpretations are possible. Ashes can be the symbol of purification and liberation; the purifying fire is not necessarily an element of destruction of what is contaminated (the body), and therefore a symbol of punishment (such as in hell), but it could be an instrument through which the material, once definitively liberated in the form of ashes, may reunite with the universal harmony of life. This circumstance represents an interpretative transition that is not necessarily influenced by any neo-paganism but evokes a deep, and probably unexpected, significance that seems to be always more widespread in current ways of meaning-making (Juppe 2005). Therefore, processes of meaning and sense-making also necessarily cross representations of (one's own) death.

According to many scholars, in the past century, death represented a sort of cultural taboo. It is an event to relegate to the private dimension (which includes the prospect of hospitalization) and is to be put off for as long as possible (Elias 1982). Death constitutes a threat to the 'logic of modernity' as it introduces a profound discontinuity between the 'celebration of life' and its end. It is banished from the public domain and, as much as possible, negated through the importance given to the body, vitality, youth, and health. Finally, death is held off by technological tools utilized for restricting the natural decline of the body or prolonging life through medical treatments, or surgical interventions (Shoshana & Teman 2006). These psycho-social traits would signal at the same time the beginning of a new phase in how to conceive death in Western society, characterized by profound ambivalence. Death would be 're-entered' into the ho-

horizon of meanings for individuals after its 'de-Christianization' (Vovelle 1986) and its 'prohibition' (Ariès 1974). This process could occur in two possible ways: either as something to fight against and put off, through developments in rationalization and the 'medicalization' of life, or, in contrast, as something to integrate within the everyday life dynamics. Within this process of integration, the choice for cremation finds its place, since such a choice is likely to be a reflection of an attitude towards death, which, in contrast to what we saw earlier, is no longer 'deleted' or 'put off' or 'suspended', but re-appears with a greater degree of awareness. According to Morin (1951), people are living longer, but this does not mean that they are living better or in better health; we live in a tension towards a-mortality, that is, towards an attempt to prolong life indefinitely, but it is precisely for this that death exists within the horizon of the daily possibilities of social actors. Moreover, it is precisely this tension towards a-mortality which confirms for us, as also affirmed by Charmaz (1991), that both life and death are aspects that routinely worry people, and not only those who are more or less seriously ill.

In an ever-increasing number of cases, the aging processes are lived and perceived in a framework of relational dependency where one feels to be as a duty for others, especially for one's family members. Therefore, cremation represents the image of a choice made to avoid a situation in which surviving family members are burdened with further obligations by the death of a loved one. This choice is not merely an 'altruistic' expression about the clearing of several materials and economic obligations connected with mourning and the expression of grief. However, it also regards the provisional dissolution of symbolic and community-based connections (the *symbolic interactions*), of which funeral rituals are also an expression and routines for honoring the memory of the deceased. These obligations have different nature, not just connected with the final physical destination of the body and the coffin, but also with the social practices linked to how long the body and coffin reside in the

cemetery. Those are the duties that Fuchs (1969) describes as the 'exercise of grief'. The cemetery and the grave mark a boundary between the living and the dead, which functions to remove death from contemporary social life. The exercise of grief is not itself immune to consistent symbolic ambivalence. On the one hand, the cemetery is necessary to reproduce and guarantee discontinuity and separation, ensuring that the dead remains confined to a devoted space – thereby reducing the sense of anxiety and anguish about death. On the other hand, the living conserves and reproduces practices of continuity within that spatial discontinuity, in the form of recurrent visits to the grave of the deceased (e.g., turning to the tomb as if dead were present), acting as if that presence could be possible only within the limits of the cemetery walls.

In many countries, the cemetery constitutes a particular space that is protected, circumscribed, and marginal compared to the center of the cities: in Northern Europe, it appears as more integrated into the urban area – often as natural green areas –, while in the Mediterranean countries the cemetery is a closed and external space, if not extraneous, to the vital center of activities and social dynamics.

There is no doubt that cremation's choice responds to the need to limit the cemetery expansion and its distance from the living world and possibly reduce the separation and discontinuity between the two worlds. The ever-growing attention given to the practical and ecological considerations of the '*management of death*' and the body of the deceased (e.g., the organization of bureaucracy, transformations in expressing the grief, talking to the deceased and visiting the grave, reducing the cost of funeral rituals) is, therefore, possible by a representation of death and by a treatment of the body that renounces to all the dependence on well-established symbolic and cultural routines. Thereby, it opens up a dimension of freedom that involves individuals who reflect on their death and those involved as surviving family members or friends. Therefore, through cremation, death is brought back to the individuals on a relational level,

and it appears to be a choice that is free from established rituals. Simultaneously, although representing discontinuity with traditional ritualism, this practice introduces a new and 'personalized' ritual. It is not by accident that the technological procedures of cremation are carried out in specific environments (crematoria) that have the same architectural structure of classical temples; these constructions have been designed to contain, besides their technical systems, spaces where secular or religious rituals for final farewells can be held, in which the dimension of community regains predominance (Loqueur 2008). The particular terminology used (the 'Farewell Hall', the 'Garden of Remembrance') evokes a language full of symbolic meanings which, nevertheless, are not connected to any structured and relatively unchangeable liturgy but include a plurality of options left open to creativity and innovation (Ramshaw 2010). Within a framework characterized by this symbolic ambivalence, cremation establishes a different way of ritualization. Eventually, it involves a different conceptualization of what Van Gennep calls '*les rites de passage*', including funeral ceremonies and mourning rituals, to be understood as separation rites, marginal rites, and aggregation rites (Van Gennep 1909). Death experience belongs now more to private sphere; this cultural transformation has not canceled, but only modified the farewell rituals, persisting in 'other' spaces where individuals can express the practices of pain, sharing them with others, and therefore relocating mourning (and death) in a diverse everyday life dimension (Psaroudakis 2020).

4. Identity work and cremation

As was previously stated, cremation's choice includes the expression of a specific desire – in a given moment of the individual's existence –, generally ratified through enrolment in an Association for Cremation or a last will. This possibility can be considered as an effort in building continuity between life and death, despite death. This strategy appears completely evident

if we consider the two-pronged decision that characterizes the choice: the first regards the decision to have oneself cremated; the second concerns the final destination of the ashes. In both cases, we are in front of a decision that considers the event of one's death and poses it as an object for an intense 'inner conversation'. Consequently, we introduce here the second sensitizing concept guiding our research design: the *identity work*, that is intrinsic in the cremation dynamic and expressed through the dispersal of the ashes.

The identity work also represents the reason for the increase in the number of cremations in Western countries. As we previously noted, the percentages are indicators of the 'return' of death in individuals' representations, given that this implies an explicit decision taken in life.

However, questions regarding the precise moment of an individual's existence, such as when a decision is taken (maybe a turning point), and the personal and social conditions – the personal biography and the definition of the situation –, investigate essential information for comprehending the phenomenon: they refer to the empirical content of our concept, which must reach a specific understanding. Unfortunately, such data seems still to be unavailable due to a scarcity of empirical research about this issue. However, the choice of joining an Association for Cremation appears to be relatively independent of the fact of ones having entered a 'dying trajectory' (Glaser & Strauss 1965; Unruh 1983). The choice for cremation can also be made in good health and a phase of life not yet characterized by old age, just because this decision is mainly inherent not to death but to the identity and identity construction.

Such a crucial choice involves a complex process of individual interpretation and representation (a *vocabulary of motives*), it implies a substantial investment in personal resources (the personal biography), and needs a conspicuous *emotional work* (Hochschild 1979) directed especially towards constructing a line of continuity with one's own identity after death. Identity work is understood as a 'reflection' which considers *death be-*

fore death, finalized towards constructing a coherent image of oneself post-life; such a strategy may well be not necessarily incompatible with an aspiration to eternal life, or to a condition in which, with death, life itself takes on to be complete. However, this meaning is constructed 'from this moment on' through constructing a coherent identity link among life, death, and after-death (Sandstrom 2003). By formulating a coherent reconstruction of the Self after death, individuals project themselves into an environment of practical realization, potentially exceeding the limitations of life as lived in the present, as if coming to an awareness that their own life has, in any case, had a sense and importance (Hallam, Hockey, Howarth 1999; Riley 1983; Strauss 2000). In the past – and, perhaps, given the current ambivalence, still today –, death was represented as a radical crisis of identity, and role's identity was anchored to role's expectations. Differently, the choice for cremation allows a re-consideration of death and an attempt to '*re-order*' personal and relational ecologies, in which a coherent integration of identity roles is possible (Simon *et al.* 1993).

Moreover, cremation may be considered a final and definitive act for practicing a sort of individual freedom and an act manifested in placing one's own body beyond every religious or cultural obligation. In specific ways, this attempt could represent a 'redemption' in respect to the condition of existence-in-life, in which the freedom of deciding for oneself is variously limited by cultural constraints, rules and norms, social expectations, and more. From this point of view, the choice about the final disposition of the ashes appears to be particularly significant: even if it is subject to the legislation of the single nations, and within these legal constraints, horizons of possibility open up for the exercise of individual freedom, and to express one's own personal (*True*) Self (Hochschild 1983).

The ashes of the deceased are consigned inside an urn to the family members, who then are obliged to carry out all the functions connected with the ashes' destination. This final disposition can take one of three different forms:

a) the urn can be conserved integrally in a specific location, called 'columbarium', generally within a cemetery or, if permitted by law, it can be conserved at the home of a family member or in some other pre-selected place, such as the garden of the house;

b) a second possibility is that of the ashes being dispersed within circumscribed and delimited shared areas, also regulated by local legislation, and contained within cemeteries (the so-called 'Gardens of Remembrance');

c) the third possibility is that of dispersal into nature.

Each one of these three environments' choices as the destination of one's ashes requires a lot of 'identity work' (Sandstrom 2003). The conservation of the ashes into an urn in a well-delimited area allows being individuated and identified. Moreover, being the recipient of feelings of devotion, affection, and caring and preserving a 'physical' closeness with the loved ones. It means, in the final analysis, not 'falling' into the anguish of the total loss of one's identity and the possibility of sharing with others one's condition (that is, the sense of resting together) (Psaroudakis 2020). Moreover, the possibility of constructing visible areas where the urns to be placed, conserved, and seen as objects of devotion, represents an important symbolic element, as this proposes a change in the cult of deads that does not 'disrupt' the traditional practices. Finally, in evidence within a cemetery's dedicated space, the temple and the columbarium show another possible burial manner. They symbolically affirm that cremation does not constitute a contemporary residue of some ancient and profane ritual but is a practice to be taken into consideration possibly.

Another possible interpretation is given by the choice of the dispersal of the ashes into nature. The sea or the mountains (which appear to be the most usually chosen areas of dispersal) are undisputed symbols of the infinite and its access; the ashes dispersal among mountain peaks or in the sea waters shows the desire of returning to what cannot be confined or circumscribed, to what is in perennial motion but maintains its

unlimited coherence, its 'universal' harmony (the Earth). Dispersal foresees the intentional 'sacrifice' of every structural, legal, and social border – even if the action is itself subject to legal limitations. The cemetery walls (or the sides of the urn) exercise no boundaries; the social practices of devotion and caring on the part of family members are redefined in other ways, and brought back to their essential communicative and symbolic dimension: the deceased is everywhere, therefore always near, and, in the final analysis, truly eternal. Perhaps we might see it realized, in another way, that highest of human aspirations, the defeating death itself, which is brought back to its natural, and at the same time its social meaning. The sea and the mountains – or other geographical-symbolic spaces too –, in which dispersal is possible are not generic spaces, but they have *significance*: they are spaces charged with meanings coming from life-experience, to which is attributed a symbolic value during life, and as such they define continuity of identity between life and death. The experience of death and the treatment of the body after death are moments of essential continuity with life: they do not represent the definitive dissolution of one's identity. Whether one chooses to retain the ashes within the urn or to disperse them, this continuity is sought for and affirmed: the urn guarantees the possibility of individuation-identification in symbolic places (as much as they are still socially segregated). Simultaneously, dispersal into nature allows the realization of identity in its most profound symbolic elements.

5. Methodological implications

This essay had the purpose of throwing some light on the cremation phenomenon according to an interactionist approach, considering that this practice has not attracted any particular interests from social sciences, particularly from sociology.

The quantitative increase in the number of cremations, also in countries in which the traditional practices of burial through interment have long been predominant, requires an interpreta-

tive effort to comprehend the qualitative aspects of this choice, especially those connected to the meanings assigned by individuals to non-ritual practices (within the horizon of funeral rites in Western countries, and the body disposition after death). More precisely, we have attempted to sketch a basic conceptual framework to move within for further empirical investigations. To reach this goal, we used the methodological devices of sensitizing concepts to guide any future data collection and data analysis; we called such concepts 'symbolic ambivalence' and 'identity work', but they can be modified and/or integrated along with the constant comparison with data (and reality) (van den Hoonaard 1997). It is worth noting how these concepts have not been defined and make no reference to specific empirical contingencies; they are open and flexible frameworks – as in the Grounded Theory method –, whose contents need to be specified through the in-depth empirical explorations of individual life experiences.

These sensitizing concepts could and must affect further methodological aspects and choices in the research process. Giving some examples, we will mention three main points:

1) *The formulation of research questions.* In this area, the two sensitizing concepts offer the possibility of defining multiple research questions, and therefore, different lines to follow through the empirical inquiry development:

What are the events, the occurrences, the situations within life experiences leading to the emergence of an interest in cremation? Is there a connection between this interest and the individual's religious, political, or philosophical orientation? How was this connection symbolically *negotiated* at the end of life? Through what interpretative processes were images such as 'destruction of the body through fire' and 'reduction of the body to ashes' elaborated? In what way has the image of one's death influenced the choice for the cremation? In what way do relationships with others enter into the choice for the cremation? What is the influence of cultural systems and stereotypes?

What is the role played by religion in this choice? What is the preferred final disposition of one's ashes? What is the connection between that disposition and the nature of the individual's personal and social identity?

Many others could be proposed, and clearly, each one of the above questions might be broken down still further for lines of more in-depth examination, which, however, will have to emerge precisely from the processes of empirical inspections.

2) *The definition of an open background in the management of interviews.* The ways interviews are conducted and observations are made during data collection are subject to much variability; grounded studies, nevertheless, are often characterized by intense and in-depth interviews (Charmaz 2006; see also Charmaz 2014). The sensitizing concepts can provide cues and anchorage points for initiating interviews, exploring individual life experiences, overcoming any moments of 'communication block' during the interview (and during narratives), constructing possible semi-structured protocols, and conceiving new paths not contemplated within the identified conceptual horizon.

3) *The gradual refinement of the conceptual framework* constitutes a constant point of reference for the process of theoretical sampling and saturation and the construction of theoretical categories. In the following picture (see Figure 2), we find a synthesis of the thematic connections denoting the semantic content (and extension) of these two sensitizing concepts discussed earlier. These connections may represent a guide aimed at guaranteeing an initial coverage of the process of theoretical sampling, which nevertheless must necessarily be broadened and include additional elements. Some issues presented in the picture traced out below need to be investigated more deeply. How does the body's image in life connect to the image of one's own body in death and the choice of cremation? Furthermore: how does the choice of cremation reconnect with the costs of managing the event?

Once they are further specified, amended, and integrated according to an abductive logic, these sensitizing concepts can also provide useful references for building the framework of a coherent and grounded theory in the data.

In our discussion, neither of the two discussed concepts is a candidate for a *conceptual category* in the analysis. They exist on a level of abstraction, which is too general. They will be useful to guide the constant comparison of data grounding on which the researcher could create more coherent categories. Only for illustration can we refer to the case of the term '*re-ritualization*': this could represent a somewhat useful analytical category for synthesizing, in the case of identity work, the enduring need to recognize (*identity continuity*) and to be recognized (*exercise of grief*), even in changing of practices in which that recognition is realized. About symbolic ambivalence, this conceptual category could underscore both the identity dimension of the individual (the non-ritual choice that introduces a discontinuity into traditional practices), and the social dimension (the search for personalized but shared, new practices).

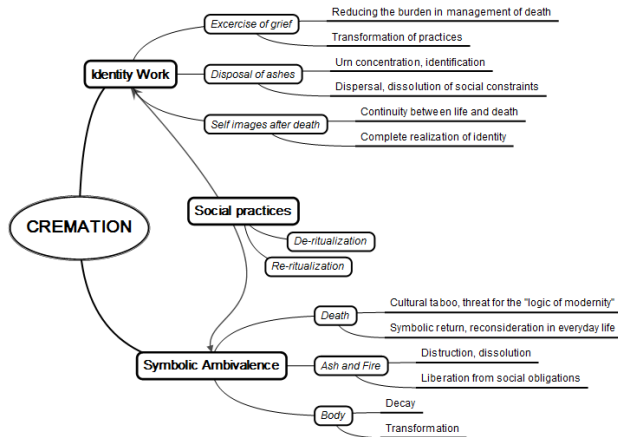


Fig. 2. The conceptual dimension of 'symbolic ambivalence' and 'identity work'.

6. Conclusion

In a certain way, this essay implicitly aspires to promote the interests of scholars, particularly those inspired by Symbolic Interactionism:

- a. in the issue of cremation, which has been relatively ignored by the social sciences until now (it could drive deep and new insights on the change in lifestyles and individual attitudes towards one of the most significant events in life, as death is);
- b. in conducting Grounded Theory research, by understanding how the research process depends on participants' meaning-making dynamics, it is strictly connected with Blumer's and Mead's perspective about identity and (social) identity construction.

Suppose it is true that the cremation phenomenon can exactly be read in light of a 'return' of death itself within the symbolic horizon of individuals, contrasting what has been certified by the most accredited over the last few decades' literature on this topic. In that case, we recognize how much could be crucial that social sciences lend to this practice its attention, with the aim of carefully and profoundly examining the current changes in the cultural (and individual) dimensions. In this regard, the phenomenon of cremation, because of the deep (symbolic) ambivalence characterizing it and the multiple meanings social actors attribute to it (the identity work), could indeed represent an inspiring field for empirical (qualitative) research and theoretical debate.

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THE CASE FOR A CRITICAL REALIST GROUNDED THEORY RESEARCH DESIGN

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Abstract

Although a constructivist approach is currently the dominant grounded theory methodology, its development into arguably three separate families highlights the versatility of grounded theory methodology. This chapter proposes a grounded theory methodological framework which diverges from the popular constructivist approach and is, instead, heavily influenced by the classic, Glaserian approach but situated in a critical realist philosophy. It will examine each of the dominant three families of grounded theory methodology and discuss the epistemological and ontological dilemmas faced when applying a critical realist philosophy in place of those already established. This discussion is used as justification why a critical realist approach must rely heavily on classical grounded theory.

This chapter explores the importance of the emancipatory goal of critical realism and how grounded theory can be used as a tool to give voice to the subjugated or alienated. Critical realism has been criticised as a philosophy without a methodology and this chapter explores the relatively unfamiliar territory of marrying critical realism with grounded theory. The chapter intends to open discourse into how Glaser's emergence of theory can be intertwined with the emergent properties of reality explored in Bhaskar's critical realism to get a deeper understanding of the reality which gives rise to action. The methodological debate which is explored centres around Bhaskar's

understanding of the 'real' domain of reality and the subsequent emergence of empirically observable actions through a generative property. It is proposed that these processes take place in open systems and as such can be researched using a grounded theory methodology.

Although a heavily methodological chapter, it also explores how the authors have developed this approach for educational research, the importance of remaining within the data when designing a critical realist grounded theory research design and some of the potential problems and suggested solutions to coding data using a critical realist lens.

A retroductive, rather than an inductive, framework is proposed as a means of analysing empirical observations. The benefits and disadvantages of each approach is considered from both a methodological and a heuristic perspective. Examples from doctoral research are given to situate the discussion in data and provide a platform to contribute to the limited discourse a propos retrodution in grounded theory.

Finally, the chapter will suggest how the process of constant comparison can be amended to ensure that all data is reduced, down critical realism's generative property of emergence, as far as possible, to its causative concepts. These causative concepts are then considered, with examples, as a means of identifying the reality experienced by actors. It is then suggested that this not only gives the researcher conclusions which can be drawn from their data, but also the opportunity to suggest practical approaches which can be employed either on a micro or macro level to address an identified cause of alienation.

Keywords: critical realist grounded theory, critical realism, grounded theory, classic grounded theory, retrodution, research methods.

1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the reader to a critical realist approach to conducting a grounded theory (GT) study, with specific focus on 'generative' methods to identify stratified social process. It explores the importance of the emancipatory goal of critical realism and how GT can be used as a methodology to give voice to individuals or groups who may experience alienation or oppressive factors. Following this, suggestions are given, with worked examples, on how the processes of open coding and constant comparison can be amended to ensure that data is reduced in line with critical realism's philosophical approach. The chapter continues by proposing a retroductive framework as a means of analysing empirical data. As the philosophy of critical realism has some unique properties, consideration of these precedes the exploration of critical realist GT methodology, allowing for the alignment of critical realism's epistemological and ontological perspective with GT methodology.

The chapter presents data from research carried out at a secondary school in the UK which examined alienation of pupils from their learning. The vast majority of pupils who participated in the researched identified the cause of alienation from their learning was due to their own disruptive behaviour in lessons. All interview excerpts discuss the participants' lived experiences and subsequent opinions. The research aims involved exploring the perception and feeling of alienation and the complex associated relationships to generate a substantive theory. In addition, there was an emancipatory aim to redress the imbalance in academic progress associated with alienation (Dotterer & Lowe 2011; Putwain, Nicholson & Edwards 2016). Participants in the study have, during their time at secondary school, become known by senior leaders for repeated reports by staff as displaying disruptive behaviour. Subsequently, they have often struggled to form effective relationships with some of their teachers. During the interviews, participants were asked to

explore their experiences of their relationships, both positive and negative, with different teachers. Teachers were also interviewed to begin to develop an understanding of the experience of both actors in reciprocal relationships. The examples given throughout this chapter will demonstrate how the research adapted GT coding methods and comparative analysis to generate a substantive understanding of the area using a critical realist paradigm. As this chapter explores a critical realist GT research design, it will use extracts from interviews with teachers and pupils and the coding techniques applied to contextualise the approach discussed.

2. Critical Realism

As a philosophy, Bhaskar's (1978) critical realism places an important distinction between knowing and being. It argues that knowledge is transitive, but that the world of being is intransitive (Scott 2010). This suggests that the critical realist asserts a reality consisting of natural and social objects (Sayer 2010), but also declares that this reality manifests itself *empirically* through a variety of emergent properties based on various determinants (Bhaskar & Danermark 2006). This property of emergence, where objects have «causative or generative mechanisms» (Sayer 2010: 91) is a result of critical realism's approach to ontology and epistemology. Critical realism does not only state that the world consists of natural and social objects, it posits that reality is stratified into three domains; *real*, *actual* and *empirical*. The boundaries of these domains are demarcated by the limits of their ontological and epistemological claims.

The *real*, focusing on ontology, is where the critical realist perspective of a singular true reality stems from. This domain is where structures and mechanisms occur – they are separate from the way they are experienced; that is to say they are intransitive (Bhaskar 1978). The *actual* refers to events which may or may not be observable; these events are generated

by the mechanisms and structures lying in the *real* domain. Through this, causative property of emergence, actions and experiences are then observed in the *empirical*; thus the *empirical* domain is entirely epistemological in nature. This property of emergence, through a stratified reality, is unique to critical realism and separates it from naïve realism which makes an assumption that there is a close correspondence between reality and the terms used to describe it (Bryman 2016).

For a researcher adopting a GT methodology, the ontological primacy given by critical realism can cause some tension due to the perceived alignment with positivist research; however, there are two key implications which separate it. Firstly, critical realists argue that the researcher's conceptualisation of reality is a way of knowing that reality (Scott 2010), differentiating themselves from positivists who would argue their conceptualisation directly reflects reality. Secondly, the *actual* domain of reality allows critical realists to include in their explanations theoretical terms which are not directly observable. It is within these two associated characteristics of critical realism where the GT researcher can find agreement. The argument that actions which have been observed in the *empirical* domain, might be caused by a theoretical construct in the *actual* domain which was not directly observable brings together components of both positivist and constructivist approaches to produce a comprehensive philosophy of science (Brown, Fleetwood & Roberts 2002). The constructs must be present for the action to have occurred. For example, a pupil talked about an incident between them and a teacher at the start of the academic year. The incident involved a disagreement between the pupil and the teacher about where to sit in the classroom. Although, on the face of it, this could seem to be a minor incident, the pupil viewed this as the catalyst which led to a subsequent lack of relationship between the teacher and the pupil. The critical incident shared by the pupil is a recollection of an observed event and so is in the *empirical* domain. On further exploration, the participant suggested

possible explanations for the cause of this incident. These were ideas and so the participant is offering analysis which begins to enter the *actual* domain – a theoretical construct which is causing the observed effect.

For a novice researcher, critical realism's rejection of a conventional 'successionist' approach to causation in open systems as regularities in favour of 'causal powers' and 'liabilities' (Hoddy 2019) might cause enough unease to leave the philosophy unexplored. The researcher can find themselves struggling to align a methodology which fits this philosophy. However, rather than invoking fear, critical realism's unique approach should bring reassurance to the researcher, as these 'causal powers' are what allow for critical realism to be applied to both natural and social sciences. The causal powers and liabilities give potential outcomes which may or may not produce a regular pattern of events, allowing the philosopher or researcher to accept that where one cause is in operation, a regular pattern of events would occur (like in natural sciences), but where many causes are in operation, such as in the social world, the events might not be regular. For example, as the research with pupils alienated from their learning progressed, the phenomenon where participants felt 'a sense of belonging' surfaced. Following this line of enquiry, it arose that different sets of experiences had led actors to feel welcomed in some classrooms, but not in others. When participants felt welcome in a class, they also felt a sense of pride in their work; where they did not feel welcomed, participants spoke about not caring about the quality of their work. Logically, a successionist GT is not suitable here, but a critical realist GT can be used to explore the individuals' experiences to develop a theory which encompasses the range of insights shared by the participants. When exploring this idea, the researcher could argue that social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner 1986) accounts for pride in their work, where social actors strive to achieve a positive sense of self, however, this would likely fit better with a successionist approach. In

search of further literature, the researcher might encounter Brown (2000) who suggests that this theory only accounts for one group of attitudes; other factors must also be involved. It follows that a critical realist explanation is there must be more than one set of causal powers in this phenomenon leading to an irregular pattern of events. Bhaskarian critical realists accept that the emergent properties of objects interact with each other to result in new properties emerging from such combinations. These properties rest upon two understandings; firstly, there is an ontological relationship between structure and agency, and secondly, that theory, or conceptual relationships frame all observational statements. It is important that when applying this philosophy, the researcher understands that social processes take place in open systems (Scott 2014).

This categorisation of ontology as «intransitive» and epistemology as «transitive» (Bhaskar 2008: 20) demonstrates how critical realism gives primacy to ontology over epistemology. Bhaskar continues by describing the «epistemic fallacy» of positivists, where an assumption is made that ontological questions can be rephrased as epistemological ones (Bhaskar 2008: 35). Indeed, this is a problem which needed careful navigation when researching alienated pupils in secondary school. When exploring the constructs which led to disruptive behaviour of secondary school pupils, the theme of 'respect' kept recurring. As a critical realist researcher, the social structure of respect, existing as a reality, was of interest. As part of the research, 'respect' was accepted as an object, but careful navigation of the epistemic fallacy meant that it was important to maintain a constant awareness that each participant's knowledge of the object is likely to be different. For example, when participants said their teachers didn't show them respect, this was not accepted as true because it assumes that each participant's knowledge of respect is the same. However, it was accepted that the participants did not feel respected because that is a state of being, not a state of knowing. Although subtle, the crit-

icism of the epistemic fallacy is a logical and crucial aspect of critical realism, which might go some way to explaining why critical realism has a paucity of aligned methodologies (as criticised by Yeung (1997) and Fletcher (2016)). Fletcher (2016) identified that much of the literature on critical realism can be classified into high-level philosophy or reports on empirical research, neither of which outline clear methodologies or methods. As a result, established researchers have nothing to tempt them to exploring critical realism, and emergent researchers have a lack of explored methodologies with which to begin their critical realist research careers. Therefore, as a philosophy without a methodology, critical realism needs examination and care must be taken when choosing a methodology and constructing an effective research design.

3. Critical Realism and Grounded Theory

In their seminal text, Glaser & Strauss (1967) stress from the outset that the intention of GT was that it could be used across a range of philosophical approaches. They try «to stimulate all sociologists to discover grounded theory» (1967: 7) without giving a certain philosophical stance as a prerequisite. Furthermore, Glaser and Strauss go on to say their «principle aim is to simulate other theorists to codify and publish their own methods for generating theory» (*Ibid.*: 8). This chapter responds to their call for sociologists to experiment with the methodology. The critical realist researcher will find themselves looking at the emphasis given to the need for the researcher to identify the theory within the limits of the data (*Ibid.*: 108). This suggests there are positivistic tendencies in the methodology which a critical realist can align themselves with. Furthermore, Glaser & Strauss' reticence to use description as a mode of analysis, stating it should only be used in «service of generation» (*Ibid.*: 28) allows the critical realist to consider using grounded theory as a methodology. Although later adaptations of the methodology (see Charmaz 2006; and Corbin & Strauss 2015) adopt-

ed interpretation and subjectivism, the original discovery of GT steered clear of these, which suggest a critical realist can apply their philosophy to the original methodological framework. GT's ability to work with both positivist and interpretivist approaches due to its flexible approach (Corbin & Strauss 2015), lends itself to critical realism's positivist approach to ontology and interpretivist approach to epistemology. Indeed, it has previously been suggested that GT is capable of handling critical realism (Liver 2012; Wurst et al. 2002).

Within *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), Glaser and Strauss drew on positivistic interrogation techniques with a pragmatic approach (see Age 2011 for detailed analysis of this), resulting in a qualitative research design that stimulates theoretical emergence through an inductive process, whilst employing deductive reasoning through negative case analysis.

When applying critical realism to research, the researcher intends to establish causal explanations for phenomena experienced in the *empirical* domain. Critical realism places a greater emphasis on being than knowing and thus requires a framework where observed, epistemologically framed, actions can be worked backwards to try to establish a natural or social, ontologically framed, object which led to the action. Of the many variants of GT (Bryman 2016), classic (or Glaserian) has a methodological approach which resonates most closely. It gives primacy to discovery and emergence (Age 2011), thus reducing the scope for creativity by the researcher; it is intended that the researcher finds a mid-range substantive or formal theory from within the data itself. Glaser's statement that «all is data» (Glaser 2001: 145), the classic design's use of the term 'discovery' and the suggestion theory emerges from the data restrict the creativity of the researcher when identifying the theory. It is these methods of avoiding interpretation which mean a critical realist GT research design must be heavily, if not solely, influenced by classic GT.

4. Developing a Critical Realist Grounded Theory

Critical realism has an emancipatory objective. Bhaskar (1978; 1986) describes this as the need to move people from *demi-reality* to the *cosmic envelope*. Bhaskar (2002) describes *demi-reality* to include exploitation, oppression, conflict and alienation in contrast to the *cosmic envelope*, where these characteristics do not exist. A desire to enable social emancipation, it is argued, must be the driving concern for a critical realist researcher (Belfrage & Hauf 2016). Bhaskar's language is unequivocal when addressing issues of inequality: «The principle of sufficient practical reason states that there must be ground for difference. If there is no such ground then we are rationally impelled to remove them» (Bhaskar 1998: 676).

Critical realism's call to redress inequality has been well explored by Wilson & Greenhill (2004) who make strong arguments to researchers that such emancipatory goals should not be marginalised to make way for more pluralistic approaches. It is, therefore, important that when adopting a critical realist approach to grounded theory, it should be done when the purpose of the research is to explore the agency or sociological environment of participants who experience a form of inequality. Conversely, research which aims to find patterns of consistency in social life or large social groups is not suitably aligned with a critical realist GT methodology. The critical realist lens, when applied, requires the researcher to focus on individuals or groups of individuals who are alienated from society or micro societies through action, inaction or personal characteristics which generate difference.

The area of emancipation is where the integration of critical realism and GT is at its strongest, and therefore, the research used to frame this chapter has a strong emancipatory goal. The critical realist philosopher's stratified view of the world makes them question what aspect of reality has led to an individual's

or group of individuals' action. A grounded theorist aims to explore an area of sociology «from *a priori* assumptions» (Glaser & Strauss 1967: 3) to generate a substantive theory which suggests how the primary concern can be resolved. Glaser & Strauss' (1967) discourse about the roles of theory in sociology also align with an emancipatory objective. For example, they posit that one role of theory is to predict and explain behaviour, whilst another role is to give the practitioner an element of control of situations. Thus, if the researcher aims to produce a theory which facilitates the ability to manage predicted behaviour in order to reduce alienation or marginalisation, we have an emancipatory purpose for research. In the example used within this chapter, the research aimed to establish a theory which explains the reality and causative mechanisms leading to pupils being alienated from their learning. Furthermore, it is hoped that actors can then use the research to predict behaviour and minimise the impact of the phenomenon in the future. Conducting GT research with a group of people experiencing alienation gives the opportunity for the substantive theory to now not only suggest some resolutions but for these to be emancipatory in nature. That is to say, they correlate with Bhaskar's (2002) desire to move those experiencing *demi-reality* to the *cosmic envelope*.

Glaser claims «all knowledge is not perspectival. Description is perspectival; concepts that fit and work are variable» (2003: 48). If we apply Glaser's use of 'knowledge' to Bhaskar's use of *real*, this statement is arguably less jarring to constructivists. Knowledge located in the *real* domain is ontologically not perspectival, but our means of communicating this is *empirical* and thus open to interpretation; perspectival. Thus, when developing abstract categories, we can use accepted GT coding methods to generate these, identify tentative categories and link properties and dimensions. Glaser & Strauss (1967) suggest data are coded with as many categories as possible. Therefore, in order to ensure that the GT methodology has a critical realist

philosophy driving it, there must be an additional layer or code: which domain of reality does the incident correspond to.

The development of open coding in critical realist GT required an additional category to be coded, identifying the domain of reality the data relates to. Particular care was taken by the researcher when coding this concept; Table 1 gives the approach used to identifying the domain of reality.

Tab. 1. Critical Realist domain open coding modus	
Domain of Reality	Open Coding modus
Empirical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant recalls experiences or phenomena which they witnessed or were a part of. There is no analysis, solely recall. • Direct observation by researcher.
Actual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The participant suggests reasons or analyses to explain the phenomena. • The participant is making inferential comments.
Real	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will not be coded during open coding. The researcher's aim is to identify the causal mechanism or mechanisms in the substantive theory.

An overview of the open coding and comparative techniques used are shown in Figure 1 below. They are based on the constant comparative technique described by Glaser & Strauss (1967). There are some key points for consideration and explanation. Firstly, the term 'generated' has been used deliberately. As explained earlier, CR's generative mechanisms state that causative real structures generate empirical events (Bhaskar 1978; Bhaskar & Danermark 2006; and Sayer 2010). Critical realist GT requires the researcher to travel backwards, down the generative mechanism. Therefore, the term generate is applied to show the generative mechanism working in reverse; the process of coding an incident generates a conceptual category the incident fits into. Secondly, the number of categories

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ries and properties are for illustrative purposes. As previously discussed, Glaser and Strauss' (1967) suggestion to code as many categories as possible means there will likely be hundreds of categories and properties coded for initially. Both conceptual categories A and B are shown as being generated from two separate *empirical* events. Again, this is for illustrative purposes and a concept could have only one or many sources. Finally, supporting literature is shown as a way to generate potential properties for theoretical comparisons. The point at which the researcher chooses to introduce literature to a GT study is one which is open to debate (see Charmaz 2006; Martin 2006; and Urquhart 2013). The suggestion for a critical realist GT research design is that literature can be introduced after initial concepts have been established. This should allow for the generation of the first set of conceptual categories and emergent properties without influence from literature.

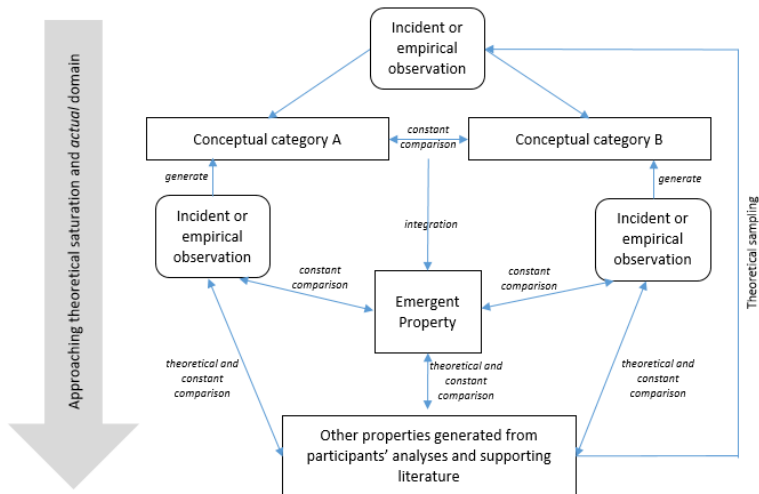


Fig. 1. Open Coding.

The grey arrow to the left indicates how the concepts become saturated as analysis moves away from the *empirical* and into the *actual*.

Mirroring «the constant comparative method» employed by Glaser & Strauss (1967: 105), Figure 1 shows how analysis of the incidents and *empirical* observations are coded into conceptual categories. Although open coding can be either descriptive, conceptual or theoretical (Saldaña 2009; and Vollstedt & Rezat 2019), classic GT should avoid description (Glaser 2001) where possible so the conceptual categories in Figure 1 should be generated by conceptual or theoretical codes only. Following their generation, Figure 1 continues to show how the conceptual categories are now compared against each other and integrated to generate an emergent property. Similar to Glaser & Strauss (1967), the emergent properties might use *in vivo* codes, where the participants' own language has generated them, or they might be generated by the researcher who has identified a pattern across different conceptual categories. Emergent properties are subsequently refined through comparison to incidents and their generated conceptual categories. It is recommended that as the researcher works through this, they use memos to reflect on the process by being analytical and conceptual (Vollstedt & Rezat 2019).

The iterative comparisons outlined in Figure 1 should allow for a series of *actual* emergent properties, grounded in data, to be generated which relate to phenomena located in Bhaskar's *empirical* domain (Bhaskar 1978) of reality.

To illustrate this, the following examples of open coding are given.

Interviewer: Do you know if he feels valued in any other lessons?

Teacher: I know he doesn't in Spanish. I've had him in tears ["upset"] not wanting to go to Spanish. But again, a lot of it is ability ["ability in subject"], so some of these lads are quite low ability and trying to learn something like a language that they're never going to really get very far with ["perceived value of subject"].

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They've sort of been forced to do at key stage three ["forced uptake of subject"], they won't have to choose it necessarily at key stage four.

This illustration of the coding used shows how the conceptual categories which the responses fit into have been generated. The participants share their experiences (the incidents or empirical observations shown in Figure 1) which are then used to generate the conceptual categories. To ensure the substantive theory is grounded in the data as much as possible, in vivo codes (Glaser & Strauss 1967) are used where possible. Figure 2 gives more detail, summarising how the conceptual categories have been generated from the incidents and, furthermore, includes a final column showing the additional, critical realist code applied to the conceptual category.

Data	Codes (Conceptual Categories)	Critical Realist domain of reality
I know he doesn't in Spanish. I've had him in tears not wanting to go to Spanish.	Upset	Empirical
But again, a lot of it is ability, so some of these lads are quite low ability and trying to learn something like a language that they're never going to really get very far with.	Ability in subject	Actual
They've sort of been forced to do at key stage, they won't have to choose it necessarily at key stage four	Perceived value of subject	Actual
	Forced uptake of subject	Empirical

Fig. 2. First example showing generation of conceptual categories.

This is an important step for the critical realist researcher, as when revisiting the data, the researcher can see at a glance whether the conceptual category was generated through empirical events only or had some level of analysis offered by the

participants. The participant has shared experiences they have witnessed or been a part of, so these are coded in the empirical domain. When the participant offers some analysis, this conceptual category is coded in the actual domain. It is important to remember that when a participant shares analyses, this is their analysis and thus their experience of the *actual* domain of reality. When comparing incidents within the same category, it is likely that the participants will vary in their analysis. Or put a different way; the generated events in the *actual* domain have been interpreted by varying personal agency. Thus, when reflecting, the researcher must absent their personal agency in order to carry theory to the most logical conclusion (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

Later in the interview, the participant mentioned respect. The following example (Figure 3) shows how coding has been used to generate conceptual categories from the participant's responses to the question 'do you think teachers need to earn respect of their pupils?' In this example, the participant is talking about their opinions and beliefs. The generated conceptual categories are coded to the empirical domain. Although the participant is offering their opinion which involves some analysis, they are not analysing a specific event, and so their analysis is not reaching the actual domain, so must remain located in the empirical domain.

Subsequent interviews were carried out with a range of teachers and pupils to explore some of the categories which had begun to arise during the first interview. Figure 4 shows some extracts from a pupil talking about their experiences and how a memo has been used to add context to the codes. Glaser (1978) suggests memos should be kept separate from the data and that coding should be stopped before writing the memo, so thoughts are not lost.

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Data	Codes (Conceptual Categories)	Critical Realist domain of reality:
<i>"You should probably, you earn peoples respect in everything else you do, so in reality we shouldn't just demand respect from the kids. We have to make an effort with it you know. We can't expect them to come into the classroom and just do what we say they've got to."</i>	Pupils feeling valued Respect Expectations Power	Empirical
<i>"They do what you say because you want to do it for us. I don't know, like you say its an 'it' that is really difficult to define."</i>	Power Relationships Desire to Behave	Empirical

Fig. 3. Second example showing generation of conceptual categories.

Data	Codes (Conceptual Categories)	Critical Realist domain of reality:
<i>"She [the teacher] is just demanding, and she'll go to me and my friend first and mainly us two get picked on. Just treated unfairly."</i>	Expectations Pupils feeling (or not feeling) valued Injustice	Empirical
<i>"We was arguing [with another student] and the girl told us to F off. My friend got sent out but she [the girl] never got into trouble for it."</i>	Pupils feeling (or not feeling) valued Injustice	Empirical
<p>Memo:</p> <p>The participant has spoken about the feeling of injustice and his own bad behaviour as a result (and potential cause of this). It was not explored whether the participant is aware they are harming their potential GCSE outcomes and if they are, why he still doesn't begin to behave.</p> <p>Additionally, this pupil conveys through their language they do not feel valued. The conceptual category 'pupils feeling valued' already exists, but it should be changed to 'pupils feeling (or not feeling) valued' to reflect responses from both participants.</p>		

Fig. 4. Participant 2 (a pupil).

In a subsequent interview with a different participant, a similar response was given to participant 2. This participant described a breakdown in the relationship with a teacher which had reached the point where it was in a negative cycle. Acting on the memo written after the previous interview, the participant was asked whose responsibility it is to change the dynamic of relationship with the teacher. This demonstrates how memos can be used to enhance subsequent interviews and ensure relevant data is collected.

As the data analysis continues, and emerging themes arise, constant comparison and integration of categories lead to emergent properties beginning to develop. This is demonstrated in Table 2.

Tab. 2. Example showing generation of emergent properties from conceptual categories	
Conceptual Category	Emergent Property
Fairness	Social justice. Actors feel injustice is present within school or classroom structure.
Injustice	
Helplessness	Lack of self-worth. Actors experience a range of phenomena which reduce the pupils' perception of their value and self-worth, limiting their ability to express agency.
Power	
Pupils feeling (or not feeling) valued	

Table 2 shows how two emergent properties have been generated through comparison and integration of the conceptual categories. The emergent properties are now compared back

against both previously coded conceptual categories and new ones as the properties approach saturation.

Now an initial sample of data has been collected and analysed, it is suggested that theoretical comparisons (Corbin & Strauss 2015) can now be made. This is when the analyst takes a conceptual category or emergent property and makes a theoretical comparison where the notion is the same but the «situation from life or the literature...might be substantively different» (Corbin & Strauss 2015: 95). In our example, the conceptual category 'pupils feeling (or not feeling) valued' has been coded in Figures 3 and 4. Theoretical comparisons can now be made to *feeling valued* allowing the dimensions of the conceptual category to be explored and compared back to see if these dimensions also apply. They can also be made to *lacking self-worth*, as this is an emergent property of *feeling valued* (see Table 2) which has been generated through integration and comparison. Further data can now be collected (theoretical sampling) to explore if these properties emerge through interviews.

From a critical realist perspective, the theoretical comparisons can help to move ideas from the *empirical* to the *actual* as the experiences shared are theoretically compared against each other to identify the events occurring within the *actual* domain (emergent properties) which are producing change. When all *empirical* events have been moved to the *actual* domain, the researcher can begin to embark on the search for mechanisms which lie in the *real*. When searching for these mechanisms, it seems logical that it is emergent properties, not the people they derive from, which will allow for the identification of these mechanisms. As data is coded, the codes abstract the meaning away from the individual who said them. When the conceptual categories have been integrated into emergent properties, the mechanisms driving these are now so abstracted from the individuals they were initially coded from that the researcher can

be confident these refer to patterns and not individual actions. Critical realism asserts a singular true reality but understands this reality emerges and is interpreted differently in the *empirical*. By comparing mechanisms, the researcher is allowing for the concepts to gradually become more identifiable through constant comparison, coding and categorising.

Each step should allow the researcher to look further back along the generative mechanisms and begin to approach the *real* domain. Brown's (2009) argument that the process of learning is laminated or stratified and incorporates multiple mechanisms including physical, biological, psychological and sociocultural further supports this mode of analysis. It is argued that, if the research is located in Brown's (2009) sociocultural and psychological domain of learning (which corresponds with critical realism's claim that the social world is systemically open), it is within this openness where inferential judgements can be made about an objective reality. Done correctly, this method of analysis maintains the epistemological and ontological stance of critical realism whilst allowing the researcher to interrogate data.

5. Retroduction

After open coding, the researcher is left with a series of emergent properties located in the *actual* domain, thus the analysis can now focus on the identification of *real* mechanisms. The process of searching for these *real* mechanisms involves a type of coding called retroductive coding. This process is a critical realist GT feature of delimiting the theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967) where conceptual categories and emergent properties are reduced. This causes the emerging theory to become more generalised meaning one emergent property will encompass many conceptual categories. It is important to remember that in critical realist GT, the aim of the researcher is to ensure that the substantive theory describes the *empirical* by explain-

ing or identifying the generative mechanism or mechanisms in the *real*.

Retroduction (Belfrage & Haur 2016), in its simplest terms, requires the researcher to ask «what must be true for this to be the case?» (Oliver 2012) during data analysis. This simple but powerful modification should allow the researcher to try to identify the causal mechanisms taking the data backwards through the emergent properties of a critical reality.

The critical realist requires a theory to explain, to the best of the data's ability, the phenomenon in the *real* through experience in the *empirical* (Scott 2005). This then permits for emergent mechanisms to be studied which move the phenomenon from the *real* to the *empirical*, identifying the stratified social process. An aspect of a critical realist philosophy is that of fallibilism, which can be described as the epistemological position that doubt can be cast on all accepted truths (Margolis 1998). Accepting the social world operates in an open system, where objects do not operate in a consistent manner (Scott 2005) means there could be two different observable manifestations which stem from the same element in the *real*. Taking the earlier example of a 'sense of belonging' as a causal mechanism in the *real*, this manifested itself in different ways. Whilst the majority of the participants felt a lack of a sense of community, some pupils felt there was a sense of community but that they didn't fit into it, perhaps because they felt a belonging to a sub-culture. Thus fallibilism, whilst providing an insight into the complexities of critical realist emergence also presents obstacles for the researcher. The fundamental changes, by introducing retroductive coding to GT's constant comparative techniques (Glaser & Strauss 1967) outlined here address these complexities. Retroductive coding can help researchers produce a substantive theory to explain the causal mechanisms and *real* social objects which lead to observed phenomena.

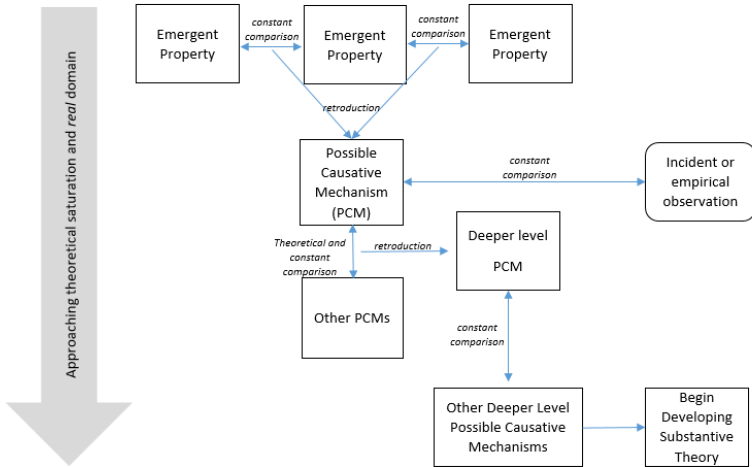


Fig. 5. Retroductive Coding.

The emergent properties generated through open coding are now subjected to constant comparison. In reductive coding, properties are not only compared to conceptual categories and incidents as they are in open coding; they are now also compared to each other. The aim of this is to integrate properties through the process of retribution. Grounded theorists are familiar with using abduction as a means of making a cognitive leap to infer new meaning.

According to Glaser (2002), abduction is a process where the researcher frees themselves from worry about data accuracy and emphasises a focus on relevant concepts which fit generated theory. It does not require accurate description and so frees the researcher from worries about trying to achieve this. Glaser & Strauss (1965) demonstrated how the researcher, when presented with participants experiencing similar phenomena, but with differing perceptions can lift a range of perspectives to an abstract level. Abstraction allowed Glaser and

Strauss to conceptualise incidents in the endeavour to identify unifying patterns. This process of analysis favours a focus on concepts the data fits into, requiring the researcher to interrogate the data in lieu of their personal agency. Abduction can, therefore, move data from an *empirical* observation to an *actual* understanding. The concepts the phenomena are coded with are suggested unobserved *actual* events or unified patterns generated by *real* structures and mechanisms.

Abduction, as a method of logical inference (Reichertz 2009) can only take the data part way towards the critical realist goal of identifying *real* mechanisms. Of the many families of GT, Glaser's constant comparison and iterative techniques take us closest to identification of Bhaskar's *real* structures. Rather than jettisoning abduction, retroduction uses much of the same processes but asks the researcher to apply a slightly different approach. As conceptual categories and emergent properties become integrated, and theoretical sense of each comparison is made (Glaser & Strauss 1967) the critical realist GT research design asks the researcher to take time to reflect again. This period of reflection should now focus on retroduction. In this chapter, it is demonstrated how the researcher interrogates the categories and theoretical comparisons by asking «what must be true for this to be the case?». There are some obvious pitfalls which need to be navigated carefully to ensure the researcher's personal agency does not interfere (see Sartre's bracketing out, 1957: 631). Glaser (2002) asserts that the researcher does not compose the story, but through tedious constant comparative techniques and theoretical sampling the theory emerges. As the researcher begins to delimit the theory, Glaser & Strauss (1967) argue that through reduction, the researcher can now begin to formulate their theory with a smaller set of core theoretical categories. Here again, is a difference to classic grounded theory in that retroduction does not lead to core theoretical categories. The purpose is to travel backwards through critical realism's generative mechanisms

rather than produce a set of categories which encompass those previously coded for. The act of retroduction has, instead, left the researcher with possible causative mechanisms (PCMs). The resulting PCM is the researcher's first view of the *real*; it is a possible *real* mechanism which has causative or generative properties which led (in part) to the observed incidents.

In Table 2, the summarised emergent properties 'social justice' and 'lack of self-worth' were generated. Figure 6 demonstrates how the retroductive question can be answered for the emergent properties, and gives the resulting PCM.

Emergent Property	Retroduction	PCM
<p>Social justice.</p> <p>Actors feel injustice is present within school or classroom structure.</p>	<p>Actors, both pupils and teachers, are aware that social justice, fairness, self-worth and power play important roles in developing positive pupil-teacher relationships. Where a dimension to this relationship is missing, the power imbalance reverts to the authority figure and the pupils experience alienation through powerlessness.</p>	<p>Powerlessness.</p> <p>Actors who experience powerlessness do not have the ability to express their agency and so aim to recapture so power by attempting to undermine those who hold it.</p>
<p>Lack of self-worth.</p> <p>Actors experience a range of phenomena which reduce the pupils' perception of their value and self-worth, limiting their ability to express agency.</p>		
<p>Memo</p> <p>The PCM 'powerlessness', when applied back to the emergent properties remains relevant, as it does when applied to the original conceptual categories. Powerlessness, as the inability to influence your surroundings will contribute to a lack of self-worth – especially if the pupil sees their peers contributing and influencing their environment. Seeing this would stimulate feelings of social injustice and so it suggests pupils who have a negative relationship with a teacher feel powerless to change it, and the wider school structures within which they are members.</p>		

Fig. 6. An example of retroduction.

When asking this retroductive question, it is also a good opportunity for the researcher to write a memo highlighting how the process has limited researcher bias. The memo in Figure 6 shows how any researcher bias is limited through comparison to original emergent properties and conceptual categories. In summary, retroductive coding begins by comparing and integrating the emergent properties (generated in open coding)

and subjecting them to the retroductive question. A suggestion to further limit bias by remaining 'within' the data is to take this period of reflection as an opportunity to commence an additional round of data collection. The researcher should take the stance that the purpose of this round of theoretical sampling is to objectively identify if the PCMs are true for the participants. Maintaining objectivity through self-awareness and checking how the PCMs arose should add rigour to the approach (Gasson 2004); any potential bias imposed through retroduction can be addressed through the next steps of coding and constant comparison.

As saturation approaches, the researcher has these PCMs to code data to. The researcher should begin to see various *empirical* observations as emergent properties of PCMs; that is to say, they are beginning to identify a causative mechanism which is driving the phenomenon being observed. Similar to how Glaser & Strauss (1967) treat theoretical saturation, any new incidents which do not fit the PCMs should be categorised and placed in a memo to allow for inclusion in the substantive theory. In the final stages of critical realist GT, the PCMs are compared against each other and theoretically compared to identify a deeper level PCM. The deeper level PCMs are similar to higher level concepts, but differ in the same way the PCMs differ to core theoretical categories; they have been retroduced.

An example of a theoretical comparison for the data used in this chapter could be exploring the experience of powerlessness in school pupils. The researcher might identify literature which supports the PCM but also find underlying properties of powerlessness which can be integrated to the PCM to develop a deeper level PCM. As PCMs are further reduced and delimited to find deeper level PCMs, the substantive theory is beginning to take shape. The data, now organised into deeper level PCMs and memos represents the theory, grounded in data and located in critical realism's *real* domain. This allows the theory

to be organised into major themes, outlining how generative mechanisms and causative concepts lead to incidents and phenomena. Furthermore, interrogation of the data has led to a depth of understanding of the topic. This allows suggestions to be made to address and reduce the observed alienation which was the initial stimulus for the research project. These suggested actions address the emancipatory objective of critical realist research.

Figure 7 summarises a critical realist GT research design, giving an overview of the process, illustrating the intent of a critical realist researcher to travel backwards, down the domains of reality.

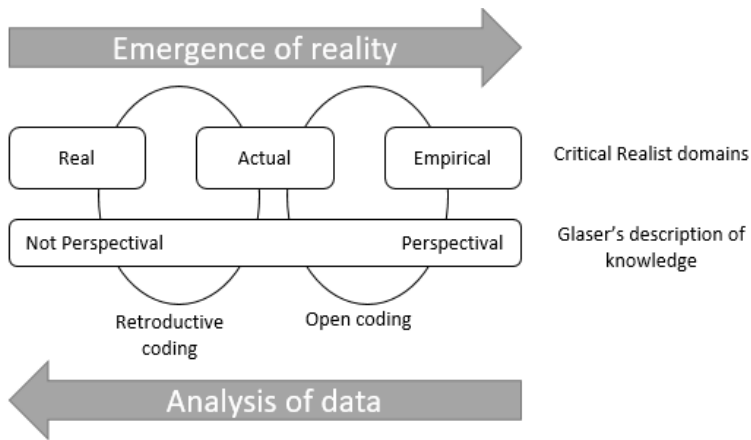


Fig. 7. Overview of the critical realist GT research design.

The critical realist domains of reality and their emergence are shown alongside the Glaserian description of knowledge, identifying the similarities. The mode of data analysis is shown opposing the emergence of reality, highlighting the need for the researcher to access the deeper levels of a critical realist reality through open and retroductive coding.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has established how classic GT is well suited to support a critical realist philosophy. It has demonstrated that the discovery of GT, as a response to the dominance of quantitative research, resonates with the epistemological and ontological stance of critical realism. The emancipatory objective of critical realism has been linked to Glaser & Strauss' (1967) GT, stating that critical realist GT should only be used when the research aims have an emancipatory goal. Examples of participant groups who could be included were given as pupils in school who are not accessing their learning, but this should be expanded to include all groups of people who experience alienation. Perhaps the most significant contribution to discourse from this chapter are the proposed changes to open coding and the constant comparison method. It is hoped these changes, including the need to code for the critical realist domain, with a suggested coding modus and the move to retroductive coding in place of theoretical or axial coding allow for an alternative approach to GT for researchers who do not hold a constructivist philosophy. Gasson highlights some of the difficulties GT researchers must navigate; particularly how much of GT is based on «inductive conclusions from a superficial analysis» (2004: 85) and the need to be sensitive to participants' varying «accounts of reality» (*Ibid.*: 88). The critical realist GT methodology suggested in this chapter addresses these issues of rigour by introducing retroductive techniques for a deep analysis to identify the causal mechanisms for varying experiences of reality.

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ORTHODOXY AND OPENNESS IN (CONSTRUCTIONIST) GROUNDED THEORY

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Keywords: Constructivist Grounded Theory, qualitative methods, orthodoxy, sensitizing concepts, iteration, abduction, CAQ-DAS.

This chapter is dedicated to answering the following questions: how is it possible to recognize a grounded inquiry process distinguished from other qualitative approaches? What are the principles or criteria whose observance allows us to claim that we are doing Grounded Theory legitimately?

The next few pages aim to put forward some arguments that may help those who think it appropriate to draw inspiration from Grounded Theory to organize and carry out their research. Sometimes happened to read papers in journals or attend presentations at international conferences. The authors declared in advance that they had been inspired by Grounded Theory – without it being clear from the subsequent discussion what methodological features justified this inspiration. In other words, the description of the research architecture, however, did not make it possible – in whole or in part – to recognize the essential criteria that are typical of the Grounded method.

Jane C. Hood argued in an essay in the now-classic *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory* that

a great many people claiming to be using GT methods are not doing anything that would be recognisable as such even when using the most inclusive definition of the term. [...] For some authors, use of the term 'grounded theory' is simply a justification for engaging in qualitative data analysis or doing some form of coding. For others, 'grounded theory' simply means building theory inductively from data (Hood 2007: 151-152).

Hood's problem concerns a fundamental misunderstanding between a generic inductive qualitative approach and Grounded Theory.

Kathy Charmaz introduces the issue of the criteria through which the quality of grounded research can be assessed. She points out that «...scholars will likely judge the grounded theory process as an integral part of the product» (Charmaz 2006: 182; see also Charmaz 2014), suggesting that the recognition of grounded research does not depend on the results it achieves but on the process through which these results were accomplished. It follows that the quality and recognisability of Grounded Theory research depends on compliance with a series of essentially methodological criteria concerning how the research was conducted. According to Hood, it is not possible to speak of Grounded Theory research without having practiced three essential aspects – so crucial that they have been defined as the 'Troublesome Trinity' – namely «1) theoretical sampling, 2) constant comparison of data to theoretical categories, and 3) focus on the development of theory via theoretical saturation of categories rather than substantive verifiable findings» (Hood 2007: 163). According to Kathy Charmaz, the criteria for assessing the genuineness and quality of a grounded investigation are credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness (Charmaz 2006: 182-183).

The issue I would like to address in this chapter concerns scholars' strategies to document that they have correctly observed and implemented the criteria of recognizability and quality, as outlined by Hood and Charmaz. The scarcity of space in journal articles or conference presentations lead authors to

privilege discussing the outcomes of the investigation carried out, rather than the process that led to the construction of those outcomes. However, this latter aspect is at least as necessary as the presentation of the substantive results since they become relevant (and legitimate) only under the methodological choices through which they were generated.

I thought it useful to propose a reflection that will help young qualitative scholars, especially when they wish to be inspired by (Constructivist) Grounded Theory and to 'observe' (and declare) this adherence in their empirical work.

No scholar, with rare exceptions, can legitimately present himself as the most faithful and accredited interpreter of a theoretical-methodological perspective or model.

Indeed, scholars have contributed, and continue to contribute, to the development of the perspective, that is recognizable based on their empirical production and manuals. In this regard, we should note that the number of articles claiming to adopt Grounded Theory (constructivist or not) is particularly conspicuous, as are the manuals dedicated to presenting the essential aspects of GTM (just to give some example, we will mention here: Bryant 2017; Bryant & Charmaz 2007; Bryant & Charmaz 2019). All these manuals, in particular, contribute to the construction of an '*orthodoxy*' – that is, a set of principles and rules that characterize and identify the Grounded method – which it is advisable to observe.

As is well known, however, the Grounded Theory perspective is articulated in a vast number of variants that prefigure a fluid and dynamic horizon of possible references – a plural set of orthodoxies, sometimes very different from each other in their methodological options. The very development of the perspective is based on the innovations, convergences, and deviations that occur within the variants themselves. Each of these orthodoxies has produced a sometimes substantial body of manuals. On the one hand, this has led to the consolidation and 'legitimization' of these orthodoxies. On the other hand, it has favored the spread of the perspective as a whole. The risk of

fragmentation into orthodoxies is fortunately countered through frequent dialogue between the different variants, some of which show convergent elements and similarities on epistemological and methodological levels (Morse et al. 2009). More generally, we should note that manuals' multiplication referring to qualitative research methods constitutes a somewhat controversial circumstance. One of the aspects that characterize qualitative methods is precisely guaranteeing the researcher a substantial margin of freedom in conducting the investigation. Consequently, a qualitative handbook should be oriented towards posing and discussing methodological problems and possible ways to deal with them, rather than stating 'constitutive features' and 'essential elements' of a given methodological perspective.

At the same time, there are identity features of Grounded Theory (from now on: GTM) in terms of methodological and procedural choices – for instance, in the processes of data collection and analysis. It is precisely to these 'identity' aspects that the following pages will be devoted to: the research process could hardly be defined as 'grounded' if these aspects are not exposed and 'respected'.

A last note: to proceed with the discussion, I deemed it necessary to restrict the field of observation to the different 'variants' of GTM, limiting it to the Constructivist Grounded Theory (from now on: CGT) (Charmaz 2003; 2008; 2014). This choice depends on two reasons: first of all, this variant constitutes one of the most widespread references in the 'extended family' of GTM, as well as one of the most 'open' in terms of degrees of freedom allowed to the researcher in carrying out his research. Secondly, it is a variant that exhibits an intimate coherence with the epistemological and methodological frameworks of Symbolic Interactionism – and thus, more than others, constitutes a coherent «theory-method package» (Charmaz 2014).

The identity criteria that characterize the CTG are (at least) five:

1. the role played by the sensitizing concepts in orienting the research process;

2. the full involvement of the researcher in the interactions with the participants and the research contexts;
3. the iteration between data collection and analysis as an essential feature of the research design and fieldwork;
4. the systematic treatment of codes and categories for analytical purposes;
5. theoretical saturation and abductive orientation in the construction of grounded theories.

Some of these aspects are shared by the whole GTM family – for instance, points 3 and 4 – while others characterize more precisely the constructionist approach – such as points 1, 2, and 5. The combination of these aspects constitutes the identity dimension of the CGT perspective. It becomes recognizable precisely by their combination, legitimized by the epistemological and methodological coherences mentioned above. The absence or weakening of one of these features risks modifying the perspective's identity; this circumstance is not necessarily a negative element since the practical requests of research or the experimentation of methodological innovations can produce transformations in the reference model. However, the researcher must be aware of the 'deviations' that may be introduced into the model, declaring and justifying them to increase, if possible, the level of empirical controllability of what has been achieved.

1. The strategic role of sensitizing concepts

The first point recalls the strategic role of defining '*sensitizing concepts*' in constructing the research design and its implementation (Blumer 1969: 147-148; Bowen 2006; van den Hoonaard 1996). We know how central concepts are within the 'methodological discourse' since we can describe and formulate the investigation's theme and the research questions. Concepts in CGT – and qualitative research in general – are not constituting units of thought from which to identify referents (the properties of concepts) to be subjected to a process of

operationalization (as happens in the case of quantitative methods). Their task is to constitute 'anchors' for the researcher in the process of empirical exploration of the reality under study in order to orient his observational and interpretative work; in turn, the temporary results of this empirical work retroactively affect the concepts themselves, clarifying and expanding them, that is, operating in a combined manner on both their '*extension*' and their '*intention*'.

It is therefore not necessary for the researcher to engage – in the research design phase – in the precise definitional analysis of the concepts: given that this process is conceived as the result of the comparison with empirical reality, precisely through fieldwork, the reference concepts are initially formulated in a general and broad manner, so that they can subsequently be clarified and even modified by the processes of data collection and analysis. In this sense, the concepts 'sensitize' the researcher to possible empirical work areas, without binding him to the verification of the existence, in the empirical reality, of the states of the concepts themselves' properties (as happens with the measurement of variables). The researcher's attention is made sensitive by the concepts as references for exploring the empirical field, which aims to give substance and content to those same concepts (in terms of properties and possible states of those properties). On the other hand, as we know, the 'revolutionary' fact introduced by GTM was precisely that of having modified the prominence of theoretical assertions in empirical research: rather than being an unavoidable premise from which to draw working hypotheses, they constitute the outcome of fieldwork. From a strictly methodological point of view, the sensitizing concepts play an essential role in the construction of the process that in GTM is called 'theoretical sampling' – through which one proceeds to the gradual identification of subjects and contexts to be studied by the relevance they assume about the studied issues. Sensitizing concepts thus provide the essential contents around which the data are to be collected, and at the same time, are further enriched, amend-

ed, expanded (or reduced) as the empirical base expands and differs. New lines of study and understanding are developed by this interpretative work concerning concepts, which, through recourse to codes and categories, are systematized and gradually organized into organic and coherent propositions, which, at the end of the investigation, will constitute the theoretical results of the investigation itself.

The centrality assumed by the sensitizing concepts in the whole survey process requires, in the documentation and dissemination-restitution phase of the research results (in the form of articles, survey reports, paper presentations), that they are made explicit as reference frameworks within which the research questions are formulated. In other words, it will be necessary to highlight the link between the sensitizing concepts and:

1. the choice of the observational contexts and the subjects to be met (the 'participants' in the research);
2. the eventual interview outline drawn up for the fieldwork, linking the general properties of the concepts with the questions that are deemed necessary to formulate during the interview or conversations with the participants;
3. the choice of introducing new observational contexts and new subjects to be interviewed into the investigation paths, as a result of the interpretative work carried out by the researcher through coding and categorization;
4. the levels of depth and breadth achieved in the clarification of the concepts themselves through the processes of abstraction obtained precisely by the work of constructing codes and categories;
5. any new concepts that the researcher deems necessary to recall by the above-mentioned analytical processes and the development of the fieldwork (abduction), focusing on the novelties, original and unexpected – and possibly surprising – aspects that they introduce with respect to the initial conceptual frameworks (Tavory, Timmermans 2014).

These aspects must be adequately described, as they constitute the essential aspects that justify the methodological choices made at the beginning and during the investigation, without which the very outcomes of the investigation could in no way be understood. To some extent, the process constitutes an outcome of the inquiry, and as such, it must be brought to the scholarly community's attention. Documenting means legitimizing and justifying the investigation results, thus endowing the empirical foundation's theoretical results. As is well known, in this work of documentation and justification, the 'memos' elaborated by the researcher play an indispensable role. Every phase, every aspect of the research, even every code and every category, every choice, and every advance in analytical and interpretative terms should find argumentative justification in a specifically dedicated 'memo'. Through recourse to the vast patrimony of 'memos' that the researcher will have accumulated in the investigation, it will be possible to reconstruct organically and systematically the pathway taken. Without this documentation, and without making it evident to the interlocutors, qualitative research can hardly be recognized as 'Grounded Theory'.

2. The involvement of the observer

Qualitative methods are configured by the researcher's personal and direct involvement in the observation of empirical reality; this aspect constitutes another central point in constructing a 'grounded' investigation. The attention and interest in the contexts and subjects involved in constructing the phenomena being studied are expressed through the researcher's active participation in the dynamics of the communicative encounter with those contexts and subjects. In other words, the researcher is personally immersed in those dynamics, and it is precisely her interaction with the participants in the research that constitutes how knowledge and interpretations of the reality studied are generated. Without this level of personal, direct, and deep involvement – an *intimate familiarity*, Blumer would say – there

can be no Grounded Theory. On this point, it is necessary to be transparent to avoid misunderstandings. A grounded investigation presents different aspects and characteristics from those of the ethnographic method; nevertheless, the researcher cannot avoid an in-depth and accurate exploration of the contexts in which she is carrying out her research, seeking a meaningful relationship with the people she meets during the investigation and acquiring first-hand knowledge of their stories.

This relationship is often achieved through in-depth interviews, i.e., a communicative interaction through which the interlocutors' point of view is 'assumed'. Some relevant consequences for the conduct of the research derive from these premises:

1. empirical data are co-constructed in the interaction between the scholar and the research participants. In the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data, the scholar considers the subjects' point of view and her own point of view and knowledge.
2. It might happen, in particular research circumstances, that the interviewers (those who collect the data) are different subjects from those who analyze the data – for example, for organizational reasons and internal division of labor within the research team. These circumstances pose severe coherence problems with what has been discussed above about the acquisition of 'intimate familiarity' and the 'co-construction' of data; the researcher is responsible for maintaining the line of coherence between the phase of data collection and analysis, in which she is deeply involved. In CGT, in other words, the process of knowledge production is not comparable to an 'assembly line' – as in the case of quantitative methods –, where the various processes are managed by different people, with differentiated roles.

Besides, it must be clear what the researcher's role was throughout the investigation so that the process underlying the

construction of the interpretations and 'grounded' theories is evident.

3. The iteration between data collection and analysis

GTM has received a great deal of attention in the scholarly community for introducing several methodological aspects that have 'revolutionized' how empirical research is understood and carried out. One of these aspects is the constant comparison of data (Charmaz 2014). The researcher ensures a continuous connection between the empirical base (her observations, interpretations, and collected information) and the conceptual apparatus that is gradually being formed as the research proceeds. This analytical technique is closely linked to the need to respect the empirical nature of reality and empirically ground the construction of theoretical assertions. Therefore, research is a continuous movement – guaranteed by the researcher – between empirical experience and the conceptual dimension, which must be kept in close connection. The researcher moves '*back and forth*' between the collected data and between data and concepts that the researcher is gradually generating during the analysis.

This continuous comparison between the data is guaranteed by introducing a radically different way of 'thinking' and organizing the research, alternating data collection and data analysis. The research process is traditionally conceived as a linear succession of phases, in which data analysis is conducted only when the previous phase of data collection is finished. In GTM, however, collection and analysis are mutually defined: not only does the analysis depend on the collection, but the collection itself is oriented by the analysis, in a game of mutual construction. The iterative nature of the process of collection and analysis responds to the need to acquire new information, to expand knowledge, to assign new depths and new extensions to sensitizing concepts through continuous 'contact' with empirical

data, since, as Blumer states, «reality exists in the empirical world and not in the methods used to study that world» (Blumer 1969: 27). From these premises, obvious methodological choices derive, which need to be documented in the restitution of the research results:

The research design must provide for an organization of fieldwork that alternates between data collection and data analysis phases. In general terms, one could imagine an empirical activity that foresees the carrying out of an initial interview and the immediate analysis of that interview's contents. The results of which – obviously provisional – should allow the researcher to choose how to proceed in the research. The first interview analysis should raise questions such as: how are the contents of the interview relevant to the research questions, and how do they contribute to the clarification and deepening of the sensitizing concepts? How do the meanings expressed during the interview dynamic generate insights consistent with the initial conceptual frameworks and allow further advances? Which unexpected and unforeseen aspects emerged from the interviewee's accounts, which deserve attention and further investigation? How to integrate and enrich the interview outline to be addressed to the next interviewees regarding what has been acquired from the first interview analysis? How to choose whom to ask to be interviewed to pursue the new lines of knowledge?

It is not necessarily the case, of course, that iteration must be done alternating an interview with its analysis, and so on. It is also possible to collect a small group of interviews to form a broader empirical base, albeit always transitory. The researcher's role is fundamental in making the most coherent methodological decisions with respect to the research context.

The interpretive model takes shape and goes far beyond the individual stories collected with the interviews through the iterative process and the constant comparison of data. As we know, the conditions under which the researcher will consider the research process 'closed' refer to the evaluation of the adequacy

of the interpretative model (the theory) to the completeness of the collected and analyzed data – i.e., considering the ‘*theoretical saturation*’ reached.

These aspects cannot be recalled – in the exposition and restitution of the results – with brief methodological notes. On the contrary, they constitute essential elements to understand how the formulation of the survey’s conclusive assertions was achieved. It will be necessary to clearly state the adoption of the iterative method, to highlight at least the crucial moments in which the conceptual categories took shape during the analytical and interpretative process, as well as how the continuous comparison between the data and between the data and the conceptual categories that were elaborated was guaranteed.

4. The systematic treatment of codes and categories

As we know, the Grounded researcher devotes much of her time to analyzing data by defining codes and categories – which constitute the conceptual tools through which she gradually constructs the conceptual frameworks that will make up the theory based on the phenomenon studied. Each variant of GTM proposes its coding and categorization procedure; in general, we can observe a double analytical step, which in CGT occurs in the initial coding and the focused coding. In virtue of this last coding phase, the categories are identified to constitute the grounded theory’s fundamental building blocks. The CGT’s plural and open orientations are flanked by the Strauss-inspired variant proposal, which proposes the researcher identify a ‘central’ or ‘main’ category, to which the other conceptual categories are logically and semantically connected. I favor the construction of a ‘*semantic network*’ that highlights the interconnection between plural categories since this strategy guarantees a greater capacity of theoretical frameworks to reflect the complexity inherent in social phenomena, and since it allows greater freedom of

movement in the possible different lines of interpretation of the phenomenon studied. Codes and categories are crucial analytical elements in GTM, irrespective of the variant of Grounded Theory adopted by the researcher; the most frequently asked question among those who approach GTM for the first time is 'how many' codes must be elaborated in order for the analysis to be considered appropriate to the study of the phenomena. This is a concern that can be quickly overcome by saying that the analysis depends on both the quantitative and qualitative richness of the codes themselves and on the interpretative depth they allow to reach. In our reasoning framework, the problem concerns the treatment of the codes more directly to justify empirically the results obtained from the investigation.

In other words, the question emerges when it comes to accounting for the correspondence between the codes developed and the results achieved. Very often, in essays published in scientific journals and, even more so, in presentations at conferences, the codes – which constitute the bulk of the 'empirical basis' and interpretation – are not adequately represented – in other words, they 'disappear' from the argumentative horizon and are not made explicit. In the essays referring to quantitative surveys, there are often data tables and graphs that allow the reader to assess the analysis' methodological adequacy. In grounded research, it is rare to find modes of representation that perform the same documentary function. This circumstance depends essentially on two factors: the first concerns the vast amounts of codes and categories used in the analysis, making it difficult to find a criterion of 'choice' in terms of representation. The second factor concerns the available space, which, as mentioned above, imposes argumentative choices that privilege the outcomes of the filedwork rather than the process through which they were achieved. However, as we know, in GTM and CGT, the argumentation of results and the process from which they emerge are not separable dimensions. The quality assessment of the empirical (qualitative) work is possi-

ble through the empirical base's inspectability and the process through which it was constructed.

This implies the need to include these representational tools within the survey reports, without which it becomes difficult for readers and the scientific community to assess the adequacy of the analytical work carried out. It should be noted that some texts on coding and categorization offer a conspicuous number of examples, which we recommend consulting here (just to give an example, Miles, Huberman, Saldaña 2014). It seems appropriate, however, to suggest a few options that I think might be useful:

1. It is quite evident that an essay or a presentation cannot account for the wealth of 'initial' codes that the researcher has generated; however, the discourse may be different in the case of 'focused codes'. These constitute a set of conceptual entities placed at an intermediate level of abstraction (between the initial codes and the categories); they should be referents of broader conceptual clusters, thus numerically more limited. Therefore, the hypothesis of enumerating the 'focused codes' in the form of lists could be considered, highlighting their relevance to the initial theoretical dimensions (the sensitizing concepts).
2. It would be advisable to identify a fine selection of 'focused codes' correlated with the categories that emerged in the phase of further interpretative abstraction. These codes' choices can be made based on salience and completeness criteria related to the theoretical categories' semantic coverage.
3. Of fundamental importance appears, from my point of view, the possibility of using semantic networks as a tool to represent 'areas' of particular density and interdependence between codes and categories – given that the density of these interdependence relations signals the strength of the connection between the different conceptual entities. One might choose to document precisely those areas of the semantic network in which the density of conceptual

interdependencies is most evident and most consistent. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that it is precisely these 'semantic relation clouds' that constitute an essential reference in the interpretative and analytical phase in order to construct theoretical assertions that are both logically and empirically grounded.

The use of software for the analysis of qualitative data (CAQ-DAS) favors creating such networks, which can constitute both materials on which to carry out the analyses and useful 'output' to report the work carried out included in one's publications. This circumstance introduces a theme that we will not go into in-depth here, but which is rather recurrent in the literature, using software for the management of the research and the analysis of the data. I would argue that software is an indispensable opportunity for the qualitative scholar – albeit with the caveat that one must always maintain control over the analytical process. This use is now imposed by the complexity of the analysis and the need to document in a systematic way the choices made in the analytical phase. They allow the researcher to compare data and conceptual categories with due attention and systematicity without impeding creativity and reflexivity in the interpretative process. Most of the most widespread software, both commercial (e.g., NVivo, AtlasTi) and open source (Qualcoder), allow the construction of semantic networks of codes and categories that have emerged in the analysis. Technically, the codes and categories constitute 'nodes' of the semantic network insofar as these two circumstances occur:

- a. The same codes are used to 'mark' different interview pieces;
- b. Different codes are used to mark the same pieces of interview.

The subsequent operations of '*merging*' the codes and constructing categories that semantically express the convergence of groups of codes generate the emergence of a complex and

articulated network of conceptual entities. The links in the network, in turn, constitute logical-argumentative paths that connect those conceptual entities on a semantic level and allow the construction of theoretical propositions.

It should also be remembered that the overall network resulting from the analytical elaborations presents such a complex and articulated configuration that it is difficult to manage, both on an interpretative and 'graphic' level. Therefore, the analysis will tend to dwell precisely on those clusters of greater density among the nodes of the network; these denser areas – as 'sub-networks' – can be used as representations of the empirical material analyzed and of the interpretative paths undertaken.

5. Theoretical saturation and abductive reasoning in Grounded Theory Methods

The grounded researcher's empirical and interpretive work is carried out through a continuous movement between data and the conceptual apparatus that emerges from the collection and analysis. As I noted earlier, much of the research accounts are devoted to highlighting the outcomes primarily in terms of theoretical propositions rather than the overall process and internal coherence.

1. Firstly, it will be necessary to identify the different 'patterns' emerging from the interpretative analysis; this means highlighting the aspects of similarity and differentiation between the various conceptual entities that constitute the intricate texture of the interpretative work.
2. Secondly, it will be necessary to check further how far the conceptual propositions are logically connected to the empirical basis, assessing how far the arguments are empirically founded and how far they respond to an interpretative process built on mere abstract connections.
3. Moreover, it will not be secondary to evaluate the completeness of the conceptual propositions concerning the

richness offered by the empirical data, identifying and enhancing those aspects that seem irrelevant, not referable to the identified 'patterns' (mentioned in point 1).

4. Finally, it will be useful to ask oneself what is the position of the conceptual frameworks emerging from the survey concerning the knowledge that one may already possess on the analyzed phenomenon; for example, whether they introduce variations or innovations, through the elaboration of fresh conceptual categories, or whether they contribute to consolidating that knowledge.

In assessing the quality of the research outcome, it is necessary to employ a reasoning mode known as abduction. It is a form of reasoning for which the creation of hypotheses and concepts is possible by exploiting 'surprising' evidence, i.e., unexpected and unforeseen. This makes it possible to extend the semantic dimensions of sensitizing concepts and introduce new concepts and new interpretation lines. Adopting this form of reasoning is also useful for identifying with greater awareness when the threshold of theoretical saturation has been reached, which constitutes the final part of the investigation process.

6. Conclusions

The issue of recognisability of Grounded Theory research is relevant to avoid misunderstandings within the qualitative research community so that those who decide to be inspired by Grounded Theory are aware of the characteristics that distinguish it from other methodological approaches. Therefore, the researcher should dedicate adequate space to documenting the essential and strategic steps that have characterized the construction of the investigation process so that it is possible to assess the adequacy of the choices made compared to the typical canons of Grounded Theory. Therefore, the question is not only about respecting the 'canons' of Grounded investigation but above all about offering the community of scholars

the elements and tools to evaluate the quality of the research. The documentability of the process is an indispensable step for any empirical research enterprise. This aspect must be given due prominence in the essays and presentations prepared by grounded scholars and all occasions where GTM methods and techniques are taught and learned – such as in Workshops and Summer Schools. This chapter has aimed to offer scholars, especially those approaching the Grounded perspective, some proposals, and tools for documenting their methodological choices. In particular, some strategies have been proposed that refer to five areas that, from my point of view, connote and identify the CGT research process, namely:

1. the role played by sensitizing concepts in orienting theoretical sampling;
2. the full involvement of the researcher in the interactions with the participants and the research contexts;
3. the iteration between data collection and analysis;
4. the systematic treatment of codes and categories for analytical purposes;
5. theoretical saturation and abductive orientation in the construction of grounded theories.

The documentation of these steps is an essential condition to allow the community of scholars to inspect the empirical base, evaluate the quality of the investigation, and evaluate the outcomes.

Two further aspects must be recalled at the end of this contribution. The first concerns the diversity of variants in GTM. This variety indeed constitutes a wealth available to scholars, who can draw inspiration from one of these variants – or a combination of variants – according to their training, their epistemological frames of reference, and the specific contingencies in which empirical investigation takes place. At the same time, the diversity of variants corresponds to a variety of canons and methodological choices that characterize them; it will therefore be essential for the researcher to state in advance what type

of GTM she will refer to in her investigation and the distinctive features of the process that she intends and has intended to exploit in coherence with this statement. This aspect is critical to offer the scientific community all the meta-information necessary to evaluate the research process.

The second aspect to be recalled concerns the character of 'openness' that is often assigned to the researcher's attitude in carrying out his research activity within the GTM. The character of openness is strategic in all the various operational phases of the investigation: in the definition of sensitizing concepts, in the construction of the 'theoretical sample', in the interpretation of data and the identification of codes and categories, in the pursuit of different lines of exploration of contexts and the elaboration of theoretical assertions. The character of openness is also consistent with the adoption of abductive reasoning and the willingness to 'learn' from people and observational contexts.

However, openness should not be seen as being in opposition to the rigor with which the underlying logic of the research must be constructed and observed. The more open, creative, and innovative one is in the investigation process, the more necessary it is to document the reflections that have led to specific methodological and interpretative choices. Grounded Theory offers the tools to make these needs compatible, and they should not be considered in contrast with each other: the use of memos and the systematic organization of one's notes during fieldwork are adequate means to achieve this goal.

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PART II: CASE STUDIES

REFLECTIONS ON THE USE OF SENSITIZING CONCEPTS IN A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

EMMA GRIBBLE

Abstract

The advice that Grounded Theory Method (GTM) researchers should start by ignoring the literature in their field (Glaser & Strauss 2008 [1967]) and approach their subject with «as few predetermined ideas as possible» (Glaser 1978) creates doubt and confusion in novice researchers because it runs counter to received wisdom on research practice. At first glance, it also provides an easy target for critics of GTM who argue that it is naive to imagine that anyone can approach research as a *tabula rasa*.

This paper reports on my struggle with Strauss and Glaser's advice during the early stages of a GTM study on the architectural briefing process for a new university campus. It focusses on the use of sensitizing concepts to «suggest directions along which to look» (Blumer 1992 [1968]) and asks, 1. do GTM scholars consider sensitizing concepts to be a legitimate research tool? And 2. what sensitizing concepts might have *fit* or *grab* for this GTM study of a series of client briefing meetings observed and recorded in 2018?

A review of the GTM literature found clear support for the use sensitizing concepts and a rich source of advice on how to search for, select, and use them. It suggests that an understanding of the open minded, indefinite quality of 'sensitizing concepts' casts new light on Glaser's advice and draws attention to the fact that he is warning against 'pre-determined' and

not ‘pre-existing’ ideas. Reflection on my GTM study research questions and initial observations suggested Discourse Analysis (DA) as logical source of sensitizing concepts so this paper includes a discussion of the potential of sensitizing concepts from DA to help answer the classic Grounded Theory question ‘what is happening here?’ when clients and building users are framing the project situation, arguing about design solutions and accounting for spatial practices.

My purpose in reflecting on my experience to date is to acknowledge the difficulties that first time researchers with limited training or theoretical knowledge may have with GTM and to suggest that anyone having doubts should hold their nerve and consider looking for sensitizing concepts to help them with their analysis.

Keywords: Grounded theory method, novice researchers, sensitizing concepts, architectural briefing.

1. Introduction

A key concern for researchers using Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) for the first time is how to start. Glaser recommends entering the field «with as few predetermined ideas as possible» (Glaser 1978: 3) and yet researchers who take this advice too literally have been criticised as naïve and unrealistic (Charmaz 2014: 30; Dey 1999: 251; Thornberg 2012: 244). In this chapter, I will report on my thought processes as I grappled with the apparent conflict between advice to avoid ‘predetermined ideas’, and the need for ‘theoretical sensitivity’ (the ability to recognise «theoretically relevant data or significant phenomena»). What was theoretical sensitivity, I wondered, if it was not developed from previous knowledge and experience? I will describe how working on two pilot studies left me feeling ill equipped to interpret my data, and how my reading of the literature suggested that ‘sensitizing concepts’ might be the answer to my difficulties. I will then discuss how I used my research questions and initial observations to decide where

to look for useful sensitizing concepts, how I selected possible concepts from Discourse Analysis (DA), and my reflections on their potential *fit* and *grab* for my research. Finally, I will review advice from the GTM literature on three questions relating to the use of sensitizing concepts: first the need to 'tailor' (Bryant 2017: 291) research methods to fit your topic and research questions. Second, the recommendation to be open-minded and experimental in selecting sensitizing concepts to try out on the data (Kelle 2007: 209). And third on how to use sensitizing concepts – to resist commitment, and to be playful and reflexive (Thornberg 2012: 253). Following my reading of the literature, I will conclude that GTM researchers should not be afraid to use pre-existing knowledge or draw on sensitizing concepts from diverse theoretical perspectives provided that they always treat them as tentative and provisional and remain ready to discard them if they do not fit the data. My purpose in reflecting on my experience to date is to acknowledge the difficulties that first time researchers with limited training or theoretical knowledge may have with GTM and to suggest that anyone having doubts should hold their nerve and consider looking for sensitizing concepts to help them with their analysis.

2. Reflections on pilot studies

My research topic is architectural briefing. I understand design to be an integral part of the briefing process so in the absence of a more specific word, I use the somewhat clumsy term *briefing/design* to keep this in mind. My research question is 'How do clients and building users engage with the briefing/design process in the early stages (RIBA 1-3) of architectural projects?'. My main case study is a new university campus but I started my research with two pilot studies, a care home and an architecture school. The purpose of briefing/design is to reach a common understanding of what a proposed new building is for, how it will be used, and the material, technological and spatial qualities necessary to support the patterns of be-

haviour needed or desired by the client – the anticipated spatial practices. However, in my initial observations of briefing/design meetings I saw that building users did not always agree about the answers to these kinds of question.

For instance, in an early meeting for my first pilot study project, a care home, I observed a difference of opinion about how the design should accommodate the needs of elderly residents with severe dementia ‘people who are not like you’. There was a clear value conflict between staff with a deeply held conviction that all elderly residents had a right to a ‘meaningful life’ and should not be socially segregated (however mentally impaired), and managers responsible for the financial viability of the home who were concerned that the presence of people with severe dementia could frighten away potential residents who would «not want to be reminded of what the future might hold for them in 5 or 10 years time».

My second pilot study was a deep retrofit of an architecture school. The existing building was described by teaching staff as a place of ‘ambush, sabotage and secrecy’ and ‘intensely political’. During my interviews I heard about opposing views on the architect’s proposals to make the design studios open plan and visible from the main circulation routes. It was reported that some studio tutors feared that ‘their creativity would be lost with their secret rooms’, while a key participant welcomed the informal oversight provided by the new layouts as a defense against ‘*Stockholm Syndrome*’ among the students.

I refer to these preliminary observations from my pilot studies to illustrate two points. First, design problems do not have a single optimal solution (Lawson 1994: 5) – what suits one group of users or clients may not suit another, and second, architecture is not culturally neutral – «space is never simply the inert background of our material existence. It is a key aspect of how our social and cultural worlds are constituted» (Hillier 1993: 11). The building users I observed during these pilot

studies debated the affordances and constraints of the proposed architectural layouts in terms of their potential to reinforce or undermine fundamental institutional values relating to creativity and pedagogy, inclusion and philosophy of care.

What this indicated, and what has also become apparent in my main case study, is that communication in briefing/design meetings is seldom neutral, and the 'facts' presented are (like the data in qualitative research), «far from being raw» (Dreyfus cited Strübing 2007: 582). What I mean by this is that when building users provide information in briefing/design meetings they are generally, either tacitly or explicitly, making a case for a preferred briefing/design solution. For instance, when IT staff were asked how they wanted to provide teaching, training and support in the refurbished architecture school the information they presented constituted several different kinds of argument in support of re-provision of computer clusters.

These arguments ranged from reference to the students (what Clarke et al. 2018, describe as 'implicated actors'). «One day I went into the studio room and I asked a couple of students and I said do you want a computer in here and they said no we want a computer area like we have in the cluster room», reference to current usage «if you go upstairs now [to the computer cluster] on the second floor it is chocka block» and an imagined scenario of computer use in the design studios «will it restrict you? because you will have materials around you and then accidentally dropping it on the keyboard...». The alternatives to cluster rooms being considered were mobile laptop trolleys or students using their own laptops. In discussing this reaction from IT staff, one participant suggested that the loss of a dedicated computer teaching space could be interpreted as a threat to the professional status and identity of the IT staff – that this loss could be interpreted as an indicator of the low value placed on their contribution to the architecture school. However, in addition to the arguments outlined above there were several

other issues to be taken into account when deciding how to deliver computer training, education and support – for instance personal laptops do not have the data processing power to manage some of the 3d modelling and rendering work that architecture students do (without crashing), co-location is a key factor in encouraging peer-to-peer learning, and ‘students like to see each other work’. This example indicates that even a relatively straightforward decision such as whether to re-provide dedicated computer teaching space is likely to be informed by a complex admixture of social, educational and technical issues as well as possible concerns about the status and identity of teaching staff. The implication of this is that communication in briefing/design meetings is unlikely to be a simple transfer of information from building users to the design team, a transparent report of current spatial practices or neutral ‘facts’ about building performance requirements. On the contrary, whether tacitly or explicitly, it is likely to take the form of arguments making the case for specific briefing/design decisions or narratives which frame the project in such a way as to make the preferred briefing/design solution appear natural and inevitable.

My original research interest was client and building user perceptions of how building design impacts on institutional culture and vice versa. I began my research by focussing on episodes of value conflict in briefing/design meetings because differences of opinion about project outcomes seemed to prompt building users to describe and justify their existing spatial practices, and put their theories about space and place into words in an attempt to persuade colleagues of the merits of their position. However, it became clear that if I wanted to understand the briefing/design process I should also pay attention to what was being done in the meetings (with rhetoric and the strategies and tactics of persuasion) and not just take at face value what was being reported about spatial practices ‘out there’ and in an imagined future campus. When I asked myself Glaser’s question «what is this data a study of?» (Glaser 1978: 57). I

suspected that it was something to do with the enmeshed relationship between what was happening in the briefing/design meetings and what was happening 'out there' in the real world, but I felt ill equipped to interpret what I was observing.

3. Reasons for choosing GTM and initial doubts

I originally chose constructivist grounded theory as a research methodology because my topic, client and building user engagement with the briefing/design process, is a situated social practice (Paton & Dorst 2011) and I understood that GTM was developed to research social interaction, dynamic processes rather than static structures. I was also drawn to the «“secret charm of abduction” [...] since it combines both the rational and the imaginative aspects of research» (Bryant & Charmaz 2007: 16). I work as an architect and something about the creative combination of these contrasting thinking styles felt familiar. However, having rejected both the miscellaneous coding families of Glaser and the prescriptive coding paradigm of Strauss and Corbin, I was left somewhat empty handed when it came to the task of interpreting my data. While highly effective, and recognisable as a more rigorous and systematic version of the methods many of us use every day to find things out, the GTM practices of iterative data collection and analysis, coding, memoing, constant comparison and theoretical sampling, are relatively theory free and offer few 'tools for thinking with'. Ironically, as a novice researcher, I found that the very qualities which had attracted me to GTM in the first place, it's non-directive, open-endedness were proving somewhat challenging. I felt I needed more tools or heuristic devices to think with, but I was confused as to whether it was acceptable, within a GTM study, to draw on pre-existing knowledge to inform my analysis.

4. Using pre-existing knowledge and sensitizing concepts in GTM

In *Discovering Grounded Theory*, Glaser and Straus suggested that researchers should start by ignoring the literature in their field so that their research would not be ‘contaminated’ by concepts that could ‘force’ the data – lead them to search for, and consequently ‘see’ something which might not be there (Glaser & Strauss 2008 [1967]: 37). Nonetheless, they were clear that «the researcher does not approach reality as a *tabula rasa*. He must have a perspective that will help him see relevant data and abstract significant categories from his scrutiny of the data» (*Ibid.*: 3). Initially, I felt that the advice to enter the field with «as few predetermined ideas as possible», and the need for a theoretical perspective were contradictory but gradually I began to realise that if you treat *all* ideas as provisional – that is if you take Glaser’s advice to refer to *pre-determined* ideas and not *pre-existing* ideas, then this apparent conflict disappears. The answer seems to lie in distinguishing between fixed ideas (definitive concepts) and provisional, adaptable, open ended ideas (sensitizing concepts). The term ‘sensitizing concept’ was originally used by Blumer who argued that unlike «definitive concepts [which] provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look» (Blumer 1992 [1968]: 148). The literature suggests that the question is «not *whether* previous knowledge should be used in actual data analysis» but *how* it should be used – and that the «only problem with pre-known or pre-held theoretical concepts is their potential dominance over the empirical data at hand» (Strübing 2007: 587).

There are several sources of previous knowledge which might influence researcher perception and interpretation of empirical data including everyday experience, professional practice and previous research. Dey and Charmaz observe that pre-existing knowledge can both help and hinder research. Glaser and

Strauss were concerned that a researcher's pre-conceptions could act as lenses or blinkers distorting or restricting their perception of the data. However, as indicated above, pre-existing knowledge can also be the source of 'sensitizing concepts' – «tentative tools» to open up enquiry «rather than shutting it down» (Charmaz 2014: 31) and conceptual frameworks, which act «as guides rather than as prison guards» (Dey 1999: 251).

The term 'sensitizing concept' has been used in a number of ways but here I am using it to mean pre-existing concepts whose relative vagueness and «lack of empirical content permit researchers to apply them to a wide array of phenomena» (Kelle 2007: 208). As Kelle suggests, the qualities of sensitizing concepts that some critics have regarded as drawbacks, their ambiguity and indefiniteness, are actually what make them most useful as 'tools-for-thinking' and aids to exploration and creative insight. For instance, the concept 'identity work' provides no specific clues as to how a given group of people may perform, claim, or contest their identity. It does not close down or prescribe the kinds of practices which might be observed or reported – it simply suggests looking in a certain direction – at identity work.

Whether or not we intentionally use sensitizing concepts drawn from everyday experience, professional practice or past research, it is inevitable that, as adults, our cultural backgrounds, disciplinary training and socialisation will influence what we perceive and pay attention to and how we interpret and make sense of our perceptions. This is a well-recognised challenge to the validity of qualitative research and Charmaz has argued that researchers need to be aware of how their «background assumptions and disciplinary perspectives» inform their interpretations and be «willing to revise or relinquish them» as necessary (Charmaz 2014: 30). It is this tentative, non-committal approach that seems to hold the answer to resolving the tension between the GTM 'mantra' (Bryant 2017: 22) to

avoid preconceptions and the impossibility of putting aside all previous knowledge and experience. The trick, it seems, is not to disown or attempt to block out prior knowledge, (which risks letting it slip in through the back door, unchallenged) but to acknowledge it and at the same time be ready to let it go if it does not prove to be useful in answering the question 'what is happening here?'

5. Where to look for sensitizing concepts?

Having reached the conclusion that the use of 'sensitizing concepts' was an accepted practice within GTM, the next question I faced was where to look for sensitizing concepts to help me with my analysis. It seemed clear that the starting point should be my research questions and initial observations. My principal research question is 'how do clients and building users engage with the briefing/design process in the early stages of architectural projects?' and early observations and interviews indicated that participants were using diverse tactics and strategies of persuasion to negotiate for their preferred briefing/design decisions. This suggested that the obvious place to look for useful sensitizing concepts would be Discourse Analysis (DA). However, when I started to read about DA, I realised that it was a broad church ranging from micro-studies of talk-in-interaction drawing on conversation analysis, through the work of discursive psychologists on identity, and how individuals make sense of the world, and on to the study of culture and social relations (Wetherell et al. 2001). Clearly, I had to focus my search a bit more narrowly if I wanted to find sensitizing concepts which would be useful in addressing my research question. Following reflection on my pilot studies and the initial observations and interviews of my main case study, I came to two conclusions:

First, although I was now paying attention to what was happening in briefing/design meetings in terms of argument, negotiation and persuasion, my reason for doing this was an interest

in client and building user perceptions of the built environment and how its affordances and constraints inform institutional culture and spatial practices and vice versa. My starting point and the motivation for my research was a professional curiosity about material culture. I therefore concluded that I should steer clear of approaches to DA that appeared to privilege words over other forms of meaning-making. As an architect I was surprised and somewhat taken aback by the extent to which some writers seemed to believe that people could only think in words – my colleagues think in drawings and models every day.

Second, my unit of analysis is the briefing/design process for a single case study project at RIBA stages 1-3, so I decided to narrow my search to DA perspectives that address phenomenon at this scale i.e. not the scale of individual perceptions or the organisation of society as a whole but at the scale of a time-limited social process situated within a single educational institution.

Having narrowed down my search field, I was encouraged to find an understanding of DA that included the material world – «each Discourse involves ways of talking, acting, interacting, valuing and believing as well as the spaces and material “props” the group uses to carry out its social practices» (Gee 1992: 107). I also felt that I was on the right track for sensitizing concepts of the appropriate scale when I read Taylor’s confirmation that DA, defined as the study of «meanings, resources and practices», investigates «evidence of phenomena beyond the individual person» (Taylor 2013: 2, 17).

The fact that both grounded theorists and discourse analysts «view meaning as constructed, situated and negotiated» and focus on action (Charmaz in Wertz 2011: 297) suggests that sensitizing concepts from DA should be compatible with GTM in terms of epistemology. The final clue that I was on the right track was Clarke’s observation that Situational Analysis (a development of GTM) fits with «more critical, cultural and

Foucauldian approaches» to DA (Clarke et al. 2018: 224). This was the type of DA I had identified as being the best place to look for sensitizing concepts for my study.

6. Provisional sensitizing concepts from DA

So, having identified DA as a possible source of sensitizing concepts to ‘suggest directions along which to look’ and perhaps even to provide a ‘perspective that would help [me] see relevant data’, I started reading about DA and looking for concepts that resonated with what I had seen and heard in my initial observations and interviews. The first thing I realised was that DA concepts could be useful in addressing what was happening at different *scales* of enquiry. I was beginning to see that clients and building users were engaged in three interconnected processes: 1. framing the situation and briefing/design process, 2. arguing the case for preferred briefing/design decisions and 3. accounting for (and predicting) spatial practices. And it appeared that DA could provide sensitizing concepts to help me interpret what was happening at each of these scales. In the following three sections, I will reflect on my case study projects and how my observations resonated with sensitizing concepts from DA at these different scales of enquiry.

6.1. Framing the situation and briefing/design process

One of the first things that really struck me when I started observing meetings and interviewing participants was the degree of *interconnection* between the built environment, spatial practices and institutional systems which meant that none of these elements of the situation could be fully understood in isolation. For instance, I was surprised to learn that the minimum size required for examination halls could be reduced by using two exam papers and distributing them so that students answering questions on type A papers were always sitting next to students answering questions on type B papers and vice versa. That

space might be designed as fluid, open ended break-out areas to ensure that it would not be recognised as 'rooms' by the university wide room-booking system – 'rooms' are made available for use by others across the university while expanded areas of circulation can be retained for exclusive use by faculty staff and students. And that controlled access to a room for the secure storage of passports was required within the student services department in order to comply with new government legislation on immigration.

These connections between different types of element and across different scales from the macro to the micro, such as the impact of national immigration policy on the layout of student services offices, resonate with Clarke's understanding of the 'situation' (Clarke et al. 2018) and her explicit use of Latour's actor-networks and Foucault's concept of apparatus (dispositif):

A thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. (Foucault 1980: 194)

The interesting thing about this way of looking at the world is that it reveals the possibility that *things could be different* – that if one element of the network shifts then the things we take for granted, that seem natural, reasonable and inevitable may reveal themselves as socially constructed and contingent.

I gave one of the processes I observed in briefing/design meetings the initial code of '*setting the boundaries*'. By which I meant both the boundaries for the project situation – what would be considered relevant and not relevant in setting the problem to be solved, and the boundaries of the project itself – what would be subject to change and what would not. For instance, would the boundaries of the project be drawn tightly around the

infrastructure project – the design of the physical building? Or would other elements within the situation be reviewed and considered open to change such as timetables, teaching methods or management systems? What would be taken as fixed within the timescale of the building project and what would be in flux?

Framing has long been recognised as critical to the briefing/design process – it is «through the non-technical process of framing the problematic situation that we may organise and clarify both the ends to be achieved and the possible means of achieving them» (Schön 1991 [1983]: 41). However, what reference to sensitizing concepts from DA suggests is that the task of framing the problem will be embedded in a wider frame – a «*knowledge schema* [...] participants expectations about people, objects, events and settings in the world» (Tannen 1993: 60) or *figured world* – «simplified, often unconscious and taken-for-granted theories or stories about how the world works that we use to get on efficiently with our daily lives» (Gee 2014: 95). And while we use our life experiences to construct figured worlds, «these experiences are guided, shaped, and normed by the social and cultural groups to which we belong» (Gee 2014: 95). These concepts of a 'system of relations' (Foucault), 'knowledge schema' (Tannen) and 'figured worlds' (Gee) raise interesting questions about the interconnections between different elements of the situation and about how the institutional culture and life experiences of clients and building users are likely to inform how they frame the problem situation – and set the boundaries of the project situation and of the project.

6.2. Arguing a case for preferred briefing/design solutions

Another feature of the briefing/design meetings that struck me as interesting was the extent to which the scope of the discussion was predetermined by the way the consultation process was designed and how these meetings were set up. Although

the main project presentations given by the design team and the Academic Director (to provide an update on design development and an opportunity for anyone to ask questions) were open to the whole university and attended by a wide range of people from different disciplines and with different roles within the university, the fit-out consultation meetings were set up to include only specific groups of users. This meant that any differences between groups such as the public engagement team, the anthropologists, engineers or security staff could not be addressed or concluded within these meetings. When any potentially contentious issue was raised, such as the allocation of space, then it had to be carried from one meeting to the next (or managed in between meetings) by the project team. The focus of the meetings was also strongly directed by the drawings produced for these meetings. These were A1 extracts from the general arrangement floor plans enlarged to show the area of space allocated to each user group. This had the effect of focussing attention on the technological and spatial requirements of the area to be occupied by the user group and away from the building as a whole. While this approach provided a clear and manageable framework for discussing the building fit-out, it also had the unintended effect of limiting discussion of more holistic concerns. However, even within the clearly defined agenda for these meetings, I felt that there was more going on than a simple transfer of information from the building users to the design team – something that might perhaps be coded as ‘making a case’ for specific briefing/design decisions.

This experience indicated three areas where pre-existing knowledge from DA might prove useful. First, the recognition that it is not possible to understand the meaning of words and phrases without taking into account «the larger units of the participants’ speech events, schemas, agendas, speech acts and conversational strategies» in which they are «nested» (Shuy 2015: 824). And that what people say during a *speech event* such as a committee meeting will be influenced by their inter-

pretation of the «tacitly understood rules of preference, unspoken conventions as to what counts as valid and what information may or may not be introduced» (Gumperz 1982: 9). This raises interesting questions about how the speech event of the briefing/design meeting is designed and managed, the tacit and explicit rules about the kind of issues that can be raised, the sort of information that will be considered valid/relevant and how these rules are established, contested and defended.

Second, the work by discourse analysts on argument, persuasion and the construction of ‘facts’ (Billig 1996; Potter 1996). The range of different types of argument, both tacit and explicit, discussed earlier in relation to the re-provision of computer clusters in the architecture school indicate that this could be a potentially useful ‘direction along which to look’. For instance, how is the relevance and reliability of the information provided in briefing/design meetings established/contested/defended and how are the positions taken by clients and building users in relation to their preferred briefing/design solutions accounted for?

Third, the concept of ‘social goods’. When I read the following passage on social goods I got the kind of *aha!* moment that Thornton refers to as one of potential benefits of being playful with the theoretical literature.

Social goods are the stuff of politics. Politics is not just about contending political parties. At a much deeper level it is about how to distribute social goods in a society: who gets what in terms of money, status, power, and acceptance on a variety of different terms, all social goods. Since, when we use language, social goods and their distribution are always at stake, language is always “political” in a deep sense. (Gee 2014: 8)

Although Gee is referring to the use of language, the same could be said of space, that to paraphrase Gee, «when we use *space*, social goods and their distribution are always at stake,

space is always political in a deep sense». So for instance, the social goods at stake in the discussion about computer clusters referred to earlier may have included status, professional identity and control of resources. And this suggests another question to be considered when analysing the briefing/design meetings – what social goods are at stake?

6.3. Accounting for spatial practices

During briefing/design meetings, clients, and building users referred to their experience of existing buildings (either positively or negatively) to explain what they wanted in the new building. They also associated existing design features with particular social atmospheres. For instance, the care home staff described the entrance hall of one of their more traditional homes as follows:

...the main communal space is the foyer is the entrance it is the place where people have to come in and go out staff have to go up and down and residents whatever their frailty gravitate towards the foyer and have found sort of little pockets of spaces that's where they sit its where they entertain its where they interact.

and compared it to a more recent design where they had 'created one of the most serene environments we have in the organisation but it is so serene that staff fall I mean we all fall asleep right and we now know what we are missing which is that sense of community'. This indicated an awareness of the potential affordances and constraints of the built environment and their impact on spatial practices. However, the meaning of a space can shift depending on who is using it – it is never finalised or fixed. Gibson argued that an affordance has to be «measured relative to the animal» (Gibson 2015 [1979]: 120) and I suggest that this concept can also be applied to an institution, such as a care home (rather than a biological species) and that his argument stands. That affordance «is neither an objective property nor a subjective property; or it is both if you

like. It cuts across the dichotomy of objective-subjective and helps us understand its inadequacy» (*Ibid.*: 121).

The affordances and constraints of material construction mean that ideas about *space-in-use* are not the equivalent of ideas about *language-in-use*. The concept of *situated meaning* is also less flexible when used with regard to the built environment. However, both concepts do offer a useful counterpoint to architectural criticism which locates all meaning in the material object. These concepts seem particularly relevant in the context of briefing/design meetings. For instance, it might be interesting to consider Gee's concept of *language-in-use* as always 'doing, saying, being' something in relation to architecture. What is a building or building element 'doing, saying, being', or perhaps more pertinently – how do different building users interpret or predict what a proposed building design will 'do, say or be?'. Thaler and Sunstein's selection of the term 'choice architecture' to describe how people can be 'nudged' to select one option rather than another is interesting (Thaler & Sunstein 2008). Perhaps they just used the word 'architecture' to imply structure and design but to me it suggests awareness that while architecture itself does not determine behaviour it can be a powerful nudge. The question here is, in what direction do building users predict the building will nudge people?

7. Advice on the use of sensitizing concepts

In this section I will briefly review advice from the literature on three related aspects of GTM research: 1. 'tailoring' a research design, 2. seeking and selecting sensitizing concepts, and 3. how to work with sensitizing concepts. Bryant defines 'tailoring' as «the way in which authors explain how their ways of doing research involve processes or procedures that depart from what they see as the authoritative or definitive form of GTM» (Bryant 2017: 291). This is a nice metaphor for adapting research methods to fit a specific topic or research question and sug-

gests that novice researchers should spend less time worrying about whether they are doing it 'right' and more time reflecting on how their chosen research methodology could be adapted or revised to better address their research questions (and in justifying any adaptations or 'tailoring' decisions). However, it is unclear whether the use of sensitizing concepts would be considered a form of tailoring in GTM or not. Perhaps this would depend on the extent to which sensitizing concepts from alternative theoretical frameworks inform the final interpretation of data and/or theory construction.

On the question of seeking and selecting sensitizing concepts, Kelle recommends working with concepts from «different and even competing theoretical perspectives» and advises researchers to resist the temptation to stick with a 'pet theory'. He argues that deliberately looking at your data through a range of different theoretical lenses will reduce your chances of missing significant phenomena (Kelle 2007: 209). The advice, that the existing literature should be used as «a possible source of inspiration, ideas, "aha!" experiences, creative associations, critical reflections and multiple lenses», (Thornberg 2012: 249) opens up a rich and enticing field of possibilities, and gives GTM researchers the licence to break out of disciplinary silos and explore diverse ways of understanding how the world works. However, as Kelle suggests it is advice that should be taken up with caution particularly by inexperienced researchers. It seems more likely to be productive, at least in the early stages of research, to select a single field of enquiry in which to search for sensitizing concepts that resonate with your initial coding and memos or at the most follow Thornberg's principle of theoretical sampling of the literature (Thornberg 2012: 251).

Thornberg offers some excellent advice on how to work with sensitizing concepts (Thornberg 2012). He describes the need to remain open-minded and uncommitted to theoretical concepts, to retain an agnostic stance in relation to all theories, even your own – and always to consider the possibility that you

may be mistaken. He supports Kelle's strategy of theoretical pluralism and Dey's suggestion that «entertaining different explanations is a way of keeping an open mind» (Dey 1993: 229). He recommends constant reflexivity and staying grounded – referring everything back to the data. However, the key strategy in his approach to informed grounded theory is to expand Charmaz's idea of theoretical playfulness to include existing theory. He suggests playing with theory in «new, innovative, creative and unorthodox ways during the constant comparison process» (Thornberg 2012: 253). The architect Herman Hertzberger suggests that good designers are «capable of delaying their attachment to any solution before fully understanding the problem» (Hertzberger cited Lawson 1994: 42) and it seems that this ability to be playful, to hold an idea in your mind and to turn it this way and that without letting it take hold of you too soon, is a key skill whether you are working with 3D design or theoretical concepts.

The key advantage of GTM is that it does not prescribe in advance which sensitizing concepts to use. This suggests that researchers are free to tailor their research designs, look at their data through multiple theoretical lenses and play with sensitizing concepts in a creative process of constant comparison with the data, codes, memos and theory-in-construction. However, the sensitizing concept has a dark shadow – the 'de-sensitizing concept'. Bryant's definition of a de-sensitizing concept is a term «introduced using something akin to the very skilful sleight of hand of an adept conjurer, as if reference to such terms had some magical or mystical explanatory power without recourse to further explanation or analysis» (Bryant 2017: 142). He warns against mistaking 'evocative terminology' for sensitizing concepts. De-sensitizing concepts close down questions with premature conclusions – sensitizing concepts generate new questions.

8. Final thoughts

Having completed my preliminary search for sensitizing concepts to use in my study of the briefing/design process for a new university campus, I believe that the concepts I have identified resonate with my foreshadowed problem and may prove useful in disentangling client strategies and tactics in briefing/design meetings from what is happening 'out there' now and in an imagined future campus. Kelle advises choosing concepts that 'lack empirical content' to minimize the risk of 'forcing the data'. He suggests that the best way to test whether a concept is empirically empty is to consider whether it is falsifiable – if you can't think of a way to disprove it then it is probably sufficiently abstract to be used as a sensitizing concept. The sensitizing concepts that I have identified for possible use in my GTM analysis include framing, speech events, social goods and situated meaning – these are all 'empirically empty' and consequently not falsifiable. The next test of these potential sensitizing concepts will be how useful they prove to be in helping me recognise 'theoretically relevant data or significant phenomena'. This will be explored in the next stage of my research but the number of interesting questions about the data that these concepts are generating is an encouraging sign.

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GROUNDING THEORY METHODS: A NEW TOOL FOR CORRUPTION RESEARCH?

RICCARDO D'EMIDIO

Abstract

Despite the flourishing of the anti-corruption industry in the past 25 years, several scholars and practitioners argue that today anti-corruption efforts across the world represent a huge policy failure. A plethora of theoretical frameworks have been employed to analyse (anti)corruption, spanning through different disciplines such as economics, sociology, anthropology and political science. In an effort to move beyond the many competing frameworks and theories, and transcending established binary oppositions (private/public, need/greed, grand/petty), this paper explores the potential of Grounded Theory Methods (GTM) to reconcile contrasting understandings of (anti)corruption.

GTM provide a range of useful tools to uncover local meanings and constructions of corruption and integrity that can enhance the theoretical conceptualisations of (anti)corruption at the micro level, pinpointing the incentives and opportunities faced by individuals going beyond rational choice approaches.

Using a constructivist grounded theory approach, this paper outlines the overall research design, methods and epistemological assumptions employed to understand how and under what circumstances social norms act as determinants of corrupt behaviour using the Ghana Police Service as a case study. Moreover, specific attention is given to the challenges faced and the tactics employed to obtain rich data on a secretive and sensitive topic such as police corruption.

The paper's main contention is that Constructivist Grounded Theory is a key methodological tool for developing a more nuanced understanding of corruption and integrity, complementing some of the limitations and shortcomings of more traditional approaches to studying corruption emerging from political science and anthropology.

Keywords: Constructivist Grounded Theory, corruption, social norms, Ghana.

1. Introduction

The birth of Grounded Theory Methods (GTM) can be traced back to 1967, with Glaser and Strauss' seminal work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss 2009). Since then, GTM have developed in many different directions, reaching a point where these can be considered as a family (Bryant & Charmaz 2011: 11) or constellation of methods (Charmaz 2014a: 15). It is beyond the scope of this paper to do justice to the different developments of GTM and its application (for a good overview see Clarke 2019). Rather, the main contention of this paper focuses on Constructivist GTM as a crucial – yet underutilised – methodological tool for corruption research.

Scholarly work on corruption shifted from the margins of academic debate in the late 70s to becoming an important field of enquiry for a range of disciplines such as economics, sociology, political science and anthropology. Despite the 'renaissance' of academic focus on corruption anti-corruption success stories in both North and South of the world remain «depressingly thin» (Hough 2016).

The disappointing track record of the industry has fostered scholarly research to better understand and map out the many reasons underlying the failure of conventional anti-corruption interventions (de Sousa 2010; Heeks & Mathisen 2012; Institute of Development Studies 2010; Moroff & Schmidt-Pfister 2010; Persson, Rothstein, & Teorell 2013; Walton 2018). While some scholars point to the Eurocentric and Western-cen-

tred approach underpinning many of the interventions and reforms (Gephart 2009; Institute of Development Studies 2010; Walton 2016) others highlight the «far too few resources [...] spent on learning from interventions» (Heeks & Mathisen 2012). Some practitioners have gone further and have interrogated the adequacy of research in identifying useful theoretical frameworks that can lead to successful policy interventions¹.

Much of the reflections and arguments contained in this paper draw on the author's doctoral research on social norms and corruption, using the Ghana Police Service (GPS) as a case study. The background to this research project is the contention put forward by several authors that anti-corruption efforts today represent a worrying policy failure (Heywood 2018; 2017; Mungiu-Pippidi 2018; Rothstein 2018). In an effort to contribute to current debates on corruption and anti-corruption, the author's Ph.D. thesis seeks to understand how, why and under what set of circumstances social norms shape corrupt behaviour.

Using some concepts emerging from social psychology, the thesis attempts to further explore the role social norms have as determinants of behaviour, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of corruption, complementing some of the limitations and shortcomings of more traditional approaches emerging from political science and anthropology. The analytical reflections put forward in this research project are very much in line with recent scholarly work (Engelbert & Kubbe 2018; Heywood 2018; Kubbe & Engelbert 2017; Mungiu-Pippidi 2018; Ocheje 2018; Rothstein 2018) and practitioners (World Bank 2015) exploring and using social norms and informality to deepen the

¹ <http://www.kpsrl.org/browse/browse-item/t/a-helpful-response-to-unhelpful-research-and-a-call-for-ideas>) and <http://cdacolaborative.org/blog/the-unhelpful-nature-of-anti-corruption-research-as-seen-by-people-trying-to-develop-solutions/>.

understanding of corruption and in turn devise anti-corruption initiatives.

This enquiry is qualitative in nature and is carried out using constructivist grounded theory methods (Bryant & Charmaz 2011; Charmaz 2017; 2015; 2014a; 2014b), using social psychology concepts as *sensitising concepts* guiding the initial analysis. The research project foresaw four different stages of data collection, with different objectives and data collection techniques. In an effort to ensure a variety of different views and insights and limit the possibility of entering groupthink, this research project put forward a mix of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and textual vignettes as an eliciting tool. Overall this research project engaged over 40 participants, these included: police officers of different ranks and units in Accra, representatives of national anti-corruption agencies (Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice, Economic and Organised Crime Office, Office of the Special Prosecutor for Corruption), civil society organizations, representative of development partners (EU, DfID, DANIDA), bus and taxi drivers.

The data collected was analysed together with a set of primary sources (official policies, Standard Operating Procedures, bills, services instructions) relating to the Ghana Police Service. The data acquired is stored and analysed using the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) NVivo.

It is important to note that to date there are very few studies of corruption employing grounded theory: a keyword search for 'Corrupt*' and 'Grounded Theory' on the database 'Web of Science' resulted in 16 articles. The same research but expanded to the fields of keyword, title and abstract on the database Scopus yielded 22 results. While this paper does not presume to argue that GTM can resolve the complex impasse facing corruption research, it does contend that – echoing Bryant & Charmaz (2011: 51) – GTM can equip corruption researchers with the necessary tools to «think outside the paradigm», «aiming at new conceptual insights based on direct hands-on research».

In this regard constructivist GTM can be a critical tool to better comprehend how corruption is understood and experienced in diverse cultural and institutional settings going beyond established dichotomies (petty/grand, need/greed, etc.) and the recurrent tension between universalism and particularism. In an effort to illustrate this point, this paper articulates how the reclaiming of the philosophical assumptions of Chicago School of Sociology in GTM has informed the research design of the author's Ph.D. research project, shaping the data collection tools such as semi-structured interviews and textual vignettes.

This paper is made up of four sections: firstly, the paper succinctly outlines the key tenets of the method of constructivist GTM, highlighting its specific epistemic and ontological assumptions. The second section sketches out the current impasse faced by (anti)corruption as a field of both research and practice. Section three outlines how constructivist GTM can be used as a research tool to overcome the theoretical and methodological impasse faced by (anti)corruption scholars and practitioners, providing some examples from the author's own Ph.D. project. Lastly, the paper puts forward some concluding remarks identifying areas for future research.

2. Grounded theory as a family of methods and its key tenets

Since *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss 2009) GTM has evolved in many different directions. Denzin (2007) identifies seven different versions of GTM: positivist, postpositivist, constructivist, objectivist, postmodern, situational and computer assisted. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to do justice to the wide developments of GTM (for a good overview see Clarke 2019), this section seeks to position the rise of constructivist grounded theory within the broader field of qualitative enquiry. Figure 1 below summarises a genealogy of GTM clustering the different developments and scholarly work

according to the different generations, as well as marking how they influence each other (Clarke 2019: 18):

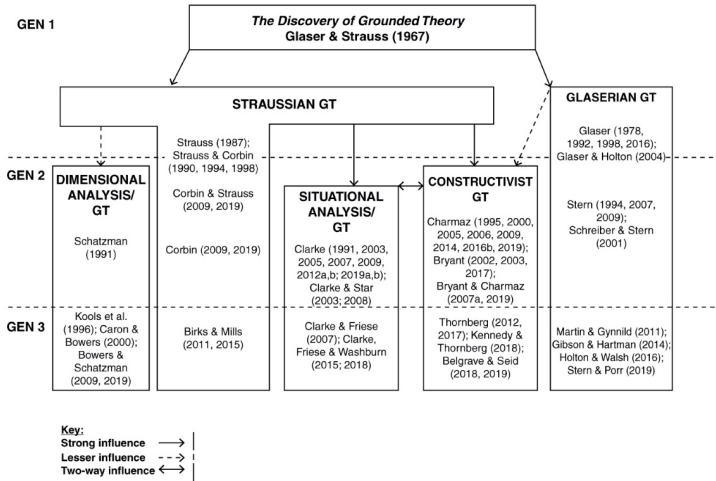


Fig. 1. Genealogy of GTM.
Source: Clarke 2019: 18.

GTM emerged in the US to contrast to the dominance of positivist quantitative research, yet – ironically – by the 1990s Grounded Theory became known «not only for its rigour and usefulness, but also for *its* positivistic assumptions» (Charmaz 2014a: 12 original emphasis), relying on an objective stance of the researcher *vis-à-vis* the social worlds being analysed.

Towards the end of the 1990s a growing number of scholars (Bryant 2002; 2003; Charmaz 2000; 2001; 2006; Clarke 2003; 2005; Seale 1999) took a 'constructivist turn', highlighting «the flexibility of the method» while resisting «mechanical applications of it» (Charmaz 2014a: 13). The underlying assumption behind this evolution is that social reality is «multiple, processual, and constructed», stressing issues of positionality and reflexivity of the researcher (*Ibid.*: 13).

GROUNDED THEORY METHODS

Despite the contrasting ontological and epistemic positionalities that underpin different traditions of Grounded Theory, there are several features which all proponents of the method agree upon: grounded theory begins with inductive logic and subjects the data collected to rigorous comparative analysis with an aim to develop theoretical insights. There are different views (Clarke 2007; Glaser & Strauss 2009; Walsh et al. 2015) with regards to the actual strategies that make up GTM, but Charmaz (2014a: 15) identifies the following steps as key building blocks of Grounded Theory:

1. Conduct data collection and analysis simultaneously in an iterative process;
2. Analyse action and processes rather than themes and structure;
3. Use comparative methods;
4. Draw on data in service of developing new conceptual categories;
5. Develop inductive abstract analytic categories through systematic data analysis;
6. Emphasize theory construction rather than description or application of current theories;
7. Engage in theoretical sampling;
8. Search for variation in the studied categories or process;
9. Pursue developing a category rather than covering a specific empirical topic.

While these steps are clearly numbered it is recognized among users of this method that GTM is not in any way a linear process, rather, it is an iterative procedure resembling the diagram presented in Figure 2 below with the ultimate objective of building a theory grounded in data. The research question shapes both the recruitment and sampling of participants as well as the data collection methods (interviews, focus group discussions, ethnography, document analysis etc.).

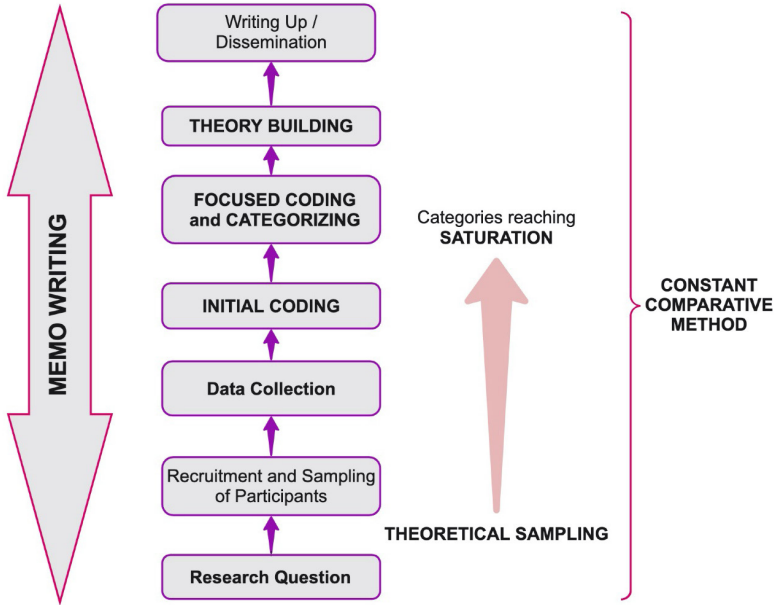


Fig. 2. Visual representation of Grounded Theory.
Source: adapted from Charmaz 2014: 18.

Once the data collection starts, analysis starts as well through coding and memo writing. «Coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory» to explain the data (Charmaz 2014: 113). Within qualitative enquiry a code is most often

a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data...Coding is not a precise science; it is primarily an interpretative act... [and it] can sometimes *summarize, distill, or condense* data, not simply *reduce* them. (Saldaña 2016: 4-5, original emphasis)

Charmaz (2014) differentiates between different kinds of coding (initial, focused, axial and theoretical) characterized by

increasing levels of abstraction leading to the development of theoretical categories and theoretical saturation (see Figure 3). Categories are 'saturated' when gathering fresh data does no longer provide any new theoretical insight or reveal new properties of the core categories (*Ibid.*: 2013). Many grounded theorists (Charmaz 2017; Glaser & Strauss 2009; Thornberg & Charmaz 2014; Walsh et al. 2015) consider categorical saturation as a direct consequence of theoretical sampling, i.e. «seeking and collecting pertinent data to elaborate and refine categories in your emerging theory» (Charmaz 2014a: 192). In other words:

Theoretical sampling is strategic, specific and systematic. Because you use it to elaborate and refine your theoretical categories, conducting theoretical sampling depends on having already identified a category. This pivotal grounded theory strategy helps you to delineate and develop the properties of your category and its range of variation. (Charmaz 2014: 199)

Grounded theorists therefore deliberately seek participants who have had particular responses to experiences. It is important to note that negative cases – i.e. cases where participants do not respond in anticipated way or depart from the majority of responses – are not discarded, rather they are integrated in the emerging theory, playing a part in the sampling process (Morse 2011).

Another critical feature of GTM and running through the entire coding process is the *constant comparative method* (Glaser & Strauss 2009: 105), whereby data is compared to data, codes compared to codes. This constant comparison process defines emergent categories with a whole set of properties (see Figure 2).

Memo writing runs through the entire research process as a way to «actively engage in ... [the] materials, to develop your ideas, to fine-tune your subsequent data gathering and to engage in critical reflexivity» (Charmaz 2014: 162-163). In this

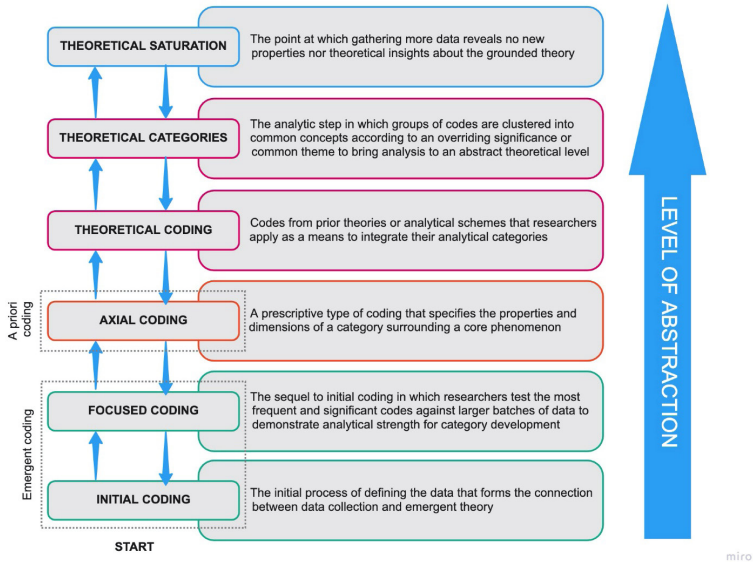


Fig. 3. Coding flow.

Source: Groen, Simmons, & McNair 2017.

regard, memo writing is the ‘analytical cement’ of the overall research process, taking codes and data apart, comparing them and defining the links between them. In other words, memos are the analytical tools which enable the researcher to cluster groups of codes into common concepts (or to use GTM language categories) bringing the analysis to an abstract theoretical level (Groen, Simmons, & McNair 2017: 13). In light of this, memos can (especially early ones) lack coherence, and simply record interpretations and incipient patterns emerging from the research sites. Ultimately, memos allow the researcher to gain the analytical distance to move away from description and into conceptualization and theory building (Lempert 2007: 249).

Theory in constructivist grounded theory – and within the interpretive approach – aims to understand meanings and actions and how people construct them, bringing in the subjectivity of participants while also recognizing the subjectivity of

the researcher (Charmaz 2014: 231). Specifically, this understanding of theory emphasizes interpretation and gives «*abstract understanding* greater priority than explanation» (*Ibid.*: 230 emphasis in the original). As it is discussed in the next section, one thing that corruption research has done since its inception is to focus on explanation and prediction, as opposed to understanding processes and meanings.

3. The impasse of corruption research

In the past 40 years, scholarly work on corruption has come from two different disciplinary traditions: anthropology on one hand and the social sciences on the other. Anthropology has provided some insightful accounts, exploring the practical manifestations of corruption such as gift exchange, reciprocity, clientelism, and nepotism (Heywood 2015; Zinn 2001). From this point of view, anthropologists were the pioneers rather than the latecomers in the study of corruption (Torsello 2015: 184).

Much of the social sciences' work on corruption on the other hand, finds its roots in rational choice theory, whereby corruption is conceptualised as a principal-agent dilemma (Harris & Raviv 1979; Klitgaard 1988; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka 2016; Rose-Ackerman 1978; Ross 1973), or as collective action problem (Bauhr & Nasiritousi 2011; Mungiu-Pippidi 2011; Persson, Rothstein & Teorell 2013; Rothstein 2011). More recently, a third theoretical approach to corruption is provided by neo-institutional economics (Della Porta 2012; Della Porta & Vannucci 2011; Hellmann 2017).

While very different between them, these approaches to conceptualising corruption share at least three key assumptions and features. Firstly, they focus on the individual as the main unit of analysis (albeit in a contextual way), overlooking other forces and dynamics at play. Secondly, they conceptualize the individual as a rational self-interest maximiser. Lastly, these approaches seek to understand (and ultimately alter) incentives

to engage in corruption from a cost-benefit or rational choice perspective.

To different extents, these ways of analysing and conceptualising corruption have not only shaped a number of institutional reforms in both the South and the North of the world, but they have also influenced the development of the global anti-corruption sector (Michael & Bowser 2009; Sampson 2010; 2015). Unfortunately, many scholars and practitioners describe this renewed scholarly and policy attention to corruption issues as an era of «great expectations and humble results» (Mungiu-Pipidi 2015), while others argue that anti-corruption intervention today represent a «huge policy failure» (Heywood 2018).

Despite the 'slippery' nature of the concept, corruption remains one the most pressing issues faced by citizens across the world: according to Afrobarometer 2019 (Pring & Vrushu 2019: 4) more than half of the citizens in the African continent believe that corruption increased in the past 12 months. Bribery demands remain a regular occurrence for approximately 130 million people in the continent (*Ibid.*). These staggering figures exemplify the extent of the failure of anti-corruption efforts, in fact almost 60% of Africans rate their governments' anti-corruption efforts as bad (*Ibid.*).

The very nature of corruption poses a specific set of methodological challenges for its study and acquisition of reliable data. It is beyond this paper to even provide a brief account of the complexities of corruption measurement (for an overview see Heywood 2015b; Sequeira 2012). Two key issues however are relevant for the current discussion: firstly, the illegal and secretive nature of corrupt behaviour makes it difficult to observe, resulting often in large n data sets using unreliable self-reports or perception of corrupt practices. Secondly, such data often does not delve or look into the underlying reasons taking place at the micro-level to engage in corrupt behaviour and the directionality associated to it (i.e. whether it arises out of coercion, mutual convenience, etc.).

Anthropologists working in corruption research also face a set of conceptual and methodological challenges such as the dichotomy between the public and the private sphere, the emic² approach underpinning anthropological research, and ethical concerns with regards to the role of informants (Heywood 2015; Torsello 2015; Torsello & Venard 2016).

Corruption research is therefore riddled by contrasting definitions and conceptualizations. Most importantly for the purposes of this paper, however, corruption research suffers from a methodological clash that impacts on the quality and use of the research findings. As emphasised by Torsello (2013: 120), «the study of corruption has methodologically suffered from an unresolved tension between particularism and universalism, which in some disciplinary approaches, such as the most of the anthropological ones, is difficult to solve».

Different gaps emerge as well from the social sciences, as called upon by Heywood (2017) whereby research should focus on better understanding:

how and why individuals engage in various different kinds of corruption, moving beyond the basic incentives-based model of instrumental rationality that has underpinned much economic analysis. We need a better understanding of how corruption is experienced and understood within specific contexts, what motivations and strategies lie behind an individual's decision to engage in a corrupt act, and how corrupt networks develop and sustain themselves. (Heywood 2017: 43)

This call for a deeper understanding of corruption chimes with Torsello et al. (2015: 3) when discussing the resistance of corruption to institutional reform:

² Emic approaches refer to taking an insider's view. Ethnographic studies show that what is termed 'corruption' from an outsider's (or 'etic') perspective, is often linked to a code of values and behaviour that is widely known and accepted from an insider's (or 'emic') perspective (Haller & Shore 2015).

because there are different local explanations to corruption and its related phenomena (clientelism, nepotism, trade of influence, abuse of office, illegal gift-exchanges and so on), corruption is extremely resistant to eradication and ultimately it is adaptable to institutional development and reform. Corruption may resist reforms in particularly when these are not aligned with the socio-cultural dimensions of this phenomenon.

It follows that understanding local constructions and meanings of corruption becomes critical to inform not only policy and institutional reform, but also to expand and deepen theoretical conceptualizations outlining its socio-cultural dimensions. This in turn opens up new research avenues to explore the qualitative differences in the institutionalization of corruption, for which economic analysis might be ill equipped (Rose-Ackerman 2010: 52).

4. The potential of Constructivist GTM for corruption research

It is against this backdrop that constructivist grounded theory can be deployed to better understand the nuances of corruption. Drawing on what Charmaz (2000) did when outlining the convergence of Social Justice Studies and constructivist GTM, this section firstly pinpoints key areas where GTM can contribute to corruption research, providing examples of how GTM was used in the author's research project. Secondly, it illustrates how GTM shaped the overall research design of the project while also outlining the practical tools used to collect data.

The reclaiming of some of the philosophical underpinnings of the Chicago School of Sociology in grounded theory was conducted by Charmaz (2000) in an effort to reconcile Social Justice Studies with GTM. Interestingly, this process of reclaiming resonates strongly with recent debates in corruption research (Heywood 2018; 2017; Mungiu-Pippidi 2018; Zaloznaya 2014) indicating that symbolic interactionism can indeed be used «to develop a more nuanced, complex and realistic way of both un-

derstanding and combating different forms of corruption at an appropriate scale and level» (Heywood 2017: 45).

Charmaz' (2000: 521) reclaiming of the Chicago School's assumption is grounded by the School's focus on «social processes as open-ended and emergent», «the significance of language» and «the reciprocal relationships between interpretation and action».

The American scholar identifies five steps in the reclamation process. Firstly, «*Establish intimate familiarity with the setting(s) and the events occurring within it – as well as with the research participants*» (Charmaz 2000: 521 original emphasis). While seeming obvious this is particularly relevant for corruption research where much social science research has been conducted without even entering the field relying on large *n* data sets. In this regard, the author not only spent over ten months conducting fieldwork in Ghana, but had been living in Ghana since 2016, working closely with the Ghana Police Service and other anti-corruption institutions in the country through his advisory work with the EU funded Accountability, Rule of law and Anti-corruption Programme (ARAP). During the years preceding his doctoral research the author had the opportunity to gain an 'intimate familiarity' with the settings and the phenomena under analysis.

Secondly, «*Focus on meaning and processes*» (Charmaz 2000: 522 original emphasis) questioning what might seem evident and identifying the range of meanings and how people form them. This consideration is critical when considering the point made by Torsello et al. (2015: 3) and quoted in the above section about the resilience of corruption to institutional reform. The socio-cultural dimension of corruption is not only enormously diverse, it is also the key feature that enables corruption to adapt to – and thrive in - very different cultural, institutional and sectoral contexts. The focus on meaning and processes shaped significantly the research design, which foresaw four separate rounds of data collection with senior police officers, representatives of Ghanaian anti-corruption institutions and bus and taxi

drivers. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews using textual vignettes as eliciting tools.

Thirdly, «*Engage in a close study of action*» (Charmaz 2000: 523 original emphasis) which is closely linked to the fourth step «*Discover and detail the social context within which action occurs*» (Charmaz 2000: 524 original emphasis). A dual focus on action and context enables the researcher to make nuanced explanations of corrupt behaviour. Lastly, «*Pay attention to language*» (Charmaz 2000: 525 original emphasis) since language shapes meaning and influences action and conversely, actions and experiences shape meaning. It is important to note here that the focus on language includes the language not only of research participants but also of the researcher.

For these last three steps the use of semi-structured interviews coupled with vignettes proved to be a fundamental tool for collecting rich data, enabling the author to develop relevant conceptual categories, while also situating action within specific social contexts. In this case, vignettes portrayed common dilemmas experienced by police officers in Ghana who were faced with the decision of acting according to the law or according to prevailing social norms, such as honouring reciprocity, celebrating the rich and wealthy and normalization of corruption (e.g. 'everybody does it'). Once participants read the story they were asked a set of questions «to further involve them in creating meaning» (Schoenberg & Ravdal 2000: 64), bringing the author closer to understanding the corrupt behaviour under analysis, unpacking it and enabling a deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics at play.

There is a great wealth of literature covering the use of vignettes in both qualitative and quantitative research (Barter & Renold 2000; Druckman et al. 2011; Finseraas et al. 2016; Ford 2016; Hughes & Huby 2004; Jenkins et al. 2010; Mutz 2011; Rungtusanatham, Wallin, & Eckerd 2011; Schoenberg & Ravdal 2000; Wilks 2004). For the purposes of this paper it is important to highlight the role that vignettes can play in making explicit the range of meanings and how participant form

them. In this regard vignettes can be a very useful eliciting tool to gauge attitudes, norms and beliefs about sensitive topics (Barter & Renold 2000; Hughes & Huby 2004; Jenkins et al. 2010; Schoenberg & Ravdal 2000; Wilks 2004). As argued by Jenkins et al. (2010: 178) a critical step in interpretative research when using vignettes is to clarify their purpose: «unlike their more experimental counterparts, the aim of qualitative vignette interviewing should not be to arrive at an accurate prediction of an interviewee's behaviour but instead to achieve insight into the social components of the participant's interpretative framework and perceptual processes».

Moreover, Barter & Renold (2000: 309) highlight the ability of carefully crafted vignettes to capture how meanings, beliefs, judgements and actions are situationally positioned making it a particularly good fit to gauge respondents attitudes, beliefs and ethical codes.

In the author's research project on social norms and corruption, there were two critical advantages in using vignettes to elicit responses: firstly, vignettes were modified in response to emergent theoretical issues, therefore «playing an interesting role in theoretical sampling within grounded theoretical approaches» (Wilks 2004: 84:). Secondly, hypothetical scenarios vignettes are non-personal, and consequently less threatening (Hughes & Huby 2004; Wilks 2004). This in turn reduced respondent bias complementing the data acquired in interviews and self-reports.

In terms of research design, this research project foresaw four different stages of data collection, with different objectives and data collection techniques as outlined in Table 1 below.

Tab. 1. Stages of Data Collection			
Stage	Data collection method	# of interviews	Objective
Stage 1 – Scoping	Exploratory interviews	15 - 20	Identifying institutional conditions and constraints
	Document review	N/A	Identifying relevant departments/units within GPS 1.3 Outline the constellation of relevant descriptive and injunctive norms.
Stage 2 – Identifying salient social norms	In-depth semi structured interviews using textual vignettes	15 – 20	2.1 Identify the most salient and relevant social norms. Understand the dynamics at play between the identified social norms and corrupt behaviour. Gather rich data to develop textual vignettes to be used in stage 3
Stage 3 – Gauging social norms and defining conceptual categories	In-depth semi-structured interviews using textual vignettes	30	3.1 Assessing the salience of social norms 3.2 Assessing sensitivity to sanctions
Stage 4 – Saturating findings	Focus Group Discussion	2 groups of max. 6 participants each	4.1 Completing processes of saturation 4.2 Contextualizing the Grounded Theory within current social and political processes.

In an effort to ensure a variety of different views and insights and limit the possibility of entering groupthink, this research project put forward a mix of semi-structured interviews,

focus group discussion and textual vignettes as an eliciting tool. Overall the project intended to engage a maximum of 50 participants, these included: police officers of different ranks and units in Accra, representatives of national anti-corruption agencies, civil society organizations, representatives of development partners, bus and taxi drivers.

Stage one of data collection (scoping stage) took place through a set of exploratory interviews and review of existing official documents (GPS Service Instructions, national anti-corruption policies and standard operating procedures for misconduct). This stage served three complementary objectives: firstly, to provide an overview of the structural and institutional conditions and constraints within the Ghana Police Service which may generate opportunities and incentives for corruption among police ranks. Secondly, to identify which departments/units within GPS have more contact with citizens and how the interactions play out in terms of negotiating or extorting bribes. Lastly, to sketch out the constellation of norms, behaviours and practices that surround and feed into police corruption.

Starting from a core group of participants from the rank and file of the GPS, other public bodies and citizens that had encounters with the police the author applied a snowballing technique (each interviewed person suggested other respondents who may have knowledge relevant to police corruption). This approach has been demonstrated to be especially suitable in corruption research when the target population is hidden, and it is hard to identify and contact potential subjects (Jancsics 2014). The initial participants were selected because of their knowledge of corruption in Ghana and of the Ghana Police Service.

The interviews were guided by an interview protocol aimed at obtaining data that could shed light on the constellation of social norms surrounding corrupt behaviour. The GTM underpinning the data collection and analysis relies on using categories generated by participants. Clearly, however, it was not feasible to approach data analysis as an entirely 'empty vessel'

with no preconceptions about the likely findings (Barbour 2007: 120). The starting point – or the sensitizing concepts – for the conceptualization of the relationships drew upon the contribution of ethnographic accounts of corruption in West Africa and Ghana. In this regard, the interview protocol built on the social norms discussed by Olivier de Sardan (1999). These included: injunctive norms of negotiation, gift giving, solidarity networks, predatory authority, redistributive accumulation, shame and descriptive norms of corruption.

Following GTM conventions, and in an effort to start delineating relevant conceptual categories initial coding and memo writing started from the first interview. This process, coupled with the review and analysis of official documents enabled the author to identify the formal rules and procedures governing police conduct and sanctioning misconduct, the existence of formal sanctions and whether these were enforced, while also shedding some light on the most appropriate units or departments in the GPS to focus on; and a rough sketch of the constellation of relevant social norms surrounding police corruption in Ghana.

Stage two focused on identifying and selecting the most salient norms related to corrupt behaviour and exploring them in detail. During this stage a range of conceptual categories started to emerge and together with some initial definition of their variance. The in depth semi-structured interviews used were critical to gather «rich data» that went «beneath the surface of social and subjective life... [revealing]... participants' views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as context and structures of their lives» (Charmaz 2014a: 23). Therefore, this data revealed the most salient social norms surrounding police corrupt behaviour (big man rule, honouring reciprocity, celebrating the rich and wealthy, honouring religious and ethnic ties), but also the different kinds of sanctions (positive and negative) associated to the norms (isolation from the family circle, transfers, ostracization, promotions, celebration in the family and

own networks). This data was critical for the development of the textual vignettes employed in the following stage.

Stage three foresaw further analyses to further elaborate and determine the variance of the initial categories identified in stage two, while assessing the likelihood and strength of sanctions associated to norms. Data was collected through the use of a set of short textual vignettes coupled with semi-structured interviews. Essentially a vignette is a very short story that «when carefully constructed and pretested, simulates real life experience» (Schoenberg & Ravdal 2000: 63-64). Each vignette addressed a specific social norm which intersected with a specific act of corruption, accurately portraying specific features of the norm. The vignettes were pre-tested with officials of the GPS as well as other relevant participants.

Finally, stage four of the data collection process included at least two focus group discussions (FGD) with a maximum of six participants each. FGDs provided insights into public discourses, while allowing participants to debate issues within the context of their own shared cultural background. In other words, FGDs were intended to ‘push’ the analysis towards completion, providing «final pieces of the puzzle... complete processes of saturation» (Morse 2011: 241). Morse (2011) labels these kinds of FGD as ‘theoretical group interviews’, where participants are invited to facilitate analysis by adding information in areas considered ‘thin’ addressing inconsistencies and ambiguities from their perspective, daily life and experience. This is particularly noteworthy when considering the constructivist approach underpinning this research project, whereby interviews and interactions with research participants become «a site of exploration, emergent understandings, legitimation of identity and validation of experience» (Charmaz 2014a: 91).

It is worth noting that throughout the data collection process theoretical sampling played a fundamental role in guiding the recruitment of participants. For example, FGDs participants were recruited from participants interviewed in stage three of the data collection process.

5. Conclusion

While this paper does not presume to argue that constructivist GTM is the panacea for corruption research, it does argue that the tools and philosophical assumption outlined in the previous sections are crucial instruments that can be deployed by researchers working in the area of corruption. In this regard, constructivist GTM can inform the research design and provide a range of useful tools to uncover local meanings and constructions of corruption and integrity, resulting in enhanced theoretical conceptualisations of (anti)corruption at the micro level, going beyond rational choice approaches. Moreover, constructivist GTM offers a systematic approach to corruption analysis that fosters integrating subjective experience with social conditions. This stands in stark contrast with much of the social science research in the area of corruption which is objectivist and flows from standard positivist methodologies.

While scholarly work in the area of corruption using GTM is still limited, research exploring how and under what circumstances specific constructions of corruption and integrity emerge, is urgently needed. Specifically, constructivist GTM opens up the possibility to better understand how corruption develops and thrives in specific cultural, institutional and sectoral settings enhancing current conceptualisations of corruption while also providing additional insights with regards to possible institutional and policy reform.

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GROUNDED THEORY METHODS

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APPLICATION OF GROUNDED THEORY METHODOLOGY FOR ANALYZING IT IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN PROJECT-BASED LEARNING COURSES

JUSTYNA SZYNKIEWICZ

Abbreviations

GT – Grounded Theory

GTM – Grounded Theory Methodology

IT – Information Technology

CEdR – Computing Education Research

Excited – Center for Excellent IT Education

Abstract

This chapter consists of methodological reflections on the application of Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology in Ph.D. research in the field of Computing Education. Grounded Theory Methodology is used to enrich the investigation of Information Technology (IT) identity development in project-based learning courses.

As a novice researcher, I encounter challenges in implementing Grounded Theory. In particular, I would like to reflect on how interview questions used shape data and subsequent GT analysis. In as much as it is a reflection on the method, it is also a reflection on the substance of my inquiry. At the beginning of the study, an interview guide was created and the way it was structured had a great impact on the codes that emerged subsequently, making them too factual and fragmented. To create

a theory, one must raise the level of abstraction of the analysis, though so far, the codes and categories created do not reach a satisfactory level of abstraction.

Keywords: Interview guide, Grounded Theory analysis, Identity development.

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the advantages and disadvantages of the interaction between data collection and analysis in Grounded Theory (GT) study. It is perhaps important to reveal that I chose Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) (Charmaz 2006; Glaser & Strauss 1967) because I was new to the topic; my knowledge about computing education and identity were minimal, while my supervisor was familiar with this style of research. Some would argue that this reasoning is not sufficient for choosing a methodology. Nevertheless, the methodology fits my research question and I believe it is a powerful tool for exploring IT identity development for someone with almost no previous knowledge of this area of research.

GT is a rigorous yet flexible type of qualitative data-driven analysis (Wertz et al. 2011) which allows the user to deeply engage in a search for the meaning created by people. It focuses on situations, contexts, processes, and interactions. Identity development is a complex, ongoing process to which factors such as social environment, previous experiences, beliefs, and expectations are essential. GT methodology allows me to listen to students' stories and investigate what they are experiencing on project courses and how they are affected by those experiences.

I, as many others new to Grounded Theory, face the same dilemma: how to structure the interview guide and how to formulate the questions so that they focus on social processes rather than factors that influence those processes. The inspiration for writing this paper comes from the need to become a better Grounded Theory researcher.

Creating an interview to capture social processes, Charmaz recommends the use of intensive interviews asking about collective processes first, and later asking about the individual's participation in them and view of them. Even though we can find an example of the interview guide in Charmaz' book (Charmaz 2014: 66), we need to gain a better understanding of how the questions we ask shape the analysis.

2. Background

I am a Ph.D. candidate at the Center for Excellent IT Education (Excited 2019). The center aims to improve the quality of computing education in Norway by focusing on implementing methods such as project-based learning, self-assessment, and student and teacher reflection, as well as student involvement in research and development activities. Research done by the center belongs to the Computing Education Research (CEdR) field that is a type of discipline-based education research concerned with questions such as how people learn computing and how we can invent and provide better ways of teaching computing (Nelson & Ko 2018).

I have an opportunity to look at the computing discipline from the perspective of an outsider, meaning I can see things that others on the inside cannot. With my background in Social Sciences, I am trying to introduce a sociological perspective to the CEdR discipline, currently dominated by quantitative approaches (S. Fincher & Petre 2004; S. A. Fincher & Robins 2019).

My Ph.D. project is a qualitative investigation into Computing Identity development in project-based learning settings. I begin my study with a question: what do students experience in the context of project-based courses and how they are affected by these experiences?

The implementation of active learning practices like projects is inspired by a student-centered philosophy of education called Constructivism, based on the work of Piaget (1970) and Vy-

gotsky (1978). The constructivist theory of learning in essence claims that «(1) learning is an active process of constructing rather than acquiring knowledge, and (2) instruction is a process of supporting that construction rather than communicating knowledge» (Duffy & Cunningham 1996: 2).

On projects courses, computing students often work in groups and actively engage in designing artefacts. They create artefacts like software products, digital games, apps, and reports.

3. Initial data collection and analysis process

My data collection consists of in-depth, open-ended, and semi-structured interviews, in addition to in-class observations. Between June 2018 and April 2019, I observed and recruited nine participants from three project courses at two Norwegian universities.

4. Initial conceptions of ‘computing identity’

In the study of Grounded Theory, a sensitizing concept (Blumer 1954) gives the researcher a point of departure and suggests a direction in which to look. After discovering emerging empirical categories, the author allows those to further guide the direction of the study. In my Ph.D. work, I consider students’ professional identity as a sensitising concept. Identity is a highly complex concept which may be found in disciplines like philosophy, psychology, and sociology. Identity conceptualisations were unknown to me at the beginning of my studies, and this concept still, after two years of research, persists in being vague, making me reluctant to create my own definition or incorporate existing ones.

5. Initial interview guide and interviewing

The interview guide, as well as the research questions, were required to be attached to the admission application to the Ph.D. program, as well as to the notification form regarding the processing of personal data in the project submitted to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). Charmaz recommends that while conducting interviews, one needs to ask very open questions and let the participants speak (2006). The first version of the interview guide consists of 35 open-ended questions that were designed based on the research questions presented in Table 1.

Tab. 1. Problem statement and research questions	
Problem Statement	Research Questions
How is university students' IT-identity formed through innovative learning in IT courses?	<p>RQ1: What influences students to pursue a higher education in IT?</p> <p>RQ2: How is the process of IT identity formation shaped by group dynamics in project-based learning settings?</p> <p>RQ3: How do project-based learning classroom settings, including stakeholder and client involvement, influence students' identity formation?</p>

I used those research questions as points of departure to form interview questions, to listen to interviewees, and to think analytically about the data. Charmaz' advice for novice researchers is to «develop a detailed interview guide to think through the kinds of questions that can help them to fulfil their research objectives» (2014: 62). The guide was divided into five parts. The first part consists of 3-4 broad questions:

1. How did you become interested in games and entertainment technology?
2. How would your friends, family, or others describe you?
3. What positive and negative aspects of group work come to mind when you think about the GameLab course?
4. What it was like participating in a course with external customers?

These broad questions were followed by 31 questions divided into six groups. After conducting the first interview, it became apparent that some of the questions were overlapping, leading to their omission in the following interviews.

After presenting my Ph.D. project, I asked Games students for volunteer participation in interviews (volunteer sampling). Participants were invited for a 30/45-minute interview. In practice, the time spent for each interview varied from 30 minutes to a little over 1 hour and 40 minutes. The first interview was conducted with a student named Oskar, a second year Games and Entertainment Technology (from here on referred to as Games) student from NORD University in Norway.

In the beginning of the study, the concept of identity was related to an individual; it was a student's identification with themselves as an IT student and future IT professional. I conducted interviews with the aim of understanding the student's perspective, his or her motivations to study IT, the influence of others on their choice of degree program, and their exposure to technology during childhood. I asked about the skills that are needed at university and in professional IT careers. I asked students to talk about their strengths and how they can make use of them in project-based learning courses.

In some of the project courses at university, external customers are involved, and I was interested to understand how client participation influences students' personal learning experience. The closing questions were related to changes in the participants' values, norms, and interests.

During the first interview, I followed the interview guide closely and asked the questions in sequence (one by one, in order). After some time, I began to become more confident and comfortable talking to students and the interview guide served as a support rather than a tool that guided the interview. Moreover, I started to recognise some patterns and would guide the interviews in the desired direction. I started to ask for clarifications, explanations, and examples during the interviews.

6. Initial coding

After transcribing the interviews with four students from the Games study program, I performed line-by-line coding using NVivo (computer-assisted, qualitative data analysis software), resulting in the creation of over 100 codes. The codes are divided into five categories:

1. experiences prior to university
2. studying IT at university
3. envisioned future work
4. best quotes
5. topics to reconsider

The line-by-line coding in the first interview turned out not to be the most suitable way of coding and is replaced with incident-to-incident coding (Holton 2018).

Both line-by-line coding and incident-to-incident coding are forms of initial coding (also called open coding). The difference is that when coding line-by-line, the researcher is assessing what is happening in each line of the data, while in incident coding, the researcher can analyse a larger part of the transcript.

Interview transcript:	Line by line coding:
<p>I always was a gamer since I was like three years old I've been playing computer games and it is a hobby and if not directly a passion of mine, I love to play games, and I'm interested in games and game like things so I decided to after having failed another study course to become a librarian and been working for a few years I saved up enough money that I wanted to try again and do something that I have some more passion in.</p>	<p>Young gamer Gaming hobby Dropping out Working and saving SPO is a better suit</p>
Interview transcript:	Incident coding:
<p>Yeah. Maybe, if you're good enough to convince the others on the team that this is necessary and 'I can do this". But I think it's a bit like risky to do something you've never done before during a project, like to start and thinking yeah, I'm going to make a graphical sign in Photoshop and never even before use Photoshop. That's, that's kind of risky, I think. But, well, if it's a need for it, and everyone on the group agrees that this is necessary, and we believe you can do this, then of course, I think you can go for it. But be aware of the risk involved in doing it.</p>	<p>It's risky to do something you never done before during the project</p>

The five categories created from the data were:

1. The *experiences prior to university* category is related to the research question concerned with the students' reason for choosing an IT study program. The codes here capture parents', friends' and other people's influence (or lack thereof) on the students. Codes in this group are also related to their passion for and interest in technology, computers, gaming, and creative fields.
2. The *experiences at university* code category consists of codes that present students' experiences related to participation in university courses where they construct digital artefacts. These codes are grouped into subgroups such as skills, customers' or executives' participation in

courses, reflections, experiences from group work, challenges encountered during the course, thoughts about performing certain team roles, and emotions. Moreover, in this category, we can find codes related to students' view of themselves as IT students and as part of the game development community at university. The *experiences at university* code category is the richest in terms of its number of codes, some of which have subgroups. For example, codes such as *skills* include codes like *social skills*, *core skills*, *learning new skills*, and *using previously acquired skills*.

3. Students' thoughts about their desired future career are presented in the *envisioned future work* category. In this category, I included codes related to students' perception of possible and desirable job roles, professional skills needed to succeed in the industry, and students' ideas about the current situation in the job market.
4. The *best quotes* main category consists thus far of 23 codes that represent students' accounts particularly well, in addition to quotes that I found particularly interesting.
5. The *topics to reconsider* category contains surprising findings that should be considered and tested against new data.

Charmaz warns that a «naïve researcher may inadvertently force interview data into preconceived categories, and that undermines a grounded theory study» (2014: 63). GT codes and categories should emerge from the data, though in my analysis the first three categories presented above are rather predetermined categories, they are products of the interview questions. The examples below present the connection between interview questions, categories, and codes created.

Interview question	Category	Codes
How did you become interested in studying IT? Has anyone influenced your choice of studies?	Pre-University experiences	Growing up with technology Someone who learns computing easily Being influenced
What skills do you think are the core skills for an IT professional?	Experiences at university	Social skills Willingness to learn Time management
What does the word IT professional mean to you? What do you think makes students good CS / Games and Entertainment Technology specialists?	Envisioned future work	Predicting job market situation You can become so many things Applying for work

We could imagine a situation in which students will talk about their experiences with technology prior to university when not asked about it directly, but they might also talk about some other issues which are more significant to them and more relevant to the processes of IT identity development. In fact, another category could emerge that is currently not included in my analysis.

The initial codes were close to the empirical data; they had a descriptive and factual nature. There is a significant number of codes that are factual, such as 'being a leader' or 'growing up with technology'. They were often formulated as in-vivo codes that use the language of participants, for example 'you can become so many things'. The codes lacked conceptual abstraction (Holton 2007) since they just described what happens in the data without explaining any further. One of the reasons for the analysis being too factual was following the interview guide so rigorously. Nevertheless, the analysis in its initial stage should closely reflect the data, becoming progressively more abstract.

7. Revised data collection and analysis process

7.1. Revised conceptions of 'computing identity'

After initial analysis of the data and becoming familiar with some of the work done in the field of students' identity development, I am now more interested in the identity of the computing discipline. The initial interest in conceptualisation of identity as something that relates to an individual has now transformed into the concept of identity as a collective phenomenon. Computing identity is something that is negotiated in interactions between faculty members, student, teachers, and other stakeholders.

7.2. Revised interview guide and further interviews

The accounts of the previous participants served as a tool for guiding the subsequent interviews. In other words, the questions asked in each interview were influenced by the accounts gathered in previous interviews. The highly extensive interview guide, consisting of 36 questions, was no longer strictly followed but rather served as a support and I began to skip some of the questions to focus on interesting or surprising topics. I experienced that a more open and flexible approach to interviewing gave me more insight and made the participants trust me more; they seemed to feel more comfortable opening up. Instead of asking questions in a sequence, I was going deeper into the themes brought up by participants.

When performing initial interviews, I asked Games students for volunteer participation in interviews (volunteer sampling). Volunteer sampling has its pitfalls; students who want to participate in the study might be the most active and high-performing students in the class. Therefore, sampling (Table 2) in the Concurrent Design courses was based on identifying silent and

dominant students during classroom observation. During interviews, I tried to grasp the students' thoughts and reflections on their identification with the computing discipline, or lack of it. I also attempted to identify the computing culture and values, I asked if they see the possibility of bringing their unique ideas into their computing project courses at university.

Tab. 2. Interview participants' demographics	
Total	9
Course name and study program	
GameLab, Games and Entertainment Technology	4
Concurrent Design, Computing Engineering	2
Concurrent Design, Digital Collaboration	3
Program level	
Bachelor	6
Master	3
Form of participation Identification of silent and engaged students begun with the recruitment for the 5th interview.	
Silent	2
Engaged	3

7.3. Coding with revised interviews

In addition to Games students, I conducted interviews with two students from a Computing Engineering degree program and three from a Digital Collaboration program. Since the interviews, it has become apparent that belonging to a degree program influences a participant's view on topics related to the degree. This resulted in different forms of presentation and categorisation of the data. Accounts were not divided into the above five categories, but according to the initial coding for each student, I created a mind map for each of the participants with four or more categories. In the centre of each mind map is the name of the study program, to which categories with codes are attached. Figure 1 presents the mind map created

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for Erik, a Digital Collaboration student and participant of the Concurrent Design project.

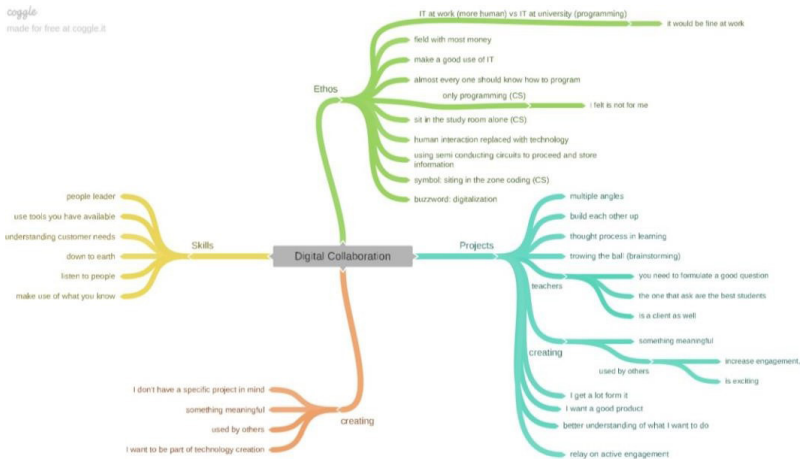


Fig. 1. Data analysis in the form of a mind map.

Changing the ways of categorising and presenting data reflects the flexibility of GTM. The idea of seeing students' identity development as a journey that begins with their *experiences prior to university*, evolves into *studying IT at university*, and continues with *envisioned future work*, was based on the analysis of student accounts from the Games Design program. However, after being exposed to the narratives of students from two other university degrees, my areas of interest changed to computing culture and I began to see the identity in my research as a disciplinary identity created by teachers, students, and faculty members, rather than the identity of an individual. The change in my interest was influenced by the literature I was exposed to, and I began to see concepts like computing ethos as an important part of my research and define them as categories. I noticed that the interview guide and literature I read predetermined some of my categories. The influence of the interview questions on the analysis is presented below.



The mind map (Figure 1) reflects the factors that influence identity development, rather than the identity development process itself. There is still a lack of focus on identity as a process in the data analysis. Nevertheless, during the interviews there was more room for participants to speak openly and that allowed me to identify how Erik's IT identity development process was affected by external factors. My data shows that Erik changed degree programs because the computing degree was too focused on programming and independent work in the first year and lacked human perspectives and interactions. Erik's strategy for coping with the situation was to change degree programs, joining a more collaborative one, Digital Collaboration. Erik is finding the new degree more suitable with regard to the possible ways to acquire knowledge (project, course, and group work) and to participate in the computing discipline (envisioning himself as leader).

The expansion of the sample by involving more diverse students encourages comparison of the data. Students from the Games Development program state that they study IT because of a love for games and willingness to shift from being a consumer to being a creator. The other two groups are more focused on getting a well-paid and easy-to-find job while doing something they like which has an influence on society.

When talking about conceptualisation, Glaser makes the abstract of time, place, and people the most important characteristic of GT study. Grounded Theory does not describe the unit

but looks for the core processes in that unit. Glaser claims that many researchers have difficulty generating conceptual hypotheses that can be applied to any time, place, and people.

By taking into consideration the differences between degree programs, I compare the differences between units, but in GT work we should preferably focus on looking for a process present within all the units (in this study degree programs), rather than describing degree programs or comparing them. The division of students based on the unit makes the concepts of computing identity related to a specific place.

8. Final reflections on the research process of GTM

Reflecting upon data collection and consecutive analysis makes me aware of the need to 1) go back to the data and pick two random incidents from each interview, 2) look at the incidents without preconceived categories, 3) code the incidents, 4) code all interviews again without using qualitative data analysis software 5) search for emerging categories 6) conduct more interviews with the emerging categories in mind.

With my new interview guide I hope to be able to gain more data on IT identity development. When interviewing I will keep in mind the lessons I learned from the previously conducted interviews, I will ask fewer questions and let the participants to speak, and I will do not follow the interview guide rigorously but rather follow the stories participants share. The questions I would like to ask students are presented below.

Main questions

1. What discipline/community do you consider yourself a part of?
2. How would you describe how you viewed computing before you started to study?
3. How, if at all, has your view of IT changed?
4. Could I ask you to describe the most important lesson you have learned by working on projects?
5. How have you grown as a person since you began to study IT?
6. Tell me about the strengths you discovered or developed through studying.

Supporting questions

1. Could you describe the IT/... discipline?
2. After having this experience what would your advice be to someone who is considering applying to study IT?
3. Could you describe what is important for the IT/[...] community?
 - a. What about values, skills?
 - b. Do you think the majority of students from your year share the same values?
4. What are the most important ways to be an IT/[...] professional?
 - a. How did you discover them?
 - b. Has your idea of being an IT/[...] professional changed?
5. Do you feel like a part of the IT/[...] community?
 - a. Could you tell me why/why not?
6. When do you learn the most?
7. Can you tell me about project courses at university?
8. If you can recall, can you tell me how you handled your first project course?
 - a. How is it different from how you handle the current one?
 - b. What did you learn?
9. Could you tell me what the best part of the project is?
10. Could you recall the most frustrating event during the project?
11. What are your thoughts on the roles you take in projects?
 - a. Do you choose them yourself?
12. How do you manage difficulties in project courses?
13. Is there anything else you think I should know to understand the learning in project courses?
14. What positive changes have occurred in your life?
15. What do you most value about yourself?
 - a. What others value?
16. Who would you like to be after the university?
 - b. Can you describe the person you hope to be then?

Learning the art of qualitative research is an ongoing process; one needs to be patient, make mistakes, be flexible, and use methodology as a tool to help one to conduct the research. There is no one way of doing Grounded Theory. There are multiple paths and finding the path suitable to me is what I am aiming for.

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF ITALIAN RELIGIOSITY: A GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH

EVELINA DE NARDIS

Abstract

The aim of this chapter is to illustrate the process of Constructivist Grounded Theory applied to a research about Italian religiosity. The data obtained are analyzed through software NVivo. For the first level of coding emerges the nodes of Church, Faith, Prayer, and God with related properties. At the second level, the categories are refined. From the research emerges that the concept of Church, Faith, Pray, and God are changing due to the process of new re-secularization caused to new ways to live religious phenomena in a world characterized by the crisis of moral values, and the loss of certainty.

Keywords: Constructivist Grounded Theory, religiosity, secularization, values.

1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research '*New religiosity in Italy*' conducted by the Sociology Department of Roma TRE University. The aim is to understand the factors that have allowed to radical transformations in Italian religious attitudes. The results of this research reflect that the changes, that take place in the society, are originated by a multiplicity of factors: massive phenomenon of migration, new political scenarios characterized by lack of credibility towards the correct functions absolved by traditional institutions as Church and State. Considering this issue, the objective is to illustrate the process of Grounded

Theory Methods to build a theory of Italian religiosity at national and local contexts. The local context concerns little towns (population inferior to 1.000 inhabitants), and average town (population between 1.100 to 2500 inhabitants), and big town (population superior to 2500 inhabitants). All cities are situated in the North, Centre or South of Italy.

The chapter is divided into following parts:

1. The role of iteration in research processes in Grounded Theory approach
2. Grounded Theory and Religious research
3. Collection and analysis of data
4. General dimensions and core categories characterizing Italian religiosity
5. Conclusions

The first paragraph illustrates the structure of iteration in Grounded Theory research. The second paragraph concerns references to the literature about religious studies with particular emphasis to emergent themes of multidimensional religiosity phenomena.

In the last paragraphs, collection and analysis of data are described. As stated by Strauss & Corbin (1998), «analysis is an interplay between the researcher and the data», and following the Constructivist Grounded Theory paradigm, the research objective is addressed to participants' ecology and to meanings that the actors confer on their realities. These processes allow the definition of concepts concerning religiosity in changing Italian society to be developed. In this paragraph, emergent core category is developed constructing a substantive theory. Once a core category is determined, all other categories become sub-categories characterized by the following descriptors: properties, processes, dimensions, and contexts. The sub-categories are linked and organized by relationship, conditions and dimensions. The core category is intended to name the central phenomenon of the study. Looking for patterns and repeated relationship, the researcher assembles the data to give rig-

orous specificity to emerging theory. With the aim to obtain authenticity of data, life experiences are textually recorded and reported. These aspects shape the approach of data collection and analysis by providing credibility of data across all research participants in the different locations.

2. Grounded Theory approach and the role of iteration's processes research

A qualitative researcher seeks to capture the authentic experience of research participants considering what Denzin & Lincoln called the «inescapable problem of representation» (2005: 19). Reflexivity can contribute to the grounding of theory by documenting the process through an analytic approach. Reflexivity involves the complex relationship between knowledge constructed by the interaction of participants and the researcher engaged in the research process. Reflexivity begins with an understanding of the importance of one's own values and attitudes within the research process. In an approach of research, based on theory building, the main goals of the research require simultaneous parallel processes rather than sequential thinking procedures. According to Glaser and Strauss, Grounded Theory could provide a method allowing the researcher to move from data to theory, with the aim of coming up with new theories grounded in the data. A fundamental task in Grounded Theory includes identifying categories that are grounded in the data. The problem of making sense of research is to anchor sensitizing concepts within data, and to further develop strong conceptual categories in relation to data. In Grounded Theory the processes of data collection, coding, analysis and interpretation of data are simultaneous, thus realizing an iterative approach collecting, coding and memoing data, and resulting in analytical categories. The axial and theoretical coding have the aim of confirming, redefining or modifying categories to better fit them into data through the constant comparison method, and after analytical and conceptual insights. Diagrams and

memos are fundamental to illustrate the connections between emergent theory and raw data and to complete the research process. The method of mapping data enables the researcher to comprehend and interpret data into coherent models of research. Creating conceptual map supports the researchers' ability to deepen the understanding of emerging themes; and this enables the researcher to look for interrelations among emergent themes with the aim of constructing theory deeply connected to data.

3. Grounded Theory and religious research

Religiosity, considered as a quality or a status/condition of being religious, can be commonly understood through the practices of personal belief in God, as an omnipotent entity in comparison of man. We also include alternative forms of religion, in which the omnipotent male God is absent, as stated by many research participants.

A more comprehensive theory of religiosity, based on Grounded Theory method appears to be adequate because it takes into account the characteristic of plurality that attains to peculiarity of religion studies, which are shared with other cultural, social and physical aspect of being religious. Another aspect, underlying religious studies, concerns the fact of being an interdisciplinary domain of research. The task of translating theoretical models in these fields is quite demanding. Correspondingly, the embedded character of study about religion is now rightly emphasized. On the level of theory, however, these obvious facts have important implications. Given the intimate connectedness of religiosity with other domains of human life, changes in the understanding of the latter will always have repercussions on the daily experience and understanding of religion (Garelli 2013). A comprehensive theory of religiosity will, at least, implicitly have to address a series of fundamental issues concerning human beings and culture. Italy is experiencing a growth in religious practices during the last decades, mainly

due to the increasing presence of immigrants and affirmation of alternative forms of meditation as yoga.

4. Data collection

Open ending interviews are administered to eighty-five women and sixty men resident in different regions of Italy. The list of questions that constituted the interviews was flexible: a guided conversation with the interviewer started from initial leading issues concerning values, politics and religion. The principles of theoretical sensitivity directed the researcher to searching for similarities or differences in the research participants' account. The choice to do in depth interviews, particularly those inspired by Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz 2012; 2006; Glaser & Strauss 1967; Kelle 2005; Strauss & Corbin 1998), provides the researcher the opportunity to tap the phenomena of religiosity into the life-world of participants by establishing patterns or systematically developing concepts and categories. In doing so, the researcher is able to develop a full-fledged theory with the aim of understanding cultural meaning in a particular domain of research. The process of analyzing data is carried out by using two different coding procedures, based on analytic processes through which the data are conceptualized and integrated in a developing theory.

5. Analysis of interviews

A qualitative research framework following in Grounded Theory contains a set of techniques that the researcher can use to identify common themes, patterns and relationships within the responses of the research participants. Grounded Theory approach is built on comparative methodology where data are grouped and conceptually labeled, in the sense that categories are linked and organized through relationships underlying conditions and dimensions.

Strauss & Corbin (1998) claim that «Analysis is the interplay between the researcher and the data because the researcher

constructs theory from the data by starting from lived experience of research participants» (Charmaz 1994: 13).

Firstly, the researcher begins to analyze the data after collecting and recording interviews as MP3 files audio. Interview transcripts are coded, interpreted and subjected to two different levels of coding to come up with a substantive theory of Italian religiosity. The interviews transcribed and processed by software NVivo 10 allow the researcher to code texts line by line. The first step of open coding procedure is to create an initial list of conceptual codes, and collection and analysis of data are repeated until saturation of categories is reached. The process of coding is enriched by annotating theoretical memos, because the documentation of the processes would provide an insight of emergent conceptual understanding that requires further explorations. Memoing occurs initially at the substantive coding level and proceed to higher level of conceptual abstraction as coding proceeds to theoretical saturation and the researcher begins to explore conceptual reintegration through theoretical coding.

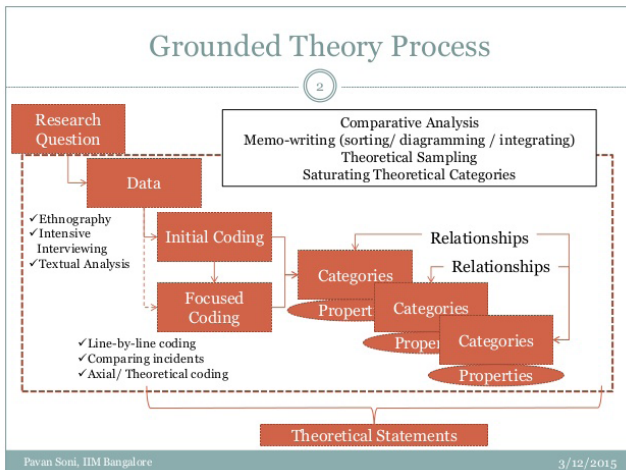


Fig.1. Grounded Theory process.
Source: Pavan Soni, IIM Bangalore (2015).

In Fig. 1 it is depicted the Grounded Theory research process and as it emerges clearly, the researcher needs to step back once in a while and ask the following questions: what is going on here? Does what I think I see, fit the reality of the data? So, researchers need to make sure that their ideas about what is happening match with the rich data. In the process understanding the research field, it is common that researchers need to change their idea of what is going on within a setting or around a particular event. All theoretical explanations, hypotheses and questions about the data collected through interviews, ethnographic research should be regarded as preliminary, whether they come from the literature, experience or making comparisons.

The process of constant comparison is engaged in axial and selective coding. The principal objective of selective coding is to explain the story line that characterizes the phenomena of Italian religiosity. This constant comparing of incidents continues until the process yields the interchangeability of indicators meaning that no new properties or dimensions are emerging from continued coding and comparison.

6. Grounded Theory processes: first level of coding

In the coding process, the conceptual abstraction of data and its reintegration as a theory takes place. The first step of analysis of data is line by line coding. After this, focused coding is done with the aim to develop concepts and relative properties by using software NVivo 10. At this level of coding, 120 codes are extracted and the first properties are defined by saturation of data guided by the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher. But to redefine the conceptual dimensions and their properties, one should keep on embracing method of comparative analysis. The dimensions as they emerged from this level of coding that underlines Italian religiosity, concern the role of Church, the faith, the prayer and God.

Tab.1. Open coding and properties	
Codes	Properties
Love	Relation, help, mercy
Well-being	Interior dimension
Centrality in education	Future, religious, family, school, naturalistic, secular
Church	Attended by crooks, building, economical interests, changeable habits, financial skirting, appearance, far from poverty, privileges, scandal, leading to war, no-vocational clergyman
Communication in digital era	Alienation, separation, information speed
Beliefs	Faith as habits, intrinsic need of human nature, syncretism, obscurantism
Doubt	Link to faith, passage of life passages
Happiness	Value to be constructed with myself and the others, care, straightforwardness
Family- son	Future, exchange, richness
Engagement	Contrast to illegal power, associations
Islam	Isis, fanatics, degeneration
Work	Loss of work as a problem, pain to lose it, engagement, sacrifices, fear of unemployment
Death	Impossible to think as life beyond earth, rites, mystery, funeral function, body
Orientalism	Humanism, force to mediation, interest for religious practice
Pope Benedictus	Conventional, rigorous, integral, non-educated
Pope Francis	Proximity to poverty, talk by heart, empathy, braveness, anti-conventional
Passions	Music, art, help to overcome the fear
Economic crisis perception	Unemployment, dark period, lousiness of institutions, lousiness of politics
Political crisis perception	Absence, non-legitimacy, sense of lousiness, criminality, nepotism
Prayer	Need, memory, solipsism
Respect	Link to community

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Society	Fragmented, history, complexity
Suffering	Depression, sense of frustration, overcome illness and mourning
Solidarity	Value, voluntary, service, hospitality
Spirituality	Do not coincide with practicing, yoga, meditation, philosophy

From Tab.1 the codes with their properties emergent from the first level of coding can be grouped into three different classifications: institutions (e.g. church and family), sentiments (social aspect) and spiritual attitudes (e.g. yoga).

For the first aspect, society and Church are characterized by clearly negative connotations that constituted dense conceptual codes for the totality of research participants. At the family's level, the references to sons/ children signify the future perspective, but also the worries for the parents in relation to economic problems such as unemployment. For the second group of labeling, sentiments concern mainly social aspects. Spiritual attitudes swing between spirituality, yoga, interior mediation and humanism, and extremism represented by Isis's phenomena and other forms of religious fanaticism.

7. The second level of coding and emergent themes of Italian religiosity

From a first analysis of Tab.1, it emerges that the most representative concepts are Prayer and Church mainly linked to a third dimension of Faith. After a second level of inference into the data, supported also by theoretical coding, the concepts appear confirmed in their validity and relevance. At the second level of coding, the aim of researcher is to identify the causes, the consequences and the conditions affecting the categories identified. In this stage of research, the concept of Faith is characterized in a religious meaning with particular reference to God. As evidence, there are 63 occurrences connecting the

concept of Faith to God. With the reference to Church, it is defined better by other characterization as *ambiguity, pedophilia, corruption and backwardness*.

The most distinguishing dimensions, as they arise from the process of constant comparisons, are Church, Faith, God and Prayer, which are analyzed in the following sub-paragraphs. From interviews it appears that Church is linked to a strong sense of family as explained by traditional faith, lived as collective phenomenon otherwise evident in alternative spiritual attitudes such as yoga.

7.1. The role of Church

From the analysis of interviews, derived from going into a deep understanding of different levels of coding. It is evident a strong inter-relationship between dimensions constructed in the first stage of coding. The religiosity appears to be declining when we take the four main dimensions into consideration: Church, Faith, Prayer and God. First at all, nowadays Church is viewed as an aged institution affected by secularization's processes and characterized by a lack of credibility as many others religious institutions. The criticism regards mainly the dogmas on which the Church is founded. Many research participants perceive the Church as a traditional institution tied to the past. In this perspective, the Church is far removed from being part of the resolution of today's social problems such as shaped by the economic crisis. The Church is considered linked and connected to abuse and misuse of power. But, if the researcher considers the other dimensions of religiosity related to Faith, many research participants still believe that Faith is a viable mean for tackling real life problems.

It is interesting what is affirmed by an interviewed about the Church:

...We are under the universal judge of God every day, since we wake up. It's about the general judgment we receive looking at the mirror and saying what are doing with your life. This is what

I mean for the universal judgment for human being, not about locusts or monsters for which I don't and I want not understand Church. I confirm that all of us are a great family, so we need to be open to Church. But it's wrong. We keep up people with the aim of receiving sacraments. But is it so necessary to have sacraments? People must understand what is right and what is wrong related to their own lives. It is an obligation, a guideline because every man is unable to live using his free will, as I told you before.

...Therefore, we need to confront with someone who is bigger and more frightening, someone who is able to stick you whenever you do something wrong. The Church use to play on this, so it is difficult to transform this in something that is "human" and easily understandable by people.

Almost all interviews show that the meaning of the Church as an institution has changed because of desacralization: the research participants indicate that they are less concerned with the mysteries related to God.

7.2. The role of Faith

If we consider another dimension of religiosity attaining to the Faith, a lot of research participants believe that Faith is a way of tackling real life problems. Faith doesn't share the same aspects characterizing belief or traditional spirituality. For almost all of the interviews, it isn't explained only as relationship with God that is expressed freely with their own personal expressions or words reflecting the situation they are in.

The research participants highlight a concept of Faith different from traditional values adherent with Catholicism. In fact, Faith is perceived as a gift or as an important human support in some periods of life, mainly in elderly age. Almost all interviewed think to live in a particular period characterized by a "pause" in faith attitude, but in some way the research participants are conscious to have it. But, from the devotee's point of view, Faith is perceived as a contact or union with God and it is experienced as an interior and personal need that everyone can engage in mainly through God's relationship. Some research

participants believe to have spent dark periods or very difficult life's situations as illness or depression, which had an effect on Faith practices. It is interesting to note that for some research participants. The development of Faith attitude can arise from a deep testimonial narrated by friends, familiars or acquaintances. In fact, the value of Faith is proved since an early age inside families in which the father or mother are involved in the activity of volunteering. From the point of view of almost all research participant, the Faith is developed through familiar experiences or activities centered on the care of others such poor people, divorced women and hospitalized neighbors.

Some elderly research participants highlighting the importance of Faith, refer to how they were dealing with traumatic experiences, while for others, Faith concerns devotion coherent with belonging to Christian community. In some interviews participants refer to a moral decadence in customs and values shaped by real economic difficulties. Therefore, many research participants hope for a return to pure forms of Christian spirituality. However, young interviewed talk about unresolved puzzling questions around formal Christian statements in relation to liturgics rites.

As reported by one respondent, Faith is considered as an innate need of man who is not obliged to go to Church for praying.

... a general reason you can believe. You don't need to stay all day to listen someone talking, it doesn't need because the faith is inside you. You don't need the presence of someone who does benediction or a slice of dried pain or holy water because this is not natural. You don't need all these things.

Faith also means believing in God, in the sense that God truly loves the human beings because God is alive, mysterious and capable of interceding in human experiences. In fact, God does not abandon man for any reason. God is powerful and infinite because he can bring goodness or evil to human destiny.

7.3. The role of God

God is considered by the most of the research participants as a superior entity in comparison with 'man'. To them God is always present during difficulties times and related to the fundamental hope to realize good or as a crucial support to reach personal aims. The research participants talk about Faith in relation to the argument of free will. From their point of view of many research participants, 'man' has usually overcome difficulties of life by invoking God. They are convinced that they are living times that can be called *silence of God* because God is a merciful father, which implies the knowledge and awareness of the suffering of man. In many events of life, God is far removed from human needs or difficulties. Recurrent attitudes in daily life concern the act of tanking God and few research participants admit that the concept of God as goodness is not understandable within the present historical period characterized by wars and destruction, especially when it is unexplainable why God is impartial with all human situation. An alternative sense of God, leads the research participants to prefer oriental spirituality.

Other are convicted that this kind of references, concerning these believes, can be found in Bible or in other Holy texts. From the analysis of interviews emerges an image that the man takes part into secularization processes which are part of modern and globalized society. Secularized individuals can live without God following different beliefs and practices. People are confident of their ability to explain all facts and experience without the interpretation of Bible... The origin of the Earth and man as stated by Biblical texts are rejected in favor of scientific hypotheses.

...I was in a period of my life without going to Church or following Christian rules and traditions, that's I call the silence of God, in the mean that I don't believe in that, a sort of black out [...].

The person interviewed has overcome difficult periods of his life, which he defined as a silence of God. In fact, God ap-

pears not enough important to the man. One reason is that the research participant, in challenging periods did not receive effective help from God. Daily experiences also show how lamentation does not receive a reassuring response resulting in a sense of vacuity. God, sometimes, remains silent or apparently indifferent to many situations of life because God does not intervene immediately to resolve severe problems in one's life.

7.4. The role of prayer

The prayer is usually addressed to a superior entity with the intention of offering thanks for goodness received in relation health, well-being or prosperity in family. The research participants also explained the modalities through which man needs to pray. They stated they need to pray each day by reading, analyzing and commenting texts from the holy scripts such as the Bible and Gospels. So, the prayer is considered as a particular request to God recurring in particular moments of life. From the analysis of interviews, the prayer is intended as a dialogue or conversation with God.

The prayer is linked to gratitude and as a mean to overcome crucial challenging periods. The presence of God is essential to achieve great successes in upcoming projects in which one is reaching for personal and professional objectives. The respondents outline alternative forms of prayer, for example the practice of yoga that is considered important to reach interior serenity or peace. The research participants categorised two different modalities for praying. First, to pray for themselves or for others with the aim of obtaining something good. Secondly, to pray to enter into relationship with God to reach a particular well-being state of life. This is done for tradition or for habits.

Beside the traditional role of prayer connected to principles of Catholicism, there is evident a tendency to consider the prayer as addressed to celestial entities for example the angel Atzu. The research participants highlight a personal concept of Faith that is different from traditional ones. Sometimes, Faith

is seen as a gift or a fundamental element to support people in some periods of life especially in elderly age. Almost all research participants retain to live a period characterized by a weakness in faith, but all people are aware that Faith is present. From the point of view of a devotee, the Faith is perceived as a contact or a total union with God. The Faith is felt as an interior need that the devotee can provide by creating a close relation with God through prayer.

It is interesting to report the words of a research participant: *«I have no need to go to Church for praying... if I want it, I start praying even if I am good or I behave well. This is what I prefer, to believe in myself»*.

God's mercy, present in Scriptures and Christian statements, can be difficult to perceive by someone who is going through painful situations, marked by sickness or social injustice, where prayer seems not to obtain answer. The prayer is linked to gratitude as a mean to overcome particular moments of life. From reflections reported in memos, which accompany all processes of coding, it is clear that another concept of prayer is used by the research participant: prayer as an interior contemplation, sometimes considered as an alternative to traditional Catholic practices and values.

The research participants pray for themselves or for others with the aim of obtaining goodness or entering into relationship with God to reach a well-being state of life.

8. Toward the definitions of core categories

The central point of Grounded Theory, is the selection of a core category that integrates all conceptual codes developed so far. Strauss & Corbin (1988) developed the process by which the core category is identified to acknowledge the role of researchers as authors of theoretical reconstruction. The construction of the main category takes place while exploring the story line which brings together the final conceptualization of sub-categories and their properties. The aim is that this conceptual label

must fit data and its conceptualization in the story line. This process acknowledges the reconstruction through the perspectives of participants giving voice to their interpretation of their context.

So, the core category *Italian religiosity* is elaborated through exploration of its different dimensions. This provides implicit guidelines for inference and insight essential to build a substantive theory.

The emerging core category Italian religiosity, is explained also by its subcategories: *rhetoric of charitable humanism*, *pastoral care*, *prisoners of discomfort* and *embracing the faith*. Each sub-category is specified by several dimensions. The core category, strongly interlinked with atheism, is identified as separate emerging themes. Certain categories are more influential than others for some of the research participants and this aspect depends on the personal system of beliefs.

Tab. 2. Sub-categories and dimension	
Sub-categories	Dimensions
Rhetoric of charitable humanism	Subordinate inclusion Colonialist language Ambiguity, pity Stigmatization of migrants Homologation
Pastoral care	Help by comforting Take care Belonging and affectivity Tendency to fanatics Christianity Involuntary catechesis
Prisoners of discomfort	Perception of crisis Dissolution of society Deviance of Church as institution Doubt attitude, critics, distrust Passive response to difficulties

Embracing the Faith	Dogma Attitude of life guided by Christian precepts Intimate desire of prayer and confession Francis Pope with his examples
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As it appears from Tab.2, religiosity is reduced to two main sub-categories that reflect the context of actual society and the role of Church characterized by two divergent characters:

1. dissolution and fragmentation that is common to clerical institutions and State;
2. hospitality and merciful attitudes toward migrants.

9. Conclusions

The analysis of data and memos writings have generated a substantive theory of Italian religiosity following the Constructivist Grounded Theory approach. From almost all of interviews, criticism and discontent emerge with regards to God and Faith.

Together, these findings reflect that changes on values and moral beliefs are characterized by significant events that hold special and particular meanings. This combination of factors, occurring within individual's life in the context of local community (family and friends) can be understood better as embedded in a wider political and cultural context.

Moreover, through constant comparison in the coding process, shared feature and variations are discovered contributing to the robustness of the developed concepts.

From the process of elaboration of data through software NVivo, *religiosity* constitutes one of most significant main category as reported by all of the research participants. This core category can be described and fully understood by considering the following dimensions: Church, Pray, Faith and God.

It is interesting to note how the Church has lost its centrality as the traditional religious institution. It is as for many a nega-

tive connotation. In fact, many interviews underline that Church is the centre of social corruption and abuse.

In sum, a prominent idea with the interviews is that Church is far removed from the principal features of early Christianity: poverty, charity and humility. A new kind of atheism is keen to engage in rejecting the catholic religious dogmas. The research participants point out to the dangers underlying the Church as an institution and indicate the power of science as form of a de-legitimation of God in relation to Faith (Fazzino 2014; Stenger 2009).

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PROMISES AND PITFALLS OF GROUNDED THEORY: CARE WORK RESEARCH IN CHINESE NURSING HOMES

ZHE YAN

Abstract

This chapter details some of my personal journey in grappling with Grounded Theory methodology (GTM) to develop my doctoral research project. GTM stands on its own as a solid and widely-used approach to delve into qualitative inquiry, with its own set of ontology and epistemology. However, it is also a fluid and flexible approach in that researchers either extract parts of the analyzing techniques as if they were doing a Grounded Theory study, or they avoid the mission of Grounded Theory, which is to construct a theory to explicate basic social processes which shed light on research participants' concerns. I endeavor to identify some of the dilemmas and struggles that novice researchers may face through a recounting of organizing my research of the caregiving experiences of aged care workers and its relevant shaping factors in Chinese nursing homes. To do so, I will introduce those principles of GTM that I adopted and used, based on the pragmatic concerns of research agenda and practice. Specifically, my arguments will be organized around the discussion of data and coding, which are foundational in facilitating systematic conceptualization and abstraction in theorizing processes. Memos will be discussed as they reveal the developmental trajectory of thoughts, and are indispensable in engaging conceptual thinking with the aid of

relevant theoretical resources mastered by grounded theorists. Memoing is conjunctive for 'raw' data and coding practices to speak with one another, which I consider the co-construction of knowledge between research participants and researchers. This process is in line with the reification of GTM principles, and in turn, it indicates the potential of GTM to demystify sometimes less transparent qualitative research practices.

Key words: Grounded Theory methodology, coding, care workers, Chinese nursing home.

1. Introduction

This chapter details my personal journey in grappling with Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) for my doctoral research project. GTM stands on its own as a solid and widely-used approach for qualitative inquiry, with its own set of ontology and epistemology. However, it is also a fluid and flexible approach in that researchers often extract parts of the analyzing techniques of GTM to interpret qualitative data, and bypass the mission of Grounded Theory to construct a theory (model) to explicate social processes impacting the concerns of research participants. While it is up to individual researchers to justify why and how they use GTM for their research agenda, I endeavor to present how I used GTM with examples from my research project on the caregiving experiences of care workers for the elderly, the factors influencing them, and the dynamics of institutional care settings in China.

To do so, I will focus on the coding procedures and how I arrive at concepts and categories with the help of coding family and theoretical memo writing. Specifically, I examine the three coding steps of GTM: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. They are the foundation stones for systematic conceptualization and abstraction in theorizing. Memos will also be discussed as they reveal the development trajectory of ideas for the researcher, and are indispensable in engaging concep-

tual thinking with the aid of theoretical resources mastered by grounded theorists. Memoing links 'raw' data and the coding procedures, which reflects the co-construction of knowledge between research participants and researchers. Memo writing catalyzes the potential of GTM in demystifying what are sometimes less transparent qualitative research practices.

The rest of the chapter is organized as follows. First, I introduce my research interest on care workers and contextualize the research setting. I then discuss how I used GTM in my research practice to suggest the fit of GTM in addressing my research questions. This is followed by examples of the development from coding to theory building. I then name the tentative core category that resulted from these processes: *sustaining the worthy self*. I conclude the chapter by discussing the promises and pitfalls that novice GTM researchers might encounter and will need to address in generating interesting and exciting grounded theories.

2. The research context

This chapter draws on my doctoral research, which investigates the social organization of care work and the ensuing experiences of care workers within China's endeavor to establish a sustainable long-term care system for her rapidly growing elderly population. My research centers on care work performed in long-term residential care facilities. Both physical and social care infrastructures determine the quality of care that elderly residents receive in nursing homes. Thus, exploring the direct work experiences of care workers and identifying the relevant influencing factors affecting care contribute to the generation of policy, practice, and intervention implications both for care providers and for policy makers.

When I initially began focusing my research on care workers in early 2017, there was limited literature available either in

English or in Chinese publications. Even now, most of the extant research is based in the western context, and explored through the lens of gender, class, race, and migration (Gottfried & Chun 2018). Care work is often presented as undesirable and dirty work (Hughes 1962; Jervis 2001), offloaded to socially disadvantaged groups who possess constrained agency (Coe & Jordhus-Lier 2011). Care workers in China are primarily rural to urban migrant workers, similar to transnational migration across borders in the western context. Others are redundant urban factory workers, laid-off when China restructured its economy with market reforms in the 1990s and when there were few mechanisms available to allow unskilled workers to re-incorporate into the new economy (Yan 2020). Given this, what can the Chinese experience contribute to the debate on elder care and care work? How is care work experienced differently or similarly in comparison to other societies? Having identified the lacuna of care work research in China, I began to search for methodologies to assist me in organizing and designing research steps. The lack of research and theorizing on care work in China, combined with my research focus on subjective experiences, led me to adopt GTM as my primary methodology. As argued by Vollstedt & Rezat (2019), grounded theory studies are fruitful in areas of research phenomena which lack a (sufficient) theoretical foundation.

My overarching research question is to examine how care work is experienced by care workers in nursing homes. This question is further developed into sub-questions, which are informed by the theoretical perspectives that are of relevance to interpret the primary concerns of research participants and how they constantly make efforts to address these concerns (Glaser 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990). These sub-questions, which are refined during the research process, address the complexity and dynamics of care work, and shed light on the influencing factors of the work experience. Specifically, these questions are informed by the theoretical framework of Symbol-

ic Interactionism, the basic premises of which may be summarized as follows: human beings behave towards other people, situations and actions on the basis of the meanings that those communications and events hold for them; these meanings emanate from social interaction; those meanings are then channeled and modified through an interpretive process (Blumer 1969). I aim to develop a situated understanding of each care worker by incorporating information about the context of action, the intentions and meanings underlying it, and the processes in which action takes place and unfolds (Denzin 1978). The relationship between the individual and society is seen as mutually interdependent; individuals both construct their reality and are influenced and constrained by it (Tanner 2001).

However, at the beginning of my research I had not planned to use GTM as my research method. Instead, I followed a more traditional qualitative inquiry approach. Research started with reading the relevant literature. I then attempted to identify the research gap I would want to address. Theoretical frameworks would then be constructed to help address my research questions. In this way I searched for theories which could point me to the development of conceptual tools with which to approach both care work and care workers, and also to facilitate the design of interview questions and the interpretation of collected data. But it proved to be a frustrating experience. It was my experience that most theories accounted only for a portion of my data, and I struggled to construct appropriate theoretical frameworks for my subject matter. To help me address my concerns, some colleagues suggested that I collect several theories and group them into theoretical frameworks. However, qualitative researchers should be cautious in attempting to force theories onto their data, and avoid missing insights which emerged from the data itself. Then, after reading the seminal works of grounded theorists, I decided to apply GTM in my research and attempted to construct a conceptual model based on that with relevant input from existing literature. I also ben-

edited from attending a three-day workshop organized by the Grounded Theory Institute in December 2018.

3. Putting GTM to work

According to Kelle (2019), one of most crucial and fascinating ideas in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* was that it provides a methodological groundwork for directly deriving categories from the data of social research. Thereby, Grounded Theory provides an alternative to the classical hypothetic-deductive approach which requires the construction of clear-cut categories and hypotheses before data are collected. Instead, Grounded Theory takes a bottom up approach, allowing categories to emerge from data analysis; i.e. constructing theories from such analyses by identifying relationships between categories. To facilitate the generation of theoretical categories from empirical data, I was open-minded in data collection throughout my research. The four research phases described in this section reveal how I used Grounded Theory. The process is not linear, but contains many steps of going back and forth. These include the constant comparison of codes, concepts and categories in data collection and analysis. This seemingly laborious process proves fruitful in connecting the concrete and the conceptual. As an additional support, memo writing connects the empirical data and the processes of theory construction.

My first round of field visits was in October and November, 2017. I visited public long-term residential care facilities in Wuhan, and conducted interviews with care managers and institutional heads to obtain my first impressions of how care institutions operate. I also visited a private company that offers services for elder care and participated in their activities in local neighborhoods. My second round of field visits was between May and June in 2018. This time, I included field visits to care facilities in Liaoning Province of northeast China. I went there with an interview guide, and interviewed care workers in both

government-sponsored and non-profit care facilities. My interview guide was open-ended in order to encourage care workers to talk about their work and how they perceive caregiving. However, I did have some questions that I wanted to ask, such as the demeaning and rewarding aspects of care work, which later turned out to be two key concepts generated from my data analysis. I stayed open and pragmatic (Strübing 2007) in my interactions with research participants. After collecting data for this phase of research, I transcribed the interviews verbatim and started open coding, supplemented by research notes and memos. A number of codes emerged, and concepts generated from this phase were re-used and further explored in the next phases of data collection and analysis.

The third round of field trips was between November of 2018 and January of 2019. I listed all the codes and concepts on paper and grouped similar ones together to bring my conceptualizations to a more abstract and theoretical level. The aim was to capture a sense of the care workers' social environment and how they reactively or proactively reflected on those experiences. During this phase, I based interviews on concepts derived from open coding. These include concepts such as dirty work, stigma, and rewards. Interview questions focused on exploring and broadening the dimensions and properties of emerging concepts. I asked care workers to further elaborate on concepts and provide concrete examples if possible. Throughout data collection and analysis, I followed what Charmaz (2006) recommended a researcher do: use gerunds. Gerunds assist in illuminating the social processes behind what we observe and also facilitate theorizing by the researcher. I started to think conceptually and theoretically at an early stage (Charmaz 2015). Researchers draw upon personal knowledge, professional knowledge, and the technical literature to consolidate the ability to theorize. Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined theoretical sensitivity as the ability to recognize what is impor-

tant in data and to give it meaning, and they include personal experience as an important source of theoretical sensitivity.

The last phase of my research was between September and October in 2019. I included ethnography in this phase of research. According to Glaser (1967), everything is data. To diversify the data source, I took an ethnographic approach to both observe and participate in care work in nursing homes. The experience of physically doing care work, and the informal communications with care workers, generated fresh insights. I consider ethnography a helpful approach to data collection and in supplementing the research agenda; meanings and interactions can be better observed through practical actions, and people behave differently contingent on the when and where of mutual interactions. Care workers more easily and comfortably spoke with me about their work in informal settings.

4. From coding to theory building

In this section, I introduce how I worked from codes to concepts and categories by focusing on the three coding processes: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Coding and concept generation in GTM initially appeared to be almost mythical for me as a novice researcher; the thinking and conceptual processes were initially elusive. I delved more deeply into the GTM literature to better grasp how conceptual ideas emerged from data analysis; especially the development trajectory from open coding to axial coding. I needed to be able to clearly explicate how I developed initial concepts from open coding and then developed these concepts further for theory construction.

In my doctoral research, different nursing homes (N=10) in urban settings in four Chinese Provinces were visited from 2017 to 2019. These included government-sponsored nursing homes, non-profit care homes, and for-profit care facilities. Specifically, care workers were asked about: their typical work-

ing day; the busiest time of the day and how they cope with it; their previous working experiences; how they decided to work in nursing homes; what motivates them to remain in elder care; stories they may want to share about themselves, the elderly residents, and their relatives; and anything else they would like to add. More focused questions related to concepts which emerged from previous interviews were added as the research proceeded.

Line by line coding was conducted to identify concepts. The constant comparative method was used as the analytical approach to categorize and organize ideas and concepts derived from line by line coding. Representative concepts were highlighted to suggest patterns in care workers' narratives, which shed light on the social process of caregiving. Concepts were constantly refined and developed. Influenced by the social constructivist approach to grounded theory, it is predicated that knowledge is co-produced between researchers and participants. To ensure the validity of my research, preliminary results were communicated among both care workers and care managers to receive feedback for further refinement of concepts and categories. Concepts and categories were reorganized through the coding paradigm to form the main storyline.

4.1. Open coding

Open coding is the first step for conceptualization. I followed the model of indicator-concept (LaRossa 2005); searching for indicators which lead to the identification of emerging concepts. For the purpose of illustration, I present part of my analytical process here. One important aspect that was explored was how it came to be that the care workers decided to work in nursing homes. In summary, these are some of the reasons: *my mother received good care when she was sick, I wanted to give back; I didn't care for my parents; I wanted my son to know that it is not easy to care for the elderly; I came here after I graduated from professional school; we have no other options*

(mei banfa de banfa); at least we get paid on time here, and the working conditions are better than other outdoor labor; I want to prepare for my own elder care. This question led care workers to reflect on the positive side of care work to 'justify' their decision to join elder care. I grouped these narratives into the following codes: fulfilling personal needs; role modelling; compromising; being pragmatic.

Another example is when I asked care workers about their impressions of care work. Their responses included words such as *dirty, the smell, feces; not everybody can do it; someone has to do it; I'm proud of myself; as if we were servants, they don't even look at us; I don't tell friends what I do; I feel shameful sometimes; meaningful/meaningless*. I grouped these into the following codes: physical work environment; self-recognition; disrespect from care clients; concealing occupational identity; experiencing emotional burden; assessing the value of elder care.

4.2. Axial coding

Axial coding appears to be similar to the three specific coding procedures that Glaser (1978) covers under a phase that he called 'theoretical coding'. These specific procedures include (a) looking for 'causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances, and conditions' (the six C's) around a focal category, and Glaser considers these as the 'bread and butter' theoretical code of sociology; (b) building process into the analysis (i.e., 'stages, staging, phases, phasing', etc.); and (c) paying attention to people's 'strategies, tactics, ...maneuverings, ploys, ... dominating, positioning,' and so on (Glaser 1978: 74, 76). According to LaRossa (2005), the addition of these relational factors to an analysis, i.e. the search for 'the six C's', is the distinctive feature of the axial coding phase. It's important to note that subcategories are categories that answer the questions of 'when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences' surrounding a focal category (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 125).

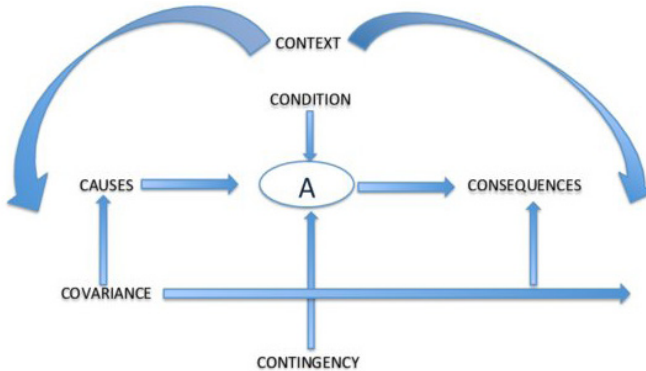


Fig. 1. Glaser 6 C's family.
Source: Glaser 1978: 74.

In the axial coding of the data related to why care workers work in nursing homes, I assigned the concept of the types of motives to umbrella the different reasons offered. I quickly realized that the motives of care workers can be categorized into different orientations. Some are financially-driven, some are spiritually-driven, and others are pragmatically-driven. Thus, a spectrum of motivational mechanisms is identified to account for why care workers joined elder care. The same exercise was applied to the other set of data on impressions of care work. Concepts such as the social construction of care work, degree of respect, level of acceptance of self, managing stigma, strategizing, all these tell the story at a more abstract and conceptual level. As a result, from the aforementioned two broad interview questions (why care workers joined elder care and how they perceive care work), several concepts emerged from the coding process. By delving into their relationships, I reorganized these concepts for theory construction at a later stage.

4.3. Before selective coding: memo writing

Selective coding is the last coding process. The purpose of selective coding is to identify the core category which can encompass all identified categories. Selective coding can be challeng-

ing for novice researchers as we lack theoretical sensitivity and the ability to judge the fit of the core category. However, this can be compensated for by returning to the data analyses through memo writing. I present in this section the memos from my data analysis. In the process of writing, I constantly asked questions about the data in front of me and engaged the constant comparative method. The data presented here were collected within the nursing homes through ethnography. Memos were written for each of the three segments of the presented data.

Tab. 1. Analytic process of data conceptualization

Data	It took many of us a long time to adjust the working environment in the nursing home. The elderly residents need help with many things, we had to change their diapers and even assist them with toileting. Many people think it's dirty, and it seems that they (relatives of the elderly) do not even want to stand next to you. But someone has to do it, I decided to work here and I need to fulfill my responsibility. After a while, you get used to it, and those who could not adjust eventually left.	The care tasks are already quite demanding, and some of the elderly and the relatives are not cooperative. They don't respect our work and look down upon us. I admit that people like us are at the lowest position of society. Some relatives are very kind and supportive of our work, and some treat us as their personal servants. We are the ones caring for their parents for them! I won't spend extra time on those who show little respect.	I don't tell friends that I work here. If I did, they would help me to look for a better job. Though we're paid care workers, I feel the residents are like my family members. How can you keep such a strict boundary with your own family? I talk with the elderly even though some of them have dementia. We're very busy every day, and have no time to rest. Sometimes we're understaffed. The younger people are unwilling to work here, but we're older and have more experience taking care of people.
Codes	adjusting to dirty work	categorizing care clients	negotiating boundaries

<p>Memo writing</p>	<p>Physical dirty work can be found in many occupations, such as construction workers. One male care worker that I interviewed was working as a construction worker on various mobile working sites. He considered care work to be 'dirtier' than construction work. I find it necessary to understand the different dimensions of dirtiness. Dust from cement at construction sites is objectively dirty, but caring for the elderly involves emotions other than the physical dirt. While both are deemed as undesirable jobs with low social status, care work involves complex feelings as it is relational. I conjecture that as elder care is outsourced and people are caught in the dilemma of filial expectations, they don't want to be considered unfilial, which would be socially condemned. 'Othering' the care workers shifts focus on the moral reasoning of care to the socially devalued perception of care work. It's difficult for care workers to resist the dominating negative perception of care work. What they can do is to activate their agency to resist or reconcile the negative encounters. My code of adjusting dirty work is the first step that care workers take. Inspired by the literature on dirty work, people who do dirty work develop strategies to sustain their work and search for meanings. Future data analysis will generate more detailed accounting of their interpretations of dirty work and the dynamics of engaging in dirty work.</p> <p>The code of categorizing care clients suggests care workers' active use of agency, though the level of agency varies for each care worker. In constructing agency, care workers sometimes categorize elderly residents and their relatives as possessing high or low <i>suzhi</i> (quality). Care workers use this term to illustrate the degree of respect received from their clients. Through categorization, care workers create a buffer to counterbalance negative encounters with some residents who are demanding and unreasonable. This phenomenon is also reinforced by nursing homes' organization of care work, which rotationally assigns residents and working shifts to care workers so that they interact with a large pool of residents over time. Care workers' cognitive strategy to create comparative groups helps to ameliorate the impact of unpleasant individual encounters. With the construction of this agency, care workers regulate the environment for the performance of ongoing quality care. In addition, upholding high moral standards allows individuals in low social status positions to gain empowerment by raising their status at the symbolic level and thereby attenuating their otherwise low social status (Bourdieu 1989). The categorization effort of care workers suggests their navigation of demanding care tasks and their strategizing to minimize the negative impact on themselves.</p>
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	<p>Care work contains not only physical care tasks, but is also relational and emotional. It is difficult for care workers to distinguish between a family member and a professional worker when they become emotionally attached to the elderly. However, maintaining the boundary can help to avoid emotional stress and tension. These include both positive emotions, such as compassion and love, and negative emotions, such as anger, stress, and shame. Care workers easily fall into the dilemma of 'prisoners of love'. Data analysis here can benefit from England's (2005) theorizing of care work. Regarding boundaries, Lamont's theoretical contribution to boundary work can also inform data analysis. The act of constructing and sustaining symbolic boundaries is termed 'boundary work'. Boundary work involves constructing collective identity by differentiating oneself from others through drawing on criteria such as common traits and experiences as well as a sense of shared belonging (Riesch 2010). How care workers construct and maintain boundaries in care work is theoretically important to explore. All in all, the concept of agency appears to be especially relevant and important in interpreting care workers' work experiences.</p>
<p>Concept</p>	<p>Maintaining caregiving role</p>

The codes represent middle-level range abstraction as they try to capture what is being said in the data. The resultant concept which emerged and which encompasses these codes at a conceptual level is *Maintaining caregiving role*. In addition, I sensed that the physical dirtiness of care work transcends its physicality and suggests wider social emotions and attitudes surrounding demeaning jobs (low social status). To be more conceptual, much of care workers' experiences are shaped not simply by the physical care tasks they perform, but also by the standing of the social group (disenfranchised, unskilled workers) with whom they are identified.

5. Knotting the dots: selective coding

Most Grounded Theory studies aim to present the research organized by a storyline. Based on the analytical effort I put into my work, I have identified the core category (the storyline) as

sustaining the worthy self. Concepts and categories identified in previous analyses are brought into further analysis in this phase. In connection with the six C's, and informed by a formal Grounded Theory study (Neill & Coyne 2018), I paired the identified categories and subcategories with the six C's.

Tab. 2. Sustaining the worthy self: categories	
6 Cs Coding category	Categories and subcategories
Conditions/antecedents	Social perceptions of care work Social hierarchy
Causes/sources	Motivations Unequal power/constrained agency Stigma Social actors
Consequences	Negotiating boundaries Coping with stigma Strategizing
Contexts	Nursing homes Marketization of care services Changing moral landscape
Covariances	The managed Chinese heart Moral labor
Contingencies/influencing variables	Dirty work Care relationships Structural conditions of care work

As illustrated by the identified categories and their relationships, care workers' primary concerns are to remain in elder care and to perform their care tasks well every day. These concerns are resolved by the social process of *sustaining the worthy self*. Care workers 'distinguish' themselves from others, be it explicitly or implicitly. Possessing a relatively low social status and doing dirty work, care workers are made invisible by both care and urban policies (Strauss & Xu 2018). However, as suggested by Scott (1987), even disadvantaged peasant groups are capable of developing strategies to resist dominating structures. Throughout both my interviews and ethnography, care

workers have revealed their own interpretations of their social world and have created their own discourse and orientation to convert care work. The processes by which they attach meaning to care work and their experiences of it are not only indicative of characteristics of care work, but can also shed light on experiences with other stigmatized occupations. Thus, the theory generated from my research can contribute to theorization for other occupations; specifically, how disadvantaged social groups sustain their self-worth, as reflected in my core category of *sustaining the worthy self*, and its implications for public policy. Literature on agency and structure, and the sociology of work and organization, to name a few, can all serve to deepen my data analysis as I continue to theorize the explanatory power of categories in broader and more encompassing ways.

For now, I have chosen the tentative core category of *sustaining the worthy self*, inspired by Glaser's (1978) identity-self coding family. I find it has a special 'grab' of the social group of care workers in China. Many of the care workers are disembedded from the socialist welfare system. In rural China, the agricultural reform made family farming less profitable for peasants in the 1990s. To make a better living and to take advantage of the abolishment of travel restrictions, rural peasants started to move into cities and provided the cheap labor needed to modernize the economy. Their urban counterparts hadn't fared much better. After introducing market mechanisms in the 1980s, many factory workers were laid-off. There was no existing reemployment mechanism to absorb the workers, and they also lost the 'from cradle to grave' work-unit-based welfare benefits.

For Grounded Theory studies, social contexts are also important data to take into consideration. It enriches the discussion of the self for care workers. Care workers' direct accounts address what they have experienced during the past several decades in China's social transformation. Each individual's life

was impacted by the social environment. As a result, the category of *sustaining the worthy self* not only reflects care workers' efforts to remain in elder care at the micro level, it also leads to a discussion of how social events and policies engender and sustain social inequity for different social groups. For example, why do care workers have to sustain their worthy self? If the pre-conceived idea is that they are doing important work, it would be logical to assume that they would receive recognition and respect. The fact that this is still not yet the case suggests the necessity to explore the social organization and system of care in general, and the ongoing vulnerability of precarious social groups. For example, the position of care workers is constantly (re)shaped by the discourse of class, gender, *hukou* (the household registration system), and age. The tentative core category demonstrates the potential of care workers' empowerment both by themselves and in concert with other actors in resisting stereotypes; though also contingent on the level of resources available and their own personal contexts.

6. Pitfalls of GTM

GTM is not a facile tool for researchers endeavoring to bring forth interesting and exciting research. Reflecting on my research experiences for my doctoral research, I have several points to share with other novice researchers. I consider them to be pitfalls, which require context-specific decisions in how to move forward with GTM. Grounded Theory is neither right nor wrong. Instead, it has more or less fit, relevance, workability, and modifiability (Eriksson et al. 2016) for a given set of data. Readers of my GTM study should evaluate it against these criteria. Nevertheless, it is essential to be transparent about the research process and try to work around the pitfalls of each methodology to increase the rigor and credibility of qualitative research.

First, the question of how to engage the existing literature brings controversy in ongoing GTM debates. The goal of most GTM studies is to construct a theory by examining the relationships between identified concepts and categories derived from data analysis. Too much reliance on existing theoretical resources found in previous literature might go against the intention of theory construction in GTM, thus derailing the study from the core mission of this methodology. However, it is difficult for novice researchers to ignore the literature in their field of study. Even with the help of coding families suggested by grounded theorists (Glaser 1987; Strauss & Corbin 1990), daunting tasks still lie ahead. One way of ameliorating dilemmas is to use sensitizing concepts. Unlike a definitive concept, which refers precisely to what is common to a class of objects by the aid of a clear definition in terms of attributes or fixed bench marks, a sensitizing concept does not enable the user to move directly to the instance and its relevant content. Instead, it gives the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances, and suggests directions along which to look (Blumer 1954).

Second, axial coding is more complicated and difficult than merely bundling similar codes. I personally find axial coding challenging in the sense that researchers need to constantly go back and forth to compare the properties and dimensions of each concept, and derive higher level concepts and categories. While Glaser (1978) devoted a whole chapter to theoretical coding in *Theoretical Sensitivity*, it is still a daunting task to explore the connection between codes, concepts and categories. At the same time, researchers need to sensitize themselves toward the indicators which generate conceptual codes, and eventually build up the storyline based on a well-organized and articulated model of concepts. Unfortunately, there is no short cut for this important procedure in coding.

Third, going back to the literature for comparison and 'polishing up' one's proposed theory (model) requires meticulous effort in identifying and examining other relevant research. Here, I recommend the approach taken by the authors in the study of seniors' self-preservation (Eriksson et al. 2016). They tried matching different theoretical codes to the emerging model and wrote a first draft on a conceptual level avoiding details (Glaser 2005). After writing the first draft, they identified relevant literature with the purpose of positioning the emerging theory in an academic context (Glaser 1998) and finally reached theoretical saturation (Glaser 1978). To improve our level of theorization, we must make good use of the literature to highlight what our research can add to the extant academic debates. In addition, the theories we construct should be able to reveal the story in our research as we have worked our way from the bottom up to construct these theories. One strategy I developed during my research is to write down the concepts or categories that I used to form theoretical propositions or hypotheses, and then checked to see if they can bring me back to my fieldwork sites and activate my memories of the conversations I had with research participants.

These are only a few challenges when applying GTM to research practice. Though GTM is a well-structured methodology, with many manual books illustrating how it works, the production of interesting and exciting research relies on how researchers creatively put GTM to work with their own theoretical sensitivity and preparedness. And that is a long-term endeavor.

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