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GROUNDED THEORY

Objectivist and Constructivist Methods

◆ Kathy Charmaz

Grounded theory served at the front of the "qualitative revolution" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. ix). Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss wrote *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967) at a critical point in social science history. They defended qualitative research and countered the dominant view that quantitative studies provide the only form of systematic social scientific inquiry. Essentially, grounded theory methods consist of systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data to build middle-range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data. Throughout the research process, grounded theorists develop analytic interpretations of their data to focus further data collection, which they use in turn to inform and refine their developing theoretical analyses. Since Glaser and Strauss developed grounded theory methods, qualitative researchers have claimed the use of these methods to legitimate their research.

Now grounded theory methods have come under attack from both within and without.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I made an earlier statement of my position on constructivism in a paper titled *Studying Lived Experience Through Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Methods,* presented at the Qualitative Research Conference "Studying Human Lived Experience: Symbolic Interaction and Ethnographic Research '93," at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, May 19-22, 1993. I am grateful to Robert Prus, who invited me to present my ideas in the conference paper; to Lyn Lofland, who wrote a detailed review of it; and to members of my first Sonoma State University writing group, Julia Allen, Patrick Jackson, and Catherine Nelson, who encouraged me to pursue the topic. I thank Julianne Cheek, Norman K. Denzin, Udo Kelle, Kyrina Kent, and Yvonna Lincoln for their supportive and thoughtful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

Postmodernists and poststructuralists dispute obvious and subtle positivistic premises assumed by grounded theory's major proponents and within the logic of the method itself (see, e.g., Denzin, 1994, 1996, 1998; Richardson, 1993; Van Maanen, 1988). What grounded theory is and should be is contested. Barney G. Glaser and the late Anselm Strauss, with his more recent coauthor, Juliet Corbin, have moved the method in somewhat conflicting directions (Glaser, 1992; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994, 1998). Nonetheless, both their positions remain imbued with positivism, with its objectivist underpinnings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Glaser's (1978, 1992) position often comes close to traditional positivism, with its assumptions of an objective, external reality, a neutral observer who discovers data, reductionist inquiry of manageable research problems, and objectivist rendering of data. Strauss and Corbin's (1990, 1998) stance assumes an objective external reality, aims toward unbiased data collection, proposes a set of technical procedures, and espouses verification. Their position moves into postpositivism because they also propose giving voice to their respondents, representing them as accurately as possible, discovering and acknowledging how respondents' views of reality conflict with their own, and recognizing art as well as science in the analytic product and process (see Strauss & Corbin, 1998). By taking these points further, I add another position to the fray and another vision for future qualitative research: constructivist grounded theory.[1]

Constructivist grounded theory celebrates firsthand knowledge of empirical worlds, takes a middle ground between postmodernism and positivism, and offers accessible methods for taking qualitative research into the 21st century. Constructivism assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understanding of subjects' meanings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994). The power of grounded theory lies in its tools for understanding empirical worlds. We can reclaim these tools from their positivist underpinnings to form a revised, more open-ended practice of grounded theory that stresses its emergent, constructivist elements. We can use grounded theory methods as flexible, heuristic strategies rather than as formulaic procedures.

A constructivist approach to grounded theory reaffirms studying people in their natural settings and redirects qualitative research away from positivism. My argument is threefold: (a) Grounded theory strategies need not be rigid or prescriptive; (b) a focus on meaning while using grounded theory *furthers,* rather than limits, interpretive understanding; and (c) we can adopt grounded theory strategies without embracing the positivist leanings of earlier proponents of grounded theory. Certainly, a continuum can be discerned between objectivist and constructivist grounded theory. In addition, individual grounded theorists have modified their approaches over time (see, e.g., Glaser, 1994; Strauss, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994, 1998). For clarity, I juxtapose objectivist and constructivist approaches throughout the following discussion, but note shifts as proponents have developed their positions.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of grounded theory methods, discuss recent debates, and describe a constructivist approach, which I illustrate with examples from my earlier studies. Researchers can use grounded theory methods with either quantitative or qualitative data, although these methods are typically associated with qualitative research. And researchers can use these methods whether they are working from an objectivist or a constructivist perspective.

The rigor of grounded theory approaches offers qualitative researchers a set of clear guidelines from which to build explanatory frameworks that specify relationships among concepts. Grounded theory methods do not detail data collection techniques; they move each step of the analytic process toward the development, refinement, and interrelation of concepts. The strategies of grounded theory include (a) simultaneous collection and analysis of data, (b) a two-step data coding process, (c) comparative methods, (d) memo writing aimed at the construction of conceptual analyses, (e) sampling to

refine the researcher's emerging theoretical ideas, and (f) integration of the theoretical framework.

Glaser (1978, 1992) establishes the following criteria for evaluating a grounded theory: fit, work, relevance, and modifiability. Theoretical categories must be developed from analysis of the collected data and must fit them; these categories must explain the data they subsume. Thus grounded theorists cannot shop their disciplinary stores for preconceived concepts and dress their data in them. Any existing concept must earn its way into the analysis (Glaser, 1978). A grounded theory must work; it must provide a useful conceptual rendering and ordering of the data that explains the studied phenomena. The relevance of a grounded theory derives from its offering analytic explanations of actual problems and basic processes in the research setting. A grounded theory is durable because it accounts for variation; it is flexible because researchers can modify their emerging or established analyses as conditions change or further data are gathered.

Many grounded theory studies reflect the objectivist approaches and perspectival proclivities of the founders of grounded theory (see, e.g., Biernacki, 1986; Johnson, 1991; Reif, 1975; Swanson & Chenitz, 1993; Wiener, 1975).[2] However, researchers starting from other vantage points—feminist, Marxist, phenomenologist— can use grounded theory strategies for their empirical studies. These strategies allow for varied fundamental assumptions, data gathering approaches, analytic emphases, and theoretical levels.

Thus diverse researchers can use grounded theory methods to develop constructivist studies derived from interpretive approaches. Grounded theorists need not subscribe to positivist or objectivist assumptions. Rather, they may still study empirical worlds without presupposing narrow objectivist methods and without assuming the truth of their subsequent analyses. Hence constructivist grounded theory studies of subjective experience can bridge Blumer's (1969) call for the empirical study of meanings with current postmodernist critiques.

◆ Grounded Theory Then and Now

The Development of Grounded Theory

In their pioneering book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss first articulated their research strategies for their collaborative studies of dying (Glaser & Strauss, 1965, 1968). They challenged the hegemony of the quantitative research paradigm in the social sciences. Chicago school sociology (see, e.g., Park & Burgess, 1925; Shaw, 1930; Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918-1920; Thrasher, 1927/1963; Zorbaugh, 1929) had long contributed a rich ethnographic tradition to the discipline. However, the ascendancy of quantitative methods undermined and marginalized that tradition. Scientistic assumptions of objectivity and truth furthered the quest for verification through precise, standardized instruments and parsimonious quantifiable variables. Field research waned. It became viewed as a preliminary exercise through which researchers could refine quantitative instruments before the real work began, rather than as a viable endeavor in its own right. The ascendancy of quantification also led to a growing division between theory and empirical research. Theorists and researchers lived in different worlds and pursued different problems. Presumably, quantitative research tested existing theory as prescribed by the logico-deductive model. However, much of this research remained atheoretical and emphasized controlling variables rather than theory testing.

Glaser and Strauss's (1967) work was revolutionary because it challenged (a) arbitrary divisions between theory and research, (b) views of qualitative research as primarily a precursor to more "rigorous" quantitative methods, (c) claims that the quest for rigor made qualitative research illegitimate, (d) beliefs that qualitative methods are impressionistic and unsystematic, (e) separation of data collection and analysis, and (f) assumptions that qualitative research could produce only descriptive case studies rather than theory development (Charmaz, 1995c). With

the publication of *Discovery,* Glaser and Strauss called for qualitative research to move toward theory development.[3] They provided a persuasive intellectual rationale for conducting qualitative research that permitted and encouraged novices to pursue it. And they gave guidelines for its successful completion.

Prior to the publication of *Discovery,* most qualitative analysis had been taught through an oral tradition of mentoring, when taught at all. Glaser and Strauss led the way in providing written guidelines for systematic qualitative data analysis with explicit analytic procedures and research strategies. Glaser applied his rigorous positivistic methodological training in quantitative research from Columbia University to the development of qualitative analysis. Grounded theory methods were founded upon Glaser's epistemological assumptions, methodological terms, inductive logic, and systematic approach. Strauss's training at the University of Chicago with Herbert Blumer and Robert Park brought Chicago school field research and symbolic interactionism to grounded theory. Hence, Strauss brought the pragmatist philosophical study of process, action, and meaning into *empirical* inquiry through grounded theory.

Glaser's 1978 book *Theoretical Sensitivity* substantially advanced explication of grounded theory methods. However, the abstract terms and dense writing Glaser employed rendered the book inaccessible to many readers. Strauss's *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (1987) made grounded theory more accessible, although perhaps more theoretically diffuse than the earlier methods texts would suggest.

Reformulation and Repudiation

Grounded theory gained a wider audience, a new spokesperson, and more disciples with the appearance of Strauss's 1990 coauthored book with Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques.*[4] This book aims to specify and to develop grounded theory methodology. It takes the reader through several familiar analytic steps, illustrates procedures with examples, and stirs a new technical armamentarium into the mix. *Basics* gained readers but lost the sense of emergence and open-ended character of Strauss's earlier volume and much of his empirical work. The improved and more accessible second edition of *Basics* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) reads as less prescriptive and aims to lead readers to a new way of thinking about their research and about the world. In both editions, the authors pose concerns (1990, p. 7; 1998, p. x) about valid and reliable data and interpretations and researcher bias consistent with "normal science" (Kuhn, 1970). Strauss and Corbin impart a behaviorist, rather than interpretive, cast to their analysis of key hypothetical examples (see 1990, pp. 63-65, 78-81, 88-90, 145-147).[5] Perhaps the scientific underpinnings of the 1990 book reflect both Corbin's earlier training and Strauss's growing insistence that grounded theory is verificational (A. L. Strauss, personal communication, February 1, 1993).[6] Whether *Basics* advances grounded theory methods or proposes different technical procedures depends on one's point of view.

Glaser (1978, 1992) emphasizes emergence of data and theory through the analysis of "basic social processes." Glaser's position (see also Melia, 1996) becomes clear in his 1992 repudiation of Strauss and Corbin (1990). He advocates gathering data without forcing either preconceived questions or frameworks upon it. In *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis: Emergence vs. Forcing* (1992), Glaser answers Strauss and Corbin's work in *Basics.* Over and over, he finds Strauss and Corbin to be forcing data and analysis through their preconceptions, analytic questions, hypotheses, and methodological techniques (see, e.g., Glaser, 1992, pp. 33, 43, 46-47, 50-51, 58-59, 63, 78, 96-100). For Glaser, the use of systematic comparisons is enough. "Categories emerge upon comparison and properties emerge upon more comparison. And that is all there is to it" (Glaser, 1992, p. 43).

In addition to Glaser's trenchant critique, readers may find themselves caught in a maze of techniques that Strauss and Corbin propose as significant methodological advancements. Linda Robrecht (1995) asserts that the new proce-

dures divert the researcher from the data and result in poorly integrated theoretical frameworks. Glaser declares that Strauss and Corbin invoke contrived comparisons rather than those that have emerged from analytic processes of comparing data to data, concept to concept, and category to category. He views their approach as "full conceptual description," not grounded theory. Glaser argues that the purpose of grounded theory methods is to generate theory, not to verify it. His point is consistent with quantitative research canons in which verification depends upon random sampling and standardized procedures. Strauss and Corbin do not answer Glaser directly, but, as Kath Melia (1996) notes, they do state their view of the essentials of grounded theory in their contribution to the first edition of this *Handbook,* while suggesting that the method will continue to evolve (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Similarly, Strauss and Corbin do not respond to Glaser's charge that they abandoned grounded theory in favor of full conceptual description in their second edition of *Basics* (1998). However, they do offer an elegant statement of the significance of description and conceptual ordering for theory development (pp. 16-21).

Both Strauss and Corbin's *Basics* and Glaser's critique of it assert views of science untouched by either epistemological debates of the 1960s (Adler, Adler, & Johnson, 1992; Kleinman, 1993; Kuhn, 1970; Lofland, 1993; Snow & Morrill, 1993) or postmodern critiques (Clough, 1992; Denzin, 1991, 1992a, 1996; Marcus & Fischer, 1986). Both endorse a realist ontology and positivist epistemology, albeit with some sharp differences. Glaser remains in the positivist camp; Strauss and Corbin less so. They move between objectivist and constructivist assumptions in various works, although *Basics,* for which they are best known, stands in the objectivist terrain. For example, in their efforts to maintain objectivity, they advocate taking "appropriate measures" to minimize the intrusion of the subjectivity of the researcher into the research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 43). Both Glaser and Strauss and Corbin assume an external reality that researchers can discover and record—Glaser through discovering data, coding it, and using comparative methods step by step; Strauss and Corbin through their analytic questions, hypotheses, and methodological applications. In their earlier writings, Glaser and Strauss (1967) imply that reality is independent of the observer and the methods used to produce it. Because both Glaser and Strauss and Corbin follow the canons of objective reportage, both engage in silent authorship and usually write about their data as distanced experts (Charmaz & Mitchell, 1996), thereby contributing to an objectivist stance.[7] Furthermore, the didactic, prescriptive approaches described in early statements about grounded theory coated these methods with a positivist, objectivist cast (see Charmaz, 1983; Glaser, 1992; Stern, 1994b; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994).

So who's got the real grounded theory? Glaser (1998) contends that he has the pure version of grounded theory. That's correct—if one agrees that early formulations should set the standard.[8] Different proponents assume that grounded theory essentials *ought* to include different things. Their "oughts" shape their notions of the real grounded theory. Must grounded theory be objectivist and positivist? No. Grounded theory offers a set of flexible strategies, not rigid prescriptions. Should grounded theorists adopt symbolic interactionism? Not always. Emphases on action and process and, from my constructivist view, meaning and emergence within symbolic interactionism complement grounded theory. Symbolic interactionism also offers a rich array of sensitizing concepts. However, grounded theory strategies can be used with sensitizing concepts from other perspectives. Pragmatism? Yes, because applicability and usefulness are part of the criteria for evaluating grounded theory analyses. Should we expect grounded theorists to remain committed to their written statements? Not completely. Published works become separated from the contexts of their creation. Neither their authors' original purpose nor intended audience may be apparent. Authors may write mechanistic prescriptions for beginners to get them started but compose more measured pieces for peers. New developments may

influence them. But readers may reify these authors' earlier written words. Strauss and Corbin's (1994) chapter in the first edition of this *Handbook* has a considerably more flexible tone than is found in the first edition of *Basics* (1990), both in describing methods and in positioning grounded theory. For example, they note that future researchers may use grounded theory in conjunction with other approaches, which I argue here. A simplified, constructivist version of grounded theory such as outlined below can supply effective tools that can be adopted by researchers from diverse perspectives.[9]

◆ *Grounded Theory Strategies*

Regarding Data

Grounded theory methods specify analytic strategies, not data collection methods. These methods have become associated with limited interview studies, as if limiting grounded theory methods *to* interviews and limiting the number *of* interviews are both acceptable practices (see, e.g., Creswell, 1997). Researchers can use grounded theory techniques with varied forms of data collection (for historical analyses, see Clarke, 1998; Star, 1989). Qualitative researchers should gather extensive amounts of rich data with thick description (Charmaz, 1995c; Geertz, 1973). Grounded theorists have been accused, with some justification, of slighting data collection (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). Nonetheless, a number of grounded theorists have gathered thorough data, even those who have relied primarily on interviews (see, e.g., Baszanger, 1998; Biernacki, 1986; Charmaz, 1991, 1995b). Perhaps because grounded theory methods focus on the development of early analytic schemes, data gathering remains problematic and disputed.

Glaser (1992) raises sharp differences with Strauss and Corbin (1990) about forcing data through preconceived questions, categories, and hypotheses. Perhaps both are right, although in different ways. Glaser's comparative approach and emphasis on process provide excellent strategies for making data analysis efficient, productive, and exciting—without formulaic techniques. Every qualitative researcher should take heed of his warnings about forcing data into preconceived categories through the imposition of artificial questions. However, data collecting may demand that researchers ask questions and follow hunches, if not in direct conversation with respondents, then in the observers' notes about what to look for. Researchers construct rich data by amassing pertinent details. Strauss and Corbin's many questions and techniques may help novices improve their data gathering. Glaser (1998) assumes that data become transparent, that we researchers will see the basic social process in the field through our respondents' telling us what is significant. However, what researchers see may be neither basic nor certain (Mitchell & Charmaz, 1996). What respondents assume or do not apprehend may be much more important than what they talk about. An acontextual reliance on respondents' overt concerns can lead to narrow research problems, limited data, and trivial analyses.

Most grounded theorists write as if their data have an objective status. Strauss and Corbin (1998) write of "the reality of the data" and tell us, "The data do not lie" (p. 85). Data are narrative constructions (Maines, 1993). They are reconstructions of experience; they are not the original experience itself (see also Bond, 1990). Whether our respondents ply us with data in interview accounts they recast for our consumption or we record ethnographic stories to reflect experience as best we can recall and narrate, data remain reconstructions.

As we gather rich data, we draw from multiple sources—observations, conversations, formal interviews, autobiographies, public records, organizational reports, respondents' diaries and journals, and our own tape-recorded reflections. Grounded theory analyses of such materials begin with our coding, take form with

memos, and are fashioned into conference papers and articles. Yet our statement of the ideas seldom ends with publication. Rather, we revisit our ideas and, perhaps, our data and re-create them in new form in an evolving process (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).[10]

Coding Data

How do we do grounded theory? Analysis begins early. We grounded theorists code our emerging data as we collect it. Through coding, we start to define and categorize our data. In grounded theory coding, we create codes as we study our data. We do not, or should not, paste catchy concepts on our data. We should interact with our data and pose questions to them while coding them. Coding helps us to gain a new perspective on our material and to focus further data collection, and may lead us in unforeseen directions. Unlike quantitative research that requires data to fit into *preconceived* standardized codes, the researcher's interpretations of data shape his or her emergent codes in grounded theory.

Coding starts the chain of theory development. Codes that account for our data take form together as nascent theory that, in turn, explains these data and directs further data gathering. Initial or open coding proceeds through our examining each line of data and then defining actions or events within it—line-by-line coding (see especially Glaser, 1978). This coding keeps us studying our data. In addition to starting to build ideas inductively, we are deterred by line-by-line coding from imposing extant theories or our own beliefs on the data. This form of coding helps us to remain attuned to our subjects' views of their realities, rather than assume that we share the same views and worlds. Line-by-line coding sharpens our use of sensitizing concepts—that is, those background ideas that inform the overall research problem. Sensitizing concepts offer ways of seeing, organizing, and understanding experience; they are embedded in our disciplinary emphases and perspectival proclivities. Although sensitizing concepts may deepen perception, they provide starting points for building analysis, not ending points for evading it. We may use sensitizing concepts *only* as points of departure from which to study the data.

Line-by-line coding likely leads to our refining and specifying any borrowed extant concepts. Much of my work on the experience of illness has been informed by concepts of self and identity. The woman whose statement is quoted in Table 19.1 talked of having loved her job as an advocate for nursing-home residents. Through coding her statement line by line, I created the code "identity trade-offs" and later developed it into a category. Line-by-line coding keeps us thinking about what meanings we make of our data, asking ourselves questions of it, and pinpointing gaps and leads in it to focus on during subsequent data collection. Note that I kept the codes active. These action codes give us insight into what people are doing, what is happening in the setting.

Generating action codes facilitates making comparisons, a major technique in grounded theory. The constant comparative method of grounded theory means (a) comparing different people (such as their views, situations, actions, accounts, and experiences), (b) comparing data from the same individuals with themselves at different points in time, (c) comparing incident with incident, (d) comparing data with category, and (e) comparing a category with other categories (Charmaz, 1983, 1995c; Glaser, 1978, 1992).

Glaser (1978, 1992) stresses constant comparative methods. Strauss (1987) called for comparisons in his research and teaching—often hypothetical comparisons or, when he was teaching, comparisons from students' lives—at every level of analysis (see also Star, 1997).[11] Strauss and Corbin (1990) introduce new procedures: dimensionalizing, axial coding, and the conditional matrix. These procedures are intended to make researchers' emerging theories denser, more complex, and more precise. Dimensionalizing and axial coding can be done during initial coding; creating a conditional matrix comes later. Schatzman (1991) had earlier developed the concept of dimensionality to rec-

TABLE 19.1 Example of Line-by-Line Coding of an Interview Statement

Line-by-Line Coding	*Interview Statement*[a]
Deciding to relinquish Accounting for costs Weighing the balance Relinquishing identity Making identity trade-offs	And so I decided, this [pain, fatigue, and stress accruing during her workday] isn't a way to live. I don't have to work. . . . So it was with great regret, and not something I planned, I turned in my resignation. It was the best thing I ever did.

a. From Charmaz (1995b, p. 671).

ognize and account for complexity beyond one meaning of a property or phenomenon. Strauss and Corbin (1990) build on his notion by urging researchers to divide properties into dimensions that lie along a continuum. In turn, we can develop a "dimensional profile" of the properties of a category. Strauss and Corbin further propose techniques for reassembling data in new ways through what they call "axial coding." This type of coding is aimed at making connections between a category and its subcategories. These include conditions that give rise to the category, its context, the social interactions through which it is handled, and its consequences.

Selective or focused coding uses initial codes that reappear frequently to sort large amounts of data. Thus this coding is more directed and, typically, more conceptual than line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 1983, 1995c; Glaser, 1978). These codes account for the most data and categorize them most precisely. Making explicit decisions about selecting codes gives us a check on the fit between the emerging theoretical framework and the empirical reality it explains. Of the initial codes shown in Table 19.1, "identity trade-offs" was the only one I treated analytically in the published article. When comparing respondents' interviews, I found similar statements and concerns about identity.

Our categories for synthesizing and explaining data arise from our focused codes. In turn, our categories shape our developing analytic frameworks. Categories often subsume several codes. For example, my category of "significant events" included positive events and relived negative events (Charmaz, 1991). Categories turn description into conceptual analysis by specifying properties analytically, as in the following example:

> A significant event stands out in memory because it has boundaries, intensity, and emotional force. . . . The emotional reverberations of a single event echo through the present and future and therefore, however subtly, shade thoughts.

In their discussion of selective coding, Strauss and Corbin (1990) introduce the "conditional matrix," an analytic diagram that maps the range of conditions and consequences related to the phenomenon or category. They describe this matrix as a series of circles in which the outer rings represent those conditions most distant from actions and interactions and the inner rings represent those closest to actions and interactions. Strauss and Corbin propose that researchers create matrices to sensitize themselves to the range of conditions conceivably affecting the phenomena of interest and to the range of hypothetical consequences. Such matrices can sharpen researchers' explanations of and predictions about the studied phenomena.

Memo Writing

Memo writing is the intermediate step between coding and the first draft of the completed analysis. This step helps to spark our thinking and encourages us to look at our data and codes in new ways. It can help us to define leads for collecting data—both for further initial coding and later theoretical sampling. Through memo writing, we elaborate processes, assumptions, and actions that are subsumed under our codes. Memo writing leads us to explore our codes; we expand upon the processes they identify or suggest. Thus our codes take on substance as well as a structure for sorting data.

Action codes (e.g., as illustrated above) spur the writing of useful memos because they help us to see interrelated processes rather than static isolated topics. As we detail the properties of our action codes in memos, we connect categories and define how they fit into larger processes. By discussing these connections and defining processes in memos early in our research, we reduce the likelihood that we will get lost in mountains of data—memo writing keeps us focused on our analyses and involved in our research.

Memo writing aids us in linking analytic interpretation with empirical reality. We bring raw data right into our memos so that we maintain those connections and examine them directly. Raw data from different sources provide the grist for making precise comparisons, fleshing out ideas, analyzing properties of categories, and seeing patterns. The first excerpt below is the first section of an early memo. I wrote this memo quickly in 1983 after comparing data from a series of recent interviews.[12]

Developing a Dual Self

> The dual self in this case is the *contrast* between the *sick self* and the *monitoring self* (actually *physical* self might be a better term [than *sick self*] since some of these people try to see themselves as "well" but still feel they must constantly monitor in order to maintain that status—they also rather easily sink into self-blame when the monitoring doesn't work).
>
> With Sara S. we see definite conversations held between the physical and monitoring self. Through her learning time or body education, self-taught and self-validated she has not only developed a sense of what her body "*needs*" she has developed a finely honed *sense of timing* about how to handle those needs.
>
> With the dual self, the monitoring self *externalizes* the internal messages from the physical self and makes them concrete. It is as if dialogue and negotiation with ultimate validation of the physical self take place between the two dimensions of the dual self. Consequently, the competent monitoring self must be able to attend to the messages given by the physical self. The learning time is the necessary amount of concentration, trial and error to become an effective monitoring self.
>
> Mark R., for example, illustrates the kind of dialogue that takes place between the monitoring and physical selves when he talks about person to kidney talks and what is needed to sustain that new transplanted kidney in his body.
>
> The dual self in many ways is analogous to the dialogue that Mead describes between the I and the me. The me monitors and attends to the I which is creating, experiencing, feeling. The monitoring me defines those feelings, impulses and sensations. It evaluates them and develops a line of action so that what is defined as needed is taken care of. The physical self here is then taken as an object held up to view which can be compared with past physical (or for that matter, psychological selves), with perceived statuses of others, with a defined level of health or well-being, with signals of potential crises etc.
>
> A consequence of the monitoring self is that it may be encouraged by practitioners (after all, taking responsibility for one's body is the message these days, isn't it?) when it seems to "work," yet it may be condemned when the person's tactics for monitoring conflict with practitioners' notions of reasonable action or are unsuccessful.

The following passage shows how the memo appeared in the published version of the research (Charmaz, 1991). The combination of analytic clarity and empirical grounding makes the memo above remarkably congruent with the published excerpt. Memos record researchers' stages of analytic development. Memo writing helps researchers (a) to grapple with ideas about the data, (b) to set an analytic course, (c) to refine

categories, (d) to define the relationships among various categories, and (e) to gain a sense of confidence and competence in their ability to analyze data.

Developing a Dialectical Self

The dialectical self is the contrast between the sick or physical self and the monitoring self. Keeping illness contained by impeding progression of illness, rather than merely hiding it, leads to developing a monitoring self. Developing a dialectical self means gaining a heightened awareness of one's body. People who do so believe that they perceive nuances of physical changes. By his second transplant, for example, Mark Reinertsen felt that he had learned to perceive the first signs of organ rejection.

When people no longer view themselves as "sick," they still monitor their physical selves to save themselves from further illness. To illustrate, Sara Shaw explained that she spent months of "learning time" to be able to discover what her body "needed" and how to handle those needs. She commented, "I got to know it [her ill body]; I got to understand it, and it was just me and mixed connective tissue disease [her diagnosis changed], you know, and I got to respect it and I got to know—to have a real good feeling for time elements and for what my body was doing, how my body was feeling." When I asked her what she meant by "time elements," she replied:

> There's times during the month, during the course of a month, when I'm much more susceptible, and I can feel it. I can wake up in the morning and I can feel it. . . . So I really learned what I was capable of and when I had to stop, when I had to slow down. And I learned to like—give and take with that. And I think that's all programmed in my mind now, and I don't even have to think about it now, you know; I'll know. I'll know when, no matter what's going on, I've gotta go sit down . . . and take it easy, . . . that's a requirement of that day. And so consequently, I really don't get sick.

In the dialectical self, the monitoring self externalizes the internal messages from the physical self and makes them concrete. It is as if dialogue and negotiation with ultimate validation of the physical self take place. For example, Mark Reinertsen engaged in "person to kidney" talks to encourage the new kidney to remain with him (see also McGuire and Kantor 1987). A competent monitoring self attends to messages from the physical self and over time, as Sara Shaw's comment suggests, monitoring becomes taken for granted.

In many ways, the dialectical self is analogous to the dialogue that Mead (1934) describes between the "I" and the "me." The "me" monitors and attends to the "I" that creates, experiences, and feels. The monitoring "me" defines the "I's" behaviors, feelings, impulses, and sensations. It evaluates them and plans action to meet defined needs. Here, an ill person takes his or her physical self as an object, appraises it and compares it with past physical selves, with perceived health statuses of others, with ideals of physical or mental well-being, with signals of potential crises and so forth (cf. Gadow 1982).

The dialectical self is one of ill people's multiple selves emerging in the face of uncertainty. Whether or not ill people give the dialectical self validity significantly affects their actions. For someone like Sara Shaw, the dialectical self provided guidelines for organizing time, for taking jobs, and for developing relationships with others. With jobs, she believed that she had to guard herself from the stress of too many demands. With friends, she felt she had to place her needs first. With physicians, she resisted their control since she trusted her knowledge about her condition more than theirs.

Practitioners may encourage a monitoring self when it seems to "work," yet condemn it when unsuccessful, or when monitoring tactics conflict with their advice (cf. Kleinman 1988). The development of the dialectical self illuminates the active stance that some people take toward their illnesses and their lives. In short, the dialectical self helps people to keep illness in the background of their lives. (Charmaz, 1991, pp. 70-72)

Note the change in the title of the category in the published version. This change reflects my attempt to choose terms that best portrayed the empirical descriptions that the category subsumed. I was trying to address the liminal relationship certain respondents described with their bodies in which they gained a heightened awareness of cues that other people disavow, disregard, or do not discern. The term *dialectical self* denotes a more dynamic process than does the term *dual self.*

Although many grounded theorists concentrate on overt actions and statements, I also look for subjects' unstated assumptions and implicit

meanings.[13] Then I ask myself how these assumptions and meanings relate to conditions in which a category emerges. For example, some people with chronic illnesses assumed that their bodies had become alien and hostile battlegrounds where they warred with illness. Their assumptions about having alien bodies and being at war with illness affected if and how they adapted to their situations. When I developed the category "surrendering to the sick body," I asked what conditions fostered surrendering (Charmaz, 1995b). I identified three: (a) "relinquishing the quest for control over one's body," (b) "giving up notions of victory over illness," and (c) "affirming, however implicitly, that one's self is tied to the sick body" (p. 672).

Theoretical Sampling

As we grounded theorists refine our categories and develop them as theoretical constructs, we likely find gaps in our data and holes in our theories. Then we go back to the field and collect delimited data to fill those conceptual gaps and holes—we conduct theoretical sampling. At this point, we choose to sample specific issues only; we look for precise information to shed light on the emerging theory.

Theoretical sampling represents a defining property of grounded theory and relies on the comparative methods within grounded theory. We use theoretical sampling to develop our emerging categories and to make them more definitive and useful. Thus the aim of this sampling is to refine *ideas,* not to increase the size of the original sample. Theoretical sampling helps us to identify conceptual boundaries and pinpoint the fit and relevance of our categories.

Although we often sample people, we may sample scenes, events, or documents, depending on the study and where the theory leads us. We may return to the same settings or individuals to gain further information. I filled out my initial analysis of one category, "living one day at a time," by going back to respondents with whom I had conducted earlier interviews. I had already found that people with chronic illnesses took living one day at time as a strategy to maintain some control over their uncertain lives. Only by going back to selected respondents did I learn that this strategy also had consequences for how they viewed the future when they later allowed themselves to think of it. The passage of time and the events that had filled it allowed them to give up earlier cherished plans and anticipated futures without being devastated by loss.

Theoretical sampling is a pivotal part of the development of formal theory. Here, the level of abstraction of the emerging theory has explanatory power across substantive areas because the processes and concepts within it are abstract and generic (Prus, 1987). Thus we would seek comparative data in substantive areas through theoretical sampling to help us tease out less visible properties of our concepts and the conditions and limits of their applicability. For example, I address identity loss in several analyses of the experience of illness. I could refine my concepts by looking at identity loss in other situations, such as bereavement and involuntary unemployment. Comparative analysis of people who experience unanticipated identity gains, such as unexpected job promotions, could also net conceptual refinements.

The necessity of engaging in theoretical sampling means that we researchers cannot produce a solid grounded theory through one-shot interviewing in a single data collection phase. Instead, theoretical sampling demands that we have completed the work of comparing data with data and have developed a provisional set of relevant categories for explaining our data. In turn, our categories take us back to the field to gain more insight about when, how, and to what extent they are pertinent and useful.

Theoretical sampling helps us to define the properties of our categories; to identify the contexts in which they are relevant; to specify the conditions under which they arise, are maintained, and vary; and to discover their consequences. Our emphasis on studying process combined with theoretical sampling to delineate the limits of our categories also helps us to define gaps between categories. Through using comparative methods, we specify the conditions under which they are linked to other categories. Af-

ter we decide which categories best explain what is happening in our study, we treat them as concepts. In this sense, these concepts are useful for helping us to understand many incidents or issues in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Strauss (personal communication, February 1, 1993) advocates theoretical sampling early in the research. I recommend conducting it later in order that relevant data and analytic directions emerge without being forced. Otherwise, early theoretical sampling may bring premature closure to the analysis.

Grounded theory researchers take the usual criteria of "saturation" (i.e., new data fit into the categories already devised) of their categories for ending the research (Morse, 1995). But what does saturation mean? In practice, saturation seems elastic (see also Flick, 1998; Morse, 1995). Grounded theory approaches are seductive because they allow us to gain a handle on our material quickly. Is the handle we gain the best or most complete one? Does it encourage us to look deeply enough? The data in works claiming to be grounded theory pieces range from a handful of cases to sustained field research. The latter more likely fulfills the criterion of saturation and, moreover, has the resonance of intimate familiarity with the studied world.

As we define our categories as saturated (and some of us never do), we rewrite our memos in expanded, more analytic form. We put these memos to work for lectures, presentations, papers, and chapters. The analytic work continues as we sort and order memos, for we may discover gaps or new relationships.

Computer-Assisted Analysis

Computer-assisted techniques offer some shortcuts for coding, sorting, and integrating the data. Several programs, including NUD•IST and the Ethnograph, are explicitly aimed at assisting in grounded theory analyses. HyperResearch, a program designed to retrieve and group data, serves qualitative sociologists across a broad range of analytic applications.[14] Such programs can prove enormously helpful with the problem of mountains of data—that is, data management. Amanda Coffey, Beverly Holbrook, and Paul Atkinson (1996) point out that other advantages of computer coding include the ability to do multiple searches using more than one code word simultaneously and the fact that it enables researchers to place memos at points in the text. Data analysis programs are also effective for mapping relationships visually onscreen. They do not, however, think for the analyst—perhaps to chagrin of some students (see also Seidel, 1991). Nonetheless, Thomas J. Richards and Lyn Richards (1994) argue that the code-and-retrieve method supports the emergence of theory by searching the data for codes and assembling ideas. Further, Renata Tesch (1991) notes that conceptual operations follow or accompany mechanical data management.

Qualitative analysis software programs do not escape controversy. Coffey et al. (1996) and Lonkila (1995) express concern about qualitative programs based on conceptions of grounded theory methods and their uncritical adoption by users. They fear that these programs overemphasize coding and promote a superficial view of grounded theory; they also note that mechanical operations are no substitute for nuanced interpretive analysis. However, Nigel G. Fielding and Raymond M. Lee (1998) do not find substantial empirical evidence for such concerns in their systematic field study of users' experiences with computer-assisted qualitative data analysis programs.[15] I still have some reservations about these programs for four reasons: (a) Grounded theory methods are often poorly understood; (b) these methods have long been used to *legitimate,* rather than to conduct, studies; (c) these software packages appear more suited for objectivist grounded theory than constructivist approaches; and (d) the programs may unintentionally foster an illusion that interpretive work can be reduced to a set of procedures. Yvonna Lincoln (personal communication, August 21, 1998) asks her students, "Why would you want to engage in work that connects you to the deepest part of human existence and then turn it over to a machine to 'mediate'?" Part of interpretive work is gaining a sense of the whole—the whole interview, the whole story, the whole body of

data. No matter how helpful computer programs may prove for managing the parts, we can see only their fragments on the screen.[16] And these fragments may seem to take on an existence of their own, as if objective and removed from their contextual origins and from our constructions and interpretations. Because objectivist grounded theory echoes positivism, computer-assisted programs based on it may promote widespread acceptance not just of the software, but of a one-dimensional view of qualitative research.

◆ *Critical Challenges to Grounded Theory*

As is evident from the discussion above, recent debates have resulted in reassessments of grounded theory. Objectivist grounded theory has shaped views of what the method is and where it can take qualitative research. Over the years, a perception of how leading proponents have used grounded theory has become melded with the methods themselves. Subsequently, critics make assumptions about the nature of the method and its limitations (see, e.g., Conrad, 1990; Riessman, 1990a, 1990b). Riessman (1990a) states that grounded theory methods were insufficient to respect her interviewees and to portray their stories. Richardson (1993) found prospects of completing a grounded theory analysis to be alienating and turned to literary forms. Richardson (1994) also has observed that qualitative research reports are not so straightforward as their authors represent them to be. Authors choose evidence selectively, clean up subjects' statements, unconsciously adopt value-laden metaphors, assume omniscience, and bore readers.

These criticisms challenge authors' representations of their subjects, their authority to interpret subjects' lives, and their writer's voice, criticisms ethnographers have answered (see, e.g., Best, 1995; Dawson & Prus, 1995; Kleinman, 1993; Sanders, 1995; Snow & Morrill, 1993). These criticisms imply that grounded theory methods gloss over meanings within respondents' stories.[17] Conrad (1990) and Riessman (1990b) suggest that "fracturing the data" in grounded theory research might limit understanding because grounded theorists aim for analysis rather than the portrayal of subjects' experience in its fullness. From a grounded theory perspective, fracturing the data means creating codes and categories as the researcher defines themes within the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) propose this strategy for several reasons: (a) to help the researcher avoid remaining immersed in anecdotes and stories, and subsequently unconsciously adopting subjects' perspectives; (b) to prevent the researcher's becoming immobilized and overwhelmed by voluminous data; and (c) to create a way for the researcher to organize and interpret data. However, criticisms of fracturing the data imply that grounded theory methods lead to separating the experience from the experiencing subject, the meaning from the story, and the viewer from the viewed.[18] In short, the criticisms assume that the grounded theory method (a) limits entry into subjects' worlds, and thus reduces understanding of their experience; (b) curtails representation of both the social world and subjective experience; (c) relies upon the viewer's authority as expert observer; and (d) posits a set of objectivist procedures on which the analysis rests.[19]

Researchers can use grounded theory methods to further their knowledge of subjective experience and to expand its representation while neither remaining external from it nor accepting objectivist assumptions and procedures. A constructivist grounded theory assumes that people create and maintain meaningful worlds through dialectical processes of conferring meaning on their realities and acting within them (Bury, 1986; Mishler, 1981). Thus social reality does not exist independent of human action. Certainly, my approach contrasts with a number of grounded theory studies, methodological statements, and research texts (see, e.g., Chenitz & Swanson, 1986; Glaser, 1992; Martin & Turner, 1986; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Turner, 1981). By adopting a constructivist grounded theory approach, the researcher can move grounded theory methods further into the realm of interpre-

tive social science consistent with a Blumerian (1969) emphasis on meaning, without assuming the existence of a unidimensional external reality. A constructivist grounded theory recognizes the interactive nature of both data collection and analysis, resolves recent criticisms of the method, and reconciles positivist assumptions and postmodernist critiques. Moreover, a constructivist grounded theory fosters the development of qualitative traditions through the study of experience from the standpoint of those who live it.

The Place of Grounded Theory in Qualitative Research

Grounded theory research fits into the broader traditions of fieldwork and qualitative analysis. Most grounded theory studies rely on detailed qualitative materials collected through field, or ethnographic, research, but they are not ethnographies in the sense of total immersion into specific communities. Nor do grounded theorists attempt to study the social structures of whole communities. Instead, we tend to look at slices of social life. Like other forms of qualitative research, grounded theories can only portray moments in time. However, the grounded theory quest for the study of basic social processes fosters the identification of connections between events. The social world is always in process, and the lives of the research subjects shift and change as their circumstances and they themselves change. Hence a grounded theorist—or, more broadly, a qualitative researcher—constructs a picture that draws from, reassembles, and renders subjects' lives. The product is more like a painting than a photograph (Charmaz, 1995a). I come close to Atkinson's (1990, p. 2) depiction of ethnography as an "artful product" of objectivist description, careful organization, and interpretive commentary. The tendency to reify the findings and the picture of reality may result more from interpreters of the work than from its author.[20] Significantly, however, many researchers who adopt grounded theory strategies do so precisely to construct objectivist—that is, positivist—qualitative studies.

Grounded theory provides a systematic analytic approach to qualitative analysis of ethnographic materials because it consists of a set of explicit strategies. Any reasonably well-trained researcher can employ these strategies and develop an analysis. The strengths of grounded theory methods lie in (a) strategies that guide the researcher step by step through an analytic process, (b) the self-correcting nature of the data collection process, (c) the methods' inherent bent toward theory and the simultaneous turning away from acontextual description, and (d) the emphasis on comparative methods. Yet, like other qualitative approaches, grounded theory research is an emergent process rather than the product of a single research problem logically and deductively sequenced into a study—or even one logically and inductively sequenced. The initial research questions may be concrete and descriptive, but the researcher can develop deeper analytic questions by studying his or her data. Like wondrous gifts waiting to be opened, early grounded theory texts imply that categories and concepts inhere within the data, awaiting the researcher's discovery (Charmaz, 1990, 1995c). Not so. Glaser (1978, 1992) assumes that we can gather our data unfettered by bias or biography. Instead, a constructivist approach recognizes that the categories, concepts, and theoretical level of an analysis emerge from the researcher's interactions within the field and questions about the data. In short, the narrowing of research questions, the creation of concepts and categories, and the integration of the constructed theoretical framework reflect what and how the researcher thinks and does about shaping and collecting the data.

The grounded theorist's analysis tells a story about people, social processes, and situations. The researcher composes the story; it does not simply unfold before the eyes of an objective viewer. This story reflects the viewer as well as the viewed. Grounded theory studies typically lie between traditional research methodology and the recent postmodernist turn. Radical empiricists shudder at grounded theorists' contamination of the story because we shape the data collection and redirect our analyses as new

issues emerge. Now postmodernists and poststructuralists castigate the story as well. They argue that we compose our stories unconsciously, deny the oedipal logic of authorial desire (Clough, 1992), and deconstruct the subject. In addition, Denzin (1992a) states that even the new interpretive approaches "privilege the researcher over the subject, method over subject matter, and maintain commitments to outmoded conceptions of validity, truth, and generalizability" (p. 20). These criticisms apply to much grounded theory research. Yet we can use them to make our empirical research more reflexive and our completed studies more contextually situated. We can claim only to have interpreted *a* reality, as we understood both our own experience and our subjects' portrayals of theirs.

A re-visioned grounded theory must take epistemological questions into account. Grounded theory can provide a path for researchers who want to continue to develop qualitative traditions without adopting the positivistic trappings of objectivism and universality. Hence the further development of a constructivist grounded theory can bridge past positivism and a revised future form of interpretive inquiry. A revised grounded theory preserves realism through gritty, empirical inquiry and sheds positivistic proclivities by becoming increasingly interpretive.

In contradistinction to Clough's (1992) critique, ethnographies can refer to a feminist vision to construct narratives that do not claim to be literal representations of the real. A feminist vision allows emotions to surface, doubts to be expressed, and relationships with subjects to grow. Data collection becomes less formal, more immediate, and subjects' concerns take precedence over researchers' questions.

A constructivist grounded theory distinguishes between the real and the true. The constructivist approach does not seek truth—single, universal, and lasting. Still, it remains realist because it addresses human *realities* and assumes the existence of real worlds. However, neither human realities nor real worlds are unidimensional. We act within and upon our realities and worlds and thus develop dialectical relations among what we do, think, and feel. The constructivist approach assumes that what we take as real, as objective knowledge and truth, is based upon our perspective (Schwandt, 1994). The pragmatist underpinnings in symbolic interactionism emerge here. W. I. Thomas and Dorothy Swaine Thomas (1928) proclaim, "If human beings define their situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (p. 572). Following their theorem, we must try to find what research participants define as real and where their definitions of reality take them. The constructivist approach also fosters our self-consciousness about what we attribute to our subjects and how, when, and why researchers portray these definitions as real. Thus the research products do not constitute the reality of the respondents' reality. Rather, each is a rendering, one interpretation among multiple interpretations, of a shared or individual reality. That interpretation is objectivist only to the extent that it seeks to construct analyses that show how respondents and the social scientists who study them construct those realities—*without viewing those realities as unidimensional, universal, and immutable.* Researchers' attention to detail in the constructivist approach sensitizes them to multiple realities and the multiple viewpoints within them; it does not represent a quest to capture a single reality.

Thus we can recast the obdurate character of social life that Blumer (1969) talks about. In doing so, we change our conception of it from a real world to be discovered, tracked, and categorized to a world *made real* in the minds and through the words and actions of its members. Thus the grounded theorist constructs an image of *a* reality, not *the* reality—that is, objective, true, and external.

◆ *Objectivist Versus Constructivist Grounded Theory*

A constructivist grounded theory recognizes that the viewer creates the data and ensuing analysis through interaction with the viewed. Data do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the

"discovered" reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts. Researcher and subjects frame that interaction and confer meaning upon it. The viewer then is part of what is viewed rather than separate from it. What a viewer sees shapes what he or she will define, measure, and analyze. Because objectivist (i.e., the majority of) grounded theorists depart from this position, this crucial difference reflects the positivist leanings in their studies.[21]

Causality is suggestive, incomplete, and indeterminate in a constructivist grounded theory. Therefore, a grounded theory remains open to refinement. It looks at how "variables" are grounded—given meaning and played out in subjects' lives (Dawson & Prus, 1995; Prus, 1996). Their meanings and actions take priority over researchers' analytic interests and methodological technology. A constructivist grounded theory seeks to define conditional statements that interpret how subjects construct their realities. Nonetheless, these conditional statements do not approach some level of generalizable truth. Rather, they constitute a set of hypotheses and concepts that other researchers can transport to similar research problems and to other substantive fields. As such, they answer Prus's (1987) call for the development and study of generic concepts. Thus the grounded theorist's hypotheses and concepts offer both explanation and understanding and fulfill the pragmatist criterion of usefulness.

In contrast, objectivist grounded theorists adhere more closely to positivistic canons of traditional science (see Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994; Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991).[22] They assume that following a systematic set of methods leads them to discover reality and to construct a provisionally true, testable, and ultimately verifiable "theory" of it (Strauss, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994).[23] This theory provides not only understanding but prediction. Three extensions of this position follow: (a) Systematic application of grounded theory strategies answers the positivist call for reliability and validity, because specifying procedures permits reproducibility;[24] (b) hypothesis testing in grounded theory leads to confirmation or disconfirmation of the emerging theory; and (c) grounded theory methods allow for the exertion of controls, and therefore make changing the studied reality possible.

Objectivist grounded theory accepts the positivistic assumption of an external world that can be described, analyzed, explained, and predicted: truth, but with a small *t*. That is, objectivist grounded theory is modifiable as conditions change. It assumes that different observers will discover this world and describe it in similar ways. That's correct—to the extent that subjects have comparable experiences (e.g., people with different chronic illnesses may experience uncertainty, intrusive regimens, medical dominance) and viewers bring similar questions, perspectives, methods, and, subsequently, concepts to analyze those experiences. Objectivist grounded theorists often share assumptions with their research participants—particularly the professional participants. Perhaps more likely, they assume that respondents share their meanings. For example, Strauss and Corbin's (1990) discussion of independence and dependence assumes that these terms hold the same meanings for patients as for researchers.

Guidelines such as those offered by Strauss and Corbin (1990) structure objectivist grounded theorists' work. These guidelines are didactic and prescriptive rather than emergent and interactive. Clinton Sanders (1995) refers to grounded theory procedures as "more rigorous than thou instructions about how information should be pressed into a mold" (p. 92). Strauss and Corbin categorize steps in the process with scientific terms such as *axial coding* and *conditional matrix* (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1993). As grounded theory methods become more articulated, categorized, and elaborated, they seem to take on a life of their own. Guidelines turn into procedures and are reified into immutable rules, unlike Glaser and Strauss's (1967) original flexible strategies. By taking grounded theory methods as prescriptive scientific rules, proponents further the positivist cast to objectivist grounded theory.

Given the positivist bent in objectivist grounded theory, where might a constructivist approach take us? How might it reconcile both positivist leanings and postmodernist critiques in grounded theory? A constructivist grounded theory lies between postmodernist (Denzin, 1991; Krieger, 1991; Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Tyler, 1986) and postpositivist approaches to qualitative research (Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988; Turner, 1981). Researchers no longer provide a solitary voice rendering the dialogue only from their standpoints. Constructivists aim to include multiple voices, views, and visions in their rendering of lived experience. How does one accomplish this?

◆ *Constructing Constructivism*

What helps researchers develop a constructivist grounded theory? How might they shape the data collection and analysis phases? Gaining depth and understanding in their work means that they can fulfill Blumer's (1969) call for "intimate familiarity" with respondents and their worlds (see also Lofland & Lofland, 1984, 1995). In short, constructing constructivism means seeking meanings—both respondents' meanings and researchers' meanings.

To seek respondents' meanings, we must go further than surface meanings or presumed meanings. We must look for views and values as well as for acts and facts. We need to look for beliefs and ideologies as well as situations and structures. By studying tacit meanings, we clarify, rather than challenge, respondents' views about reality.[25]

A constructivist approach necessitates a relationship with respondents in which they can cast their stories in their terms. It means listening to their stories with openness to feeling and experience. In my studies of chronic illness, several people mentioned that they saw me as someone to whom they could express their private thoughts and feelings. Sometimes, however, researchers frame their questions in ways that cloak raw experience and mute feelings. In studies that tap suffering, we may unwittingly give off cues that we do not welcome respondents' going too deep. Furthermore, one-shot interviewing lends itself to a partial, sanitized view of experience, cleaned up for public discourse. The very structure of an interview may preclude private thoughts and feelings from emerging. Such a structure reinforces whatever proclivities a respondent has to tell only the public version of the story. Researchers' sustained involvement with research participants lessens these problems.

The conceptual level of coding, writing memos, and developing categories likely differ in objectivist and constructivist grounded theory. For example, Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) stick close to their depiction of overt data. I aim to understand the assumptions underlying the data by piecing them together. For example, "living one day at a time" is a taken-for-granted explanation of how one manages troubles. Everyone knows what living one day at a time is. But what does it assume? Ill people report living one day at a time or having good days and bad days as self-evident facts. Not until they are asked what these terms mean experientially—that is, how they affect their relating to time, what feelings these experiences elicit, and so on—do they start to define a form and content for "living one day at a time" or "good" and "bad" days.

Objectivist grounded theory studies may offer rich description and make conditional statements, but they may remain outside of the experience. Furthermore, objectivist grounded theory methods foster externality by invoking procedures that increase complexity at the expense of experience. Axial coding can lead to awkward scientistic terms and clumsy categories. Terms and categories take center stage and distance readers from the experience, rather than concentrate their attention upon it. Processual diagrams and conceptual maps can result in an overly complex architecture that obscures experience. Any form of grounded theory can generate jargon. Objectivist grounded theory especially risks cloaking analytic power in jargon.

Making our categories consistent with studied life helps to keep that life in the foreground. Active codes and subsequent categories preserve images of experience. For example, in my discussion of immersion in illness, my categories were "Recasting Life," "Facing Dependency," "Pulling In," "Slipping Into Illness Routines," and "Weathering a Serious Episode." [26]

Coding and categorizing processes sharpen the researcher's ability to ask questions about the data. Different questions can flow from objectivist and constructivist starting points. These questions can be concrete, as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998), or more abstract. Concrete questions are revealed in their discussion of two categories—pain experience and pain relief: "Who gives pain relief to people with arthritis?" "What gives relief?" "How is the pain experienced and handled?" "How much relief is needed?" "When does the pain occur and when does she institute relief?" "Why is pain relief important?" (1990, pp. 78-79). Here the categories take on an objective, external character—objective because these questions assume answers that reflect "facts"; objective because the answers assume that the researcher discovers what being in pain "really is all about"; objective because the topic of pain now takes on an external character that can be identified, addressed, and managed.

In contrast, I start by viewing the topic of pain subjectively as a feeling, an experience that may take a variety of forms. Then I ask these questions: What makes pain, pain? (That is, what is essential to the phenomenon as defined by those who experience it?) What defining properties or characteristics do ill people attribute to it? When do they do so? These questions lead into a question I share with Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998): How does the person experience this pain, and what, if anything, does he or she do about it? My questions aim to get at meaning, not at truth. As a result, a constructivist grounded theory may remain at a more intuitive, impressionistic level than an objectivist approach.

My version of grounded theory fosters the researcher's viewing the data afresh, again and again, as he or she develops new ideas. Researchers can code and recode data numerous times (see also Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Posing new questions to the data results in new analytic points. I go back and forth between data and the drafts of chapters or papers many times. I take explicit findings in certain interviews and see if they remain implicit in other interviews. Then I go back to respondents and ask specific questions around the new category. For example, when I returned to a young woman with colitis to ask how the slow, monotonous time of convalescence might seem in memory, she understood my line of questioning immediately and cut in without skipping a beat: "It seems like a wink" (Charmaz, 1991, p. 92).

Every qualitative researcher makes multiple analytic decisions. Foremost among these is how much complexity to introduce. How much is necessary to convey the story with depth and clarity? How much seems like hairsplitting that will irritate or confuse the reader? At what point does collapsing categories result in conceptual muddiness and oversimplification? To achieve the right level of complexity, we must know the potential audience and sense the appropriate style and level at which to write for it.

◆ *Rendering Through Writing*

The analysis of qualitative data does not cease when the grounded theorist has developed a theoretical framework; it proceeds into the writing (Mitchell & Charmaz, 1996). A grounded theorist's proclivities toward objectivism or constructivism also come through in his or her writing about the research. The image of a scientific laboratory comes to mind with objectivist grounded theory, reflected in carefully organized and stated written reports of concepts, evidence, and procedures. Constructivist grounded theory spawns an image of a writer at a desk who tries to balance theoretical interpretation with an evocative aesthetic. To illustrate how analysis proceeds into writing constructivist grounded theory, I provide several writing strategies and examples from earlier work.

As Laurel Richardson (1990) declares, writing matters. Consistent with the postmodernist turn, I attempt to evoke experiential feeling through how I render it in writing. This means taking the reader into a story and imparting its mood through linguistic style and narrative exposition. This strategy removes the writing from typical scientific format without transforming the final product into fiction, drama, or poetry. I frame key definitions and distinctions in words that reproduce the tempo and mood of the experience:

> *Existing* from day to day occurs when a person plummets into continued crises that rip life apart. (Charmaz, 1991, p. 185)

> Others wait to map a future. And wait. They monitor their bodies and their lives. They look for signs to indicate what steps to take next. They map a future or move to the next point on the map only when they feel assured that the worst of their illness is over. These people map a future or move to the next point when they feel distant enough from illness to release their emotions from it. (p. 191)

Analogies and metaphors can explicate tacit meanings and feelings subsumed within a category (see also Charmaz & Mitchell, 1996; Richardson, 1994):

> Such men and women feel coerced into living one day at a time. They force it upon themselves, almost with clenched teeth. Here, living one day at a time resembles learning an unfamiliar, disagreeable lesson in grammar school; it is an unwelcome prerequisite to staying alive. (Charmaz, 1991, p. 179)

> Drifting time, in contrast [to dragging time], spreads out. Like a fan, drifting time unfolds and expands during a serious immersion in illness. (p. 91)

Simple language and straightforward ideas make theory readable. Theory remains embedded in the narrative, in its many stories. The theory becomes more accessible but less identifiable as theory. Several strategies foster making the writing accessible. Catching experiential rhythm and timing allows the researcher to reproduce it within the writing:

> From embarrassment to mortification. From discomfort to pain. Endless uncertainty. What follows? Regimentation. (Charmaz, 1991, p. 134)

> Days slip by. The same day keeps slipping by. Durations of time lengthen since few events break up the day, week, or month. Illness seems like one long uninterrupted duration of time. (p. 88)

Questions help tie main ideas together or redirect the reader. Sometimes I adopt the role of a chronically ill person and ask questions as she would.

> Is it cancer? Could it be angina? Pangs of uncertainty spring up when current, frequently undiagnosed, symptoms could mean a serious chronic illness. (Charmaz, 1991, p. 32)

Immediacy draws the reader into the story. A story occurring in the present as if now unfolding draws the reader in. I sacrificed immediacy for accuracy by writing about respondents in the past because the events described took place in the past.[27] Where authors place their stories and how they frame them can bring experience to life or wholly obscure it.

A mix of concrete detail with analytic categories connects the familiar with the unfamiliar or even esoteric. Thus I kept material in *Good Days, Bad Days* (Charmaz, 1991) that had been covered before, such as the chapter on living with chronic illness. I took the reader through messy houses, jumbled schedules, pressures to simplify life, fragile pacing, and enormous efforts to function to the relief when remission occurs. This detail gave readers imagery on which to build when I moved into a more elusive analysis of time.

Writers use a linear logic to organize their analyses and make experience understandable. Yet experience is not necessarily linear, nor is it always readily drawn with clear boundaries. For example, experiencing illness, much less all its spiraling consequences, does not fit neatly into one general process. The grounded theory method emphasizes the analysis of a basic process the researcher discovers in the data. Al-

though I pondered over organizing the book around one process, I could not identify an overarching theme. Experiencing illness consists of many processes, not a single process that subsumes others. Further, illness ebbs and flows. Chronically ill people define periods of relative "health" as well as spells of sickness. Thus I chose to collapse time and experience to cover illness.

Written images portray the tone the writer takes toward the topic and reflect the writer's relationships with his or her respondents. I aim for curiosity without condescension, openness without voyeurism, and participation without domination. Maintaining balance is difficult, because I try to portray respondents' worlds and views. Throughout the research and writing of *Good Days, Bad Days,* I tried to go beyond respondents' public presentation of self in illness. Otherwise, the knotty problems, the fear and pain, the moral dilemmas and ambivalent decisions do not come through.

Writers makes moral choices about portraying respondents, designing how to tell their stories, and delineating ways to interpret them. These choices also lead to the researcher's assuming a role as the writer (Krieger, 1991). In my book, I remain in the background as a storyteller whose tales have believable characters, not as an omniscient social scientist. My tone, style, and imagery reduce omniscience. However, because I stayed with the conceptual categories and built the stories around them, my work remains consistent with grounded theory and much social scientific writing.

Revising a manuscript can result in changes in style, possibly even of genre. Carefully crafted grounded theory categories work well as signposts in professional journals. A book editor may delete all the subheadings in one quick read. As signposts go, the narrative style changes. A more straightforward scientific style recedes as a more literary style evolves. Of course, how one sees that style and whether one defines it as scientific or literary depends upon where one stands. The postmodernist may see this style as objectivist, realist, and scientific; the positivist may see it as disconcertingly literary. I agree with Atkinson (1990) that impressionist tales are often embedded in realist accounts. I try to pull readers in so they might sense and situate the feeling of the speaker in the story. Here, what Van Maanen (1988) calls impressionist tales sounds exactly what Clough (1992) calls "emotional realism." Perhaps, however, portraying moods, feelings, and views evokes an aesthetic verisimilitude of them.

◆ *Summary and Conclusion*

Given the analysis above, what conclusions can we draw about grounded theory studies? What might be the future of grounded theory? First, grounded theory methods evolve in different ways depending upon the perspectives and proclivities of their adherents. I aim to move researchers toward an explicitly constructivist approach. If we examine our epistemological premises, we can acknowledge the limits of our studies and the ways we shape them. In this way, adopting and refining grounded theory methods furthers the study of empirical worlds.

Second, we can reduce or resolve tensions between postmodernism and constructivist grounded theory when we use the former to illuminate and extend the latter. In short, postmodernism can *inform* realist study of experience rather than simply serve as justification for abandoning it. The postmodernist turn has forced renewed awareness of our relationships with and representation of subjects that will long influence qualitative research, possibly longer than the term *postmodernism* itself holds sway. Similarly, the importance of situating qualitative research in historical and cultural context is underscored. We grounded theorists can profit from the current trend toward linguistic and rhetorical analysis by becoming more reflexive about how we frame and write our studies. This trend supports constructivist approaches in grounded theory because it explicitly treats authors' works *as* constructions instead of as objectified products.

Third, the future of grounded theory lies with both objectivist and constructivist visions.

Scientific institutions and conventions are unlikely to undergo rapid change. Granting agencies and tenure review committees may long favor objectivist work over constructivist craft. The qualitative revolution has opened up possibilities and potentials, but gatekeepers are likely to reward scholars whose work comes closest to their own. Thus, we can expect to see growing numbers of large studies with small qualitative components and more team projects in multiple sites. Does this mean that constructivist grounded theory will wither and wane? No. The trend toward interpretive study, the quest for understanding, and the challenge to the imagination impel us to take our inquiry into the world. Through sharing the worlds of our subjects, we come to conjure an image of their constructions and of our own.

Notes

1. For my comparisons of objectivist and constructivist grounded theory, see the section below headed "Objectivist Versus Constructivist Grounded Theory."

2. For example, in his definitive study of natural recovery from heroin addiction, Patrick Biernacki (1986) controlled his referral chains for obtaining interviews for sampling, theoretical, and verificational considerations (pp. 214-219). Some colleagues have placed Biernacki's work in the emerging postmodern ethnography. However, in our conversations before he died, it was clear that he saw his work as realist qualitative research in which the investigator tries to achieve accurate reporting of a world. We both agreed that my use of grounded theory is more phenomenological and constructivist than his own. Anselm Strauss made the same assessment of my work relative to his (Strauss's) as well.

3. Lindesmith (1947) and Cressey (1953) both attempted earlier to codify analytic methods for qualitative research through analytic induction. Their work has been preserved in the criminology and deviance literatures but has faded in general methodological discussions.

4. Juliet Corbin has a strong background and a doctorate in nursing science. She has long been a leader in the establishment of qualitative methods in nursing; since the publication of *Basics,* she has attained prominence in the social sciences and other professions as well.

5. To illustrate, when discussing conceptualizing data as the first step in analysis, Strauss and Corbin (1990) provide the following hypothetical example from a restaurant: "While waiting for your dinner, you notice a lady in red. She appears to be just standing there in the kitchen, but your common sense tells you that a restaurant wouldn't pay a lady in red just to stand there, especially in a busy kitchen. Your curiosity is piqued, so you decide to do an inductive analysis to see if you can determine just what her job is. (Once a grounded theorist, always a grounded theorist).

"You notice that she is intently looking around the kitchen area, **a work site,** focusing here and then there, taking a mental note of what is going on. *You ask yourself, what is she doing here? Then you label it* **watching.** Watching what? **Kitchen work**" (pp. 63-64).

This example continues in the same vein. It relies on careful observation of the overt behavior of the woman in the restaurant, from the objective observer's viewpoint. It does not take into account what that reality is like from the perspective of the restaurant worker. Nor do the categories develop from comparative study of other restaurants.

6. Anselm Strauss critiqued the draft of my 1995 paper on grounded theory in which I then claimed that grounded theory is not verificational (Charmaz, 1995c). He said that I was wrong.

7. For example, when writing about "mutual pretense," Glaser and Strauss (1965) state: "This particular awareness context cannot exist, of course, unless both the patient and staff are aware that he is dying. Therefore all the structural conditions which contribute to the existence of open awareness (and which are absent in closed and suspicion awareness) contribute also to the existence of mutual pretense. In addition, at least one interactant must indicate a desire to pretend that the patient is not dying and the other must agree to the pretense, acting accordingly" (p. 67). Corbin and Strauss (1987) also adopt a distanced voice in the following passage: "The impact of body failure and consequent performance failure can be measured by the impact that it has on each dimension of the BBC (biographical body conceptions). Since each dimension (biographical time, body, self conceptions) exists in a tightly bound relationship with the other, the conse-

quences of body failure with regard to one aspect are further felt with the other two. It is the combined impact of the three aspects of the BBC that profoundly affects biographical continuity and meaning" (p. 260). Several of Corbin and Strauss's works on chronic illness, such as *Unending Work and Care* (1988), read as if much less distanced than other works. Two factors may contribute to the difference: Strauss's experience with chronic illness and Corbin's direct involvement in data gathering.

8. Stern (1994a) agrees. She sees recent developments in grounded theory methods as eroding the method and the power of the subsequent analyses.

9. For a more developed discussion of how to do constructivist grounded theory, see Charmaz (1995c).

10. Grounded theorists work up and out from data. Not every qualitative researcher does. Rena Lederman (1990) observes that some anthropologists avoid using their field notes when developing their finished work. She writes of how anthropological field notes fulfill different functions for the researcher while he or she is away in the field and later, when the researcher is home. Ethnographers write as both close to and distant from their respondents while in the field, but their loyalties shift to the professional community when they reach home. Then the same field notes that provided a concrete grasp of reality in the field impart a sense of doubt. Lederman argues that conceptions of field notes as fixed and stable data crumble at this point. Instead, field notes can assume multiple meanings and are open to reinterpretation and contradiction.

11. Strauss's remarkably facile mind could not stop making comparisons. He taught students to compare unlikely categories of people, actions, settings, and organizations to tease out the properties of a category (see also Star, 1997).

12. The original memo was considerably longer and contained snippets of data throughout. The more distanced tone of the 1983 memo reflects my earlier socialization in writing and in grounded theory. It also reflects tensions between the relativism I adopted during my first year of graduate school and the objectivism in my grounded theory training (see Charmaz, 1983). By 1990, when *Good Days, Bad Days* went to press, this material reads as less distanced and more constructivist although it is essentially the same as the 1983 memo. In the interim, I came closer to integrating my realist intention to study empirical problems with the relativism inherent in constructivism (see Charmaz, 1990). In addition, I worked on making abstract ideas accessible.

13. I use the term *subjects* not because I view them as subordinate, or subjected to inquiry, but because the term *research participants* is so cumbersome.

14. For guidelines in choosing a data analysis software program, see Weitzman and Miles (1995).

15. However, recent listserv discussions of qualitative computer analysis indicate that some users still view the programs as too mechanical. For example, Aksel Hn Tjorca (MedSoc Listserv, November 17, 1998) found NUD•IST to be useful in sorting data initially but feared that hierarchical categories embedded in the program might work against the relational nature of the data.

16. To gain a sense of the whole on which we are working, we may need to have entire documents, if not the complete data set, before us. Yvonna Lincoln (personal communication, August 21, 1998) tells me that she works with all her data spread out on a large table. That way, she can gain a sense of the whole and, simultaneously, plan how to assemble the parts.

17. There are tensions between the constructivist assumptions of varied and problematic meaning and objectivist assumptions of the world as real, obdurate, external, and predictable. A constructivist grounded theory acknowledges realities of enduring worlds and tries to show how they are socially created through action, intention, and routine.

18. For a detailed report on how diverse scholars have responded to such concerns, see the 1992 debate in the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* about reality and interpretation in William Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (Adler et al., 1992). Mariane Boelen (1992) challenges the veracity of Whyte's study and, by doing so, challenges reifications made of it (but not the notion of reifying ethnography itself). The responses to her challenge, however, range from accepting objectivist premises to questioning them (see Denzin, 1992b; Orlandella, 1992; Richardson, 1992; Vidich, 1992; Whyte, 1992). Vidich (1992) points out that Boelen assumes only one possible view of reality and that Whyte missed it. Denzin (1992b) and Richardson

(1992), however, question the objectivist premises that both Whyte and Boelen share.

19. To my knowledge, those who raise these criticisms have not resolved them through using grounded theory. Their recommendations range from abandoning empirical study to moving toward narrative analysis. To the extent that narrative analysis focuses on or drifts into emphasizing the type and structure of the narrative rather than respondents' meanings, I fail to see it as a better alternative than grounded theory studies. Nor do I see recording respondents' statements in one-line stanzas as offering a better frame for meaning than interview excerpts.

20. An author may call attention to an issue, frame a manuscript on it, but assume that the one issue constitutes the entire empirical reality. For example, before my analyses of illness focused squarely on the self, I argued that loss of self is *a* fundamental form of suffering. Readers reified my argument and concluded that I erroneously saw loss of self as the only experience of illness (see Robinson, 1990).

21. Glaser and Strauss (1967; Glaser, 1992; Strauss, 1987) have long stated that the core issues become apparent in the research setting, as if any trained observer will discover them. Similarly, they write as if neither standpoint nor status affects what observers see and find.

22. For a good outline of positivist premises, see Denzin (1989).

23. Strauss and Corbin (1994) call for grounded theory advocates to abandon the quest for truth. However, they also make a strong case for aiming for verification, which assumes a quest for truth. In their 1994 chapter, they also affirm two points I raised earlier, that the researcher's analysis is an interactive product of the views of the researcher and the data, and that the early works are written as if the researcher discovers an external order in the data (see Charmaz, 1983, 1990).

24. Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that exact replication is not possible, but sufficient reproducibility is. They propose that other researchers with similar theoretical premises, data gathering procedures, and research conditions develop similar theoretical explanations.

25. By making our early drafts available to those subjects who wish to read them, we make it possible for them to challenge and correct our views.

26. It is important to distinguish when the actor has agency and when he or she is acted upon. A hazard of any inductive method such as the constructivist approach is overemphasis on the individual. The constructivist approach leads to a style that emphasizes the active, reflective actor. Yet larger social forces also act upon this actor. So the researcher needs to learn how these social forces affect the actor and what, if anything, the actor thinks, feels, and does about them.

27. See, in contrast, Catherine Riessman (1990a) for presenting stories in the present.

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