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QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWING AND GROUNDED THEORY ANALYSIS

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Novices raise two fundamental questions about qualitative interviewing: (a) How do you do it? and (b) How do you analyze your interview data? In this chapter, I address how grounded theory methods shape qualitative interviewing in relation to personal narratives and guide analysis of interview data. Essentially, grounded theory methods consist of flexible strategies for focusing and expediting qualitative data collection and analysis. These methods provide a set of inductive steps that successively lead the researcher from studying concrete realities to rendering a conceptual understanding of them. The founders of grounded theory, Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (1967), aimed to develop middle-range theories from qualitative data. Hence they not only intended to conceptualize qualitative data, but planned to demonstrate relations between conceptual categories and to specify the conditions under which theoretical relationships emerge, change, or are maintained.

Grounded theory methods consist of guidelines that aid the researcher (a) to study social and social psychological processes, (b) to direct data collection, (c) to manage data analysis, and (d) to develop an abstract theoretical framework that explains the studied process. Grounded theory researchers collect data and analyze it simultaneously from the initial phases of research. Researchers cannot know exactly what the most significant social and social

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psychological processes are in particular settings, so they start with areas of interest to them and form preliminary interviewing questions to open up those areas. They explore and examine research participants' concerns and then further develop questions around those concerns, subsequently seeking participants whose experiences speak to these questions. This sequence is repeated several times during a research project. Hence grounded theory methods keep researchers close to their gathered data rather than to what they may have previously assumed or wished was the case. These methods give researchers tools for analyzing data as well as for obtaining additional focused data that inform, extend, and refine emerging analytic themes. Thus the interviews that grounded theory researchers conduct are focused; grounded theory methods create a tight fit between the collected data and analysis of those data.

In-depth qualitative interviewing fits grounded theory methods particularly well. At first glance, the advantages of qualitative interviewing for conducting a grounded theory analysis seem unassailable. An interviewer assumes more direct control over the construction of data than does a researcher using most other methods, such as ethnography or textual analysis. As John Lofland and Lyn Lofland (1984, 1995) have noted, the interview is a directed conversation. Grounded theory methods require that researchers take control of their data collection and analysis, and in turn these methods give researchers more analytic control over their material. Qualitative interviewing provides an open-ended, in-depth exploration of an aspect of life about which the interviewee has substantial experience, often combined with considerable insight. The interview can elicit views of this person's subjective world. The interviewer sketches the outline of these views by delineating the topics and drafting the questions. Interviewing is a flexible, emergent technique; ideas and issues emerge during the interview, and the interviewer can then immediately pursue these leads.

Grounded theory methods depend upon a similar kind of flexibility. In addition to picking up and pursuing themes in interviews, grounded theorists look for ideas by studying data and then returning to the field to gather focused data to answer analytic questions and to fill conceptual gaps. Thus the combination of flexibility and control inherent in in-depth interviewing techniques fits grounded theory strategies for increasing the analytic incisiveness of the resultant analysis. Grounded theory interviewing differs from in-depth interviewing as the research process proceeds in that grounded theorists narrow the range of interview topics to gather specific data for their theoretical frameworks.

Throughout this chapter, I draw upon my earlier grounded theory studies of how adults with serious chronic illnesses experienced their conditions. After completing a doctoral dissertation in this area based on notes from 55 interviews (Charmaz 1973), I conducted 115 more intensive interviews, almost all of which were tape-recorded. These interviews focused on the effects of illness upon the self and relationships among self, time, and illness (Charmaz 1987, 1991a). The English language does not include a full, explicit, and shared vocabulary for talking about time. Thus the open-ended nature of grounded theory methods and the emphasis on emergent ideas in this approach proved especially helpful for the study of implicit meanings of time. My next project looked directly at what it means to have a chronically ill body; that work built upon earlier data and 25 new focused interviews for which there was a detailed interview guide, 12 of which were conducted with earlier participants (Charmaz 1995a, 1999).

In the past, most discussions of grounded theory have taken data collection practices for granted, giving them scant attention. Glaser and Strauss (1967; Glaser 1978) stressed the analysis and its resultant strengths. They redirected qualitative research to turn toward theoretical statements and reduced the distance between empirical research and theorizing. Yet data and theorizing are intertwined. Obtaining rich data provides a solid foundation for developing robust theories. Grounded theorists must attend to the quality of their data. Thus in the following pages I not only outline the logic of grounded theory but also attempt to show how researchers can obtain and use rich data with which to construct viable grounded theories.

◆ *Variations on Grounded Theory*

All variants of grounded theory include the following strategies: (a) simultaneous data collection and analysis, (b) pursuit of emergent themes through early data analysis, (c) discovery of basic social processes within the data, (d) inductive construction of abstract categories that explain and synthesize these processes, (e) sampling to refine the categories through comparative processes, and (f) integration of categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions, and consequences of the studied processes (see Charmaz 1990, 1995b, 2000; Glaser 1978, 1992; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss 1987, 1995).

Grounded theory methods have taken two somewhat different forms since their creation: constructivist and objectivist (Charmaz 2000). The constructivist approach places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from the shared experiences of researcher and participants and the researcher's relationships with participants (see Charmaz 1990, 1995b, 2000; Charmaz and Mitchell 1996, 2001). In this view, any method is always a means, rather than an end in itself. Methods do not ensure knowing; they may only provide more or less useful tools for learning. Constructivists study how participants construct meanings and actions, and they do so from as close to the inside of the experience as they can get. Constructivists also view data analysis as a construction that not only locates the data in time, place, culture, and context, but also reflects the researcher's thinking. Thus the sense that the researcher makes of the data does not inhere entirely within those data.

Objectivist grounded theory, in contrast, emphases the viewing of data as real in and of themselves. This position assumes that data represent objective facts about a knowable world. The data already exist in the world, and the researcher finds them. In this view, the conceptual sense the grounded theorist makes of the data derives from the data: Meaning inheres in the data and the grounded theorist discovers it (see, e.g., Strauss and Corbin 1990; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978). This perspective assumes an external reality awaiting discovery and an unbiased observer who records facts about it. Objectivist grounded theorists believe that careful application of their methods produces theoretical understanding. Hence their role becomes more that of a conduit for the research process than that of a creator of it. Given these assumptions, proponents of objectivist grounded theory would argue for a stricter adherence to grounded theory steps than would constructivists.[1]

Objectivist grounded theorists also assume (a) that research participants can and will relate the significant facts about their situations, (b) that the researcher remains separate and distant from research participants and their realities, (c) that the researcher represents the participants and their realities as an external authority, and (d) that the research report offers participants a useful analysis of their situations. Interviewers who subscribe to these assumptions look for explicit themes, gather findings (i.e., facts), and treat their analytic renderings as objective.

The dual roots of grounded theory in Chicago school sociology and in positivism have produced both advantages and ambi-

guities. The Chicago school pragmatist, symbolic interactionist, and field research traditions that Anselm Strauss brought to grounded theory give this method its open-ended emphasis on process, meaning, action, and usefulness.[2] Barney Glaser's positivism imbued grounded theory with empiricism, rigorous codified methods, and its somewhat ambiguous specialized language.[3] Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed grounded theory methods to codify explicit procedures for qualitative data analysis and to construct useful middle-range theories from the data.

My approach to grounded theory builds upon a symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective with constructivist methods (Charmaz 1990, 1995b, 2000). I make the following assumptions: (a) Multiple realities exist, (b) data reflect the researcher's and the research participants'4 mutual constructions, and (c) the researcher, however incompletely, enters and is affected by participants' worlds. This approach explicitly provides an *interpretive* portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it (Charmaz 1995b, 2000; Guba and Lincoln 1994; Schwandt 1994).[5] The researcher aims to learn participants' implicit meanings of their experiences to build a conceptual analysis of them. A constructivist approach takes implicit meanings, experiential views, and grounded theory analyses as constructions of reality. A constructivist approach to grounded theory complements symbolic interactionism because both emphasize the study of how action and meaning are constructed.

◆ *Grounded Theory Interviewing as Unfolding Stories*

Interview data are useful for grounded theory studies that address individual experience. For example, many people experience disrupted lives because of grief, illness, marital dissolution, or financial crises, but they may not have sustained contact with other people who face similar troubles (Charmaz 1991a; Stephenson 1985). A researcher can create an interpretive analysis of their experiences through qualitative interviewing.[6] Grounded theorists aim to explain social and social psychological processes. In my work, such processes have included situating the self in time, disclosing illness, and adapting to impairment. In researching these processes, I had to identify the conditions and sequences surrounding what chronically ill people did and what happened to them as a result. A hazard in such an undertaking is the possibility that the researcher will aim to define the analytic story at the expense of the participant's story. Thus the researcher needs to achieve a balance between hearing the participant's story and probing for processes.

A grounded theory interviewer's questions need to define and to explore processes. The interviewer starts with the participant's story and fills it out by attempting to locate it within a basic social process. The basic grounded theory question driving a study is, "What is happening here?" (Glaser 1978). In this case, the "happening" is the experience or central problem addressed in the research. Most grounded theory interview studies do not look at what is happening in the construction of the story during the interview. Objectivist grounded theorists view interview questions as the means for gathering "facts." In this view, interview questions are more or less useful tools to obtain these facts. In contrast, constructivist grounded theorists see an interview as starting with the central problem (which defines suitable participants for the study) but proceeding from how interviewer and subject co-construct the interview. Their constructions are taken as the grist of the study, but constructivists frame much of this material as "views," rather than hard facts. Constructivists emphasize locating their data in context. Thus they may attend to the context of the specific interview, the context of the individual's life, and the contextual aspects of the study and research problem within the setting, society, and historical moment.[7] Objectivists, in contrast, concentrate on the specific data they have and treat. Thus their analyses may glow with accuracy but fade in context. Both constructivist and objectivist grounded theorists try to get at key events, their contexts, and the processes that contribute to shaping those events.

The first question may suffice for the first interview if stories tumble out. Receptive "uh huhs" or a few clarifying questions or comments may keep a story coming when the participant can and wants to tell it. I choose questions carefully and ask them slowly to foster participants' reflections. Grounded theory researchers use in-depth interviewing to explore, not to interrogate (Charmaz 1991b). Framing questions takes skill and practice. Questions must both explore the interviewer's topic and fit the participant's experience. As is evident below, questions must be sufficiently general to cover a wide range of experiences as well as narrow enough to elicit and explore the participant's specific experience.

I list some sample questions below to illustrate how grounded theory interviewers frame questions to study process. These questions also reflect a symbolic interactionist emphasis on learning participants' subjective meanings and on stressing participants' actions. The questions are intended to tap individual experience. For a project concerning organizational or social processes, I direct questions to the collective practices first and then later attend to the individual's participation in and views of those practices (see also in this volume DeVault and McCoy, Chapter 18). The questions below are offered merely as examples. I have never asked all of them in a single interview, and often I do not get beyond the initial set of questions in one session. I seldom take an interview guide with me into an interview, as I prefer to keep the interaction informal and conversational.

Researchers who are working on grounded theory studies of life disruptions or of deviant behaviors of some kind risk being intrusive. Participants may tell stories during interviews that they never dreamed they would tell. Their comfort should be of higher priority for the interviewer than obtaining juicy data. Thus concluding questions should be slanted toward positive responses, to bring the interview to closure on a positive note. No interview should end abruptly after the interviewer has asked the most searching questions or when the participant is distressed. The rhythm and pace of the interview should bring the participant back to a normal conversational level before the interview ends. The following examples of interview questions illustrate the above points.

EXAMPLES OF GROUNDED THEORY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Initial Open-Ended Questions

1. Tell me about what happened [or how you came to ____].
2. When, if at all, did you first experience ____ [or notice ____]?
3. [If so,] What was it like? What did you think then? How did you happen to ____? Who, if anyone, influenced your actions? Tell me about how he/she or they influenced you.
4. Could you describe the events that led up to ____ [or preceded ____]?
5. What contributed to ____?
6. What was going on in your life then? How would you describe how you viewed ____ before ____ happened? How, if at all, has your view of ____ changed?
7. How would you describe the person you were then?

Intermediate Questions

1. What, if anything, did you know about _____?
2. Tell me about your thoughts and feelings when you learned about _____.
3. What happened next?
4. Who, if anyone, was involved? When was that? How were they involved?
5. Tell me about how you learned to handle _____.
6. How, if at all, have your thoughts and feelings about _____ changed since _____?
7. What positive changes have occurred in your life [or _____] since _____?
8. What negative changes, if any, have occurred in your life [or _____] since _____?
9. Tell me how you go about _____. What do you do?
10. Could you describe a typical day for you when you are _____? [Probe for different times.] Now tell me about a typical day when you are _____.
11. Tell me how you would describe the person you are now. What most contributed to this change [or continuity]?
12. As you look back on _____, are there any other events that stand out in your mind? Could you describe it [each one]? How did this event affect what happened? How did you respond to _____ [the event; the resulting situations]?
13. Could you describe the most important lessons you learned about _____ through experiencing _____?
14. Where do you see yourself in two years [five years, ten years, as appropriate]? Describe the person you hope to be then. How would you compare the person you hope to be and the person you see yourself as now?
15. What helps you to manage _____? What problems might you encounter? Tell me the sources of these problems.
16. Who has been the most helpful to you during this time? How has he/she been helpful?

Ending Questions

1. What do you think are the most important ways to _____? How did you discover [or create] them? How has your experience before _____ affected how you handled _____?
2. Tell me about how your views [and/or actions depending on topic and preceding responses] may have changed since you have _____?
3. How have you grown as a person since _____? Tell me about your strengths that you discovered or developed through _____. [If appropriate] What do you most value about yourself now? What do others most value in you?
4. After having these experiences, what advice would you give to someone who has just discovered that he or she _____?
5. Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during this interview?
6. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

There is overlap in the questions above, and this is intentional. Such overlap allows the interviewer to go back to an earlier thread to gain more information or to winnow unnecessary or potentially uncomfortable questions. Taking notes on key points during the interview helps as long as it does not distract either interviewer or participant. Notes remind the interviewer to return to earlier points and suggest how he or she might frame follow-up questions.

Grounded theory researchers must guard against forcing data into preconceived categories (Glaser 1978). Interviewing, more than other forms of qualitative data collection, challenges researchers to create a balance between asking significant questions and forcing responses. An interviewer's questions and interviewing style shape the context, frame, and content of the study. Subsequently, a naive researcher may inadvertently force interview data into preconceived categories. Asking the wrong questions can result in the researcher's forcing the data, as can the way questions are asked, with which emphasis, and with what kind of pacing.

By asking the wrong questions, the interviewer will fail to elicit the participant's experience in his or her own language. Such questions superimpose the researcher's concepts, concerns, and discourse upon the subject's reality—from the start. Grounded theory analysis attempts to move inductively upward from data to theoretical rendering. When either forced or superficial questions shape the data collection, the subsequent analysis suffers. Thus researchers need to be constantly reflexive about the nature of their questions and whether they work for the specific participants.

The focus of the interview and the specific questions will likely differ depending on whether the interviewer adopts a constructivist or an objectivist approach. A constructivist would emphasize the participant's definitions of terms, situations, and events and try to tap the participant's assumptions, implicit meanings, and tacit rules. An objectivist would be concerned with obtaining accurate information about chronology, events, settings, and behaviors. Then, too, Glaser's (1978) influence would produce questions different from those likely to be used by proponents of Strauss and Corbin's (1990, 1998) version of grounded theory.

On a more general level, all interviewers need to be aware of the assumptions and perspectives they might import into interview questions. Consider the following:

- Tell me about the stressors in your situation.
- What coping techniques do you use to handle these stressors?

These questions might work well with a sample of research participants, such as nurses, who are familiar with the terms *stressors* and *coping techniques,* as long as the interviewer asks participants to define these terms at some point. However, the thought of identifying sources of stress and having explicit techniques for dealing with them may not have occurred to many other participants, such as elderly nursing home patients. The interviewer must pay attention to language, meaning, and participants' lives.

Like other skilled interviewers, grounded theory interviewers must remain active in the interview and alert for interesting leads (for suggestions, see Gorden 1987; Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Seidman 1998). Sound interviewing strategies help the interviewer to go beyond commonsense tales and subsequent obvious, low-level categories that add nothing new. Any competent interviewer shapes questions to obtain rich material and simultaneously avoids imposing preconceived concepts on it. Keeping the questions open-ended helps enormously. When participants use expressions from the lexicon of their experience, such as "good days" and "bad days," the interviewer can ask for more detail. Consider the difference between these interview questions:

- Tell me what a "good" day is like for you.
- Do you feel better about yourself on a "good" day?

The first leaves the response open to the experiences and categories of the participant, inviting the participant to frame and explore his or her own views of a good day. The second closes down the discussion and relegates the answer to a yes or no. This question also assumes both the definitional frame and that participant and interviewer share it.

A basic rule for grounded theorists is, *Study your data.* Nonetheless, grounded theory interviewers must invoke another rule first: *Study your interview questions!* Being reflexive about how they elicit data, as well as what kinds of data they obtain, can help grounded theory interviewers to amass a rich array of materials.

◆ *Multiple Sequential Interviews*

Unfortunately, grounded theory studies have come to be identified with a "one-shot" interviewing approach (Creswell 1997). However, multiple sequential interviews form a stronger basis for creating a nuanced understanding of social process. Ethnography, case studies, historical research, and content analysis are also suitable methods for grounded theory analysis (see Charmaz and Mitchell 2001; see also Atkinson and Coffey, Chapter 20, this volume).

One-shot interviewing undermines grounded theory research in several ways. The logic of the grounded theory method calls for the emerging analysis to direct data gathering, in a self-correcting, analytic, expanding process. Early leads shape later data collection. Again, paying attention to language helps to advance a constructivist approach. Rather than glossing over a participant's meaning, a constructivist asks for definitions of it. For example, the interviewer's request above, "Tell me what a 'good' day is like for you," elicits the properties of a "good" day and how the participant constructs his or her definition. New questions arise as the researcher talks to more people and gains greater understanding of their situations. One useful way for the researcher to check leads and to refine an analysis is to go back and ask earlier participants about new areas as these are uncovered. When interviewers rely on one-shot interviewing, they miss opportunities to correct earlier errors and omissions and to construct a denser, more complex analysis. Consequently, the contribution of the research to a theoretical rendering of the empirical phenomenon also has less power.

Interviewers who must use single interviews can attempt to mitigate these problems by ensuring that later interviews cover probing questions that address theoretical issues explicitly. An interview may capture a participant's views and preferred self-presentation at one point in time. Both can change. The present frames any view of the past (Mead 1932). As the present changes, so also may the participant's view of past events and of self. For example, one participant told me she had glossed over earlier events in a preceding interview because she could not face what they implied about her marriage. She had not acknowledged what an earlier set of medical tests indicated. At the time, her husband refused to drive her to the hospital for the tests and took little interest in their outcome. By downplaying the seriousness of the tests, she also diminished the significance of his actions.[8] Multiple interviews chart a person's path through a process. Conducting multiple interviews also fosters trust between interviewer and interviewee, which allows the interviewer to get closer to the studied phenomenon.

Multiple sequential interviews also permit independent checks over time. Through multiple interviews, the participant's story gains depth, detail, and resonance. Yet the significance of conducting multiple interviews transcends the simple aim of prompting a fuller story. Multiple interviews allow the researcher to hear about events when participants are in the middle of them, not only long afterward. For example, in my own research I was able to listen to a young woman's accounts of shifts in her definitions of trusted relationships as her experience changed over the course of years.

The logic of grounded theory demands that the interviewer successively ask more questions about participants' experiences that probe for theoretical insights. Through the early data analysis, the researcher's questions aim to explore leads about the studied process much more than about individual proclivities. The grounded theory interview develops through a shaped, but not determined, process.

Interviewers then have the opportunity to follow up on earlier leads, to strengthen the emerging processual analysis, and to move closer to the process itself. One-shot interviews often leave the researcher outside of the phenomenon and contribute to the objectivist cast of many grounded theory works. The interviewer may visit the phenomenon and at least peek at it, if not engage it, but he or she does not enter it and live in it. The one-shot interviewer need not sustain his or her gaze or become immersed in either the participant's realities or the participant's feelings (although listening to tapes and reading transcripts over and over may seem like immersion in the field). Grounded theory researchers often lay out general parameters of a topic as external observers but remain apart from it (Charmaz and Mitchell 2001).[9] The externality and objectivism in much grounded theory data collection and analysis has granted grounded theory credibility at the cost of the full realization of its phenomenological potential.[10]

◆ *Grounded Theory Guidelines for Analyzing Data*

Grounded theory provides researchers with guidelines for analyzing data at several points in the research process, not simply at the "analysis" stage.

CODING DATA

Coding is the pivotal first analytic step that moves the researcher from description toward conceptualization of that description. Coding requires the researcher to attend closely to the data. Nonetheless, the codes reflect the researcher's interests and perspectives as well as the information in the data. Researchers who use grounded theory methods do so through the prism of their disciplinary assumptions and theoretical perspectives.[11] Thus they already possess a set of "sensitizing concepts" (Blumer 1969; van den Hoonaard 1997) that inform empirical inquiry and spark the development of more refined and precise concepts. Symbolic interactionism provides a rich array of sensitizing concepts, such as "identity," "self-concept," "negotiation," and "definition of the situation." The idea of identity has served as a sensitizing concept for me, alerting me to look for its implicit meanings in the lives of participants (Charmaz 1987). In my research on the lives of the chronically ill, I saw identity and threats of the loss of identity as connected with a variety of participants' actions and concerns, such as identity goals, that formed an identity hierarchy. Participants moved up and down this identity hierarchy as their physical conditions and social circumstances changed.

Grounded theorists draw upon sensitizing concepts to begin coding their data, although usually they do so implicitly. Constructivist grounded theory encourages researchers to be reflexive about the constructions—including preconceptions and assumptions—that inform their inquiry. Objectivist researchers minimize this reflexivity to the extent that they treat the researcher as a tabula rasa who conducts inquiry without prior views or values. If researchers make their sensitizing concepts more explicit, they can then examine whether and to what extent these concepts cloud or crystallize their interpretations of data. Researchers can use sensitizing concepts if they spark ideas for coding and take the nascent analysis further and drop them if they do not. Questions that researchers might ask about sensitizing concepts include the following: (a) What, if anything, does the concept illuminate about these data? (b) How, if at all, does the concept specifically apply here? (c) Where does the

concept take the analysis? As researchers answer such questions, they make decisions about the boundaries and usefulness of the sensitizing concept. Extant concepts are expected to earn their way into a grounded theory analysis (Glaser 1978).

From a grounded theory perspective, the first question to ask and to pursue is, "What is happening in the data?" (Glaser 1978). Constructivist grounded theorists acknowledge that they *define* what is happening in the data. Objectivist grounded theorists assume they *discover* what is happening in the data.

Grounded theory coding is at least a two-step process: (a) Initial or open coding forces the researcher to begin making analytic decisions about the data, and (b) selective or focused coding follows, in which the researcher uses the most frequently appearing initial codes to sort, synthesize, and conceptualize large amounts of data.[12] Thus coding entails the researcher's capturing what he or she sees in the data in categories that simultaneously describe and dissect the data. In essence, coding is a form of shorthand that distills events and meanings without losing their essential properties. During the coding process, the researcher (a) studies the data before consulting the scholarly literature, (b) engages in line-by-line coding, (c) uses active terms to define what is happening in the data, and (d) follows leads in the initial coding through further data gathering. Studying successive interviews helps the researcher to stay close to the studied empirical world and thus lessens the probability that he or she will force borrowed concepts on it (Glaser 1978, 1992; Melia 1996). Similarly, coding each line with active terms prompts the researcher to link specific interview statements to key processes that affect individuals or specific groups. After the grounded theorist defines these processes, he or she gathers more data about them. Grounded theory coding can lead the researcher in unanticipated directions; for example, the researcher may find that he or she needs to obtain new kinds of data from the participants or to increase the interview sample to include another type of participant.

Initial coding helps the grounded theory researcher to discover participants' views rather than assume that researcher and participants share views and worlds. Should ambiguities arise, the grounded theorist returns for another interview. Through additional interviews, the researcher can check whether and how his or her interpretations of "what is happening" fit with participants' views. In the sample of initial coding displayed in Table 15.1, the excerpt is from an interview with a woman I had interviewed over a seven-year period. She had become increasingly disabled during that time from the effects of lupus erythematosus and Sjögren's syndrome, combined with back injuries. I tried to understand how this woman's statements about her physical suffering affected her situation at work. Although I had conducted previous interviews with her, this one focused on her experiencing bodily limitations. Hence the interview questions frame the content, which, in turn, shapes the codes constructed in analysis of the data. Certainly my theoretical interests in the social psychology of time and of the self informed my coding of her experience. Note the specificity of the codes in relation to the interview statements.

The line-by-line coding in Table 15.1 generated several categories: "suffering as a moral status," "making a moral claim," and "having a devalued moral status because of physical suffering" (Charmaz 1999). Line-by-line coding prompts the grounded theorist not only to study the interviews, but to examine how well the codes capture participants' implied and explicit meanings. By keeping these codes active, I preserve process and can later discern sequences after examining multiple interviews. By defining processes early in the research, the grounded theorist avoids limiting the analyses of interviews to typing people into simplistic categories. By conducting multiple sequential interviews, the researcher

Table 15.1 INITIAL CODING

Christine Danforth, a 43-year-old receptionist, had returned to work after eight recent hospitalizations and a lengthy convalescence from a flare-up of lupus erythematosus and Sjögren's syndrome (see Charmaz 1999). A statement from her interview and the initial coding of the statement appear below.

Initial Coding	*Interview Statement*
Recounting the events Going against medical advice Being informed of changed rules Suffering as a moral status Accounting for legitimate rest time Distinguishing between "free" and work time Receiving an arbitrary order Making a moral claim Finding resistance; tacit view of worth Having a devalued moral status because of physical suffering Taking action Learning the facts Making a case for legitimate rights Trying to establish entitlement Meeting resistance Comparing prerogatives of self and other Seeing injustice Making claims for moral rights of personhood	And so I went back to work on March 1st, even though I wasn't supposed to. And then when I got there, they had a long meeting and they said I could no longer rest during the day. The only time I rested was at lunchtime, which was my time, we were closed. And she said, my supervisor, said I couldn't do that anymore, and I said, "It's my time, you can't tell me I can't lay down." And they said, "Well you're not laying down on the couch that's in there, it bothers the rest of the staff." So I went around and I talked to the rest of the staff, and they all said, "No, we didn't say that, it was never even brought up." So I went back and I said, "You know, I just was talking to the rest of the staff, and it seems that nobody has a problem with it but you," and I said, "You aren't even here at lunchtime." And they still put it down that I couldn't do that any longer. And then a couple of months later one of the other staff started laying down at lunchtime, and I said, you know, "This isn't fair. She doesn't even have a disability and she's laying down," so I just started doing it.

can establish the conditions under which individuals move between categories.

Grounded theory requires the researcher to make comparisons at each level of analysis. Action codes show what is happening, what people are doing. These codes move the researcher away from topics, and if they address structure, they reveal how it is constructed through action. I try to make action in the data visible by looking at the data as action. Hence I use terms such as *going, making, having,* and *seeing*. Using action codes helps the researcher to remain specific and not take leaps of fancy. In addition, action codes help the grounded theorist to compare data from different people about similar processes, data from the same individuals at different times during the course or trajectory of the studied experience, new data with a provisional category, and a category with other categories (Charmaz 1983, 1995b; Glaser 1978, 1992; Strauss 1987).

In selective or focused coding, the researcher adopts frequently reappearing initial codes to use in sorting and synthesizing large amounts of data. Focused codes are more abstract, general, and, simultane-

Table 15.2 SELECTIVE OR FOCUSED CODING

Selective Coding	*Interview Statement*
Going against medical advice	And so I went back to work on March 1st, even though I wasn't supposed to. And then when I got there, they had a long meeting and they said I could no longer rest during the day. The only time I rested was at lunchtime, which was my time, we were closed. And she said, my supervisor, said I couldn't do that anymore, and I said, "It's my time, you can't tell me I can't lay down." And they said, "Well you're not laying down on the couch that's in there, it bothers the rest of the staff." So I went around and I talked to the rest of the staff, and they all said, "No, we didn't say that, it was never even brought up." So I went back and I said, "You know, I just was talking to the rest of the staff, and it seems that nobody has a problem with it but you," and I said, "You aren't even here at lunchtime." And they still put it down that I couldn't do that any longer. And then a couple of months later one of the other staff started laying down at lunchtime, and I said, you know, "This isn't fair. She doesn't even have a disability and she's laying down," so I just started doing it.
Suffering as a moral status	
Making a moral claim	
Having a devalued moral status because of physical suffering	
Making a case for legitimate rights	
Seeing injustice	
Making claims for moral rights of personhood	

ously, analytically incisive than many of the initial codes that they subsume (Charmaz 1983, 1995b; Glaser 1978). They also cover the most data, categorize those data most precisely, and thus outline the next phase of analytic work, as indicated in Table 15.2. Selective coding must take into account a careful study of the initial codes. Note that I include the same data as displayed in Table 15.1 to show which codes I chose to treat in greater analytic detail.

These codes cut across multiple interviews and thus represent recurrent themes. In making explicit decisions about which focused codes to adopt, the researcher checks the fit between emerging theoretical frameworks and their respective empirical realities. Of the initial codes listed in Table 15.1, "suffering as a moral status" received analytic treatment. Within the same study, comparisons of different interviews netted similar statements about learning about having an impaired and unpredictable body and how to monitor it.

The reciprocal relation between the coding of data and the creation of analytic categories now becomes apparent: Grounded theorists develop categories from their focused codes. Subsequently, they construct entire analytic frameworks by developing and integrating the categories.

MEMO WRITING

Memo writing links coding to the writing of the first draft of the analysis; it is the crucial intermediate step that moves the analysis forward. Grounded theorists use memos to elaborate processes defined in their focused codes. Hence memo writing prompts them to raise their codes to conceptual categories. Through memo writing, researchers take these codes apart analytically and, by doing so, "fracture" the data.

That is, they define the properties of each category; specify conditions under which each category develops, is maintained, and changes; and note the consequences of each category and its relationships with other categories. As researchers analyze categories, they ground them in illustrative interview excerpts included in their memos. Thus memos join data with researchers' original interpretations of those data and help researchers to avoid forcing data into extant theories. Memos can range from loosely constructed "freewrites" about the codes to tightly reasoned analytic statements.

Memo writing helps grounded theorists to do the following:[13]

- Stop and think about the data
- Spark ideas to check out in further interviews
- Discover gaps in earlier interviews
- Treat qualitative codes as categories to analyze
- Clarify categories—define them, state their properties, delineate their conditions, consequences, and connections with other categories
- Make explicit comparisons—data with data, category with category, concept with concept

The researcher's gains from memo writing go beyond the specific analytic procedures. Memo writing helps the researcher to spark fresh ideas, create concepts, and find novel relationships. This step spurs the development of a writer's voice and a writing rhythm. Memo writing is much like focused freewriting for personal use (see Elbow 1981). Memos should be written quickly—as fully as possible, but not perfectly. Aiming for perfection is a worthy goal for revising drafts. At the memo-writing stage, however, researchers need to explore their ideas and aim for spontaneity, writing down questions and musi later checking. Memos may read like to a close friend rather than like stodgy scientific reports. Through memo writing, the researcher begins analyzing and writing early in the research process and thus avoids becoming overwhelmed by stacks of undigested data. This step keeps the researcher involved in research and writing. Furthermore, memos explicitly link data gathering, data analysis, and report writing. They provide the foundation upon which whole sections of papers and chapters can later be built. One latent benefit of memo writing is the increased sense of confidence and competence it can instill in the researcher (Charmaz 1999).

The excerpt below is the first section of an early memo from one of my studies; it is followed by a brief discussion of the published work that covers the same material (Charmaz 1991a). I wrote this memo quickly after comparing data from a series of recent interviews.

Example of a Grounded Theory Memo: "Suffering as a Moral Status"

> Suffering is a profoundly moral status as well as a physical experience. Stories of suffering reflect and redefine that moral status. With suffering comes moral rights and entitlements as well as moral definitions—when suffering is deemed legitimate. Thus the person can make certain moral claims and have certain moral judgments conferred upon him or her.
>
> Deserving
> Dependent
> In need
>
> Suffering can bring a person an elevated moral status. Here, suffering takes on a sacred status. This is a person who has been in sacred places, who has seen known what ordinary people have

not. Their stories are greeted with awe and wonder. The self also has elevated status. . . .

Although suffering may first confer an elevated moral status, views change. The moral claims from suffering typically narrow in scope and in power. The circles of significance shrink. Stories of self within these moral claims may entrance and entertain for a while, but grow thin over time—unless someone has considerable influence or power. The circles narrow to most significant others.

The moral claims of suffering may only supersede those of the healthy and whole in crisis and its immediate aftermath. Otherwise, the person is less. WORTH LESS. Two words—now separate may change as illness and aging take their toll. They may end up as "worthless." Christine's statement reflects her struggles at work to maintain her value and voice.

And so I went back to work on March 1st, even though I wasn't supposed to. And then when I got there, they had a long meeting and they said I could no longer rest during the day. The only time I rested was at lunchtime, which was my time, we were closed. And she said, my supervisor, said I couldn't do that anymore, and I said, "It's my time, you can't tell me I can't lay down." And they said, "Well you're not laying down on the couch that's in there, it bothers the rest of the staff." So I went around and I talked to the rest of the staff, and they all said, "No, we didn't say that, it was never even brought up." So I went back and I said, "You know, I just was talking to the rest of the staff, and it seems that nobody has a problem with it but you," and I said, "You aren't even here at lunchtime." And they still put it down that I couldn't do that any longer. And then a couple of months later one of the other staff started laying down at lunchtime, and I said, you know, "This isn't fair. She doesn't even have a disability and she's laying down," so I just started doing it.

Christine makes moral claims, not only befitting those of suffering, but of PERSONHOOD. She is a person who has a right to be heard, a right to just and fair treatment in both the medical arena and the workplace.

In the sections of the memo excerpted above, I addressed the following concerns: (a) establishing suffering as moral status, (b) explicating the tacit moral discourse that occurs in suffering, and (c) sketching a moral hierarchy. I realized that the term *stigma* did not capture all that I saw in key interviews. Subsequently, I recoded earlier interviews and talked further with select participants about these areas, then formed questions to ask other participants. In this way, I thought I might tap participants' unstated assumptions that would shape my developing categories. Objectivist grounded theory guidelines suggest that the direct relationship between data and categories generates definitive and obvious categories (Charmaz 1983; Glaser 1978, 1992; Glaser and Strauss 1967). That may not be true. If researchers bring similar perspectives to the same data, they may define similar categories; otherwise, they may not. Categories denote researchers' ways of asking and seeing as well as participants' ways of experiencing and telling.

Slight differences from the memo above are evident in the more developed published version (Charmaz 1999). In the published work, I discuss a range of social conditions that affect the hierarchy of moral status in suffering and describe more empirical examples. In conducting my research, I find it helpful to include the exact wording of interview excerpts in my memos from the start. After exhausting the analytic potential of categories in a memo, I can take the memo further by relating it to relevant literatures.

THEORETICAL SAMPLING

Theoretical sampling—that is, sampling to develop the researcher's theory, not to represent a population—endows grounded theory studies with analytic power. Grounded theorists return to the field or seek new cases to develop their theoretical categories. Thus theoretical sampling builds a pivotal self-correcting step into the analytic process. Predictable gaps become apparent when researchers raise their codes to analytic categories and find that some categories are incomplete or lack sufficient evidence. Obtaining further data to fill these gaps makes the categories more precise, explanatory, and predictive. For example, I sought further data on the elevated moral status of suffering to flesh out that category. When categories are incomplete, grounded theorists interview select participants about specific key ideas to extend, refine, and check those categories. Thus I returned to earlier participants to learn more about bodily suffering and, later, sought new interviewees and read personal accounts to illuminate the categories.

Theoretical sampling helps grounded theorists to do the following:

- Gain rich data
- Fill out theoretical categories
- Discover variation within theoretical categories
- Define gaps within and between categories

Through theoretical sampling, a researcher can define the properties of a category, the conditions under which it is operative, and how and when it is connected with other categories. For example, I needed to explore "making moral claims" with a number of participants to discern to what extent the category was evident and when and how it fit into my emerging analytic framework and the participants' experience. That meant comparing interview excerpts from the same person to discover when he or she did or did not make moral claims, how this person may have learned to make such claims, what the properties of this experience were, and when, if at all, making moral claims reflected definitions of self. Then I compared different participants' interview excerpts. For example, when Christine says, "and I said, you know, 'This isn't fair. She doesn't even have a disability and she's laying down,' so I just started doing it," she is doing more than just recounting a past event; she is making moral claims.

Theoretical sampling relies on comparative methods. Through comparative methods, grounded theorists define the properties of categories and specify the conditions under which categories are linked to other categories. In this way, categories are raised to concepts in the emerging theory. By the time a researcher conducts theoretical sampling, he or she will have developed a set of relevant categories for explaining the data. Presumably, a grounded theorist will keep seeking data to check a category until it is "saturated" (i.e., no new information is found). In practice, saturation tends to be an elastic category that contracts and expands to suit the researcher's definitions rather than any consensual standard (see also Morse 1995).

After deciding which categories best explain what is happening in the study, the grounded theorist treats these categories as concepts. In this sense, these concepts are useful for understanding many incidents or issues in the data (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Strauss (1987) suggests that researchers conduct theoretical sampling early in the research, but I recommend con-

ducting it later in order to allow relevant data and analytic directions to emerge without being forced. Theoretical sampling undertaken too early may bring premature closure to the analysis.

INTEGRATING THE ANALYSIS

Memo writing provides researchers with the material from which they can draft papers or chapters. Grounded theorists decide which memos to use on the basis of their analytic power for understanding the studied phenomenon; they may set aside other memos for later projects (Charmaz 1990). Theoretical sampling sharpens concepts and deepens the analysis. Then the work may gain clarity and generality that transcends the immediate topic. But how do the memos fit together?

Writing memos during each phase of the analysis prompts the researcher to make the analysis progressively stronger, clearer, and more theoretical. Each memo might be used as a section or subsection of a draft of a research paper. Some sets of memos fit together so well that ordering them seems obvious. The researcher's integration of the memos may simply reflect the theoretical direction of the analysis or stages of a process. But for many topics, researchers must create the order and make connections for their readers. How do the ideas fit together? What order makes most sense? The first draft of a paper may represent a researcher's first attempt to integrate a set of memos into some kind of coherent order.

Researchers go about integrating their memos in many ways, but the steps generally include sorting the memos by the titles of categories, mapping several ways to order the memos, choosing an order that works for the analysis and the prospective audience, and creating clear links between categories. When ordering memos, a grounded theorist may think about how a particular order reflects the logic of participants' experience and whether it will fit readers' experience. The grounded theorist will attempt to create a balance between these goals, which may mean collapsing categories for clarity and readability.

Grounded theory methods provide the researcher with powerful tools for honing an analysis. One inherent danger in using these tools is that the researcher may create a scientistic report overloaded with jargon. Like other social scientists, grounded theorists may become enamored of their concepts, especially because they provide a fresh handle on the data.

◆ *Conclusion*

A grounded theory interview can be viewed as an unfolding story. It is emergent although studied and shaped. It is open-ended but framed and focused. It is intense in content yet informal in execution—conversational in style but not casual in meaning. The relationship of the research participant to the studied phenomenon as well to the interviewer and the interview process also shapes the type, extent, and relative depth of the subsequent story. This unfolding story arises as interviewer and participant together explore the topic and imprint a human face upon it. The story may develop in bits and pieces from liminal, inchoate experience. It may tumble out when participants hold views on their experience but are not granted voices to express those views or audiences to hear them.

Interviews may yield more than data for a study. Research participants may find the experience of being interviewed to be cathartic, and thus the interviews may become significant events for them. Furthermore, participants may gain new views of themselves or their situations. Many participants gain insights into their actions, their situations, and the events that shape them.

Simply telling their stories can change the perspectives participants take on the events that constitute those stories and, perhaps, the frames of the stories themselves. These shifts in perspective may range from epiphanies to growing realizations.

The kinds of research stories told are likely to differ between constructivist and objectivist renderings of data. The constructivist approach leans toward a story because it rests on an interpretive frame. Like a story, a constructivist grounded theory may contain characters and plots, although they reflect reality rather than dramatize it. Unlike a story such as an ethnographic tale, with rich description of people and events, a constructivist grounded theory stresses the analytic and theoretical features of the study processes. An objectivist grounded theory study takes the form of a research report prepared by an unbiased observer. Thus it looks more like a traditional quantitative study than a story, emphasizing parsimony, clarity, comprehensiveness, and analytic power. Objectivist grounded theorists attempt to specify the applicability and limits of their analyses through explicit conditional statements and propositions, whereas constructivists weave these into the narrative.

Grounded theory interviews are used to tell a collective story, not an individual tale told in a single interview. The power of grounded theory methods lies in the researcher's piecing together a theoretical narrative that has explanatory and predictive power. Thus inherent tensions are apparent between the emphasis on the subjective story in the interview and the collective analytic story in grounded theory studies. Grounded theorists place a greater priority on developing a conceptual analysis of the material than on presenting participants' stories in their entirety.

Are these inherent tensions irresolvable? No, not if the researcher intends to follow grounded theory strategies and stays on the analytic path. Not if the researcher outlines the place of interview stories in the final report and the research participant agrees. Not if the researcher believes that reciprocities are possible between interviewer and participant during the interview process itself. Priorities may legitimately differ during data collection and analysis. So, too, may the roles of researcher and participant. Although roles are always emergent and may take novel turns, clarity about reciprocities and ethics can mitigate later dilemmas. The interviewer can minimize the hierarchical nature of the relationship between interviewer and participant through active involvement in that relationship (see also Fontana and Frey 1994). The interviewer can give full attention to what the participant wants to tell—even when it seems extraneous or requires additional visits. And the interviewer can pace the interview to fit the participant's needs first. During data collection, then, participants take precedence. During analysis and presentation of the data, the emerging grounded theory takes precedence.

Tensions between participants' stories and grounded theory analyses may be more academic than actual. Postmodernists who take a literary turn may argue for telling research participants' whole stories, yet participants may not. Whether participants wish to have themselves and their stories captured in prose and revealed in public remains an empirical question as much as an ethical issue. Not every participant finds the prospect appealing—especially if the story reveals private, unmanageable, or discreditable concerns.

Taking a different stance, there is no inherent reason grounded theorists cannot include fuller stories or, for that matter, move closer to a narrative style. Grounded theorists are not prevented from exploring and adopting other genres to some extent simply because earlier grounded theorists adopted the style of scientific reportage. The potential exists for discovery and innovation. In the meantime, grounded theo-

rists need to remain reflexive during all phases of their research and writing. In this way, they may learn how their grounded theory discoveries are constructed.

■ *Notes*

1. For a more complete statement of contrasts distinguishing constructivist and objectivist grounded theory, see Charmaz (2000).

2. Robert Prus (1987, 1996) discusses a complementary approach for using symbolic interactionism as a guiding perspective for the development of conceptual analyses of data.

3. Since the foundational statements of grounded theory were made, Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1990, 1998) have added dimensionalizing, verification, axial coding, and the conditional matrix to the grounded theory lexicon. Glaser (1992) contends that these procedures subvert grounded theory analyses. Phyllis Noerager Stern (1994a) asserts that they erode grounded theory, and Linda Robrecht (1995) states that axial coding adds undue complexity. Ian Dey (1999) has examined the logic of grounded theory, and he notes that Glaser and Strauss use the term *categories* inconsistently in their works.

4. I use the term *participants* to indicate their contribution to the research.

5. Earlier major grounded theory statements took a more objectivist position (see Charmaz 1983; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978; Strauss and Corbin 1990, 1998).

6. If these individuals were to become involved with informal support groups or formal organizations that focus on their problem, then a combination of interviews and ethnographic research would be the best choice (see Gubrium and Holstein 1997).

7. Gale Miller (1997) provides a nice statement addressing the need for placing texts into contexts.

8. This example comes from data collected for the study reported in my book *Good Days, Bad Days* (Charmaz 1991a).

9. This difference suggests Henri Bergson's ([1903] 1961) distinction between two ways of studying phenomena: going around them as contrasted with entering them.

10. Holly Skodol Wilson and Sally Hutchinson (1991) provide a statement about the use of grounded theory and hermeneutic approaches. I argue for less fidelity to method and more fidelity to the studied phenomenon.

11. For other statements of the steps of the method in addition to those already cited, see the work of W. Carole Chenitz and Janice Swanson (1986), Stern (1994b), and Strauss and Corbin (1994).

12. Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) introduce a third step in coding, axial coding, which aims to code the dimensions of a property. For example, expanded time and spatial horizons are properties of a good day. Using axial coding would lead me to analyze further what expanded time and space include. Glaser (1992) views axial coding as unnecessary; I find that it adds complexity to the method but may not improve the analysis.

13. This list is adopted in part from Charmaz (1999:376-77).

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16

ANALYSIS OF PERSONAL NARRATIVES

◆ Catherine Kohler Riessman

It is a common experience for investigators to craft interview questions carefully only to have participants respond with lengthy accounts, long stories that appear on the surface to have little to do with the questions. I became aware of this in the early 1980s while researching the topic of divorce. After completing a household interview with a divorcing spouse, I would note upon listening to the tape that a respondent had gone "on and on." Asking a seemingly straightforward question (e.g., "What were the main causes of your separation?"), I expected a list in response but instead got a "long story." Those of us on the research team interpreted these stories as digressions.

Subsequently, I realized that participants were resisting our efforts to fragment their experiences into thematic (codable) categories—our attempts, in effect, to control meaning. There was a typical sequence to the moments of resistance: The long story began with the decision to marry, moved through the years of the marriage, paused to reenact especially troubling incidents, and ended often with the moment of separation (Riessman 1990a). If participants resisted our efforts to contain their lengthy narratives, they were nonetheless quite aware of the rules of conversational storytelling. After coming to the end of the long and complex story of a marriage, a participant would sometimes say, "Uh, I'm afraid I got a little lost. What was the question you asked?" With such "exit talk," the interviewer could move on to the next question.

Looking back, I am both embarrassed and instructed. These incidents underscore the gap between the standard practice of research interviewing on the one side and the life world of naturally occurring conversa-

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