3RD EDITION

QUALITATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO RESEARCH METHODS

EDITED BY

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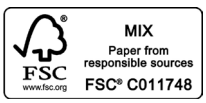

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Contents

4 Grounded Theory

Kathy Charmaz

Consider the following statement from a lengthy interview about experiencing chronic illness.[1] Susan Nelson, a 47-year-old woman, has multiple chronic medical problems, including diabetes, depression, vision loss, and congenital myopathy (a disease affecting her muscles). Her declining health affects her everyday life and how she views herself. When responding to the interviewer's first question about her health, Susan explained what congenital myopathy meant:

> Mine was adult onset, so it's milder – it's most common in children. But they don't live to adulthood because it eventually affects the muscles of the respiratory system and – and so then they die because they can't keep breathing. Mine just affects basically my extremities. Extreme muscle pain, extreme fatigue. Any repetitive use of any set of muscles just causes almost instant pain and fatiguing. Now I have managed to work around it – working and resting and working and resting and working and resting – um, but I couldn't get on an exercise bike and pedal it for 30 seconds. Just, it's – I never understood why when I would go on walks with my friends, you know, you're supposed to increase your endurance, you know, and I never got to feeling better. I always hurt so hard after I got home, I'd have to lie down and the next day I was, you know, just real, you know I wasn't able to do a whole lot of anything, and I thought this is really weird, you know. I don't understand this, and I complained about a lot of symptoms for a lot of years and it took me a long time for the doctors to take me seriously. Because I'm a Lab Tech, all my conditions, I've discovered on my own by running my own blood tests.

Susan's statement contains detailed medical information, but also reveals feelings, implies a perspective on self and situation, and offers insights about her illness history. Note her clarity when she first explains her health status and her bewilderment as she later describes experiencing symptoms. Susan's words foretell an interview filled with detailed information and intriguing views.

As a novice researcher, how can you analyse research participants' views and experiences such as Susan describes? How can you give all your data a fair reading? Which methodological guidelines can assist you throughout the research process?

This chapter answers these questions by showing you how to use the grounded theory method to collect and analyse qualitative data. Grounded theory is a comparative, iterative, and interactive method that provides a way to study empirical processes. It consists of flexible methodological strategies for building theories from inductive data. As a comparative method, grounded theory keeps you interacting with the data and your emerging ideas about them. You could compare Susan's statements about experiencing pain and fatigue with similar statements from other people who also had no medical validation, as well as with those who received a quick diagnosis. While you examine Susan's statements, you label them with codes, such as 'experiencing increasing pain', 'feeling mystified', 'working around it', and 'lacking validation'. Subsequently you can compare these codes with codes from other research participants' interviews. As the research proceeds, you can compare these data and codes with the tentative categories you develop from your codes.

Grounded theory demystifies the conduct of qualitative inquiry. Rather than applying a preconceived theoretical framework, your ideas about the data guide how you construct the theoretical analysis. The distinguishing characteristics of grounded theory (see Glaser, 1992; Glaser and Strauss, 1967) include:

- collecting and analysing data simultaneously
- developing analytic codes and categories from the data, not from preconceived hypotheses
- constructing middle-range theories to understand and explain behaviour and processes
- memo-writing – that is, analytic notes to explicate and fill out categories
- making comparisons between data and data, data and concept, and concept and concept
- theoretical sampling – that is, sampling for theory construction to check and refine conceptual categories, not for representativeness of a given population
- delaying the literature review until after forming the analysis.

The logic of grounded theory influences all phases of the research process although the method focuses on analysis, which I emphasize here. Before outlining the analytic strategies of grounded theory, I provide a brief history of the method and an introduction to the theoretical perspective with which grounded theory is most closely aligned. Qualitative methods foster making unanticipated discoveries that shift earlier research questions and designs, so I describe how grounded theorists form research questions and construct research designs. I next discuss how grounded theory shapes data collection in pivotal ways that advance theoretical analyses. Subsequently, I detail specific grounded theory strategies and show how they foster theory construction. A brief discussion of criteria for evaluating grounded theory studies ends the chapter along with several examples of how researchers have used the method.

HISTORY AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The emergence and development of grounded theory

Grounded theory methods emerged from the collaboration of sociologists Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (1965, 1967) during the 1960s and took form in their pioneering book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967). Sociology has had a long tradition of ethnographic fieldwork, interview, and case studies from its beginnings to the present (see, for example, Adler and Adler, 2011; Allahyari, 2000; Dunn, 2002, 2010; Fine, 2010; Glaser and Strauss, 1965; Goffman, 1959; Lois, 2010; Thomas and Znaniecki, 1918; Whyte, 1943/1955). However, this tradition had eroded by the 1960s, as sophisticated quantitative methods gained dominance.

Quantitative methods were rooted in positivism, or the assumption of a unitary scientific method of observation, experimentation, logic and evidence. Positivist methods assumed an unbiased and passive observer, the separation of fact from value, the existence of an external world separate from scientific observers and their methods, and the accumulation of knowledge about the studied topic. Hence, positivism led to a quest for valid instruments, replicable research designs, and reliable findings.

The division between constructing theory and conducting research grew in 1950s and 1960s sociology. At that time, theory informed quantitative research through the logico-deductive model of inquiry, which relied on deducing testable hypotheses from an existing theory. Yet this research seldom led to new theory construction.

Grounded theory holds a special place in the history of qualitative inquiry. In their cutting-edge book, Glaser and Strauss (1967) opposed conventional notions about research, methods, and theory and offered new justifications for qualitative inquiry. They challenged:

- the arbitrary division between theory and research
- prevailing views of qualitative research as a precursor to more 'rigorous' quantitative methods
- beliefs that qualitative methods were impressionistic and unsystematic
- the separation of data collection and analysis phases of research
- assumptions that qualitative research could not generate theory
- views that limited theorizing to an intellectual elite.

Glaser and Strauss built on their qualitative predecessors' implicit analytic strategies and made them explicit. As Paul Rock (1979) points out, early qualitative researchers had taught students through mentoring and immersion in field experience. Glaser and Strauss's written guidelines for conducting qualitative research changed that oral tradition. And, moreover, Glaser and Strauss justified and legitimized conducting qualitative research on its own canons instead of on the criteria for quantitative research.

Glaser's rigorous quantitative training at Columbia University imbued grounded theory with its original positivistic epistemological assumptions, logic and systematic approach. Strauss's training at the University of Chicago linked grounded theory with ethnographic research and symbolic interactionism, the sociological descendant of pragmatist philosophy. This perspective stresses human reflection, choice and action and is part of the interpretive tradition in sociology.

Grounded theory contains both positivistic and interpretive elements. Its emphasis on using systematic techniques to study an external world remains consistent with positivism. Its stress on how people construct actions, meanings and intentions is in keeping with interpretative traditions. Increasingly, grounded theorists join me (see, for example, Bryant, 2003; Clarke, 1998, 2003, 2005; Keane, 2011, 2012; Thornberg, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2012; Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014) in assuming that a researcher's disciplinary and theoretical proclivities, relationships and interactions with respondents all shape the collection, content and analysis of data. Grounded theory can bridge traditional positivistic and interpretative methods in disciplines such as psychology that have embraced quantification. Grounded theory allows psychologists to study aspects of human experience that remain inaccessible with traditional verification methods. Because grounded theory facilitates studying processes, psychologists can use it to study how individual and interpersonal processes develop, are maintained, or change.

Despite its usefulness, grounded theory is a contested method. Glaser's self-published book, *Theoretical Sensitivity* (1978), contained the most definitive early statement of how to use the method and established it as a type of variable analysis. His book, however, lacked the enormous appeal of Strauss's co-authored books with Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research* (1990, 1998). Strauss and Corbin's books significantly revised grounded theory. Ironically, few readers discerned the disjuncture between their books and the original statements of the method (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). Unlike Glaser, who emphasized emergent concepts and theory construction, Strauss and Corbin moved grounded theory towards verification and added preconceived technical procedures to be applied *to* the data rather than emerging *from* analysing them. In his scathing response, Glaser (1992) argues that Strauss and Corbin's procedures force data and analysis into preconceived categories, ignore comparative analysis, usurp the method, and impose unnecessary complexity on the analytic process.

Perhaps the major challenge to the early grounded theory works is the constructivist revision (Bryant, 2002, 2003; Charmaz, 2000, 2006, 2014; Clarke, 2005; Mills, Bonner and Francis, 2006) that I first explicitly articulated in 2000 (Charmaz, 2000). Constructivist grounded theory continues the iterative, comparative, emergent and open-ended approach of Glaser and Strauss's (1967) original statement; adopts the pragmatist emphasis on language, meaning and action; counters mechanical applications of the method; and answers criticisms about positivistic leanings in earlier versions of grounded theory.

Constructivist grounded theory preserves the useful methodological strategies of grounded theory but places them on a relativist epistemological foundation (see Charmaz, 2000, 2009, 2014). It also takes into account methodological developments of the past five decades that focus on:

- attending to data collection
- examining researchers' representation of research participants
- acknowledging our co-construction of data with participants
- recognizing the researcher's subjectivity, preconceptions and social locations
- scrutinizing the research situation and process
- engaging in reflexivity.

The constructivist approach illuminates what researchers bring to their studies and do while engaged in them. Constructivists scrutinize the researcher's actions, examine the research situation, and locate the research process in the social, historical and situational conditions of its production.

Several major grounded theorists have aimed to use the method to study processes at the organizational and societal levels. Strauss (1987, 1993) initiated this direction, independently as well as with co-author Juliet Corbin (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998). Adele Clarke (2003, 2005, 2007) has extended their efforts in her 2005 book *Situational Analysis*, which builds a new method from earlier grounded theory precepts.

Two current trends promise to influence future grounded theory studies: the growing interest in mixed methods and the turn towards social justice inquiry (Charmaz, 2005, 2011b, 2012). Grounded theory methods fit mixed methods research well (Johnson, McGowan and Turner, 2010). The flexibility of grounded theory makes it amenable to shaping quantitative instruments, to following up on quantitative findings, and to offering an in-depth view of the studied experience. The turn towards social justice has spawned diverse grounded theory studies that either begin from a value stance or arise through involvement in the research process (see, for example, Furlong and McGilloway, 2012; Karabanow, 2008; Keane, 2011; Mcintyre, 2002; Mitchell and McCusker, 2008; Thornberg, 2007; Thornberg and Jungert, 2014; Veale and Stavrou, 2007; Wasserman and Clair, 2010).

Symbolic interactionism as a guiding theoretical perspective

Researchers with varied theoretical perspectives adopt the grounded theory method. Thus grounded theorists have built on such diverse foundations as critical realism, feminist theory, hermeneutics, and transpersonal psychology – however, the method is most closely intertwined with symbolic interactionism.

As a theoretical perspective, symbolic interactionism rests on several major assumptions and offers general concepts to look at the empirical world rather than providing an explanatory theory. Symbolic interactionists subscribe to this fundamental assumption: people construct selves, social worlds and societies through interaction (Charmaz, 1980). Because the perspective emphasizes understanding why individuals think, feel and act as they do from *their* standpoints, symbolic interactionists focus on how people construct meanings and actions in everyday life.

Symbolic interactionism views shared symbols, cultural meanings and shared language as part of collective life. Our interactions depend on these shared meanings, and our identities

and selves arise from them but may change as experience changes. Symbolic interactionists share the following views:

- human life is fluid – in process – and consists of constant action
- meaning and action each influence the other
- meaning-construction, process and action constitute the foci of symbolic interactionist study, not social structure and stability
- individuals can choose their actions and exert some control over their lives
- human beings interpret what happens to and around them and thus can alter their actions
- social structures and constraints exist but people construct and reproduce these structures and constraints through their routine actions.

Symbolic interactionists hold a positive concept of human nature that views people as social, active, reflective and creative. In this view, we human beings are not mere reproductions of our cultures, affiliations and situations. Rather, our ability to reflect and interpret makes us creative and allows personal change. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, possibilities arise for creating novel interpretations and actions. Through articulating three basic premises of symbolic interactionism, Herbert Blumer (1969: 3) clarifies how individuals construct these novel interpretations and actions but do so within a social context.

1. Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them.
2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.
3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.

Blumer's first premise turns conventional understandings of meaning inside out. People *confer* meanings on things – whether these things are objects, events or people. Meanings do not inhere in things as individuals ordinarily assume. Nor are meanings singular and shared by all. Instead, meanings are multiple and situated in specific contexts. What you do with something arises from what it means to you – and these meanings have consequences. For example, as long as a young woman could define her fatigue and shortness of breath as a mild condition rather than chronic heart disease, she declined to take heart medications. The meaning she attributed to her symptoms shaped her action and inaction towards them.

The second premise reveals Blumer's view that meanings are social rather than individualistic. Yet this premise also suggests that action and meaning shape each other, and thus supports the pragmatist assumption that meanings arise from what people *do* with things – their actions. Blumer's third premise speaks directly to this point. We *interpret* what things mean when we are involved in dealing with them. This premise reflects Blumer's major interest in the interpretive process and its implications for human life. We are not social robots; we can think, feel and act. People have the ability to assess and reassess things they encounter through thinking about them.

Blumer's depiction of symbolic interactionism may give readers the impression that individuals are constantly indicating what things mean to themselves. Are they? No, much of life is routine and we act accordingly – until our ordinary meanings and actions are called into question or new situations or opportunities arise. In either case, our taken-for-granted meanings and actions no longer fit our current situation, and then we reinterpret what is happening. The logical conclusion of the symbolic interactionist perspective fits Blumer's claim that social interaction *forms* conduct rather than merely expresses it.

Symbolic interactionism has been most closely associated with social psychology although researchers have also used it to study social movements, organizational life and subcultures, such as gangs. But psychologists may resonate most with symbolic interactionist studies of the construction of self, identity, meaning, sexualities and emotions (see, for example, Charmaz, 2011a; Eastman, 2012; Garrett-Peters, 2009; Haworth-Hoeppner and Maines, 2005; Lois, 2010).

FORMULATING A RESEARCH QUESTION AND DESIGNING A STUDY

Grounded theory is an emergent method (Charmaz, 2008). An emergent method begins with the empirical world and builds an inductive understanding of it as events unfold and knowledge accrues. Beyond a few flexible guidelines, grounded theory is indeterminate and open-ended. You draw upon and develop specific methodological tools to answer emerging theoretical and empirical questions during the research process. Your research questions and study design evolve as you proceed, rather than emanating from deducing a hypothesis from an extant theory or following a tightly preconceived plan.

Grounded theorists must keep their research questions and research designs open-ended. We aim to study significant issues that we find in our field settings. Dissertation committees, institutional review boards and granting agencies, however, often require grounded theorists to produce research proposals using a conventional research question and design. Hence, grounded theorists must balance constructing general initial research questions that satisfy external audiences with building possibilities for refining their research design. In one study (Charmaz, 1991a), I started with general questions about how serious chronic illness affected people's lives and how they experienced time. I moved on to develop more refined ideas about self, identity, time and suffering. This approach led to using intensive interviews as the main method of collecting data.

What kinds of research questions can grounded theory methods address? Glaser and Strauss (1967) might answer, 'every kind'. They contend that researchers can adopt grounded theory to study diverse processes. Psychologists can use grounded theory methods to study individual processes, interpersonal relations and the reciprocal effects between individuals and larger social processes. For example, you can study typical psychological topics such as motivation, personal experience, emotions, identity, attraction, prejudice, and interpersonal cooperation and conflict.

With grounded theory, you begin by exploring general questions about a research topic of interest. You collect data about what relevant people for this topic say and do about

it. How might you devise your initial research questions? Grounded theorists' background assumptions and disciplinary interests alert them to certain issues and processes in their data from which they can develop research questions. Consistent with Herbert Blumer's (1969) depiction of 'sensitizing concepts', grounded theorists often begin their studies with general concepts that offer open-ended ideas to pursue and questions to ask about the topic. My guiding interests about living with chronic illness and experiencing time brought concepts such as self-concept, identity and duration into the study. I used those concepts as *points of departure* to form interview questions, to look at data, to listen to interviewees and to think analytically about the data. Guiding interests should provide ways of developing, rather than limiting, your ideas. Then you develop specific concepts through studying your data and emergent ideas during successive stages of analysis. Recently, I participated in a demonstration project in qualitative psychology in which five different researchers analysed the same data (Wertz et al., 2011). Our lead author, Fred Wertz, asked us to use the concept of resilience to guide our analyses. Although resilience is a useful concept, I saw it as too definitive – and therefore too restrictive – to begin a grounded theory analysis and could not adopt it.

Sensitizing concepts provide a place to start, not end. Disciplinary perspectives provide such concepts, but grounded theorists must use them with a critical eye. Professional researchers already hold epistemological assumptions about the world, disciplinary perspectives, and often an intimate familiarity with the research topic and the pertinent literature. Yet grounded theorists should remain as open as possible to new views during the research, and critically examine how their own views may enter the research. The open-ended approach of grounded theory gives you an opportunity to learn things you never expected and to gain in-depth understanding of the empirical world. Take this opportunity but scrutinize your views and actions each step along the way.

COLLECTING DATA

The logic of collecting data in grounded theory

Grounded theory methods rely on simultaneous data collection and analysis. Your early analytic work leads you to collect more data around emerging themes and questions. For example, we sense Susan Nelson's efforts to account for her pain and fatigue in the interview excerpt above. Her remarks alert the interviewer to ask about discovering her other conditions and to explore how other people responded to both her search and her conclusions. Following up on an interview participant's comments allows for building further questions into subsequent interviews with other participants.

Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis helps you manage your study without being overwhelmed by volumes of unfocused data that do not lead to anything new. If you have already collected a substantial amount of data, begin with it, but subsequently collect additional data about your emerging analytic interests and categories. That way, you can follow up on topics that are explicit in one interview or observation but remain implicit or absent in others. For example, a woman with multiple sclerosis mentioned having 'bad days'.

She said, 'I deal with time differently [during a bad day when she felt sick] and time has a different meaning to me' (Charmaz, 1991a: 52). When we discussed meanings of time, I saw how she connected experiencing time with images of self. On a bad day, her day shortened because all her daily routines – such as bathing, dressing, exercising and resting – lengthened substantially. As her daily routines stretched, her preferred self shrunk. After I saw how she defined herself in relation to mundane daily routines, I asked interview questions that addressed this relationship.

The core components of grounded theory studies are analytic categories the researcher develops while studying the data rather than preconceived concepts or hypotheses. These categories move the study towards abstract analyses yet simultaneously elucidate what happens in the empirical world.

From the beginning, researchers actively construct their data with study participants. The first question to ask is, 'What is happening here?' (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Then you have to think of ways to find out. Perhaps their enthusiasm for developing a method of theory construction led Glaser and Strauss (1967; Glaser, 1978) to imply that categories inhere in the data and may even leap out. I disagree. Rather, categories reflect interactions between the observer and the observed. Certainly, social researchers' world-views, disciplinary assumptions, theoretical proclivities and research interests influence their observations and emerging categories (see also Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Clarke, 2005; Dey, 1999; Thornberg, 2010; Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014).

Constructing interview guides with open-ended questions is particularly helpful for novices. A well-constructed guide fosters asking open-ended questions, provides a logical pacing of topics and questions, avoids loaded and leading questions, and gives you direction as well as your interview participants (see Charmaz, 2014; Josselson, 2013; Olson, 2011). Constructing interview questions also helps you to become aware of your preconceptions.

Grounded theorists follow leads that we define in the data but may not have foreseen. Thus, I also pursued other topics that my respondents defined as crucial. As I listened to their stories, I felt compelled to explore their concerns about disclosing illness, although I had not anticipated moving in this direction. I studied how, when and why ill people talk about their conditions. My interest in time, however, alerted me to see whether people's accounts of disclosing their conditions changed over time.

What kind of data should you gather for grounded theory studies? To the extent possible, I advocate going inside the studied phenomenon and gathering extensive, rich data about it, while simultaneously using grounded theory strategies to direct data collection. Rich data reveal participants' thoughts, feelings, intentions and actions as well as context and structure. My call for rich, detailed data means seeking full or 'thick' description (Geertz, 1973), such as writing extensive field notes of observations, collecting respondents' written personal accounts, and compiling detailed narratives of experience (such as transcribed tapes of interviews). Seidman (2006) advocates sequential intensive interviewing to build trust and to elicit detailed data. Transcribed tape recordings of interviews provide nuanced details. I find that studying the transcriptions gives me new insights and more codes with which to work. In contrast, Glaser (1998) argues that transcribing wastes time and fosters becoming lost in data.

Grounded theorists take different, sometimes contradictory approaches to data collection, although all assume that the strength of grounded theory lies in its empirical foundation. Glaser (1992, 1998, 2013) consistently stresses discovering what is happening in the setting without forcing the data into preconceived categories. For him, forcing data includes: applying extant theories to the data; assuming the significance of demographic variables (such as age, sex, race, marital status and occupation; also called face-sheet variables) *before* beginning the study; and imposing evidentiary rules (*a priori* prescriptions about what stands as sufficient evidence) on the data. He also advocates short-cuts, such as moving quickly from one empirical world to another to develop a category, and, until recently, urged accepting a group's overt statements about itself. The latter practice can obfuscate members' fundamental concerns or justify their desired public image. Such short-cuts can cause problems. Researchers may obtain only a surface view of a group when they move quickly from one research site to another, and institutional review procedures typically preclude doing so. In addition, people may only state a public relations viewpoint unless they trust the researcher. Furthermore, members may reveal their values and priorities through actions and assumptions, not careful statements. In effect, short-cuts may curtail discoveries, miss basic social processes, overlook subtle meanings and force data into categories prematurely.

Rich data afford views of human experience that etiquette, social conventions and inaccessibility hide or minimize in ordinary discourse. To obtain rich data:

- describe participants' views and actions in detail
- record observations that reveal participants' unstated intentions
- construct interview questions that allow participants to reflect anew on the research topic
- look for and explore taken-for-granted meanings and actions.

'Tell me about', 'how', 'what' and 'when' questions yield rich data, particularly when you buttress them with queries to elaborate on or specify, such as 'Could you describe … further?' (for a sample interview guide, see Charmaz, 2014). Look for the 'ums' and 'you knows'; explore what they indicate. How might they reflect a struggle to find words? When might a 'you know' signal taken-for-granted meanings? What do long pauses indicate? When might 'you know' seek the interviewer's concurrence or suggest that the respondent is struggling to articulate an experience? In my research, however, respondents' stories about illness often spilled out non-stop. For example, Christine Danforth, one of my research participants, stated:

> If you have lupus, I mean one day it's my liver; one day it's my joints; one day it's my head, and it's like people really think you're a hypochondriac if you keep complaining about different ailments. … It's like you don't want to say anything because people are going to start thinking, you know, 'God, don't go near her, all she is – is complaining about this.' And I think that's why I never say anything because I feel like everything I have is related one way or another to the lupus but most of the people don't know I have lupus, and even those that do are not going to believe that ten different ailments

> are the same thing. And I don't want anybody saying, you know, they don't want to come around me because I complain. (Quoted in Charmaz, 1991a: 114–15)

Obtaining rich data gives researchers the material for developing a thorough knowledge of their studied empirical worlds or research problems. A thorough empirical grounding in data helps you discern your research participants' meanings of their experiences, and how to interpret these data starting from their situations. You may also see other things in the data, because you bring different perspectives and concerns to them than your participants. (Here I assume that to the best of their ability researchers should find out what is 'happening', and that we can find out because we share language and meanings with those we study, or we can learn them. Ultimately, however, our interpretations shape whatever we find and record and we must be cognizant of our interpretive processes as well as those of the people we study.)

Throughout a grounded theory research project, you increasingly focus your data collection because your analytic work guides which further data you need. *The grounded theorist's simultaneous involvement in data gathering and analysis is explicitly aimed towards developing theory*. Grounded theory ethnographers, for example, move from attempting to capture the whole round of life to focused areas to explore, observe and analyse. Grounded theory interviewers adapt their initial interview guides; they add areas to explore and delete extraneous questions.

Grounded theorists follow leads to develop their emerging theoretical categories (Glaser, 1978). Other qualitative researchers may produce thick description of concrete behaviour without filling out, extending or refining theoretical concepts or making theoretical connections. In contrast, grounded theorists use thick description to ask theoretical questions. For example, young adults agonized over telling room-mates, acquaintances and dates about their conditions. Their stories sparked my interest in dilemmas of disclosing illness. Rather than obtaining thick description only about their difficulties in disclosing, I began to ask analytic questions about disclosing as a process and then gathered data that illuminated that process. These analytic questions included:

- What are the properties of disclosing?
- Which social psychological conditions foster disclosing? Which inhibit it?
- How does disclosing compare with other forms of telling?
- How, if at all, does disclosing change after the person becomes accustomed to his or her diagnosis?
- What strategies, if any, do people use to disclose? When do they use them?

Researchers may adopt several grounded theory strategies to gather descriptive accounts without following the analytic steps that make their work theoretical. Listen closely to your respondents, attempt to learn unstated and assumed meanings of their statements, and shape your emerging research questions to obtain data that illuminate your theoretical categories. Then you will be doing grounded theory.

Data Collection and Studying Meanings and Processes

The grounded theory emphasis on studying processes moves research away from static analyses. We emphasize what people are doing, an emphasis which also leads to understanding multiple layers of meanings of their actions. These layers could include a person's (1) stated explanation of his or her action, (2) unstated assumptions about it, (3) intentions for engaging in it, (4) effects on others, and (5) consequences for further individual action and interpersonal relations. Throughout the research process, look at action in relation to meaning to help you obtain thick description and develop your categories.

How do you study meaning? Some grounded theorists believe they can readily discover what is significant in the research setting simply by looking or asking. However, the most important issues to study may be hidden, tacit or elusive. We probably struggle to grasp them. The data we 'find' and the meanings we attribute to them reflect this struggle. Neither data nor meaningful interpretations of them simply await the researcher. We are part of the meanings that we observe and define. In short, our understanding of respondents' meanings emerges from a particular viewpoint and the vocabulary that we invoke to make sense of them.

A researcher has topics to pursue; research participants have goals, thoughts, feelings and actions. Your research questions and mode of inquiry shape your subsequent data and analysis. Thus, you must become self-aware about why and how you gather data. You learn to sense when you are gathering rich, useful data that do not undermine or demean your respondent(s). Not surprisingly, then, I believe the grounded theory method works best when the grounded theorist engages in data collection as well as data analysis phases of research. This way, you can explore nuances of meaning and process that hired hands might easily miss.

Respondents' stories may tumble out or the major process in which people are engaged may jump out at you. Sometimes, however, respondents may not be so forthcoming and major processes may not be so obvious. Even if they are, it may take more work to discover the subtlety and complexity of respondents' intentions and actions. The researcher may have entered the implicit world of meaning, in which participants' spoken words can only allude to significance, but not articulate it.

Many of my participants spoke of incidents in which their sense of social and personal worth was undermined. They complained, recounted hurtful conversations, and expressed incredulity about how other people treated them. I began to see their accounts as stories of suffering (Charmaz, 1999). These stories reflected more than a stigmatized identity – but what? I pieced together meanings behind their stories in a hierarchy of moral status that catapults downwards as health fails, resources wane and difference increases. Sufferers talked about loss, not moral status. Yet everything they said assumed a diminishing moral status.

The further we go into implicit meanings, the more we may conceptualize them with abstract ideas that crystallize the experiences eliciting these meanings. For example, I defined implicit meanings of 'bad days' according to my participants' evaluations of

intensified intrusiveness of illness; reduced control over mind, body and actions; and curtailed choices and actions. I synthesized, condensed and conceptualized participants' statements to make their tacit understandings explicit.

At this point, we grounded theorists speak in our analytic categories rather than reproduce participants' words. Some meanings are so well understood that they remain assumed and unstated. Other meanings are felt, but participants have no words to voice them. For certain topics, close study and direct questioning may suffice. For other topics, you may need to redirect inquiry. Because our language contains few words with which to talk about time, many of my research participants' attitudes towards and actions concerning time remained unspoken and taken for granted. Yet their stories about illness often depended on conceptions of time and referred to implicit qualities of experienced time. Christine Danforth's statement above referred to the quality and unevenness of her days. If researchers plan to explore such areas, then they need to devise ways to make relevant observations or to construct questions that foster pertinent responses. To illustrate, I asked my research participants questions such as, 'As you look back on your illness, which events stand out in your mind?' and 'Could you tell me what a typical weekday is like for you?' At whatever level you attend to your participants' meanings, intentions and actions, you can create a coherent analysis by using grounded theory methods. Hence, the method is useful for fact-finding, descriptive studies as well as conceptually developed theoretical statements.

Perhaps the most important basic rule for a grounded theorist is: *Study your emerging data* (Glaser, 1978, 1992). Studying the data sparks your awareness of respondents' implicit meanings and taken-for-granted concerns. How do you study data? From the very start, transcribe your audiotapes yourself or write your own field notes rather than, say, dictating them to someone else. Studying your data prompts you to learn nuances of your research participants' language and meanings. Subsequently, you learn to define the directions where your data can take you. Through studying interview audiotapes, for example, you attend closely to your respondents' feelings and views. They will live in your mind as you listen carefully over and over to what they were saying. For example, one student in my class remarked:

> What an impact the words had on me when I sat home alone transcribing the tapes. I was more able to hear and feel what these women were saying to me. I realized how, at times, I was preoccupied with thoughts of what my next question was, how my eye contact was, or hoping we were speaking loud enough for the tape-recorder. (Charmaz, 1991b: 393)

If you attend to respondents' language, you can adapt your questions to fit their experiences. Then you can learn about their meanings rather than make assumptions about what they mean. For example, when my respondents with chronic illnesses often talked about having 'good days' and 'bad days', I probed further and asked more questions around my respondents' taken-for-granted meanings of good and bad days. I asked questions such as: 'What does a good day mean to you?', 'Could you describe what a bad day is?', 'What kinds of things do you do on a good day?', and 'How do these activities compare with those on a bad day?' By comparing interview accounts, I discovered that good days meant that participants' temporal

and spatial horizons expanded and that possibilities increased for realizing the selves they wished to be. But had I not followed up and asked respondents about the meanings of these terms, their specific properties would have remained implicit.

Certainly, it helps to have strong data-gathering skills. A skilled researcher knows when and how to ask more questions or to make more focused observations. Nevertheless, novices can make remarkable gains in skill during a brief time by attending closely to their methods and by studying their data. By gathering rich data and by making meanings explicit, you will have solid material with which to create your analysis.

ANALYSIS

The grounded theory method consists of several major strategies outlined below. Many grounded theorists now use computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to help them. Several of these programs have been designed for grounded theory projects. The software can help you organize materials for ready retrieval and synthesis but they cannot do the analysis for you.

Coding the data

Coding is the process of defining what the data are about. Unlike quantitative data, in which *preconceived* categories or codes are applied to the data, grounded theorists *create* their codes by defining what they see in the data. Codes emerge as you scrutinize your data and define meanings within them. This active coding forces you to interact with your data again and ask questions of them. (Thus, the interactive nature of grounded theory research is not limited to data collection, but also proceeds throughout the analytic work.) As a result, coding may take you into unforeseen areas and new research questions.

Coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data. It consists of at least two phases: an initial phase involving the naming of each line of data, followed by a focused, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize and organize large amounts of data.

While coding, you use 'constant comparative methods' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to establish analytic distinctions – and thus make comparisons at each level of analytic work. At first, you compare data with data to find similarities and differences. For example, compare interview statements within the same interview and with comments in different interviews. When conducting observations of an activity, compare what happens on one day with the same activity on subsequent days. Next, you can ask Glaser's two important analytic questions that separate grounded theory coding from other types of qualitative coding:

- What category or property of a category does this incident indicate? (Glaser, 1992: 39)
- What is this data a study of? (Glaser, 1978: 57; Glaser and Strauss, 1967)

These questions prompt you to think analytically about the fragments of data or incidents that you are coding. You begin to link the concrete data to more abstract ideas and general

processes from the beginning, rather than remaining at a topical or descriptive level. Even taking mundane statements apart and looking at their implicit meanings will deepen your understanding and raise the abstract level of your emerging analysis.

Initial coding entails examining each line of data and defining the actions or events that you see as occurring in it or as represented by it – line-by-line coding (see Box 4.1). Compare incident with incident; then, as your ideas take hold, compare incidents to your conceptualization of incidents coded earlier. The code gives you a tool with which to compare other pieces of data. That way you can identify properties of your emerging concept.

BOX 4.1 INITIAL CODING: LINE-BY-LINE CODING

	Excerpt 1, *Christine Danforth, age 37, lupus erythematosus, Sjögren's syndrome, back injuries*. Lupus erythematosus is a systemic, inflammatory auto-immune disease of the connective tissue that affects vital organs as ell as joints, muscles and nerves. Sjögren's syndrome is a related auto-immune inflammatory disease characterized by dry mucous membranes of the eyes and mouth.
Shifting symptoms, having inconsistent days Interpreting images of self given by others	If you have lupus, I mean one day it's my liver; one day it's my joints; one day it's my head, and it's like people really think you're a hypochondriac if you keep complaining about different ailments …
Avoiding disclosure Predicting rejection	It's like you don't want to say anything because people are going to start thinking, you know, 'God, don't go near her, all she is – is complaining about this.'
Keeping others unaware Seeing symptoms as connected Having others unaware Anticipating disbelief Controlling others' views Avoiding stigma Assessing potential losses and risks of disclosing	And I think that's why I never say anything because I feel like everything I have is related one way or another to the lupus but most of the people don't know I have lupus, and even those that do are not going to believe that ten different ailments are the same thing. And I don't want anybody saying, you know, [that] they don't want to come around me because I complain.

(Continued)

(Continued)

	Excerpt 2, *Joyce Marshall, age 60, minor heart condition, recent small cerebral vascular accident (CVA) (stroke).* In her case, the stroke left her with weakness, fatigue and slowed responses when tired.
Meaning of the CVA	I have to see it [her CVA] as a warning.
Feeling forced to live one day at a time Having a worried past Earlier losses Difficult living one day at a time; concentrate on today Giving up future orientation	I can't let myself get so anxious. I have to live one day at a time. I've been so worried about John [her husband, who had had life-threatening heart attacks and lost his job three years before retirement] and preparing to get a job [her first in 38 years] … It's just so hard with all this stress … to concentrate on what I can do today. I always used to look to the future.
Managing emotions through living one day at a time Reducing life-threatening risk	I can't now; it upsets me too much. I have to live one day at a time now or else there may not be any me.

Line-by-line coding means naming each line on each page of your written data (Glaser, 1978) – although this data may not always appear in complete sentences. Through line-by-line coding, you take an analytic stance towards your work and, simultaneously, keep close to your data. Coding leads directly to developing theoretical categories, some of which you may define in your initial codes. You build your analysis from the ground up without taking off on theoretical flights of fancy.

In addition, line-by-line coding reduces the likelihood of imputing your motives, fears or unresolved personal issues to your respondents and to your collected data. Some years ago, a young man in my undergraduate seminar conducted research on adaptation to disability. He had become paraplegic himself when he was hit by a car while bicycling. His ten in-depth interviews were filled with stories of courage, hope and innovation. His analysis of them was a narrative of grief, anger and loss. When I noted that his analysis did not reflect his collected material, he realized how his feelings coloured his perceptions of other people's disabilities. His was an important realization. However, had he assiduously done line-by-line coding, he might have arrived at it before he handed in his paper.

From the standpoint of grounded theory, each idea that you adopt from earlier theory or research should earn its way into your analysis (Glaser, 1978). If you apply theoretical concepts from your discipline, you must ensure that these concepts work. Do they help you understand what the data indicate? (If they do not, use other terms that do) Can you explicate what is happening in this line of data?

Line-by-line coding forces you to think about the material in new ways that may differ from your research participants' interpretations. For Thomas (1993), a researcher must take the familiar, routine and mundane and make it unfamiliar and new. Line-by-line coding helps you to see the familiar anew. You also gain distance from both your own and your participants' taken-for-granted assumptions about the material, so that you can see it from new vantage points.

If your codes define another view of a process, action or belief from that held by your respondents, note this. Your task is to make analytic sense of the material. How do you make analytic sense of the rich stories and descriptions you are compiling? First, look for and identify what you see happening in the data. Some basic questions may help:

- What is going on?
- What are people doing?
- What is the person saying?
- What do these actions and statements take for granted?
- How do structure and context serve to support, maintain, impede or change these actions and statements?

Try to frame your codes in as specific terms as possible – and keep them short. Make them active. Gerunds give us linguistic tools to preserve actions because a gerund is the noun form of the verb. Short, specific, active codes help you define processes in the data that otherwise may remain implicit. What you see in these data derives from your prior perspectives and the new knowledge you gain during your research. Rather than seeing your perspectives as truth, try to see them as representing one view among many. That way, you may gain more awareness of the concepts that you employ. For example, try not to assume that respondents repress or deny significant 'facts' about their lives. Instead, look for how they understand their situations before you judge their attitudes and actions through your own assumptions. Seeing the world through their eyes and understanding the logic of their experience brings you fresh insights. Afterwards, if you still invoke previously held perspectives as codes, you will use them more consciously rather than automatically.

In the example of line-by-line coding in Box 4.1, my interest in time and self-concept comes through in the first two codes. Note how I kept the codes active and close to the data.

Initial codes often range widely across a variety of topics. Because even a short statement or excerpt may address several points, it could illustrate several different categories. I could use the excerpt in Box 4.1 to show how avoiding disclosure serves to control identity. I could also use it to show either how a research participant learns that other people see his or her illness as inexplicable or how each day is unpredictable. Having multiple interviews allows me to see how social and emotional isolation begins and progresses.

Initial codes help you to separate data into categories and to see processes. Line-by-line coding frees you from becoming so immersed in your respondents' world-view that you accept it without question. Then you fail to look at your data critically and analytically. Being critical about your data does not necessarily mean being critical of your research participants.

Instead, being critical forces you to ask *yourself* questions about your data. These questions help you to see actions and to identify the significant processes. Such questions include:

- What process is at issue here? How can I define it?
- Under which conditions does this process develop?
- How do the research participant(s) think, feel and act while involved in this process?
- When, why and how does the process change?
- What are the consequences of the process?

Through coding each line of data, you gain insights about what kinds of data to collect next. Thus, you distil data and direct further inquiry early in the data collection. Line-by-line coding gives you leads to pursue. If, for example, you identify an important process while coding your fifteenth interview, you can return to earlier respondents and see whether that process explains events and experiences in their lives. If you cannot return to them, you can seek new respondents who can illuminate this process. Hence, your data collection becomes more focused, as does your coding.

After you have established some strong analytic directions through your initial line-by-line coding, you can begin focused coding to synthesize and explain larger segments of data. Focused coding means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data. Thus, focused coding is more directed, selective and conceptual than line-by-line coding (Glaser, 1978). Focused coding requires decisions about both which initial codes make the most analytic sense and categorize your data most accurately and completely. Yet, moving to focused coding is not entirely a linear process. Some respondents or events make explicit what was implicit in earlier respondents' statements or prior events. An 'Aha! Now I understand' experience prompts you to study your earlier data afresh. Then you may return to earlier respondents and explore topics that had been glossed over, or that may have been too implicit or unstated to discern.

The strength of grounded theory coding derives from this concentrated, active involvement in the process. You *act* upon the data rather than passively read your material. Through your actions, new threads for analysis become apparent. Events, interactions and perspectives that you had not thought of before come into analytic purview. Focused coding checks your preconceptions about the topic.

In the first excerpt in Box 4.2, I selected the codes 'avoiding disclosure' and 'assessing potential losses and risks of disclosing' to capture, synthesize and understand the main themes in the statement. In the second, the following codes were most useful: 'feeling forced to live one day at a time', 'concentrating on today', 'giving up future orientation', 'managing emotions', and 'reducing life-threatening risk'. Again, I tried to keep the codes active and close to the data. Through focused coding, you can move across interviews and observations and compare people's experiences, actions and interpretations. Note how the codes condense data and provide a handle to them.

BOX 4.2 FOCUSED CODING

	Excerpt 1, *Christine Danforth, age 37, lupus erythematosus, Sjögren's syndrome, back injuries*
Avoiding disclosure Assessing potential losses and risks of disclosing	If you have lupus, I mean one day it's my liver; one day it's my joints; one day it's my head, and it's like people really think you're a hypochondriac if you keep complaining about different ailments … It's like you don't want to say anything because people are going to start thinking, you know, 'God, don't go near her, all she is – is complaining about this.' And I think that's why I never say anything because I feel like everything I have is related one way or another to the lupus but most of the people don't know I have lupus, and even those that do are not going to believe that ten different ailments are the same thing. And I don't want anybody saying, you know, [that] they don't want to come around me because I complain.
	Excerpt 2, *Joyce Marshall, age 60, minor heart condition, recent small CVA (stroke)*
Feeling forced to live one day at a time Concentrating on today Giving up future orientation Managing emotions Reducing life-threatening risk	I have to see it [her CVA] as a warning. I can't let myself get so anxious. I have to live one day at a time. I've been so worried about John [her husband, who had had life-threatening heart attacks and lost his job three years before retirement] and preparing to get a job [her first in 38 years] … It's just so hard with all this stress … to concentrate on what I can do today. I always used to look to the future. I can't now; it upsets me too much. I have to live one day at a time now or else there may not be any me.

Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) also introduce a third type of coding, axial coding, to specify the dimensions of a category. The purpose is to sort, synthesize and organize large amounts of data and reassemble them in new ways after open coding (Cresswell, 1998). When engaged in axial coding, the researcher also links categories with sub-categories, and asks how they are related. Whether axial coding helps or hinders remains a question. Whether it differs from careful comparisons also is questionable. At best, it helps to clarify; at worst, it casts a technological overlay on the data. Although intended to obtain a more complete grasp of the studied phenomena, axial coding may make grounded theory cumbersome (Robrecht, 1995).

Axial coding is an *a priori* procedure to apply to the data. In contrast, you may find that emergent methodological directions and decisions arise when you study your data. While studying disclosure of illness, I re-examined the data I had coded during open coding. Then I coded for the range between spontaneous statements and staged pronouncements. I linked forms of telling explicitly to the relative absence or presence of strategizing. After discovering that people invoked different forms of telling, I looked more closely at the context of their telling and the conditions affecting how and whom they told, as well as their stated intentions for telling. I coded for how, when and why they changed their earlier forms of telling. These strategies may lead to charting causes and conditions of the observed phenomenon.

Raising focused codes to conceptual categories

Focused coding moves your analysis forward in two crucial steps: (1) it establishes the content and form of your nascent analysis; and (2) it prompts you to evaluate and clarify your categories and the relationships between them. First, assess which codes best capture what you see happening in your data. Raise them to conceptual categories for your developing analytic framework – give them conceptual definition and analytic treatment in narrative form. Thus, you go beyond using a code as a descriptive tool to view and synthesize data.

Categories explicate ideas, events or processes in your data – and do so in telling words. A category may subsume common themes and patterns in several codes. For example, my category of 'keeping illness contained' included 'packaging illness' (that is, treating it 'as if it were controlled, delimited, and confined to specific realms, such as private life') and 'passing' (which means 'concealing illness, maintaining a conventional self-presentation, and performing like unimpaired peers') (Charmaz, 1991a: 66–8). Again, make your categories as conceptual as possible – with abstract power, general reach, analytic direction and precise wording. Simultaneously, remain consistent with your data. By making focused codes brief and active (to reflect what is happening or what people are doing), you can view them as potential categories. Processes gain visibility when you keep codes active. Succinct, focused codes lead to sharp, clear categories. That way, you can establish criteria for your categories to make further comparisons.

Grounded theorists look for substantive processes that they develop from their codes. 'Keeping illness contained', 'packaging illness', and 'living one day at a time' above are three such processes. As grounded theorists create conceptual handles to explain what is happening in the setting, they may move towards defining generic processes (Prus, 1987). A generic process cuts across different empirical settings and problems; it can be applied to varied, substantive areas. The two codes above, 'avoiding disclosure' and 'assessing potential losses and risks of disclosing', reflect fundamental, generic processes of personal information control. Although these processes describe choices people with illness make in

disclosing information, people with other problems may treat information control similarly. Thus, a grounded theorist can elaborate and refine the generic process by gathering more data from diverse arenas where this process is evident. In the case of disclosing, homosexuals, sexual abuse survivors, drug users and ex-convicts often face problematic issues in personal information control and difficult disclosure decisions, as well as people with chronic conditions and invisible disabilities.

Concentrate on analysing a generic process that you define in your codes; then you can raise codes relevant to theoretical categories that lead to explanations of the process and predictions concerning it. These categories reflect what you think about the data as well as what you find in them. As Dey (1999) observes, categorization in grounded theory is more complex and problematic than its originators suggest and involves making inferences as well as classifications.

As you raise a code to a category, you begin to write narrative statements in memos that:

- explicate the properties of the category
- specify the conditions under which the category arises, is maintained and changes
- describe its consequences
- show how this category relates to other categories.

Categories may consist of *in vivo* codes that you take directly from your respondents' discourse, or they may represent your theoretical or substantive definition of what is happening in the data. For example, my terms 'good days and bad days' and 'living one day at a time' came directly from my respondents' voices. In contrast, my categories 'recapturing the past' and 'time in immersion and immersion in time' reflect theoretical definitions of actions and events. Furthermore, categories such as 'pulling in', 'facing dependency', and 'making trade-offs' address my respondents' substantive realities of grappling with a serious illness. I created these codes and used them as categories, but they reflect my respondents' concerns and actions. Novice researchers may find that they rely most on *in vivo* and substantive codes. What results is often a grounded description more than a theory. Nonetheless, studying how these codes fit together in categories can help you treat them more theoretically.

Through focused coding, you build and clarify your category by examining all the data it covers and by identifying variations within it and between other categories. You also will become aware of gaps in your analysis. For example, I developed my category of 'existing from day to day' when I realized that 'living one day at a time' did not fully cover impoverished people's level of desperation. In short, I had data about a daily struggle to survive that were not subsumed by my first category of living one day at a time. The finished narrative can be seen in Box 4.3.

BOX 4.3 THE CATEGORY OF 'EXISTING FROM DAY TO DAY'

Existing from day to day occurs when a person plummets into continued crises that rip life apart. It reflects a loss of control of health and the wherewithal to keep life together.

Existing from day to day means a constant struggle for daily survival. Poverty and lack of support contribute to and complicate that struggle. Hence, poor and isolated people usually plummet further and faster than affluent individuals with concerned families. Loss of control extends to being unable to obtain necessities – food, shelter, heat, and medical care.

The struggle to exist keeps people in the present, especially if they have continued problems in getting the basic necessities that middle-class adults take for granted. Yet other problems can assume much greater significance for these people than their illness – a violent husband, a runaway child, an alcoholic spouse, or the overdue rent.

Living one day at a time differs from existing from day to day. Living one day at a time provides a strategy for controlling emotions, managing life, dimming the future, and getting through a troublesome period. It involves managing stress, illness, or regimen, and dealing with these things each day to control them as best one can. It means concentrating on the here and now and relinquishing other goals, pursuits, and obligations (Charmaz, 1991a: 185).

Note the comparisons between the two categories above. To generate categories through focused coding, you need to compare data, incidents, contexts and concepts. Making the following comparisons helps:

- comparing different people (in terms of their beliefs, situations, actions, accounts or experiences)
- comparing data from the same individuals at different points in time
- comparing specific data with the criteria for the category
- comparing categories in the analysis with other categories.

As I compared different people's experiences, I realized that some people's situations forced them into the present. I then looked at how my rendering of living one day at a time did not apply to them. I reviewed earlier interviews and began to seek published accounts that might clarify the comparison. As is evident in the distinctions between these two categories above, focused coding prompts you to begin to see the relationships and patterns between categories.

Memo-writing

In grounded theory, memo-writing consists of taking categories apart by breaking them into their components. Grounded theorists write memos throughout the research process to examine, compare and analyse data, codes and emergent categories. Memo-writing becomes the pivotal intermediate step between defining categories and writing the first draft of your completed analysis. This step spurs you to develop your ideas in narrative fullness and form early in the analytic process. Memo-writing is the logical next step after you define categories; however, it is also useful for clarification and direction throughout your coding. Writing memos prompts you to elaborate processes, assumptions and actions covered by your codes or categories. Memos help you to identify which codes to treat as analytic categories, if you have not already defined them. (Then you further develop your category through more memo-writing.)

Think about including the following points in your memos:

- defining each code or category by its analytic properties
- spelling out and detailing processes subsumed by the codes or categories
- making comparisons between data and between codes and categories
- bringing raw data into the memo
- providing sufficient empirical evidence to support your definitions of the category and analytic claims about it
- offering conjectures to check through further empirical research
- identifying gaps in your emerging analysis.

Grounded theorists look for patterns, even when focusing on a single case (Strauss and Glaser, 1970). Because they stress identifying patterns, grounded theorists typically invoke respondents' stories to illustrate points – rather than provide complete portrayals of their lives. By bringing raw data right into your memo, you preserve telling evidence for your ideas from the start of your analytic narratives. Through providing ample verbatim material, you not only ground the abstract analysis, but also lay the foundation for making claims about it. Including verbatim material from different sources permits you to make precise comparisons. Thus, memo-writing moves your work beyond individual cases through defining patterns.

Begin your memo with careful definitions of each category. This means you identify its properties or characteristics, look for its underlying assumptions, and show how and when the category develops and changes. To illustrate, I found that people frequently referred to living one day at a time when they suffered a medical crisis or faced continued uncertainty. So I began to ask questions about what living one day at a time was like for them. From their responses as well as from published autobiographical accounts, I began to define the category and its characteristics. The term 'living one day at a time' condenses a whole series of implicit meanings and assumptions. It becomes a strategy for handling unruly feelings,

for exerting some control over a now-uncontrollable life, for facing uncertainty, and for handling a conceivably foreshortened future. Memo-writing spurs you to dig into implicit, unstated and condensed meanings.

Start writing memos as soon as you have some interesting ideas and categories to pursue. If at a loss about what to write, elaborate on codes that you adopted repeatedly. Keep collecting data, keep coding and keep refining your ideas through writing more and further-developed memos. Some researchers who use grounded theory methods discover a few interesting findings early in their data collection and then truncate their research. Their work lacks the 'intimate familiarity' with the setting or experience that Lofland and Lofland (1995) avow meets the standards for good qualitative research. Cover your topic in depth by exploring sufficient cases and by elaborating your categories fully.

Memo-writing frees you to explore your ideas about your categories. Treat memos as partial, preliminary and eminently correctable. Just note where you are on firm ground and where you are making conjectures. Then go back to the field to check your conjectures. Memo-writing resembles free-writing or prewriting (Elbow, 1981) because memos are for your eyes only; they provide a means of getting ideas down quickly and clearly; and they preserve your natural voice. When writing memos, incorrect verb tense, overuse of prepositional phrases and lengthy sentences do not matter. You are writing to render the data, not to communicate it to an audience.

Use memos to help you think about the data and to discover your ideas about them. Later, after you turn a memo into a section of a paper, revise it for your prospective readers. You can write memos at different levels of abstraction – from the concrete to the highly theoretical. Some of your memos will find their way directly into the first draft of your analysis. Set aside others with a different focus and develop them later.

Direct much of your memo-writing to making comparisons, what Glaser and Strauss (1967: 105) call 'constant comparative methods'. This approach emphasizes comparing incidents indicated by each category, integrating categories by delineating their relationships, delimiting the scope and range of the emerging theory, and writing the theory. As I suggested with Susan Nelson's interview excerpt, you compare one respondent's beliefs, stance, actions or situations with another respondent's, or one experience with another. If you have longitudinal data, compare a participant's response, experience or situation at one point in time with that at another time. Then, as you become more analytic, start to make detailed comparisons between categories and then frame them into a theoretical statement. Through memo-writing, you distinguish between major and minor categories. Thus, you direct the shape and form of your emergent analysis.

At each more analytic and abstract level of memo-writing, bring your data right into your analysis. Show how you build your analysis on your data in each memo. Bringing your data into successive levels of memo-writing ultimately saves time: you do not have to dig through stacks of material to illustrate your points. A section of a memo is provided in Box 4.4. Note that I first defined the category, 'living one day at a time', and pointed out its main properties. Then I developed aspects of living one day at a time, such as its relationship to time perspective, which is mentioned here, and to managing emotions. The memo also covered how people lived one day at a time, the problems it posed (as well as those it solved) and the consequences of doing so.

BOX 4.4 EXAMPLE OF MEMO-WRITING

Living one day at a time

Living one day at a time means dealing with illness on a day-to-day basis, holding future plans and even ordinary activities in abeyance while the person and, often, others deal with illness. When living one day at a time, the person feels that his or her future remains unsettled, that he or she cannot foresee the future or whether there will be a future. Living one day at a time allows the person to focus on illness, treatment and regimen without becoming entirely immobilized by fear or future implications. By concentrating on the present, the person can avoid or minimize thinking about death and the possibility of dying.

Relation to time perspective

The felt need to live one day at a time often drastically alters a person's time perspective. Living one day at a time pulls the person into the present and pushes back past futures (the futures the person projected before illness or before this round of illness) so that they recede without mourning [their loss]. These past futures can slip away, perhaps almost unnoticed. [I then compare three respondents' situations, statements and time perspectives.]

Theoretical Sampling

Memo-making leads directly to *theoretical sampling* – that is, collecting more data to fill out the properties of your theoretical categories. Here, you sample for the purpose of *developing* your emerging theory, not for representation of a population or increasing the generalizability of your results. Conducting theoretical sampling requires already having tentative categories to develop – and test – through rigorous scrutiny of new data. Thus, you seek more cases or ask earlier participants about experiences that you may not have covered before. You need more data to be sure that your category accurately describes the underlying quality of your respondents' experiences. In contrast, quantitative researchers need to have random samples whose characteristics are representative of the population under study. Whereas survey researchers want to use sample data to make statistical inferences about the target population, grounded theorists are interested primarily in the fit between their data and the emerging theory.

When I was trying to figure out how people with chronic illnesses defined the passage of time, I went back to several participants whom I had interviewed before and asked them more focused questions about how they perceived times of earlier crisis and when time

seemed to slow, quicken, drift or drag. Because such topics resonated with their experiences, they even responded to esoteric questions. For example, when I studied their stories, I realized that chronically ill adults implicitly located their self-concepts in the past, present or future. These time-frames reflected the form and content of self and mirrored hopes and dreams for self, as well as beliefs and understandings about self. Hence, I made 'the self in time' a major category. Thereafter, I explicitly asked more people whether they saw themselves in the past, present or future. An elderly working-class woman said without hesitation:

> I see myself in the future now. If you'd asked where I saw myself eight months ago, I would have said, 'the past'. I was so angry then because I had been so active. And to go downhill as fast as I did – I felt life had been awfully cruel to me. Now I see myself in the future because there's something the Lord wants me to do. Here I sit all crumpled in this chair not being able to do anything for myself and still there's a purpose for me to be here. [Laughs.] I wonder what it could be. (Charmaz, 1991a: 256)

Through theoretical sampling you can elaborate the meaning of your categories, discover variation within them and define gaps between categories. Theoretical sampling relies on comparative methods for discovering these gaps and finding ways to fill them. I advise conducting theoretical sampling after you have allowed significant data to emerge. Otherwise, early theoretical sampling may bring premature closure to your analysis.

Engaging in theoretical sampling will likely make variation visible within the studied process or phenomenon. One of my main categories was 'immersion in illness' (Charmaz, 1991a). Major properties of immersion include recasting life around illness, slipping into illness routines, pulling into one's inner circle, facing dependency, and experiencing an altered (slowed) time perspective. However, not everyone's time perspective changed. How could I account for that? By going back through my data, I gained some leads. Then I talked with more people about specific experiences and events that influenced their time perspective. Theoretical sampling helped me to refine the analysis and make it more complex. I then added a category, 'variations in immersion', to highlight and account for different experiences of immersion in illness. I filled out this category through theoretical sampling because I sensed variation earlier when comparing the experiences of people with different illnesses, different life situations and different ages, but had not made clear how immersion in illness varied and affected how these people experienced time. Subsequently, for example, I sampled to learn how illness and time differed for people who spent months in darkened rooms and how both varied when people anticipated later improvement or faced continued uncertainty. Thus, initial demographic variations in immersion led to useful theoretical understandings of variations in immersion itself. Making comparisons explicit through successive memos enabled me to draw connections that I did not initially discern. The memo became a short section of a chapter that begins as in Box 4.5 and then goes on to detail each remaining point.

BOX 4.5 VARIATIONS IN IMMERSION

A lengthy immersion in illness shapes daily life and affects how one experiences time. Conversely, ways of experiencing time dialectically affect the qualities of immersion in illness. The picture above of immersion and time has sharp outlines. What sources of variation soften or alter the picture of immersion and time? The picture may vary according to the person's (1) type of illness, (2) kind of medication, (3) earlier time perspective, (4) life situation, and (5) goals.

The type of illness shapes the experience and way of relating to time. Clearly, trying to manage diabetes necessitates gaining a heightened awareness of timing the daily routines. But the effects of the illness may remain much more subtle. People with Sjögren's syndrome, for example, may have periods of confusion when they feel wholly out of synchrony with the world around them. For them, things happen too quickly, precisely when their bodies and minds function too slowly. Subsequently, they may retreat into routines to protect themselves. Lupus patients usually must retreat because they cannot tolerate the sun. Sara Shaw covered her windows with black blankets when she was extremely ill. Thus, her sense of chronological time became further distorted as day and night merged together into an endless flow of illness (Charmaz, 1991a: 93).

Theoretical sampling helps you to construct more precise, analytic and incisive memos. Because theoretical sampling forces you to check ideas against direct empirical realities, you have solid materials and sound ideas with which to work. You gain confidence in your perceptions of your data and in your developing ideas about them.

When do you stop gathering data? The standard answer is that you stop when the properties of your categories are 'saturated' and new data no longer spark fresh insights about your emerging grounded theory. But researchers disagree about the meaning of saturation. As Janice Morse (1995) suggests, researchers proclaim saturation rather than prove that they have achieved it. Thus, like other qualitative researchers, grounded theorists may assume their categories are saturated when they may not be. The kinds of analytic questions and the conceptual level of the subsequent categories matter. Mundane questions may rapidly produce saturated but common categories, whereas novel questions may demand more complex categories and more sustained inquiry (Charmaz, 2014; Lois, 2010).

WRITING UP

After you fully define your theoretical categories, support them with evidence, and order your memos about these categories, start writing the first draft of your paper. Writing is

more than mere reporting. Instead, the analytic process proceeds while writing the report. Use your now-developed categories to form sections of the paper. Show the relationships between these categories. When you have studied a process, your categories will reflect its phases. Yet you still need to make an argument for your reader as to why this process is significant. That means making *your* logic and purpose explicit. This may take a draft or two. Then outline your draft to identify your main points and to refine how you organize them. (But do not start your draft from an outline – use your memos.) As your argument becomes clearer, keep tightening it by reorganizing the sections of your paper around it.

What place do raw data such as interview excerpts or field notes have in the body of your paper? Grounded theorists generally provide enough verbatim material to demonstrate the connection between the data and the analysis, but emphasize the concepts they have constructed from the data. To date, qualitative researchers do not agree on how much verbatim material is necessary. Compared to those qualitative studies that primarily synthesize description, grounded theory studies are substantially more analytic and conceptual. Unlike some grounded theorists, I prefer to present detailed interview quotations and examples in the body of my work. This approach keeps the human story in the forefront of the reader's mind and makes the theoretical analysis more accessible to a wider audience.

After you have developed your analysis of the data, go to the literature in your field and compare how and where your work fits in with it – be specific. At this point, you must cover the literature thoroughly and weave it into your work explicitly. Then revise and rework your draft to make it a solid finished paper. Use the writing process to sharpen, clarify and integrate your developing analysis. Through writing and rewriting, you can simultaneously make your analysis more abstract and your rendering of it more concrete and precise. In short, you hone your abstract analysis to define essential properties, assumptions, relationships and processes while providing sufficient actual data to demonstrate how your analysis is grounded in people's experience.

CONCLUSION

The inductive nature of grounded theory methods assumes an open, flexible approach that moves you back and forth between data collection and analysis. Your methodological strategies take shape during the research process rather than before you began collecting data. Similarly, you shape and alter the data collection to pursue the most interesting and relevant material without slighting research participants' views and actions. By developing and checking your ideas as you proceed, you not only stay close to the empirical world, but also learn whether and to what extent your analytic ideas fit the people you study.

Grounded theorists aim to develop a useful theoretical analysis that fits their data. The systematic strategies of grounded theory enable qualitative researchers to generate ideas. In turn, these ideas may later be verified through traditional quantitative methods. Nonetheless, as Glaser and Strauss (1967) originally claimed, grounded-theory qualitative studies stand on their own because these works: (1) explicate basic (generic) processes in the data; (2) analyse a substantive field or problem; (3) make sense of human behaviour;

(4) provide flexible, yet durable, analyses that other researchers can refine or update; and (5) hold potential for greater generalizability (for example, when conducted at multiple sites) than other qualitative works.

But do most researchers who claim to do grounded theory research actually construct theory? No, not at this time. At present, most construct conceptual analyses of a particular experience instead of creating substantive or formal theory. These researchers pursue basic questions within the empirical world and try to understand the puzzles it presents. They emphasize analytic categories that synthesize and explicate processes in the worlds they study, rather than tightly framed theories that generate hypotheses and make explicit predictions. Many researchers engage in grounded theory coding and memo-making but, as Hood (2007) points out, do not conduct theoretical sampling or pursue extensive analysis of their categories. However, grounded theory methods provide powerful tools for taking conceptual analyses into theory development. For this reason, grounded theory methods offer psychologists exciting possibilities for re-visioning psychological theory, as well as useful strategies for rethinking psychological research methods. Box 4.6 shows three good examples of grounded theory studies.

BOX 4.6 THREE EXAMPLES OF GROUNDED THEORY STUDIES

Regions of the mind: brain research and the quest for scientific certainty

Susan Leigh Star (1989) analyses how localization theory gained acceptance as the dominant explanation of how the brain functions. By studying the routine work of early brain researchers, Star questions the foundational assumptions of science. Localizationists faced opposition but Star shows that their theoretical take-over did not rest on unassailable scientific proof. Gaps in their research and reasoning can be discerned. The localizationist take-over occurred because of their claims and sustained strategic actions during a particular historical context in which scientists faced and tried to resolve several types of uncertainty, such as the pressure to standardize criteria for disease categories and diagnoses. Star explains how localizationists' routine actions and strategies created definitions of certainty. They controlled the terms of the debate, shifted uncertainties from one realm to another, combined dissimilar data, generalized case results, focused on select problems, and ignored ambiguous findings. Through their routine efforts, localizationists established boundaries that prevented other theories of brain function from gaining credibility. By explicating the interactive and developmental processes that advanced localizational theory, Star constructs a new theoretical explanation for change and stability in scientific theorizing. Her study concludes that scientific theorizing does not result from

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unassailable evidence but instead arises from scientists' ideological proclivities and the exigencies of their routine work.

The body, identity and self: adapting to impairment

Kathy Charmaz (1995) outlines the process of altering life and self to accommodate to physical losses and to reunify body and self. This process begins with how chronically ill people experience noticeable physical changes and diminished bodily functions, define them as real, and cope with changes in bodily appearance. Bodily changes and their meanings affect the identity goals of people with chronic illnesses and foster making identity trade-offs. The views and actions of other people figure prominently here. When chronically ill people feel devalued, they weigh interactional costs and balance necessary activities against possible identity trade-offs. During illness crises, however, the struggle to realize identity goals may cease and people may surrender to their sick bodies. At this point, the quest for control over illness ceases and the ill person flows with his or her body. Perhaps paradoxically, people who described this kind of surrender felt at one with themselves and able to face uncertainty and the possibility of death. This study shows how relationships between embodiment and identity goals shift as illness progresses, and also questions common beliefs in struggling against illness during crises.

Maintaining integrity in the face of death: a grounded theory to explain the perspectives of people affected by lung cancer about the expression of wishes for end-of-life care

Gillian Horne, Jane Seymour and Sheila Payne (2012) construct a grounded theory, 'maintaining integrity in the face of death', in which patients with advanced lung cancer and their families try to balance the contradictory demands of simultaneously living in the present and facing death. The authors argue that achieving this balance demands that patients and their families act and talk with integrity. Thus these research participants aimed to act and talk in ways that allowed dying individuals to remain 'real' or 'normal' and forestall discussions of death while they still felt relatively well and could work and carry out their usual responsibilities. The authors constructed the following major categories from their data: (1) 'face death when it comes', (2) 'planning for death, not dying', (3) 'only months to live', and (4) 'clinical discussions about the future'. By 'carrying on as normal' and focusing on the present, people can maintain a sense of purpose and hope for themselves and close family members. Horne, Seymour and Payne found that their research participants' concerns about family permeated their responses and fostered living in the present. As dying patients' conditions worsened, their concern for family often spurred practical plans for handling death. In some cases, patients avoided talking about dying with their families to protect them from worry and sorrow.

NOTE

1 The interview was conducted by a trained student assistant for a mini-grant entitled 'Identity Hierarchies and Identity Goals: Adaptation to Loss among the Chronically Ill', awarded by Sonoma State University. All names of interview participants have been changed.

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FURTHER READING

Charmaz, K. (2009) 'Shifting the grounds: constructivist grounded theory methods for the twenty-first century', in J. Morse, P. Stern, J. Corbin, B. Bowers, K. Charmaz and A. Clarke, *Developing Grounded Theory: The Second Generation*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, pp. 127–54.
This chapter argues for shifting the epistemological foundations of grounded theory from its objectivist origins to constructivist assumptions that take into account the historical, social, situational, and subjective conditions of inquiry.

Charmaz, K. (2014) *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2nd edn). London: Sage.
The second edition considerably expands earlier explanations of the grounded theory method, provides detailed discussions of intensive interviewing, offers clear guidelines and varied examples, and includes a chapter on symbolic interactionism as a theoretical perspective.

Clarke, A.E. (2005) *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory after the Postmodern Turn*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
This book takes the implications of postmodernism and presents a revised version of grounded theory that builds on the pragmatist legacy of Anselm Strauss, locating research in the conditions and situations of its production.

Corbin, J. and Strauss, A. (2008) *Basics of Qualitative Research* (3rd edn). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
Corbin's updated version of grounded theory reflects her changed epistemological and ontological perspectives and the integration of recent developments in qualitative inquiry.

Glaser, B.G. (1978) *Theoretical Sensitivity*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
This book contains Glaser's definitive statement of how to use the original grounded theory method.

Glaser, B.G. and Strauss, A.L. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
Glaser and Strauss provide the original statement of the grounded theory method and present the rationale for it and for qualitative research, more generally.

Strauss, A.L. (1987) *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists.* New York: Cambridge University Press.
This book provides a 'hands-on' description of how Anselm Strauss taught grounded theory to graduate students through group participation.