

The Grounded Theory Review: An international journal

Blocking Conceptualization

Barney G. Glaser, Ph.D., Hon. Ph.D.

**Forging a Path for Abstinence from Heroin:
A grounded theory of detoxification-seeking**

*Anne McDonnell, BA, HDip. And Marie Claire
VanHout, BSc., MSc., PhD.*

**Reading with Methodological Perspective Bias:
A journey into Classic Grounded Theory**

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**A Grounded Theory of Liberated Identity:
Lesbians transcending oppression**

Amy Russell Ph.D., LMSW

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Submissions Guidelines

We welcome papers presenting substantive and formal classic grounded theories from a broad range of disciplines. All papers submitted are double blind peer reviewed and comments provided back to the authors. Papers accepted for publication will be good examples or practical applications of classic grounded theory methodology. Comments on papers published are also welcomed; these will be shared with the authors and may be published in subsequent issues of the Review. Manuscripts should be prepared as Word (.doc) files using single line spacing and New Century Schoolbook 11 pt typeface. Forward submissions as Word documents to Judith Holton at judith@groundedtheoryreview.com

Title Page: Include names of all authors, their affiliations and professional degrees. Include the address of the corresponding author, telephone number & email. A brief biographical statement of each author is welcome although optional.

Abstract: The title page is followed by an abstract of 100 to 150 words. Include maximum of five key words.

Introduction: Briefly overview the focus of the study. Comment on data sources, data collection and analysis.

Theory: Using sub-headings, clearly identify the theory's core category (variable) and related concepts, explaining each briefly. Under an additional subheading, articulate the main theoretical propositions (hypotheses) of your theory.

Discussion: Discuss the general implications of your theory for practice. Discuss its contribution to knowledge by addressing extant theory and literature. Discuss its limitations.

Notes to the Text: Notes to the text should be kept to a minimum and should appear at the end of the text.

References: References should appear as a separate section titled 'References' at the end of the paper following the text and any endnotes. References should conform to APA publication format.

Word Count: As a rule, papers should not exceed 8,000 words.

Graphics: Our preference is to minimize the use of graphics, figures and tables. If they are necessary, authors of papers accepted for publication will be asked to supply print ready artwork.

Blocking Conceptualization¹

Barney G. Glaser, Ph.D., Hon. Ph.D.

My purpose in this chapter is to go into some detail on the various blocks to conceptualization that the reader can and should be wary of so he/she can either avoid them, deal with them adequately to do a GT study, or submit to them humbly for greater gains for the moment. They are authoritative blocks, preconceptions, inability to adequately conceptualize, the initial confusion and regression, multi-version view of GT, QDA requirement blocks, data collection overload, data coding overload, peer reviews, dealing with jargonizing GT, and being a novice both in experience and in scholarship with GT. Obviously these are related in many ways and I have dealt with them a bit in above chapters on helping coding. My goal here is to put them into relief for focused attention and thought so they can be avoided or handled.

Generating good GT conceptual ideas requires the researcher to be a non citizen for the moments of research so he can come closer to letting the data speak for itself. He/she needs to be free for the research of the normal issue orientations of everyday life so he/she must limit normal citizen bias. Suspending issues of gender, age, color, religion, nationality etc. are important. Therefore to avoid this kind of block the researcher should not get into a study when he/she cannot handle the issue as data impartially; not handle as neither right nor wrong. Gender studies are particularly sensitive and hard to avoid strong bias orientations. Face sheet data has to emerge as relevant, and often none do. They cannot be assumed as in QDA. So many GT studies have nothing to do with face sheet data.

Authoritative guidance is a major block to conceptualization. Authoritative guidance comes in all forms -- companies, committees, supervisors, senior colleagues, academic department, IRB requirements etc. And

¹ This paper is Chapter 10 of Dr. Glaser's new book, *Getting Out of the Data: Grounded Theory Conceptualization*, (Sociology Press, 2011)

if they do not know GT with an adequate level of experience they are likely to block coding in favor of looking for preconceived concepts and problems and demanding conformity to bureaucratic requirements which block emergent coding and herald QDA descriptive requirements. We all know this.

Evert Gummesson, a professor of business, writes: “Although most companies confess to the marketing concept claiming they are customer –centered with customer needs and customer satisfaction as their prime goal which is compatible with GT they still want to see research descriptions on preconceived practices of marketing, textbook theory, short term profits or long term goals or quick fixes and demand for facts on preconceived issues.” In sum, in this research situation there is no room for momentarily disregarding existing demands while conceptually coding for the emergent.

The business conceptual jargon leaves little room for letting GT tell its theory. This goes on in many academic fields of intense jargon, such as psychology, political science, psychiatry, economics, to name a few that leave little or no room for new concepts in the authorities view. Their jargon is supported by taken for granted assumptions that influence what is attended to by extant theory which blocks attending to coding for what is really going on. Often the local jargon codes are wrong or miss the gist of what is going on, yet are assumed to have validity. So be careful of using in vivo codes that have no grounding, even if they are descriptively captivating, and they will likely block coding using the cc method. The in vivo code must have interchangeable indicators. If local jargon emphasizes an in vivo code that names a pattern with relevance, fit and grab imagery, and passes the indicator requirements of validity the researcher is fortunate. It does happen but not often. And when it does, the participants usually see the pattern descriptively by its indicators, not conceptually though they did conceptualize. For example a few hospital doctors may say they are acting supernatural when on duty, and then describe what they mean. It is only a quick thought for the researcher to conceptual the pattern as supernormalizing as he sees and

hears others acting supernormal. Open conversations without structured interviews will tap whatever in vivo concepts respondents may have.

Coding overload blocking happens two ways. One incident coding produces too many codes that are not allowed in GT as they are not patterns. They are extraordinary, particularistic and probably not relevant. Coding beyond saturation of many categories, that is, each category has too many indicators, and then not stopping generating more codes easily ends in too many codes. Both sources of coding overload result from not choosing a core category. And can be stopped by choosing a core category and doing selective coding on the core and then doing a substantive theory about it. One only discovers at any one time a piece or slice of the data for a core category. Other possible cores are another study of the same data, The researcher should be aware of this occurrence as the second project grows in his head due to his knowledge of the data. The second possible study should be held in abeyance, certainly not included in the first study. In short, cut the theory down to a single size. Unless fatigue has set in, the second study awaits with partial coding already done. Do not let two studies block each.

Having no personal compatible schedule, plan and/or a series of deadlines can subtly block a study. Johnben Loy wrote me “without a deadline I found myself dragging on the research for months. I had a deadline imposed which galvanized me into action.” Johnben finished on schedule then and received his PhD. A schedule with a deadline challenges blocks and removes many of them. So the researcher, should if needed, set himself a comfortable schedule that he can stick to based on his personal pacing as he/she knows he can comply with and keep up. This stimulates the delayed action learning of GT by regular experience. It also keeps up preconscious processing and develops confidence in autonomous decisions. I always advise, for example, the plan of coding a bit every night to keep the constant experiencing of positive effects flowing.

I have seen the advice “try to see action in each segment of data. Attempt to code using words that reflect action.” This

could be a preconceptive block on coding if taken too seriously. Let whatever emerges emerge, just not looking for patterns to code and name which reflect action or processes. Many are static like types, dimensions, cutting points etc.

I have suggested line by line coding as a way of screening and interviews or field notes for emergent interchangeable indices. One should move fast looking for indicators, and then skip and dip in the data once a code has been saturated. Thus line by line is merely the beginning. It can get out of hand and block theory if an authority suggests to a researcher to code each line indefinitely and independently, which leads into single indicator concepts, then concept overload with a loss of formulation of core substantive theory. Single indicator codes lead to a range of non valid, particularistic codes that never gain groundedness. One indicator does not make a code.

I have mentioned many times about over coding, but the same caution goes to caution against under coding. An exciting code like supplanting or like desisting residual selves can block further coding for the joy of explaining at length by description what it entails. The conceptual grab of the code can feel thrillingly theoretical with great general implication and feel that all that's necessary for a theory. Then the study become one of conceptual description, not GT. Keep up the coding for the sub core codes and their properties until you reach theoretical completeness; keep up selective coding. Do not let making sense speculatively take over, as it can easily as sense making comes easily to many. Sense making can easily lead to speculative theory on one code that is exciting.

Many people are meaning finders, irrespective of data and can conjecture a potpourri of eclectic, at will codes with no grounding on a exciting core They quickly sense make data to stop chaos or not knowing while following the "grab" of the category. The result being speculative theory. One has to point out to them that this is not GT which requires cc method coding.

Ruth Naylor coined the term "fear zone" to write about the confusion and doubts that occur and block the novice when starting the initial coding for a GT. She sees fear as the

main concern for the majority of novice PhD candidates who are not completely brimming with autonomy and self confidence. They need to be ok'd with experienced guidance. As Ruth said "I have been writing to Marko and also wrote to Annette and both of them sent great advice which helped me get unstuck (out of the fear zone and into the do it anyway zone)" Thus the fear zone that comes with starting a GT blocks coding, which block can be relieved by good authoritative guidance. But it can be a solidified block brought on by inexperienced in GT QDA advisors, both informal and more emphatically formal PhD advisors, who cannot tolerate the students confusion and wish to see extensive QDA description and coverage to feel themselves comfortable.

The uncomfortable, inexperienced supervisor will form up the novice student with preconceived categories, committee and school requirements to undo the confusion and rescue him from fear. The experienced supervisors and colleagues will themselves learn from their help to handle unclear coding and confusion, which redounds to the confidence of the novice. Thus the inexperienced GT researcher questing for help, usually a PhD candidate, must chose their authoritative advisor help wisely or they can be derailed and blocked from coding easily. Joining computer networks of GT researchers on the PhD is great for encouragement, support, specific helpful ideas and relieving blocks.

Also the inexperienced GT researcher must avoid or learn how to handle the inexperienced supervisor, who wants periodic work checks and then imposes QDA requirements. Fears cannot be successfully handled when taken to senior advisors who do not do or understand GT from reading and especially from experience. The novice must know his "outs" or he will find he must compromise with the performing requirements of committees and advisors. If the novice cannot find help then he can be lost two ways, both in doing the GT alone as a minus mentoree and in being at odds with his department's socially structured vested fictions yielding schedule and content requirements activated by a conforming supervisor.

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The fellows of the GT Institute are all experienced authoritative helpers and, of course, my and Judith Holton's seminars rescue many novices quiet successfully. And as GT spreads throughout the world the availability by internet grows of experienced colleagues who can help support the novice and support the GT conceptual thinking style. Asking questions of these colleagues will help handle personal impasses starting with proper conceptual coding using the cc method

The fear zone of inexperience is expressed by many. One wrote Judith Holton who is a highly experienced GT researcher: "I am a little bit struggling with my GT analysis as I have reached the conception theoretical level enough and instead tend to go back to the descriptive out of anxiety (arising from not knowing where my analysis is going)" Judith replied wisely "As to staying conceptual, yes it is easy to slip back into description when we are worried about where our analysis is going and whether what we are is going to be good enough. The important thing is to recognize that this regression is a natural part of the GT process and that the antidote is to stay open and trust in emergence. It works." Yes, keep going and trust to preconscious processing of interchangeable indices and that the eureka moment is not far away.

Another student wrote: "had supervisor meeting with my two supervisors only yesterday... I am in a lot of difficulty with supervisors understanding of classical GT and descriptive writing. In final analysis I have tried to hold on to principles of GT in my write up style, but I am under a lot pressure to complete second drafts of chapters and I lack support from my supervisors." The concern is clear: being supervised by authoritarian professors conforming to the school, department and QDA requirements can easily block the novice GT researcher from the very start or even midway into his research. The novice should be careful of the program and supervisors he chooses. Taking on the QDA formal approach to the Ph.D. with a GT analysis may not work, the block maybe too hard to overcome for the novice. The novice should be humble. Initial fear of doing GT correctly cannot be successfully allayed when taken to supervisors or colleagues

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who do not understand GT from the "having done it" experience. The GT jargon can be learned by reading my books but requires experience of doing a full GT research study, to not let the jargon slip into QDA description.

In spite of what Tony Bryant says "by late 1990's GT was far and away the most widely claimed method for social research, eclipsing all other methods put together," many researchers engaging in GT still have little or no awareness of conceptualization, conceptual level and therefore the integration of conceptual levels. Because of the multi-version view of GT they still can do QDA description as GT and not know the difference or simply know of QDA's legitimacy as supposed GT. This, of course, accounts for the volume of jargonizing GT advocates supposedly legitimating GT.

The draw of QDA is clear. Most people see description as a natural way of seeing life. Many researchers find it hard, if aware at all, to give up time, place and people in favor going on the conceptual abstract. Changing to a conceptual level requires an ability many QDA researchers may not have to develop or barely have Furthermore, many QDA researchers have an annoyed aversion to being categorized by or within a pattern, preferring to remain particularistic and descriptive. In sum, there is a general block among researchers to lifting data to a conceptual level since most people are descriptive. I am always surprised and delighted when an individual emerges from the group that NEEDs the conceptual level, in spite of all the descriptive research. The reason is that they have conceptual ability, however latent, so description seems repetitive and often almost boring by saying the same thing over and over in different ways, when they have automatically conceptualized the pattern. GT then becomes just what they want to do for research. Choosing to do a GT starts their autonomy from fellow QDA students and QDA supervisors. The drift back to the descriptive level at times occurs as natural, but not by choice, as they code and learn the skill to maintain the conceptual level and a new way of thinking.

Keep in mind that suspending QDA rules of data collection and analysis, as well as the literature so as not to block a GT study, does not mean throwing out all one has

learned. The cc method is after conceptualizations of “what is” not what ought to be. Suspending and remaining open to what is really going on will soon transform the beginning novice researcher to simply going where the data leads. Most will go through the eureka effect (finding a core category with grab) fairly soon and then suspending becomes routine. But keep in mind that for the novice and his supervisor (s) they must be able to tolerate a period of ambiguity and not knowing to suspend extant, preconceived knowledge. One must stop overlaying what is going on by what should go on.

This is particularly hard for ideologically driven people or people with considerable research experience in other methodologies. They have some unlearning or new learning to do to supervise a GT research. Competitive department teachers add one more possible block to coding with full departmental support. I have seen that even though a PhD committee delivers the usual QDA rhetoric of worrisome accuracy, immaculate descriptive capture and conforming to a particular theoretical perspective rhetoric, they can still be overwhelmed by the richness of a GT, once the core and some sub core categories are discovered. Blocks are then lifted.

However if the worrisome accuracy concern persists in a committee by wanting many illustrations of codes like they are evidencing findings as valid and wanting the researcher to show how he/she got to the code, that can block coding. One comment on Anna Sandgren’s dissertation “She did not give example of how she got to the concepts i.e. she should have illustrated the theses with field notes” Ana had to explain that illustrations are just that. They are not evidencing, and that codes are not findings requiring backup data. They are conceptual abstractions which can be varied by conceptual properties. Anna was not blocked, but a novice could very easily be blocked by such derailment to the descriptive level.

To be sure, the novice GT researchers using classical GT exhibit as best they can method loyalty to GT. But supervisors with method a loyalty demand to a QDA style will block the novice’s coding from the very start. The supervisor will need to rescue the novice from “not knowing” and confusion by suggesting the loyal using of QDA frameworks

and preconceptions to coding. Under this condition staying open will be closed down for the GT novice and the evolving learning curve of GT will be shut down as apparent ineptitude. Data overwhelm is likely to result. What the novice has to offer in being open to the emergent patterns is lost to the QDA description orientation and worse yet to descriptive redundancy of keeping the citing of interchangeable indices as if a generalization not a pattern. The novice’s inexperience with GT is not a confusion block, it is an open benefit to fostering getting out of the data, but this is hard for the QDA supervisor to grasp.

It very difficult to understand and develop method loyalty to GT prior to using it. But if the novice has the courage to let the problem concepts emerge in the face of QDA demands, once the main concern and core category emerge, it provides an armor very hard for the QDA supervisor to pierce and tell the novice something different. Especially hard, even if the /QDA supervisor wants to see pet codes or what he feels should be going on. QDA descriptive capture will soon be forgotten in favor of the emergent patterns of main concern and core category and further into the memoing for a theory. I cannot say it often enough: it is vital for the novice to find supervisors who enhance the openness of coding. That is, find a supervisor with open enhancer strategies.

Some schools through their departments and then committees require lock step planning for the dissertation. This kind of planning does not suit a GT. It blocks the experiential growth that comes with the flexibility of abstract coding. The implied plans are typical for QDA descriptive work and descriptive generalizations and not intended for GT abstraction which requires a variable action like everything is going on at once as the theory grows, at whatever pace. The pace is usually faster than a preconceived plan predicts which is often recited in heavily jargonized terms.

Here is an example of a plan written on Jan 2011 that goes on too long: “I am currently reading Theoretical Sensitivity and Doing GT as preparation. Thereafter, I hope to secure an on-line support as I prepare my proposal. My faculty is comfortable with my choice of GT, but I still have to

succeed with my proposal. I hope to have the proposal ready for June 2011 and ethical approval for access to the hospital also by June 2011. Then I will probably need a year of being a big ear with observation and interviewing before the main concern and its continual resolution should emerge. That would leave me with six to nine months to integrate the relevant literature into the emerging GT. Then, six months to do final writing up, editing and defense of the PhD. Then, hopefully I would write the book/paper either in 2013 or 2014. I hope to finish my PhD in about 24 to 30 months.”

Obviously this plan is based on inexperience with actually doing GT as she will soon learn. It is bare of the immediate disciplines that arise when doing coding, such as coded every night, constantly stop to memo, trusting to the emergent using the cc method, selective coding and theoretical sampling as to what is next, etc. Staying open to the four S's of GT is important. GT goes on simultaneously, sequentially, serendipitously and short range schedules. So much goes on all at once as it sequences, no preconceived plan fits.

The distinction between QDA and GT requires that the dominant QDA community gets the difference between conceptual and descriptive research and that coding to conceptualize based on the cc method procedure is the only way to really know GT. The QDA continued jargonizing of GT suppresses coding in favor of data worries, lofty talk and worrisome accuracy. As I said in my book “Jargonizing” (Sociology Press, 2009), the GT vocabulary is way ahead of the GT method and GT product. Jargonizing GT is usually without proper GT meaning. It does not require procedural talk. It just remodels GT to a QDA with no clear procedures, folksy idioms, rhetorical musings and lofty talk. To conceptualize is ignored by QDA writers in favor of description, so implied is why should they care about the careful procedural emergence of codes. All this blocks the need to get out of the data abstractly by starting the real work of GT: conceptually code. The novice will feel blocked until he finds an experienced GT guide. And as the volume of GT researchers increase with the jargonizing popularity so does the blocking of conceptualization increase. However this also

increases the many who run aground in the QDA confusion and then find and come to conceptual GT as true believers who have at last found their way.

One student writes: “I would like to come down and spend some time talking to Barney regarding my GT progress. I do not have any advisors who speak GT and the ones I do have continue to have suggestions that I leave GT and use QDA. I have a deadline for a pre-reading on 12/9 10 and I submitted a bit of conjecture to satisfy the college and it was a total waste of time.” So I met with her and afterwards she wrote: “Thanks so much for yesterday. I am so excited at the theory that is writing itself right before my very eyes.”

Here is more testimony examples to the exhilaration from coding: Another student wrote me, Linda Poiseroux, “Honestly, using GT is the best choice I ever made. It was amazing to see the data emerge and form into categories/properties allowing the main concern and core category to appear. What a thrill”, Phyllis Stern wrote me, “Well the theory does rise up off the page as the terms implies, but after painstaking coding, when you finally get it, it seems like a second coming” Another student wrote me “also I want to tell you that when you go back to data you see things you never anticipated.”

Bashing GT coding by QDA researchers can severely block coding. A student writes, “GT studies have been criticized for possessing some mystical quality where by a slight of hand produces a list of “themes” and we are invited to take them on trust that they somehow emerged from the data without being offered step by step explanation of how they have been built up.” It is difficult to ascertain the credibility of research if the product cannot be linked explicitly with the process... The way in which the process is actually executed remains largely elusive with inconsistent and therefore no way to ensure credible and trustworthy research.” This researcher has absolutely no conceptual ability or vision and does not study my books. He just jargonizes wanting QDA evidential proof. How codes are discovered is a simple a set of procedures in print since 1965. His bashing however naive and unwarranted and unscholarly

could easily block novice researcher who is in the fear zone.

Suddaby, in his paper “What is Wrong with GT” bashes GT too. He says, “A common characteristic of most efforts to use GT is a neurotic overemphasis on coding. That is the ridged application of GT techniques might produced passable results but such mechanical approach usually lacks the spark of creative insights upon which exemplary research is based.” This statement would block the coding joy of any novice GT researcher with its doubtful implications of coding. Again, he has a very “QDA view of conceptual research and a lack of knowing GT procedures. Suddaby complains, “The process of data analysis including techniques and category creation should be made apparent to the reader.” The cc method paper has been published everywhere and first in 1965, So much for his poor scholarship which leads to bashing GT.

There is excessive concern of ethic committees and IRB boards for the privacy of respondents when doing GT. There is no notion that their concern may apply to QDA description but not to GT abstraction, where time, place and people are left out. They do not know the description/conception difference. As a result they require consent forms and usually approved interview guides, and specific data collection populations, all of which block flexible data collection, flexible coding and theoretical sampling. IRB requirements can strangle the open, not preconceived nature of GT. GT cannot legitimately follow the theory quest as it emerges from coding and changes relevancy of topics, populations, locale, etc. Open conversations, so useful to emerging codes, as a byproduct of strict interview guides are forbidden by consent forms. They go on anyway, but their forbidden nature is blocking of full collection and use in order to keep them non-revealed.

Some professors of QDA research say that “doing good research demands some form of linkage between the philosophical, theoretical perspective and methodological consideration that together constitute a coherent approach to knowledge. This stops coding in its tracks. It is rhetorical with no meaning for GT. How to solve this is not the researcher’s

problem. Trying to link GT with a philosophical, theoretical perspective blocks it use to a particular data. It privileges one data type over another, like specializing in constructionism or symbolic interaction or systems theory. It does not address the notion that GT is a general methodology using any data. This lofty talk demands that the data used be with the theoretical perspective chosen All this detracts from the “all is data” and all data has patterns, general approach of GT.

Coding as soon as possible shortens this fear zone period by the experiencing the exhilaration and joy of the “drugless trip” ending in the “eureka, I’ve found it” feeling of discovery. The reader can see from this chapter that I could go on endlessly to show that there are countless blocks to coding conceptually coming from many quarters. They are, to cite a few: school PhD requirement structures, PhD formats, department structures and perspectives, inexperienced GT professors as supervisors or external critics, preconceptions from many sources, IRB requirements’, journal peer reviewers, QDA bashers of GT, novice fears, general and authoritative inexperience with GT, inability to conceptualize, multi-version view of GT, tape recording, computer management of concepts etc., etc. most which follow the standard QDA description model. There are more.

I can only hope that the researcher using GT will be aware and wary of these blocks, and more unmentioned here, by knowing many indicators of them, for himself and his GT’er friends, and overcoming them to take a chance on conceptual coding and the ensuing exhilaration of the drugless trip to the eureka moment of discovery.

In closing this chapter, here are my comments on several data worries quotes from social constructivists with no realization of GT abstraction. These quotes are a sure block to coding what is going on:

Quote: “With much of emphasis placed on coding procedures, theoretical saturation and theorization, little reflexive attention appears to have been placed on the construction of interview data and possible statements for a reflexive approach to GT to handle criticism of ways of using data collected via traditional GT methods.”

My comment: There is no traditional data collecting methods in GT. "All is data" and it is up to the researcher to figure out what data he/she has and code its patterns. What reflexive means here is not detailed! It is just lofty talk to engender data worries which in turn blocks coding for the abstract level. Use of data is the emphasis in the quote, whatever that means in constructionism, but it sure blocks GT coding by the cc method.

Quote: "Constructivist grounded theorists acknowledge that categories, concepts and theorization do not merely emerge from data but rather are defined by the researcher. The constructionists list several limitations of GT data: 1. GT researcher bases his data on his own conception of respondent. 2. He treats the respondent as a vessel of facts. 3. He ignores the inscription devices in the construction of the interview and 4. He treats the data collected as reports that are reality."

My comment: These are descriptive data worries of QDA researchers. "All is data" for the GT researcher. Whatever the data is it is coded by the cc method for patterns, which are not preconceived. If anything the constructionist says is relevant, it will emerge in the coding. The abstract level of GT leaves the constructionist concerns behind to wallow and wrestle on the descriptive level. What is real for the GT researcher is exactly what is going on in his "whatever" data and data mix.

Quote: "Constructionists acknowledge the mediating role of how categories and concepts are constructed by interviewer and respondents as coproducers of knowledge."

My comment: Thinking about this statement would block anyone from coding. It sows doubts about codes using the cc method for abstraction in favor of accurate description, if ever achieved without argument doubts. It puts more block on abstract coding by emphasizing coverage of descriptive data and worse yet, by emphasizing the particularism of each individual respondent, so impossible to generalize. If a bias exists in anyone interview, it is just another variable to be conceptualized. It is hard to jump into GT conceptual coding thinking about all this, which has a series of descriptive

concerns with no realization that GT coding follows a pure, variable conceptual track.

Quote: "From the outset of a study the lived experience of the participant is assumed to be accurate and then is mediated by the researchers' various technologies and inscription devices he employs. As the interview travels though these technologies less of the respondents experiences are captured. Yet, paradoxically the constructivist researcher provides the participants with more responsibility and more voice in categorizing themselves as much as possible."

My comment: All this is absolute NO for GT. The GT researcher just codes the data, over many respondents, for patterns of what is going on as "all is data". Very few respondents know their abstract latent patterns, and if one does seem to that is just more data to code. The goal of constructionism is descriptive coverage and coproduction of accurate knowledge. This not the goal of GT abstraction. In GT, respondents are not the passive vessel of objective knowledge as constructionists accuse GT of treating them. They are the data, whatever it may be, and the data is coded conceptually in abstraction of their lived experiences. Respondents' participation to a level of collaborative research is totally irrelevant for GT.

The constructionist block on conceptual coding, however unintentional, is clear. Their needs have no place in GT research. Nor do constructionist views on data collection make for an out dated classical GT that needs renewed legitimacy. Constructionism is just a different methodology trying to take over classical GT using the multi-version view of GT to accuse GT of failing descriptive objectivity. For GT their arguments are not relevant. The novice GT researcher would find it hard to code if he/she joins in this discussion, which can easily be ignored.

Forging¹ a Path for Abstinence from Heroin: A grounded theory of detoxification-seeking

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Abstract

Through a classic grounded theory approach, this study conceptualises that the main concern of heroin users who are seeking detoxification is giving up heroin use; 'getting clean.' Forging a path for abstinence explains how people respond to their concern of getting clean from heroin. Three sub-processes make up this response which are; resolution (resolving to stop); navigation (deciding how to stop), and initiation (stopping use). These sub-processes are carried out by heroin users within a context of subjective levels of four significant personal resources; dependence knowledge; treatment awareness; treatment access, and alliance. The nature of the resource context greatly determines whether a heroin user seeks detoxification, or not, is response to getting clean. The substantive theory demonstrates that valuable insights are gained from studying heroin users out of treatment experiences of trying to become drug-free.

Keywords: heroin, detoxification, self-detoxification, help-seeking, classic grounded theory

Introduction

In recent years, the overall number of people using heroin in Ireland has increased, and the geography of heroin use in Ireland has changed. Problem opiate use, mostly heroin, accounts for 63% of those entering drug treatment in Ireland. This compares with a European average of 47% (EMCDDA, 2009, Kelly et al., 2009). In addition, treatment statistics

¹ *forge verb*; to make or produce, especially with some difficulty

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continue to reflect frequent treatment 're entry' together with increased 'new treatment' cases (Carew et al., 2009). During the 1980s, heroin use was located primarily within the inner city of the country's capital, Dublin (Dean et al., 1983). Now, heroin use is regarded as prevalent and increasing in rural areas throughout the country (Lyons et al., 2008, NACD, 2008, Carew et al., 2009, Kelly et al., 2009). Widespread increase of detoxification services is necessary in order to meet the needs of heroin users (Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2007, Corrigan & O'Gorman, 2009, Doyle, 2010). This study aimed to develop a greater understanding of heroin users' experiences of detoxification-seeking by exploring what is the main concern of heroin users when they are seeking detoxification, and how do they respond?

Data Collection and Analysis

The study analysed data from; one to one interviews with heroin users and service providers; gatekeeper discussions, and field notes. The study interviewed twelve people who had experienced heroin dependence, and nine drug service provider representatives who engage directly with heroin users. A continuum of heroin careers and trajectories in terms of long term dependencies, and more 'novice' type users was represented. Service providers provided insight into the aspects of detoxification-seeking which they are part of on a day to day professional basis. Data collection involved one field researcher collecting and analysing data at the same time, from entry into the field, in order to further explore, validate and build emerging categories and theory. This process of constant comparison and theoretical sampling began with a number of discussions with a small group of local drug service providers (gatekeepers), followed by one to one interviews. As concerns of the participants were identified in the data, the indicators were coded. Through coding and memoing, constant comparison and further theoretical sampling, theoretical categories were developed and confirmed, or otherwise, on an on-going basis. Hypotheses were developed based on the relationship between categories, and to the core category. The researcher recruited heroin

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users and service provider representatives who could potentially provide information to confirm, or disconfirm the emerging hypotheses. The substantive theory encompasses the core category and hypotheses which were validated, and saturated.

Access to heroin users was facilitated both by service providers and snowball sampling. The field researcher also spent time within a local drug treatment service to recruit and interview heroin users. In conducting the interviews, the researcher went to locations arranged either directly with the participant by telephone, or previously by a gatekeeper, based on ensuring confidentiality and safety for both researcher and participant. When commencing the study, the researchers were conscious of ethical issues such as, '*what are the consequences of the study for the participants?*', '*and for the wider community?*', '*how can informed consent of participants be ensured?*.' Heroin users may be vulnerable due to the nature of addiction, and the potential for intoxication and experiencing withdrawal during the research process. The researchers were mindful of the potential impact which these contexts may have on informed consent, voluntariness and decision-making capacity of research participants. In addition, at all the time the confidentiality of participant's personal information was paramount (Kleber, 1989, Sugarman, 1994, Anderson & Dubois, 2000). The study originally received ethical approval at Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) in July 2007, and data collection and analysis was conducted on an ongoing basis throughout April 2008 to April 2009. Subsequently the substantive theory was written up as a Master's thesis over a lengthy period of time, being finalised in 2010.

Getting Clean

The main concern of heroin users who are seeking detoxification is giving up heroin use. For heroin dependent people life involves the on-going experience of extreme mental, emotional, social and physical difficulties inherent in living with heroin dependence. Such difficulties include, not definitively, one or more of the following; social exclusion; being labelled ("*junkie*", "*scumbag*"); the heavy financial

burden of the cost of heroin; a negative effect on, or loss of, family and personal relationships; inability to get or keep a job; lack of life opportunities; involvement in crime and/or the judicial system; risk of overdose; physical ill health; loss of control; paranoia and fear. Living with the on-going impact of heroin dependence prompts heroin users to want to get clean. Getting clean is an ongoing concern for heroin users throughout active drug use and involves cycles of abstinence and relapse over time. Heroin users respond to the concern of getting clean by forging a path for abstinence. This is; resolving to stop using heroin, deciding how to stop and stopping (for any length of time). Due to relapse, it is a process which is often repeated, and sometimes different than before.

Forging a Path for Abstinence

The path which heroin users shape towards abstinence is defined by the resources available to them. Forging a path for abstinence can involve both weaving away from, and towards, the formal drug treatment sector. It is within this process that detoxification is sometimes, but not always, sought.

I started taking heroin after parties to come down and after 5 or 6 years it got to be a regular thing. I'd been taking it like on a daily basis since then. I've tried to stop with varying degrees of success. I'd be off it for a couple of weeks. I think the longest was 5 or 6 months. Once I was in a treatment centre for 3 months. I got a couple of charges so I decided I really had to get better. It was run so badly, and it didn't have any funding. Because the choice is so limited I would have gone to where ever I was told to go. It got me off the streets and it got some clarity back into my life. Treatment wise it didn't do me much good but it gave me clean time. The motivation was the threat of prison that was keeping me clean, I was clean for a while. Then I relapsed and was using for two years. Two steps forward and two steps back. I don't think it's easy to access any of the services, I don't know if

that's a policy they have for addicts. It's madness, there's no treatment centre in Ireland that does a detox and treatment. You have to be clean first....I couldn't get clean, which I thought was a complete kind of a trap. They want you to be clean, but that's why I wanted to go to them, to get clean. I started on the methadone, and I was using methadone and heroin for maybe two weeks, so since then I've been clean from 'street' drugs. And I don't want to be on methadone maintenance, I want to be on a methadone detox.

Resolution

Resolution is the first step in the process of forging a path for abstinence from heroin. This happens when an individual reaches a point during active drug use where they make up their mind up to stop using heroin. What influences resolution to stop using the drug varies from person to person. Resolution to stop using heroin is often grounded in a person's prioritisation of their life goals over heroin use, such as; starting a family; being able to care and provide for children; or gaining or maintaining employment. Equally, a crisis or risk situation can be a significant prompt for resolution to stop using heroin. Having children taken into state care, progression to intravenous heroin use from inhalation, being charged with a criminal offence relating to personal drug use, hospitalisation for ill-health (mental or physical), and experiencing overdose are crisis/risk situations which influence an individual heroin user to resolve to stop using heroin. Short term abstinence goals, such as having breathing space to recuperate physical and mental health can also underpin resolution to stop using heroin.

Everyday it's (heroin) on my mind. I'm either doing it, or I'm thinking about where I'm going to get the money to do it. It just takes hold, it controls. You don't walk with your head up, you're always looking down. People look at you differently, they know you're on drugs, they stand back from you as if you're going to rob them. It wasn't that I wanted to take it every day, I had

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to or else I wasn't able to look after the children, with stomach cramps, a really awful state. Just to be able to go to sleep at night and not have to worry what am I gonna do for tomorrow, who am I gonna borrow off. I'm not part of my family, because of the drugs. I've really had enough, for a long time now. You reach a certain point and you've just had it. I've hit the point where I've had enough, I'm on it a good few years now and I've just reached the point where I want to be normal. I want it now. I'll make it come to me.

Navigation

When a person resolves to stop using heroin, the next step in the process of forging a path for abstinence is navigation. Navigation is the process of deciding *how* they will do so. This may be solitary or collaborative in approach, and may involve help-seeking or not. Solitary navigation refers to when a person decides how they will stop using heroin without referring to either formal, or informal support structures in their environment. It is essentially decision-making on how to stop using heroin, without help-seeking from peers, family or services. This occurs during any and all stages of heroin use, from very early to latter stages. Collaborative navigation happens when a person who is forging a path for abstinence from heroin engages with informal and/or formal support structures available to them. This involves working together with another to decide how they will stop using heroin. Information-seeking and treatment-seeking are frequently carried out by heroin users together with informal and/or formal supports. Heroin users engage in information-seeking from other drug users in order to better understand and cope with the process of withdrawal from heroin, and to acquire information and advice on drug treatment services and options. The process of seeking information from other active heroin users, and individuals who are abstinent from heroin use, is frequent among heroin users who are deciding how they will stop using heroin, due to the ease of access of information from peers, and the willingness of users to share information with each other. Long-term heroin users often have numerous personal

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experiences of completing withdrawal and/or participating in drug treatment (eg. in-patient, methadone maintenance, drug counselling, medical and social models). Heroin users also engage with family members during navigation. Family members are often involved in an advocacy role supporting the heroin dependent person, sourcing information on dependence/withdrawal, information on treatment options and seeking access to drug treatment. During navigation heroin users also seek information from formal support structures, mainly community based, such as GP's and drugs counsellors. Information-seeking from general practitioners is focused on finding out how to complete withdrawal from heroin and gain information on available treatment options. Information-seeking from a GP is generally the *first* formal help-seeking step in deciding how to stop using heroin.

I think I was only on heroin a few months or a year, I went in and I told him that I was a heroin addict and that I wanted help. This was my first time ever asking for help and he wrote out a prescription for tablets and then that was it. At the time I thought that was the only option. I didn't know anything really so then when he said you can do a detox (self) with tablets I thought that was my only option. He didn't say about methadone or anything, so I just took that option. So I just went to the chemist then. I got the prescription and had to figure out how do I do this, or what do I take because I never went through it before. Then my mother in law rang (Centre C) to see could if I get in there, but you have to be detoxed before you go in there, so they gave (drugs counsellor's) number. We rang him and we had to tell him everything and we got an appointment. So then we found out about the methadone clinic. It's (ceasing heroin use) not going to be anytime soon anyhow. First we (user and counsellor) have to try find out if doing methadone is going to be the way for me, it may be for some people and it wouldn't be for others, or else do a detox with my doctor. So we don't know which one to do yet, which one will suit me better.

Initiation

Initiation is the latter step in the process of forging a path for abstinence from heroin, which results in abstinence, and/or relapse. Initiation describes the process by which a person who is heroin dependent stops heroin use. A person ceases heroin use, and as such inevitably begins withdrawal from heroin, by self-management or by participating in drug treatment. Self-management of withdrawal from heroin happens within all stages of heroin use, and is unsafe. Self-management of withdrawal from heroin is when a person manages their withdrawal symptoms themselves, without medical supervision, by 'cold turkey' or with the use of other drugs (including alcohol, illegal methadone, prescription drugs). Frequently, heroin users self-manage their withdrawal using prescription medication from a GP which has been prescribed to ease withdrawal symptoms during self-detoxification. Family members also provide remedial support to the heroin dependent user who is going through withdrawal within the family home, such as being someone to talk to, providing medication and/or food. Withdrawal is a very difficult process to endure. Self-managing withdrawal often results in relapse to heroin use during, or immediately after, withdrawal. As such, self-detoxification attempts often contribute to a more informed experience of resolution and navigation based on an improved understanding of withdrawal, tolerance and relapse. Ceasing use of heroin and managing withdrawal within formal drug treatment consists of accessing one of the following; methadone maintenance, in-patient detoxification or residential rehabilitation which includes a detoxification phase.

I don't agree with methadone, it's another heroin to me. I was on the methadone and I gave it up. I could have done detox on valium and sleepers but that's not right either, you're getting strung out on other things then, and valium is harder to come off than heroin. I just think that cold turkey is the best thing, it wakes you up to what you're doing to yourself. It just hit me, it hit me 6.30 of a Sunday morning, I just didn't know what hit me in the bed, I started screaming and my father ran in. He hadn't a clue and I just told him I

was going through withdrawals. He just started giving me sleeping tablets. It was rough. It's very dangerous, a lot of people still do it, I know a lot of people doing it. And I still went back at it (using heroin).

The Resource Context of Forging a Path for Abstinence

The sub-processes of forging a path for abstinence happen over a lengthy period of time or otherwise, depending on the goals of the heroin dependent person. Resolution, navigating and initiating are influenced by the availability, or lack, of four significant personal resources to the individual heroin user. These resources are; dependence knowledge; treatment awareness; treatment access; and alliance. For heroin users, these supports exist on a spectrum of 'poor' to 'rich'. Outlined below is a concise description of each of these supports.

Dependence Knowledge

Dependence knowledge is subjective knowledge of the specific aspects of drug dependence including; tolerance; withdrawal, and the risk of relapse. Heroin users have varying subjective levels of dependence knowledge when they are responding to their concern of getting clean. Very early (in heroin using career) experiences of being concerned with getting clean are characterised by poor dependence knowledge and the harsh subjective realisation of the challenge of being 'strung out' on heroin. Being dependence knowledge rich entails the heroin user having a strong insight into drug dependence. Heroin users become rich in dependence knowledge over time, largely from extended personal experience of using heroin, withdrawal and relapse.

Dependence Knowledge – 'Poor'

When I first had the sickness (withdrawal symptoms) I thought it was the flu, I didn't understand what was wrong with me. I didn't know I was sick from I wanted more heroin. I didn't even know that you could get them (withdrawal symptoms), because I was only on it

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a short time, I didn't even know anything about it or I didn't even know there was a sickness, at the start.

Treatment Awareness

Rich treatment awareness entails the heroin user knowing the treatment options available, and having an effective understanding of the differences within the treatment options available, such as; entry criteria, target groups and models (medical/social). Similar to dependence knowledge, poor treatment awareness is common within early experiences of forging a path for abstinence, and is strengthened by information-seeking, treatment-seeking and participating in drug treatment.

Treatment Awareness – 'Rich'

I was in detox centres, one was Centre A (in-patient), and the other one (Centre B) was a house out in the middle of nowhere that was just pure cold turkey-that place was tough; it was a lot of religious. A lot of these places are religious so they're into praying, music and things like that. Centre A was they bring you in and put you on your methadone and detox you off it. But they don't give you nothing to help you sleep, which would be a good thing. You lose a lot of sleep for the first few weeks. Centre A was 2 weeks detox and 5 months doing aftercare but then there was aftercare after that as well. And Centre B was from a day to whatever length of time you want.

Treatment Access

Access to treatment is affected both by treatment availability, the relationship of suitability to treatment entry and programme criteria, and perception of treatment services. Localities with compromised drug treatment services for heroin users directly negate poor treatment access. In addition certain target groups such as women, and parents experience poor treatment access. Residential treatment programmes are frequently inaccessible for heroin users who are not in a position to avail of residential treatment due to; commitment to subjective employment; potential job loss for

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extended leave; lack of care for dependent children or a lack of money for the cost (in the case of non-subsidised residential treatment provision). For heroin users who are still using the drug (or other drugs) while trying to decide how to stop using, treatment access is low where treatment programmes require abstinence upon entry. Treatment access is also impeded when navigation is based on previous negative experience of treatment services, such as; experiencing judgmental attitudes; dissatisfaction with level of involvement in treatment plan; and conflict with service provider based on issues such as non-compliance with treatment criteria.

Treatment Access – 'Poor' Availability

It's (seeking -detoxification) a nightmare, it's a major ordeal and I think it's absolutely disgraceful.....there's nowhere to go, there's a waiting list, and while you're waiting in the meantime you still have to keep taking the drugs or do it (withdrawal) yourself, it's a no win situation, it's very frustrating, it's annoying and it makes you very angry.

Treatment Access – 'Poor' Perception

I know I can get it (methadone) in (Centre D) but ye have to go down there and you have to wait 6 months then to get on it and people only stay on it a month or two. I'd sooner stay on the heroin or whatever. People go down there and they give a dirty urine or whatever, fair enough they f****d up, so what, they punish them by taking them off their methadone for a month or six weeks. What if someone missed their prescription for cancer medication or something. Is that a good way to punish them to say I'm not giving you your medication for a month to 6 weeks now. An illness is an illness like. That's what kept me going on it (heroin) for so long like, and far as I knew that was the only place that you could get it if you were from (Town B) like.

Alliance

The alliance context refers to the presence or lack of relationships which heroin users can refer to for support. Relationships which are referred to by heroin users during resolution, navigation and initiation include both informal and formal relationships including peer relationships (other drug users), family, and therapeutic alliances. The adverse effects of heroin use can negatively affect an individual heroin user's well-being (physical, social, spiritual, emotional and/or mental) to such an extent that a significant level of basic supports, other than drug treatment, are required in order to plan how they will stop using heroin, and in order to stop. A heroin dependent person may or may not be forging a path for abstinence within a context of their psycho-social and medical needs (other than their addiction) being supported through a positive alliance, or not. Holistic supports including medical/psychiatric, counselling/ listening, advocacy, accommodation, childcare and resources necessary to contact treatment services (phone, money, transport) are aspects which are often catered for by formal or informal relationships present. In a context of being alliance poor, a person who is trying to stop using heroin will begin to build alliance/s for abstinence, when opportunities arise. This practice involves building new relationships, and/or strengthening existing relationships (informal and/or formal). In contexts of low treatment access, advocacy for heroin users to access treatment, and/or the support of simply having someone to talk to, motivates users to remain focused on their abstinence goals. Such support also results in positive feelings of being helped and being cared for, despite low treatment access. The presence of a therapeutic alliance with a community-based, accessible professional (eg. drugs counsellor, or a general practitioner), or indeed with a peer or family member, is a significant support for an individual who is trying to get clean from heroin, as challenges and barriers in navigation can be overcome collaboratively.

Alliance – 'Rich'

My mother wanted me to go and see a drugs counsellor so I went and I was seeing one of them,

supposedly just about the cannabis, but I ended up telling her then everything (heroin use), so that was kind of the start of it then.

My doctor now cares, there's no talking down to ye. She doesn't tell you, I tell her what I want (methadone dosage), what I feel comfortable with like, and that's the way it should be, no one knows how I feel better than me. I know what I need, I know they're the doctors but they only know what you're telling them, they're not there to criticise you. I'm lucky because my mother would know alot about it because she's gone and made it her business to find out alot about it, so I can talk to her about pretty much anything.

Risk Resource Contexts

The difficult physical, psychological and emotional nature of withdrawal, along with the risk of overdose due to lowered tolerance levels after detoxification, negate that a supported model of detoxification is the most appropriate for the safety of the person who is ceasing heroin use. However, deciding how they will stop using heroin (navigation) is directly influenced by the level of resources available to a person who is forging a path for abstinence from heroin. As the four resource contexts are increasingly 'rich', the enablement of seeking detoxification increases. In order to maximise the possibility of choosing to seek detoxification, the context of navigation requires such a highly positive resource context. Risk resource contexts are likely to influence an individual to choose to self-manage their withdrawal from heroin unsafely. There are several recognisable risk resource contexts. Firstly, a risk resource context is one in which the person who is deciding how they will stop using heroin has one or more 'poor' resource contexts, e.g. poor treatment access; poor dependence knowledge; poor treatment awareness; and poor alliance. Significantly self-management of withdrawal is also highly likely when navigation occurs within a context of poor treatment access and rich treatment awareness. This means that when a person is aware that there is a lack of detoxification services available and/or accessible to them,

and they are concerned with getting clean from heroin, they are highly likely to initiate cessation of heroin use by self-management of withdrawal. Self-management of withdrawal is also frequent when navigation is carried out within a context of rich alliance based on family support.

There's not that many centres that actually you can come off heroin in. You have to do your detox before ye get in. What's the point in that, being clean before ye get in. The whole point of it is you could go in there cos it's too hard to do your detox outside where you're dying sick and it's only a phone call away.

She just can't get anywhere, and she keeps going to the doctor and the doctor is telling her she will just have to do it cold turkey, and she can't do it, she just can't do it with a child there, it's impossible.

They (parents) would have rang a doctor and asked what could be expected (during withdrawal), and my mother really got into it. I had to bring my mother over with me (to the general practitioner's surgery) and she had to explain that it (prescription medication) wasn't just to get stoned, that they were for a reason (self-detoxification).

Help-Seeking during Early Stages of Heroin Use

Research shows that help-seeking is more common during stages of drug-use which are a significant length from onset of dependence, and in which a greater number of problems relating to drug use are being experienced by the user (McElrath, 2001, Neale, 2002, Appel et al, 2004, Dennis et al, 2005, Hopkins & Clark, 2005). Equally, this study conceptualises that during stages of heroin use which are not a significant length from onset of dependence, people do seek help. During early stages of heroin use in particular users seek help for the management of withdrawal from heroin, albeit from supports outside of formal drug treatment, namely local general practitioners, family and other heroin users (Hartnoll, 1992, McElrath, 2001, Appel et al., 2004, Hopkins & Clark, 2005, Grella et al., 2009). Such help-seeking

behaviour offers an early opportunity to create a positive experience of help-seeking for individuals who are likely to relapse if indeed abstinence is achieved (Hartnoll, 1992, McElrath, 2001, Hopkins & Clark, 2005). Help-seeking at this stage is located primarily within the community, indicating that for many heroin users a community-based treatment intervention is the preferred option during early help-seeking for abstinence. In addition, positive experiences of help-seeking such as information-seeking and treatment seeking during early stages of heroin use are paramount in strengthening subjective treatment awareness, dependence knowledge, and alliance, which in turn enable further help-seeking including detoxification-seeking.

Enabling Heroin Detoxification-Seeking

It remains that self-managing withdrawal outside of a formal treatment support system is unsafe. This study shows that there are several factors which can influence heroin users to seek detoxification, and thus reduce potential harm from self-detoxification. It is evident from epidemiological research that some heroin users can become abstinent without accessing formal treatment (Ward et al, 1999, Bobrova et al, 2006, Ison et al, 2006, Bobrova et al, 2007). Significant adverse life events prompting concern and need for help, feeling the negative effects of drug dependence and having supportive relationships are key factors which influence drug users to seek help (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, McElrath, K, 2001a, Power et al, 1992). The theory of forging a path for abstinence underpins that when a person is deciding how they will stop using heroin, that detoxification-seeking is facilitated or impeded by the resource context of their decision-making. Detoxification-seeking within formal drug treatment settings is facilitated by rich treatment access and/or rich alliance. This theoretical perspective has significant implication for service development. Low-threshold services such as drop-in centres through which therapeutic alliances between services and heroin users, and therapeutic alliances among heroin users (active and abstinent) can be forged prior to specific help-seeking for abstinence emerge as viable service development. It has been suggested that internal barriers to seeking treatment can be reduced by

engaging constructively with drug users who are going through critical emotional/ psychological changes, harnessing the momentum from pivotal life events, and involving supportive relationships (Hartnoll, 1992, Hopkins & Clark, 2005, Bobrova et al, 2007, Neale et al 2007b). In addition, strengthening treatment access to detoxification on a widespread basis requires the development of services which meet the suitability of the subjective needs of heroin dependent users, including providing for access to community-based detoxification services for those people who are not in a position to access residential services.

Normalisation of Self-Detoxification, and Risk

This study suggests that heroin users are particularly vulnerable to managing their withdrawal from heroin unsafely, outside of the treatment system, through attempting self-detoxification when they wanted to harness the *pivotal* motivation that compels them to cease heroin consumption. Individuals who are responding to the concern of getting clean from heroin frequently choose to self-manage their withdrawal outside of formal treatment, which is an unsafe experience for them. Research suggests that self-detoxification attempts by opiate users are frequent (Noble et al 2002, Dennis et al 2005, Hopkins & Clark, 2005, Ison et al, 2006). Within a context of poor treatment access to detoxification, the normalisation of self-detoxification is a risk, not only among heroin users themselves but among others in their environment; family members, drug service providers, and health professionals. Applying elements of the framework of normalisation as developed in the UK in the 1990s as a way of understanding the increase of illicit drug use, this study suggests that the normalisation of self-detoxification can be located when the following are characteristics of self-detoxification within a geographical area (Parker et al, 1998, Measham et al, 2001, Measham & Shiner, 2009); self-detoxification within the area is socially accepted, prevalent, accommodated, facilitated and mediated by sub-terranean heroin user normative group dynamics; when there is a high level of attitudes among heroin users of the merits of self-detoxification in becoming abstinent from heroin use; high availability of and access to prescribed medication and street methadone, and genuine

disillusionment with current services In such contexts self-detoxification becomes in itself, a normalised path to abstinence from heroin. Studies suggest that pathways to abstinence from heroin, other than specialist treatment, are achievable, due to findings of heroin-free status, and harm reduction behaviours among people who do not access specialist drug treatment for heroin use (Strang et al, 1998, Appel et al, 2004, Hopkins & Clark, 2005). Research also suggests that even if clear access pathways are available, not all heroin dependent users would enter treatment if offered (Zule & Desmond 2000, Noble et al, 2002, Booth et al, 2003). This study echoes the findings of other research studies which show that individualised perceptions regarding potential heroin treatment are paramount as these perceptions facilitate and inhibit treatment entry (Nelson-Zlupko et al, 1996, Shen et al, 2002, Bobrova et al 2006, Bobrova et al, 2007). There is a significant risk inherent in a compromised drug treatment system, as subjective awareness of the compromised drug treatment is raised, consistent treatment-seeking within the system is impeded as awareness gained is applied to navigation towards alternative paths for abstinence, such as self-management of withdrawal. Heroin users gain insight and learning from subjective experiences of abstinence and relapse. Individuals who achieve abstinence (for any length of time) gain knowledge of characteristics of dependence (tolerance, withdrawal, relapse), and an increased awareness of their own treatment needs, and treatment options available. Subsequent efforts to become abstinent from heroin involved applying increased knowledge and awareness to their life situation. This learning is integral within the process of forging a path for abstinence.

Conclusion

The ideology of recovery being not only abstinence but growth, reclaiming self and self-change is evident within the theory of forging a path from abstinence (Laudet, 2007). The concept of the stages of resolution, navigation and initiation recognise that at a basic level simply resolving to stop using heroin use is a process of learning and self-change. In addition cycles of abstinence and relapse offer an opportunity to learn, and carry learning through to further episodes of

deciding how to stop, and stopping. In this context and considering frequency of relapse to heroin use, development of services which provide strategies for long-term management of heroin use, harm reduction, and personal development appear viable and necessary. Low-threshold services based on developing positive relationships among heroin users, and between volunteers/workers and heroin users would improve the alliance context for heroin users, which would provide a solid base for accessing information and support when they are forging a path for abstinence, or otherwise. Seeking-detoxification, and indeed other treatment, would be less difficult with easier access to accurate information on services available, and consequently less of a '*struggle*' to find out the options. Heroin users can remain outside on the drug treatment system on their pathway to abstinence (Gossop et al, 1991, Ward & Mattick, 1999, Guggenbuhl et al, 2000, Bobrova et al, 2006, Bobrova et al, 2007, Peterson et al, 2010). Not all heroin users seek detoxification. Completing self-detoxification is widely accepted as being unsafe, with regard to medical consequences, and the impact on emotional and social health of the individual. As such, there is a clear and viable opportunity for community-based peer education and/or harm reduction programmes for disseminating information on risks and processes of heroin use, self-detoxification and increased information on alternative treatment options. Managed withdrawal is a beneficial treatment process for heroin users, in terms of both harm reduction and abstinence (Gossop et al, 2003, Cox et al, 2007). A primary enabling factor for seeking-detoxification is a collaborative relationship with other drug users and/or family members and/or medical practitioners which are supportive during pivotal motivation to get clean based on negative life experiences and personal crisis situations. The development of, and further support for existing, low threshold services, family support, community based detoxification services, with service user involvement emerge as the way forward to meet the psycho-social and health needs of heroin users who are concerned with getting clean, and as such forging a path for abstinence.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that although it managed to reach a number of heroin users who had never accessed formal treatment, it did not include drug users who are currently homeless, in prison or members of specific target groups such as members of the Traveller community, and people with disabilities.

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Reading with Methodological Perspective Bias: A journey into Classic Grounded Theory

Rick Deady

Introduction

The following is a naïve narrative of my journey into classic grounded theory (CGT) and the consideration of the possible existence of methodological perspective bias when reviewing literature. Whilst research bias has been viewed from a number of differing perspectives, such as sample bias, interviewer bias, publication bias etc (Sica, 2006), there appears a dearth of discussion within the literature on methodological perspective bias, as well as, a reluctance to publicly acknowledge the existence of such bias. For the purpose of this paper the concept of bias is defined as “a source of systematic error ... deriving from a conscious or unconscious tendency on the part of a researcher to produce data, and/or to interpret them, in a way that leans towards erroneous conclusions which are in line with his or her commitments” (Hammersley and Gomm, 1997, p.1).

Some time ago I was given a PhD thesis to read, my colleague thought I might be able to offer some useful insights since it was relevant to a study I was engaged in. The methodology used by the PhD candidate was Classic Grounded Theory (CGT), with which I had passing familiarity following the usual methodological investigations and decisions required of an MSc student. Like many MSc students I needed to qualify my research method in terms of its fit with the proposed study under investigation. I was, however, more familiar with positivistic methodologies. Although convention states that the research method should fit the study question, in order to develop my research skills I was keen to experience the use of a qualitative methodology, consequently I targeted the study towards an investigation of psychiatric nurses’ lived experiences (Deady, 2005), a subject

area that lent itself to a qualitative methodology. I began to study seminal texts on qualitative research that were available to me at the time (e.g. Banister et al, 1994, Cresswell, 1994, 1998, Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, Moustaka, 1994 Silverman, 2000, Slevin, and Sines, 1999/2000, Strauss, and Corbin, 1990) and became more familiar with different methodologies such as phenomenology, ethnography and grounded theory². I concluded that phenomenology was the methodology suited to the study. The methodology had easily identifiable qualitative data analysis (QDA) stages, whereas the general method of Grounded Theory, purporting to handle both qualitative and quantitative data, was to me at the time, more difficult to comprehend. Some of this difficulty related to the unique terminology used, such as emergent fit, substantive coding, theoretical coding and memoing, which appeared different to other methodologies, apparently not an uncommon experience for researchers considering CGT (Roderick, 2009). As a result, given the time constraint of my MSc it was more constructive for me to use what I viewed as a more conventional qualitative research methodology and chose phenomenology. I became familiar with phenomenological methodology; in particular, the discussions on bias, the concept of 'bracketing', and epistemological arguments as to whether it was ever fully achievable. There is an abundance of advice about avoiding bias throughout the QDA research process (Silverman, 2000, Moustakas, 1994) and as a novice researcher I accepted them.

Current Perspectives on Bias in Qualitative Research

The arguments on bias in contemporary qualitative literature have, however, largely centred on bias during the research process, that is, during subject selection, data collection, analysis and publication (Mehra, 2002, Petegrew et al, 2008, Silverman, 2001). In addition, some authors (e.g. Denzin, 1989) comment on the issue of bias that the researcher brings to a study when choosing a research topic. For Mehra (2002) this bias can influence a study from start to finish, hence, the dictum that qualitative researchers need to

² At this time I initially made the error of seeing Grounded Theory as a purely qualitative methodology as it appeared in qualitative literature as such.

be self-aware of their personal bias throughout the research process through reflexivity. There is, however, little or no discussion about possible methodological perspective bias when conducting a literature search or review. Whether it is achievable or desirable to attain a state of complete non-bias is at best questionable and remains an ongoing debate in the qualitative literature (Silverman, 2000, Mehra, 2002). There has, however, been considerable debate within CGT circles on the notion of "staying open" when using and reviewing literature (Glaser, 2005, McCallum, 2006, Andrews, 2006, Nathaniel, 2006, Thulesius, 2006, Ekstöm, 2006). For Glaser (2005) the goal in conducting CGT is to help the researcher stay open to the non-forced, non-preconceived discovery. With these discussions in mind this paper will explore whether the dominant methodological perspective of the researcher and/or the reader of literature reviews influences the construction of the literature review.

The Awareness of Staying Open

My re-reading of the aforementioned doctoral thesis following an increased familiarity with CGT prompted this question. On the initial reading I felt that it was a poor piece of work for what was supposed to be a doctorate. It seemed "woolly," and I found myself wondering where the concepts being discussed had originated and how they were validated. In essence I think I was unconsciously looking for the QDA markers, such as 'report rich narratives' (Speziale and Carpenter, 2007, p.20), familiar in phenomenological research as exemplified by the work of Colaizzi (1978 in Smith, 1996) and Giorgi (1985). However, following workshops on CGT I became intrigued with this methodology. In particular, the realisation that CGT was not a methodology guided by one theoretical perspective (Glaser, 2005). The notion "all as data" (Glaser, 1998) was particularly intriguing, as I had felt that other methodologies tended to have gate-keeping rules to prevent use of casual or serendipitous observations. In this regard, Glaser appears to suggest that CGT is not a method that can be conducted to a prescribed order as by its nature it embraces what Gibson (2005, p.43) termed epistemological anarchy. The notion of finding something in the data, wondering where more data could be found, following its

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threads through theoretical sampling and attempting to capture the underlining pattern in the data requires the researcher to remain open to the non-forced, non-preconceived discovery of emergent theoretical codes (Glaser, 2005). In this way data had to earn its relevance in the study.

With this in mind I re-read the thesis, and on this second reading I found it insightful, it made sense and it had grab. I realised that I had previously read it with the methodological bias of a phenomenological perspective and this meant I had misinterpreted some commentary as subjective and wondered at the absence of other data. In short, I had misunderstood the methodology being used and so had missed the point of the argument being presented. This observation suggested to me that familiarity with CGT was a necessary prerequisite in order to understand the theoretical significance of findings being presented. Consequently, I began to speculate whether the methodological perspective of the reader could either blind one to the theoretical framework being presented or lead one to misinterpret the literature due to methodological bias. For example, I realised that CGT did not require “face sheet variables” such as gender, age, ethnicity etc; if these issues were relevant they would emerge from the data analysis as part of the constant comparison process (Glaser, 1998). Whilst these variables have to earn their relevance within the data of CGT, within QDA methodologies the exclusion of these variables within sample selection is viewed as anomalous. As a consequence, I suggest that this ‘earned’ relevance of data in CGT may be lost in the reading of CGT literature by the novice or methodologically biased reviewer. The question this observation raised in me at the time was whether it is the responsibility of the reviewer to be ‘competent’ in reviewing CGT literature or whether it is incumbent on the CGT researcher to explain the method as a prerequisite for understanding the findings/theory.

One might argue that my inexperience in research and research methodology was responsible for this misperception of the doctoral study. However, I think the issue was more significant than this and that the bias arose from reading a CGT study from a purely phenomenological perspective. Obviously, phenomenology and CGT arise from different

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traditions; the former a philosophical tradition and the later from sociological tradition. Glaser (2005) has argued that the training of some disciplines e.g. nursing, favour descriptive rather than conceptual approaches, which may account for the popularity of phenomenological approaches in this discipline. Nevertheless, nursing researchers have been accused of “method slurring” (Baker et al, 1992). I suggest that this slurring occurs because both methods are generally poorly understood and that novice researchers may choose to ignore differences between them when reviewing literature in order to avoid an internal debate of theoretical frameworks in favour a global understanding of what is essentially being reported in order to find a research gap. For example, although both methods encourage no literature reviews before investigations, they treat the phenomenon of bias in different ways. Whilst some phenomenological perspectives (Heiddeger, 1962) encourage the researcher to suspend preconceptions, CGT encourages the researcher to use these experiences to become more theoretically sensitive. In a simplistic way phenomenology appears to view the researcher’s bias as a potential unwanted by product to be ‘bracketed’ and as such remain unquestioned. CGT, on the other hand, sees researcher bias as a potential source of data that needs to be managed productively. For example, whilst phenomenological methodology encourages a theoretically descriptive account of what may be happening that is largely epistemological in nature, and so not grounded in the data, CGT requires an emergent fit that explains its relevance, or not, in the process presented. As a result, in dealing with the issue of bias Glaser (1998, p.143) comments “that bias is just one more variable and it is automatically controlled for amongst honest researchers.” The researcher realises that no matter how he may initially be distorting the data, as incidents are compared and the category patterns out then the distortions will be revealed.”

Consequently, a greater understanding of CGT allowed me to recognise that my original phenomenological perspective had biased the initial reading of the doctoral thesis as a subjective discussion. The researcher in question often articulated her thoughts and feelings on what she was

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discovering and how this had informed her actions and theoretical development within the study. The memos she had generated, and presented in her dissertation, which I initially viewed as subjective/interpretive commentary, were in fact the articulated management of the emergent theory where concepts were being related to concepts. I had not understood the significance of the memoing process in articulating conceptual emergence and those were the core of the write up.

Memoing and Staying Open

Reading novice accounts of doing CGT are abound with comments of 'how do you memo', and the advice often given is that there is no one way (Glaser, 1998), accordingly there is an absence of exemplars in CGT. I now understand that his lack of an imposed framework allows the investigator to remain open to his/her own method of conceptual emergence. As a result, a lack of experience and understanding of the process and function of memoing used in CGT had biased my understanding of what the CGT researcher was presenting. For example, whilst QDA methodology encourages the recording of the decision making processes, the memoing process of CGT is distinctly different to that of reflexivity, keeping of a diary or as an aid memoir. Memos, Glaser and Holton (2004) argue help the analyst take data to a conceptual level, whereas, QDA methods lead to "flat, descriptive and often superficial presentations" Glaser (2005, p.3). As Glaser (1998) states "memos are the theorizing write-up of ideas about substantive codes and their theoretically coded relationships as they emerge during coding, collecting and analysing data and during memoing." As a result, the constant comparison process together with memos continues throughout and informs the whole research process and is an effective way of dealing with preconception and staying open. Although Martin (2006) has suggested a four phased process in relation between an emerging grounded theory and the existing literature in staying open, it is this process in particular, I believe, that is little understood by those outside CGT. Martin's phased approach articulates well the emergent thinking of the grounded theorist when engaged with the literature in an open and critical manner. Whereas in QDA

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methodology all apparently relevant themes are accepted without the necessary rigour of their relevance to the phenomenon under investigation and so do not have to "pattern out" (Glaser, 2005, p.13).

Furthermore, the literature review in QDA methodology is also accepted as evidence for support of the findings rather than being applied with rigour to their relevance to the findings, that is, only elements that support or do not support the findings are identified. Consequently, although there is a debate as to the validity of reviewing literature prior to CGT studies (e.g. McCallum, 2006a, Martin, 2006a), the location of the literature review in CGT after the identification of the core category has, I believe, a number of advantages, first it becomes a source of data to be further analysed for theoretical completeness. In this way the literature review does not transport potentially bias views or frameworks from previous studies into the current study before discovery has occurred. In this regard, Glaser (1998, p.71) argues that using literature as more data to be tested insulates against the negative aspects of bias that are inherent in what he terms "theoretical capitalism," where authoritative works/authors may have the effect of preconceiving the novice GT researcher through literature reviews before a study has begun or findings are influenced in light of what is already known instead of generating categories and their properties to be compared to what is emerging. Secondly, using literature as data, I believe, requires a fundamentally different process to traditional literature reviews, in that it is more focussed in its application rather than being a global review. As a result, it has the potential to identify subtle differences between the existent literature and the research findings and so generate original findings.

It is clear from the literature that there are challenges to understanding many aspects of CGT methodology, even for the 'expert. For example, Glaser's (2005) commentary on Ian Dey's critique of CGT, where he challenges Dey's naïve observation of Theoretical Code selection as an arbitrary act, Glaser suggests results from Dey's lack of experience in doing CGT. I believe that Glaser is suggesting that for a clear understanding of CGT it is necessary to understand the

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process involved and this understanding can only be achieved experientially, by actually doing CGT research. Whilst, Moore (2009, p.8) argues that “the epistemological assumptions related to grounded theory are not clearly explained, which appears to have led to misinterpretation and misuse of the method,” my experience is that both Glaser and Moore are correct. Whilst some theoretical aspects of CGT are currently difficult to comprehend from the CGT literature, and whilst one can read extensively about GT, it is in the doing that a greater depth of understanding of the method and its findings are achieved. Nevertheless, whilst efforts have been made more recently to make CGT methodology more transparent and accessible (Grounded Theory Review, 2005, 2006) to the novice, Johnston’s (2009, p. 20) study highlights the current difficulty in academia in getting CGT published due to journals and reviewers often being inhospitable or ignorant of the intricacies of papers written using CGT method, suggesting methodological perspective bias.

Reviewing with or without Methodological Perspective Bias

McCallin (2006, p.53) has argued that “while methodological issues are foundational to rigorous research, so to is the issue of thinking and how the researcher integrates methodology with the overall process,” Accordingly, it is argued here that if a literature review is to be undertaken before any qualitative research the potential for introducing bias has to be acknowledged and managed and that it is incumbent on the reviewer to highlight what this bias may be, methodological or otherwise. In this regard, McCallin (2006, p.56) further argues, that the timing of a literature review may be much less important than previously thought and that “Surely critical analysis of existing literature, regardless of timing, opens up the mind to the strengths and limitations in received writing, and for consideration in relation to the developing theory.” As a consequence, reviewing literature from a particular frame of reference or perspective begins to influence a study from the outset and may influence or prejudice the process thereafter in the choices researchers make. This, however, may not necessarily be a problem, so long as the perspective is acknowledged from the outset and

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critically discussed.

As a novice Grounded Theorist I feel that the initial exposure to CGT has challenged many of my traditional views of QDA research that on the one hand imposes procedural frameworks on the analytical process (Colaizzi, 1978, Giorgi, 1985), whilst on the other hand infers the neutrality of the literature review within the study. It seems self-evident that if researchers are going to argue for the rigour and validity of their work then bias needs to be acknowledged and dealt with explicitly throughout the whole research process, and the neutrality of the reviewed literature cannot be assumed. Acknowledging and managing bias liberates the research process from speculation as to the transparency of the study. It has been exemplars of CGT methodology that have demonstrated to me the need for rigour throughout the research process, including the literature review (Glaser, 2005). As a consequence it is argued that all literature should be viewed as data in need of critical analysis and not just used to support findings or as an introduction to a study. As it stands, readers are required to take on trust that the review is not methodologically biased in anyway and to make a judgement, based on the discussion, whether what is presented is comprehensive and inclusive of all methodological perspectives. This position is clearly unachievable given the limitation on space in many journals and beyond the resources and experience of many researchers. I suggest that, at best, many researchers review as much literature that is available within their sphere of practice, through a particular theoretical or methodological perspective. This is not to suggest that reviewing from a dominant perspective is necessarily wrong or that some perspectives are superior to others, in fact, it is the diversity of perspectives in research that enables problems to be viewed from different theoretical frameworks and add to knowledge. However, if an author of a review believes that there was no perspective that influenced the review this should be stated, conversely, if they believe that a particular perspective did influence the review then this should be stated as a limitation.

Certainly White (HRMAS Newsletters, 1998) has argued for researchers to declare their frame of reference (e.g. feminist, social interactionist) as in all other aspects of their research. The advantage to the reader, I believe, would be to highlight an awareness of potential limitations in the scope of the review or question the influence their own perspective has on interpretation. For example, when feminist researchers acknowledge that they intend to challenge a particular dominant paternalist world view, one might not expect to see a strong paternalistic argument, however, it sensitises the reader to the need to understand a feminist perspective in order to understand the review/study. Currently in the majority of research articles the perspective of the researcher is unknown until the methodological section of the paper. What is being suggested here has the potential to strengthen the established function of the literature review by acknowledging the frame of reference (biases and perspectives) from the outset, which tends to be the norm in much feminist research?

In contrast, a brief examination of contemporary literature reviews in qualitative papers (Hall, 2009, Smith, 2009, Shapero Crane et al, 2009, and Baltimore and Crase, 2009) highlights eclectic perspectives that are often not made explicit. Although the focus is on the subject matter, there is little evidence to suggest any guiding principles or framework for the literature reviews. If the sole purpose is to identify a gap in the literature, then they are successful, however, it could be argued that a list of the papers reviewed and a statement of the gap found would suffice. This is not to say that authors of the papers were not being analytically critical when they reviewed the literature, they may often follow established guidelines for critiquing qualitative research articles (Greenhalgh and Taylor, 1997, Mays and Pope, 1996, 2000), however, in the absence of a transparent framework or perspective there is always the possibility of unacknowledged bias. Accordingly, I suggest, as with much feminist research, researchers should apply the same rigor to the literature review as they do to the methodological aspects of their studies. In this way the perspectives of researchers are made explicit from the start, potential limitations identified and

perspective bias established and acknowledged.

Methodological Acknowledgement in Literature Review

In many respects I believe that CGT addresses this issue by identifying the nature, purpose and function of the literature review (McCallum, 2006, Andrews, 2006, Nathaniel, 2006, Thulesius, 2006, Ekstöm, 2006). In CGT the role of the literature is clear; it is a source of data that it is part of the constant comparative analysis process once the core category, its properties and related categories have emerged (Glaser, 2004) a role that is different to QDA reviews. As a result, although the researcher's personal bias may be present at times during literature review it is patterned out by the by the emerging theory. As a consequence, I believe that CGT research has increased credibility as it articulates all aspects of the literature within the research process and uniquely the role of the literature within a study, a characteristic it shares with systematic reviews (Magarey, 2001). Therefore, it is argued that the accusation of methodological perspective bias can be directed at much qualitative research that does not articulate its frame of reference or the purpose of the review beyond identifying a research gap. Whereas, the challenge for researchers using CGT is to articulate the methodology in a language and manner that makes it more accessible and understandable to novice researchers and readers from all theoretical perspectives. In this regard, presenting exemplars of the memoing process used to identify the emergent theoretical codes would allow a more transparent view of the researcher's conceptual progression, as well as, allowing commentators to analyse the validity of the actions taken.

Conclusion

At this stage in my research apprentices I believe that there is evidence to suggest that methodological perspective bias can occur both in the analysis and presentation of literature reviews and that this bias is met with CGT methodology. Consequently, qualitative researchers not using CGT need to ask themselves the question "what perspective do I represent?" "how may this perspective influence my reading?" and how should I factor it out? Whilst CGT, in this

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regard, offers a potential solution to address methodological perspective bias during literature review, there is a need for CGT's to articulate this process in a language that is accessible to all levels of researcher ability and practice.

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A Grounded Theory of Liberated Identity: Lesbians transcending oppression

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to generate theory that emerged based on the conceptualized data from interviews with lesbian women through Classic Grounded Theory methodology. Theory generation is grounded in the unique perspectives of lesbian women's experience in cultural contexts. This is a strengths-based process that focuses on how participants meet challenges in culture, rather than how they are consumed by them. From the data, a basic social process emerged that is both complex and paradoxical: transcending oppression through liberating one's identity. The paradox lies in the aspect that from a lesbian woman's pain comes her strength. This difference, lesbian identity, is also the source of strength. This paradox is compounded with the awareness that culture negates lesbian loving relationships. There are three stages to lesbian liberated identity: authenticating, reconciling, and integrating. Application to and implications for professionals and academics are presented.

Keywords: lesbians, liberated identity, spirituality, political, classic grounded theory

Introduction

Historically, behavioral science theories and developmental models have focused on the individual outside of culture, hence negating the unique cultural oppression of lesbian women. The few theories that address lesbians are seated in "heterosexist paradigms" that fall outside the lived experience of lesbian women (Brown, 1995, p.18). Subsequently, theory has pathologized lesbian development through the absence of biopsychosocial frameworks (Brown, 1995). Research and psychological interventions have also focused on the internal daily living problems of lesbian

women instead of the oppressive cultural experiences that lesbian women encounter (Kitzinger & Perkins, 1993). The absence of political theories that explore lesbian cultural experience have opened the door to pathologizing explanations that blame the victim (Kitzinger & Perkins). Instead of investigating the challenges posed by the system the individual is navigating within, labels of coping are applied to the individual (i.e. internalized homophobia) as opposed to the source (homophobic and heterosexist oppression), thus minimizing external forces and maximizing assumed pathology of the person within the system.

Using Classic Grounded Theory, the purpose of this study was to generate theory that emerged from conceptualized data from interviews with lesbian women. Findings revealed that the women in this study created unique social processes to maintain, even edify, their lesbian identity when it was threatened. From conceptualization of the data, theory emerged as a specific process in which strengths were utilized to face challenges when interacting within culture. This process and theory, transcending oppression through liberating one's identity, is complex and paradoxical because the participants garnered strength from the pain caused by oppression. Although this oppression may lead to suffering, it also created resilience. Since lesbian loving relationships are thus ignored or minimized within culture, this compounded the paradox.

Method

Participant selection was based on lesbian identity and diverse demographic characteristics because heterogeneous sampling is required to expand and refine the emergent theory (Glaser, 1978). Heterogeneous lesbian subgroups were recruited to enhance non-comparability of groups. Key informants, lesbian women identified as resources with exceptional knowledge of the potential sample, were used for access to lesbian subgroups and later as interview participants for theoretical coding. Using the researcher's own network, key informants, snowball participants, and lesbian social services, theoretical sampling was conducted.

Lesbian Social Services

To diversify potential participants, the initial sample was drawn from lesbian social service agencies. Four social service agencies agreed to publicize the study. Theoretical sampling began with a local lesbian social service sponsoring a function for recipients. Interviews were conducted onsite and from this event additional participants were recruited. All agencies and participants were immediately supportive and verbalized investment in research that increased the visibility of lesbian issues.

The final sample consisted of 28 lesbian women from differing backgrounds, classes, ages, races and ethnicities, geographic locations, and educational levels. Over-sampling for Hispanic lesbian women was conducted to ensure racial diversity. Other means to sample for diverse lesbians included: (a) sampling from specific agencies that served lower-income women, (b) snowball sampling from ethnic minorities, and (c) requesting agencies to recruit for women of color. Socioeconomic status ranged from lower to middle class. Some women were physically challenged; all women had worked in a profession. Some women had been married, some had children, but all identified as lesbian. Participant ages ranged from 18-72 years old. Face sheet variables that remained significant throughout the study were geography, identification as lesbian in less than two contexts, and traditional family of origin. Constant comparison of face sheet variables also directed the researcher in theoretical sampling, compelling sampling for diverse characteristics dissimilar to previous participant characteristics.

Lesbian identity as an integral part of cultural experience was grounded in the data; therefore, theoretical sampling did not occur outside of lesbian subgroups. This is a limitation in that it precludes generalization across other groups who may share similar if not the same basic social process, but also an implication for future studies.

Arranging and conducting interviews presented protocol problems. Screening for race, age, and other variables within an oppressed group was problematic in that asking a participant to divulge sensitive information about her identity

seemed insulting. Because of this issue, some interviews were arranged with minimal information, i.e. only knowing the participant was a lesbian woman.

Data Collection and Analysis

Constant comparison generated coding categories and began after the first field notes were transcribed; this was the primary activity in data collection (Glaser, 1998). Constant comparison was an ongoing process and very critical throughout all stages of this study. Completing 28 interviews, and no more, increased intimacy with the data and subsequently increased the flow in conceptualization. To memo from constant comparison and conceptualization, memoing sessions occurred for line-by-line analysis with coding written in the margins of field notes. Through this process, the transition from open coding to selective coding occurred at the seventh participant interview. When the theoretical codes were named later in the study, data were fractured by cutting incidents, properties, and categories into strips directly from field notes and constantly compared through sorting and memoing. When face sheet variables became evident, they were used to expand the codes and directed theoretical sampling.

Adjusted conversational interviewing was the data collection method. Conversational interviewing uses flexibility to determine concepts embedded in participant reports (Glaser, 2001). The researcher is “just listening in a kind of open ended conversational interview,” using different interviewing styles as theoretical sampling dictates (Glaser, 1998, p.174). The initial spill question was: “What is your experience as a lesbian living in today’s culture?” Interviews ranged from twenty minutes to two hours. Field notes contained *in vivo* codes (codes taken directly from language that define how the group resolves the main concern) and researcher abstractions. Conceptualized codes were extracted from hand-written notes taken during interviews. At the end of each participant field note, a separate section for conceptualized ideas and concepts was added.

As theoretical codes were fleshed out of the data, meanings of substantive codes including comparing and

contrasting codes, conceptualizing beyond concepts, and spending much time searching through the dictionary for the perfect word to convey meaning, was an ongoing process. To ensure theoretical sensitivity, social science definitions were not used in order to avoid forcing existing theory onto the emergent concepts. Dictionary definitions, as suggested by grounded theory methodology, were used to describe the conceptualized data because they are based in daily customary language. The main concern and resolution were named after the basic social process was evident.

The final stages of data analysis included the documentation of abstracted ideas into memos. Memos conceptualized data, operationalized categories through their extracted properties, and provided hypothesized connections between categories. Memo sorting began the formulation of the theory for readability. This study also utilized photography to add meaning and representation to the codes, after all interviews were conducted. Memos were transcribed directly from interviews with added conceptualization memos at the end of each note and all were analyzed line-by-line. Additional hand-written memos were later typed. Ideas were also voice recorded and transcribed as memos ultimately resulting in 30 voice recordings. Memo sessions consisted of writing about the data and documenting ideas about the data.

The Grounded Theory: Liberated Identity

Liberated identity emerged from the conceptualized data as a comprehensive and strengths-based process to transcend oppressive cultural forces. The *Webster’s* (Mish et al., 1987) definition of *liberated* is “freed from or opposed to traditional social and sexual attitudes or roles” (p.688). Traditional attitudes and roles contain heterosexual bias and can be harmful to lesbian identity since they negate and pathologize lesbian loving relationships. Liberated identity therefore is a basic social process used to affirm integral lesbian identity and lesbian loving relationships. Resolution of the main concern is hypothesized as being accomplished through liberated identity. The theory was named by answering questions during conceptualization like “How does a lesbian woman find peace in cultural contexts that demean the identity that she considers an asset?” The answer was that

she *liberates* her identity by transcending oppression. Formulating the main concern presented itself as a sociological construct or a broader social concern.

The main concern that emerged from the data is *transcending oppression*. The participants were actively attempting to rise above and resolve aspects of oppression, including exclusion, judgment, and prejudice. The data revealed patterned complex behaviors while facing the paradox that one must transcend oppressive culture but also live in oppressive culture to acquire needed resources. These resources in turn are essential in transcending oppression that originates from these cultural contexts. Transcending oppression is the catalyst to begin stage progression to liberate identity.

Transcending oppression can result from a culturally forced proclamation of difference that is based in the identification as a different other, a person who is not a member of dominant culture; an identity that cannot be conceptually separated from cultural context. However, context does not define identity but social interactions are based in identification as a different other and are integral to these interactions. Identity, like cultural contexts, was constant and verified as central during data collection. Similarly, oppression was assumed to occur and required an understanding of how oppression it was justified. The need to transcend oppression is assumed in all interactions because it had been experienced repeatedly in all contexts. All women in the study spoke of emotional, psychological, and physical pain from authenticating. The most extreme cases of violence involved rape, physical assault, ostracism from family, forced resignation and/or termination of employment, excommunication from church membership, vandalism to property, verbal assaults and abuse, sexual harassment, and physical separation from partner.

Liberated identity, as a basic social-psychological process, has three stages: authenticating, reconciling, and integrating. Figure 1 shows this nonlinear process. The stages are theoretical codes; the core code of “liberated identity” names the complete process. Each theoretical code is comprehensive, as is the process as a whole.



Figure 1. Lesbian Liberated Identity

The basic social process is not continuous. The three stages are permeable, neither sequential nor exclusive, and they are often revisited. When stages are revisited, differing properties of the stage may be experienced, such as visual showing when verbal correcting had been experienced in previous stage encounters; however, the overall purpose for progression remains the same, for example, to authenticate one’s identity. Progression from one stage to another is compelled by cultural experience. Thus, being in one stage at a particular time does not force a progression to another stage. Women instead operated within each stage at multiple times, returning to the first two stages when compelled by oppression. Movement toward the sought-after integrating stage comes with external and internal problem-solving. Stages were heuristic (“generally not perceivable by the persons involved, but demarcated by the sociologist for theoretical reasons”) (Glaser, 1978, p.98); the women in this study were unaware of their impact as creators of a formal basic social process.

Authenticating

Authenticating is the first stage in lesbian liberated identity, overt disclosure that one is a lesbian. This is an external action (authenticating is an action for others, not for oneself) that has personal implications. Mish et al. (1987) gives this definition of *authenticate*: “to prove, confirm, in an authoritative manner; worth of acceptance or belief as conforming to fact or reality; trustworthy, of a cadence; veritable, actuality, true existence and actual identity” (p.117). For this fitting definition, three key concepts that

guided sorting and analysis were *proving*, *confirming*, and *establishing worthiness*.

Authenticating is the least complex of the three basic social process stages. It is visited in three main cultural contexts: family of origin, work, and general society. Authenticating is conceptualized as behavior to challenge heterosexist bias by proclaiming one's difference as a lesbian woman. Authenticating was not a *process*, as coming out theories assert (Cass, 1984; Coleman, 1982; Lewis, 1984; Sophie, 1986), but a *stage* in a process—a tool or a tactical action. Authenticating is taking control over cultural expectations and assumptions of heterosexuality to present self in an honest manner. Lesbian women authenticated in at least one cultural context, the lesbian community. Authenticating as a lesbian is a singular, strategic, and purposive action to proclaim lesbian identity and establish this difference from traditional sexual attributes and roles. Women who do not authenticate in more than this one cultural context, however, experience greater grief and loss of integrity. This affective component is revisited in the reconciling stage. Authenticating is done by degrees through overt statements, through differences embedded in language, or through signs and symbols. In this study, authenticating occurred mostly in overt statements that immediately set limits and proclaimed difference. Women considered less “out” than others had authenticated in only one or two cultural contexts, the lesbian community and/or the family of origin.

Hypothesized purposes of authenticating are (a) defying traditional sex roles, (b) sharing relationships, and (c) proving worth (Sub-Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c). Authenticating properties served one or more of these purposes in this study. Vulnerability to oppression presumably compels authenticating, but the often spontaneous action is founded more in a sense of accountability for educating others about identity and for limiting heterosexist assumptions identity.

Education and responsibility are conditions of authenticating as women go from the safety of the lesbian community to advise heterosexuals about lesbian identity through language, visible difference, and standards of interaction. This responsibility serves the purpose of

authenticating by exploding the assumption of heterosexuality, sharing with others, and proving worth. The properties of authenticating are (a) verbal correcting, (b) visual showing, and (c) behavioral proving.

Verbal correcting refers to the defiance of assumptions, honesty, and sharing that lesbian women bring to daily conversations, all with little thought for the consequences of oppression and as strategy to forestall uncomfortable interactions. Verbal correcting maintains the integrity of lesbian relationships and proclaims difference. In the study this property was evident in the family of origin and in social interactions within a more generalized realm of culture. There are three proposed conditions to verbal correcting: defiance, honesty, and sharing. Verbal correction makes lesbians visible and exaggerates proving oneself worthy of acceptance and inclusion.

Visual showing is the second property of authenticating. Its purpose is to externally reveal differences as a lesbian woman. Simply put, it is *being out in the open*. It is authenticating as visual action. Through visual showing, women take on the responsibility to show that lesbians are among society and can act appropriately. The underlying assumption is that cultural cues can distinguish lesbian women from those adhering to traditional role ascriptions in dress, mannerisms, or associations. Such visual cues include taking a partner to public places, going out with other women, associating with other women, taking adopted children with one's partner to church, being in public places, etc. But the lesbian woman has an additional responsibility: even as she visually reveals that she is different, she is also responsible to the lesbian community as a whole to set a good example. It is a deliberate action to raise the consciousness of lesbian identity difference in the public realm.

Behavioral proving is the third property of authenticating. It refers to the unspoken effort to avoid oppression as a lesbian woman. Taking control over the things one can is central to proving one's worth as a public citizen living in multiple cultures. This property was evident in the study within the cultural contexts of work and social interactions within a generalized realm. Oppression in any context due to

lesbian identity is expected; therefore, anything may be used to oppress. Combating this requires tenacity in any action, whether on the job, in a neighborhood, or in daily social interactions. Behavioral proving is founded in this concern that any characteristic, even those irrelevant to lesbian identity, may be used to oppress.

Following are examples of properties within the authenticating stage of verbal correcting. One participant discussed her being a member of a campus club: “I am not very invested in it, but thought it would be good to meet other people at school. Unexpectedly, they begin talking about fundamentalist Christian values and homosexuality as a sin. This of course makes me uncomfortable, so I come out to them that I am a lesbian. The rejection is obvious on their faces, but I am not seeking their approval. Instead I am seeking exclusion from their group since I do not want to be judged. Exclude me they do.”

The second example relates to authenticating within the family of origin: “My family is traditional and assumes I simply have not met the right man to marry. After taking it as long as I can, I finally tell them to stop the madness and to move on. They are devastated and need time to grieve. They cannot understand why I don’t want to wear the long white dress. That is just it—I don’t want that. I am a lesbian woman and love women.” Finally, an example relevant to more casual encounters: “I keep others from assuming I am heterosexual by telling them about my partner and what *she* does. I have her picture on my desk at work.”

Another property in authenticating is visual showing to reveal identity; lesbian women may go out together—to restaurants, concerts, events, etc.—to be seen as a group. This organized and intentional outing to be seen, *going out to be out*, assumes others see the differences in identity. One aim is to show others how mannerly and well-behaved lesbians are, and that they can operate in culture beside heterosexuals without incident.

Reconciling

Reconciling is the second stage in lesbian liberated identity. Reconciling is an internal, cognitive, and affective act

done for oneself to reconcile one’s lesbian identity with oppressive cultural contexts. Lesbian women in this stage must decide whether to continue their connection with oppressive cultural contexts or to break with them. The inner resolution of one’s difference from overt or covert heterosexist assumptions and expectations is the primary purpose of reconciling.

This definition of *reconciling* (Mish et al., 1987) was used as the basis for naming the theoretical codes: “to resolve friendship or harmony; to settle, resolve; to make consistent or congruous; to cause to submit to or accept something unpleasant; to check against another for accuracy; to account for” (p.984). The properties derived from this definition to fit the data in the study were (a) checking, (b) submitting, and (c) making congruous. Conceptually, this entails a *suspension* of lesbian identity, not the *negation* of that identity. Reconciling has three purposes: (a) checking identity against culture, (b) submitting to the reality of oppressive culture, and (c) making identity congruous with cultural contexts. Reconciling occurs in four primary cultural contexts: family of origin, work, church, and regional location. For study participants, reconciling within their family of origin and church had the most damaging affective repercussions. Yet, while the most painful, these contexts were the places women most desired continued connection.

Reconciling requires that individuals take a very attentive, observant, and measuring perspective on culture. It functions as a kind of cultural note-taking while one observes how others react to homosexuality. (For that reason, authenticating is often negotiated in this stage.) Like authenticating, reconciling is forced by cultural circumstances. It is the price of authenticating, one that was universal for all study participants. Reconciling is free of anger, fueled by an inherent forgiveness of others, though this forgiveness does not imply the acceptance of oppressive cultural contexts or their heterosexual requirements. Instead, a lesbian woman understands the oppressive forces of certain contexts and figures out how to maintain harmony within those contexts. If that is impossible, she finds or creates cultural contexts that affirm her lesbian identity.

Protectively embracing one's lesbian identity is required in reconciling — even if that identity must be suspended for a time, it remains an asset and source of strength. Vulnerability is felt in the reconciling stage, whether one is authenticating or not. It is experienced as grief, loss, and emotional hardship as one encounters the affective pain, psychological discomfort, and suspension of identity that comes in the reconciling stage. Finally, reconciling is the struggle for identity preservation in a culture that negates, ignores, and oppresses lesbian identity. To survive oppressive cultural contexts that will not change, one option is to suspend one's identity: to set aside, make temporarily inoperative, or defer lesbian identity to be revisited later (Mish et al., 1987). The other option is to remove oneself through migration to safe places and/or to create new contexts that affirm lesbian identity, such as the creation of a family of choice.

The basic social process stage of reconciling begins with checking one's lesbian identity against a given cultural context to find if they are congruous. This requires the note-taking aspect of reconciling; it screens a context for safety or threat. Beginning with lesbian identity, it progresses to an investigation of cultural perceptions of this identity. While it is an internal act, checking does involve observations of external culture. There are three properties of checking: (a) assessing safety, (b) negotiating out, and (c) altering behavior. Assessing the safety of a cultural context is part of evaluating how one's identity may be received. If circumstances warrant it, *outness* is negotiated. Although based solely on the actions and verbalizations of others, this is an internal decision. The lesbian woman considers when to disclose her loving relationships and to what degree. This requires suspending identity as she collects information. As a last resort, women may alter their behavior to avoid disclosure of their lesbian identity. Altering behavior does not imply any change in identity or feelings about being a lesbian. It is simply a survival strategy required to endure a heterosexist environment.

The second property of reconciling is internally submitting to the unpleasant nature of oppressive cultural contexts. Acknowledging the incongruity between lesbian

identity and ascriptions of heterosexual culture, lesbian women use their identity as a source of strength to face such oppression. They engage in an internal debate to find harmony between self and world. Again, identity is not changed but may be suspended for the sake of this harmony. Submitting is the acceptance of others' oppressive attitudes toward lesbian identity. It requires a sense of forgiveness and compromise that is based in serendipity and destiny — the trust that life events happen for a reason and embracing what happens even if oppression is the consequence. Reconciling operates within two conditions: naming oppression and resolving pain.

Making identity congruous with cultural contexts is the problem-solving property of reconciling. A lesbian woman knows her lesbian identity is not congruous with most cultural contexts; otherwise, she would not have to screen for safety, submit to the realization that she is oppressed, and work out how to attain a whole sense of self. Making identity congruous sometimes requires leaving a cultural context: when the lesbian woman has no influence over an oppressive context, she may opt to leave to maintain the integrity of her lesbian identity. She always has the option of returning to these contexts. Thus the principal choices are leaving oppressive contexts, finding safe contexts (migration), and returning to contexts that are oppressive. Determining whether or not identity can be maintained in spite of counterinfluences is central. Migration is a way of leaving in an attempt to connect: women migrate from oppressive cultural contexts for anonymity and to connect with the lesbian community. After being away for a time, lesbian women sometimes consider returning to a given context, usually church and family of origin. Reconnection depends on the lesbian woman, since she makes the effort, not the context she has left.

An example of submitting in the reconciling stage of liberated identity follows: "I would not be the person I am today if I had not experienced the pain of being made fun of by classmates for being a tomboy. I was teased for how I acted and what I wore, my intense relationships with my girlfriends, and the confusion I felt about my identity. I would not be the

good, forgiving, and lighthearted person I am today if this had not happened to me. Those events made me stronger and I can deal with whatever comes my way now. I like who I am.”

Integrating

Integrating is the final and most complex stage, representing a higher level of lesbian liberated identity. It is an internal and external behavioral, affective, and cognitive process. The definition of *integration* (Mish et al., 1987) is “to integrate; to form, coordinate, blend into a whole; to unite, incorporate as equals into a larger unit; to end segregation of and bring into common and equal membership in society, desegregate; coordination of mental processes into a normal effective personality or within the individual’s environment” (p.630). This definition matched the theoretical codes and includes (a) equal membership, (b) to unite, (c) to blend into a whole and, (d) effective personality. Integrating gives lesbian women the personal and political power to transcend oppression by liberating identity from heterosexist ascriptions and proscriptions: the integrating lesbian is not anxious about such cultural requirements. Personal power is rooted in the control of self-disclosure. Personal and political advocacy are properties of integrating; however, there are no qualifiers to how this advocacy is accomplished.

Integrating is characterized by balancing multiple identities, using lesbian identity as an asset, making similarities with others visible, and defining difference as positive. Integrating does require that the lesbian woman not avoid any cultural contexts because then she may be denying herself resources. Integrating can be visualized as *diffusion*: weaving, interconnecting, and spreading “cultural elements from one area or group of people to others by contact” (Mish et al., 1987, p.354). Integrating is the absence of shame, anger, and the need to defend one’s lesbian identity. When lesbians authenticate in the integrating stage, it is done for themselves and to enhance a valued relationship; it is not done to defy heterosexism.

The four properties of the integrating stage do not imply a lesbian woman’s complete integration into all cultural contexts. As long as oppression exists, complete integration is

neither possible nor desired. Integrating does represent, however, a lesbian woman’s ability to operate within a heterosexist context. There is a fearlessness and grace to integrating because women who do so are not consumed by a concern with reprisal. Integrating is the ability to render cultural boundaries and barriers, whether overt or covert, permeable. While authenticating is proclaiming difference and reconciling is negotiating difference, integrating is *defining* difference. Being out in the integrating stage is natural and no longer qualified as limited to certain acts.

An integrating lesbian does not feel compelled to authenticate, even in heterosexist contexts. She saves her energies for more important things, like loving relationships. Lesbian women want to be seen for both differences and similarities. Integrating allows them to make the decision when to educate others about difference and affinity. In the integrating stage, women feel less concern about vulnerability and the avoidance of oppression. Knowing that one can transcend whatever oppressive forces cultural contexts deliver changes vulnerability to strength. Women feel a sense of perseverance. Cultural contexts in integrating are less discernable, replaced by a more political and spiritual awareness of the larger nature of culture.

Operating in some oppressive cultural contexts may be necessary for gaining (a) financial resources, (b) provisions for family, (c) educational attainment, and (d) status and power. This refusal to avoid such contexts in turn forces authenticating and reconciling and may subsequently lead to forced or chosen segregation. Integrating thus requires the knowledge that lesbian women will never fully be part of culture and will always experience some segregation; integration is complete in a given setting when the woman no longer deems difference as negative or feels forced toward authenticating and reconciling by heterosexist expectations. Lesbian women integrate into cultural contexts whether the participants in those contexts know it or not. The hypothesized properties of integrating ((a) cultural awareness, resistance, and knowledge of equality, (b) uniting with culture, (c) being in culture, and (d) effective personality) are outlined below.

Awareness, resistance, and knowledge of equality signify an understanding of privilege, segregation, inequality, and difference. The integrating lesbian woman must (a) be aware of oppression, (b) resist oppression, and (c) proclaim internally that she is equal. She must understand the cultural contexts of gender, race and ethnicity, sexual minority membership, and the multiple oppressions she experiences in each of these subgroups. She ends segregation within herself through cognitive, affective, and social knowing. With this property comes a strong *us and them* mentality. This is not perceived as negative but as a way to define differences. *Us and them* has negative connotations only when oppression is evident. Lesbian women, with their unique understanding of culture through experience, use this knowledge to transcend cultural oppression. Thus they seek to establish an understanding of *us and them* that increases their knowledge of oppressive contexts. To reveal this knowledge of her equality in different and possibly oppressive contexts, lesbian women must reach out to culture by uniting with it.

The second property of integrating is uniting with culture. This is an external action undertaken to connect with, minister to, and educate others in those contexts that present heterosexual bias through the properties of (a) ministry, (b) tolerance, and (c) healing. The underlying belief behind uniting is not only that lesbian women must integrate to gain greater resource access, but also that it takes many more random acts of kindness on the part of the lesbian community to make an impact on the perceptions of oppressive others. Uniting means to affect change within other persons through a relationship with them. It is reaching out to different others to connect and reconnect. The first category is educating others through ministry. It is leaving the safety of lesbian community to establish relationships within which to educate others via shared similarities and informing them of differences. The second category of uniting is respecting and accepting others. Due to their oppressive experiences, lesbian women are sensitive to the need to be tolerant and non-judgmental in their interactions. Healing is a spiritual process with political ends. The primary catalyst for healing is the ability to love others regardless of one's own

oppression.

The third property of integrating is being in culture. This is both internal and external action that benefits the lesbian community and other cultural contexts, uniting the community and blending into other cultures. The underlying purpose of being in culture is to end segregation through participation. These actions are achieved through the properties of (a) creating equal culture, (b) advocacy, (c) visibility, (d) weaving cultures, and (e) self-reliance. This includes the refusal to remove oneself (unless forced) from any culture due to ascriptions and proscriptions of heterosexism. Once the lesbian woman is diffused within all necessary cultural contexts, she cannot be denied resources.

Being in culture requires the lesbian community to create an equal culture to give its members inclusive and accepting places to be. This goes beyond reconciling and finding a family of choice, and instead entails the creation of an ideal culture that is safe and sustaining. With the creation of an equal culture comes the responsibility to advocate for that community. Advocacy requires taking care of your own; it is the logical next step in creating equal culture. Being in culture requires that lesbian women remain visible as a community and on an individual level. You must be seen so others know you exist. Because lesbian women are necessarily in culture, they weave their multiple identities together, integrating cultures by their participation. Since oppression is unlikely to end anytime soon, integrating lesbian women need a safety net of self-reliance. When integrating into culture, the woman knows she has the support and resources to fall back on if she is excluded. This was especially true for lesbian women of color in the study because their experience of multiple oppressions made them self-reliant.

The fourth property of integrating is effective personality. This is an internal process that integrates one's lesbian identity with culture. The woman learns to use what she is scorned for, her lesbian identity, as a source of strength. This internal acceptance of lesbian identity enables her to be fully in culture. Women in the study said that this was the property of integrating they aspired for; some had acquired it

and some had not. Older women said that at the age of 40 they experienced an epiphany as they simply stopped worrying about other's reactions to their lesbian identity. They became their effective selves without struggle or forcing it. After that, finding comfort in any context was easy: being the best person she could be was enough, and her lesbian identity was the primary source of this stability. With this epiphany came peace and self-actualization. Three properties are embedded in effective personality: (a) changing attitudes about lesbian identity, (b) spirituality, and (c) fortitude.

Attitudes about oneself in culture change at this stage in integrating. The lesbian woman is now out in all contexts without qualification: she is comfortable anywhere. She also saves her energy for herself and her relationships; she does not waste time arguing with others or trying to convince them about her equality. Spirituality, characterized by hope, balance, and belief in serendipity, is a second property. This does not mean women deny cultural oppression or misunderstand reality. They simply shift their focus to spiritual hope and their belief that someday oppression will be alleviated. The third aspect of effective personality is fortitude, expressed as a fearlessness, grace in living, and high standards. The standards the integrating woman sets for herself are to refuse to be hypocritical, feel shame, or overreact about her lesbian identity. Instead she strives to be a good person and positive example. Women feel more control in how they present themselves, so no longer need to placate.

Examples of the integrating stage follow: "You must be seen so others know you exist"; and "See that I am here with you; I am like you but I am also different, and I have manners and respect for others." Visibility is a political act. Also, ending segregation and no longer adhering to heterosexist paradigms were evident: "We are everywhere and you may or may not know it." and "Stop being fed." Additionally, focusing on similarities with others is important in this stage and was mentioned multiple times by participants: "We are not different: It is not about sex, we are not different; They'll see we're like them"; "Respecto;" and "Our relationships are just as meaningful."

Discussion

Analysis of existing literature integrates liberated identity through constant comparative analysis. This weaving of the literature enhances the understanding of liberated identity as well as identifies the contributions of the grounded theory to the knowledge base. In grounded theory research, existing literature is data. Existing literature informs and expands the grounded theory.

Liberated identity offers adaptations and modifications to existing theories to better understand cultural experience. Analysis of authenticity in social work practice and coming out stage theories exemplifies the emphasis liberated identity places on cultural contexts and external forces of oppression. Reconciling reveals the necessity to suspend identity and the power of separation from oppressive cultural contexts. Analysis of existing literature with liberated identity's integrating stage reveals the importance of historical, political, and spiritual movements.

Much positivistic literature is inadequate to understand integral identity because it has ignored the impact of oppression and instead has focused on individual pathology. The stability and empowerment provided by created communities among marginalized groups has also been negated. What informs liberated identity well are existential, community, and political theories that contribute to a contemporary shift in the importance of interactions within culture. Although multiple theories can be applied to liberated identity, the most fitting is Young's Politics of Difference. Young (1990) identifies how *cultural imperialism* (when a group is "invisible at the same time that it is marked out and stereotyped" p.123) has universalized socially appropriate norms and thus assigns inferiority to difference. For a new paradigm of justice to be endorsed, differing cultures cannot assimilate and comply with cultural imperialistic standards of this universality. Politics of Difference reveal the parallel to liberated identity in the (a) reinvention of different others' identity, (b) creation of equal culture, (c) proclamation of difference as good, (d) political action on behalf of created communities, and (e) most importantly, the refusal to replicate oppression in the basic social process undertaken to

liberate identity. This theory represents that action and affective processes liberate identity through the use of what is oppressed (difference) as the source of strength (difference). In turn, creating equal cultures that do not replicate oppression is valued and primary.

Cultural contexts reproduce cultural imperialism by ignoring difference and then regard these as inferior, which is the main barrier to cultural equality in contemporary Western culture (Young, 1990). "Cultural imperialism involves the universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm." (p.59) Young states this is a violent paradox for diverse groups because they are simultaneously made invisible but also marked as inferior and abject. The dominant and powerful never need acknowledge their group status since it is assumed to be universal and standard.

Cultural imperialism rests on the standard that body and mind are separate; body is the antithesis to the mind, or reason, which is symbolized as white, objective, bourgeoisie, and male (Young, 1990). This "scaling of bodies" (Young, p.124) reduces pluralistic attributes to the concepts of unity and standardization. This measuring of physical characteristics against an approved norm allots differences as deviant, inferior, and deficient of reason. Observation is then the only means to assess difference, and this reliance on visual assessment exaggerates the exclusiveness of reason versus body. Persons associated with sexual behaviors, i.e. lesbian women, are "easy to identify because of the physical symptoms of ugliness and degeneracy they exhibit" (Young, p.128). For example, under cultural imperialistic standards, women are considered affective, associated with the body and sexuality; they are the opposite to the assumed norm of the white, bourgeoisie male. Measuring (scaling) bodies unconsciously defines plurality and difference as ugly, physical, and identifiable (Young).

Paradigms of liberation are critical guides in the Politics of Difference, as well as in liberated identity. When applying equality in universal standards, as contemporary discursive consciousness purports, it implies that group difference is accidental and coincidental (Young, 1990). Group difference

cannot be "transcended" (p.157), but rather should be defined as a *social process* that can privilege and oppress. Accidental implies that society has no control over the distribution of justice. Group differences are a reality and as such a part of contemporary culture. Oppression of group difference is also a reality and cannot be considered accidental.

Emancipation implies that assimilation is not desirable because group difference may be misplaced and in turn support the notions of cultural imperialism, according to Young (1990). Diverse cultures would lose their integral identity if they relinquished their traditions, values, and specific cultural existence; diverse cultures would not give up these associations even if it meant they were no longer oppressed (Young). Emancipation in a Politics of Difference requires transcending oppression by proclaiming difference, making it visible, and redefining it as good; assimilation is not an element of this process.

Because equality is consciously based on universality and social rules, Young (1990) claims that if different groups were to affirm and proclaim difference, this may again justify their oppression. Without the knowledge that oppression operates even when social rules assert equality, pluralism and group difference continue to be invisible but yet marked out as inferior. Reclaiming difference requires understanding of how one is oppressed. Young states that affinity, group difference, and public discourse in pluralistic society are requirements of a Politics of Difference in which persons are not deemed inferior, ugly, or abject.

Liberated identity transforms cultural imperialism into a catalyst to increase visibility of otherness and then to educate that this is beneficial to society. What is used to oppress is used to liberate. Liberated identity and Young's *Politics of Difference* complement each other and expand this grounded theory in the analysis of different as *good* and the critical nature of redefining what *good* is.

Application and Implications

This research led to the discovery of a basic social process of liberated identity that is used by lesbian women to transcend oppression in cultural contexts. From this model,

the impact of culture on marginalized groups is evident and the necessity of transcending oppression is a link to maintain integral identity. The paradox of liberated identity is that the source of unpredictable oppression is also the source of strength. Lesbian experience is heavily influenced by cultural factors; culture and individual are inseparable. Cultural barriers and social definitions of difference as being inferior are used to redefine and proclaim difference, increase visibility, and connect with oppressive contexts. The creation of equal culture is also seen in the integrating stage of being in culture property through creation of community.

Liberated identity has implications not simply as a basic social process but also in the political, spiritual, and relational implications seen in the study. Political action implications for lesbian women include culture and community, naming oppression, and economic factors. Oppression is a social process that is maintained by political forces and agendas; therefore, the oppressed must find political routes, which includes economic power, to empower self and community. Each basic social process stage of liberated identity contains politically-laden behaviors. Authenticating is an overt action to challenge heterosexist assumptions. Reconciling involves forced or chosen segregation from oppressive cultural contexts. Integrating is the primary political stage of liberated identity. With a focus on external factors, a shift from blaming individuals to placing responsibility in the proper places has begun.

Liberated identity contains spiritual themes throughout the social process, specifically in the reconciling and integrating stages. The reconciling stage involves redefinition of spirituality. Integrating in liberated identity exerts spiritually-laden attempts to unite with culture and to define an effective personality through equanimity, hope and balance. A major implication of liberated identity is expanding our understanding of how spiritual practices resist political agendas originating in religiously-exclusive doctrines. This also implies a non-dichotomous way of thinking about spirituality. Fusion of different spiritual practices, leaving institutionalized religion, and redefining spirituality can enhance faith to transcend oppression and liberate identity.

Lesbian women are oppressed *because of their relationships with other women*. Thus the implications for relational processes are numerous. Transcending oppression and liberated identity are based on relationship as well. Relationship with self is more evident in spiritual processes of reconciling and integrating. Further, relationship with others is evident in all three stages of the basic social process. Authenticating is sometimes done to establish a relationship with others, but mostly to challenge heterosexist bias. Relationship with others in reconciling involves creating a family of choice and connection, disconnection, and sometimes reconnection. Integrating involves a deliberate effort to establish relationship with culture through uniting with and being in culture. In addition, strengths-based approaches must be taken to understand how marginalized groups use relationship and outreach to liberate identity.

It is essential that practitioners integrate external forces of oppression instead of solely focusing on internal problems when working with lesbian women. While looking within to transcend culture through a liberated identity may be essential for a lesbian client, naming the oppressive forces in culture is essential as well. Professionals are ethically required to consider cultural forces that hinder quality of life for marginalized populations. Focusing only on the individual has contributed to pathologizing and depoliticizing practice theories of lesbian development. Using liberated identity as a model in professional and academic settings can assist not only in ideological shifts to what is personal is political, but also in addressing needs of lesbian women to increase strengths-based approaches to authenticating, reconciling, and integrating lesbian identity within oppressive cultural contexts.

Liberated identity has implications not simply as a basic social process but also in the political, spiritual, and relational implications seen in the study. In sum, the application of the liberated identity model reveals the importance of conceptualization as research method, a paradigm shift from focus on individual pathology to the impact of oppressive culture, and using participant's strengths to guide formulation and expansion of theory.

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