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## THE GROUNDED THEORY METHOD: APPLICATION OF A VARIANT OF ITS PROCEDURE OF CONSTANT COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS TO PSYCHOTHERAPY RESEARCH

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#### **EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION**

Dr. Rennie has conducted a large study of 14 psychotherapy clients' moment-by-moment experiences of the entire hour of a therapy session. His participants were engaged in therapy at the time of the study. He interviewed them about their recall of moments in a therapy session from which they had just emerged, with the recollections having been stimulated by a replay of a tape of the session. He was thus given access to their inner worlds of what it was like to be a client. In this chapter he focuses on the grounded theory method (GTM) and his modifications of it.

This method was originated by sociologists Glaser and Strauss and is among the first rigorous qualitative research methods to be widely practiced. The name refers to the grounding of research in life-world data and to the development of a theory of the subject matter from analysis of those data. In the traditional method, the theory arises from developing codes for the data through a "constant comparative" procedure in which each line of data is compared with identified (coded) content, and either receives an earlier code or is assigned a new one. Categories are similarly developed from the codes, and then a core category is named to hold all the others. Rennie describes the constant comparative procedure originally suggested by Glaser and Strauss, and contrasts it with a variation that he and his students developed. This variation involves breaking transcripts into units of meaning and interpreting the meanings of each meaning unit. Categorizing is done immediately, from one meaning unit to the next, rather than through the intervening step of developing codes and then categorizing them. He illustrates the variation with a case drawn from his study and gives an overview of the returns from his study as a whole. The chapter closes with a constructive view of the implications, for those wishing to adopt the method at the current time, of a rift that developed between Glaser and Strauss on how to do constant comparative analysis.

#### **BACKGROUND**

The GTM (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1994) was developed in protest against a

perceived prevailing, rational approach to theorizing in their discipline of sociology. Glaser brought to this development a background in descriptive quantitative sociology whereas Strauss was influenced by symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). In the method, theory is developed in a bottom-up, inductive way, in which preconceptions about the topic of interest are put aside as much as possible, so that the resulting understanding or theory is closely tied to the data from which it is derived, or *grounded*. Since its inception, the GTM has come to be recognized widely as an important member of the family of qualitative approaches to inquiry in the social and health sciences.

My engagement with the method began with my application of it to a study of the client's experience of an hour of psychotherapy. In its use, my research group and I altered a key feature of the method—namely, a procedure having to do with what Glaser and Strauss have described as *constant comparative analysis*, in turn having to do with the conceptualization of categories representing the meaning of phenomena. More recently, as well, I have dwelt on the theory of the method, or its methodology. What I have not done at any time, however, is to spell out in a way that is easy for readers to grasp how the modification of the constant comparative analytical procedure is to be carried out. Even my own students have complained that they could not understand depictions of it in my writings without being guided by me personally in its conduct. The goal of this chapter is to make the procedure more transparent.

In achieving this objective, however, it is necessary to attend to the overall method, which in turn must be embedded in my view of its methodology (i.e., theory of the method). Accordingly, in laying an appropriate context for the presentation of the procedure within the framework of my psychotherapy study, I provide an overview of both method and methodology. It is important to point out that I make this excursion without attempting to get into my position on several issues that have been raised about the GTM—namely, the matters of validity and generalization (see Rennie, 1999, 2000; Rennie et al., 1988), and reliability (Rennie, 1994a, 1995b; Rennie and Frommer, 2001) of the method. To attempt to review my position on these issues would deflect from the focus of the chapter, given the space allowed for it.

I begin with an overview of the psychotherapy study, including an illustration of the kind of report that the participants in the psychotherapy study provided. This section is followed by a general description of the GTM and my position on its methodology, preliminary to the elucidation of the alternative way of doing constant comparative analysis. A case study is used to illustrate the procedure. I then summarize the main understandings I derived from my study and close the chapter with reference to an emergent difference of opinion between Glaser and Strauss on the proper

conduct of the part of the method that has to do with the constant comparative procedure.

I begin, then, with an overview of the phenomenon in which I was interested, and how I went about studying it.

### OVERVIEW OF THE APPROACH TO STUDYING THE CLIENT'S EXPERIENCE OF AN HOUR OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

Being interested in their moment-to-moment experience of being in an hour of therapy, I interviewed clients about their recollections of what went on in a therapy interview that they had just completed and that had been either audio- or videotaped. I arranged for clients actively in therapy to replay the therapy tape in my presence, where I invited them to stop the replay and report their recollections of what had been experienced in that particular moment in the therapy session. This interview procedure thus applied Kagan's (1984) technique of *interpersonal process recall* (IPR; cf. Elliott, 1986). The IPR interview was tape-recorded. Both interviews were transcribed. My main focus was on the transcript of the IPR interview, although the transcript of the therapy session itself was necessary, of course, to provide the context for the participant's comments.

The requests for referrals of participants were paced by the speed with which I was able to analyze the IPR transcripts. By the end, six men and eight women had participated—among them, two of my own clients. Two of the participants were interviewed about two separate therapy sessions, resulting in a total of 16 IPR interviews (for details on how I approached the interviews, in terms of both ethics and the issue of the extent to which the research interviewer should lead as opposed to follow the participant's lead, see Rennie, 1995b). The participants ranged in age from mid 20s to mid 40s, had been in therapy for a period of six weeks to more than two years, and were currently engaged in therapy. All were white. Three were with a private practitioner; the others were receiving therapy in the student-counseling center of either of two large Ontario universities (two participants were my own clients seen through the auspices of such a center, who were interviewed about their therapy with me by colleagues). My impression was that none of the participants was psychotic at the time of the interviews; one dropped by my office three years after her research interview, disclosing that she had, in the interim, been hospitalized for a while with what had been diagnosed as bipolar disorder.

The participants' therapists were six women and six men. Eight were psychologists with a doctorate, two were graduate students in clinical psychology, and two were social workers with a master's degree. All had

at least five years of experience. Collectively they represented the person-centered, gestalt, transactional analytical, rational-behavioral, rational-emotive, and eclectic approaches to counseling and psychotherapy.

With the exception of one participant, the IPR interviews were conducted within two hours of the therapy session. In five IPR interviews, videotape was replayed; whereas in the others, audiotape replay was used. (More information was given by video recording, but it was easier to get audiotaped interviews than videotaped ones.) The interview format was open ended, with the participant being given primary control over when the tape was stopped for comment. Each interview generally lasted about two hours. In two cases it went to four hours and, for one of these participants, it stretched over two days.

### ILLUSTRATION OF A MOMENT OF EXPERIENCE

An illustration of what participants reported in the IPR interviews is given by a participant about his sixth session with his therapist. He had begun that session with a fairly lengthy story about emotional issues residual from his relationship with his ex-wife. Eventually, his therapist had attempted to summarize this material and to relate it to other themes that had emerged in previous sessions, with the following remark:

So, there's this terrible feeling that you've been kept in the dark all this time and had no sense of control over it. And part of you, you know—we've talked about it before in different ways—[a part of you] really needs, wants to be in control. And part of your head, you know—this activity in your head is all designed for control, to give you a kind of security, you know? I think this ties back also—I mean I'm going to make a broad generalization, but it ties back to, to loss, you know, when you suddenly lose somebody you, you have a sudden disaster. I mean you begin to orient your life to control the world so, so that it will never happen again. I mean, we all do this in a sort of variety of ways. I think your control, the need to be in control is a sort of desire to, to avoid disaster's befall on you, to feel secure.

During the IPR interview, the participant stopped the replay of the therapy tape where the therapist said, "I mean, we all . . ." (in the second to last sentence of the excerpt), and commented:

I couldn't understand what [the therapist] was saying at that point. I *really* couldn't understand at all. I mean, I had a sense that something valuable was being said but I couldn't relate to it, and I was probably in my mind—I mean, I *know* I was impatient because I couldn't make it work in my mind. It wasn't coming in. I couldn't see the meaning. Because it pulled too many events in my life together in some fairly—I mean, I sometimes do get impatient when [the therapist] is talking because I want to get on to something that I can relate to and feel. I, I knew it was right, what he was saying, somehow, without actually seeing the way it was relevant. I couldn't see how he could pull all these things together.

The client had revealed none of this confusion to his therapist, however. Instead, at the end of the therapist's statement ("felt secure"), he had smoothly gone with what the therapist had said, with the reply:

You can't control the disasters, can you? It's the control of the reactions to the disaster if it ever occurs.

This reply was enthusiastically endorsed by the therapist. Thus, the client's attempt to support the therapist had worked, with the consequence that any possibility of addressing his confusion about what the therapist had said was lost completely, at least in this moment of interaction. All other participants reported such covert management of disjunctive moments in their interactions with their therapists.

It was to this kind of material that I applied the GTM.

### THE GROUNDED THEORY METHOD

Grounded theorists are interested mainly in the meaning of persons' experiences and conduct and attempt to understand them by both listening to what people say and observing how they behave. Usually fresh material is acquired through field research. Nevertheless, published descriptions of relevant experience and action may be used as well, especially during the later stages of an inquiry. Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommend that the conceptualization of material should be taken through two main steps. The first is to conceptualize *codes*. These are conceptualizations that stay close to the literal meaning of the passage of text under study (see Charmaz [1995] for a nice depiction of this phase of the analysis). At times the literal text is used as a code, when a representation of experience given by a respondent seems apt (described by Glaser and Strauss as an *in vivo code*). The analyst proceeds to conceptualize *categories* in terms of the relations among codes. Categories are thus generally more abstract than codes. The conceptualization of relations among units of text to produce codes, among codes to produce categories, and among categories to produce higher order categories is referred to as *constant comparative analysis* (elaboration to follow). An important feature of the GTM is that the given unit of text is assigned to however many meanings are seen in it. In the main, this feature of the method distinguishes it from content analysis. Typically, in content analysis a given unit of analysis is assigned only to one category so that statistics can be applied to the frequencies of assignments of units to categories; in the GTM, statistics play no role. Nevertheless, in the GTM, the frequency of assignment of units of analysis to categories may be used as an indicator of the generality of a given category among the participants under study (e.g., Rennie, 1992).

Categories subsumed by higher order ones are called *properties* of the latter. The result is a hierarchical structure of categories, with each level gathering together the categories in the level below it. Eventually a *core* category is conceptualized that is interpreted to subsume all other categories. Thus, the initial categories are grounded in the text, and higher order categories are grounded in those they subsume. This structure applies to phenomena that appear relatively stable over time. Alternatively, if the phenomenon of interest is a process, then the categories and the relations among them should represent the process.

Data gathering and analysis proceed concurrently and are interactive, the activities being guided by considerations of the phenomenon of interest. In this regard, there are three other important aspects of the method. First, throughout the study, the activity of seeking sources of information governed by the topic of interest and by the emergent understanding of it as the analysis proceeds is described as *theoretical sampling* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Second, grounded theorists use the technical term *saturation* to describe the state of the inquiry and analysis when new data appear to add little to the understanding of the phenomenon, at least in terms of how it applies to the material investigated. Depending on the uniformity of the phenomenon among its sources of information applied to it, saturation may occur in as few as six or so sources. Meanwhile, third, both before and during the inquiry and analysis, the analyst writes what Glaser and Strauss describe as *theoretical memos*. These entries in a research journal record the analyst's preconceptions and hunches about the phenomenon, sense of the relations among codes and categories, sense of what might be the core category, and so on, at all stages of the inquiry. The theoretical memos are used extensively in the final formulation of the understanding and in the write-up of the study.

### A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

When they put forward the method, the main position on its methodology advanced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was that it is an inductive way of generating theory. The emphasis was on theory generation more than on theory validation. Validation was to come about subsequent to theory development, in the way of normal science (see Rennie, 1998b). They also maintained that the role of the researcher's perspective is so great that different analysts working with the same data could develop alternative theories, which is acceptable as long as all theories developed are grounded in the data, each in its own way. In my view, in making this observation, Glaser and Strauss failed adequately to take into account the epistemological implications of this operating from a perspective. It may be supposed that, if indeed the researcher's perspective is involved,

the method entails interpretation in a major way. In his more recent writings, Strauss (1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1994), perhaps because of his background in symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) with its kinship with cultural anthropology, explicitly paid heed to the role played by interpretation in the method. This stance was not taken by Glaser, however, who adhered to the position on the matter implicit in the original 1967 presentation of the method (see Glaser, 1992).

With student colleagues, I (Rennie et al., 1988) have concluded that as an interpretive approach, the method involves the application of method to the interpretation of text, or hermeneutics, and so may be thought of as methodical hermeneutics (Rennie, 1998b, 1999, 2000; Rennie and Frommer, 2001). I believe that thinking of it as a form of hermeneutics provides a coherent framework for explaining how it is that the method opens up the space between realism and relativism. Putting this notion another way, the method takes into account both the objectivity of what is being addressed and the subjectivity involved in addressing it. I see this space as being especially pertinent to the human sciences (cf. Fischer, 1977; Giorgi, 1970; Rennie, 1995a; Taylor, 1971).

Having provided this background, we are now in a position to get to the main focus of the chapter. Along the way, my group and I do constant comparative analysis.

### CONSTANT COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

As indicated, Glaser and Strauss distinguish between codes and categories, with the latter being derived from the former. Codes tend to be descriptive whereas categories tend to be more abstract. When we took on the method, my group and I concluded that even the development of codes involves interpretation and that, correspondingly, they are basically low-level categories. Thus, we dispensed with the distinction between codes and categories, representing all conceptualizations of meaning as categories (Rennie et al., 1988).

In Glaser and Strauss's (1967) procedure, it is recommended that the researcher analyze text line by line. Each code is recorded as a note in the margin of the text, such as the transcript of an interview, or perhaps on an index card. Within the framework of the perceived context of the study as a whole, the analyst begins by taking two codes and comparing them, asking: Are they similar in some way, or different? Why? (With, again, both questions being asked within the sociocultural context in which the phenomenon is perceived to be framed.) If judged to be similar, then they are put together. If different, they are kept separate. The third code is compared with the other two. If the first two were kept separate, and the third is similar to one of the two, then it is placed with that code. If the



first two are combined, then the third is added to them, creating a single cluster of three codes. Alternatively, if the meaning of the third code is different than that of the other two, then it is kept separate, and so on. The result of this constant comparison is a number of clusters of codes. The overall meaning of the cluster is conceptualized, and this conceptualization is declared a category. After all the codes are sorted in this way, then the analyst scrambles the codes and starts again, choosing a code at random from the set of codes, and repeats the analysis (a *resorting* of the codes). This repetition is done under the assumption that resorting the codes could result in new categories. The resorting is repeated until no new categories seem necessary.

My group developed an alternative way to do the constant comparative procedure (Rennie et al., 1988). In this procedure, the text (in our case, a transcript of an interview) is broken into passages, or *meaning units* (MUs; cf. Giorgi, 1970). In deciding what constitutes an MU, the analyst is alert to the main point or theme of a given passage. We have found that when people are interviewed, they wish to make a point and that, when they have made it, they move on to something else. There's a shift of main meaning. It is as if a given passage is enclosed in what we sense to be an "envelope" of meaning. We declare the material enclosed by the envelope to be an MU. This parsing may be done either prior to the analysis of the MUs or as the analysis proceeds. The MU is studied carefully, and every meaning that we interpret is represented by a category. Categorizing in this way, we found, allows for the meaning of the text to "hang together" in terms of themes and their properties. We also found that the procedure provided the additional advantage of making the analysis less tedious than doing it line by line.

Once conceptualized, the category is indexed (discussion to follow) and the analyst proceeds to the next MU (cf. Turner [1981], who, unknown to us at the time, similarly proposed analyzing text progressively rather than resorting codes). If the meanings of this MU overlap with the meanings of previous MUs, then the new MU is assigned to the categories already formulated. Alternatively, there may be new meanings in this MU, calling for the conceptualization of one or more new categories. New categories are indexed, after which the analyst proceeds to the next MU, repeating the process. As the analysis proceeds, there is a decreasing need to conceptualize new categories because the meaning of the new MU is already accounted for by existing categories.

At times, a word or phrase in the MU seems apt as a category that, analogous to Glaser and Strauss's *in vivo codes* (mentioned earlier), we refer to as an *in vivo category*. For example, in my study, participants sometimes remarked that they were "on track" or "off track" in their discourse with the therapist. Thus I conceptualized the category *Client's Track*. Most often, however, the language used differs from the language of the MU,

while containing its meaning. During the analysis, one's sense of each category is best left fluid in the early going. The density of the meaning of the category increases as more MUs are assigned to it. This is so because each MU has a different shade of the same basic meaning (illustration to follow). Eventually, it is possible to define the category in terms of this density—to raise it up by its bootstraps.

It is necessary to develop a filing system to manage the analysis. The system may be either physical or electronic (i.e., a database program). In the physical approach, we list the emerging categories alphabetically on a sheet of paper that we keep at hand when analyzing text. We also use filing cards for two purposes.

The first purpose is create what we refer to as *meaning unit cards*. We print two copies of each transcript. One transcript is kept intact, for our archive. The other is used to isolate and record the MUs. We cut the MUs from this second printout and paste them on index cards. Each MU is given an identifying code that connects it to its source. For example, in my study, I identified each MU in terms of (1) the accumulation of MUs studied in the analysis as a whole, up to the point of this particular MU; (2) the author of the MU; and (3) the placement of the MU in the transcript from which it was extracted. Thus, having decided that the participant's previous response indicating confusion about what the therapist had said was an MU, I gave it identifier 1165K9. This identifier means that it was the 1165th MU among all transcripts studied to that point, that this particular transcript came from the IPR interview with participant K, and that this was the ninth MU parsed out of his transcript. In addition, the categories to which the MU is assigned are entered at the top of the MU card (or at the top of the first card in the set, if more than one card is necessary to handle the size of the MU).

The second use of index cards is as follows: When one is engaged in analysis, it quickly becomes evident that the accumulation of MU cards will become voluminous. To reduce cognitive overload, we reduce the contents of an MU into key words, often abbreviated. We attempt to get the reduction into a single line, producing what we came to call a *one-liner*. It is crucial to emphasize that the "key-worded" summaries are never used in the conceptualization of categories. That activity is applied to the full MU in the context of the transcript as a whole. We have found that, because we are so familiar with the MUs, having worked with them closely and repetitively during the constant comparison analysis, seeing the key words signifying the text of an MU restores our memory of the meanings in the MU. For each category, then, we created what we came to call a *category card*. The one-liners, suitably coded to connect them to the MUs from which they are derived, are entered on the category card. Hence, in the case of my study, at the end of my analysis, when I had settled on 51 categories, I had 51 sets of category cards (for those categories, see Rennie, 1992).

While scanning the one-liners on a category card, the analyst is given a compact representation of the meaning of the respondents' accounts as they pertained to that category. A further advantage of this technique is that the analyst can lay category cards side by side, enabling a comparison of the compacted meaning of a given category with other categories. Indeed, we have found that, when writing up the returns from our analyses, we usually need to work only with the category cards because, as indicated, they are sufficient to remind us of the contents of the full texts. If we want to illustrate a category, we scan the one-liners, choose the best one, and retrieve and use the MU from which the one-liner was derived.

Our approach and the one described by Glaser and Strauss, in essence, are different routes to Rome. Both approaches stay close to the meaning of the text and both eventuate in a hierarchical structure of categories, with lower order categories serving as properties of the higher order ones. Both engage the writing of theoretical memos. In both, the extent to which passages of text are relevant to a given category is an important criterion of whether the category should be kept as is or, alternatively, either modified, pooled into another category, or discarded. Finally, although our procedure entails moving progressively through text, it also calls upon the analyst to backtrack, thus covering the same ground covered by the resorting of codes. When a category is conceptualized for the first time after the analyst has already gone through a number of MUs, he or she refers to earlier MUs to determine whether the category was missed in any of them. Thus, with our procedure, the applicability of categories is addressed comprehensively, just as in the Glaser and Strauss procedure.

### RETURN TO THE EXAMPLE

As an illustration of how the procedure works, I focus on the MU mentioned earlier, about the failure to understand what the therapist meant. After reading and rereading the 58-page double-spaced transcript, this was the ninth MU that I parsed out of it. As described, I cut the MU out of the second copy of the transcript and pasted it onto an index card. With the list of categories by my side, I deliberated on the meaning of this MU, and assigned it to four categories: *Client Understanding Therapist's Frame of Reference*, *Therapist Interpretation*, *Therapist Accurate Response*, and *Client's Track*. All four categories were on the list, and so I did not conceptualize any new ones for this MU.

This judgment was made possible because I allowed a broad range of meaning to be covered by categories. Hence, I allowed *Therapist Accurate Response* to accommodate inaccurate responding as well as accurate responding. Similarly, I allowed *Client Understanding Therapist's Frame of Reference* to take into account misunderstanding as well as understanding.

I did this because I reasoned that a category about understanding can accommodate whether the client understood. I even allowed this category to accommodate instances when, as in the case of this MU, the client sensed that the therapist was correct without knowing why. I allowed such broad meanings to keep the number of categories within manageable limits. A bonus is that allowing several related meanings to be subsumed by the same category increases its density, its richness, in keeping with the goals of the method.

Continuing with the analysis of this MU, the four categories were indicated on the MU card, whereupon I reduced the meaning to the one-liner that, in some cases, spilled over into two lines:

1165K9            Cldnt undrstd T; sensed T was right; impatient; wntd to get onto smtg that he cld relate to and feel

This reduction was then typed onto the category card for each of the four categories. Thus, the *Client Understanding Therapist's Frame of Reference* category card contains, among others, the following entries which were derived from the transcripts of multiple participants:

1165K9            Cldn't undrstd T; sensd T was right; impatient; wantd to get onto smtg that he cld relate to and feel  
 177C5             C thinks T thinks it would be easier for C to admit things if T asks for them  
 469F22            C tried to rembr apprch T usd in intrptng dream  
 470F22            C wntd his rspns to be in right cntxt; save time  
 471F23            C wtd to spk same langg as T so T wldnt waste time interpreting  
 657J1             C ddnt knw wht T meant by "For sake of accuracy;" lost  
 739J83            C ddnt knw what T was getting at; question whethr the reinfrng of acdmc work should be up to C  
 881Su115        C ddnt know if T knew he wntd reassurance; however, he did good  
 1023S104        Big qestn for C: is T's head clear?

This example of a category card illustrates how the summaries give the nuances of various meanings represented by the category. Most of my students are using software to assist the analysis; it saves time to have to type a one-liner only once and then use the computer to enter the reduction into files equivalent to the category cards. We have found that the *N-Vivo* (see Richards, 1999) program seems best equipped to handle both MUs and one-liners. An important caveat in this regard, however, is that any program should be used only to organize the text. The user should not lapse into the belief that use of the program will constitute the analysis itself. The instrument of the analysis is the analyst, not the program. It is easy for analysts to fall into this belief, especially when using a data-based program such as *N-Vivo*, which was designed especially for the GTM. These programs are designed such that the analyst is made to work with "tree" structures, which can easily and inappropriately force the data. Indeed, my students have often found that they have to combine computer analysis with the use of physical tools such as index cards to avoid this peril.

Nevertheless, used in the right way, a database program markedly cuts down the time required for analysis, by virtue of what they offer in the management of text.

## SUMMARY OF MY UNDERSTANDING DERIVED FROM THE STUDY

### MY HORIZON OF UNDERSTANDING

The matter of perspective has received a lot of attention by phenomenologists (e.g., Husserl, 1931) and hermeneuticists (e.g., Gadamer, 1992), in terms of what they refer to as the *horizon of understanding*. During the promotion of the discovery of something new, it is important to take into account conceptions, intuitions, hunches, hypotheses, and so on, brought into a grounded theory study so that an effort can be made to put them aside. Indeed, in their early works especially, Glaser and Strauss suggested that inquirers into a phenomenon should avoid reading about it prior to inquiry and analysis to minimize the imposition of prejudices (see also Charmaz, 1995). This attempt to put prejudice aside is described by phenomenologists as *bracketing* (e.g., see Zaner, 1970).

Of course, some predisposing assumptions are so deeply ingrained that the researcher is unaware of them, which makes bracketing of them impossible. Nevertheless, every researcher is aware of many of his or her assumptions, and it is these that can be addressed in this way. When a researcher informs the reader about the perspective brought to the study of the phenomenon, it helps the reader to understand the researcher's understanding. This stance goes to the heart of the epistemology entailed in the method. Radical constructionists (see Rosenau, 1992) take the skeptical position that because we can never get to the bottom of the lingual and cultural influences on how we think, there is no point in trying. Alternatively, positivists operate on the principle that it is possible to keep subjectivity out of the picture by focusing on what is evident empirically. Again, I am among those who are attempting to work out an epistemological position between these two extremes by encouraging the communication of prejudices of which we are aware (cf. Charmaz, 1995; Kvale, 2001; Madill et al., 2000).

My approach to counseling and psychotherapy, entitled *experiential person-centered counseling* (Rennie, 1998c, 2004), combines the Rogerian person-centered approach and the experiential approach promoted by Greenberg et al. (1998). Thus, at the time of the study (as now), I saw the client as a person who is engaged in action (as opposed, say, to being primarily under the control of environmental contingencies or, alternatively, of unconscious motivations). I had also come to believe that the client should be helped to engage in action more effectively.

## THE MAIN UNDERSTANDING DERIVED FROM THE STUDY

Throughout the analysis, what impressed me consistently was how active, inwardly, the participants had been in the role of client (cf. Bohart and Tallman, 1996, 1999). Although they had often responded in a straightforward manner to the therapist's interventions, they also often had deliberated on their responses, weighing alternatives in deciding whether they would respond at all and, if so, how.

Furthermore, they reported having done a lot of evaluating of the therapist. Moreover, this evaluation was often made within their awareness of their awareness of themselves. This activity, which was reported to me in the IPR inquiry, had often been covert in the interaction with the therapist. In my interpretation, it was the most pervasive activity indicated by their reports. Thus, I eventually concluded that, as a representation of the pervasiveness and the quality of this activity, the core category was *Client's Reflexivity*, which I defined as self-awareness and agency within that self-awareness (Rennie, 1992). Moreover, the kind of reflexivity involved is what Taylor (1989) has called *radical reflexivity*—that is, awareness of being self-aware, a capability that seemingly is limited to humans.

The results of the study have been given in a series of reports (e.g., Rennie, 1994a, b; for a summary, see Rennie, 2002). In what follows, I summarize the understanding represented by the 51 categories subsumed by *Client's Reflexivity* (see Rennie, 1992). To make the presentation less cumbersome, I make no attempt to indicate the actual categories supporting each claim to understanding; that connection is given in previous writings.

Clients are aware of being self-aware while being aware of the therapist. They listen to what the therapist has to say, integrating it into their experience. They may agree with the therapist, or not. They may voice their agreement, or not. Regardless, they think about what the therapist has said, has not said, or should say. They are aware of the therapist's presence, manner, and style, being alert to what the therapist seems to think about them and whether the therapist likes them, cares for them, respects them. At times, their talking is at one with their thinking; at other times, they deliberate on what they say, thinking more thoughts than they utter, evaluating them, choosing what to say, and how, and when. Throughout this activity, they are aware of their feelings. These feelings surround their thoughts, influence their thoughts, or perhaps are the subject of their thoughts, even dominating their thoughts.

They are persons, in relationship with themselves and with this other person, who happens to be a therapist. This is a special relationship. It is a relationship meant for them; it is about their hurts, fears, and concerns. They are in therapy to feel better; they may also be in it to become different in some way. They may intend to get at their feelings, to penetrate the mists of occluded awareness that prevent them from breaking through whatever it

is that is in the way of their feeling and being different than they are, in becoming better. Or they may intend, either consciously or semiconsciously, to manage the threat posed by the therapist and/or the threat posed by the way they are.

When desiring to penetrate their experience, they are pulled in a particular direction, on a track, a train of thought. The pull is captivating, compelling. In its grip, clients flow in it, unheedingly, not aware that they are either thinking or talking; instead, they are just doing it (cf. Searle, 1983). In such moments, their experience is not reflexive; instead, they are caught up in it. The intention girding the pursuit of meaning is sustained until it reaches its completion or until it is disturbed. When completed, clients talk about something else. When disturbed, the disturbance may either arise from within or from their experience of the therapist.

In terms of disturbance from within, the flow of thought may lead clients into a zone of feeling that they did not anticipate; the new feeling jolts them. They come out of the flow and become aware of it. This is a moment of reflexivity. In it, they decide what to do with the disturbance, whether to enter into it or to think about something else, avoiding the feeling. If the experience is spoken about, then they have to decide whether to express the disturbance beneath their verbal expressions or to modulate it, or shift away from it and talk about something else.

Alternatively, the disturbance may result from what the therapist has said or done, which interferes with the client's intention. In their awareness of their self-awareness, they are torn between clinging to the intention guiding their thoughts and directing attention to the therapist. In their minds, the therapist is an expert. His or her words are not to be taken lightly; he or she may know something that the clients do not know. They are inclined to feel that if they follow the therapist's lead, it could be more productive than their own lead. Thus, often clients give way to the therapist. Having complied, should the therapist restore their line of thought, they are relieved. When this happens, it means that by their discretion, they manage to have it both ways: They have shown respect for the therapist, yet have been enabled to come back on track. At other times, the strength of the intention is so great that clients refuse to release it. They may pretend that they did not hear the therapist and keep going. Or they may pretend to listen, while continuing their train of thought silently. Or they may interrupt the therapist, forcing the dialogue back in line.

All this occurs in this way when the relationship with the therapist is comfortable. When it is not comfortable, clients divide their time between following their own lines of thought and managing the relationship with the therapist. The management is complicated. The therapist may be experienced as aggressive, necessitating countermeasures, without giving offense. The therapist may be prejudiced about certain values held dear by the clients, necessitating careful avoidance of those topics. When the relationship is like

this, clients work overtime monitoring what they can and cannot say, and how. They try to establish compatibility with the therapist so that they can engage in a worry-free exploration of their experience.

Overall, the analysis of their reports led me to understand that clients are often keenly aware of what they are experiencing in each moment of the therapy. This experience includes their awareness of the relationship with the therapist. They monitor their sense of themselves, of the relationship, and tread their way through the treacherous waters on both fronts, propelled forward by the desire somehow to feel better than they have been feeling.

This study was a large one and gave rise to more than 1800 MUs, and the assignment of more than 3000 MUs to categories (Rennie, 1992). I have found that the constant comparative procedure described earlier produced a management of this large amount of material that facilitated the various writings I have derived from this study. My students, as well, have found the procedure to work well with their studies, regardless of whether they study psychotherapy.

As it happens, the matter of how to approach the task of categorizing in the GTM has, of late, become a matter of rather pressing concern in grounded theory circles. This turn of events has come about because of an emergent difference of opinion between Glaser and Strauss.

### THE CURRENT CONTROVERSY OVER THE GROUNDED THEORY METHOD

Following their initiation of the GTM (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), its originators began to see it differently (cf. Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987). This growing rift split wide open in the 1990s (cf. Glaser, 1992; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1994; see Rennie, 1998b; Corbin, 1998; Rennie, 1998a). It entails two main issues. First, Strauss departed from the original notion that the application of deduction is not involved in the GTM (Strauss, 1987). To demonstrate this, he instituted a procedure described as deductive during which, when encountering something of interest or of significance in the data, the analyst asks what might explain it. In response to this question, hypotheses are created. Additional data, as they unfold, are brought to bear on the hypotheses, leading to judged confirmation of one over the others. The same procedure of question asking, hypothesizing, and testing of hypotheses is used as the analyst proceeds through the overall data. Thus, a more rational, deductive approach to categorizing takes the place of the more empirical, inductive approach to it that is more characteristic of the original way of doing constant comparative analysis.

Another change made by Strauss, together with an associate, Juliet Corbin (e.g., see Strauss and Corbin, 1990), was to insist that in order for a grounded



theory analysis to be complete, it must incorporate what they refer to as the *coding paradigm*. This paradigm, or scheme, is a set of “conditions, context, action/interactional strategies and consequences” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 96) with regard to the phenomenon under study. With this procedure, the initial returns from the application of the constant comparative analysis are to be interpreted within the framework of this paradigm. The effect is to convert every grounded theory analysis into a process formulation, in contrast to the earlier formulation of the method that allowed for the emergence of structural formulations as well.

Alternatively, Glaser has restricted the role of deduction to the activity of theoretical sampling. This means that, in the light of what has emerged as important aspects of the phenomenon as understood in terms of the data sources (e.g., research participants) studied to a given point in the analysis, it is deduced that other kinds of data sources will shed important light on the phenomenon. Correspondingly, he has held to the original, inductive way of engaging in coding, maintaining that the incorporation of deduction in the way Strauss now prescribes could lead to premature closure on the understanding of the phenomenon under study. As for the coding paradigm, Glaser (1992) has argued that this scheme is only one of many sensitizing concepts that may be pertinent to phenomena and that to insist on it alone may force the data. That is, insistence on its use, exclusive of other sensitizing concepts, may threaten the grounding of the analysis.

It will be noticed that in describing our alternative to the way of doing constant comparative analysis, I have made no mention of Strauss’ radical new way of doing constant comparative analysis. Nor have I mentioned Strauss and Corbin’s coding paradigm. The main reason is that neither innovation fits with our way of doing the constant comparative procedure because it was developed prior to the rift. Thus, it is precisely because the original approach is retained by Glaser that I now find myself agreeing with his concerns about the Strauss–Corbin changes. Thus, I too am concerned that Strauss’s more rational approach to categorizing runs the risk of subverting the discovery-oriented intent of the method. And I share Glaser’s reservations about the universal applicability of the coding paradigm. I too feel that requiring this application could force the data. Moreover, I feel that these reservations are supported by my observation of what other grounded theorists have done since the emergence of the rift. None of the contemporary manuscripts and publications coming to my attention has demonstrated an uptake of Strauss’s deductive way of categorizing, and few users of the GTM have complied with the maxim that the coding paradigm must be applied. Thus, it is my judgment that those considering adopting the GTM will be on safe ground when staying with some form of the original way of doing constant comparison (e.g., see the writings by Charmaz, 1995; Henwood and Pidgeon, 1992; Stern, 1994; and Wilson and Hutchinson, 1996; for commentaries on and variations

of the original procedure). When all is said and done, it is adherence to this original way of engaging in the constant comparative procedure, in one way or other, that provides the greatest promise of using the GTM in the discovery-oriented way that was, from the outset—and continues to be—its hallmark.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

**DAVID L. RENNIE**, PhD, CPsych, is a Professor of Psychology at York University, Toronto, where he has taught since 1970. He took his first two degrees in psychology at the University of Alberta, in 1959 and 1965. He worked at a number of clinical and counseling positions in Alberta from 1959 to 1967, when he departed for the University of Missouri, Columbia, where he obtained a PhD in clinical psychology in 1971.

At Missouri he conducted research on imitative learning as well as the related topic of vicarious reinforcement. Upon arrival at York, his interest shifted to counselor training research and then to research on the client's experience of therapy. It was at the point of the second shift that he abandoned the conventional approach to research in favor of the grounded theory form of qualitative research.

Having been trained as a positivistic, quantitative researcher, the shift to qualitative research required a considerable adjustment. Thus, while applying it, he was also interested in justifying it. This interest took him to the theory of the GTM, or its methodology, and to coherent epistemological underpinnings of it. This work on methodology has become his main focus in recent years.

Throughout the course of his career, he has produced 60 publications, including a book on counseling and two co-edited books on the application of qualitative research methods and methodologies to the study of counseling and psychotherapy. He is a fellow of both the Canadian and American Psychological Associations and is currently president-elect of the humanistic division of the American Psychological Association (APA).