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GROUNDED THEORY: A PROMISING APPROACH TO CONCEPTUALIZATION IN PSYCHOLOGY?

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ABSTRACT
There is a growing body of opinion that psychology suffers from an elaborate research technology that overemphasizes theory verification and impairs thinking and discovery. Grounded theory is advanced as an approach to research that can address this crisis of method in psychology. The grounded approach is described and illustrated in terms of its application to psychotherapy process research. The emphasis on theory creation characterizing the approach is examined within the history of induction. The challenges to and limitations of grounded theory are discussed.

There are growing indications that psychology as a discipline is undergoing a crisis of confidence about its research methods. These rumblings of discontent were felt two decades ago when Bakan (1967) characterized psychologists as playing at science in much the way children play at being cowboys, imitating every aspect of cowboy life except the one which is most central — taking care of cows. In much the same way, Bakan contended, psychologists have been concerned with developing an elaborate research technology while ignoring the main work of science — thinking and discovery.

The fault does not lie entirely with contemporary psychologists. It has been pointed out that psychology imitated physics with its emphasis on hypothetico-deductive research while in retrospect the fledgling science might have found astronomy or zoology, with their emphasis on description, more appropriate models (Endler, 1984; Kendler, 1986). As a result, the ensuing technology has increasingly dictated the kinds of studies that are done and has made theorizing less common and less respectable than energetic but trivial research (Bakan, 1967; Brandt, 1982; Endler, 1984; Gergen, 1982; Koch, 1981; Secord, 1982; Silverman, 1977). Many theories that have been developed have been tested by disjointed investigations of irrelevant hypotheses (Arthur, 1983). Even when the hypotheses of studies have been more closely tied to theories, testing has been contaminated by research participants responding to their own inner hypotheses about the experiments in which they are engaged (Orne, 1962; Silverman, 1977). Furthermore, speculation that investigators themselves are incapable of shedding biases despite the most rigorous experimental approaches (Kuhn, 1970; Polanyi, 1969) has received empirical support (Pyke, 1982).

Adair (1981) proposes that six research models have been developed in response to criticism of laboratory research. At one end of this continuum are supporters of laboratory experimentation either in its present form (e.g., Kruglanski, 1973) or as a buttressed approach (e.g., Orne, 1973; Rosenthal, 1967). At the other extreme are skeptics who advocate either temporarily abandoning...
the laboratory experiment (e.g., Barker, 1965; Harré & Secord, 1972; Silverman, 1977;) or replacing it with observational, humanistic research strategies (e.g., Giorgi, 1970).

There is another approach which falls toward the observational, humanistic end of this continuum and which has relevance for research in psychology. The grounded theory method (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) provides an opportunity to create theory in subject areas that are difficult to access with traditional research methods. Glaser and Strauss developed this approach in response to a perceived crisis in theory development in sociology. In their view, sociology suffers from deductive, armchair theorizing in which data are forced to fit theories in lieu of a more appropriate generation of theories from data. As an antidote, they worked out a systematic, inductive approach to theory building that has shown promise in sociology and education. However, regional boundaries separating disciplines have occluded psychologists' awareness of grounded theory.

We became introduced to grounded theory in our search for a way to understand psychotherapy process from the client's point of view. As we surveyed the literature, we found that attempts to portray therapy from the client's perspective mainly entailed theory-driven, quantitative approaches entailing instrumentation (e.g., Elliot, 1984; Hill, Helms, Spiegel, & Tichenor, in press; Orlinsky & Howard, 1975; Strupp, Walloch & Wogan, 1964), content analyses of clients' accounts of the psychotherapy experience (e.g., Mayer & Timms, 1970; Oldfield, 1983), and case studies (e.g., Rogers, 1951; Yalom & Elkin, 1974). With few exceptions (e.g., Fessler, 1978), there had been no attempt to systematically contend with a hermeneutic analysis of clients' verbatim accounts. Yet we felt that this approach would be required to understand the client's perspective in a way which is relatively uncontaminated by theory derived from the therapist's perspective, given that most psychotherapy researchers are psychotherapists.

Having come from the hypothetico-deductive research tradition, we were apprehensive about shifting to a qualitative approach. After considering the approach outlined by Bogdan (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Bogdan & Taylor, 1975), the American phenomenological approach (e.g., Giorgi, 1970; Keen, 1975), and the British new paradigm research (e.g., Harré & Secord, 1972; Reason & Rowan, 1981), we chose the grounded theory method. We were attracted to it because it seemed relatively more systematic than any of the other approaches and because, compared to the phenomenological and new paradigm approaches, it places less emphasis on the role of the researcher in co-constructing the respondent's accounts. We viewed the reduced emphasis on co-construction as being two-edged: it meant that a grounded analysis would be relatively less intense but, as a compensation, would be a way of studying a relatively larger number of individuals. We were swayed by the last feature because of its implication for generalizability.

In adopting the new method, we have had to abandon most of the canons of the hypothetico-deductive approach, particularly random assignment, the use of large numbers of participants, hypothesis testing, experimental control, and statistics. This abandonment led us into what we now refer to as "the period of darkness" wherein we were not sure that what we contemplated doing was credible, and were tormented with a dread that, even if we felt that the returns from the new approach were credible, peers within our discipline would rule otherwise.

To a certain extent we have now run this gauntlet and have emerged with the conviction that there is a place for this approach within psychotherapy process research. Encouraged by the returns in our own field of endeavour, and buttressed by successful application of the approach in related disciplines, we raise the possibility that it holds promise for psychology as a whole.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. The first goal is to depict an implementation of the grounded approach by drawing upon our own work. This objective is addressed in the main body of the paper, wherein we provide an overview of the grounded approach and then depict what Glaser and Strauss refer to as the "constant comparison method." The second goal is to consider the main issues pertaining to grounded theory, at least as we see them. Four issues are raised in the Discussion section: philosophical differences about the virtues of theory generation versus theory verification in induction; and credibility of the approach in the light of researcher subjectivity, the use of verbal reports as data, and generalizability of findings. It is our hope that, in describing the approach and in addressing contentions surrounding it, we will provide a bridge for psychological investigators
who are contemplating a transition from a quantitative to a qualitative approach to inquiry.

**Description of the Approach**

**Overview**

The emphasis in the grounded theory approach is on the generation of theory through the inductive examination of information. This emphasis is contrasted with the more traditional approach in sociology (and psychology) of using information to verify existing theory. This is not to say that verificational activities hold no place in the grounded approach. M. H. Marx (1963) advocates a "functional" interplay between induction and deduction in social science. In a similar vein, grounded theorists may choose to test a generated theory through traditional research techniques. However, this use of deduction holds a minor place in the approach. Furthermore, although the method can be applied to quantitative information, it has usually been used to analyse qualitative data such as interview protocols, records, or bibliographic material.

As inductivists, grounded researchers are faced with a paradox. They attempt to rid themselves of preconceptions about the phenomenon under investigation so that its "true" nature will be allowed to emerge in the analysis. At the same time, they believe that this Husserlian "phenomenological reduction" (see Giorgi, 1970; Spiegelberg, 1972) can never be achieved. This paradox has both practical and philosophical implications.

In terms of practice, grounded researchers generally avoid reading pertinent literature until the investigation is finished and their grounded theories are in place. Once a theory is set, existing theories are evaluated and those that fit the grounded theory are integrated with it so that it may be further enriched and elaborated. A second practical implication is that researchers attempt to identify and record their biases at every stage of the development of a grounded theory. This explicit acknowledgement of assumptions helps to contain their influence. Furthermore, if the biases are indicated in the final write-up of the grounded theory, readers of the report are able to evaluate it more effectively.

Philosophically, it is recognized that the researcher is a mediator of the phenomenon under investigation and that different investigators might develop somewhat different views of the same phenomenon, each of which may be credible within its own limits. The grounded approach forces investigators to stay close to their data, so that somewhat different theories arising from the same data are the result of the different analysts emphasizing different aspects of them. Hence, the reactive impact that investigators have upon their data bears more on the scope than on the credibility of an emerging theory. The technique that forces investigators to stay close to their data, and which constitutes the systematization of the approach, is the constant comparative method.

**The Constant Comparative Method**

Glaser and Strauss (1967) maintain that there are three general approaches to qualitative research. In the first approach, investigators code data and crudely quantify the codes in an attempt to prove a theoretical proposition. In the second approach, researchers are interested only in creating theories. They inspect data to detect new properties of theoretical categories. In the third approach, which entails Glaser's and Strauss's constant comparative method, the first two approaches are combined. Investigators systematically categorize data and limit theorizing until patterns in the data emerge from the categorizing operation. This method requires data collection, open categorizing, memoing, moving toward parsimony through the determination of a core category, recycling of earlier steps in terms of the core category, sorting of memos, and the write-up of the theory in terms of the picture arrived at through the last step (Glaser, 1978).

In the following description of the method, we shall be deriving illustrations from our research on the client's experience of psychotherapy.

**Data Collection.** One of the main features of the grounded approach is that data collection is...
influenced by the outcomes of the emerging analysis. The collection proceeds through successive stages which are determined by changes in criteria for selecting data sources (e.g., interviewees) according to what has been learned from previous data sources. Initially, the researcher focuses on learning what is central and crucial to the phenomenon. Hence, participants are selected who seem likely to represent the phenomenon and who are relatively similar. This is done in order to maximize the chances that aspects of the phenomenon will emerge clearly. This approach facilitates the generation of categories and consensus about their properties (see below).

Next, the researcher seeks to clarify variability within this focal area. Variability is defined as the appearance of respondents' attributes that are potential qualifiers of the emerging theory. In order to examine the impact of such attributes on the theory, data sources representing the attributes are selected. This selection requires one or more comparison groups. For example, in a study of the experience of psychotherapy as recalled by former clients (Phillips, 1984; 1985), the analysis of the accounts of an initial set of respondents gave rise to a tentative theory that the primary experience of clients in therapy is one of active self-focus. However, these respondents had participated in eclectic, humanistic therapy. The generalizability of the model was challenged by interviewing clients of other types of therapists, such as those with a behavioural or psychoanalytic orientation.

The selection of new data sources on the basis of the emerging theory is what Glaser and Strauss refer to as theoretical sampling or, as we prefer to call it, theory-based data selection. As an approach to data acquisition, it is very flexible. When two or more groups are compared in traditional research, attempts are made to hold constant all variables other than those defining the comparison. However, in the grounded approach, groups can be compared on the basis of even a single dimension if it is judged to be germane to the emerging theory. As the number of comparison groups increases, the conditions and limitations of the theory unfold.

Categorization. The choice of an analytic unit is somewhat arbitrary but, once defined by a given set of investigators, should be clearly explained and consistently used. For example, Glaser (1978) recommends that interview material should be analyzed line by line. However, in our work we have found that the method is more workable if a transcript is broken up into meaning units of individual concepts conveyed by the interviewees (see below).

The mechanics of the analysis of data may vary among investigators. Glaser and Strauss indicate that they like to make their analytic notes on the margins of their research protocols. We prefer to condense the contents of meaning notes and to record each condensation on an index card. For example, here is a meaning unit derived from a transcript of an inquiry interview with a young man who had just emerged from a psychotherapy session, therapy tape in hand, and who commented on the therapy as the tape was replayed:

Int. Can you recall what was going on between you and your therapist during this part of the interview?
Cl. Well, he was just listening intently. He wasn't commenting very much. I never really let him. Sometimes I interrupt him all the time because I have more to add, you know.

The meaning unit was condensed in two steps. The first reduction was as follows:
C (client) reported that T (therapist) was listening intently and wasn't commenting too much because C wouldn't let him. C would interrupt because he had more to add.

This reduction was further rendered to a summary that could be typed on one line on another index card:
T listened intently; C interrupted; more to add.

Units of analysis are sorted into clusters on the basis of the meaning embedded in the items. The meaning tying items to a given cluster is lexically symbolized, and this symbol constitutes a category. For example, here are a number of second-order reductions of meaning units, derived from the responses of several interviewees, that have the same general meaning as that embedded in our first example above.

An articulating word by T helps C continue with thought.
T's metaphor disrupted C's train of thought (Interviewee B).
T's self-disclosure did not throw C off (Interviewee C).
T's security enables C to correct him to retrack.
T's leading is important when C needs it; it hits the main focus (Interviewee D).
When T is off track, C feels C is not communicating very well.
Although it doesn't seem like it, T must know that C is moving toward something (Interviewee E).

For the early stage in the analysis, it is recommended that category generation be descriptive, so that the name of the category closely reflects the language used by the respondents. This procedure serves as a check against straying from the substance of the data. For example, the meaning units above are assignable to a descriptive category labelled The Client's Track. This category is descriptive since many interviewees used words and phrases like “retrack” and “offtrack.”

As categories continue to emerge, units of analysis are compared to each category. Each unit is assigned to as many categories as possible. If no categories fit a given unit, a new category is developed to represent it. The assignment of a given unit to as many categories as possible is referred to as open categorizing. This technique separates the grounded method from content analysis since, in the latter approach, a given datum is assigned to only one category. As an example of open categorizing, some of the above incidents that were first assigned to The Client’s Track subsequently were assigned to other categories as follows:

“C would interrupt T because C had more to add” was also assigned to Sidetracking the Therapist;

“Talking is like daydreaming — make some important discoveries” was additionally assigned to Client Evaluates Own Processes and to Client’s Sharpening of Preconscious Awareness; and

“Made connections alone but it was not so pleasant” was categorized under Client’s Sharpening of Preconscious Awareness and Relationship with Therapist.

Continuing with the example, units that were initially assigned to other categories were subsequently assigned to The Client’s Track:

“C looks for signs from T that C is on the right track” had been assigned first to Faith in the Therapist;

“C sidetracked T by asking her about her bandaged finger” had been categorized first under Client Sidetracking the Therapist; and

“Rude to comment when not getting anywhere; there’s more to it than that” initially had been placed under Fear of Criticizing the Therapist.

Open categorizing permits the researcher to preserve subtle nuances of the data and supplies the groundwork for the development of rich theory.

A number of commentators have indicated that qualitative researchers should actively interpret their findings. They should not merely generate descriptive categories but should also construct categories that help to explain the descriptive categories and the relationships among them (see Collaizi, 1979; Sullivan, 1984). Glaser and Strauss subscribe to this viewpoint. A grounded theory is typically a blend of descriptive and constructed categories with the former often subsumable under the latter. As an example of a constructed category, the first meaning unit above (“C interrupted the T”) is also pertinent to the category Client Defensiveness. This is a constructed category since the interviewees seldom used the term “defensive” when describing their interactions with their therapists, yet the concept seemed to capture certain aspects of the interactions.

As the analysis proceeds, it becomes clear that some categories are defining characteristics or properties of other categories. It also becomes clear that the categories saturate, which means that the analysis of additional protocols reveals no new categories, properties, or relationships among them. Saturation often occurs after the analysis of 5 to 10 protocols (Conrad, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Jones, 1980; Pennington, 1983; Phillips, 1984; Quartaro, 1985; Rennie, 1984).

Researchers using the grounded method must categorize their own data which means that the approach is labour intensive, particularly during the early stages of an analysis. As categories and their properties begin to saturate, the categorization of new data quickens. Independent categorizing by research collaborators can be useful as a check on the perceptual field of the primary investigator.

2Our illustration of categorizing makes it appear that the actual assignment of categories is based on a scrutiny of the second-level reductions. They are in fact based on careful study of the first-level reductions. This is an important point, since the first-level reductions have fuller meaning than do the second-level reductions. However, we find that, once the categorizing decisions have been made on the basis of analysis of the first-level reductions, the second-level reductions reintegrate our memories of the meanings contained in the first-level reductions (and hence in the transcripts). The advantage in working with the second-level reductions is that they can be easily arrayed. The arrays give compact portrayals of the meanings embedded within categories, and of the relationships between categories.
Memoing. As analysts collect and analyze data, ideas inevitably occur about the data, the categories and the theory. In the grounded approach, these ideas are systematically recorded in the form of memos. For example, Jan 5/84. I like the category Politics of the Relationship but it is as yet not part of the taxonomy. I'm holding it in reserve. Most of its properties are embedded in Criticism of T by C. I'm reluctant to quickly adopt the Politics title because the term implies transaction and I don't have the therapist's side. But I do find the title appealing. "Game" is another possibility.

These memos have several functions. They help the analyst to obtain insight into tacit, guiding assumptions. They raise the conceptual level of the research by encouraging the analyst to think beyond single incidents to themes and patterns in the data. They capture speculations about the properties of categories, or relationships among categories, or possible criteria for the selection of further data sources. They enable the researcher to preserve ideas that have potential value but which may be premature. They are useful if gaps in the relation of theory to data arise, for they provide a record of the researcher's ideas about the analysis and can be used to trace the development of a category. They are used to note thoughts about the similarity of the emerging theory to established theories or concepts. Finally, as shall be seen below, they play a key role in the write-up of the theory.

The Movement Toward Parsimony. After saturation has been achieved, the researcher's focus shifts to the relationships among categories. Some categories are deemed central because they have links with many other categories as a result of the multiple categorization of items (as illustrated above). It becomes apparent that the network of linked categories forms a hierarchical structure in which central categories subsume lower-order categories. Depending on the conceptual nature of the categories, the structure can have several levels, with the categories in each level serving as properties of the category or categories at the next highest level. At this stage in the analysis, judgements about the pertinence of categories are made on the basis of the extent to which they contribute to the emerging structure. Categories that have few connections with it are either dropped or collapsed into other categories. For example, one respondent interviewed by the first author had a therapist with a gestalt orientation, and another participant's therapist had a transactional analytic orientation. In their inquiries, both of these clients commented on the therapist's orientation to such an extent that the categories of Gestalt Techniques and Transactional Analytical Techniques were demanded by the data. However, as the study came to a conclusion, the endorsements of these categories were localized in the two clients giving rise to them. Consequently, both categories were pooled into the category Therapist Directiveness.

As part of the process of developing central categories, effort is directed toward determining the most central, or core category. This is the category that is most densely related to the other categories and their properties. It is typically an abstract category but it is not vague. It is clearly defined by its properties, which are the categories it subsumes. It is sensitive to new information in the analysis because it is associated with many other categories. It is thus the last category to saturate and usually emerges late in the analysis.

Turning to our work to illustrate core categories, Phillips's (1984; 1985) Self Focus category captured much of the meaning expressed in the accounts of former clients as they reflected upon the experience of psychotherapy. This is a rich category, understandable in terms of six (constructed) underlying processes serving as its properties. These properties are in turn supported by a number of descriptive categories pertaining to the therapy experience. Secondly, in analyzing clients' comments on the playback of their own psychotherapy audiotapes, Rennie (1984; 1985a,b; 1987) found that the clients: often had private reactions to therapist operations; typically metacognitively appraised their own affective and cognitive processes, again in privacy; and often covertly engaged in executive manoeuvres in order to influence the course of the therapy and the relationship with the therapist. These private processes frequently constituted the real therapeutic work, as phenomenologically experienced. This finding led to the development of a core category called Client Agency, supported by many other categories on several levels. For example, one property of Agency is Client Feeds the Process. This property in turn is supported by The Client's Track, Client
Narration/Regurgitation, Confessions by Client, Discriminating Use of the Therapist, Unfinished Business, and Client Evaluates Own Processes. Another property of Agency is Client Deference. This property has its own properties consisting of, for example, Concern About the Therapist's Approach, Client Understanding the Therapist's Frame of Reference, and Fear of Criticizing the Therapist. In this analysis, Client Agency has 8 properties which in turn have a total of 37 sub-properties. The main feature of this model of the client's experience of psychotherapy is that it brings the role of metacognition into sharper relief when compared to theory-driven models derived from the hypothetico-deductive approach to psychotherapy process research.

Glaser (1978) suggests that should more than one highly central category arise, effort should be made to determine if only one of them is a core category to which the others are subsumable. Failing this, he recommends that the nonsubsumable categories be split off from the analysis and reserved for additional grounded theories, lest the analysis becomes overly complex and burdensome.

Writing the Theory. In the grounded approach, the main repository of the analyst's interpretive activity is the research memo. It is the memo that enables the investigator to record ideas about potential central categories and about relationships among categories. This conceptual material is the basis of the grounded theory. During this advanced stage of the analysis, the research memos are sorted, and new memos are created in response to the insights and speculations produced by initial memo sorts. Additional memoing contributes to the generation of the core category and the specification of the structure of its properties and the relationships among them. This meaning system provides the organizational structure for the write-up of the theory.

There are four criteria for a grounded theory. It should be believable in that it should seem to the reader to be a plausible explanation. It should be adequate in that it should present a comprehensive account that does not omit large or important portions of the data. It should be grounded in terms of the appropriate procedures and thereby inductively tied to the data. Finally, it should be applicable and should lead to hypotheses and additional investigation (Glaser, 1978).

Discussion

The grounded theory approach is a systematic and potentially powerful strategy for theory development. It provides investigators with a heady freedom in exploring complex phenomena. Having the method in hand is like carrying a flashlight that can be beamed on any aspect of a cluttered attic. In principle, anything can be addressed so long as it is represented in colligative symbols. The method can illuminate aspects of human existence as varied as organizational communication (Browning, 1978); marital dissolution (Laner, 1978); the ways of being of cancer patients who outlived their life expectancy (Pennington, 1983); the experience of getting settled in a new city (Jones, 1980); the processes of academic change (Conrad, 1978; Newcombe & Conrad, 1981); graduate students' subjective experience of being blocked when attempting to do a thesis (Rennie & Brewer, 1987); and, as we have seen, the client's subjective experience of psychotherapy.

In making the transition from a quantitative, hypothetico-deductive approach to a qualitative, grounded one we have undergone a transformation of our relationship to the research process. We do not seem to mind how much time this type of research requires because of the saliency of the data. We have the sense that we are getting close to the bone and in conference presentations we are getting feedback that reinforces that impression. Furthermore, when we attend to the work of other qualitative researchers, we feel a similar sense of cogency as we relate to their findings, and encounter an excitement about this approach to inquiry that matches our own.

At the same time, the approach is contentious (Brown, 1973; Layder, 1982). In our view, there are four main issues: the place of theory-generation as opposed to theory-verification in induction; and the credibility of the grounded approach in terms of the researcher subjectivity it entails, in terms of its utilization of verbal reports as data, and in terms of the generalizability of findings. Let us look at these issues in turn.

Contentions About the Grounded Theory Approach

Philosophical Differences about Theory-Generation versus Theory-Verification. Induction is generally characterized as the formulation of general laws from particular instances. In a history that extends to Aristotle, there has been controversy about how such propositions are formed. There has also been debate on whether
it is the development of propositions or the proof of them that should be given primary importance. For example, Whewell (1847/1967; 1860/1971) maintains that propositions are formed by bringing imagination, or "conceptions" to bear on facts. The exact processes of this creative inferencing are poorly understood. Nevertheless, the inferencing is vital because without it the investigator is awash in a sea of facts. It is this power of conceptions to colligate facts that leads Whewell to conclude that the formation of theory is a more critical aspect of induction than is the proof of it.

J.S. Mill (1872/1973-1974) argues with Whewell on both counts. Mill grants that colligation of facts is an essential part of induction, and he agrees that conceptualization in induction is "skillful guessing." However, he asserts that a conception is something seen in the facts, not something added to the facts. It is perhaps this downplay of the role of creative inferencing in induction that leads Mill to conclude that the proof of inductive propositions is more essential than their generation.

The grounded approach is more in keeping with the philosophy of Whewell than of Mill. It thus runs counter to prevailing sentiment in psychology about the proper praxis of induction. One of the virtues of the hypothetico-deductive approach is that products of its use have the trappings of scientific credibleness. The grounded approach is less scientistic. Here theories are developed through the use of conceptualization to colligate facts, rather than through a recurring cycle of inferencing and hypothesis testing. Exemption from the constraint of the verificational approach frees grounded researchers to address highly complex meaning structures that might otherwise be beyond the pale. However, the release is won at the expense of a number of threats to the credibility of the approach. These threats bear both on the intrinsic worth of a grounded theory and on its generalizability.

Threats to Credibility: Subjectivity: A grounded theory wins its credibility through its persuasiveness. This in turn is a function of the extent to which the inferencing processes of the grounded analyst have been demystified. It is also a function of the extent to which the categories underpinning the theory have been documented. There are forces at play that threaten sufficient realization of both of these requirements.

It is difficult for grounded researchers to fully realize the goal of identifying and disclosing their implicit assumptions. The norm of total objectivity, one of the legacies from positivism, is still effective. Grounded theorists receive little comfort from the attention that has been drawn to the role of subjective factors in traditional research approaches (e.g., Kuhn, 1970; Polanyi, 1969; Pyke, 1982) in light of the dearth of evidence that such criticisms have influenced the ways in which scientific results are presented in mainstream publications. Consequently, it is difficult to be candid about the subjective factors that were at work as a given grounded theory was formulated. There are fears that the open disclosure of such factors will impede acceptance of the research effort by the scientific community.

Editorial constraints on the length of publishable articles impose limits on the extent to which grounded researchers can document their categories. Various solutions to this problem have been suggested. Glaser and Strauss claim that grounded researchers need not dwell on documentation when writing up their theories, because categories emerging from truly grounded analyses will resonate with the reader and will not require much illustration. J. Shotter (personal communication, October 14, 1983) maintains that the detailed presentation of a representative example from each category is one solution. In line with Shotter's suggestion, Rennie and Brewer (1987) gained editorial approval by giving one example per category for each of two comparison groups.

Hence, candor about the reactive impact of the investigator on the investigation is constrained by the climate of positivism in psychological research. However, there is a change in the wind. New humanistic and interdisciplinary societies (e.g., the International Human Science Research Conference) and new journals (e.g., The Humanistic Psychologist, Phenomenology and Pedagogy, and Methods) are being formed which encourage such openness.

Verbal Reports as Data: Another area of threat to the intrinsic worth of grounded theories derives from the fact that the grounded analysis of accounts typically entails the use of verbal reports as data. This means that grounded researchers may not gain access to internal processes of which participants are unaware. The investigators may also be misled by participants who misrepresent processes of which they are aware. Nisbett and Wilson (1977) adduce
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evidence to support their conclusion that, when attempting to report on cognitive processes, individuals do not truly introspect but instead draw upon a priori, implicit causal theories about the extent to which a given stimulus is a plausible cause of a given response. This claim has given rise to a number of challenges (see Adair & Spinner, 1981; Cotton, 1980; Ericsson & Simon, 1980; Morris, 1981; Rich, 1979; Smith & Miller, 1978; White, 1980). It is beyond the scope of this article to review all of the opposing arguments. However, we would like to briefly summarize the points made by Ericsson and Simon (1980) and Morris (1981), which are especially compelling.

Ericsson and Simon examine verbal reports as data in terms of a model derived from information theory and they cite evidence supporting their prediction that verbal reports can be accurate if they address processes that are actually attended to and registered in short-term memory. Along similar lines, Morris (1981) takes the logical position that verbal reports can draw only on conscious material, and that what is conscious is intentionality.

The existence of levels of cognitive processing requires grounded researchers, who rely on verbal accounts as data sources, to carefully consider which levels are appropriate for verbal report. It also behooves them to use techniques that facilitate accurate reporting when appropriate levels are being tapped. Meichenbaum and Butler (1979) maintain that improvements over the typical post-experiment inquiry can be made in the form of intensive interviews and videotape recall. In using these techniques, we have found that interviewees can subjectively judge the extent to which they are either remembering a past event or constructing it (see Spence [1982] for a discussion of this distinction in the context of psychoanalysis). We have additionally found that participants can derive subjective estimates of the extent to which an internal attribution is felt to be true. The absence of external criteria makes it impossible to validate the truth value of individual verbal reports that are evaluated through these procedures. However, the use of the constant comparative method to demonstrate that different individuals say the same thing increases the credibility of individual accounts.

Generalizability: The fact that grounded analyses are typically conducted on a small number of selected participants is problematic. Ideally, grounded researchers extend the generalizability of their emerging theories by systematically comparing a series of contrasting groups, selecting participants from each group until saturation ensues. However, the arduous nature of this work limits the conduct of extensive comparisons. Thus the generalizability of grounded theories is often in question.

The replication of findings across a small number of participants places the grounded approach between the individual case study and traditional group approach to psychological research. Like the case study, it provides the investigator with the opportunity to explore subjective, idiographic events. Unlike the case study, it emphasizes the necessity to replicate the evidence of such events by addressing more than one individual. In replicating individual findings across as many people as are necessary for emergent categories to saturate, the investigator gets a foothold on a commonly experienced phenomenon. The resultant theory typically communicates to the reader this contact with commonality. It is intimacy with the phenomenon that grounded theorists seek much more than external criteria of adequacy such as hard evidence of generalizability derived from a random sampling of a large number of individuals. Once again, the object of the approach is to create new theory that is directly tied to the reality of individuals. The object is not to verify the theory so generated beyond the verification yielded by saturation of categories. Additional verification is deliberately left to subsequent studies and/or other investigators.

Summing up this discussion of challenges to the grounded approach, candor about investigator reactivity and full documentation of findings are being facilitated by the development of professional societies and editorial policies sympathetic to qualitative research. Scrutiny of the usefulness of verbal reports as data indicates that they can yield valid information about intentionality. Finally, the problem of limited generalizability of grounded findings is not resolved but is accepted by grounded researchers as a legitimate price to pay for research that is intimately tied to the phenomena it addresses.

The approach yields access to aspects of human experience which are difficult, if not impossible, to address with traditional approaches to psychological research yet are inherent in the subject matter of psychology. We
have found that the hermeneutic analysis of psychotherapy clients’ accounts has exposed the covert worlds of clients as they participate in therapy and has demonstrated the extent to which they are metacognitively aware and active within that privacy. We are accordingly developing models of this dimension of the client’s experience of therapy which complement existing models derived from alternative research approaches.

In our view, there is nothing special about psychotherapy clients’ accounts which makes them suitable for a grounded analysis. As indicated above, in principle any type of verbal report is appropriate for this research approach, which opens it up to a vast domain of subject matter. It is our conclusion that the grounded theory approach does hold promise as a useful research strategy that could be broadly applied within the discipline of psychology.

**RéSUMÉ**

On avance de plus en plus l’opinion que la psychologie est la proie d’une technologie de recherche élaborée qui surestime la vérification de la théorie et nuit à la découverte. La théorie de base est proposée comme approche à la recherche qui peut résoudre cette crise de méthode en psychologie. L’approche de base est décrite et illustrée en termes de son application au processus de la recherche en psychothérapie. On met l’accent sur la création de la théorie caractérisant cette approche qui est examinée à l’intérieur de l’histoire de l’induction. Les défis et les possibilités de la théorie de base sont discutées.

**References**


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