Staying Open: The use of theoretical codes in grounded theory

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Abstract

Theoretical codes (TCs) are abstract models that emerge during the sorting and memoing stages of grounded theory (GT) analysis. They conceptualize the integration of substantive codes as hypotheses of a theory. In this article, I explore the importance of their emergence in the development of a grounded theory and I discuss the challenge of the researcher in staying open to their emergence and earned relevance rather than their preconceived forcing on the theory under development. I emphasize the importance of GT researchers developing theoretical sensitivity to a wide range of theoretical perspectives and their associated codes. It is a skill that all GT researchers can and should develop.

Introduction

The full power of grounded theory comes with staying open to the emergent and to earned relevance when doing grounded theory (GT). This is especially so with regard to writing up a GT with emergent theoretical codes (TCs). Researchers seem to have the most trouble at this stage of the generating Process – sorting memos and writing up the theory with emergent TCs. Substantive coding comes comparatively easily and is exciting, giving the researcher the exhilarating feeling of discovery. Theoretical coding does not come easily as an emergent and has a beguiling mystique. As one PhD student emailed me: "theoretical codes and interchangeability of indicators were the two aspects of GT that I found the most difficult to comprehend." (Holton email January 26, 2004). Another GT researcher writes, "The author of this current paper suggests that theoretical coding perhaps places the most demand upon the grounded theorist's creativity" (Cutcliffe, 2000).

Theoretical codes are frequently left out of otherwise quite good GT papers, monographs, and dissertations. The novice GT researcher finds them hard to understand. This article begins the process of trouble shooting this problem by dealing with many facets of theoretical coding and will consider several sources of difficulty in using TCs. The goal is to help the GT researcher stay open to the nonforced, non-preconceived discovery of emergent TCs.

The reader may consider this article hard to understand unless he/she has read and studied my several former books. There will be some repetition of the ideas I have already written, but they will be in the service of offering new insights regarding TCs. Readers who are challenged in staying on a substantively abstract level of conceptualization may find this article even harder. Keeping researchers on an abstract or conceptual level is hard - especially for those in nursing, medicine, business and social work – since they are trained at the accurate description level. They tend to slip easily into a theoretical descriptive level as the trained style and practical considerations of their professional field take other.

Staying open to TCs will help maintain the substantively conceptual level required by GT and will increase its power.

This article is grounded in my origination of GT, in supervising many, many GT researches and dissertations, in reading many dissertations and GT monographs and in intense study of noted QDA methodology books. It is grounded in the hard study of the above caches. It is NOT a "think up" article. It is grounded in what is going on in GT research. The focus of this article, as is my many books, is to help researchers get GT research done – achieve GT products that receive the rewards of PhD degree and career moves. It is not an epistemological rhetorical wrestle that gets wordy and goes nowhere. People are doing GTs all over the world and GT methodology helps them achieve their product. Epistemological discussions are of no potential help to the actual doing of research. Rather, they can easily have the negative effects of sowing doubt in the emergence of categories and causing premature judgements of relevance.

As I have defined previously, "Theoretical codes conceptualize how the substantive codes of a research may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into a theory. They, like substantive codes, are emergent: they weave the fractured story back together again. Without substantive codes they are empty abstractions." (Glaser, 1978) TCs are abstract models, allowing the researcher to talk substantively of categories and properties while thinking conceptually. The important point is that the reader should develop a clear notion of their conscious use and relevance in generating theory. Then she/he can use, with theoretical sensitivity, an emergent theoretical code or codes to put a theory together. This consciousness can help in staying open. Reading my previous books will help achieve this abstract level. TC abstraction and use come with GT experience over many researches. It is part of the experiential growth of GT skill development. This abstraction avoids the flat, descriptive and often superficial presentations of QDA products.

Staying Open

Staying open to the emergent, earned relevance of theoretical codes is the point of this article. Repetitions that come from sections in *Theoretical Sensitivity* and *Doing Grounded Theory* (Glaser, 1978, 1998) are in the service of this goal. Staying open to earned relevance means that theoretical codes are not to be forced by disciplines, supervisors or pet codes. Trusting to emergence and one's own theoretical sensitivity is paramount.

For the researcher, staying open to earned relevance of TCs means being open to the fullest possible array of TCs. The researcher must learn and master sensitivity to as many TCs as possible. The more TCs the researcher learns, the more this requirement becomes moot. There are hundreds. The lists in *Theoretical Sensitivity* and *Doing Grounded Theory* (Glaser, 1978, 1998) offer the most frequently used and familiar ones, but they are a small list compared to the possible number of TCs to which one can be open by perusing the literature of many scientific fields.

GT is NOT a methodology guided by one theoretical perspective and its TCs. GT is a general method, based on a concept-indicator model that can use any TC derived from any

theoretical perspective. This theme is hard to sustain in actual research. It is not easy to stay open because of previous training, the tremendous grab of some TCs – e.g. basic social process – and the tendency to cling to a particular theoretical perspective and its attendant idols or great men—e.g. symbolic interaction. The researcher sees what he has been trained to see. Breaking out to being open takes time and is hard both personally and in a framed research context. I realize that what I am saying is easier said than done. But it can be done. Many do. The basic idea is to become open and sensitive to the emergent, earned relevance of TCs. The procedure is to stop preconceived forcing based on discipline, supervisors, pet codes, a "grande" perspective and unwarranted hunches.

Hard To Stay Open

Staying open is not easy. It is hard. Most people attempt a GT research framed, or inculcated in a theoretical framework, either consciously or unawares. Perhaps it is hard to truly become open, but it is quite possible as GT procedures from start to finish are designed to open up the researcher and keep her/him open to the emergent and to earned relevance. When the researcher gets the point, GT procedures provide ways to perpetually suspend the frameworks of any forcing theoretical perspective in favour of what substantive and TCs emerge. Staying open then becomes relatively easy. Not knowing before the emergent becomes fun and discovery exciting.

Most GT researchers I have read to date get the staying open point easily for substantive coding, but not for TCs. They miss the point for TCs for failure to study them, thus not becoming sensitive to what TC might emerge. Rather, they use the TC of their theoretical perspective of trained origin. In restricting TCs to their field of origin, they miss possible emergent TCs by not being sensitive to a fuller array of them.

One normal block to staying open is to describe GT by a popular TC "as if" GT research always yields that TC. "I have often described grounded theory as an explanation of some underlying basic social process, and so I guess, in my mind, the development of a GT is really a qualitative causal modelling process" (Olsen email March 7, 2003, Institute for Qualitative Methodology). To be sure, basic social processes (BSPs) frequently emerge and are pervasive, but not always, as I clearly said in *Theoretical Sensitivity* (Glaser, 1978). In fact, in our now famous book, *Awareness of Dying*, the core category was a typology of dying expectations (Glaser & Strauss, 1965).

In *The Grounded Perspective II: Description's Remodeling of Grounded Theory Methodology*, I detailed at length the remodeling of GT by the QDA methodologists (Glaser, 2003). GT has been used to "jargon up" QDA methodology and, in the bargain; TCs are caught up in the method mix jargon. QDA methodology stultifies GT. Staying open to a full array of sensitively emergent TCs is restricted to the author's forced theoretical perspective, frequently symbolic interaction or systems theory. TCs become "assumed" by the framed researcher.

Staying open to whatever TC is relevant is the goal in my effort to extricate the forcing of TCs by the qualitative methodologists and their "grande" theoretical perspectives. There is

nothing wrong with using structural or symbolic interactional TCs if they earn relevance, but my effort is to stop the ascendant default remodelling caused by the routine forcing of TCs. I especially wish to stop, or at least curb, the use of a TC to remodel GT to another QDA method. For example, using Strauss's conditional matrix "as if" always relevant and irrespective is pure forcing. One reads of Strauss's conditional matrix everywhere in the QDA literature. Remember, GT is a general methodology than can use any data and therefore any TC.

Milliken and Schreiber argue for the generality of GT when they write about the epistemology of GT (Milliken & Schreiber, 2001). They say, "Epistemology has been defined more loosely in sociology to encompass the methods of scientific inquiry used to study knowledge. Thus, epistemology can be seen both as a philosophy of human knowing and how one learns about it. Inherent in different epistemologies are different assumptions and beliefs about the nature of know, of what can be known, and who can be the knower ". In applying these thoughts to GT, they say: "In contrast to quantitative methods, in which the researcher is the expert, in grounded theory the researcher defers to the experience of the participant, who has experience with the phenomenon of study. The researcher's job is to investigate the socially constructed meanings that form the participants' realities and the behaviors that flow from these meanings. That is, we want to know how they understand and act within their worlds. What can be known of the covert and overt behavior of participants is negotiated between the researcher and participant, toward a shared understanding. Clearly, in our view, the epistemology of grounded theory is steeped in symbolic interaction." (Milliken & Schreiber, 2001), p.180)

This view is patently wrong. It is pure QDA rhetoric in the quest of worrisome accuracy (Glaser, 2002). It neglects conceptualization. It uses a "grande" theoretical perspective and its TCs to define GT, thus denying that GT is a general method that can use any type of data and the TCs of any theoretical perspective. GT searches for the latent patterns in any type of data to articulate a grounded theory. Latent patterns are everywhere and all is data for GT including the use of any TC from whatever perspective. To be sure, interactionally constructed data exists BUT it only a piece or one type of the data used in GT studies. To be sure, GT as a general method picks up constructed data in many studies these days, but these researchers must transcend the data type to see the general use of GT methodology and enrich their research by using "all as data" (Glaser, 1998). GT does not need a "grande" epistemology, as such, to justify its use. It is based on a latent structure analysis approach using a conceptindicator model yielding emergent theoretical frameworks to which the researcher must stay open.

Two experienced grounded theorists express the staying open requirement well. Phyllis Stern says "theoretical coding…simply means applying a variety of analytic schemes to the data to enhance their abstraction" (Stern, 1980). Holly Skodol Wilson says,"Theoretical codes are the ways in which substantive codes and data they express are interrelated. There are innumerable families of theoretical codes. All are ways of relating variables theoretically. I attempted to discover multiple and varied relationships between and among concepts. Such an approach is designed to yield molecular rather than linear theoretical models". (Skodol Wilson, 1977). Thus, the true nature of TCs has been around for many

years and cannot be allowed to be remodeled by a single theoretical perspective as others, especially the QDA methodologists, would try.

Theoretical codes come from all fields and their theoretical perspectives, whether social psychology, sociology, philosophy, organizational theory, economics, political science, history, biochemistry, etc. Staying open to TCs from these fields is very enriching of GT. For example, the random walk TC from biochemistry is very useful in GT. Conjunctural causation from political science is an eye opener for GT.

Staying open to what can emerge can be turned in on itself, however, "as if" to be open somehow cannot be based on the researcher's ability to suspend knowledge. This inability is seen as routine and unavoidable and to be expected of expert knowledge. Katherine May argues thatexpert knowledge in qualitative research consists of an exquisitely tuned capacity to know where to look and the ability to ferret out similarities and differences based on experience. Although entering the field with as open a mind as possible has advantages, she contends that her experience in the health care arena was an undeniable asset. She says "expert analysts are virtually always informed by extant knowledge and use this knowledge as if it were another informant" (May, 1994). Thus, her view is that staying open is not possible for the learned and that, alternatively, experienced preconceptions are useful. Thus she implies that experienced researchers get formed in their field and cannot transcend their experienced view. They see it everywhere, rather than staying open. I say not so! Experienced people are more able to suspend their knowledge of a literature and research field based on their skilled, competent research ability to stay in control of perceptions and thereby stay open. They can spot preconceptions both substantively and for TCs quite easily, since they are more aware (Morse, 1994). While it is easy for the novice researcher to be open due to lack of knowledge (Glaser, 2003), it can be just as easy for the experienced researcher - if not more so - based on awareness of more subtle forcing.

Learning TCs

By now the reader may be throwing up his/her hands and feeling that she/he cannot stay open; that it is too hard to leave the stability, comfort and safety of the cherished, learned and trusted TCs of their field. Not so! They are not to be given up. They are to be extended by learning more TCs, by being sensitive to these and then letting earned relevance dictates their use. Staying open to emergent TCs requires learning as many as possible so the researcher is sensitive to what may earn relevance.

First of all, the researcher should study TCs beyond the boundaries of his current discipline and keep studying them. It never ends. There are so many. Learn as many as possible. The possibilities are endless. As Hans Thelesius wrote me, "Theoretical codes are tricky and I have more to learn there for sure". (Thulesius email, December 14, 2002). He is open to the endless task and its possible difficulties.

Start with the TCs I have listed in *Theoretical Sensitivity* and in *Doing Grounded Theory* (Glaser, 1978, 1998). They are exciting to learn because of their abstract view of data. Take time to assimilate them when they seem difficult to grasp quickly. The wider the array of

TCs that one learns, the less the tendency to force a pet or discipline TC on a substantive theory and the easier it is to stay open and sensitive to the emergent.

The excitement of learning TCs is well put by Walter Fernandez when he says, quite rightly, "Theoretical coding conceptualizes how the substantive codes are interrelated by generating hypotheses that are then integrated into a theory. The grounded integration of concepts is a flexible activity that provides a broad picture and new perspectives. The theoretical flexibility, however, must remain grounded on data. The concept of flexibility implies theoretical sensitivity to a number of possible coding paradigms, or coding families, consciously avoiding over-focusing on one possible explanation. Glaser (1978, 1998) provides a comprehensive (but not definitive) list of code families allowing for this flexibility" (Fernandez, 2003). Fernandez then provides his reader with a two-page chart of 26 TC families. Each family includes several TCs. The list is taken from my books. Being sensitive to all of these possible TCs immensely increases the researcher's ability to stay open. Staying open to the emergent is what Fernandez means by "flexibility", while he insists on earned relevance.

The more TCs a researcher learns, the less the tendency to derail a GT into a routine QDA by diluting the GT with a pet or discipline TC - e.g., its all constructed interaction or the conditional matrix – which is so, so wrong (Glaser, 2003). There is no argument for the routine discipline use of a TC for, by consequence, it closes staying open. Stern and Schreiber say, the researcher using GT needs to exercise care to avoid a departure from the intent of the authors who developed it, Glaser and Strauss. In short, there are a number of variations in doing GT, all of which are acceptable. On the other hand, there are a lot of wrong ways of doing it". (Schreiber & Stern, 2001)

Imposing TCs is a wrong way of doing GT. Earned relevance of one or a mix of TCs is the acceptable way. There is no "for or against" argument for the discipline TCs as they are just some of many that may emerge. This is the GT procedure: Let TCs emerge in mature memos and in sorting. Do not worry about results and remember - no GT is better than the skill development of the researcher and, in the bargain, no TC is better than what the researcher is sensitive to – unless it is forced. TCs, like substantive codes, are a result of the researcher's learning curve.

The TC learning curve requires the study of many fields and their theoretical perspectives. In *Doing Grounded Theory*, I said, "the fact that many do not use or understand TCs simply means that they should start learning them. One reads theories in any field and tries to figure out the theoretical models being used. It is a fun exercise. It is a challenge to penetrate the patterns of latent logic in other's writings. It makes the researcher sensitive to many codes and how they are used. He or she should take the time it takes to understand as many theoretical codes as possible by reading research literature also. This is a very important part of developing theoretical sensitivity" (Glaser, 1998). Skimming and dipping in papers for TCs from other fields is fun and easy. They pop up. Let me give some examples.

In perusing a biochemical paper, I came upon the "random walk" model. This means all variables are in unorganized flux until one crucial variable is introduced and then, all of a sudden, all the variables fall into stable organization. This is highly applicable to social life and action. People mixing around and visiting in all directions before a meeting, suddenly come to order when a host, teacher, or lecturer appears. It happens in fancy seminars, courts, staff meetings, and in kindergarten classes. In some cases, a gavel is pounded and "come to order" is announced. The formal and sentimental order of the occasion is produced almost immediately.

Another powerful TC that comes from economics is "amplifying casual looping." This is part of the interaction of effects family. As consequences become continually causes and causes continually consequences, one sees either worsening progressions or escalating severity. This applies to spousal power abuse or authority power abuse as the abuse gets worse. It applies to increasing organizational failure. It applies to falling in love. I am sure the reader can now see more possible applications. Causal looping amplified in either direction - positive or negative. This TC integrates substantive codes nicely, when it emerges. It applies to the bullying self-socialization phenomenon that we saw in the Columbine massacre (Gisburne, 2003). For additional economic models, see Frederic S. Lee, "Theory Creation and the Methodological Foundation of Post Keynesian Economics" (Lee, 2002). Lee focuses on repeatable causation and
mechanisms thereof.

Yet another powerful TC – "conjunctural causation" comes from political science. Ragin (1987) explains it clearly: "The other characteristic form of the problem of order-in-complexity concerns the difficulty involved in assessing causal complexity, especially multiple conjunctural causation. When an outcome results from several different combinations of conditions, it is not easy to identify the decisive causal combinations across a range of cases, especially when the patterns are confounded". The problem is not to specify a single causal – consequence model using Strauss's conditional matrix. The problem is to determine the character of more complex causal models that exist in the substantive data. And many causes may not be relevant; only high impact causes have earned relevance.

My three examples show how complex causal models that emerge can provide integration of substantive codes that go far beyond simple causation that is forced "as appropriate". The reader will find it fun to skim theories from other fields to pick up their TCs and thereby open themselves up to many TCs, assimilating and becoming sensitive to their particular meaning. The more this is done, the more the researcher will have the realization that the number of TCs is endless and yet to be named and that staying open and sensitive to whatever TC emerges is the only way to do GT. In the alternative, it is a pure shut down to remodel GT by saying it has only one theoretical perspective. This learning approach to TCs solves the problem that Marjorie MacDonald neatly articulates – the almost total absence of theoretical codes in current nursing GT research due to a lack of integrating the macro and micro levels of social action (Schreiber & Stern, 2001).

TCs are Slippery

As I have said above, theoretical coding is the least understood aspect of generating GT. When GT is used merely as a legitimating jargon to QDA, then of course, understanding TCs is a moot issue. But when the researcher is genuinely trying to do GT, the first confusion is the general idea of theoretical coding of the data for substantive categories and TC models with TCs. This is an unfortunate terminological confusion. Both types of codes emerge in memos. They occur in mixes, and TC mixes are often the integrative picture that fits and works. For example, a causal model can easily be mixed with a zone of tolerance and two outside cutting points. Learning TCs emphasizes the earned relevance of these mixes as they model substantive codes. The possibilities are not as infinite as it might seem; they are grounded empirically.

Unlike substantive codes, the underlying "groundedness" of a TC is less clear, since they are abstract models of integration based on best fit. Their fit is not as underlying tight with the data as a substantive code. Their organization of a theory is not wrong so much as variable, for an abstract level can have alternatives; whereas the grounding comes out in the work, fit and relevance of substantive codes. This "slipperiness" often results in confusion, depression and anxiety over non-emergence or the best way of integrating. Commitment to one model is seen as "dangerous". Of course, best fit is required in TC emergence, but given the ready modification of a GT in the hands of others, the TC model can easily get adjusted, changed or corrected. The slipperiness of abstract TCs is a power. Using a theoretical code is not dangerous; it formulates the confusion around putting the GT into writing. This is why forcing a TC is often a tendency and a premature way out of the confusion of waiting and working for the TC of earned relevance. It is best to let the TC emerge. Forcing leads to familiarity within a discipline but also to irrelevancies. For example, every GT is not a BSP (basic social process) and, rich as this TC is, forcing stages on a theory can dilute its fit, work and relevance.

The goal of a GT researcher is to develop a repertoire of as many theoretical codes as possible. There could be hundreds. The more theoretical codes the researcher learns, the more she/he has the variability of seeing them emerge and fitting them to the theory. They empower an ability to generate theory and keep its conceptual level.

Theoretical Coding: Substantive Codes vs. Theoretical Codes

To revisit what I have been saying: "If and when the researcher gets beyond substantive coding and a full memo bank, he begins to sort and then he will use emergent theoretical codes, explicit or implicit, to integrate his theory." However, "there is confusion between substantive codes and TCs among some researchers" (Glaser, 1998). Needless to say, substantive codes are the categories and properties of the theory that emerges from and conceptually images the substantive area being researched. They are used to build the conceptual theory, but are not theoretical codes. This is a bit confusing to some, especially those with little or no theoretical training.

In contrast, theoretical codes implicitly conceptualize how the substantive codes will relate to each other as a modeled, interrelated, multivariate hypothesis in accounting for resolving the main concern. They are emergent and weave the fractured substantive story turned into substantive concepts - back into an organized theory. They provide the models for theory generation and emerge during later coding, memoing and especially in sorting. Theoretical codes must also pattern out to be verified and provide grounded integration.

"Without substantive codes, theoretical codes are empty abstractions; but substantive codes can be related without theoretical codes. The result, however, is usually confused, theoretically unclear, and/or typically connected by descriptive topics but going nowhere theoretically. It is the interaction between substantive and theoretical coding which characterizes GT as an analytic inductive research methodology rather than conceptual journalism" (Glaser, 1998), p.164). This statement is simple enough to say but leads to confusion in many ways. Everyone understands substantive coding, but TCs, and how to code for them, are not well understood. TCs are confused with substantive codes on a conceptual level, by similar words, in mixing, and in research action, calling it theoretical coding for both types of codes, and just missing the TC involved.

Everyone loves and understands the constant comparative method for generating substantive categories and their properties. Their discovery produces a high with tremendous grab for the researcher. As one researcher wrote me, "your phrase 'fluctuating networks' has really grabbed my attention. Thanks for these little flashes of brilliance" (Holton email June 9, 2003). But this joy and grab is not so for TCs, except for perhaps discovery of a BSP. TCs are often ignored; left implicit or just plain missed and not understood. Researchers generate categories naming latent patterns all the time. The patterns are about social action and recognized in life by the naming with a category. The same researchers often do not systematically generate TCs except to mumble at times cause, consequence or process. The reason is simple. Substantive categories grab by denoting recognizable patterns whereas TCs seldom have this grab since they denote abstract models that are usually implicit in the theory, not consciously used and seldom explicitly mentioned. Another source of mentioning a TC nonpurposely occurs when it is virtually the same as the substantive category, such a balancing or process.

Thus, it is clear that substantive and theoretical codes are on a different conceptual level of abstraction and TCs are a more abstract level since they model the integration of substantive concepts. Thus, substantive codes and theoretical codes not only differ in abstract level but in kind. Substantive codes refer to latent patterns and TCs refer to models. However, many confuse the two types of codes in different ways by mixes that take figuring out.

First, TCs are confused with core variable in many writings. A core variable may be TC'd but it is not the core. For example, becoming or cultivating may be a core substantive code and they are basic social processes; but the basic social process is not the core. It is just a TC that models the substantive code. Jan Morse clearly makes this confusion when she says, "The theory (GT) is …usually organized around a central theme (basic social processes or core variable/categories). Can the theory have two or more competing major basic

processes or major core variables/categories? Perhaps, but this is rarely seen. The basic social process or core variables/categories appear to serve the purpose of focusing the researcher…." (Schreiber & Stern, 2001). Clearly, she confuses the model with the substantive.

Morse also, in the above citation, confuses the level of GT by mixing the substantive with the theoretical code. She says, "The theory is usually categorized as mid-range" to paraphrase Merton's notion of middle range. This is patently incorrect. A GT can be generated at any level varying from a very specific grounding to the general implications of a substantive theory to high level formal theory. For example (and there are many), a very grounded theory of cautionary control generated in the study of dentists dealing with HIV patients has much general application to cautionary control in all dentistry and medicine. Indeed, it can be turned into a high level formal theory dealing with cautionary control policy and action in all of society as it seeks to protect its citizens. In short, it is up to the researcher to choose the level of his GT. But to be sure, increasing the level of a GT does not just come by forcing a TC on it like "conceptualization" a - popular QDA strategy these days.

Ian Dey offers another "authoritative" but confusing description of theoretical and substantive codes (Dey, 1999). I say "authoritative" as Dey talks with nothing but self-styled authority. The reader can, if he wishes, figure out the confusion. I offer it merely as another example: "First, the distinction between substantive and theoretical coding is not very clear. Glaser presents theoretical coding as "implicit" in substantive coding; suggesting that in doing the latter, one is inevitably engaged in the former. He presents theoretical coding itself as a separate activity – that of relating the substantive categories. One question this raises is whether categories at some level can be identified which do not already involve some theoretical elements, for example, such as causation, process, degree and soon. Do categories "stand by themselves" or are they not always part of a broader concretization that already implies relationship among the categories?" (Dey, 1999, p.108) He then asks two questions about theoretical coding. "Is theoretical coding an aspect of substantive coding or a separate activity?" and "How do we select among theoretical codes that all fit the data?"

These comments by Dey are too descriptive, in which in pure data everything is involved at once. GT abstracts out of data substantive categories and theoretical codes separately. On the abstract level, the two types of codes are quite different. Also, since he is descriptive and not following GT procedures, he does know about sorting and how by sorting a TC emerges that integrates. Dey asks the question, "Do processes divide naturally into stages, or is this rather a construct used by the analyst to order events?" It is not either/or. It is empirically both or only one source of a process may emerge. If a few TCs emerge, they can be mixed or the researcher can choose the one he thinks best articulates the theory. It is his autonomy to choose which of the emergent and further, it is just conceptual theory that can be modified, not QDA accurate description with its concern for worrisome accuracy. At least the theory is grounded as best possible, NOT conjectured out of a fertile, reifying mind.

In sum, Dey is not aware of the abstract nature of GT, being firmly entrenched in the QDA methodology. Therefore, his ability to discuss GT issues is nil, since it is on the descriptive level. He has no sense of GT abstraction. He is using GT jargon on the data level of description, leading to multiple views and worrisome accuracy and this "allows" him to doubt GT as a method. This article and my many books on the GT perspective easily allow us to discount his binary analysis (good vs. bad) as not relevant to GT as an abstracting methodology. His work is a classic case of remodeling GT to a QDA method. On the abstract level, the distinction between substantive coding and theoretical coding (modeling) is easy. On the descriptive level, the distinctions are easily muddled.

Are TCs Necessary?

The answer is "no", but a GT is best when they are used. TCs help. TCs are always implicitly there even when not consciously used. But a GT will appear more plausible, more relevant and more enhanced when integrated and modelled by an emergent TC. The hypotheses will be clearer and stand in relief. TCs avoid the superficiality of QDA methods. Using a TC at the later stages of memoing makes generating substantive categories and their properties easier and the resulting theory more complex and multivariate. TCs are always latent in the substantive coding, but being sensitive to enough TCs to see one emerge helps theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, delimiting the theory and reaching theoretical completeness because the TC becomes an emergent guiding framework.

Of course, the researcher can analyze without an emerging TC framework, but it is harder. Applying the emerging TC framework is of great help in the ensuing analysis. Actually, it is hard not to apply a TC framework but be cautious. The TC must emerge and not be forced. Categories and their properties emerge easier when one can see their relation to other categories within a framework. Then, memoing on the relations between categories becomes easier also as the memos capture the theory with a TC model.

In conclusion, while not necessary, the need for a TC is great in generating a GT. It is easy, by prior training, to force one on the theory as a framing tendency. I can only counsel to let it emerge. For example, every study is NOT a BSP. John Cutcliffe says this clearly, if somewhat over strongly: "Few would argue that substantive coding is an integral part of data analysis within grounded theory, but if the intellectual rigor halts at substantive coding then it is debatable that the researcher used a grounded theory methodology. The author of the current paper would argue not. Glaser (1978) argues that it is the theoretical coding, the conceptualization of how the substantive codes may relate to each other as hypotheses, which enable the substantive codes to be integrated into a theory. It is the theoretical coding that can provide the full rich understanding of the social processes and human interactions that are being studied. The author of this current paper suggests that theoretical coding perhaps places the most demand upon the grounded theorist's sensitivity. Further, it is perhaps theoretical coding and the postulating of previously undiscovered or unarticulated links that enable the development of the theory." (Cutcliffe, 2000) As I said, his statement is a bit zealous, but its promise is correct. Staying open to emergent TCs is important, if not totally necessary.

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