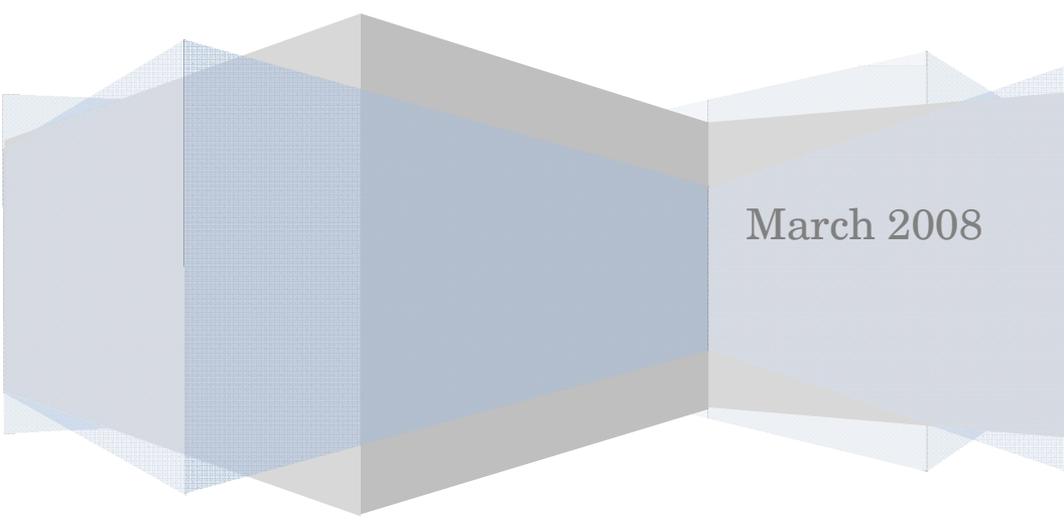


The Grounded Theory Review

An international journal

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An abstract graphic composed of several overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes in shades of blue, grey, and white. The shapes are layered and partially cut off by the edges of the page, creating a complex, three-dimensional effect. The text 'March 2008' is positioned on the right side of this graphic.

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

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The Grounded Theory Review: An international journal

From the Editor

This issue of the Review clearly illustrates the increasing reach of classic grounded theory. Three of the papers included are the work of novice grounded theorists – from Iran, Finland and the USA. The authors of these papers have attended seminars with Dr. Barney Glaser and have benefitted as well from the advice and support of more experienced grounded theorists through the Grounded Theory Institute, established over a decade ago by Sociology Press to provide a forum for networking, learning and mentoring among those scholars motivated to enhance their understanding and practice of classic grounded theory methodology.

The GT Institute and its website (www.groundedtheory.com) are currently undergoing a major review and revitalization. The intention is to enhance the services available to all members. We also look forward to seeing the websites of the Review (www.groundedtheoryreview.com) and Sociology Press (www.sociologypress.com) more closely aligned with the Institute thereby providing an integrated virtual presence for those who visit the site.

As with all change efforts, there are some growing pains to be overcome but change also presents opportunity. Are there features or services that you especially value? Do you have suggestions for additional features that could enhance your networking, learning and practice of classic GT? Then, forward your ideas along to Jillian Glaser Rhine, Institute Administrator jillrhine@comcast.net.

As with each issue of the Review, we are pleased to include here a classic paper by Dr. Glaser, *Comparative Failure in Science*, published over 40 years ago based in part on Glaser's doctoral thesis in which he used quantitative data to develop conceptual

theory regarding the organizational careers of research scientists. Dr. Glaser has most recently revisited his early work in using quantitative data to complete his latest book, *Doing Quantitative Grounded Theory*, (Sociology Press, 2008).

Rounding out this issue, we are pleased to offer a brief methodological note on an aspect of doing GT that frequently challenges the novice – instilling the spill. In *Eliciting Spill*, Alvita Nathaniel offers advice about opening conversations with research participants so as to facilitate emergence of their concerns rather than preconceived professional concerns.

Finally, we note the continuing interest in exploring the legacy of grounded theory and its contribution to knowledge. The 7th International Conference on Social Science Methodology organized by ISA RC 33 to take place in Naples, Italy, September 1-5, 2008, will include a featured session on "Re-discovering Grounded Theory. Forty years of the research practice." The session will be convened and chaired by Dr. Krzysztof Konecki, Lodz University, Poland. For further details check the Conference website:

<http://www.rc332008.unina.it/aree7.html>.

- Judith A. Holton, Ph.D.

Submissions

All papers submitted are peer reviewed and comments provided back to the authors. Papers accepted for publication will be good examples or practical applications of grounded theory and classic grounded theory methodology.

Comments on papers published are also welcomed, will be shared with the authors and may be published in subsequent issues of the Review. See our website www.groundedtheoryreview.com for full submission guidelines.

Forward submissions as Word documents to Judith Holton at judith@groundedtheoryreview.com

Comparative Failure in Science¹

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

Besides degree of clarity, another aspect of a demotion is the relative failure which it indicates. The clearer the forms of comparative failure, the more painful they are likely to be. However, a certain degree of failure may indicate nothing more than the lack of outstanding success, while indicating moderate success.

A perennial problem for some scientists is their *feeling of comparative failure* as scientists. This problem becomes clearer if we consider two major sources of this feeling that are inherent in the vary nature of scientific work. (i) In science, strong emphasis is placed on the achievement of recognition; (ii) the typical basic scientist works in a community filled with “great men” who have made important and decisive discoveries in their respective fields; they are the acknowledge guiding lights. These esteemed scientists, who have attained honors beyond the reach of most of their colleagues, tend to become models for those who have been trained by them or who have worked under them. As Eiduson has put it in her recent psychological study of basic research scientists “Scientists: are idols-oriented.”

To take these honored men as models is important for training as well as for a life of research. During training, one learns to think creatively. Emulation of these models results on the internalization of values, beliefs, and norms of the highest standard. This emulation of the great continues and guides the scientist in his research work, however individual in style his work may be.

But it is precisely here that a feeling of comparative failure may arise. In emulating a great man the scientist tends to compare himself with the model. He estimates how closely he has equaled his model in ability to adhere to high standards of research, to think of relevant problems, to create “elegant” research designs, to devise new methods, to write clearly, to analyze data. In addition, because of the strong emphasis on attaining recognition for research contributions the scientist perhaps will compare his own degree of success with his model’s

¹ Originally published in *Science*, 143(3610) (March 6, 1964): 1012-14

to gauge how he himself is doing. In using the great man's achievements and the recognition accorded him as criteria, the scientist may be motivated to strive continually and unremittingly towards greater heights. On the other hand, he may see himself, over time, as a comparative failure for not having attained a comparable amount of recognition.

Eiduson brings out the dynamics of this problem for scientists:

The model, then, is the ego ideal figure who represents the ultimate position, and in fact, defines what a scientist should do, how he should think, how he should act. *By comparison, everything else is inevitably of lesser worth* [italics mine]. We have seen the way scientists in this group rebuke themselves as they become old, distracted, sit on committees or government advisory boards, or become administrators- and thus move away from the ideal. From this picture it is obvious that the scientist is hard on himself. He has a built-in, clearly marked scalar system, along which attitudes and kinds of performances are measured. When he moves away and deviates from the pattern, he becomes a maverick, or a person who has tossed aside the flaming torch.

Average Success

With this basic problem in mind, I recently made a study of the organizational careers of basic research scientists, one purpose of which was to ascertain the consequences, for the scientist's career, of receiving or not receiving an average amount of recognition: At the time of this study, these scientists were employed in a government medical research organization devoted to basic research. This was a high-prestige organization from the standpoint of scientists and was run much as though it were a series of university departments. The study is relevant to this discussion in showing something of the career history of basic research scientists, who are today affiliated with high-prestige organizations devoted to basic research. In these contexts organizational scientific careers are still primarily dependant on professional (not organizational) recognition.

By "average amount of professional recognition" I mean supervisor's favorable evaluation of the quality of the scientist's current research, and proper credit, through publication and through acknowledgement in the publications of others, for his contribution to the cumulative knowledge in his field. This

definition gives three major sources of recognition within reach of the typical scientist; references from superordinate colleagues, publication, and publication acknowledgements in the work of others. This “average” degree of professional recognition is attained by most of the country’s scientists at any one time and by practically all scientists at one time or another. This degree of recognition is in marked contrast to the highly regarded, and restricted, high-prestige honors (in the form of awards, prizes, grants, lectureships, professorships, and so on) that are part of the professional recognition accorded those scientists who make great and decisive discoveries- the “great men.”

Three general aspects of scientists’ careers were studied: performance; security in, and advancement of, position; compatibility with others, and satisfaction with one’s location in science. With respect to performance, an average degree of recognition was found basic to high performance. That is, recognition maintained high motivation to advance knowledge, and high motivation resulted in the scientist’s devoting more of his own time to research; this, in turn, resulted in high-quality scientific performance, as judged by the researcher’s closest professional colleagues.

Since, of course, such performance on the part of many individuals is the basis of organizational prestige; it was not surprising to find the organization providing, in return, a stable scientific career for a scientist who received average professional recognition. The scientists accorded this degree of recognition, in contrast to those accorded less, felt more satisfaction in their jobs and salaries. They tended to be more optimistic about their chances of promotion, and their rate of promotion was higher. With respect to the conditions for research - a most important consideration for basic-research scientists - they fared considerably better than scientists not accorded average recognition. They had more freedom to work on their own ideas, had more chance for originality, had more chance to use their current abilities and knowledge as well as to gain new abilities and knowledge, and had generally better research facilities and supplies. In sum, the “average” recognition accorded them was sufficient to give them security and advancement in their scientific careers.

Lastly, with average recognition, the high quality performance and steady advancement could be achieved in a

setting that provided personal satisfactions. The scientists accorded average recognition, again in comparison to those accorded less, were more content with their research and non-research colleagues. More of them felt intense interest in working with close professional associates. They were more satisfied with their assistants and with the other scientists, the organization leaders, their own supervisors and the directors of their particular institutes. They felt strengthened through belonging to work groups, such as sections and laboratories. They depended more on personal contacts for scientific information, both inside and outside the organization. They participated more in seminars, meetings, and the activities of professional clubs and other small groups.

Closely linked with this compatibility with their associates was a satisfaction with their location in the community of organizations of science. The scientists accorded average recognition, in comparison to those accorded less, felt strongly attached to their respective institutes and organizations. Indeed, they felt more satisfied with the organization's reputation in the scientific world, and more of them felt that a sense of belonging to an organization which had prestige in both the scientific and the general community was of utmost importance. In comparing their own organization (from the standpoint of what job factors they deemed most important) with the "best" universities, hospitals, industrial research organizations, and government research organizations, more of them consistently reported that their organization was generally better. In sum, the context of their careers in science was highly favorable.

Together these findings suggest that an average amount of recognition has a generally stabilizing effect for the careers of the scientists within the high-prestige organization of the study. (Even for individuals who received little or no recognition, the pressure on careers was not so great as to cause an exodus from the organization or from science itself. The great majority of these men thought the lack of recognition was only temporary and planned to continue in the organization, trying to advance knowledge.)

These findings suggest that career stability based on average professional recognition is probably found in other organizations similar in nature to the basic-research organization of this study, and that in organizations of lesser standing even less recognition

may assure career stability. In the light of these findings it appears that the feeling of comparative failure that may result when the average scientist judges his lesser success by the considerable success of his “great man” model tends to occur in many instances within the context of a stable, promising career. Further, most scientists can gain, if they do not have it currently, the degree of recognition necessary for a stable career. Comparative failure, then, is an evaluation resulting from a social comparison. It is not to be taken as an absolute failure (loss of position as a scientist). A comparative failure can still be successful; an absolute failure is through.

The Scientific Career: A carnivorous god?

Comparisons with great men are, however, taken not as comparative but as absolute failure by Kubie in his famous “Some Unsolved Problems of the Scientific Career.” Kubie warns future scientists of the perils ahead when devoting themselves to that “carnivorous god, the scientific career.” His criteria in warning of potential failure are absolute (not comparative) judgments, based on the careers of the more notable great men of science. For example, he talks of the “ultimate gamble which the scientist takes when he stakes his all on professional achievement and recognition [*italics mine*], sacrificing to his scientific career recreation, family, and sometimes even instinctual needs, as well as the practical security and money.” Implying again that the scientist whose success falls short of the great man’s is an absolute failure, he characterizes the young scientist as having “a self-deceiving fantasy: that a life of science well may be tough for everyone else, but that it will not be for him,” and as having “ambitious dreams; unspoken hopes of making great scientific discoveries; dreams of solving the great riddles of the universe.”

Kubie states that the young scientist “dreams unattainable dreams.” More directly relating his judgments to great men, he cautions against choosing science as a career, because of the “many failures it took to make one Pasteur.” He states that most young scientists, in using great men as models, unwittingly set themselves up to become failures: “...most young men view the prospect solely by identifying with the most successful chiefs, never stopping to consider how many must fail for each one who reaches this goal.” Without making the distinction between absolute and comparative failure, this last statement clearly

implies the former.

Admittedly, from this standpoint man must fail and few will attain the stature of their models, but this is hardly a reason for dissuading young men from becoming scientists. The chance is slight that they will equal or surpass their models, but they should be informed that most can gain the fundamental degree of recognition indicated in my study as necessary for a promising career in science. Surely the career to which they commit themselves need not be as Kubie says, “devoid of security of any kind, whether financial or scientific.”

Furthermore, these young men should be encouraged to enter science and take great men as their models, for most will be the artisans who do the commendable, but not the earth-shattering, research which accumulates to form the foundation for future decisive advances. Kubie himself has recently, although somewhat ambivalently, recognized this, in comparing the typical scientist with the internationally famous scientist. “These little known and unrewarded men are the expendables of science. They are no less essential than are the few who reach their goals. Therefore, until many years had passed it would be hard to weigh which of these two men had had the more profound impact on scientific knowledge.”

Perhaps my discussion draws the kind of “implication” from “statistics” that Kubie is looking for in future research when he says in his article on the scientific career: “It is the...duty of scientists and educators to gather such vital statistics on the life struggles of a few generations of scientists and would-be scientists and to make sure that every graduate student of the sciences will be exposed repeatedly to the implications such data may have for his own future.” Career decisions are perhaps among the most important determinants of a man’s fate, and anything which contributes to an understanding of the career in science may help people make these decisions more wisely.

Research on Comparative Failure in Science

While it is possible to be a comparative failure in virtually any occupation, the chances of becoming one are built directly into any occupation of scientist. Yet little or nothing is known about this area of comparative failure. Therefore, I wish to discuss a few of the properties of comparative failure that may be

useful for guiding exploratory research. To be sure, the most important and meaningful properties of this problem area are yet to be discovered. Since comparative failure is based on some social comparison, statements about it must always take into account a reference criterion. In this study, the reference individual is the “great man” model in science, and comparisons are based on his degree of success. The criteria for this invidious comparison must be established empirically for any occupation within its particular situational context. The problem of comparative failure may be seen as a specific one within the more general area of comparative reference group theory.

The relative nature of comparative failure is in marked contrast to the absolute nature of failure wherein one cannot hold an occupational position and therefore must leave it. Comparative and absolute failures vary independently. A person who is an absolute may or may not be a comparative failure. It is true that a scientist forced out of science because of mediocre work will probably feel himself a comparative failure with reference to his many former colleagues and models. However, if he can leave these comparative reference individuals behind during the “cooling-out” process attached to his loss of occupational position, he may not at all feel himself a comparative failure. More simply, if he realizes from his absolute failure that he was not cut out to be a scientist, then evaluations of comparative failure become superfluous and may not persist. Again, comparative failure can unnecessarily cause absolute failure; that is, cause a scientist to leave his profession or to stumble along feeling that he is an absolute failure.

Comparative failure takes on more strategic meaning when no absolute failure is involved. A major source of comparative failure is, of course, demotion or downgrading of one’s rank in the occupation. This topic has been analyzed quite nicely for business and industrial organizations. It had yet to be considered for scientists. Another general source of comparative failure appears when an important reference individual outstrips the scientist. Statements about colleagues, such as “He advanced very quickly,” can mean that the speaker was probably left behind with a lesser degree of success. Practically all scientists have classmates and colleagues who have been far more successful.

Another interesting and significant source of comparative failure was brought out in this volume. With reference to the

“great man” model, the typical scientist can have an objectively satisfactory career and yet feel a comparative failure! If this feeling persists, he may be oblivious to the stability of his promising career. If he actually lacks the fundamental range of recognition, and further, feels that his chances of gaining some recognition are hopeless when compared to his model, in focusing on the unattainable he is likely to ignore the general possibility of having a fruitful (if lesser) career by achieving the degree of recognition within reach of his ability.

The adjustment to comparative failure involves a “cooling down” of aspirations for success so as to be in accord with one’s research ability and career prospects (rather than a “cooling out,” as Goffman has described it for absolute failure, when one must give up all those aspirations linked with an occupation or position). The scientist as comparative failure does not have to go through the often very painful process of giving up commitment, involvement, and investment in his chosen profession. He need only set his achievement and career sights at a lower level than those of his models. Indeed, his models, who provide the basis for an unfavorable comparison, also provide a perspective on just where to see hopes for a career in science. This perspective is denied the absolute failure, since he is going nowhere.

Various aspects of both the scientist and his “great man” model will affect judgments of comparative failure. Aspirations for a success similar to the model’s probably are highest immediately after graduate school, but they diminish as the scientist takes his own and his model’s measure during the years of research maturity that follow. This change most likely will vary according to the age at which the model did outstanding research; in some fields, great men appear at an earlier age than in others. If he is in a field in which great discoveries come early, the scientist may feel that he is “through” soon after he has begun. If the discoveries come late, then he may believe he has ample time to equal his model - and his feelings of comparative failure may emerge much later.

The type of models that a scientist takes will also vary according to his age. The young scientist usually is focused on his classmates, equal colleagues, teachers, his work from supervisors, and current great men in his field. Hence, he has many reference individuals on which to base a feeling of comparative failure before he cools down his aspirations. In later years, as these

models no longer loom so large, the more successful scientist may switch to the non-living immortals of his field. Indeed, although a scientist may have become a great figure, he may still evaluate himself strongly as a comparative failure, judging himself in relation to the immortals he aspires to equal. Notwithstanding the many useful consequences of taking immortals as models, it is quite possible that comparative failure can be even more intense for a contemporary great man whose aspirations (in contrast to those of the typical scientist) may have been sharpened, not dulled, on the grindstone of experience. In other words, not only may a comparative failure be successful, but the most successful scientist may be the most intense comparative failure. Thus, comparative failure may be more pronounced among the beginning scientists and current great men than it is among others.

It should be noted also that I have dealt only with comparative failure as self-evaluation, not as other-evaluation. The latter also represents an area for research in the sociology of science. For example, a strategic aspect of advancement in the scientific career is the comparative evaluations given by the scientist's referees. These are speculations. Only future research can tell us of the processes leading to comparative failure; of its incidence at various stages of an objectively successful career; of the "cooling down" mechanisms by which scientists cope with such a feeling and are helped by others to cope with it: of its effect on creativity, motivation, and partial retreatism; and of its effects on absolute failure and organizational turnover.

Overcoming Obstacles: Opportunities of academically talented women in Iran

Shahla Alborzi, Ph.D.; Mohammad Khayyer, Ph.D. with the assistance of Tina L. Johnston, Ph.D.

Abstract

The aim of the present research was to study the lifetime obstacles and opportunities of academically successful women working at Iran universities. Successful female academics in Iran are concerned about the social and personal barriers to pursuing successful careers in academia. These women continually work to overcome these barriers in an ongoing process called overcoming obstacles. This basic social process has five stages: perceiving inequality, conflicting, dissolving, empowering and acting purposefully. Throughout the process, these women have first become aware of gender inequities and then worked towards overcoming them using self-motivation properties and support from external sources such as family, mentors and colleagues. This substantive theory, though rooted in a specific country with a strong male dominated social structure, is applicable to all societies as they continue to work towards equitable access to high-level career opportunities.

Introduction

For many years, researchers have studied the life and contributions to society of academically talented persons around the world. These studies have tried to increase knowledge about their features, interests, motives and also, their success and failures (Hulbert & Schuster, 1993). Many societies view the support of talent development as critical to their nation progress. Sociologists have noted that the progress and development of each nation depends on the development of its gifted and talented individuals (Kitano & Perkins, 1996).

Usually, giftedness in childhood is determined on the basis of specific intelligence testing or performance criteria; however, the process of identification of giftedness in childhood does not accurately predict giftedness in adulthood, specifically in women (Kerr, 1997). Fahlman (2004) describes the characteristics of giftedness in adulthood suggesting that these gifted

characteristics are affected by social supports and interpersonal relationships. Reis (1991) stated that human societies have interpreted the characteristics of adult giftedness according to individual performances and contributions to society. The subjects of this study will be termed gifted or talented interchangeably as each of them exhibits high levels of performance and contributions to their families, university positions and Iranian society.

From another point of view, throughout history, powerless individuals and groups without voices have been recognized as minority populations. These numbers include individuals with low social and economic status. Women, because of their social position relative to men, have been the focus of research (Bizzari, 1998). These researchers have studied and reported on such problems as accessibility to jobs, wage comparisons between males and females, the structure of family, demands of nurturing children and educational access (Garrison, 1993; Hulbert & Schuster, 1993). Despite the broad range of studies of women's issues, few studies have been carried out that focus on academically talented women, particularly studies that have shown the impact of socio-individual factors on the lives of these women in Iran. Furthermore, the few studies that have been carried out in Iran are highly quantitative in nature and, therefore, have not examined the deeper cultural meaning of the ongoing obstacles and opportunities of gifted women in Iran (Alborzi, 1998).

The lack of research on this topic in general, and specifically in Iran, provided a catalyst to conduct the present study. The authors sought to better understand the obstacles, challenges and also opportunities that academically gifted women have experienced in Iran. A good understanding of life obstacles and opportunities of academically gifted women must involve an appreciation of the cultural context within which these events and actions take place as well as an evaluation of their significance from the perspective of the interviewees. Such is the focus of this study.

The classic grounded theory research method, discovered by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) and further refined by Glaser (1978) was chosen because the authors felt that this research approach would reflect the view points of participants and how they experienced their world. Uniquely, however,

grounded theory is a method that does more than just describe events; it uses such description and other data to develop theory (Glaser & Holton, 2004).

Methods

The aim of the present research was to study the lifetime obstacles and opportunities of academically gifted (talented) women in Iran. Sampling in the initial stage of the study was purposeful with women who had earned PhDs or post doctorate degrees and physicians who have specialized in various fields of medicine selected as a focus population, as per Resi's definition of gifted (talented) adults (1991). In all, 40 individuals from two universities in Iran were interviewed. The major fields of their studies were human studies, agriculture, science, and medical sciences. Three of the participants were professors, five were associate professors and 32 of them were assistant professors. The interviewees were between 38 and 56 years old. Thirty-two of those interviewed were married and eight were single.

The main data source of this study was derived from interviews. Data collection and analysis was conducted over a two and one-half year period. The first author of this paper conducted all of the interviews, following Glaser's (1978) suggestion that initial data should be gathered from the individuals who are the best informants in that area. Data thus gathered helps the researcher decide where to gather subsequent relevant data. Therefore, the first participant interviewed was interested in and had knowledge of women studies. The selection of this participant brought significant information to the researchers, helping them to gather subsequent information. In the initial phase, the interviews were open or unstructured, and then the structure of the subsequent interviews changed to semi-structured interview as previously collected interview data was coded. Each interview took about between 2 to 4 hours. During each interview, field notes were taken and then, after each interview, the field notes were transcribed following which the researchers began coding procedures.

Unrestricted memoing was carried used throughout the analysis process seeking to capture creative ideas and meaning making of the data and codes (Glaser, 1998; Glaser & Holton, 2004)). Memos were written for every code, concept, and category, capturing ideas about the relationships between properties and

categories, creative thoughts and ideas for further sampling. Memo sorting helped to organize the completed theory.

The Theory of Overcoming Obstacles

Using constant comparative analysis of the data, the theory of overcoming obstacles emerged. Overcoming is a basic social-psychological process that enables women to tolerate obstacles in order to meet personal and professional needs, goals and values. The women in this study felt and perceived inequality in every part of their society but, because of their specific characteristics such as goal orientation, self competency and assertiveness, they were able to tolerate and overcome or pass through the obstacles.

Stage One: Perceiving gender inequality

Perceiving gender inequality is the initial stage of overcoming obstacles. At this stage, subjects mentally process or feel inequality. Gender inequality is multidimensional for the women in this study. They experience inequality between women and men in their society from various points of view. It seems that the root of this inequality is hidden in the culture and tradition of the society. At this stage, the women feel and perceive these inequalities: "The culture of our society and dominant discipline causes obstacles; daughters have limitations from a cultural point of view." or "Unequal attitudes of societies in relation to the role of women are not only in a traditional society like Iran they also exist in other parts of the world." When perceiving gender inequality, these women perceive meaning and challenge when they notice these social beliefs and by facing the social interactions. These two properties of perceiving gender inequality are noticing social beliefs and facing social interactions.

Noticing social beliefs. As subjects notice the stereotypical gender beliefs of the society around them, they gather information regarding those social beliefs of gender inequality in order to evaluate the society beliefs. They perceive these beliefs over time from personal experiences: "Women's credibility depends on men. Society does not accept women except when they are married, and men believe that they are the crown on a women's head." or "The society believes that the man should be in a higher position than women. Decisions should be made by men."

Facing social interactions. The results of social beliefs that are widespread in the society are reflected in the social interactions of the members of that society. The social relations between the individuals in the socio-cultural milieu are based on social beliefs of the society. Therefore, the individuals form their initial impression of the discrimination being imposed on them; they also consider the behaviours of other members of the society in relation to the discrimination. These social interactions create a framework of perception and help the subjects make meaning: "Priorities in the society are first married men, and then single men, then married women, and finally single women, respectively."

In social interactions, the man is seen as a dominant individual, and the woman is seen as a defeated individual. However, gender inequality in social interactions is presented in gender relations, educational and vocational opportunities, and educational and social expectations. Perceptions of social beliefs and social interactions are a recursive process that enables individuals to gain more clarity regarding the dimensions of gender inequality. In this stage, emotions play a significant and vital role in deciding to overcome obstacles. The stage is associated by anxiety, indecision and perhaps fears.

Stage Two: Conflicting

The second stage of the overcoming process is conflicting. When individuals perceive gender inequalities in society, they face many conflicts in their life and are confronted with uncertainty and imbalance with themselves. In the conflicting phase, mental challenging of the individual takes place through feelings of personal and social unbalance.

Feeling of personal imbalance. Individuals confront physical, psychological and emotional imbalance in their everyday lives. These imbalances have many dimensions such as *protecting family*: "The main responsibility of women is at home". Gifted women are pulled in many directions; to cope, they master the art of *performing multiple roles*: "My time is completely managed, men need less time management. In comparison to men women need time management because they have several responsibilities." These women suffer from *feelings of invisibility* as they are often passed over for job opportunities: "The women are like the left hand, because they are not offered any

opportunities to use their abilities.” They voice *feelings of sacrifice* as they juggled their many responsibilities at home and work: “All of the responsibilities are my duties: housekeeping, taking care of children, preparing for new courses, studying, and meanwhile my salary has not been expensed for myself”.

Feeling of social unbalance. Individuals encountered disturbances and challenges that are imposed on them from the social context in which they live and work. These feelings of social imbalance include *psychosocial pressuring, confronting social expectations* and *justice administering*. Psychosocial pressuring causes gifted women to feel socially imbalanced. They are under constant pressure to get too many tasks completed but must live with status quo social norms: “I am anxious about my ongoing tasks”; “We are the victims of circumstances.” Women may *confront their social expectations*, recognizing them and bringing them to light: “Society has the same expectations of duties for women at home and working women.” Gifted women push for personal and societal change (*justice administering*): “Nowadays, women are completely aware about the things that are happening around them, so they push for their rights.” In the unbalancing phase, women recognize this imbalance and compare their positions to those of their male counterparts and begin to push for their rights.

Stage Three: Dissolving

Dissolving is an active phase of balancing, where the intentions of the individual are to dissolve the imbalance in various ways. In this phase, advantages and disadvantages of the various actions are compared with respect to consistency of personal logic.

Dissolving emerged in the present study as a mental model used for the purpose of overcoming obstacles. It is the mental activity in a decision making process, before choosing a course of action. Therefore, dissolving is an interpretive and comparative mental activity seeking to balance the imbalance, through a motivational process. In the dissolving process, individuals decide to confront the imbalance by *resisting, self-reliance, committing* and *taking advantage of the situation*. Gifted women display resistance when recognizing the need to push back against negative conditions: “If I would like to improve my situation, I should fight.” They recognize that they are responsible for their

own success (*self-reliance*): "My husband or my boss said that opportunities have been given to me-these are not opportunities, A woman improves herself."; "I have learned in this lifetime that, if I lose something, I will acquire it again." Talented women find success by committing themselves to finding success: "Women are successful in management, because they feel more responsibility, more sensitivity, more precision, and more patience." These women find success by taking advantage of the situations they get: "I do my job in this way to take care of my family and to preserve my work."

Stage Four: Empowering

The fourth stage of the overcoming process is empowering. Empowering includes all of the factors that individuals utilize in order to empower themselves. The sources of the process of empowering are both internal and external to the individual. In this phase, the individual responds to the results of perceiving, conflicting and dissolving. In this empowering phase, women enable themselves through *self-empowering*, *perceiving support*, and *perceiving socio-cultural changes*.

Self-empowering. Self-empowering is the internal aspect of empowering. Self-empowering is the process of developing the total abilities that women utilize in order to empower themselves. Individuals develop their cognitive and emotional abilities to overcome obstacles. Also, in this stage, they try to coordinate the development of their cognitive and emotional abilities simultaneously. In this process, logic and emotions work in balance in order to prepare women to act effectively. A woman said: "The women can prove themselves, because they are sharper and more subtle", or, "The presence of successful women in the society is because of their abilities", or, "The women can do several things simultaneously and do them correctly".

From emotional (motivational) aspects, individuals said: "I do not feel any weakness; although the obstacles have negative effects, but sometimes they will be the motive for improvement", or, "Self-believing and self-confidence is very important, they believe that they can", or, "It was difficult to swim upstream, but I do it", or "Feeling alive is important in me, I think when I am alive I should move forward, I believe that anyone who is not bright, but wants to go forward, can do it". It seems that both aspects of self-empowering (cognitive and emotional) are

complementary. In other words, it can be said that the interactions of these two aspects of self-empowering shape the process and develop the abilities of individuals, preparing them to act effectively in order to overcome obstacles.

Perceiving support. Perceiving support is the external aspect of empowering. It is the effective spiritual, mental, psychological and physical supports and assistances that talented women have received for their development. The sources of this supporting can be family, spouse or others: “My family climate was supporting, I am psychologically secure.”; “My husband creates opportunities for me, because he helped me, he did not act jealously, and did not create obstacle.”; “I had effective teachers in my schooling, they encouraged me, and they were my model.” Therefore, support is an external source of motivation that individuals perceive. Perceiving support facilitates the empowering process in talented women. With strong external support, women feel increased self-empowerment; perhaps too, their self-empowerment aids in increasing their external support.

Perceiving socio-cultural changes. The women in this study see that positive changes have occurred in gender equality across worldwide societies. This understanding motivates them to move towards their own empowerment. This idea, called *perceiving socio-cultural changes* directly affects the conditions of women, particularly talented women in Iran: “Worldwide changes have affected women, now they know that they have the abilities that should be seen in their behaviour.” Or “The views of the world, in relation to women have changed.” These worldwide changes have occurred in Iranian society too; therefore, the perception of Iranian women has been changed positively: “I am optimistic regarding the future of the women in Iran; our society is moving in this direction, these changes have occurred in other societies as well.” or “The conditions of women are better now; the social barriers have been decreased from before.” Both the support from various sources and perceptions of socio-cultural change facilitates and positively affects the empowering process. At the end of this stage, individuals decide to confront logically and constructively the obstacles in their lives.

Stage Five: Acting purposely

In order to overcome the obstacles the individuals act purposely. The effects and the results of empowering are reflected

in various ways in the purposive behaviour of individuals. The behaviours that talented women show are based on their logical thinking and motivational beliefs. These purposive behaviours have two general aspects. Gifted women make efforts to meet their goals and employ communicating, planning and managing skills to stay on track to reaching their goals.

Making efforts. Making efforts are the activities and resistance of the individuals in order to attain their goals, or to overcome their obstacles: “Higher expectation of others leads to more efforts.”, or “My perseverance is good, I do everything on time.” Or “The obstacles should not be a reason for stopping.”

Communicating, planning and managing skills. The women in this study are skilled in interacting with others, making arrangements and organizing. They know that effective communication, planning and management skills are key to overcoming obstacles. Also, these skills have a mutual relationship with *making efforts*. When individuals have been acting on intended efforts, these skills are firmly shaped in them. The feedback that talented women receive as the result of their actions leads them to increase their efforts: “Women are imprinted, and the emotional aspects of their behaviors cause their relationships to be positive.”; “Women develop positive relationships.”; “I utilized my social skills and showed my abilities.”; “Women have the planning abilities. They are more subtle and more regulated, and they have an ability to organize.”

In summary, purposive behaviours lead women to overcome obstacles that may originate from within the empowering category. There are mutual relationships between acting purposefully and empowering. In other words, when abilities are developed, they are reflected in actions. Acting purposefully based on these abilities can, in turn, be developed through both cognitive and emotional abilities. The results of the interactions among these five stages or categories, leads women to overcome obstacles to academic success in their lives.

Discussion

The results of this grounded theory study indicate that, despite gender inequalities, women find ways of succeeding and overcome gender inequity obstacles. Overcoming obstacles is a

psycho-social process that motivates women to struggle more and become more aware of their life opportunities. The women in this study have confronted gender inequality. They have felt it in social interactions. They have faced inequality in gender relations, educational and vocational opportunities and educational and social expectations. They perceive the root of this inequality in the culture and tradition of their society. In a study carried out in China, Yang (2000) mentioned that it is often impossible for women to gain access to high occupation levels because it is difficult for them to obtain jobs which are related to political, economic or leadership decisions. They must expend more effort than men to find success. The reasons for this are socio-cultural beliefs that view men as stronger than women, therefore men are favoured to represent society. More critical indices are used to evaluate women. These attitudes, constructed on unrealistic opinions, extensively limit a woman's position in influential decision-making positions in society. As a result, in the lifetime cycle, men continue to feel superior and women to feel inferior. This kind of thinking influences the kinds of relationships and the roles played by men and women (in work, marriage, etc.). Men often feel that they are in positions such as "superior gender", "high achiever" and "innovator", and women continue to maintain a status of "inferior gender", "admirer" and "aide" (Yang, 2000). This point of view, which is rooted in Chinese culture, could be considered when talking about gender inequality or talking about lack of contribution of women in important decision making. The authors felt that the role of mass media is significant as it can present women with all of their real abilities and help to undermine gender inequality thus modifying public ideas in relation to women (Yang, 2000). However, in the present study, participants mention that the role of mass media in relation to women in Iran is not only is not positive but is, in fact, negative.

Kerr (1994) and Reis (1991) identified external barriers to talented women, such as attitudes of parents, schools, others in their environment, discrimination in work. They suggest that possible internal barriers such as self-doubt, self-criticism and lower expectations have existed in the lifetimes of talented women. When the women in this study perceive gender inequality, they are faced with many conflicts in their lives and feelings of imbalance. Women who are ambivalent about parenting or career roles face internal crisis and those who

strongly desire to commit themselves to creative endeavours in sciences are faced with social disapproval because of their atypical gender role. In contemporary society, exceptionally able women experience considerable stress related to role conflict and work overload (Noble, 1989). Cognitive dissonance theory assumes that people are motivated to resolve inconsistencies among their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours to provide justification or rationalization for their actions and experiences (Festinger, 1957; Narmon-Jones and Mill, 1999, in Jost, Pelham, Sheldon & Sullivan, 2003). Dissonance theory is widely interpreted as an egoistic theory of the self; when a person reduces his dissonance, she defends her ego and keeps a positive self-image. It seems that the women of the present study use dissolving as a mental model to reduce cognitive dissonance in overcoming obstacles.

Tirri and Koro-Ljungberg (2002) suggest that women sometimes have to give up the activities that they really love in favour of family. In other words, the women care about their families; they prefer to spend time with family and devote themselves to family rather than personal interests. While these women have as much potential to take part in decision-making roles as men, they are not provided the opportunity. The women in the present study regard their responsibilities to family in balance with their personal needs. They work hard to manifest their potential and utilize their responsibilities to promote their professional careers and successful social relationships. Even women who are highly prestigious professionals or who are involved in occupations that are male-dominated try to establish equilibrium between their home responsibilities and their occupations. Arnold (1993) pointed out that these women cope with the system as individuals, instead of addressing the existing institutional barriers in the structure of the labour force. They obtain an ideal equilibrium between their internal and external lives (home-duties and occupation). This theme shows the importance of social valuing of family and spousal roles in societies.

In a case study of four distinguished Polish women, researchers found that talented women exhibit traits of self-reliance, ability to resist, dominant trends, and risk-taking behaviours. These successful women show career motivation, interest in education and lively feelings. Like the results of the

present study, these findings suggest that academically talented women from various nations - particularly those from developing countries - share personal characteristics of determination, love of learning and an indemonstrable will to achieve their goals. The Polish women, like those in Iran, attributed their successes to internal factors as well as familial support (Kitiano and Perkin, 1996).

A number of studies have reported intrinsic and extrinsic factors that motivate a gifted woman to achieve her goals. Their success is attributed to external factors such as support of influential teachers, financial aid, advisors, families and faith as well as internal factors such as resilience and courage (Al-Lawati & Hunsaker, 2002; Kitano & Perkins, 1996). According to expectancy learning theory, (Atkinson in Al-Lawati & Hunsaker, 2002), individuals are motivated to act either from a desire to approach success or from a desire to avoid failure. The women of the present study wanted to do what they feel is right by creating some sort of changes in their lives. According to this theory, motivation to act is a function of the interaction between a particular goal and the motive of the individual's expectancy that will lead to purposeful actions.

In the present study, the process of empowerment identified by the life cycle process of overcoming obstacles suggests women manifest behaviour in accordance with their emotions and cognition. Through their abilities and by their hard work, women overcome obstacles and attain a constructive balance between their vocational commitments and family lives. Talented women believe that in order to reduce discrimination and acquire balanced lives for all women, they should be seeking remedies in various domains, individually and socially.

Conclusions

Stereotypes are tools that serve to disempower disadvantaged groups (Jost and Banaji, 1994). Once these stereotypes are internalized, group members may begin to believe that their lower status is legitimized and consequently they do not fight against it (Foster, Arnt, and Honkola, 2004). In the grounded theory of overcoming obstacles, when academically gifted women experience gender inequality, they try to dissolve the imbalance by various means in their desire to overcome personal obstacles. Rather than disempowering themselves, as

system justification theory suggests, they empower themselves. This reaction is more in accordance with social identity theory with women, as a low-status group, responding to negative social identity by choosing to redefine characteristics of their identity in order to attain a more positive, empowering identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

Group consciousness theories (Barky, 1977; Bovles and Klein, 1983; Stanley and Wise, 1983; Wilkinson and Schneider, 1990) have been explicit in redefining women's social identity, so that it is empowering rather than debilitating. In particular, these theories suggest that social groups be defined along the historical experiences of the group rather than by stereotyped traits. (In Foster, Arnt, and Honkola, 2004).

Research Implications

Larry (1998) stated that the development of a comprehensive theoretical framework for recognizing obstacles and challenges of gifted women should be preceded by studies that lead to an emergence of theory. This study's grounded theory highlights the problems related to female career success and how successful women overcome these problems. Gender inequality in educational, cultural, professional, legal, and employment backgrounds continue to exist in Iranian and other developing societies. This gender inequality is tied to domination of men and socio-cultural expectations in society that cause challenges for women. The results of these challenges sometimes lead capable women to give up their social activities. However, in spite of these conditions, some women have utilized their abilities according to their responsibilities. They have exhibited motivation, expended great effort and, with external support and socio-cultural changes, have developed their abilities to try and overcome the obstacles in their paths.

This study, although focused on female academics in Iran, is applicable to all societies. Even in countries where gender equity appears to exist it is important to monitor public opinion and value systems that may indicate decreasing equities (Yang, 2000). The implications of this emergent theory suggest that young women can be helped by counselling and planning to better understand their abilities and assist them in self-empowerment. Societies and responsible persons in these societies should pay more attention to the needs of women in order to decrease

societal and career challenges and obstacles.

The results of this study show family and other external supports have significant roles in the lives of successful women. These external supports should be fostered and developed to better meet the needs of developing women. Programs should be developed that foster family, school and societal relationships for women. Individuals who are responsible for educating women who show academic promise should be prepared to foster and support these interests. Finally, responsible authorities in society need to lead nations in helping women take positive steps, eradicating obstacles and facilitating accessibility to their lifetime aims.

Relevance and Rigor

In grounded theory development, academic rigor is measured by the extent of a theory's fit, relevance, workability and modifiability (Glaser, 1978). This theory fits as it emerged from data drawn from the words and ideas of talented women working in a male dominated society. It is relevant to those living in societies with open gender bias but also to societies with hidden biases. This theory works as it explains how gifted female academics manage to succeed in their careers while balancing social demands that are not always equitable. The theory of overcoming obstacles is readily modifiable, based on new data that might arise through additional theoretical sampling. The theory would remain fairly stable given new situations, however, categories or properties of categories may emerge as additional populations, such as those in other countries or other minority populations are sampled for data.

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Stabilising of Life: A substantive theory

Aino-Liisa Jussila, Ph.D.

Abstract

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore how families live after one parent has been diagnosed with cancer and to develop a substantive theory to explain how families solve the main concern in their lives. The study design was prospective using 32 joint couple conversations with parents of 13 families (N=26) during different stages of the cancer trajectory as well as 26 hours of observations of five families, including ten parents and nine children (N=19), collected during a boarding course on psychosocial rehabilitation. The data consisted of 2377 incidents and a memo fund of 97 pages. The main concern of families was how to respond to the shock of a parent falling ill with cancer. The core category was stabilising of life through facing of hardships and assuming an attitude towards the future which patterned out as detaching, fighting, adjusting and submitting.

Introduction

Cancer as a disease influences not just one person in the family; instead, it can be perceived as a family disease since the falling ill of one family member affects the entire family and its well-being (Anderson and Tomlinson 1992, Åstedt-Kurki et al. 1999, Anderson 2000). Therefore, when one of the parents falls ill with cancer, it impacts the everyday life of the diagnosed person and their family members. In addition, the cancer patient's relatives or significant others find that the disease is a part of their lives (Eriksson 1996, Kuuppelomäki 2000, Eriksson and Lauri 2000a, 2000b, Eriksson 2001, Lindholm et al. 2002).

It is essential to include the family in caring for the patient and to treat the entire family as a patient, since the family has a great importance to the cancer patient. According to earlier research, however, the family may even be ignored and misunderstood by health care professionals, although the family with cancer has many issues to be addressed in order to be able to decrease anxiety and to be able to offer the emotional support that the patient requires. Thus, family life with cancer should be studied to improve health care of the cancer patients and their

families.

The Discovery Process

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore how families live after one parent has been diagnosed with cancer and to develop a substantive theory to explain how families solve the main concern in their lives. The study design was prospective using 32 joint couple conversations with the parents of 13 families (N=26) at different stages of the cancer trajectory as well as 26 hours of observations with five families, including in total ten parents and nine children (N=19), collected during a boarding course on psychosocial rehabilitation. The data consisted of 2377 incidents and the memo fund of 97 pages. The data was collected and analysed according to the classic grounded theory methodology (Glaser, 1978, 1998, 2001).

A Grounded Theory of Family Survivorship through Stabilising of Life

The substantive theory of family survivorship and its core category of stabilising of life provide a typology of strategies for families living with a parent diagnosed with cancer. According to this typology, families can remain in one type of behaviour or move from one to another. The properties of stabilising of life are *facing of hardships* and *assuming an attitude towards the future*. They are related to the feelings and actions prevailing in the family and, in turn, indicate that the family's stabilising of life, as regards facing of hardships and assuming an attitude towards the future, entails either detaching from the disease, fighting against the disease, adjusting to life with the disease or submitting to the disease.

Stabilising of life for a family with cancer either follows the sequence of behavior in accordance with the subcore categories or varies between the four behavioral patterns. The variation of stabilising of life depends on the situation-specific realisation of criteria representing the various feelings and actions involved in facing of hardships and assuming an attitude towards the future. Stabilising of life is manifested in the family based on different criteria depending on whether facing of hardships and the associated feelings and actions are life-embracing, persistent and active or powerless, dejected and passive, and whether assuming an attitude towards the future and the feelings and actions

related to it are positive, hopeful, meaningful, balanced and trusting or negative, hopeless, anxious, fearful and doubtful. The variation in stabilising of life is manifested as variation in the different stages included in its four different behavior patterns.

Detaching from the Disease

The life of a family detaching from cancer is marked by *maintaining of hope*, which is characteristic of the atmosphere in the family throughout the process of detaching from the disease. As hopes of recovery awaken, the family maintains hope supported by the recognition of dispelling concerns and optimistic thinking. This is manifested in the family's positive attitude towards life and their active role in detaching from the disease. In the family's process of detaching from the disease, maintaining hope is followed by *living trustingly*. In this phase, family members live in the present as fully as possible trying to avoid the effects of being ill. When the family is balanced and shares an atmosphere that evicts concerns, family members live trusting in the future. There is trust among family members in detaching from the disease and dispelling concerns, and they strive actively and trustingly for the future.

Despite detaching from the disease, suffering from cancer does not pass without effects in the family. When the family members' life values change while living with the disease, and spiritual growth and reinforcing of self-esteem take place, the family's *self concept changes*. In this stage, the active pursuit of meaningfulness in life, which is built on a new set of values, is now more pointedly evident in the family members' lives as they strive for detaching from the disease.

Progressing of recovery is, in a way, a turning point towards better, as it consists of feelings and actions associated with becoming motivated in self care, increasing of treatment satisfaction, restoring the zest of life and facilitating of life in the family. When family members take care of the parent and promote his/her recovery, treatment satisfaction increases. This, in turn contributes to restoring the zest of life thereby facilitating the life of the family. The active nature of the family, a positive attitude in treating the ill family member, and a feeling of meaningful life promote the patient's feeling of recovery and detaching from the disease. At the same time, facilitating of life amidst the disease appears more and more real.

Continuing the habituated life releases the family from the circumstances of the disease and enables the detaching from the disease and the continuing of normal life. When the family's life returns to normal and when the relationships have remained the same despite the disease, the family can resume normal, everyday routines. Resuming the former life is also manifested in a positive attitude towards life, a balanced atmosphere in the family, and the feeling of meaningful life as the family detaches itself from the disease.

Fighting against the Disease

In the atmosphere of a family fighting against the disease, becoming surprised by the disease and grieving over falling ill enter into the first stage of the process of fighting against the disease. *Deliberating about falling ill*, which starts the process of fighting against the disease, comprises the emotions and actions linked to becoming confused by the disease and seeking reasons for falling ill. After the family hears about the disease, they are perplexed and start to deliberate about the disease. Then, the fearful and anxious atmosphere prevailing in the family is strengthened by the active seeking for reasons for falling ill.

In the family's process of fighting against the disease, deliberating about falling ill is followed by *rebellious against the change in life*. In this phase, family members gather up all their resources in order to resist the disease and to prevent it from taking the upper hand. When deliberating about life becoming more difficult, the family rebels against the change in life brought about by the disease and criticises the patient's treatment in order to bring about changes. Prevalent is a critical and rebellious but also guilty atmosphere on the one hand, and on the other hand, unyielding and life-embracing behaviour aimed at evicting troubles within the family. These intertwine with a feeling of hopelessness towards the future as the family fights against the disease.

Overcoming adversities is an expression of the family's strength in the process of fighting against the disease. When the family takes responsibility for the patient's treatment and creates fighting morale, they keep up the overcoming of adversities by processing their worries and by dispelling the feeling of disease among them. In this stage, the family overcomes the feelings of hopelessness with their own activity as

they fight the disease.

In the process of fighting against the disease and overcoming many adversities, people prepare themselves for the after-effects of treatments and for the deterioration of the patient's present condition. *Preparing for worse* involves feelings and actions related to getting accustomed to the after-effects of the treatments and to preparing for a decline in the patient's condition. When the family is preparing itself for the after-effects of treatments, it is simultaneously preparing for worse by anticipating a decline in the patient's condition. In the fight against the disease, this is manifested in a feeling of anxiety in spite of active and life-embracing actions.

Ensuring functionality enables the fight against the disease. It involves feelings and actions in the family relating to securing the future, bearing responsibility for the family, protecting close ones, rationalising the facing of disease and adopting a new way of spending time. Family members are ensuring the functionality during the parent's disease by aiming in different ways to secure the future. Moreover, they aim to bear the responsibility for each other, protect each other from the negative effects of the disease, rationalise their attitude towards the disease as well as adopt a new way of spending time.

Adjusting to Life with the Disease

Clarifying of facts begins the process of adjusting to life with the disease. In this phase, assuming a serious attitude towards treatment and realising the limited scope of the future are central features of the family's atmosphere. When the nature of the cancer becomes clear, the facts relating to the disease are clarified and the family starts to live according to the realities brought about by the disease. At first, the atmosphere in the family is dejected, but little by little, the family members begin to act according to the situation as they adjust to life with the disease.

In the family's process of adjusting to life with the disease, clarifying of facts is followed by *resorting to help*, during which the family members seek to find relief from their difficult situation. Family members experience finding relief not only in contacts to others close to them or in their philosophy of life, but also in resorting to the individual resources and relying on the expertise of various professionals. In this phase, despite the

prevalent anxious atmosphere, family members aim to overcome the feeling of powerlessness prevailing among them as they are adjusting to life with the disease.

Returning to life is an essential phase in the parent's and his/her family's process of adjusting to life with the disease, whereby the family members feel concretely that living with the disease is possible. As the family becomes accustomed to changes in life, family members begin returning to life by means of being perplexed by the ending of treatment, attaching to the present and processing being ill. The atmosphere in the family is hopeful and the feelings towards the future are trusting as the family adjusts to life with the disease.

As life is stabilising, the feeling of togetherness among the family is deepening with the process of adjusting to life with the disease. Suffering from a disease results in an *intensifying of togetherness*, both by strengthening the intimate relationship and unifying the family, as well as by bringing their immediate circle closer together. Thereby, in the family's atmosphere, signs of hopefulness, but also helplessness may be detected as the family members are adjusting to life with the disease.

Maturing through hardships enables the family's adjusting to life with the disease by maintaining equilibrium and realising the importance of looking after oneself. In so doing, the family notices a higher level of acceptance of circumstances in comparison with the early days of suffering from the disease. Maturing through hardships is manifested within the family both as noticing the hardships caused by being ill and as realising the solution to them as the family is adjusting to life with the disease.

Submitting to the Disease

Life coming to a standstill begins the process of submitting to the disease, wherein family members are shocked to hear about a parent falling ill and may even experience feelings of panic and fear of death. They feel as if their entire life is coming to a standstill due to feelings of shock caused by the grave nature of the disease. Then, an atmosphere of giving up and surrendering prevails as they submit to the disease. This sense of surrender is especially enhanced by uncertainty about the nature of the disease and fearfulness towards it.

In the family's process of submitting to the disease, life coming to a standstill is followed by *succumbing to fear*, when different kinds of feelings of anxiety spread from one family member to another. As dreading the different treatments spreads in the family and being ill as such is felt as a source of concerns, family members are comprehensively overcome by fear. Then, the atmosphere in the family is dominated by a dread directed towards the disease itself, receiving treatments for it and living with it, all of which contribute to succumbing to fear.

Succumbing to fear is followed by *being burdened by concerns*, whereby the disease has become a permanent burden in the life of the family. Along with being burdened by concerns, life for the family becomes more difficult and stabilises by submitting to the disease. When the family becomes aware of the parent's deteriorating condition, they feel that concerns and hardships are nearly overwhelming. A powerlessness and passivity in evicting troubles and an uncertainty towards the future emerge among the family.

Life turning more difficult complicates the everyday life of the family and attaches the life of the family to submitting to the disease. When the everyday life of the family becomes burdensome and the relationship between the parents faces the crisis caused by the disease, the life of the family becomes more difficult and family members become depressed. The entire immediate circle experiences feelings of dejection. This is manifested in the family as passivity and hopelessness as well as submitting to the disease.

Getting caught in being ill attaches the family to the circumstances of being ill and ties them to submitting to the disease. When the family, in a way, clings to being ill and family members grow tired, the family undergoes getting caught in being ill. The disease takes control over the everyday life of family members and submitting to the disease deepens. Among the family, this is manifested in life's filling with the disease.

Discussion

Many deductive studies have identified the impact of an adult's cancer diagnosis and treatment on the functioning of the family and their importance in relation to the patient's and the family's adjustment to cancer (Cooley & Moriarty, 1997). In addition, many researchers have found that a family member's

cancer diagnosis is the family's concern and affects the entire family (Cooley & Moriarty, 1997, Shepard et al., 1999). There is a link between a patient's feelings of helplessness or hopelessness in the face of cancer and inappropriate communication among the family members (Inoue et al., 2003). There is also evidence that the cancer diagnosis of an adult family member is a shock to the entire family (cf. Mellon 2002).

This inductive substantive theory of family survivorship (Jussila 2004) has the core category of stabilising of life as a response to the shock with two properties: facing of hardships in the family and assuming an attitude towards the future in a family. The emergent theory and its typology of stabilising of life include some similar characters to the family survivorship model (Mellon & Northouse, 2001, Mellon, 2002), derived from the resilience model of family stress, adjustment and adaptation according to McCubbin and McCubbin (1996). According to the family survivorship model (Mellon & Northouse, 2001, Mellon, 2002), the illness survival stressors relate negatively to the family's understanding of cancer. These stressors include concurrent family stressors, fear of recurrence, and somatic concerns. Furthermore, family resources, such as the resoluteness of the family and social support for the family, relate positively to the family's understanding of cancer. Moreover, the family's understanding of cancer relates positively to quality of life and mediates the effect of the illness survival stressors and the family resources. (Mellon & Northouse, 2001, Mellon, 2002.) Therefore, the family's quality of life is strongly related to facing of hardships and assuming an attitude towards the future in the family, which are the two properties of stabilising of life. Thus, the outcome variable of the family's quality of life in the family survivorship model by Mellon and Northouse (2001) has some similarities with this substantive theory of family survivorship and its typology of stabilising of life, although this inductive theory has its own unique and powerful character.

Families perceive stabilising of life as essential in their survivorship. Stabilising of life in a family of a parent suffering from cancer has similarities with the theory of reconstructing reality in a family of a child with recently diagnosed cancer (Clarke-Steffen, 1997). The families view reconstructing reality as creating a new normalcy. During the transition of living with

childhood cancer, families are using strategies of managing the flow of information, reorganising roles, evaluating and shifting priorities, changing the future orientation, assigning meaning to the disease and managing the therapeutic regimen. (Clarke-Steffen, 1997). Hence, the character of the process is involved in reconstructing reality as well as in stabilising of life in order to continue living in the family with cancer.

Stabilising of life in a family is closely connected to normalizing of life on an individual basis, as stated by Killoran et al. (2002), when long-term survivors of metastatic cancer attempt to normalize their lives through the process of self-transformation. It is characterised by viewing the diagnosis as insignificant; questioning the diagnosis or disbelieving the severity of disease; not worrying; not questioning the cause for the disease; and explaining the recovery in terms of faith in medicine, spirituality and personal volition (Killoran et al., 2002). Stabilising of life is also closely related to the process of transforming personal tragedy on an individual basis through different phases identified as encountering darkness, converting darkness, encountering light, and reflecting light among breast cancer patients (Taylor, 2000). The similarity between a family's stabilising of life and an individual's normalizing of life through transformation is found in the character of the process, although stabilising of life has its own character in the typology as well.

In this research, the typology of stabilising of life consists of detaching, fighting, adjusting and submitting. The typology of stabilising of life in a family with cancer is now compared to the typology of functioning of the family during the palliative phase of cancer according to Kissane et al. (1994). Cohesiveness, expressiveness and conflict are the parameters in differentiating adaptive families from those coping poorly and those whose members develop psychological morbidity. The members of supportive families with high cohesiveness have a low level of psychological morbidity and function competently in the social world. Accordingly, supportive families have similarities with families behaving in a detaching manner during stabilising of life. Supportive families as well as conflict-resolving families have low psychosocial morbidity, while ordinary families with intermediate levels of cohesion, expressiveness and conflict experience somewhat higher psychosocial morbidity. Therefore, the character of conflict-resolving and ordinary families

resembles the character of families behaving in an adjusting manner during stabilising of life because the number of conflicts, differences of opinion and negative feelings is tolerable. Furthermore, hostile families with a great number of conflicts have the highest levels of psychological morbidity and poorest levels of social adjustment and have some similarities with the families behaving in a fighting manner during stabilising of life. On the other hand, sullen families having some conflicts, poor cohesion and limited expressiveness resemble the families behaving in a submitting manner during stabilising of life. (Kissane et al., 1994.)

This substantive theory of family survivorship (Jussila 2004) provides researchers, health care professionals and educators with a greater understanding of the perspectives of caring families with cancer in health care. It may also be used in developing the health care of families and in developing the education of health care professionals.

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Pushing For Privileged Passage: A grounded theory of *guardians* to middle level mathematics students

Tina L. Johnston, Ph.D.

Abstract

This grounded theory research identified conflict over decisions about placement into high ability mathematics classes. A theory termed *pushing for privileged passage* emerged from data collected from parents and educators in the Northwest United States as well as international literature. *Pushing* occurs following a break down of trust among parents and/or educators over various facets of the school and over student ability-grouping decisions in mathematics specifically. Subsequently they try to circumvent the system to gain advantaged placement for specific students. Those who push use *investing* strategies to insure a child's future success. They use *pressuring* techniques on decision-makers to garner advanced mathematics access. Finally, those who push use strategic *lobbying* for program changes.

Introduction

Despite research suggesting that grouping students by ability is detrimental to low and high achieving students (Ballantyne, 2002; Boaler, 2002; Boaler, Wiliam, & Brown, 1998; Camblin, 2003; Oakes, 1985; Slavin, 1990; Slavin, 1995; Stevenson, Schiller & Schneider, 1994; Wheelock, 1992) and ill-advised by research on the needs of adolescents (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Camblin, 2003; Mills, 2001; Oakes, et al, 2000), ability grouping is a common practice in middle level mathematics classes (Braddock & McPartland, 1990; Wheelock, 1992). Most schools offer a low, average and advanced mathematics group. However, schools also exist with as many as six and as few as two group levels, at both grade level and advanced (Johnston, 2006; Oakes, 1985).

Middle schools that group students by ability use criteria for placing a student into the various mathematics groups. A committee organizes and establishes these filtering criteria. This

process is sometimes affected by outside forces along with the committee participants' beliefs, student population needs, and examples from other schools. Once criteria are established, students are filtered into various ability groups by educators or counselors using the filters as well as personal or group judgments (Johnston, 2006; Oakes, 1985).

Methodology

This study employed the use of classic grounded theory (GT) based on the early work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and further development by Glaser (1978, 1992, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2005). The study set out to better understand the issues surrounding the various ability grouping models in middle level mathematics classes, hoping to better understand the practice and problems associated with it. The resultant theory centers around the issue of mathematics placement, outlining a process that explains the actions of the various guardians (parents & educators) in a child's education.

Forty-one subjects who worked with or had children attending 13 schools in 10 school districts and three states were interviewed. Sixteen teachers, three administrators, and 23 parents were interviewed. Twelve of the 14 teachers taught middle level mathematics classes and two taught 5th grade students. Nineteen of the parents had one or more children at the middle school level; many also had children in other school levels. One had children only in high school and two had children only in elementary school. Seven parents had children in at/below grade level classes and 16 had children placed in advanced mathematics classes. Six out of the 19 teachers and administrators spoke of their own middle school aged or older children.

Open-ended interviews were conducted. Subjects were informed of the topic of the project. If administrators or teachers did not immediately begin to share their thoughts on ability grouping in middle level mathematics, the researcher asked them to discuss their schools' mathematics ability grouping arrangement; similarly parents were asked to discuss their children's mathematics placement. Following this, minimal prompting was required except to probe topics initiated by

subjects. Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to two hours. In addition school district demographic information and research literature was collected that related to problems, categories and properties of the developing theory.

In early phases of coding and comparing, the researcher focused on identifying problems and broad categories. As more data were collected, focus shifted to identifying properties of the categories. Throughout the process, coded statements/notes and memos were sorted together. Theoretical sampling (in the field and from within collected data), memo writing, coding and comparing actions were repeated until the main problem identified by educators and parents became prominent and a principle category was found that explained how subjects continually tried to resolve the prominent problem. As the theoretical framework stabilized, theoretical sampling moved towards saturating the core and related categories and associated properties until all relevant categories were well developed and stable.

As the main concern became apparent from early interview data, the researcher approached administrators, teachers and parents for their perspectives. If most of the interviewed parents had children in the high mathematics group, the researcher sought parents with children in at/below grade level classes for contrast. As parents mentioned others who were actively working towards advanced middle level mathematics placements, the researcher contacted them for interviews. Since the same problem developed among several schools in one part of Oregon, the researcher interviewed teachers from wider regions within Oregon and the Northwest United States. Literature was collected and integrated representing research projects across the United States, Canada and United Kingdom as well as from multi-nation studies. Finally, as parents with ties to India, China, Korea and Mexico were interviewed, the researcher requested information about how students were grouped in mathematics in those countries. Although specific gender, ethnic, and socioeconomic data were not collected the researcher attempted to gather data from a variety of sources, including gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

The Main Concern

Interviews with participants revealed a two-tiered concern. At the more general level, educators and parents involved in this study had lost trust in the educational system (Johnston, 2006). Secondly and more specifically they either worried that an ability-grouping filter would pass over their focus student (this student may be their own child or one in whom they see promise) or the student had actually been passed over for placement in the advanced mathematics group. These parties disagreed with this decision. A lack of trust in general and, more specifically, a lack of trust in the school ability grouping filter system were identified as the main concern voiced by subjects when asked about their experiences of the substantive area.

My son exceeded the benchmark but didn't do well on the placement test. He was placed into 6th grade math. When I talked to the principal she acted like she didn't believe me. The next week she called me back to tell me that indeed my son had exceeded the benchmark. I'm not one to push my kids but I want them to progress and not stay stagnant.

The Theory of Pushing For Privileged Passage

Pushing is a way for parents and educators to deal with the lack of trust and fear and/or disappointment in the student placement process into mathematics ability groups. When untrusting parties become cognizant that a student whom they believe is mathematically extraordinary may fail or has failed passage through an ability grouping filter into an advanced mathematics class, they begin to push against that filter. They push by *investing* time and money in preparation for the focus student to successfully pass through the grouping filter. If this fails, they employ more combative methods by *pressuring* decision-makers to alter the placement. Finally, pushers may use strategic techniques by *lobbying* within the school system to change that system. By *pushing*, these 'guardians' are *investing*, *pressuring* and *lobbying* the mistrusted system in order to provide a *privileged passage* for their focus student or ward. A basic social process that explains the different stages of *pushing* employed by educators and parents with students in middle school mathematics classes is detailed below.

Pushing

The principal category and ultimately the title of the theory (*pushing*) developed from the words subjects used to describe the focus student's needs, the reasons they felt that the student should have access to advanced curriculum as well as descriptions of the actions taken by themselves (the pusher) to gain access to advanced curriculum. The group of words, seen repeatedly in interview notes were, 'push', 'pushing' and 'pushed'. Parents and educators viewed these students (perceived as having advanced abilities) as needing to be 'pushed'; as perhaps 'parent pushed'. Other parents and educators suggested that, while they not ones to 'push', they wanted students to progress. Time and again, the word push was used. As interview statements were coded and compared, more and more fit under the category of *pushing*. At times, words were used that were synonyms of pushing such as advocated, look out for, supervise, etc. These were sorted into the *pushing* categories where they fit best. Once the main *pushing* category was found, the coded data and memos were compared and sorted, seeking the stages of *pushing*. These stages became *investing*, *pressuring*, and *lobbying*.

Pushing can be defined as exerting oneself continuously, vigorously, or obtrusively to gain an end or engage in a crusade for a certain cause or person; in essence, becoming an advocate for a particular cause or person (Wordnet, 2006). This definition presents *pushing* as a positive action. In theory, educators are the pushers or advocates for all students (Mann, 1848). Parents are the pushers or advocates for their children (Crozier, 1997). So how do seemingly positive notions create conflict? The problem lies in who is deemed deserving of challenging material, all children or specific children? If all children do not receive access to advanced mathematics content, how are those children who should receive the attention and material selected? Although neither a plot nor scheme, pushers are fighting to garner access into classes with an elite group of students receiving advantaged instruction (Kohn, 1998; Oakes & Wells, 1998; Spear, 1994). The pushers do not want their focus students to learn with the remaining average or below-average majority.

There are three levels of *pushing*. Some pushers may work at all of these levels over a period of time while others may

only apply one or two in their quest to garner advantaged placement for their focus student. The levels have been arranged by scope (foundational, combative, and strategic). They are also offered in the order by which most pushers employ them. At the most basic or foundational level, pushers employ *investing* strategies aimed at preparing students to successfully pass through the mathematics placement filter into the advanced group. If the focus student fails to get into the advanced mathematics track despite the employment of investment strategies, pushers will often demand and successfully achieve placement. If this fails or if the pusher is particularly knowledgeable of the school system more strategic lobbying strategies can be implemented that will ‘improve’ the system (Hatton, 1985).

Investing

Investing is an action characterized by laying out capital with an expectation of profit. The actions discussed in this category are the most common methods by which parents participate in their child’s schooling (Crozier, 1997). Those who do not trust ability-grouping filters in mathematics will invest their capital on the child. There are three properties of *investing* (or types of capital); personal tutoring, purchased tutoring, and classroom volunteering.

Investing pushers provide students with extra tutoring and one-on-one homework supervision. These may be as specific as participating in nightly homework sessions where students are assisted with completing work, correcting mistakes and redirecting correction or errors or as general as providing periodic progress checks and availability for assistance. Investors may provide focus students with access to outside materials or tutoring. They may be provided with math books, computer software and even enrolled in formal tutoring or cram classes so that students garner ‘more mathematics’ which may be focused on basic skills practice, deeper knowledge of mathematics, or advanced topics.

One of my friends sent off for Chinese curriculum in mathematics and other subjects. She has taught them at home after school each day in order to make sure they get into the gifted track program. Her daughter is now

taking Pre Calculus while in 8th grade. She says I should do the same but I'm not sure if that isn't too much pressure.

Spending time building relationships with those who will ultimately play a role in grouping decisions is also an investing strategy employed by *investing* pushers. Whether personally tutoring, arranging, outside tutoring or supplemental curricula or building relationships with people who may assist them in future placement these *pushers* are focusing action on the student, an investment that they hope will be rewarded with access to higher mathematics placement.

Pressuring

Pressuring pushers attempt to persuade, exert force or coerce decision-makers into bending to their will. At this level, those who have been disappointed by a focus student's ability-group placement in mathematics may turn their focus to *pushing* those in charge of the placement process attempting, and usually succeeding, in changing the decision. Pressuring may be employed in three ways; rallying support, exerting pressure on the teacher, and/or pressuring administrators.

Pressuring pushers who rally support may talk to others about the focus student's disappointing class placement. These conversations may be between educators, parent to parent or between parents and educators. In all cases, the goal of these conversations is to rally support. *Pressuring* pushers then go, as teams, to those who can alter decisions (advanced group teachers or administrators) to ask for altered placements (for one or more of the supporters focus children).

When I talked about with the other parents that he hadn't got into the high math group they suggested I put in a change of schedule request and planned go to the principal As soon as possible to get him changed. One of the moms that I knew from Downs Elementary (with an older son in the high math class) said we should go together. Her daughter did not get into the high math class and she wanted her in too.

Pressuring pushers may alternatively ask their supporters to separately contact those able to reverse the decision to ask for

changed placements.

Pressuring pushers may go directly to the teacher in charge of the advanced group and ask if the focus student can be added to their class. This strategy can only be employed by those who have knowledge of the teaching schedule thus is only used by those who have privileged knowledge such as fellow school employees or parents who have already had older children in the class. Most *pressuring* pushers take their request for changed student class placement to an administrator, either a building principal or counselor. Administrators may explain the filtering criteria as an argument against the change in placement while others will simply place the student into the higher level math class with no discussion. In either case, this approach is almost always successful and students are quickly moved to higher level mathematics classes.

Lobbying

Lobbying occurs when pushers act to influence policy-makers for a specific cause or to change the system. Lobbying has three properties: *positioning*, *policy-changing*, and *systemic change*. This pushing action may not be the most commonly applied strategy; however, it is the one that stands to have influence over the greatest number of students. *Lobbying* pushers with focus students in middle-level mathematics classes employ this strategy by *positioning* themselves on school or district committees. As a participant on these committees, they may work towards *changing policies* (such as filtering criteria or class offerings). Finally, lobbying pushers may assist schools in working on *systemic change* (such as rearranging school schedules, curricula or finding funding for and designing a magnet school).

Lobbying pushers who are *pushing* against group filters may position themselves onto a variety of committees that may benefit their focus student's placement in mathematics class. *Lobbying* positioners have contacts within the school who make them aware of upcoming volunteer positions. They may at one time have been a classroom volunteer having this earlier investment pay off in terms of access to lobbying instead of, or in addition to, benefiting from a return in terms of advanced placement for their focus student. The type of committee(s)

determines whether the pusher has a direct impact on grouping decisions or a much greater impact on the student's education.

Once in position, the pusher who works on policy-changing committees works towards setting policies that will directly affect his/her focus student or with that student's future needs in mind. Following a conversation about how an older son was not accepted into the high math class and remained unchallenged for the year, one parent said:

Because of his brother, I pushed for the creation of the 6/7-math class instead of having students jump right into Algebra. I was hoping this 6/7 math would aid in smoothing students' transition to Algebra.

Lobbying pushers also work towards larger policy changes by participation on committees. They may work on school boards or grant writing teams. They may take jobs as administrators or serve on district steering committees. Pushers in these positions are most often very knowledgeable of the school and educational policies. They are very often teachers, administrators or work in peripheral education fields (university positions, educational service districts, etc.) These pushers can have the greatest impact on both their focus student's access to education as well as other students impacted by the policy changes they implement. Most often the focus student in this situation is the pusher's own child or children (Hatton, 1985). The policy changes that result are not always, but can be, detrimental to other students' access to a rigorous mathematics education.

Discussion

Pushing for privileged passage has implications for several aspects within the field of education, including issues of trust, equity, and advocacy.

Trust

The impact of a loss of trust on the subjects of this study, as well as documented in the literature, would suggest that schools need to pay attention to both work (within school) and community relationships (Tschannen-Moran, 2000; Wells & Oakes, 1996). Within-school trust is important to building positive working and learning environments for students (Fullan,

Bertani & Quinn, 2004). This is also true of school and community trust. Some studies suggest that students' perform better, they stay in school longer and they have more positive attitudes towards school when schools and parents have a trusting relationship (Northwest regional educational laboratory, 2007). Building strong and high-quality school-home communication is a key to building such trust (Adams & Christenson, 2000).

Rewarding *pushing* behaviors

The actions taken by the subjects of this study indicate that schools are rewarding parent involvement by allowing them a say in decision-making. This in and of itself is clearly positive. There are lots of articles that discuss the benefits of building community relationships where community members actively participate in decision-making (Fullan, 1995; Fullan, Bertani & Quinn, 2004; Reyes, Scribner & Scribner, 1999). There is, however, a down side. The results from this and other studies indicate that sometimes 'community members' are not acting in the best interests of all students. They are acting in the best interests of specific students (usually their own children). Sometimes termed squeaky wheels, these community members successfully pressure schools into making decisions that may negatively impact populations of students who do not have the benefit of an educational guardian. In fact, this study would suggest that the 'rewards' from the school are actually detrimental to unrepresented students (Benveniste, Cornoy, & Rothstein, 2003; Johnston, 2006; Hatton, 2985).

How much pushing?

Finally, there is growing consensus that students need some *pushing* in order to become successful learners. High-press questioning is an example of a positive pushing technique used by some teachers. Research of this method suggests that students who are pressed to explain their thinking learn more (Kazemi & Stipek, 2001). Studies suggest that parents can also have a strong effect in raising academically successful children (Belfield & Levin, 2005; Poliakoff, 2006; Doherty & Peskay, 1992).

On the other hand, there is also evidence that too much pressure can be applied. Recent research on high school students suggests that too much pressure is placed on students to earn

high grades, to take too many advanced classes, and to maintain large numbers of after school activities. This pressure can take a toll on children who are pushed. Some pushed students suffer from high anxiety and even depression. They may take unethical measures such as cheating to stay at the top of their class in their quest for highly sought after university acceptance (Greenless, 1996; Harrington-Leuker, 1989; Jing & Chen, 1995; Raymond, 1995). How much *pushing* is enough and how much is too much? More knowledge is needed to discern the lines between these two extremes.

General Implications

This substantive theory of *pushing* suggests some general implications as follows:

The main concern: There exists a subset of adults (hereafter guardians) who face situations where their powerless wards (may be a child or not depending on the circumstances) are at the mercy of mistrusted organizations.

Pushing as the core category: To resolve issues of lost trust, guardians push against mistrusted organizations, seeking to protect their wards and to assure them of *privileged passage*. The strategies used by guardians include:

Investing: The guardian invests time and resources on their ward. They also make themselves visible within the mistrusted organization in order to smooth passage for their ward

Pressuring: When the guardian feels that their ward has been denied the privileged passage they are due they act by rallying others and pressuring low-level and upper-level managers to rectify the unfair treatment.

Lobbying: The guardian takes action to change the mistrusted system. They position themselves into power positions and then act to create a trusted environment for their ward.

Powerless Populations: There are several social situations where issues of trust and advocacy come into prominence. Several segments of the population commonly fall under the care of, or require specific assistance from, persons taking on the role

of a guardian including aging parents, persons with special needs, persons with mental illness, the injured, minority groups, children, etc. These populations may need medical care, mental health treatment, work permits, funeral services, legal advice, etc. These represent similar situations to the one outlined above however there is a distinct difference between these and an educational setting. Unlike most other institutional settings, the focus of 'treatment' in schools is almost always a large group. Changes made affecting one student also affect classmates (Osborne, 2000). These group affects make the impact and potential consequences of *pushing for privileged passage* more pronounced.

Athletics: Much documentation exists on the phenomenon of adults pushing athletic success among youth and the effects that pushing has on their participation in sports. Studies have been conducted on the effects that pressure to be the best player, garner specific positions, or win competitions may have on a player's well being as well as sociological consequences for these individuals and their teams. Players who are placed under too much pressure, similar to those under academic pressure, may cheat, use performance enhancing drugs, develop injuries, or exhibit aggressive behaviors. As a result, some youth programs work with parents to reduce pressuring, seeking to return youth sports to a leisure activity. At the university level, pressures to win may cause coaches to illegally pay players, exert pressure on instructors to award passing grades or coerce other students to provide homework for players. Players may cheat on school-work or use performance enhancing drugs. Some university participation licenses and players have been suspended for illegal and/or unethical practices such as this (Citizenship through Sports Alliance, 2005; Barrett, 2006; Hellstedt, 1988; Leonard, 1988).

Although these different push situations are not exactly the same as the pushing that occurs in middle level mathematics placement situations, plenty of indication exists that a formal theory of pushing could be researched and developed using these situations as well as others. Future researchers have much room to develop both substantive theories in these areas as well as move toward a formal theory of pushing.

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Eliciting Spill: A methodological note

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Classic grounded theory is an inductive process that focuses on the experiences and perceptions of research participants (Glaser, 1978, 1998). Although grounded theorists may utilize other types of data, most are likely to gather information through qualitative interviews. The theorist seeks to understand what is going on as people resolve their main concern in a given substantive area. People know what is important to them and most want to tell their stories. They feel encouraged to talk when they recognize that their stories are valued. Once the informant realizes that he or she is being heard, the story flows. This is what Glaser refers to as “spill.” When this occurs, the theorist becomes a vessel to receive the story. As Glaser describes it, “The researcher will become a ‘big ear’ to pour into incessantly” (1998, p. 124). But, as easy as this seems, the researcher must overcome certain positivist tendencies to allow this to happen. Rather than asking a list of pre-planned questions, the grounded theorist will try to develop one question that will trigger the telling of a story. Eliciting spill requires a deliberate process that employs a deep understanding of the fundamentals of classic grounded theory. Derived from Glaser’s writings, the following are suggestions intended to help the novice grounded theorist to elicit spill.

Prepare for the Interview

The theorist must understand how the classic grounded theory method guides every step of the process. Grounded theories emerge from data: they are not preconceived. For that reason, the theorist should choose a broad substantive area. It is more likely that the researcher will be able to recognize important concepts and patterns of behavior if the area of study is relatively broad. For example, life transitions pose many problems which must be processed or resolved. These periods of change provide rich data for analysis and culminate in important theories. The researcher must be open to hearing the story from the informant’s perspective. After all, the focus of the research in classic grounded theory revolves around the participant’s own perception of a problem in their lives and their struggle to resolve the problem. Attentively listening to participants’ stories and

remaining open to their ideas and interpretations is the only way the researcher can arrive at new knowledge.

To avoid preconception, which halts the generation of new knowledge, it is best if the theorist reviews the literature after the GT process is well underway. However, because of institutional pressures, it is likely that most researchers will conduct a literature review early in the research process. So, an alternative to delaying the review of literature is to consciously put aside what has been learned from the literature and enter each interview with an open mind, free of preconception. This requires conscious effort and time for decompression between the literature review and data collection.

Choose the Right Sample

A grounded theory emerges from a group's main concern and how it is continually processed or resolved. As the theorist seeks to understand what is going on with a group of people, he or she should focus attention on that specific group and give careful attention to choosing an appropriate sample. The researcher may want to interview a few people close to those involved in the substantive area under study to learn more about associated social-structural processes, to theoretically sample, and so forth. However, the theory is properly discovered by sampling those directly involved. For example, if one wishes to know about the transition from freedom to prison, interview prisoners; if one wishes to learn about nurses' moral dilemmas, interview nurses.

Choose the Right Setting

Except in the case of field research, most interviews should be conducted in settings conducive to open and free discourse: places where both researcher and informant are comfortable enough to be truly present, without pretence or fear. The setting should be a physically comfortable, neutral space where the informant feels free to honestly disclose personal and sensitive information. The wrong setting can be a strong impediment. For example, an experienced grounded theorist described his first interview with a top-level leader. He conducted the interview in the informant's office. As you might expect, the informant answered each question with the officially correct and proper answer—he was “properlining.” A second interview in a neutral place yielded a wealth of information. The informant no longer

felt restricted by his official role and was able to communicate on a human-to-human level.

Ask the Right Question

Grounded theory seeks to conceptualize a main concern as experienced and perceived by the participants in a substantive area, so it must be a concern *for those individuals* and not simply a professional concern of the researcher. The researcher chooses the substantive area and sample population and allows the main concern to emerge from the study. Few informants will have much to say in response to a problem that they do not perceive as a concern. If the researcher ends up asking lots of questions to elicit information, he or she has probably asked the wrong “spill” question.

When crafting the spill question, the researcher should be careful to avoid false assumptions that will derail the theory. The researcher should not assume, for example, that parents love a child, alcoholics wish to be sober, or middle managers wish to advance in an organization. Perhaps a parent despises a child, an alcoholic enjoys drinking, or a middle manager is comfortable in a current position. If the posed question assumes a falsehood, spill cannot occur.

A good question is clearly stated, simple, and free from confusing connotations. The question should include common language appropriate to informants’ education and cultural group and should be as free as possible from connotations that confuse meaning. Many terms in common usage have contradictory meanings and are easily misunderstood. The researcher should avoid professional jargon, which creates power imbalance and can become a barrier to genuine human-to-human discourse. If the informant understands the jargon, he or she may feel compelled to match the language to impress the researcher with his or her knowledge. On the other hand, the informant cannot answer meaningfully a question that is unclear.

Blend

Unless conducting a field study on how informants react to conspicuous researchers, the researcher should attempt to blend with them. Blending means looking and sounding like the people one is with. People are more likely to speak openly and honestly

if they are comfortable in the presence of another. Most people are comfortable with others that seem to be like them. Within reason, the researcher should dress in a manner that blends with the informant. If the informant is an executive who wears business suits, the researcher should not arrive in blue jeans. If the informant is a patient in a free clinic, the researcher should avoid dressy clothing and jewelry.

The researcher should attempt to be inconspicuous in sound as well by matching speech volume and cadence to that of the informant. For example, questions delivered in a rapid, clipped Manhattan speech pattern might be a put-off in an Alabama nursing home. Again, this is a rule-of-thumb that requires reasoned judgment; but, most people are more comfortable with people who are like them and are more likely to spill when they feel comfortable.

Encourage Spill

People want to be heard and respected. Certain purposefully used communication strategies convey respect and encourage spill. Giving nonjudgmental, undivided attention will send a message that the informant has a contribution that is worth hearing. The researcher should begin the conversation with an open, non-judgmental question that encourages the informant to tell his or her own story. The question can begin with the words, "Tell me about...." or "What was it like when...." In many cases, this is all that is required to elicit spill. If the informant is comfortable and has a main concern, the story will flow. Unless it is culturally inappropriate, the researcher should make good eye contact and listen carefully without worrying about the next question. If the narrative stalls, the researcher can encourage the informant to continue by using statements such as, "Go on," "Tell me more about that," and so forth. Gaps in the narrative and periods of silence allow the informant to gather thoughts and give the impression that the researcher believes the story is worth waiting for.

Telling the truth can be dangerous. Grounded theory studies in the past have uncovered questionable business practices, unethical medical acts, and so forth. During the interview, informants will try to measure the danger they will put themselves in if they spill this type of information. This is one of the reasons that Glaser (1998) discourages audio taping. Most

people hesitate to disclose sensitive or dangerous information in the presence of a tape recorder. Conspicuous note-taking can have the same cooling affect. So, the researcher is more likely to elicit sensitive information without audio tapes or note taking. If one must tape or take notes, it should be done as inconspicuously as possible.

Conclusion

Spill is more likely to occur if the researcher follows the fundamental rules of classic grounded theory, sets the stage, and seeks the truth as known by the informant. Theory emerges from stories that people tell about a concern that they have experienced. The researcher must choose the right sample, choose the right setting, and ask the right question. Strategies to encourage spill include making the informant comfortable, blending, asking open ended questions, and listening. Through knowledge of GT methodology and use of subtle yet effective communication strategies, the researcher can elicit spill — the grounded data of GT research.

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