The Grounded Theory Review: An international journal

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From the Editor

In 2009, we issued a special call for papers, Along the GT Learning Curve, to focus on the novice experience in learning and doing Classic Grounded Theory (CGT). We especially welcomed papers that demonstrate the challenges, rewards and lessons learned and that offered advice to others undertaking their first CGT study. It has taken some time to bring this issue to publication; to select the papers and to work through various iterations of review and revision. We are very pleased to finally present this issue with six papers from a wide range of professional fields including business, psychology, education, social work and medical sociology. The range of disciplines alone speaks to the reach of CGT as a research methodology.

These papers are presented as good examples of the novice attempt at that first CGT study; they are not presented as perfect but rather as examples from which we all can learn. For the novice, reading these papers should give encouragement and some appreciation for the rewards of choosing to do a CGT study. For the more experienced grounded theorist, they serve to remind us that we have all been there; finding our way through that first effort, reading the books and trusting that the method would work. None of us produced the perfect CGT study!

Many of us also found ourselves faced with seemingly incompatible social structural constraints imposed by supervisors, ethics committees, institutional and organizational gatekeepers. But, through the process we learned a great deal. First and foremost, we learned that 'just doing it!' is the only way to learn CGT with the potential to improve with each study that we undertake and with each study that we take the time to read and methodologically analyze.

My comments here are not intended as criticism of the six papers but rather as my perspective on the methodological realizations that each provides, the areas for improvement

and the lessons learned. Generally, the papers suggest challenges that are frequently encountered by the novice CGT researcher. These include conflating CGT with qualitative research, preconceiving the study through a literature review at the outset, adopting a conceptual framework to guide the study, using interview protocols, etc. Some of the qualitative remodeling probably follows from the need to accommodate supervisor and university degree requirements that are often inconsistent with CGT methodology. Other challenges are openly acknowledged by the authors as they recount how they had to work through the confusion and even regression in coming to understand what each stage of the CGT process entails. These papers clearly demonstrate that 'reading' CGT as an intellectual exercise is just the beginning of 'doing' CGT and that each novice attempt is simply a first step in the process of truly understanding why and how CGT is a different methodology (Christensen, 2007) and not simply a variation of qualitative research.

What lessons are there for us in these papers? Elizondo-Schmelkes (this issue) reminds us that the motivation for undertaking a CGT study is often a life cycle interest (Glaser, 1998: 48-49) and that while we will situate our study in a particular substantive area (in her study, the post graduate experience), the latent pattern of social behaviour discovered will frequently have general implications well beyond that particular social situation. We may then begin seeing that latent pattern in many areas of our lives as well as in other CGT studies - with the danger of developing what Glaser (2005) has termed 'pet' theoretical codes. Elizondo-Schmelkes also reminds us of the sense of freedom that the theorist experiences in discovering the autonomy and creativity that comes in doing CGT.

Gordon (this issue) reminds us of the power of CGT to offer theoretical explanation for areas of professional practice where theories are lacking. She suggests as well the power of a good CGT to influence not only professional practice but also to enhance social understanding of a problem. Her struggles to set aside personal and professional biases and professional knowledge and to remain open to what emerged from the data, trusting that the CGT process would indeed produce a theory are challenges that most of us can readily

acknowledge from our own novice efforts. Her confidence grew with her experience in using the methodology and with recognizing the grab that her emerging theory had for those in her substantive field. She was on to something and they knew it!

Loy (this issue) takes us inside his experience as a novice with a revealing reflection on how he discovered CGT, why he was attracted to using the methodology – again, extant theory was non-existent or did not ring true for him. The challenges he faced in sorting through the different 'versions' of CGT, in managing 'stakeholders' to his research and degree process, and in embracing the experiential nature of CGT are all common bends in the road along the CGT learning curve. His approaches to confronting these challenges may serve as good advice and inspiration to others who find themselves similarly challenged. His recommendation of writing a 'big memo' to help in pulling the theory together echoes Glaser's frequent advice at seminars to write a working paper as a first effort at presenting an emerging theory.

Oturu (this issue) also indicates that he selected CGT because of a recognized lack of good theory to guide practice in HIV treatment. Like Gordon (this issue), Oturu also acknowledges the challenges of setting aside professional knowledge to allow the relevant concerns of his population to emerge through data analysis. He recognizes as well the critical importance of using the full CGT package (methodology) and not simply 'cherry picking' specific CGT methods. His efforts to comply with institutional requirements for his PhD degree, necessitating the use of interview protocols and transcription of interviews, led to his adopting two methodological 'innovations' which he has labeled 'transcoding' and 'transmemoing' (p.66). While perhaps interesting solutions to imposed institutional requirements, without sufficient experience in applying CGT procedures, such variations run the risk of derailing important methodological clarity early in the novice's learning journey.

Oturu and Loy both declare their philosophical stance as social constructionist and appear to struggle with the idea of CGT as a general methodology that can accommodate any philosophical perspective (Holton, 2007). The struggle is perhaps understandable given their declared stance but it is

important to recognize that as social constructionists, they have simply chosen to limit the type of data that they use with possible implications for the emergent theory. This limitation of data is their choice as researchers but it is not a limitation of CGT as a methodology; like all CGT studies their resultant theories could well be modified with the analysis of additional types and sources of data. Their choice of data certainly did not undermine the emergent theories as both authors produced award winning studies.

Selymes (this issue) reminds us that being too steeped in the literature and the jargon of our professional field can be a challenge to remaining open in a CGT study. Her study is complex and at times somewhat inaccessible due to heavy dosages of psychological terminology. She starts with a preconceived professional concern and may then have found herself consumed by the rich data that her study generated. It appears that she may have been overwhelmed with too many potential core categories and was perhaps reluctant to transcend the detail in the data to focus on one latent pattern. Regardless of these pitfalls on her novice journey, her concept of self-victimizing is excellent.

Stillman (this issue) demonstrates a clear intellectual understanding in her exposition of the methodology but intriguing questions come to mind. As a substantive theory of school counselors, why did her data collection in this substantive area cease after only seven interviews? While she chose then to theoretically sample other substantive areas (hospitals, non-profit boards), she presents her concept of working the system as a substantive theory applied to school counselors? It would be interesting to learn more about her decisions in terms of theoretical sampling, data collection and analysis. Did she lack access to sufficient interviews with school counselors? Or, was the scope (and thus the title) of her study fixed by social structural constraints within the research proposal process of her institution? Or, was she simply attracted to exploring her core concept in other substantive fields? Her theory of working the system most certainly has general implications that many of us will recognize well beyond the field of education.

It is our hope that the reader will find the six studies presented here not only interesting reading from a

substantive perspective but will also see in these novice efforts both the challenges and rewards that await along the GT learning curve. It is our hope that reading these papers will inspire not only novices but also the more experienced to 'just do it!'

~ Judith Holton

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Submissions Guidelines

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Graphics: Our preference is to minimize the use of graphics, figures and tables. If they are necessary, authors of papers

accepted for publication will be asked to supply print ready artwork.

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Authenticizing the Research Process

Nora Elizondo-Schmelkes, MA, Ph.D. Candidate

Abstract

This study reflects the main concern of students (national and international) who are trying to get a postgraduate degree in a third world (or "in means of development") country. The emergent problem found is that students have to finish their thesis or dissertation but they do not really know how to accomplish this goal. They resolve this problem by *authenticizing* the process as their own. The theory of authenticizing involves *compassing* their way to solve the problem of advancing in the research process. Compassing allows the student to authenticize his/her research process, making it a personal and 'owned' process. The main categories of compassing are the intellectual, physical and emotional dimension patterns that the student has, learns and follows in order to finish the project and get a degree. Authenticizing implies to author with authenticity their thesis or dissertation. Compassing allows them to do this in their own way, at their own pace or time and with their own internal resources, strengths and weaknesses.

Introduction

In Mexico, many postgraduate students finish their programs but never get a degree because they don't finish a research project. The percentage of this happening is much higher in third world or developing countries, where there is a graduation ratio from as low as 2% to 21%, creating an average in the last ten years of 16%. In first world countries, this ratio goes from 31% to 64%, creating an average for the same period of 40% (World Bank, (WB), 2007). This contributes to the fact that the level of education in third world countries is lower. The lack of development in third world countries is partly because lower education implies a lack of researchers. Out of the top 100 research universities, 99 are in first world countries. Regarding knowledge flows, 93% of the published articles in the past five years come from

first world countries (Guardian, 2010).

I was invited to work as a supervisor for master degree students doing their research, in order to get their degree in a third world country. Most of the students assigned to me were researchers who had not finished their thesis during the expected time and were long overdue and stuck somewhere in the process. As I had never supervised a thesis and my own thesis supervisor had not been very helpful during my research process, I tried learning about the implications of this job.

The literature that provides information on how to be a supervisor is mainly related to concepts, structure and methods. Both in English (Wisker, 2008) and in Spanish (Schmelkes, 2010), handbooks on research projects include the basics as to how to get organized and what to do when doing research. Although this information had been previously provided to the students, by teachers and supervisors, it had not been enough to help them advance in their studies. When interviewed about what it was that they needed in order to continue with their research, students themselves didn't exactly know what it was they needed.

The population I worked with in general for this stage of the study (see methodological notes) consisted of students in different institutions, trying to get a masters degree in Mexico. Of these, 65% had spent over five years in their project. Students from other third world countries were interviewed as well and all complained about the same thing: no time, no knowledge of how to write a thesis, or how to write in general. This procrastination has also been reported in Silvia (2005).

Of those students who had actually gone through the process successfully, 55% indicated that supervisors had not been much help during their research process; 35% considered their supervisors an obstacle. That left only 10% fully satisfied with the work of their supervisors.

This grounded theory study began emerging when current students started telling me what was really going on during their classes, with their teachers, supervisors and with their own research process. Their comments and inputs are the data that grounds this theory and therefore some are

included as part of the text.

The Theory

Authenticizing is a pattern of behavior that explains a way of dealing with the research process by trying different ways, in all directions, in order to match true needs with musts and wants. To authenticize, the students engage in *compassing* through their process to finish their research process, write up a thesis or dissertation and get a degree.

As part of the authenticizing process, the student goes through three stages: *Protocoling*, *Directing* and *Engaging*. The student will use compassing to go from one stage to the other and to go through each stage by itself. These stages are overlapping and may be happening simultaneously. Even though one phase may be apparently finished and done with, through compassing, the student can come back to any one of them at any given time throughout the research process

Throughout the process, the student may display *resistance* characterized by confusion, doubt and stress. Such resistance is necessary to the process for without confusion and doubt, there is no movement. A certain amount of uncertainty is indispensable to impulse the process. Piaget (1960) called it the 'disequilibration' needed to learn (Wadsford,1996).

> I was so confused after class that I was really scared. I hadn't understood a thing. I knew I had to do something about it. I had no idea what, but I knew I couldn't just sit and wait. I had to move. I had to do something. I had to ask someone for help... Just do something...anything.

Without resistance, the student may be absorbed by a lack of interest and become stuck in the process or lose focus.

> I couldn't understand a thing he was saying so I started browsing through the net...I figured eventually I was going to have to work on it so I'd wait 'till I really had to do something about it... In the mean time, I could work on something else...

How a student handles resistance as they compass

through the authenticizing process largely determines whether they will continue, will be delayed or not even finish. Resistance is handled differently, depending on where the student may be in the overall process.

The core category: compassing

Compassing is characterized by three dimensions: intellectual, physical and emotional (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Compassing* categories

I Intellectual patterns
F Physical patterns
E Emotional patterns

Intellectual patterns are the most frequent. Since writing up a thesis or a dissertation is an intellectual process *per se*, these patterns also seem to present the least resistance. With intellectual patterns, the mind is the main active element. Structures, concepts, explanations, revising the literature, methodology, complying with correct bibliographic references are all examples of intellectual patterns. Words like *know*, *understand* and *explain* dominate intellectual patterns.

> I knew exactly what I wanted but I couldn't understand what she wanted. Finally I asked her to explain the structure again and show me exactly how, I wanted to learn more... still couldn't understand so I tried explaining it to her...finally I did it the way I knew how...

Students are constantly asking questions, trying to understand, reading, conceptualizing and planning. They are accustomed to receiving intellectual patterns as advice; that is, their supervisors, advisors and teachers usually build up their 'help' tools within these patterns. As intellectual patterns are mainly in the mind and have to do with analyzing and rationalizing, much of the work is 'intangible'

and therefore does not materialize as a project, much less as a final report, thesis or dissertation.

Physical patterns have to do with concrete actions and products. Doing is the main element during these patterns. Sitting down and actually writing, sleeping, getting distracted by exercising, going to the movies or printing chapters are patterns that students were following that belong to the physical dimension.

> Every time I saw how much I had written and my document getting bigger I did more. I felt like I was being productive. I was on the right track.

The rhythm in which physical patterns emerge is usually faster than intellectual patterns and more intense.

> I was so bored. I couldn't relate. I tried but it was tiring to listen and all I could hear was blah blah blah. I couldn't even participate…

Emotional patterns are related to feelings emerging due to the research process; whether uncomfortable like confusion, stress and doubt, or comfortable such as accomplishment, recognition and satisfaction. In these patterns, companionship and being aware of the feeling was the outstanding element.

> I wanted her to tell me if I was right or wrong. When she said I was doing fine I was so excited. It was very meaningful to receive her comments that I was involved with such enthusiasm. She was always there for me, her accompaniment made me feel good, like I was never alone.

Compassing implies going from one dimension to the other trying to balance what is needed. As dimensions of human kind (mind, body and spirit), none of us can escape having the three kinds of patterns (intellectual, physical and emotional). There is, however, a predilection in which we compass ourselves into authenticizing. This means that there is one dimension that is more familiar to us, where we feel most comfortable. This dimension forms a vertex with the other two dimensions. One of the two other dimensions is a second pattern known or manageable and the third

dimension that is the most unfamiliar to us, our 'Achilles heel'. The three dimensions are always present; they happen constantly, separately, subsequently and simultaneously.

Every person has these three dimensions present at all times and life itself is a process of compassing. The vocabulary a person uses will evidence the type of pattern he or she finds most comfortable. If the person has a very marked predominant pattern, it may create an obstacle in compassing because resistance toward the other dimensions will increase and the compassing movement will be hampered. For example an predominantly intellectual pattern means the person might read a lot, think up a lot of ideas or know a lot about his subject. This is all in the mind, but not on paper, the physical dimension. Therefore he/she may be stuck until he/she balances the other dimensions through compassing. The compassing process allows the person to move and become more flexible. During authentizising, compassing is persistently happening and resistance, characterized by confusion, doubt and stress, is constantly present as the main property of each stage of the research process but also as characteristics that allow *compassing* as well. Resistance is handled according to the predominant pattern (dimension) of the student.

Compassing implies the shifting process, dealing with resistance, the confusion, doubts and stress that accompany it, and is usually driven by making a decision. Consciously or unconsciously, the student will be faced with taking a choice. If he/she chooses to stay in the known pattern (dimension), resistance will persist. If the choice implies moving, compassing is set in motion and resistance will be handled with toward the next stage or toward a decision to be made within the same stage where he/she is.

The stages

Both compassing and counter-acting resistance are present during the three stages of the research process: Protocoling, Directing and Engaging.

Protocoling stage

The initial protocoling stage begins the moment the

student learns he/she has to write a thesis or dissertation and therefore has to pick a topic, define a study or determine which area he or she is interested in researching. The requirement to develop a protocol for their research project can trigger resistance with its properties of confusion, doubt and stress.

> I am completely lost, I have no idea what I am going to do and what is expected of me. I have never done this before, I'm not even sure I can do it...I'm thinking maybe getting into this program wasn't really a good idea. Maybe this isn't for me.

The lack of direction found at this stage may very well contribute to confusion. For someone unable to handle confusion, the initial decision may be to abort the "getting a degree" mission; leaving without finishing the thesis or dissertation. Confusion is always accompanied with stress and doubts. If the confusion is too much to handle, stress and doubts may be so intense that a lack of self confidence may be experienced as well, and it is possible that anxiety takes over.

> It is just too much. I just can't handle it and I still don't know what she (the supervisor) wants from me. It's not worth it. So what if I don't have a degree?

Due to this state of confusion, there is a lack of focus in this phase; that is, the main focus at this point is not getting the degree but rather just trying to make initial smaller decisions about the area, topic, method to be used, literature or even just about the classes and homework that must be complied with. If the student is able to make those initial decisions, even if slowly, he/she is able to go to the next stage.

> At last I knew that was exactly what I really wanted to do my research in and that gave me a little ease. Even though I had no idea what was next, I felt calm.

Every time the student is faced with a situation where a choice needs to be made, resistance will appear, whether it's a simple choice like sitting down to work, or a harder choice like which methodology to use for the study.

The origin of resistance may be external or internal. External resistance has to do with anything in the environment; expectations from others, work, friends, family, resources or even an event such as a hurricane. Their predominant dimension (intellectual, physical or emotional) will determine how intense the resistance will be. For example, a student with a predominantly emotional pattern may be very affected by what others expect from him/her, whereas one with an predominantly intellectual pattern may rationalize such expectations and not give them much weight. In other words, external effects create resistances that will also find a spot in the internal patterns where one might feel stressed over work (an emotional pattern) or one might be excited into doing it (as part of a physical pattern). What comes from the outside is situated in one of the three dimensions, it is "taken as own" and then works as an internal resistance.

> I don't have enough time. I have a lot of work and lately I've been out of town a lot so it's hard for me to sit down and focus on it.

Internal resistance comes from within and therefore has to do mainly with beliefs, ideas, feelings and thoughts.

> I felt everything I did was wrong. Nothing right. Every time I talked to him he would confuse me even more and I just kept feeling incapable"

Regardless of how they are patterned, internally and externally originated resistances are "taken as own"; stealing focus away from making decisions by hampering compassing. The intellectually patterned student will find more resistance in the doing and the feeling; the physically patterned student will find resistance from the intellectual and emotional dimensions; and, the emotionally patterned student will establish resistance in the physical and the intellectual dimensions. Through compassing, the student is able to move from a comfortable 'known' dimension to balancing the three patterns. Resistance is faced and the student is moved toward making a decision. Focus is regained through compassing with the student able to make genuine self-sufficient decisions and choices. When the decision or choice taken is

made consciously, authenticizing emerges as the student 'authors' the research process with autonomy and authenticity.

Obeying is also part of authenticizing and is determined by the way the student has to comply with certain guidelines for the required research protocol. In this matter, there is usually not a lot of choice to act differently. It is considered part of something they "*have to do and is ok with it*". If resistance, internal or external, emerges within the obligated requirements, or if the student is "not ok with it," the protocol stage is obstructed creating a delay and causing the student to momentarily lose focus. Once focus is regained through compassing, the decisions necessary to continue the process are taken.

Directing stage

Making decisions gives direction to the research process. This direction comes from compassing. Where in the protocol stage, compassing is still very unfamiliar and in the engaging stage it happens with fluidity, in this stage, compassing is most present and intense during this stage. Compassing leads to authenticizing the research process.

Authenticizing is authoring this process with autonomy and authenticity. The student *compasses* to balance his or her intellectual, physical and emotional dimensions through identifying what he/she needs in order to 'get it done', to solve the main concern: finish the thesis or dissertation and get the degree. In authenticizing, the student sets his or her signature to his/her own, genuine, personal process. Compassing, in order to authenticize, is the process that allows him/her to make decisions or choices in order to continue his/her own and owned process.

Obeying, however, is also found in this stage. Here it has more to do with a decision or choice rather than something pre-established that has to be met or complied with. Students who solve their main concern by obeying use obedience as part of the authenticizing. In other words, their way to authenticize is by compassing according to external expectations or demands, not always being aware of what they want or need but rather complying to the needs and

wants of others, such as their supervisor. These studnets usually present more emotional patterns. In such cases, their autonomy lies in their emotional being, which is what they author.

> I wanted to feel I was doing the right thing. When I did what he told me, he would be happy and that would make me happy.

Intellectuals obey basically because of mind issues: "*it made sense*": physicals because of doing issues: "*I just wanted to get it over with*"; and, emotionals because of feeling issues: they "*feel recognized*" or it simply makes them "*feel good.*" As the directing stage progresses, a sense of responsibility emerges from a deeper and more meaningful perspective; a responsibility for owning the process with it, an inner force that pushes the process forward.

Engaging stage

This stage is characterized mainly by learning and persistence. Learning in its holistic sense, implies being open to receive, search and accept new ways often bursting expectations, beliefs, ideas and paradigms. *Engaging* implies taking the challenge, making decisions and being flexible and doing so with motivation and a sense of intention. Trust, hope and self-confidence facilitate engaging while perseverance, determination and resolution nurture the will to reach the goal.

> Once I got that, it was as if someone had turned the light on and I could see! Everything made sense. Everything started to fall into place. It just came and everything was downhill from then.

When this stage is reached, there is a sense of pride, satisfaction and freedom; resistances appear less and decisions and choices are more easily made. The student has learned how to compass his/her way through authenticizing his/her research process. In other words, both compassing and authenticizing are now part of his/her being. If resistance, obeying or both come up during this stage, the student is now able to handle them from a self-governed or self-ruled authentic and autonomous stance. This stage

creates a sense of empowerment, inspiration and confidence building.

At this point, in the engaging stage, the main concern is clearly at focus. The more the process advances, the clearer the image is and the spotlight on getting a degree becomes easier to reach. The way to get there is apparent, understandable, comprehensible and accessible. Engaging now drives the process.

Discussion

The existence of the three dimensions (intellectual, physical and emotional) is something known since the ancient Greeks. As explained by Adler (1978), Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) viewed men as the maker, the doer and the knower. In all three of these dimensions, man is always a thinker, but the kind of thinking is different in each: as a maker, it is productive thinking, as a doer, it is practical thinking and as a knower, it is theoretical thinking. Each also has a value in concern.

When matched to the theory emerged, the physical being is man as the maker. He is constantly attracted to doing, making or producing something in the material or physical world, whether it's an art piece or an activity like writing a dissertation. Although it might be confusing because of the terminology, the doer is actually the emotional being, for he/she is attracted by what is felt when doing in relation to another human being or society. The knower is clearly the intellectual being. He/she is attracted to everything related to knowledge.

Ever since the early Greek philosophers, man has been studied as a being of three dimensions: the mind, the body and the spirit. The word spirit has many different connotations but all have one thing in common: they are non-corporal. In this study only the emotional part of the human being is considered as the non-corporal part of man. So, the intellectual dimension represents the mind, the physical represents the body and the emotional represents the spirit. Man in three dimensions.

Further and previous philosophers focused on different

aspects around these three dimensions. However, they all agree on certain facts: that they are undeniable, present at all times and codependent, that is, one cannot exist without the other. There are exceptions, such as in certain health conditions, but man has to deal with the three dimensions at the same time at all times.

Humanism is an approach in study, philosophy or educational movement or practice focused on values and concerns of the human being, therefore coherent with the theory emerged. For humanism, the primary task that a human has is to become oneself, to be what he really is. Compassing allows the student the freedom to become him/herself during the research process and increase the capability of awareness and be conscious of him/herself. It leads him/her to authenticizing his/her research process.

Among the areas where humanism is current, psychology, philosophy and education, are of academic relevance to the process a student goes through when developing a thesis or dissertation for this study is of academic nature.

Although teaching was traditionally the focus of education, learning has become the main concern in the last decades. Teaching has evolved from traditional behavioral methods to more constructivist, student oriented methods. Kolb (1981, 1984), developed a learning style model emphasizing the importance of experiential learning. The model is based on two axes. On one end of the vertical axis is the abstraction of concepts and on the other end is the concrete experience; on the horizontal axis, at one end, reflective observation and on the other, active experimentation. These four points categorize learning styles as converger, diverger, assimilator and accommodator.

Honey and Mumford (1982) took these same axes but modified the theory by naming the concrete experience as active (they do) and the abstraction of concepts as theorists (they conclude). On the horizontal, they named the reflective observation as reflectors (they review) and the active experimentation as pragmatics (they plan) with the four learning styles identified as reflective theorist, reflective

activist, pragmatic theorist and pragmatic activist.

Certain aspects of these models fit the compassing theory and similarities can be found. We can identify the intellectual patterns in all of the styles. This illustrates the emphasis on intellectual patterns. The physical dimension is also considered in the doing and in the concrete experience. However, the emotional patterns are the most difficult to identify. This is characteristic of education over the past century where an intellectual pattern has been predominant. Analysis, conceptualization and knowledge are valued and therefore education has focused on such tasks.

Bloom, Krathwohl, and Bertram (1956, 1964), however, were among the first to use the three dimensions to create an educational theory by naming three domains in a taxonomy – commonly referred to as Bloom's taxonomy - of educational objectives: cognitive, affective and psychomotor. This theory clearly fits with the concept of compassing.

The cognitive domain corresponds to the intellectual dimension. It "includes those objectives which deal with the recall or recognition of knowledge and the development of intellectual abilities and skills" (1956, p.7). As in this study the intellectual patterns were more and more frequently found. Bloom also mentions that this domain is "in which most of the work in curriculum development has taken place and where the clearest definitions of objectives are to be found" (1956, p.7) and that "the largest proportion of educational objectives fell into this domain" (1964, p.6). Most of the western education systems have been based in the intellectual dimension, that is, in having to do with the development of knowledge. This domain implies the "remembering and reproducing of something which has presumably been learned, as well as objectives which involve the solving of some intellective task for which the individual has to determine the essential problem and then reorder given material or combine it with ideas, methods, or procedures previously learned" (1964, p.6). A thesis or dissertation fits as an intellective task that falls into these implications and therefore the domain itself, which justifies the fact that the most encountered patterns emerging in this study were the intellectual ones.

The affective domain of Bloom's taxonomy contains "objectives which emphasize a feeling tone, an emotion, or a degree of acceptance or rejection" (1964, p.7). These kinds of objectives are expressed as "interest, attitudes, values, and the development of appreciations and adequate adjustment" (1956, p.7); as well as emotional sets or biases, all of which must have emotions and feelings. This clearly refers to the emotional dimension. "It is through feelings, which are inwardly directed and private, that emotions, which are outwardly directed and public, begin their impact on the mind…" (Damasio, 1999, p.36), becoming observable changes in behaviors or attitudes and including the cognitive domain as well. Like compassing, this shows how the emotional, intellectual and physical dimensions coexist and influence each other.

The third domain of Bloom's taxonomy is the psychomotor dimension, which includes the motor skill area; that is, objectives that emphasize muscular manipulation of material objects. Activities that require neuromuscular coordination are part of this domain; clearly mapping to the physical dimension of this theory. Bloom et al. (1962) found that these objectives were rarely found in literature and most of them were related to handwriting, speech and to physical education, as well as trade and technical courses. In this study, most of the representations found of this domain had to do with the physical creation of the written work or the thesis or dissertation.

As an educational process, compassing facilitates personal equilibrium and enables awareness. The word education comes from the Latin "*educare*" which means: "to draw out/lead out/bring up" (UND, 2010). The development of awareness enables the student to author the thesis or dissertation with autonomy and authenticity; thus authenticizing the process.

Autonomy comes from the Greek "*auto*" meaning self and "*nomos*" meaning law becoming one who laws or rules oneself (University of Notre Dame, 2010). Philosophers applied this concept referring to the capacity that man has to make in-coerced decisions usually made rationally, although "reason does not require that autonomy be abandoned, only that its

balance with other individual and communal values be restored" (Gayling and Jennings, 1996, p.5) and autonomy has been considered the basis for establishing moral responsibility over one's decisions and actions, implying they are done in a way that shows independence. Autonomy also implies the realization of our potential as human beings. Behind it stands "a particular vision of what it means to be a human individual, a self, and a vision of what social relationships and arrangements ought to be to nurture that self" (Gayling & Jennings, 1996, p.6). Humanism supports the idea of autonomy for it promotes the search, from within the self, for moral and creative potentials to make one's own decisions and taking responsibility for them (Rogers, 1974).

Authenticity, in the existentialist philosophical theory based on Sartre, refers to the particular way of being faithful to internal ideas rather than depending on external ones. It implies how the person deals with the external environment, including ideas, pressure, culture or any other influence received from the otherness, that is, everything and everyone outside his/her conscious self. From Erichs' Fromm (1900-1980) psychological point of view, authenticity refers to how the person comes to terms with situations in life from his/her own true inner needs rather than from demands or expectations from the otherness. It is also a term used for the philosophy of art (aesthetics), referring to the faithfulness of the author or artist to his/her work of art. In this sense, the thesis or dissertation is the researcher's work of art.

In these different approaches and conceptions, the independent self is the main character and the focus is on respecting and following the inner self. Authenticity represents one way of the self acting in response to the outside world. Through compassing, the student can balance the intellectual, physical and emotional dimensions into an awareness and consciousness of him/herself that leads to authenticizing the research process.

Methodological Notes

As a grounded theorist, I was immersed in this study both as an instrument and an analyst of the data. I myself found out how I had gone through the process of my research

in order to get my degree in a third world country and this led me directly to grounded theory. I found this method actually favors authenticizing the research process, that is, it allows freedom to author and create, from my own autonomy.

When I learned that grounded theory recommends no previous literature review and no preconceptions of the problem (Glaser, 1998), I was relieved. I did not have to unlearn much because I had found very little literature on the way students go through or live their research process. Most of the literature referred to the "writing a dissertation process"; the how's and what's rather than the students' process when doing so. I wanted to observe their journey.

This study had several data collecting stages. The first stage started in a small institution in which I work. All students were Mexicans studying in Mexico. In this stage, I interviewed the last three generations of alumni in order to find out what had helped them during their research process. I also asked my current students to write up a journal in which they included everything they were going through related to their research and methodology classes during the duration of their research process. The students I was supervising were also asked to write a journal. The information from the interviews and the journals was analyzed with open coding to look for emerging indicators, categories and patterns.

During the second stage the data were collected from alumni and students in different postgraduate levels at other universities in Mexico. The third stage included international students getting their postgraduate degree in Mexico and Mexican students doing an international fellowship but getting their degree in Mexico. The last stage included virtual interviewing of students in other third world countries getting a degree in their own country and international students getting a degree in a third world country other than Mexico.

During all three stages the data collected were constantly compared with previous indicators, patterns and categories found. There was an openness to receive what was actually happening (Glaser, 1978). Whatever was found was modified or refitted as new relevant patterns emerged. As theoretical

sampling was done, indicators became interchangeable, patterns were conceptualized into categories and memos were constantly written. This process was done constantly and recurrently during the three stages of data collecting until the point of saturation where no new categories were emerging (Glaser, 2001). Memos about indicators, concepts, and properties were constantly written then memos about memos began to emerge until eventually saturation was reached. The sorting of memos began and it was possible to visualize the theory as a whole.

After the theory had emerged, an additional stage of comparison was made through talking with international students who participated in grounded theory seminars outside their country. Although none of these students were getting a degree in a third world country, the data collected fit well with the emergent theory of authenticizing.

Implications and Limitations

This theory is a latent lesson: whether we are aware of it or not, compassing is always there. Once the compassing process emerged before my eyes, I could see it everywhere. I spotted it in everything I did myself and I found it in every person I met. One way or another, I encountered people who were going through a process where they needed compassing in order to authenticize what they were doing or deciding. Whether it was just to make a simple decision or a life changing experience, patients, clients, students, friends, family and colleagues were compassing their way through life.

Although a limitation of this study lies in the fact that it was directed to third world countries, as an international student, I have seen it happen in other countries as well. However, this grounded theory is by no means finished but rather open to new data to be compared, analyzed and integrated to it. This theory is modifiable and expandable not only in itself but also for other fields and areas of study.

This paper deals only with the students' personal inner process by itself during the research process. However, the implications for practice of this theory may cover the process of the supervisor and the development of a relational model applied to supervising a research process. The implications

for practice of this theory are not limited to the research process but rather applicable to any decision making process. In understanding how it is we make decisions through compassing we can broaden our horizons in understanding ourselves and our relationships.

Conclusion

Research is a voluntary burden. We are willingly immersed in it, so might as well make it pleasurable. Authenticizing enables us to make the research process our own creation. It implies the authenticity of an artist creating a new masterpiece, and the autonomy of the person authoring such creation. Authenticizing is a human social behavior that is implied in every attitude we have. We are constantly making decisions in everyday life. Compassing is a process that is continuously taking place in every decision we make.

Authenticizing implies an awareness of our self and a consciousness of our being, developed through compassing our undeniable human dimensions: the intellectual, physical and emotional dimensions of our existence; not only in authenticizing the research process to write a thesis or dissertation, but rather a task to write our own life.

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Re-Vitalizing Worthiness: A theory of overcoming suicidality

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Abstract

Rates of suicide and suicidality have risen in many countries in recent years and in Ireland this trend has been particularly evident among young men (NOSP, 2005), focusing attention on how best to respond to this group. Although mental health professionals have been identified as a key group to respond to the suicidal person, it has been suggested that they are ill-prepared for working in this area (Maltsberger & Goldblatt, 1996; Ting et al., 2006; Cutcliffe & Stevenson, 2007). This study aimed to address these issues by developing a theoretical understanding of suicidality among young men to inform professional practice. Using Classic Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), in-depth one-to-one interviews were conducted with 17 young men who had been suicidal and had been in contact with the mental health services. The substantive theory that emerged, *re-vitalizing worthiness in overcoming suicidality*, describes the psychosocial process that young men go through to resolve their main concern, which centres on their painful pull between life and death. Overcoming suicidality involves moving from a death orientation to a life orientation while incorporating the inevitability of death into their new sense of being. This transition entails identity re-configuration whereby young men emerge as individuals of value who are deserving of life. The process is influenced significantly by personal insights and interpersonal interactions that influence their suicide trajectories and life pathways. The theory contributes to the fields of suicidology and mental health by providing a theoretical understanding of overcoming suicidality and identifying professional and social practices that facilitate and impede this process.

Key Words: suicidality, young men, recovery, suicide prevention, suicide intervention.

Introduction

There has been a notable increase in suicide and suicidality rates in many countries, including Ireland, in recent years. This trend has been particularly evident among young people and, in Ireland young men between the ages of 16-34 years are a specific group identified as being at higher risk. This group of young men accounted for almost 40% of deaths by suicide in Ireland in 2003 (NOSP, 2005), focusing attention on how best to respond. Although in Western societies mental health professionals have a prominent role in responding to the suicidal person, it has been argued that their lack of training in the specific area of suicide renders them ill-prepared for this work (Maltsberger & Goldblatt, 1996; Ting et al., 2006; Cutcliffe & Stevenson, 2007). This study aimed to address these issues by developing a theoretical understanding of suicidality among young men to inform professional practice.

Using Classic Grounded Theory (CGT) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), in-depth one-to-one interviews were conducted with 17 young men who had been suicidal and who had been involved with mental health services. Participants were, to varying extents, transitioning away from suicidality, hence the substantive theory that emerged, *re-vitalizing worthiness in overcoming suicidality*, refers specifically to this process. It captures how these young men resolve their main concern, which centres on their torturous pull between life and death. This conflict is conceptualized as *negotiating a dialectic of destiny* and is resolved by undergoing a complex non-linear psychosocial process. This process involves confronting ambivalence about living and dying and re-establishing oneself anew in the world, thereby re-configuring one's identity. For young men moving from a death orientation to a life orientation, this also means incorporating an awareness of the inevitability and unpredictability of death into one's new being. This transition is facilitated by profound intrapersonal insights and interpersonal encounters that influence the suicide trajectory and life path. Re-vitalizing worthiness, which refers to regaining a sense of value as an individual who is deserving of life, is central to this process.

The substantive theory contributes to the fields of

suicidology and mental health by providing a theoretical understanding of how young men overcome suicidality and identifies how others, including health professionals, influence this process. Validation by self and others is deemed helpful, for example acknowledgement of the person's struggles with life and a demonstrated desire to work alongside them to resolve their fears and concerns. Responses that minimize the person's subjective experience, or objectify the young men and exclude them from their own care and treatment are viewed as invalidating and unhelpful, and serve to reinforce their sense of unworthiness.

Methodology

CGT evolved from the collaborative work of sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967) and provides the researcher with an orientation to and systematic method for theory generation. This methodology was chosen as there are identified knowledge gaps in the field of suicidology. For example, there is limited understanding of the suicidal process and suicidal person (Aldridge, 1998).

CGT incorporates a number of interlinked processes, such as: analyst theoretical sensitivity that guides his / her engagement with the study process as this unfolds; the Constant Comparative Analytic Method that allows all data to be systematically analysed; sampling procedures that guide movement from selective to theoretical sampling, in order to enrich emergent categories; and theoretical memoing that facilitates integration of theory. These activities combine in an iterative process throughout data gathering and analysis.

A CGT study identifies the main/core concern of participants, or the issue that preoccupies those involved in the substantive area. The analyst then identifies how this concern is resolved, which is captured in the core category/variable and accounts for most of the activity in the substantive area. Hence, the theory is grounded firmly in the data, as opposed to being pre-determined by existing theory. At the latter stage of theory-building a thorough literature review is conducted which serves as further data (Glaser, 1998; Glaser, 2001). In this study, this process was

concerned with how participants resolved their torturous pull between life and death in order to overcome suicidality.

Data analysis

Key elements of the Constant Comparison Analytic Method in CGT include building categories, or describing key incidents in the data; outlining their properties, or the characteristics of these categories; and formulating hypotheses that explain the relationship between categories until a core category emerges. In this method, data collection and data analysis do not occur in a linear sequence, they are cyclic in nature. However, for the purposes of reporting the research, the process of analysis is described in stages. The first stage involved open coding whereby the researcher listened to the recorded interviews and identified incidents in the data. Each of these identified incidents or processes was then labelled, termed substantive coding as the labels codify the substance of the data. Each label was then compared with every other label and these were assigned to categories according to obvious fit, allowing a tentative heading for each category.

The next stage of the analysis saw the development of the tentative framework. This was achieved through selective sampling of the data to expand and densify the emerging theory. The tentative categories and perceived links were examined to discover umbrella terms under which several categories fit, as a result of comparing each category with other categories to see how they connected. The umbrella term therefore encompassed several initial tentative categories, while further comparison with more data helped the refinement of these concepts and variables and the development of hypotheses and the main category. The final stage was dominated by theoretical coding where concepts are compared with more highly developed concepts, and these are compared with more data.

Rigor

In CGT interrelated criteria for rigor are provided (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1998) against which the study can be evaluated by the researcher and others, as follows:

- *Relevant theory* provides explanations that make sense of what is going on in the substantive area.

- *Fit of theory* describes theory that is substantively congruent, or fitting the study phenomenon.

- *Workability* means that the theory informs the everyday practice of those involved in the substantive area.

- *Modifiability* refers to the unfinalized nature of the theory, which can be expanded with new information.

- *Parsimony* suggests that the theory should identify and succinctly describe central processes that address the core concern of participants in the substantive area.

- *Scope in applicability* refers to how useful the theory is to those in the substantive area and beyond.

- *Grab* means that the theory should be attractive to and memorable for those who hear about it.

Thus far, the theory has been discussed with some of the participants, other non-participant suicidal individuals and professionals working in the mental health field who have confirmed its relevance, workability and grab.

Participants

Inclusion criteria for participants were males, aged between 16-34 years, who were suicidal and were involved with mental health services. Participants were recruited through a number of mental health facilities where poster invitations were displayed. Local health professionals also brought the study to the attention of those fitting the inclusion criteria. In-depth one-to-one interviews were conducted with 17 young men, with an average age of 25 years, who came from diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds, had experienced different levels of suicidality, from suicidal ideation to multiple suicide attempts, and who had varied experiences of the mental health services. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Research Ethics Committee at Dublin City University.

A Theory of Re-vitalising Worthiness in Overcoming Suicidality

The main concern, *negotiating a dialectic of destiny*, describes two opposing pulls the young men experience, one that yearns death and the other that yearns life. In attempting to protect themselves and others from this deep inner conflict they cut themselves off from the world, becoming increasingly isolated. Profound ambivalence shows itself in a belief that they have nothing to offer the world and that they do not deserve to live, while simultaneously they yearn for a different life. Hence, they are caught between their desire for life and their drive toward death, while unable to communicate this openly and clearly for fear of recrimination. This concern occupies their being as they work out if and how they should be in the world while moving along their unique suicide trajectory and life path. The psychosocial process the young men undergo to resolve their conflict about living and dying is conceptualized as *re-vitalizing worthiness,* thereby overcoming suicidality. This is a complex interconnected and non-linear process that is unique to each individual, however, for the purposes of describing the process it is presented in stages.

The theory, *re-vitalising worthiness in overcoming suicidality*, captures the psychosocial process whereby young men transform their identities and their lives as they re-negotiate the nature and meaning of their relationship with living and dying. This process involves bringing life to an aspect of their being that has been dormant, that is, their sense of worthiness as individuals of value who are deserving of life. They face and challenge their suicidal existence, shed their suicidal selves and move forward to enact new lives. This major shift involves making choices about how they position themselves in relation to their suicidality, their selves, their relationships and their worlds. Rather than concealing their suicidal selves, they begin to accept this as part of who they are and to do so in a way that allows them to occupy themselves with living rather than dying. Hence, they move from a death orientation or a position of living to die when suicidal, to a life orientation or a position of living to live with an awareness of dying when beyond suicidality. This transitional process is represented in the concepts,

confronting a crisis of destiny and earning a life, each of which incorporates a number of categories.

Confronting a crisis of destiny

Confronting a crisis of destiny, describes how the young men pause, take note of their life situations and decide that things have to change, so that they are no longer pulled between life and death. This awareness is frequently initiated when they reach a point of immense crisis and find that they can no longer continue in their suicidal existence. They discover that they can make a choice about whether they live or die and they make a clear decision to live and to change their lives. This stage of the process is conceptualised in two categories, *living the crisis* and *reaching a point of no return*.

Living the crisis

Finding themselves devoid of value as human beings, the young men gradually withdraw from the world and disassociate from the parts of themselves for which they feel guilt and shame, thereby becoming unreachable and losing personage. This isolation also serves to protect others from their dark worlds and the inevitability and close proximity of death. They assess their worthiness by comparing themselves with other people and measuring their life performances against perceived social norms and personal goals. Failure to fit with such norms or achieve these goals confirms to them that they have little to offer the world and it had little to offer them, resulting in a strong negative self-conception and increased suicidal ideation and behaviours, which frequently culminates in a suicide attempt.

> ...like you don't know who you are and it's horrible to feel like that...and a lot of people don't understand when you say that...

The young men view themselves as different and adopt personas that reflect their personal designation such as the "black sheep," "failure" or "freak." The powerlessness associated with failure perpetuates a sense of victimhood, blame, shame and being voiceless. They feel lost and occupy an in-between world. Consequently, they are consumed with self-loathing, which is frequently coupled with despise for

others. This results in self-directed and other-directed violence, consistent with the idea that "...homicide and suicide are two channels of a stream of destructiveness" (Aldridge, 1998, p.27).

> ...I was so pissed off with people around me and so pissed off with myself because there was nothing I could do to change it [life]...

The young men live out their destiny crises by testing life and death while remaining ambivalent about both. Ambivalence is recognised as a central component in suicidality, which ironically facilitates the person to stay alive as it keeps open the possibility of death (Caruso, 2009). In the aftermath of an unsuccessful attempt they remain ambivalent about survival, at times simultaneously glad and sad to be alive.

> I don't know if I was more sad or pissed off because I didn't do the job [kill self], or more pissed off because I was in hospital...

The young men experiment with risky behaviours that challenge death such as dangerous driving, and with behaviours that makes them feel alive such as self-mutilation. Such activities serve to numb their pain, providing temporary relief and enabling them to engage superficially with life. Many of their suicidal acts are associated with excessive alcohol and drug consumption, a common feature in suicidality (Hawton, 2005), although the young men view substance misuse as a soothing strategy rather than a causal factor in their suicidality.

> ...that's why I started taking drugs, to blank it out...It helps when you are out of your head because you forget everything...

Some try to resolve their destiny crisis by attempting suicide. The suicidal acts are complex as they avoid death by alerting another to the event, or are rescued unexpectedly, thereby getting another opportunity to live. These acts are impulsive, confirming the view that there is frequently a short time-frame between trigger events and a suicidal act (O'Connor & Sheehy, 2001). However, despite the impulsive

nature of the act, many of the young men harbour suicidal thoughts for many years before taking action, hence, their impulsivity could be seen as reflecting and perpetuating their long-standing strong sense of loss of control over themselves and their lives.

Reaching a point of no return

Living with their torturous crises of destiny the young men eventually reach a point where living in their in-between worlds is no longer tolerable, signalling to them that life must change.

> You can't stay in that crisis state. You have to move forward or back. If you decide to go back, you can't expect help anymore...

Various events provide them with the impetus they need to review their relationship with living and dying and to make a choice about their fate, a process that is paced differently for each person. These pivotal moments that challenge their negative self-conception initiate a change from looking externally to looking internally for a solution, and begin to shift their perceived locus of control form external to internal (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2004). This facilitates them to take charge of their destiny, and to make some sense of their suicidality and their lives, and thus has a significant impact on them in terms of their sense of personal agency and self-determination. Such events include being unburdened from enacting a life that does not seem to be of their own choosing, allowing their uniqueness to be celebrated. In addition, realizing that nobody else can change their lives encourages them to take responsibility for themselves, influencing how they manage their lives and distress.

> If I wanted to stay alive I had to change my life, I knew I had to change the situation...

The young men frequently signal their distress and desire for change to others. Some of these signals are responded to in a helpful manner, enhancing the transitioning process. Responses that minimize their pain or convey a lack of interest or understanding are unhelpful and impede the transitioning process temporarily. Nevertheless, in making a

decision about their destiny, they begin to move towards life rather than death and face the challenge about how to live in ways that are meaningful and worthwhile, beginning the process of re-shaping themselves and their lives.

> ...I don't know if I realised I had to change myself or I don't know how it happened, or I just changed who I was because I didn't like the person I was at the time and so I just changed me altogether...

Earning a life

Earning a life describes how the young men reach a point that forces them to decide on the course of their destiny and to choose to live. They begin to build and enact their new sense of self. The construction of a new sense of identity has been recognized as key to recovery from a range of life adversities (Clarke, 2001). This confirms to them and others that they have earned a place in the world. It involves integrating different perspectives and experiences in their journeys toward consolidating a new identity. They also need to decide with whom they will engage and whose version of reality they will accept. This requires making decisions about how they present themselves in the world and how they relate to others. This stage is conceptualised in two categories, *real-izing worthiness* and *enacting a new worthy identity*.

Real-izing worthiness

In shifting their focus from a life that is dominated by a desire to die to one that is dominated by a desire to live, the young men become more emotionally and cognitively aware and available, and are more open to see, think and feel in new ways. This allows them to challenge their pessimistic thinking and profound sense of hopelessness (Beck et al., 1975), to notice previously unrecognised positive aspects of their selves and their lives and to identify life enhancing possibilities and resources. They gradually come to see that life is challenging but nevertheless rewarding, and that their fears and concerns, while valid, can be managed less painfully. Thus they move from perfectionism and rumination (O'Connor & Sheehy, 2001) to acceptance and reflection. However, the past does not disappear; rather, orienting toward life means managing a death oriented past and the negativity that this

represents. While remembering the past is frightening and confusing for the young men, as it is a stark reminder of their darkest moments, it also serves to alert them to the fact that they do not want to return to that place of intolerable pain, thereby providing an impetus for staying alive.

> ...the way I was feeling before was by far the worst thing that I have ever felt in my whole life, like it is just the fear of going back to that to be honest with you...

With awareness that the past does not necessarily determine the future, the young men are able to generate and sustain hope and a sense of control in living. Others also inspire hope and confidence by demonstrating belief in their personal value, encouraging them to take on new challenges. Receiving expressions of genuine belief in one's personal value by others is deemed central to recovering one's mental health (Helm, 2009).

> My friends would have had a nice sense of me and would have felt there was a huge amount of potential in me, in a very broad sense, in a very human sense, that was being inhibited...

Challenging their victim saturated selves means that the young men relinquish passivity and become more actively involved in directing their lives in purposeful ways. This reinforces a sense of personal value that allows them to become visible and connected with the world, consistent with the view that reconnecting with humanity is essential to overcoming suicidality (Cutcliffe & Stevenson, 2007). Re-engagement with life and the world also enables them to express thoughts and emotions previously withheld, which consolidates their connections with those in their lives, including social and professional relationships.

> ...she [partner] said 'What's going on in your head?', and I said 'Basically, I am hurting'...

Vigilance for imperfections in self and others is replaced with an openness to seeing positive opportunities for connecting, shifting them from being victims to being authors of their lives and inter-subjective selves, and from isolation to

belongingness. Rather than seeking out others to blame or loath, the young men seek out those with whom they can have rewarding experiences, enhancing their personal worth and interpersonal connectedness and consolidating their sense of self. However, disconnecting from sources of torment is important in sustaining control and a positive direction in life.

> I just decided that I had to cut myself off completely from her [mother]...

Renewal of self-trust is necessary so that the young men are no longer at the mercy of chance, fate or others, and this is enhanced by a deep knowing about themselves and death acquired in their suicidal crises and close encounters with death. It has been proposed that an acute awareness of death allows one to accept the inevitability and close proximity of death, thereby challenging illusory assumptions about the predictability and safety of life and one's value in the world (Janoff-Bulman, 1985). The young men reshape such assumptions to go on living and can then reframe life events as learning opportunities rather than confirmation of their unworthiness. This gives them the strength to deal with life challenges, allowing their new identities to take shape.

> ...I kind of know I could deal with most things now because I know I have come through the other side of pretty serious stuff...

Enacting a new worthy identity

As the young men re-engage with their selves, others and life again, they become ready to establish and enact their new sense of identity in their daily lives. This requires commitment and hard work so that old patterns of thinking and behavior do not re-emerge and regain control. Resolution of the pull between life and death and the integration of the worthy and unworthy selves is a dichotomous synthesis whereby the young men bring union and harmony to previously contradictory aspects of their selves and their worlds. Such synthesis can emerge in the aftermath of a sense of disintegration (Fisher, 1999). Following their suicidal crisis, life for these young men does not reach the heights of reward that they had previously imagined and had scolded

themselves for failing to achieve. However, they do have the opportunity to be ordinary people, living ordinary lives, and they accept this with enthusiasm.

> ...okay, so I can't change the world, but I can do something that has meaning, that fits with my values...

Part of the integrating process involves the young men making sense of their selves and their lives and gaining a sense of power in relation to their suicidality. This can be described as power *with* rather than power *over* suicidality, as some aspects remain a mystery to them. They find resources to go on living despite questions about their pasts and uncertainty about their futures. Sometimes this involves putting the suicidal episode aside and focusing on their daily routines while at other times it means engaging in deep searching of the self. Such moments of internal reflection are frequently triggered by external encounters that revalidate the young men's worthiness, resonating with the literature that views resilience as a relational phenomenon (Wexler et al., 2009).

With new insight into and awareness of their strengths and vulnerabilities, the young men free themselves from the chains of convention so that their uniqueness can be appreciated and performed in their daily living, which has been deemed an important aspect of regaining an acceptable sense of self (Fisher, 1999). This new state of being replaces ambivalence with certainty, hopelessness with hope, chaos with direction, and a sense of being lost to one of being found. Living a satisfactory life promotes a sense of responsibility for and commitment to their selves and their lives, enhancing worthiness in a circular fashion.

> All of a sudden I began to think of about how I could create a place for myself in the world, a place where I could be comfortable...

The young men appreciate that others in their situation might not have the resources to move forward in the same way; hence they are grateful for opportunities that confirm their efforts and achievements. They develop new interests and activities that reflect their sense of caring about

themselves and their lives, replacing old self-destructive patterns with more life-enhancing routines. In addition, they formulate new and enabling self-descriptions, having previously been labelled and labelling themselves in derogatory ways.

> I am after putting effort myself just to do it like. For some people they might be weaker. I don't know how I done it myself, but there are a lot of people who mightn't be able to...

The young men acknowledge the influence of contact with a health professional and they clearly distinguish between helpful and unhelpful encounters. They identify positive practices as those that enhance worthiness, such as a collaborative, respectful and individualised treatment approaches, belief in their value as people, and genuine caring and concern on the part of the practitioner.

> ...I just thought that this transparency, this openness, this sense of collaboration whereby not only do I have a voice but this person is even willing to say 'Well this is how I work, and if it is something you are interested in I will share even the mode of work I do with you...I think that is extraordinary....

In terms of unhelpful responses the young men highlighted practices reflective of a "risk society" (Roberts, 2005) that seek to eliminate risk through control, overshadowing care and connection. Discourses underpinning the desire for predictability and control also give rise to contradictory pulls within the professional, such as competing beliefs about the person's value as an individual (Joyce et al., 2007) and deservedness of care (Bergmans et al., 2007), which can serve to reinforce young men's sense of difference and powerlessness.

> When you are a service user of psychiatric services it tends to be that you are given the terms, I think it is defined for you. There is very little sense of you being able to name or construct what is going on for you with professionals...

The study highlights the unpredictability and complexity

of the suicide trajectory and recovery path. For professionals this brings into sharp focus the importance of making and taking opportunities for engaging in validation and in life-enhancing interactions with suicidal young men. At the very least this involves engaging in "simple acts of human kindness" (Helm, 2009, p. 59).

Summary

Re-vitalizing worthiness captures the central psychosocial process that young men go through to attempt to answer their profound existential question about the meaning and nature of their relationships with living and dying. Having succeeded in confronting and addressing their worst fears about themselves, their lives and their fates, they emerge as stronger and more integrated young men who proudly establish their place in the world. They overcome suicidality and repair their sense of fragmentation in the world by shedding their unworthy identities and claiming significance as persons of worth who are deserving of life.

Discussion

This study explores the phenomena of suicide and suicidality among 17 young men who experienced suicidality and were involved with mental health services. The substantive theory that emerged suggests that overcoming suicidality is possible, that re-vitalizing worthiness is central to this transition and that this complex process is influenced by a range of internal and external factors. Hence, the study raises a number of issues in terms of understanding and responding to a suicidal young man at professional and social levels and highlights areas for further research, as elaborated briefly below.

Implications for professional practice

It is important to identify how the substantive theory can inform mental health practice, given the prominent role professionals have in responding to the suicidal person. Participants ranged the span of suicidality presentations that are typical of those that attend mental health and other services. Hence, the transitioning processes described are highly relevant to mental health practice.

The literature suggests that overcoming adversity is largely influenced by contextual factors, such as support and encouragement received from key others and opportunities provided for reflection and growth (Clarke, 2001), a view supported by this study. Hence, the mental health practitioner has a vital role to play in the dynamic re-vitalizing worthiness process. Any interaction with a young man, regardless of his level of suicidality and the nature of the contact, can potentially impact his life journey. Worthiness can be facilitated through establishing a safe context for reflection and disclosure of inner turmoil, and engagement in worth-enhancing encounters. While such processes may not directly impact a young men's mental pain, it can influence his suicidal urge at a moment in time, serving as a deterrent against suicide (Shneidman, 2001). It can also trigger or create momentary space for reconsideration of his life, which may serve as a catalyst for reorientation toward life and reorganization of self-destructive patterns (Orbach, 2001).

A number of key practices and processes are identified as significantly impacting the re-vitalizing worthiness process. The mental health professionals that make the most positive difference in the lives of young men are those who work *with* rather than *on* them, tolerate and work with the mystery of their experiences, engage with them in relation to their dark side, sustain a supportive role throughout their unpredictable journeys of self-discovery, and demonstrate belief in their potential to recover and renew their lives. Practices that are identified as unhelpful include those that perpetuate young men's sense of difference and powerlessness. Such practices are experienced as controlling, confining, coercive and stigmatising, for example pejorative labelling and exclusion from their own care and treatment. These views and experiences are consistent with the recovery literature in general (Watkins, 2007), although prior to this study they have not been succinctly elaborated in relation to suicidality.

The emphasis on risk containment leading to restrictive practices may reflect the profound fear (Becker, 1973), social stigma (Sommer-Rothenberg, 1998) and professional discomfort (Gibbs, 1990) associated with death in general and suicide in particular. Given the documented negative

consequences for professionals (Ting et al., 2006) and consequently clients (Samuelsson et al., 1997) of such restrictive practices, it is important that institutions providing training and education for professionals working with suicidal young men recognise the complexity of practice in this area and reflect this in course curricula. Some possible areas for consideration in training include incorporation of the multiplicity of theoretical, moral, social, gender and personal perspectives that can influence practice, so that practitioners can critically examine their decision-making and its foundations (Gordon, 2010). If practitioners are to sustain emotional tolerance, psychological awareness and an ethos of critical enquiry in the face of conflicting discourses and demands, they need support and opportunities for personal and professional reflection and integration, such as clinical supervision and continual professional development opportunities. In addition to enhancing job satisfaction and practitioner morale, such activities promote and nurture holistic, safety enhancing practices and therapeutic engagement. This means embracing a preventative approach while also shifting professional beliefs from *cure* to *care* and actions from *control* to *connection.*

Social implications

This study has social implications at micro and macro levels that stretch beyond the mental health arena. It is worthwhile noting that many suicidal people, particularly young men, do not engage with mental health services, which reflects well established help-seeking attitudes and behaviors (Burke et al., 2008). Furthermore, those who do engage have already had multiple encounters with others in their social networks and local communities. Therefore, promoting rather than diminishing social ownership for suicide and suicidality holds open the possibility of empowering others such as family, friends, peers, colleagues and other members of social and community networks to respond in more proactive ways to validate young men in their daily lives, or at the very least not to condone invalidating social practices. An opportunity also exists for community based professionals, such as school or college staff and family health practitioners, to respond in ways that facilitate young men in becoming visible, without

the fear of further stigmatization and social rejection. This is important given that initial contact with the suicidal person influences the course of their help-seeking path (Hemmings, 1999) and can challenge stigma and reduce marginalization. Furthermore, young men frequently continue to have such contact following professional health care, hence expanding the network of care can be helpful (Stevenson & Gordon, 2009).

Implications for research

The study draws attention to some areas that require further exploration in relation to and beyond the substantive area. The theory provides an in-depth understanding of the process of *re-vitalizing worthiness*, however, it was beyond the scope of this study to examine specific aspects of this process in greater depth. For example, exploring how personal and interpersonal processes converge at a moment in time to enhance worthiness, which might also provide some insight into why some young men remain suicidal or complete suicide.

Research examining the relevance of the theory beyond the substantive area, for example, in relation to young men in other cultures, older men, and / or women would strengthen and expand the theory. Synthesizing studies that have focused on recovery from other life adversities would move the theory beyond the substantive area and form a sound basis for the development of a formal theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) of recovery. This demonstrates modifiability of the substantive theory, which is an important measure of rigor.

The GT Learning Curve: Challenges and Rewards

"By far the most exciting use of grounded theory over the last ten years is its legitimating of concept generation. The researcher is empowered to discover and generate new categories and properties, instead of being forced to use received concepts...It is academic freedom to the max." (Glaser, 1998, p.133)

Some of the key challenges and rewards that the first author and main researcher (EG) experienced in this study include remaining open-minded, trusting the study process

and defending the robustness of the theory which ironically mirrored aspects of the participants transitioning process.

Open-mindedness

Remaining open-minded throughout the study process required me to reflect upon my personal and professional biases about the topic, and study context, process and outcomes. However, it was important to ensure that I did not become embroiled in my own reflective process, privileging this above the data. I was assisted in striking this balance by consulting with the other authors about data conceptualization and by seeking variation in data through adherence to the Constant Comparative Analytic Method. This facilitated discovery of unknown biases, management of the known as this emerged and promoted a more curious posture in relation to emerging concepts. This process mirrored how the young men were able to emerge from the confinement of their dark realities as they opened their minds to alternative ways of thinking about themselves and their lives.

Trusting the process

Another associated challenge was to trust in the study process and believe that the theory would emerge in time. Anxiety about coming up with a product within the study timeframe pushed me to sometimes want to settle for a poorly saturated and partial theory. Again managing this was facilitated by consultation with the other authors and importantly patience. This mirrored the young men's impatience with their unsatisfactory lives, which pushed them to seek immediate solutions, and finally abated as they began to trust in themselves and the world.

Robustness of theory

Finally, another related challenge centred on believing in and defending the robustness of the substantive theory that emerged. Knowing when a point of theoretical saturation had been reached required me to play with emerging concepts until the core variable felt whole and complete also requiring patience and trust in the process. This was similar to how the young men who were feeling invisible for much of their lives were enabled to become anew as they gained confidence in

themselves and their ability to sustain their new lives.

Trusting the process and defending the robustness of the theory became easier towards the end of the study when I began to talk about the theory to people who were suicidal and to colleagues who reinforced its relevance and grab. This mirrored the experience of the young men as their new identities emerged and were validated by positive feedback and support from others in their lives.

Conclusion

This CGT study developed a substantive theory for understanding the process of overcoming suicidality among young men in Ireland. It highlights that overcoming suicidality is possible and identifies that *re-vitalizing worthiness*, which means regaining a sense of value as an individual deserving of life, is central to this process. The study adds to the fields of suicidology and mental health by offering a systematically developed, new and coherent theory of overcoming suicidality. It explains in detail the processes involved in this transition providing practitioners with a new and exciting way to understand recovery in suicidality. It outlines social and professional practices that enhance and impede this process. Hence, practitioners in the field of mental health and beyond can draw upon the substantive theory to work sensitively and therapeutically with suicidal young men at different points on their suicide trajectories. The challenges experienced in conducting this CGT study were outweighed by the rewards of acquiring a PhD for the first author and by the achievement of developing a substantive theory that is unique and makes a significant social and professional contribution in the area of suicide.

Acknowledgements

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Dynasting Theory: Lessons in learning grounded theory

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Abstract

This article captures the key learning lessons gleaned from the author's experience learning and developing a grounded theory for his doctoral dissertation using the classic methodology as conceived by Barney Glaser. The theory was developed through data gathered on founders and successors of Malaysian Chinese family-own businesses. The main concern for Malaysian Chinese family businesses emerged as *dynasting* – the building, maintaining, and growing the power and resources of the business within the family lineage. The core category emerged as dynasting across cultures, where founders and successors struggle to transition from traditional Chinese to hybrid cultural and modernized forms of family business from one generation to the next. The key learning lessons were categorized under five headings: (a) sorting through different versions of grounded theory, (b) educating and managing research stakeholders, (c) embracing experiential learning, (d) discovering the core category: grounded intuition, and (e) recognizing limitations and possibilities.

Keywords: grounded theory, learning, dynasting, family business, Chinese

Introduction

My journey towards grounded theory began in my doctoral studies after I had engaged in and published several quantitative survey research projects and found the approach to explaining human behavior to be too limiting. First, the questions and response-choices were pre-established; second, I had no access to the respondents to ascertain how they interpreted the questions or to clarify the reason behind why they chose the responses they did; and third, the theories that guided the development of the questionnaires also seemed somewhat disembodied from the people I was studying. As a result, I decided to change my dissertation methodology to

one that would better satisfy my longing to really understand what was going on for the people. I turned to qualitative methodologies at first, not expecting to end up doing a grounded theory study. Neither did I anticipate the many challenges I would have to go through along the process of learning grounded theory when I finally decided to do it.

Early in my dissertation, I started an anonymous blog to keep myself motivated and connected to other graduate students. I made entries of my grounded theory learning process as I experienced it. For relief, I added touches of humor and sarcasm to my entries. Given its personal nature, I struggled as to the appropriateness of identifying my blog in this article. Surprisingly, in researching for this article, I discovered that an editor of a recent textbook on qualitative research mentioned my blog in the preface of her textbook (Lichtman, 2011, p. viii). I reasoned that if my blog had enough value to be mentioned in a textbook, I might as well fully embrace the spirit of collaborative and open learning and reveal my authorship publicly. My blog, *The Lonely Dissertator*, can be accessed at http://lonelydissertator.blogspot.com (I stopped updating my blog shortly after I completed my dissertation defense in May 2010).

My dissertation was entitled *Dynasting Across Cultures: A Grounded Theory of Malaysian Chinese Family Firms* (Loy, 2010). Data were gathered from interviews, participant observations, opportunistic conversations, and also relevant literature. There were a total of 22 formal interviews with 25 different participants: 10 male successors (aged 20s-70s), 3 female successors (aged 30s-50s), 4 male founders (aged 60s-70s), 1 female founder (aged 60s), 3 family members no longer in the business (1 founder-wife in her 70s, 1 daughter aged 50s, 1 niece aged 40s), and 4 non-family members of the business (1 male staff aged 60s, 1 female staff aged 50s, and 1 friend of founder aged 70s). The formal interviews were conducted from March through May 2009 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Further theoretical sampling took place up until February 2010.

My key lessons in learning grounded theory can be categorized under five headings: (a) sorting through different

versions of grounded theory, (b) educating and managing research stakeholders, (c) embracing experiential learning, (d) discovering the core category: grounded intuition, and (e) recognizing limitations and possibilities. In writing this article, I drew from my blog entries as well as chapters 3 and 4 (methodology sections) of my dissertation. Before discussing my key lessons, I will first provide a summary of the theory that emerged in my study.

Summary of dynasting theory

The main concern that emerged for Malaysian Chinese family firms was *dynasting*. I hypothesized that Malaysian Chinese business founders (and their successors) tend to be motivated towards building, maintaining, and growing the power and resources of the business within the family lineage. The notion of dynasting differs from succession. Dynasting implies growth over generations; succession can take place without the impetus of growth—for example, a business (such as a small farm) can be passed on without the desire to grow it into a dynastic concern. Two elements are essential for a family to dynasty: the presence of a successful-enough business (which the founder built) and the presence of at least one successor in the next generation to take over the business. By definition, a dynasty begins only as the second generation assumes the business.

For many Malaysian Chinese family firms, the founders tend to hold to traditional practical Chinese values while the successors tend to be Western educated and have westernized and modernized ideals (especially when the business has been successful enough for parents to send their children for Western education overseas). The emerged core category that explained the data on how founders and successors were resolving their main concern was *dynasting across cultures*. In their substantive context, traditional Malaysian Chinese founders and westernized successors are hypothesized to be engaged in basic social structural and psychological processes of dynasting across cultures, where they struggle to transition from traditional Chinese to hybrid cultural and modernized forms of family business from one generation to the next. Dynasting across cultures applies to Chinese family firms where the patriarch holds to traditional Chinese values

and successors are Western-trained. Less so does it apply to situations where the founder is Western-educated, although aspects of the process can still apply.

The process of dynasting across cultures happens through an overlapping four-phase developmental trajectory: (a) the founder builds the business, then (b) tests and molds successors upon their entry, (c) stays on to protect the emerging dynasty, and (d) upon his final years is venerated as the founding patriarch. Running somewhat in parallel to the founder trajectory, the successors are (a) indoctrinated in their youth, then (b) upon entry into the business struggle to adapt to founder ways and to prove themselves, (c) over time, gradually influence change, and (d) finally hybridize the established dynasty. The result of this autopoietic process is a family business that successfully dynasties across cultures.

Interested readers can access the full dissertation for free online through the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy at http://purl.umn.edu/94299.

Sorting Through Different Versions of Grounded Theory

When I first approached my dissertation topic, I was advised by a faculty member to conduct a pilot study interviewing family business members in Malaysia for their top 10 concerns. I interviewed three people and one repeated concern was that of successors not being able to have open communications with their founders. Given the dearth of research on family business in Malaysia, I decided that a qualitative methodology such as grounded theory would be suitable.

My advisor suggested that I read through Strauss and Corbin (1990). But being the diligent researcher, I decided that I would begin with *Discovery*, the first book on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). After a brief attempt, I found that it was too difficult to understand and decided to read the "latest book" on grounded theory (i.e. Corbin & Strauss, 2008) for further explanation not realizing that there had been departures from the original grounded theory. At the time, I felt that Corbin and Strauss (2008) explained the process

well. However, the diligent researcher in me also compelled me to read Charmaz (2007) given that her work had been talked about in class, and then finally, to re-read *Discovery* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In addition to these works, I had also signed out from the library all the books on grounded theory, including Bryant and Charmaz's *Handbook on Grounded Theory* (2007) as well as Glaser's *Basics* (Glaser, 1992) in which he explained the difference between the original version and Strauss and Corbin's version (1990).

Sorting through the different versions of grounded theory was a challenging feat. No faculty member in the department of Family Social Science at the University of Minnesota—and possibly the entire university—during my time was able to provide the needed guidance, leading me to hunt down the information on my own. The books became my guides and my advisor became my cheerleader by offering remarks such as "I am learning from you about grounded theory from this process, keep up the good work."

After studying the different works, I felt that I wanted to produce a theory and not *full conceptual description* as Glaser explained was the result of the Strauss and Corbin method. However, my social constructivist leanings made me uncomfortable with the positivist language in Glaser's writings. I finally proposed to use a methodology blending the Glasserian and Charmaz versions. I wrote in my dissertation proposal the following explanation:

> I propose to use a constructivist grounded theory methodology vis-à-vis Charmaz (2000, 2006) that regards the development of theory as a co-construction of interactions between researcher and participants. In addition, I intend to draw on the methods of coding, analysis, and sampling advocated by the classic approach to grounded theory vis-à-vis Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser (1978, 1992), taking advantage of the rigors of the methods without necessarily being confined to the strictures of a positivist paradigm (Charmaz, 2006).

Unlike the majority of doctoral students, I was fortunate to be in a position where I had the budget, the resolve, and

most importantly, an open-minded adviser who encouraged my desire to pursue further learning of classic grounded theory by attending a grounded theory seminar in Mill Valley, California in 2009 led by Barney Glaser. It was not until I attended my first classic grounded theory troubleshooting seminar that I was made aware of the corpus of works by Glaser (published by Sociology Press), and convinced of the importance of reading it.

By the time I attended the classic grounded theory seminar, I had already defended my dissertation proposal to use a combination of Glasserian as well as Charmaz versions of the methodology. Furthermore, I had already conducted a thorough literature review, and gathered, taped, and transcribed half of my interviews prior to being informed at the seminar that I was not supposed to do any of those things. To learn that most of my efforts had been spent in vain felt discouraging, and humbling. Fortunately, as advised by Barney Glaser, I was able to use the recorded interviews by going back to them as secondary data, as it were, and take field notes.

Throughout my dissertation process, I had to *trust* in the advice and writings of Glaser and other fellows of the Grounded Theory Institute. Not having personally produced a grounded theory and not having an advisor with a strong understanding of classic grounded theory left me feeling quite alone in the process.

Educating and Managing Research Stakeholders

The ethical guidelines of the Institutional Review Board of North American universities maintains that the purpose and approach of a proposed research be clearly stipulated, including the source for data gathering and the types of questions to be asked. However, the emergent approach of classic grounded theory with its dictum "all is data," requires researchers to be open to where theoretical sampling takes them. I was not only faced with the difficult and lonely task of doing grounded theory whilst learning it, I also had to be sure I could defend my departure from a focused, field-delineated research question to an open, exploratory one where prior literature review was discouraged—that is, after I first had to

convince myself that it was not unethical for me to conduct a classic grounded theory study.

I reconciled my ethical dilemma through the help of Judith Holton's dissertation in which she maintained that in grounded theory methodology the data is conceptualized in such a way that it becomes "abstract of people, time and place and, as such, the strict adherence to standard ethical considerations of informed consent and voluntary participation are not only frequently impractical but, more to the point, unnecessary" (Holton, 2006, p. 60). Drawing from Holton's work, I further cited van den Hoonaard (2002), arguing that "the logico-deductive bio-medical basis out of which research ethics review policies and guidelines have been derived are being challenged by qualitative researchers as not being congruent with the aims and purposes of inductive qualitative social research" (Loy, 2010, p. 42).

To convince my committee members of the validity of using classic grounded theory methodology, I kept my process of learning as transparent and up-to-date as possible with my adviser through frequent communication. Attending a grounded theory seminar led by Barney Glaser provided me with the legitimacy and authority to educate my adviser as to the methodological changes, not only through the physical attendance of the seminar but also by introducing the plethora of works published by Glaser through Sociology Press. To my pleasant discovery, not only were the changes accepted, several members of my committee including my adviser later commented that they had learned a lot from my dissertation about grounded theory. Such laudatory comments continued to be received post-dissertation in conference presentations as well as by editors of journals in the field of family business. My study also received the 2010 International Family Enterprise Research Academy and Family Business Network Pacific Asia dissertation award—a validation of the rigor and power of classic grounded theory methodology.

Educating research stakeholders on classic grounded theory methodology is not only an interpersonal process but also an institutional one. As mentioned earlier in parentheses, I had to educate my university library by providing it with a

list of the most helpful works I found for learning to do classic grounded theory in addition to Glaser and Strauss (1967), particularly *Theoretical Sensitivity* (Glaser, 1978), *Doing Grounded Theory* (Glaser, 1998), and P*erspectives III: Theoretical Coding* (Glaser, 2005). Out of curiosity, I checked the library holdings recently (January 14, 2011) and was glad to see that the library now stocks all these works and more, published through Sociology Press, and that every single one of them were out on loan. Providing easy access to Glaser's works for faculty and students is likely to facilitate further understanding and acceptance of the methodology amongst the academic community. For me, convincing my university to purchase these books was easy because our librarians respected doctoral students in their dissertation phases as having the most advanced knowledge in their chosen research areas.

Embracing experiential learning

Learning to do classic grounded theory for the first time can be a challenging endeavor. As a marriage and family therapist, I understand and articulate the process of learning marriage and family therapy as an experiential phenomenon. Understanding and accepting the learning of classic grounded theory as an experiential process greatly helped me to grapple with the challenges. Part way through my dissertation, I came to a visceral or emotional realization—a *eureka*—that my experience of doing grounded theory was like that of learning to ride a bicycle: it was not something that I could learn through merely an intellectual understanding, it was a process that required learning by doing, and with live guidance.

Even though I had attended a grounded theory seminar, I found myself stuck again and again through my dissertation process. *How am I supposed code? Is what I am doing correct? What exactly are interchangeable indices? What is the difference between a code and a category? What should a memo look like?* The chaos and what Barney Glaser referred to as "regression" in the process of doing grounded theory gave rise to much anxiety. *How much data do I need? Is there anything new to what I am discovering? Will I ever finish my dissertation?* I found myself reading through the literature

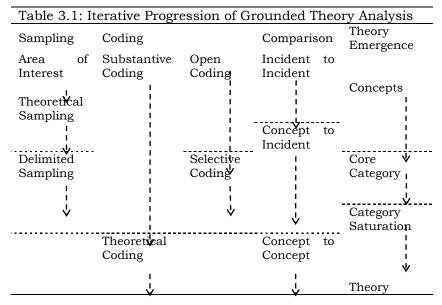repeatedly, but still had trouble moving forward.

Nine months after I began my process of research and after repeated frustration from getting stuck again and again, I sought out fellows of the Grounded Theory Institute for direct guidance, particularly Andy Lowe and Judith Holton. I recall my experience sitting with Andy Lowe in Bangkok as he helped me to overcome my "stuckness" in memoing by having me write down whatever I had in my mind pertaining to the data, and then reading through my writings and dialoging with me about them. The process freed me emotionally to accept that there was not necessarily a right way to memo (and thus, not get stuck on worrying about being wrong), but what was more important was to engage in the process of memoing.

I decided to attend a second grounded theory troubleshooting seminar in Oxford in 2010, led by Judith Holton, Helen Scott, and Antoinette McCallin. Through dialogue with the fellows of the Grounded Theory Institute where I received feedback on my analyses and memos, my abstract or "disembodied" understanding of grounded theory began to take shape along with the emergence of the theory itself. The answers to the questions posed two paragraphs above came together in a very clear way in the final writing of my methodology section. The following block quotes from my dissertation address these questions.

> Grounded theory methodology employs theoretical sampling, which is the simultaneous and iterative process of data collection, coding, and constant comparative analysis, where the theoretical emergence of concepts and categories directs the researcher in terms of subsequent data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Along with theoretical sampling, grounded theory advocates the use of conceptual memo writing as an important part of analysis throughout the entire procedure. Table 3.1 provides an overview of the iterative progression of grounded theory analysis.

> There are two types of coding in grounded theory: substantive coding and theoretical coding, with the

former preceding the latter. Holton summarizes the substantive coding process in this way: "In substantive coding, the researcher works with the data directly, fracturing and analyzing it, initially through *open coding* for the emergence of a core category and related concepts and then subsequently through theoretical sampling and *selective coding* of data to theoretically saturate the core and related concepts" (2007, p. 265).

Table 3.1: Iterative Progression of Grounded Theory Analysis

Sampling	Coding		Comparison	Theory Emergence
Area of Interest	Substantive Coding	Open Coding	Incident to Incident	
Theoretical Sampling				Concepts
			Concept to Incident	
Delimited Sampling		Selective Coding		Core Category
				Category Saturation
	Theoretical Coding		Concept to Concept	
				Theory

The constant comparative process involves three types of comparisons: (1) incident to incident for the emergence of concepts, (2) concepts to more incidents for further theoretical elaboration, saturation, and densification of concepts, and (3) concepts to concepts for their emergent theoretical integration through theoretical coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Holton, 2007). Theoretical coding occurs as the final stage "to conceptualize how the substantive codes may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into the theory" (Holton, 2007, p. 283).

In *substantive coding*, the researcher begins with line-by-line *open coding* of data, engaging in *incident-to-incident* comparative analysis guided by a set of questions: "what category does this incident indicate?", "what property of what category does this incident indicate?", "what is the main concern faced by the participant?", and "what accounts for the continual resolving of this concern?" (Glaser, 1998, p. 140). These questions help the researcher to rise above descriptive details and to stay at a conceptual level focusing on the patterns among incidents that yield codes (Holton, 2007, p. 275). As more concepts are derived from data, the comparative analysis process moves from comparing *incident-to-incident* to *concept-to-incident* for the saturation of categories. By writing memos on concepts that arise through the constant comparative process, a potential *core category* begins to emerge. The core category can be any kind of theoretical code such as a process, a typology, a continuum, a range, and so forth, with the purpose of integrating the sub-core categories to explain how the main concern of participants is continually processed or resolved (Glaser, 1998; Holton, 2007).

In the block quotes above, I provided a table to summarize what I termed the Iterative Progression of Grounded Theory Analysis. I made the table as a way to visually simplify the process and their timelines in terms of development. However, I was also aware that in some ways, the table limited the actual process of what I had experienced as the process was much more iterative than the visual table may suggest. Nevertheless, I felt it was a valuable exercise in learning, and to ensure that I had not departed from the method in my attempt to visualize it, I sent it to Judith Holton for her feedback.

Discovering the core category: grounding intuition

As the category of *dynasting* began to emerge in my analysis, I felt very uncertain about the plausibility of using it to explain the other codes. My doctoral training had thus far taught me to read, think, and write like scholars for whom

verification of concepts was the mainstay of academic parlance. To come up with an idea that was new to the field meant to challenge existing literature and prominent scholars who had years of experience and high levels of scholarly accolades. The field had conceptualized the idea of family business transition from one generation to the next as *succession*. However, the potential core category emerging in the data and through my analysis pointed to a phenomenon that was more than succession—that what was going on for the people I was studying looked a lot more like that of creating and building dynasties. Furthermore, the word *dynasting* itself did not exist in the literature or in any dictionary. I worried that I would not be able to convince my committee members or future journal editors of a novel idea— and a word—that others had not yet conceived.

As I grappled with the uncertainty of the category, I continued to engage in theoretical sampling. Despite my uncertainty, the data continued to reinforce the idea that dynasting was not only a good category where fit to the concepts was concerned; it was also relevant to the research participants. I noted one such example in my dissertation:

> On January 24, I asked my brother: "what would you say if I told you that what is going on with Chinese Malaysian family business founders and successors is that they are dynasting?" He replied, "Yes. I would say that that is a very good way to put it. That is exactly what they are doing. They are building a dynasty." And he went on to elaborate about successors being heirs to the family business and that over time, "they are essentially trying to set up an empire." (Loy, 2010, p. 57)

In the end, despite my hesitation to challenge established ideas in the field, I felt that it was not only necessary but also defensible to use dynasting as a concept as it was evident in the data. In other words, the data grounded my intuitive hunch that theoretical saturation was taking place. Shortly after I made the decision to retain the category of dynasting, the main category of *dynasting across cultures* emerged to provide what I felt was the best fit for the data to explain how founders and successors worked to resolve their main

concern. The rest of the concepts came together relatively quickly after that to form a theory.

Prior to attending my second grounded theory troubleshooting seminar in Oxford 2010, I decided to write a "big memo" entitled "Dynastying Across Cultures" that integrated the concepts through the core category of dynasting across cultures in four overlapping phases. By this point in time, memoing was no longer an emotionally-stuck endeavor for me, and I felt free to "experiment" with tying concepts together without fear of being wrong—that was what the memo felt like to me then, an intuitive experiment or a trial in putting together concepts. The memo I wrote essentially became a 5-page abstract submission to a family business conference. The deadline of the conference submission gave me the impetus to work hard towards completion as I had a tendency to keep ruminating on the data rather than work towards pulling them together. I also showed this big memo to the participants at the Oxford 2010 troubleshooting seminar. I received positive comments from both the conference as well as the second troubleshooting seminar. In this way, writing a big memo—or pulling the theory together in what felt like an intuitive experiment—and then having it "grounded" with feedback in two conferences gave me the confidence that my theory was good enough to be written up. Followed further advice from the Oxford seminar to tie the concepts through theoretical codes, the other aspects of dynasting theory came together for the final writing up of my theory.

Recognizing limitations and possibilities

My understanding of theory was greatly enhanced when I recognized the limitations and boundaries of dynasting theory. Not all Malaysian Chinese family business founders are interested in dynasting. The data showed that clearly too. As I had gathered copious amounts of data prior to understanding classic grounded theory methodology, I was able to see that much of the data was not directly relevant to developing dynasting theory. These pertained to family businesses that were not interested in growing the business—people for whom building a business was merely about economic livelihood and not about creating a legacy.

Recognizing to whom dynasting theory applied—and to whom it did not—helped me to understand that it was one amongst other possible theories to explain what was going on for Malaysian Chinese family firms. Nevertheless, it was an important theory as it was a relevant yet hitherto undocumented explanation for what was going on for the people I studied. Paradoxically, recognizing the limitations also increased my appreciation of the importance of theories to provide useful insights into a social phenomenon.

Recognizing the limitations also taught me that there was a great deal more to be discovered—that the possibilities to further refine and expand upon the theory was limited only to my willingness and resources to do further research. Dynasting theory can be further modified to include families outside of the business arena—in organized religion, politics, sports, and even crime—to yield a theory that can potentially explain, over a spectrum of arenas, the behaviors of families that seek to dominate organized social phenomena across multiple generations.

Another humbling-yet-exciting realization of a limitation was my own mastery of grounded theory. I am by no means an expert. In fact, I am very much just beginning to embark on learning grounded theory. This is a humbling realization in light of the fact that I had expended a year and a half of rigorous study on the methodology. Yet it is incredibly exciting that despite my novice-status to the methodology, I was able to produce a theory that has received positive recognition from respectable sources. For instance, several leading family business scholars in the field gave me very positive feedback for my work and have asked me to consider writing an article on how classic grounded theory can be used to expand theorizing in family business. I believe the positive recognition I have received is testimony of the power of grounded theory methodology as it was originally conceived.

It is also exciting that I can continue to refine my knowledge and skills and to enrich social understanding at the same time by exploring new phenomena of interest, especially in areas that have received little scholarly attention. My next project through which I hope to further hone my methodological skills in grounded theory will be to study

expatriate families—people with whom I have daily contact both through personal connections as well as in my professional capacity as a marriage and family therapist; people for whom there seems yet to be developed a rigorous grounded theory to identify and to explain their important concerns.

Conclusion

In summary, embarking on a classic grounded theory study for my dissertation has taught me much more than what I could have learned had I chosen to do a verification study to prove whether existing theories or concepts apply to a chosen social arena. Doing a verification study is like being given a fish and learning to decipher whether or not it is a fish. Doing grounded theory is like understanding the currents of the rivers, the fish breeding patterns, and the responses of different types of fish to different types of bait. Grounded theorizing offers a bird's eye view—broad yet detailed—to social phenomena. Learning to do classic grounded theory has given me a key to unpacking and decoding the patterns of our social worlds. But the learning was not easy. The process of my learning-whilst-doing was arduous and fraught with uncertainty (not the mention the need to expend extra time and financial resources). For those interested in embarking upon a classic grounded theory study for their dissertations, I would recommend that they consider doing a small pilot grounded theory study under the guidance of a grounded theory fellow to get a feel for what it may be like to do a full dissertation through the methodology. Having had a sense of completion with a small project—having learned how to grapple with the sense of chaos and uncertainty that comes with learning grounded theory for the first time—will likely give greater confidence (which will lessen the sense of anxiety) that a full dissertation can be successfully completed when embarked upon. For me, my dissertation itself has felt like a pilot project, albeit an oversized one, which has prepared me as well as given me the confidence to engage in future grounded theory research projects that I hope will result in much positive contribution to our understanding of the world.

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Stigma in Access to HIV Treatment in African Settings: The importance of social connections[1]

Kingsley Oturu, MD, MBBS, MSc.

Abstract

Access to antiretroviral therapy is desperately needed in Nigeria. Increased access to anti-retroviral therapy for HIV treatment contributes to improved quality of life and reduced health care costs. It may assist in reduction of stigma and risk of HIV transmission. Although a lot of global funding has been mobilised to improve access to HIV treatment, many people in Nigeria still do not have access. The HIV treatment access rate in Nigeria is 16.6%. It is often assumed that with the provision of antiretroviral therapy, patients will readily access HIV treatment. However, as this grounded theory (GT) study suggests, *stigma* stands out as a major barrier to HIV prevention and treatment services in Nigeria. The main concern of the participants that emerged in this GT study was the fear of different types of stigma that stand as barriers to access. *Self stigma*, *familial stigma* and *community stigma*, *institutional stigma* and *organisational stigma* surfaced as issues that influence access. The participants were also able to overcome stigma and other barriers to accessing HIV treatment through the use of social connections. *Social connection* emerges as the core category of this theory. The core determinant to engaging with social connectors is the type of disclosing strategy utilised by the research participants. The social connection theory on access developed from this study suggests that although stigma poses a major barrier to HIV treatment, social connectors can play a major role in supporting the patient in overcoming barriers to access HIV treatment. Social connectors were identified as trusted acquaintances that influenced how and

when HIV patients access treatment. I therefore argue in this paper that in African settings, social connectors should be targeted in access programs and not just the individual patient. The theory may be adapted for other diseases associated with stigma, such as leprosy or mental illnesses. It may also be relevant for African patients living in western or non-African contexts or in contexts within developed countries where there is strong social capital.

Introduction

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection is a global health issue that affects 33.4 million people worldwide. Sub-Saharan Africa bears the main brunt of the epidemic accounting for 67% of the HIV infections and contributing to 75% of all AIDS death in 2007 (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS [UNAIDS], 2009). With a population of 140 million and a HIV prevalence rate of 4.4%, Nigeria has the 3rd largest number of People living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in the world (UNAIDS, 2009). The impact of an unchecked HIV epidemic include increasing number of AIDS orphans, increasing funeral costs, loss of time and resources caring for the sick, reduced economic productivity and stigmatization of those infected and affected by the HIV virus (Oturu, 2006; Tindyebwa, et. al., 2006).

With the advent of anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) for HIV treatment, people infected with HIV infection are able to live longer and have better quality of life (Alonzo, A., & Reynolds, R. (1995). However, despite a lot of initiatives, many PLWHA in Nigeria still do not have access to ARVs (POLICY, 2004). Although there are currently about 215 ARV treatment sites in Nigeria, it is estimated that only 16.6% of the 550,000 people who require ARV treatment are actually on the drugs (United Nations General Assembly Special Session, [UNGASS], 2007).

This GT study discovers that stigma still remains the main concern of PLWHA who access ARVs in Abuja, Nigeria. Unlike most diseases, the issue of stigma surrounding HIV infection provides a uniqueness that makes it difficult for patients to access treatment (Parker & Aggleton, 2003; Castro & Farmer, 2005). The need for theoretical development in HIV

studies is buttressed by Attawall and Mundy (2003) and Abadia-Barrero and Castro (2006) who assert that there is a desperate need for theoretical tools to investigate stigmatization within social processes.

Methodology

The GT methodology was used for this study. It is an approach in research where data are collected and used to generate rather than verify theory about a group of individuals within a social setting (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The primary source of data collection was through semi structured interviews. The interview site was in Abuja, Nigeria. This location was selected because it is a multicultural setting and has a high HIV prevalence rate of 8% (UNAIDS, 2006). Ethical approval was obtained for the study from the Research Ethics committee of Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom.

Thirty HIV positive patients who had attempted to access HIV treatment were recruited through a National HIV support group and interviewed. Data collection took place over 6 months (February 2009 to August 2009). The research instrument used was an interview guide. The interviews were adapted as necessary for the participants' need to take a break or to allow a close associate to support them during the interviews. Theoretical sampling was employed whereby participants were recruited who could provide more information to the emerging social connection theory.

Four stages of analysis were undertaken in this research. These are transcription, open coding, selective coding and theoretical coding. The author conducted all the interviews and analysis of the data. Throughout the course of the research, field notes, theoretical memos and reflective memos were kept to keep track of the ideas emanating from the research.

Transcription. The interview data was collected with the aid of a digital recorder. Field notes were taken and the audio recordings were transcribed. The transcription was not done mechanically. As I began to transcribe, I noticed concepts that had not been apparent while I was doing the interviews. I started having successive series of eureka moments that

guided the analysis. It was a pleasurable experience as concepts began to emerge from the data. This kind of experience has been termed 'the drugless trip' (Glaser, 1998). The term 'transcoding' is developed to describe this innovative technique of transcribing and coding simultaneously. Each code developed during the transcription also had a corresponding memo that provided information on the theoretical ideas underpinning the codes, in a process termed 'transmemoing'. Behind these conceptual labels is the application of standard Classic Grounded Theory (CGT) technique to the non-classic GT (Qualitative data analysis) procedure of transcribing recordings of interviews. Within the remit of this doctoral research, it is difficult to do a 'pure' CGT (such as not transcribing or not using the computer) because of the need to meet departmental requirements. Attempts were made to overcome this by drawing on the simultaneous property of CGT in transcribing and coding/memoing simultaneously (Glaser, 1998:15). Transcripts were transferred to Nvivo8 computer software for detailed analysis. The transcripts, codes and memos were also printed out of the computer and sorted manually.

Open coding. In this process concepts derived from the analysis are labelled and categorized. Each category was delineated in terms of properties and dimensions. During open coding, an open mind was maintained as I read through the data. Different texts were labelled with relevant codes as depicted by the data. Reading through the data and thinking about what it is saying, allowed different concepts begin to emerge from the data through the process of subconscious processing (Holton, 2007). Constant comparisons were also undertaken. Different incidents within the same transcript were compared with each other. Incidents in later transcripts were also compared with incidents in earlier ones for similarities and differences.

Selective coding. In this process, a core category was identified and systematically related to other categories. The core category is the central phenomenon of interest that links all the other categories (Strauss & Corbin 1990; Cresswell, 1998; Holton, 2007). Relationships between categories are refined and developed. Categories are then integrated

together. In selective coding, the most significant codes are used to sift through large amounts of data with the aim of determining as much information with regards to the properties and dimensions of these codes (Charmaz, 2006). Codes that could be merged to explain higher level concepts are then organised into categories. As codes are selected, a code is identified that is central to the analysis and links all the various codes together. This is called the 'core category'. In this study, *social connection* was identified as the core category that linked the various codes together.

Theoretical Coding. The last stage of the analysis is theoretical coding. When the core category is identified, it is systematically related to other categories. Relationships between categories are refined and developed. Categories are then integrated together using theoretical codes (Scott, 2008). Theoretical codes specify the possible relationships between the different categories that have been developed from the selective coding (Charmaz, 2006). In other words, they integrate the fractured theoretical story back together again (Glaser, 1978:72). The theoretical code that emerged from this research was based on the relationships implied by the research data (Glaser, 1978, Holton, 2007). The theoretical code used in this study is the 'stages theoretical code' (Glaser, 1978). A GT was then developed that is grounded in the data. The GT tests of fit, relevance (grab), modifiability and workability were also applied on the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1998).

Fear of Stigma as a Main Concern

Stigma stood out as the major barrier to accessing HIV treatment in this current GT study. There were other barriers to access discovered including poverty, lack of political will, religious/spiritual influences, poor health care service and lack of functional health care facilities in the rural areas. The role that these factors play on access to ARV therapy is beyond the scope of this paper. In this paper, I focus largely on stigma and the *fear of stigma* which was discovered to be the main concern of the participants. Goffman (1963) suggests that for a person to be stigmatised, the person needs to have a discredited attribute. The stigma is brought about by the discredited attribute that is socially constructed as

being deviant by the mainstream society.

> This stigma you are seeing is a big barrier oh! …The stigma in the village and community is very high…The stigma was so high. The stigma even makes some people not to access their drugs.'(Patricia).

The fear of stigma and other obstacles to accessing ARVs are dealt with mainly through different types of disclosure / non-disclosure to social connectors that enable them overcome the access obstacles. The fear of being exposed to the community following awareness of the diagnosis stops people from accessing ARVs. It is the fear of HIV stigmatisation that may actually cause more people to die than the actual presence of HIV. The fear of stigmatisation causes the patients to have stress, isolate themselves, lose appetite and not feed well. This exacerbates the whole disease process and leads to death. It is fear that stops people from accessing treatment. The fear of seeing a friend or relative at the health care centre who then knows of their diagnosis is very great.

In order to tackle the problem of stigma, it is important to have an accurate conceptualisation. A good theoretical framework could serve as a foundation for an effective program to tackle stigma. The absence of an effective theoretical framework that serves as an evidence base for stigma reduction strategies is a major limiting factor in the fight against stigma (Jewkes, 2006). In this current GT study it is argued that stigmatisation occurs as a typology along different concentric levels as the patient attempts to access treatment.

> So many people are afraid of stigmatisation and they don't want to see their family members and they don't want their friends to know that they are accessing such a treatment.

> But that fear…because if a Nigerian is seeing you, because there is a sign board…Even when I go there, … I will be thinking if I come down from the lift and somebody will see me.

The fear of people finding out and spreading rumours with the consequent stigmatisation is very real. This fear is what makes patients to try other alternative therapy such as herbs. The herbal practitioner usually engages the patient in psychological therapy. The herbal practitioner takes cognisance of the patient's belief in God and the belief in the spiritual aetiology of HIV. This is in contrast to the local ARV centre where confidentiality is destroyed by the mass treatment of HIV patients in a secluded area.

> …So, when em this girl, I've known her for some time. She lost her husband. We've been in committees. Other committees in the church… But, one day she was so surprised that I met her at the hospital and she was about to access her drugs when I came in… There was nothing she could do.

Due to the large number of patients being seen at the ARV centres, the health care workers do not have enough time to spend with patients. The physician often does not have the luxury of time to discuss social or spiritual matters. The discussion is often technical and focusing on laboratory tests and patients symptoms. Patients are seen quickly and in some cases, mechanically.

In this GT research study, different forms of stigma were found to stand as barriers to access. These occur in a typology and include *self stigma, familial stigma, community stigma and organisational stigma* (Figure 1). These are related to the 5 main stages of access identified in the study. During each of these stages, the patient may experience one form of stigmatisation or the other. The role of *social connectors* is crucial in helping them overcome these barriers.
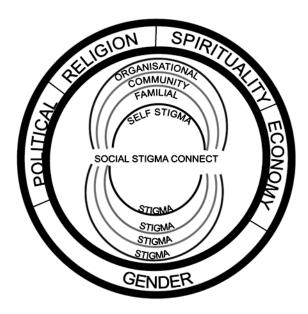
Figure 1. Oturu's typological stigma framework

Self stigma refers to the state whereby a patient feels that everyone is aware of his/her diagnosis and attempts to isolate himself/herself. The patient may experience emotional turmoil, fear, depression, anxiety or other emotional problems. It is critical that support from the health and social services be available to the patient as he/she weighs available options.

> Isolation... I can isolate myself because I will begin to look at everyone passing believes that I'm HIV positive or people are discussing about me. Somebody begins to isolate himself. He begins to dissociate himself from people when they are doing something.

Familial stigma connotes stigmatised reaction that emanates from people familiar to the patient. These could include family members or friends. It is often assumed that people familiar to the HIV patient will readily support the patient. People familiar to the patient may stigmatise or

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dissert the patient. They may also detract the patient from accessing ARVs so that other people do not know of the HIV diagnosis. Post Diagnostic Violence occurred following disclosure to family members. This connotes domestic violence on the HIV positive person following disclosure of his/her HIV status.

> When I left my husband, I did not just leave because of the HIV… because at a point I was like a problem to him and every day beating, beating. The last time I left was because he beat me to coma. I was in coma. So, when I got up, I was looking at myself as a ghost. I said 'Ah ah! So it's true that if you are dying you will know but you can't just help yourself.

These suggest that unless members of the family are targeted in ARV access programs, they could actually provide emotional or physical harm to the HIV patient.

Community stigma occurs when the community discriminates against the patient. It could occur in the neighbourhood as neighbours refuse to buy wares of PLWHA. It could also occur in institutions. Institutional stigmatisation is differentiated from organisational stigmatisation in that policies within the institution are purposely set to discriminate against a HIV positive person and reduces their life chances compared with persons who are HIV negative. This has been noticed in commercial organisations such as banks in Nigeria that make it mandatory for staff to be tested for HIV/AIDS before they are employed.

> The only area I have problems with HIV is…I begin to see that when people want to go for scholarship, they begin to ask them to come and test for HIV. So does it mean that if you are infected in this country, they don't give you scholarship again…No bank employs you when you are infected.

Organisational stigma emerged as an issue that prevented patients accessing treatment. Due to the nature of vertical funding, the HIV treatment sections of hospitals are placed in a different geographical location from the mainstream hospital. When other patients see anyone going to the 'HIV centre' for treatment, they assume that they are HIV positive.

This also occurs when certain 'HIV days' are set aside for treating HIV patients. This leads to an inert form of stigmatisation. Nevertheless, the impact is real in stopping some people from accessing treatment.

> I remember specific days are given to see people who are HIV positive in almost all the hospitals. On that particular date, you find out that most other patients feel reluctant to go to the hospital…You know these are HIV people… if you go to national hospital, they are a complete section you have for HIV.

Projectory stigma also emerged as a concept. In this case, the family and friends of a person known to be HIV positive is stigmatised even though they may be HIV negative. One of the participants recounted how in one school, his children were segregated from other children because a rumour went out that he was HIV positive. This type of stigma is similar to Goffman's (1963) courtesy stigma. It could also occur with health care workers that work with HIV positive persons. Health and social staff that work with HIV positive patients could also experience projectory stigma as people feel that they are helping HIV positive persons because they too are HIV positive.

> My son was already in school, he was given a single long bench alone to sit…. All the others were sharing 6…7 to one bench but my child was given one…. You see?

Disclosure to Social Connectors

Different forms of disclosing strategies emerged from the study. Due to the long incubation period of HIV infection, the disease is not visible until it progresses to AIDS. Hence, it is possible for the patient to hide the diagnosis. However, in order to access treatment, the patient has to confide in or disclose to someone. This disclosure however, makes the patient vulnerable to stigmatisation as evidenced by discrimination by those that he/she discloses to. In other words, disclosure effectively moves a person closer from the state of being discreditable to the state of being discredited. Notwithstanding, disclosure is useful if the patient needs to access ARVs. The patient who because of fear of stigma

refuses to go for treatment ultimately enters the stage of being discredited. Thus, ARVs can help a person from being discredited. However, the person still remains discreditable because of the continued presence of the HIV infection in the body.

Selective disclosing refers to the strategic disclosing of HIV status to people who will support and not discriminate against the patient. This is often a difficult decision to make. In order to disclose, some of the participants engage in 'stigma testing'. Issues surrounding HIV are discussed informally and the responses of the potential confidant are gauged. If the responses are discriminatory, then the patient will not disclose. However, in most cases, there was no rational strategy about who to disclose to. Usually, participants disclosed to their spouses or partners. Others disclosed to religious leaders or close family members.

Supportive disclosing. This involves informing a friend, religious leader or close relative was trusted for emotional support. With supportive disclosing, there was no rational criterion that was used. The basic ingredient appears to be trust. Some patients decided to disclose to their partners, while others preferred to disclose to strangers who could help them access treatment.

Compassionate non-disclosing. This refers to the non disclosure of the HIV status to very close family members such as parents because of the emotional trauma that such disclosure may have. Some of the participants are held in high regard by their parents. They feared the loss of respect from their parents and the shame of being diagnosed with HIV. Some of the participants preferred to access treatment at a location that is far from where they live so that people close to them do not know about their HIV status.

Open disclosure. This was a strategy utilised by people who had high self esteem and felt that they should not be ashamed of their HIV status. This often involves going on national radio or television programs, campaign rallies and openly disclosing their HIV status. Although it could be argued to be empowering, it also opens the door widely for stigmatisation. One of the participants who 'openly disclosed'

was barred from having any contact with her sister's family. She expressed regret at having openly disclosed. Another participant who openly disclosed was forced to resign from his political position since he was said to be 'weak' in contracting HIV. Shocked at the familial and societal reaction to open disclosure, most of the participants tend to use other forms of disclosure.

Indirect disclosing. The patient leaves clues about the diagnosis but does not overtly disclose his/her status. This may include leaving hospital appointment cards openly for everyone to see or asking children to bring their bottle of ARVs so that they can take their medication. If or when the disease begins to manifest in form of signs (weight loss, rashes) and symptoms such as chronic fever, the patient is forced to look for treatment of these ailments. The patients usually disclose to a social connector that can link them to where they can access treatment.

The findings of this GT study are also in agreement with those conducted by Apinudencha et al. (2007) in Thailand. They suggest that disclosure of HIV status to the community could lead to increased stigmatisation. Who disclosures are made to and how they are made can potentially increase or reduce HIV-related stigma.

The different disclosure strategies discovered in this GT study are reminiscent of Glaser and Strauss' (1965) awareness strategies discovered in their seminal work on awareness of dying. However, in this GT study, it is not 'awareness of dying' that is as much of an issue the 'fear of stigmatisation.' There are some links however, in that the fear of stigmatisation emanates from the awareness of the society of the HIV diagnosis. In a similar GT study examining the way physicians communicate with patients to enable them adhere to HIV treatment, Barfod (2007) argues that physicians are able to motivate patients to adhere to treatment when they 'de-shame'. HIV patients in this current doctoral study do feel shame of diagnosis. Due to this shame, some of the patients decided not to disclose to close relatives such as parents or siblings. Instead, they preferred to disclose to strangers who helped them access treatment. The core emotion that stops participants from accessing treatment is 'fear'. In order for

social connectors to help, the patient needs to disclose to them using different disclosure strategies.

A Theory of Social Connection

The social connection theory suggests that in resource poor settings, people access HIV treatment following support from social connectors who encourage them to access the health care service. This support may be through the provision of information, encouragement and counselling, informal connections, giving 'notes' or letters. Social connectors help patients overcome treatment accessibility issues which in turn are caused by fear of stigmatization or shame.

For the purpose of this paper, a social connector is a social actor who is able and willing to connect the patient to a health care facility where they can have access to treatment. I suggest that the patient passes through some phases, with each successive phase building on the former till the climax of access is achieved. Most of the participants had to confide in someone that they could trust. The social connectors vary in terms of their social function. Individual social connectors could be family members, friends, religious leaders, politicians, or health care workers. Social connectors could range from very close confidants to complete strangers. These social connections are very important to help the patient overcome different barriers such as cost of transportation, lack of knowledge and fear of stigma.

Institutional social connectors

There is a thin line dividing individual and institutional social connectors as the individual social connectors often are part of a wider institution. Amongst the religious institutions that supported PLWHA, the Catholic Action Committee on AIDS stood out as being very active. Also active were the Redeemed Christian Church of God. The religious leaders were very useful in supporting members to access treatment. However, some religious institutions stood as barriers. In some churches, members were urged to pray instead of taking the ARVs. In others, patients were discriminated against by their church members. Discrimination took on different forms, ranging from exclusion from the church, open

announcement of the HIV status to members of the congregation, to refusal of marriage of HIV positive couples. These suggest that much work is needed in providing religious institutions with knowledge about HIV. Other civil society groups help support patients to access HIV treatment. Of particular importance are the roles of community support groups. Some of the participants gained access after being introduced to the right procedures by a member of the Network of PLWHA organisation in Nigeria.

Social connection tools

The use of social connections tools, made it easier for some people to access treatment. These include notes, letters and phone calls. Note giving is a common influencing tool used in Nigeria. An influential person writes a request on a small sheet of post it paper, complimentary sheet or complimentary card.

> It is my sister. That my younger sister. She works there… She is em. She is with the house of rep.

> She gave me referral (note).

A letter is a more formal approach to helping people have access to treatment. The letter is usually written from a reputable organisation that knows that the health care centre concerned should have enough resources to provide access to treatment.

> Then the doctors were not ready to give me drugs again because they felt I have done shakara (showed off) for them. (giggle) That is why I had to come to the network(of PLWHA in Nigeria) to get a letter. With that letter, they attended to me quickly.

A phone call can help facilitate access although it does not appear to be very common. One of the participants admitted that she was given access to the life saving drugs after her physician made a phone call to a colleague who was conducting a research trial on a new antiretroviral drug.

> 'So he phoned the woman… The following day, I went to the hospital. I saw the lady. Immediately the lady saw me, she felt sooo, so you know, so sympathetic.

> She said there's nothing we can do. She just registered my name. So, everything was free.

Social connectors can directly intervene by following the HIV positive patient to the ARV centre to access treatment. Family members and close friends and other social connectors can play a key role as 'facilitators' that support patients to access HIV treatment. However, they could also serve as 'detractors' who stand as a barrier for people accessing treatment through discriminatory behaviour. For example, one of the participants was advised by family members to use herbal medication instead of going to the ARV centre. With the right policies and strategies in place, these family members could serve as social connectors who directly assisting them to access the service or providing them with support and information on how to access treatment.

Stages in the access continuum

In order to access treatment, the patients have to pass through different successive stages to access treatment. These stages are hereby outlined.

The stage of non desire

The patient often passes through a stage of contemplation and guilt following exposure to high risk behaviour (such as unprotected sexual intercourse). This prompts the patient to do the HIV test. When the patient starts developing symptoms that are non responsive to medical treatment, they start thinking of doing the HIV Elisa test. This is followed by a stage of affirmation, when the HIV test is done and the result is positive. There is a stage of denial whereby the patient refuses to believe the HIV diagnosis. There is the stage of reaffirmation, when the HIV test is redone or some other confirmatory test (Western Blot) is done to confirm the HIV diagnosis. This is followed by the stage of emotional turmoil. The patient is often distraught with the diagnosis. During this stage, the patient may pass through bouts of self stigma, isolation, anxiety or depression. He or she may try to reject the diagnosis. Those that are religious will attempt to use faith to fight the infection. Usually, there is no desire to access treatment because of the lifelong implications of taking ARVs. During this period, the

patient may then enter into the stage of disclosure. The patient has to make a decision as to who to disclose and when. Depending on if the disclosure is made and to whom it is made, the patient then follows some other main stages. He or she may receive social connection support or religious support or may be advised to try alternative remedies.

The alternative access stage

At this point, the patient tries various alternative treatments. These could range from spiritual treatment such as prayers and incantation, to using of local herbs, to using of organised herbal products from Chinese companies or food supplement companies. The social actors involved at this stage could range from the traditional pharmacist, the herbal marketer, herbalist or pastor of a church. Forever living products ranked high as a product that was used as an alternative to ARVs. Others used local herbs. When these fail, then the patient begins to look for pharmaceutical treatment from the organised health care system.

> They said the man used to (giggles) that has a cure for HIV. But there is no any cure. If you go, they will give you leaves. You will go and cook. You'll cook, you'll drink and you'll bath. I took it for many years.

The stage of desired access

It is at this stage that the patient attempts to get information about how and where to access antiretroviral treatment following failure of the other alternative treatment regimes. Usually by this time the disease would have progressed. Friends and relatives may be commenting that the patient is losing weight or looks ill. It is important that these social connectors support the patient at this stage to access treatment. Prior to 2004 when the ARVs were made free, people passed through a lot of problems before they could access the drugs.

> It was a hell even to put your name on the list. It was a hell. Some people passed through hell before they accessed the ARVs. (Patricia)

Realised access stage

During this stage, the patient passes through the hurdles of laboratory tests and hospital bureaucracies to access treatment from the medical centre. The limiting factor is the ability of the patient to get a HIV positive laboratory result and a CD4 count of less than 200 cells. The patient may then start taking the ARVs. Following realised access, the patient may pass through a stage of 'normalisation'. The signs of symptoms of HIV disappear and the person begins to live a 'normal' life.

Disrupted access stage

During this stage, the patient may stop taking the drugs. This could be due to a number of reasons. Some may realise that they are 'normal' as evidenced by being physically healthy and therefore decide that there is no need to continue treatment. Some may be encouraged by religious leaders not to take the drugs as they are now 'healed'. Others may drop out due to the organisational arrangements that lead to stigmatisation. Some of the patients may drop out due to financial reasons.

Continued access

Those who overcome the above barriers they may continue accessing treatment. Some of the other patients who go through the disrupted access stage may overcome these obstacles and continue treatment. Most of the patients continue to access treatment in centres that are far from where they live so that people that live around them do not know of their HIV status. Essential to people who continue to access treatment is meeting the same health personnel, friendly service and professional care. Despite the long waiting times, people prefer to continue receiving treatment from the place where they were first started treatment.

The effect of access to ARVs on stigma is mixed. A form of stigma reduction termed 'non-associative stigma reduction' was discovered in this GT research study. However, the stigma reduction is due to non association with HIV. Due to the fact that the person on ARVs looks healthy, he/she is not associated with HIV and so is not stigmatised. However, if the

community knows that he/she is HIV positive and is on ARVs, they may still stigmatise.

These stages are not necessarily linear. A patient may start with anti-retroviral treatment and stop due to financial or reasons. He/She may switch to traditional medication and/or prayers and later switch back to ARVs. Some patients do not pass through all the stages. For example, a patient who got diagnosed at antenatal care may simply have direct access to the ARVs without trying alternative therapy. These stages also do not depict the ease at which patients obtain access.

Discussion

Link and Phelan (2001) argue that stigma, prejudice and discrimination are different dimensions of the same phenomenon. However, differentiating the labelling difference (stigma) from the reactions of the society may make it easier to target the different actors that influence stigma. Kurzban and Leary (2001) argue that stigmatisation comes about as a the society uses psychological processes designed by natural selection to avoid people with a stigmatised attribute and join forces with normal people for competition and exploitation purposes. However, a lot of stigmatised diseases such as cancer or incontinence are not easily contacted.

Pescosolido, Martin, Lang, and Olafsdottir (2008) made an ambitious attempt to merge all the theoretical frameworks from psychology, social science disciplines on stigma. The attempt provided a complex representation of a truly complex problem. However, complex and diverse conceptualization makes it difficult to grasp in a programmatically useful way. The conceptualisation of stigma in this GT research is unique in the sense that it goes beyond the individual level to examine the familial (interpersonal), community and organisational domains of stigma. It looks at the structural and contextual dimensions of stigma and the impact of not only the relationships, but also of the context in which stigma takes place.

Nigeria is a very religious country. Instead of trying to contradict the religious leaders, it may be more productive to involve them in the formulation of ARV access programs. All

the participants in the study were religious and believed that their faith in God helped them to access treatment. Most of the participants suggested that they are able to overcome their fears by having faith in God. The God theory suggests that there is a Being who created human beings and the world and desires human beings to live under His guidance (Grudem, 1994). As Adogame (2007) argues, Nigerian people's belief in divine healing (theotherapy), gives them hope to cope with the HIV diagnosis. This assertion is reflected renditions of participants in this current GT study.

> 'People's belief in God plays a major role in helping them cope with their HIV diagnosis and access treatment. Nigeria is a very religious country. When there is no more hope, people turn to God. I believe that I am being kept by divine healing of God as I am not on ARVs but am still healthy'(Tama).

The findings of this current GT study are similar to those identified by Makoae et. al., (2008), whose study across 5 African countries showed that Africans turn to God as one of their coping strategies of dealing with HIV stigma.

Oke (1995) and Adegoke (2007) discovered that cultural perception of illnesses as having evil spiritual undertones (such as witchcraft) was strongly associated with the use of spiritual healing churches as an alternative to modern health care in Western Nigeria. There is a strong belief in the spiritual aetiology of HIV infection that is often not recognised by health care practitioners. This further helps in alienating the patient from the health care worker. One of the participants suggested that she believed she was HIV positive because she refused to marry her former boyfriend. She believed that he had placed a curse on her for disappointing him. Due to this belief, a lot of the participants disclosed their HIV status to their religious leaders before disclosing to their close friends.

Implications and recommendations

This work theorises how social capital can be useful in improving health. It is simplistic to believe that having large social capital will necessarily translate to improved health or improved access to ARVs. This GT study highlights the fact

that close family members and friends can and do stigmatise HIV patients. Social connection theory suggests that social networks and links need to be stimulated or nudged in the right direction to improve health. There is the need to appreciate the fact that in the African context, rational decisions and behavioural activities based on analysis of evidence of the effectiveness of health care interventions may not necessarily apply. Religious beliefs and cultural norms may play major roles in influencing health seeking behaviour.

This research identifies that stigma occurs at different levels. There is no one size fits all strategy for tackling stigma. Different types of stigma will require different strategies. Self stigma will require counselling, self help literature and support from social connectors. Familial stigma will require family counselling and health promotion strategies that go beyond the individual patient to target family members. Community stigma will require innovative health promotion, film, social marketing and social media strategies. Having separate infrastructure for HIV patients creates a form of organisational stigma as every patient going to that centre is already assumed to be HIV positive as that is the only illness being treated there. This effectively violates the confidentiality of the patient's condition. There is need for mainstreaming of HIV treatment with the main health care system to prevent this. Comprehensive health care services that take cognisance of socio-economic, spiritual, religious and psychological needs to the patient, is urgently needed. Health care workers also need to be trained on customer service relations and how to empathise with their patients. It is necessary for functional, well equipped health care centres be made available in the rural areas. Political support is needed to provide a good environment for supporting social networks that facilitate access to ARVs. Advocacy to politicians and formulation of anti-stigma legislation is needed to protect the rights of PLWHA. Social connectors should be included in formulation and implementation of anti-stigma strategies.

Limitations

Some of the descriptive findings may be biased to reflect factors that affect PLWHA that belong to HIV support groups and not all PLWHA in Nigeria. Notwithstanding, the results of

the research could provide insight on strategies that members of HIV support groups employ in accessing ARVs. It may not provide answers to systemic and structural problems within the health care system. The sampling techniques and small sample size may limit the possibility of generalizing all the descriptive findings. However, the theory derived from the research may be generalised and applied to other settings and circumstances that applies to treatment for diseases associated with stigma (such as leprosy and mental health illnesses).

The CGT Learning Curve

This paper is a reflection of my utilization of GT to study access to HIV treatment in Nigeria at a point in my learning curve. GT is used in this paper as a methodological approach of undertaking research without the restriction of a preconceived theory. My adventure into GT began as I searched for a methodologically sound strategy for my PhD research that would help in theoretical development. After reading through the literature, it was clear to me that there was a gap in the theoretical debates on access to HIV treatment. GT was chosen for this study because it is a rigorous methodology with well documented systematic set of procedures for analysing data.

It was challenging to differentiate my professional concerns from the main concerns of the participants of the study. Although Glaser (1998) suggests that the researcher ought to go into the study without any preconceptions, it is difficult to do this within the remit of a PhD. In order to meet departmental requirements of the University ethics committee, I had to demonstrate that I had a professional concern. As Glaser (2008) advises, this should not deter the researcher from doing GT as the concerns of the participants will still emerge in the context of the professional concerns of the researcher. Notwithstanding, the researcher needs to be theoretically sensitive and keep an open mind. As Holton (2008) suggests, the researcher should do what he/she needs to do to meet departmental demands and get the PhD while innovatively following the principles of GT that allow the main concerns and new theory to emerge.

I was in a 'minus mentoring' situation where I had to rely on GT books to actually do the GT (Glaser, 1998). As Glaser (1998) advises, the best way to learn GT is to do it. I read through the different articles and books on GT to understand the different variants and the rationale behind them. Reading widely provided me with the arsenal and zeal to undertake the study. One of my fears was that concepts may fail to emerge from the data. With patience, reflection and subconscious processing the concepts emerged.

It was challenging not allowing preconceived ideas from the literature to influence the research. Doing a literature review was also necessary to meet the University Ethics committee and to argue why a GT methodology was preferred for the study. It was necessary to demonstrate that I had a good understanding of the GT methodology and debates. Consequently, two waves of literature review were done. There was a first wave, which looked at GT literature and access studies broadly. The bracketing technique was used to overcome this. With bracketing, previous knowledge and ideas are suspended so as not to influence the research (Backman and Kyngas, 1999). The second wave of literature review which was directed by findings of the research was more focused and more relevant to the emerging theory.

It is also important to differentiate the use of GT as a method of analysis from the use as a methodology. Some researchers only use the coding and memoing components of GT when analyzing data. For the purpose of this research, GT was used as a methodology. In using GT as a methodology, the iterative process was utilized that allowed the results of the analysis of the data to guide further research directions, literature reviews and modification of questions and selection of participants to contribute to the emerging theory.

It was challenging coming to grasp with the different variants of the GT methodology. Charmaz (2006) provides a constructionist view of performing GT. However, she argues that the GT process involves the active involvement of the researcher in constructing the theory and plays down the importance of allowing the theory to emerge from the data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) provide a symbolic interactionist version of GT. Glaser (1992) makes ad hominem arguments in

his publication that criticize Strauss and Corbin's (1998) version of GT; as he suggests, their early prescription of a 'one size fits all' coding paradigm framework stifles the analysis. The artificial inculcation of the coding paradigm also defeats the aim of doing GT. This is to develop a theory that emerges without the constriction of a framework.

Glaser is quoted as saying that grounded theory is 'aphilosophical' (McCallin, 2008). Glaser's aphilosophical stance about grounded theory suggests that anyone can do grounded theory irrespective of his/her philosophical position; be it critical realist, objectivist or social constructionist (Holton, 2008; McCallin, 2008). As a social constructionist, I suggest that data do not speak for themselves. As Bryant and Charmaz (2007:38) aver, the constructionist researcher engages the data in conversation and works in synergy with the data to develop the theory. However, engaging in research from a social constructionist position does not necessarily preclude the theory from emerging from the data.

As Covan (2007), a student and protégé of both Glaser and Strauss (1967) argues, behind the classic grounded theory method is the positivist epistemological paradigm that suggests that the researcher is objective; separate from the data and that the data emerges irrespective of the professional or cultural characteristics of the researcher. Viewing grounded theory as a method, places a limitation on the theoretical development as the researcher is restricted in working along prescribed dictates within the 'GT method box'. However, when GT is viewed as a methodology, it allows the theories to emerge 'out of the box' as it were. A broader perspective is utilized in which the potential for theoretical developments are limitless. Viewing grounded theory as a methodology, rather than a method opens the door for the emergent properties of grounded theory to be demonstrated on the GT methodology itself. Hence, it could be argued that different variants of Grounded Theory may emerge from the core Classic Grounded Theory methodology. As Bryant and Charmaz (2007:50) argue, it is critical to reposition Grounded Theory in the light of current philosophical landscapes in a manner that recognises different perspectives of researchers.

This will enable us to move beyond simple criticisms that label grounded theory as being positivist or limited to micro analysis.

Conclusion

GT is a useful approach for developing high quality research that is grounded in the data. The social connection theory provides a useful framework for investigating and planning access projects. The theory attempts to bridge the link between the micro process of access and the macro environment. It reveals the vital role that social connectors play in influencing access to HIV treatment at the individual, community and organisational levels. In order for HIV treatment access rate to increase, these social connectors need to be targeted and empowered to facilitate access to treatment. Health promotion programs should be developed not just for the individual but for the social connectors in the society that can assist the patient in accessing treatment.

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The Theory of Social Control and the Social Psychology of Dissatisfaction: Inhibition, regression and isolation in a cultural context.

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Abstract

The Theory of Social Control (TSC) is grounded in satisfaction and happiness research. The study investigated the reasons behind relatively low levels of civil and personal satisfaction, subjective social well-being and experienced happiness in the post-communist Hungarian social context. The basic social process uncovered in the research is *self-situating*, which involves a continuous assessment of *social control,* which occurs on three psychological dimensions: *activity, fairness* and *connectedness,* operated via *social flow.* The culturally salient outcome of self-situating in Hungary is *self-victimizing,* meaning a subjective loss of control on all three dimensions. Some of the most important emotional-motivational consequences of self-victimizing are *inhibition, regression* and *isolation,* which contribute to various socio-cultural phenomenon such as distrust, bystander strategies, pessimism or anomie across a number of social situations. Based on the emerging theory, the concept of subjective social control is introduced and an expanded three-dimensional model of civil satisfaction, comfort and contribution, along with psychological and cultural implications, are discussed.

Key words: social control, self-situating, self-victimizing, activity, fairness, connectedness, inhibition, fury, isolation

Introduction

Happiness, satisfaction and subjective well-being stem from the social aspects of everyday life as much (or even more significantly) as they are tempered by individual goals, emotions and evaluations (Ryff, 1989; Ryff and Keyes, 1995; Diener and Diener, 1995; Diener, Oishi and Lucas, 2003). Regardless of whichever particular aspect of happiness we are trying to grasp (the emotional or the evaluative,) one thing will

be salient across any scientific viewpoint: that happiness is a social phenomenon. It is both timely and desirable therefore to expand the scope of happiness research so that it includes the social and the public aspects besides the individual features of our subjective experiences.

The aim of my research was to discover and highlight the social psychological mechanisms behind happiness and to determine the main factors (main social psychological processes) behind social, political and personal satisfaction and civil comfort. The antecedent to such a concept of social well being exists in the research on cultural aspects of subjective well-being (Diener and Diener, 1995; Diener, Oishi and Lucas, 2003). By cultural aspects, I refer to culturally transmitted psychological predispositions that determine subjective well-being of people on a large scale. Compared to other countries with similar economical performance, similar system features and levels of political freedom or even with similar historical and political background, Hungary falls behind in most cross-national studies that examine differences in subjective well-being and civil/personal satisfaction (Andorka 1994; Rose és Haerpfer 1994; Rose, Mishler és Haerpfer 1998; Spéder és Kapitány, 2002; Sági, 2002). With these in mind the main question of the research was: *what is going on* in the Hungarian socio-cultural setting that explains such deficiencies in the subjective and personal well-being of the citizens? I was looking for social, cultural, psychological patterns that are salient in people's experiencing of their social circumstances, and in the affects and reactions of people to the various personal, societal and political changes and events in their lives.

Methodology

Classical (Glaserian) Grounded Theory (CGT) was used as general methodology in the study (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser 1978; Glaser, 1998). CGT, rather than beginning with developing a hypothesis, starts out with data collection through various methods (in-depth interviewing, direct observation, text analysis, questionnaires, statistical data, and so on). From the collected data, key points are marked by codes that emerge from the transcribed interviews. Coding is followed by conceptualizing (memo writing and sorting),

during which further observations and field notes are produced, concepts are formed from the codes then concepts are organized into categories. The emerging categories will provide the skeleton or the frame for the emerging theory, which is condensed only in the last phase of the research.

The two most important aspects to GT in this particular research were constant built-in verification of emerging categories and concepts by constant comparison (1) and the use of all observed stimuli as data (2). Other elements of the method included theoretical sampling, theoretical coding, memo writing and sorting. GT helps researchers define a problem in its most natural context, discover relevancies of certain factors in a complex question regarding the social world, and make it relatively easy to find out what is going on. GT was used as a general methodology for this study because it provides the researcher with a careful balance of the inductive and deductive approach, making it relatively easy to discover new concepts and categories relevant in a given research area and test multiple hypotheses emerging at the same time. CGT in its regular procedure generally focuses on one core category, that is, one basic psychological or social psychological process to discover and particularize. However, with a complex psychological issue such as happiness and personal (dis)satisfaction, multiple GTs had to be carried out to fully understand underlying principles. This means that hypothesis generating, coding and conceptualizing did not stop at one emerging basic social psychological process, but rather, a set and a network of social psychological processes were handled in the line of the research.

Data collection started out in Hungary. Participants were volunteering via the largest Hungarian online social network. Criteria for selection were Hungarian nationality and mother tongue, samples included 30 in-depth interviews of residents. Hungarian mother tongue was the only requirement at this point. Theoretical sampling guided the research later for more carefully conceptualized data selection following GT requirements.

The interviews started out with the following question: "When you think through your life, what turning points come to your mind that have been significant emotionally to you –

be it any type of personal or social incidence?" This way of discrediting helped the research participants to start out from their own, subjectively important life events and give a narrative-evaluative frame to their accounts to which an affective evaluation were attached inherently.

Theoretical sampling shifted the focus onto direct observations of real-time social interactions between people as well as onto the analysis of public texts both live (political, public or other media-based, such as internet comments and conversations) and symbolic (songs, tales, proverbs.) My aim was to test the emerging core category (*subjective social control*) and its emerging dimensions. The three emerging dimensions of social control are: *activity*, which is personal potency and situational ability, with extremes towards the regressive and the aggressive pole (1); *fairness*, which occurs via social comparisons, measuring the self to others involved in the given social situation (2); and *connectedness* implying a range of modes from isolation through positive social involvement to symbiotic inclusion (3). Theoretical sampling called for further examination in the context of social conflicts, social losses and gains, victory and defeat (both nation-wide accounts such as culturally relevant texts, or the narratives and conversations involving sports results, e.g. a losing/winning match/game/race of national sporting; and personal accounts such as a forum discussion/blog of a break-up or a support forum for pregnant women and women with infants). As a general consequence of the emerging theory, particular cultural patterns in relation to affective and evaluative aspects of happiness and assessment of social control become salient and easily accessible.

A Theory of Social Control

> Worldviews are sets of beliefs and assumptions that describe reality. A given worldview encompasses assumptions about a heterogeneous variety of topics, including human nature, the meaning and nature of life, and the composition of the universe itself, to name but a few issues (Koltko-Rivera, 2004, p. 3.)

Worldviews are primarily realized through our social perceptions and involve the self through the processes of *self-*

situating. Worldviews imply attitudes and patterns of behavior, or in other words social strategies, including all forms of mental or physical activities in one's social context. From the data, various particular, mutually exclusive patterns of complex social attitudes/social strategies may be pointed out. Examples are: *self-victimizing, achieving, celebrating, protesting, withdrawing, complaining, defying* and *contributing.* These are in line with and could be described along the three dimensions of self-situating (e.g. complaining implies an inactivated, unfairly treated self that bonds with someone on a particular negative experience; achieving implies an active self that accepts its social circumstances but acts isolated; protesting occurs when several people wish to express their being mistreated in a joint effort, and so on.)

Self-victimizing

A strikingly salient social pattern (implicit social psychological strategy) in post-communist Hungary is *self-victimizing*, which occurs at the intersection of these three social noetic processes. Self-victimizing is in social terms a possibly disadvantageous outcome, which results in self-estranging and the extreme splitting of *the I,* and *the other.* Self-victimizing occurs when the self is perceived as fully differentiated from its social surroundings: it is relatively and subjectively inactive, isolated and is being treated unfavorably. The victimized self lacks *social control* and the person experiences a subjective estrangement from the rest of the social world, and in particular *inhibition, regression* and *isolation.* Self-victimizing seems to contribute not only to the decreased level of social and psychological well-being of individuals or groups but also to certain socio-cultural phenomenon such as distrust, bystander behavior, pessimism or anomie.

> [...] there is a certain degree of helplessness because now nobody takes care of us, its all men for themselves, but the transition period has been handled pretty badly and I think they still can't get a grip on it, because they have no set script.

Contrary to the victimized self, the *contributing* self is integrated to and actively involved in its natural social

community, experiencing fairness, potency, a possibility for control and a relatively high level of social and personal comfort and satisfaction. These subjective experiences may be noted on the conceptual level such as a social aspect of the *flow experience* (optimal experience, see Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; 1990.)

> [...] this is a private initiative, that by helping others also helps me [...] we started this volunteering scheme, say to organize Kids' Day, or revamp classrooms or donate blood and we were organizing such programs, so I really don't know maybe helping the helpless is also part of it, to be able to help someone in need [...]really, when I see that people are willing to make a difference and do it selflessly, that was a good feeling, to help, that there are people like that.

In general, the emergent theory indicates that that evaluative processes (social situating) affect subjective social well-being (SWB) by the mediating effect of *implicit social control* assessed in the particular situation. The levels of assessed/perceived control will affect well-being and comfort experienced by the person (see the example below).

> [...] for example, my parents did not buy me a microscope, though everyone else had [...] the rich kids went to that school and Zsolnay method, I did not really feel good there, then I transferred and there I felt good, I still have my friends from there and nobody became a crook, so everyone can become someone, but there it was different, we never had a cent, but still had a good time. Because nobody had money.

Apart from shaping civil (dis)satisfaction and (dis)comfort, the operations of cultural patterns bear enormous social relevance in every society by determining modes of civil contribution and social (in)action. Depending on the social processes in motion, next to self-victimizing various further social strategies of varying levels of social control may be pointed out in a descriptive manner. Cross-cultural, situational and personal differences in the probability of prevalence of these are all emerging from the data, and differences in the levels of subjective, personal and social

satisfaction at each strategy are also present. These strategies or reaction modes differ in their components: *defying* is the reaction mode of the isolated and active citizen, who is discrediting his or her social setting; *protesting* is different from defying in that it involves a grouping up of individuals who are therefore not isolated but connected; *celebrating* is the passive collective behavior of people who experience awe over their circumstances (*awe* is in this framework the opposite extreme of discrediting), *withdrawing* is a reaction mode that involves the isolated and inactive individual to accept his or her circumstances, *complaining* means grouping up but staying inactive while discrediting certain ways of life; *achieving* occurs while self-isolating, self-activating and accepting in the social setting; while *contributing* represents the social aspects of the flow experience. All forms/patterns of social attitudes and action involve gains (e.g. an active role or positive affections) as well as losses (e.g. solitude, negative emotions such as anger, guilt, shame or a lack of contribution) and contribute to the varying levels of subjective well-being.

Self-victimizing: a relative loss of social control and well-being

According to the emerging theory of social control (TSC) the variances in the levels of SWB between individuals, groups and (sub)cultures arise as a consequence of varied implicit evaluations of the levels of *social control* which the self attains in a given social setting. Satisfaction in a social setting is modulated by evaluative and behavioral strategies of the individual to gain and/or to hold on to social control in one's particular environment. From the data, three core dimensions of social control (*activity*, *fairness* and *inclusion*) have emerged. Subjective experiences range from regression through flow to aggression (activity), from inhibition to through integrity to awe (fairness) and from isolation through fit to symbiosis (inclusion.) These implicit subjective experiences and their consequences can be identified with some of the most distinguishable sociocultural patterns or strategies (a possible descriptive typology as follows: *self-victimizing, complaining, defying, withdrawing, protesting, celebrating, achieving and contributing*) of varying levels of

happiness.

The results of the research indicate that psychological and cultural factors predominate in influencing civil satisfaction and contribution over both actual life events or running public affairs, and current economic or political states of the nation. According to results the most relevant modes of mediation between actual events and civil comfort are those culture-specific patterns of social perception, cognition and action, which guide the latent framing of the *self* and the *other* and implicitly direct the interpretation of social/societal situations. This emerged consistency is in line with previous literature (see Mussweiler, Strack, 1999; Mussweiler, Strack, 2000; Mussweiler, Bodenhausen, 2002 on self evaluation and Mead, 1934; Bourdieu, 1972; Bruner, 1990; Giddens, 1984; Goffman, 1959; Kitayama, Markus, 1999, 2003; Markus, Mullally, and Kitayama, 1997; etc on the culturally embedded and socially interrelated self). The most important notion here is that as the participants' experience and narrative reports demonstrated it is impossible to perceive and frame a social event or situation meaningfully without situating the *self* in relation to the particular or generalized *other*. This implicit and uconscius placement (or in other words, a complex and multi-dimensional social comparison) of the self may be called *social situating.* Although previous research (see above) has indicated the significance of the *self* in both cognitive and affective aspects of social functioning, these interdisciplinary concepts have, apart from a few examples, not yet sufficiently pervaded SWB research. The emerging theory highlights the importance of the cultural and inter-relational nature of evaluations on life satisfaction. It also underlines the limitations that previous SWB concepts (Ryff, 1989; Ryff and Keyes, 1995; Diener and Diener, 1995; Diener, Oishi and Lucas, 2003) imply. These concepts consider multiple variables when examining well-being, however, they fail to note that SWB functions are not individual and arbitrary mechanisms but rather consequences of the human existence in a primarily social and cultural 'pond'.

Social situating is the general social or *socio-noetic* process by which people give meaning to their social

surroundings and at the same time define and interpret the self in the given social situation. During everyday social contact the person's own self is experienced not as a finite, stable, steady entity; it is much rather assessed each time through a latent procedure of social placement and as a correlate to the general other or others in the given social setting. Social situating and the placement of the self is realized on three separate parallel dimensions that mark the evaluations and personal experience in each and every social situation: agency, valence and social layout. Social situating results in two, mutually exclusive outcome: *self-differentiating* and *self-accommodating* (achieving the *social flow*). The social noetic process of situating the self occurs implicitly in any instance where the self appears as operating in a social context. The surroundings can be perceived and categorized unconsciously as either similar (self-accomodating) or dissimilar (self-differentiating) with the self on any given dimension of this unconscious comparison. Self-differentiating can be observed in the following utterances:

> […] unlike the colleagues who would now say, wow it was horrible after that because they were afraid to accept tough deadlines, let me repeat: several times we also worked on week-ends.

The differentiated self is *contrasted* to its social surroundings (as opposed to being accommodated), and in this particular sample this is realized by various salient (although implicit and unconscious) subordinate social noetic processes, *self-inactivating*, *discrediting*, *self-isolating, self-accelerating, transcending* and *blending.* The several forms of self-differentiating may inhibit subjective well-being by causing a subjective sense of lost (externalized) control. From a SWB viewpoint, the emerging theory implies that satisfaction with life in this particular cultural setting will be decreased upon the processes of self-evaluation. Deviation from the flow experience (see the expression *flow* used to describe the optimal human experience in Csikszentmihalyi 1988; 1990) will involve the relative loss of self-integrity, experienced as an externalization of social control. In this sense, control is shifted from outside of the self to the other, or, in other words, the self is falling outside the nucleus of

social control. *Self-accomodating* here stands as flow understood in the social context. Each of these processes bring about a decrease by reducing the level of subjectively experienced control over a given social situation.

Self-inactivating is the social noetic process by which the self is differentiated from others in the social setting on the dimension of agency. The inactivated self is framed as less powerful, competent, responsible, capable or active than the other or others in a particular situation. Incidnts of self-inactivating could be observed bot hon the personal level and in evaluations of the nation's affairs.

> […] I can't do the same with a simple checking account because I have to accept what they tell me. Even if I know how the bank is stealing from me, or how they are trying to trick me, I can't do anything about it, I have no power.

Note the contrary process, *self-activating* in the following incident:

> […] it would be very cool when you have a kid and you can devote all your time to him and take care of him and teach him, because that's the best part that you teach him stuff, you decide how he will turn out or, at least you try to give everything you know to him, everything that's good in your life, your knowledge or whatever, your experience and I would really like to do this already.

Self-accelerating, on the other hand comes with a massive push the person experiences as drive."[…] the helplessness, ignorance, indifference, lameness of people these all can really piss me off, just pump the adrenalin in my brain."

Discrediting is the social noetic process by which the self is differentiated from others in the social setting on the dimension of valence. Discrediting occurs when the social situation of the self is viewed as less favorable, just or fair than that of the other or others in a particular situation, inhibiting possibilities for acceptance of a given social circumstance and reducing experienced personal control.„*[…]*

only because miserable idiots like these are leading this country." The contrary process, *acceptance* enhances feelings of control and increases satisfaction:

> […] well, thanks God I always have been able to change workplaces and make more money than before and so it became more transparent to me that OMG how much I have to pay for taxes and of course it's unjust that I also have to pay the Solidarity Tax or whatever but after all it doesn't set me back too much, because I can afford it, and then rather me than someone who gets minimal wage.

Whereas the opposite extreme on the dimension of fairness is *transcending* – the person is overwhelmed to experience the fairness of a higher power.

Self-isolating is the social noetic process by which the self is differentiated from others in the social setting on the dimension of social layout. The isolated self is framed as less embedded or more isolated than the other or others in a particular situation. Many Hungarians experience isolation if not in physical but rather in social or in functional terms:

> […] it would be great to belong to a community where I can talk about this, or make it happen, where I can voice my opinion to someone, and that, maybe even get someone to listen to what I have to say.

When instead of subjective isolation, a feeling of connectedness is experienced, SWB is higher among participants: „[…] it really made me very happy, that I met people who make me so…, with whom I could really bond, have this feeling of unity, of togetherness." A sense of symbiosis, however means that the self is blending into its surroundings, in which the self loses its autonomy.

Discussion

> Subjective well-being (SWB) refers to how people evaluate their lives […]. A person's evaluation of his or her life may be in the form of cognitions [or] in the form of affect. Thus, a person is said to have high SWB if she or he experiences life satisfaction and frequent joy, and only infrequently experience unpleasant

emotions such as sadness and anger. Contrariwise, a person is said to have low SWB if he or she is dissatisfied with life, experiences little joy and affection, and frequently feels negative emotions such as anger or anxiety. The cognitive and affective components of SWB are highly interrelated, and only recently are we beginning to understand the relations between various types of SWB" (Diener, et al. 1997, p.25.)

The above quote demonstrates the main premises behind and the most important characteristics of SWB research in the previous decades in social psychology. SWB is, by these assumptions primarily individualistic, static, personality-based and comprising of two types of subjective and evaluative experiences: affections and cognitive judgments. This perspective of SWB however, has its limitations when applied in the social and cultural context.

The research introduced in this paper was aimed at discovering social psychological causes and mechanisms behind unusually low levels of civil and personal satisfaction, civil comfort as well as low levels of social and subjective well-being in Hungary. Such anomalies have been experienced in the Hungarian society continually since the change of the political system two decades ago. A cultural psychological approach was taken to reveal the main social psychological processes that govern the development and endurance of these problems (Sági, 2002; Molnár and Kapitány, 2007; Tóth, 2009) apart from the structural, political, historical, economical factors (Spéder and Kapitány, 2002).

Throughout the last two decades, both public and scientific discourse in post-communist Hungary (along with some other such/post-communist societies) have conceptualized certain characteristics of the cultural and social scene as disadvantageous socio-cultural and/or system-based traits such as decreasing levels of tolerance (Hunyady, 2008); dramatic and disillusioned tone of public discourse (Nádas, 2010); or a lack of stable democratic institutional background (Hankiss, 1999.) Research also highlighted such problems as high levels of depression and other affective disorders and a high rate of suicide attempts

(Kopp, 2008), low indicators of public mood (Sági, 2002; Kopp, 2008), high levels of alcoholism and other depression related drug abuse (Széll, 2007; Kopp, 2008), or a high occurrence of chronic disease (Kopp, 2008). Other problems are: distrust in both the political and civil sphere and in interpersonal relations (Tóth, 2009; Skrabski and Kopp, 2008); anomie and a conforming attitude towards both small and large-scale corruption (Tóth, 2009); concerning moral dysfunctions (Spéder and Kapitány, 2002); as well as dissatisfaction and forthright violence (Sági, 2002). However, so far psychological and social psychological reasons in these matters have only been considered to a limited extent. Public and scientific discourse, on the other hand have pointed out the salience of complaining, distrust, irrational expectations, anomie, perceived loss of morality and pessimism, which apart from being overall, macro-level problems, tend to influence people's everyday lives and reduce the levels of positive affect and both personal and social subjective well-being (Csepeli, 2008; Kopp, 2008; Skrabski and Kopp, 2008; Hunyady, 2008).

Scientific research behind subjective well-being has been developing fast, both in body and scope, in the last few decades. SWB has been conceptualized previously in many ways, from hedonic quality of experience to experiences in personal growth; however, most commonly used indicators of SWB still remain the global life satisfaction and evaluation of personal happiness (Kahneman and Krueger, 2006). Cultural differences shown by general indicators of SWB have been pointed out earlier, just as personal differences in experiencing relative satisfaction with life (Diener, Oishi, and Lucas, 2003; Diener and Diener, 1995). Personal SWB is, according to previous results, influenced by certain personality traits such as neuroticism and extraversion, as well as situational, demographic, institutional, environmental, and economical factors (van Hoorn, 2007). So far, the main assumptions established among social psychologists are that *positive subjective well-being* is due to certain demographic factors, such as (Lee, Seccombe, and Shehan, 1991; Mastekaasa, 1991; Gohm, Darlington, Diener, and Oishi, 1997; Diener, 1995; Diener, Sandvik, Seidlitz, and Diener, 1993). According to previous research, SWB is an important

contributor to mental health (Diener and Diener, 1996); can be altered by one's worldviews (Larsen, Diener, and Croponzano, 1987); is largely culture-dependent (Diener, Diener, and Diener, 1995; Suh, Diener, Oishi, and Triandis, 1997.) SWB is, furthermore, in line with pleasant and unpleasant affect; may have a strong genetic basis, (Lykken and Tellegen, 1996; Tellegen, Lykken, Bouchard, Wilcox, Segal, and Rich, 1988; Kagan, 1994; Costa, McCrae, and Zonderman, 1987); may change considerably with significant life events but remains relatively stable over the course of time (Suh, Diener, and Fujita, 1996.) It is also related to social comparison (Taylor, Wood, and Lichtman, 1983; Will, 1981; Wood, Taylor, and Lichtman, 1985); and mediated through personality effects, via variables such as optimism, self-esteem, neuroticism and extraversion (Diener, Sandvik, Pavot, and Fujita, 1992; Costa and McCrae, 1980; McCrae and Costa, 1985).

Previous research also shows that the SWB of a nation can be determined by subjective (social and psychological) background factors in particular, apart from hard data in a country such as GDP, and some other features expressible in numbers to a lesser extent such as sociological and political factors and other cultural aspects. There is, furthermore an expansion in the concept of subjective well being, with the notion of psychological well-being added to the picture (Ryff, 1989; Ryff and Keyes, 1995). Ryff and fellow scientists promote a more complex framework of human well-being that encompasses 6 distinct dimensions of wellness (Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life, Self-Acceptance). However, there seems to be a striking lack in the literature of examination of social well-being – all SWB and PWB concepts seem to focus merely on the individual side of the human. What is the case, when we examine subjective social well-being?

Conclusion

An extended view and a complex framework of SWB and happiness were introduced in the paper. When examined from a systemic point of view, SWB turns out to be primarily a social function, which is determined mostly by social psychological factors. Such factors include implicit processes

by which we socially situate and frame our own selves and the general or particular other in a given social/societal situation. These processes, namely *social situating* (the two basic social processes uncovered in the research were *self-differentiating* and its antagonism, *self-accommodating*) and an involuntary and unconscious assessment of control guide our social perception, cognition and behavior. These are also the main background factors that guide human happiness and are in correlation with affective evaluations and feelings of people in a certain cultural setting. Personal dissatisfaction arise when the person experiences his or her self as outside of the natural social nucleus causing a weakening or loss in assessed control and a lack of personal comfort. Patterns of self-situating can determine both personal as well as cultural choices and tendencies influencing attitudes, worldview and behavior.

The expanded three-dimensional model of civil satisfaction, comfort and contribution described above is parallel to previous concepts and research evidence both in happiness research and in studies on cross-cultural differences. However, further examination of the relationship of these concepts to other previously discovered notions such as individualism and collectivism, self-esteem, self-regard, purpose in life, community service, personal goals and personal evaluation of control over life events would prove useful. Apart from shaping social situations *self-differentiating* may also play an important role in more broad, societal (historical even) incidents and processes, and their actual real-life operation also deserve a further detailed look (e.g. how are mistrust and isolation connected; how can an executive activate his or her listeners; which are the most striking health consequences of differentiating the self in the long run, and so on). Less distant aims for further research are to operationalize the above-introduced concepts and to perform correlation examinations to show their convergence to previous indicators of subjective well-being.

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Working the System: School Counselors Aligning to Advantage

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Abstract

This study, based in the substantive area of school counselors, was conducted using classical grounded theory, an inductive, systemic method of data collection and analysis. The core variable, or the school counselors' main concern and how they were resolving it, emerged as the need to develop and implement a comprehensive program within the complex ecology of a school. *Working the system: Aligning to advantage* was discovered to be the school counselors' resolving process. The data revealed that as school counselors *work the system*, they engage in strategic actions of *aligning to advantage* themselves, others, and/or the overall system. *Working the system* comprises three stages: *accessing*, *engaging*, and *sustaining*, each associated with aligning behaviors, which have *personal*, *interpersonal*, and *structural* dimensions. The theory is useful to school counselors and other leaders engaged in systemic change in complex ecological systems.

Keywords: alignments, systems, leadership, school counselors

Introduction

In the past few years, the profession of school counseling has undergone a substantial transformation, culminating in the development of a unified program model (American School Counselor Association (ASCA), 2005; Stone & Dahir, 2006). School counselors, no longer focused solely on the provision of mental health services to a select group of students in need, are now trained to develop and implement comprehensive programs that align with the educational mission of the school and meet the developmental needs of all students. They are expected to take a leadership role in school reform efforts, work collaboratively to remove systemic barriers to achievement (ASCA, 2005; Educational Trust, 2003), and address the personal/social, academic, and societal challenges that impede learning (Brown & Trusty,

2005). Transformative changes have occurred as school counselors move from a position model to a program focus (Gysbers & Henderson, 2005; Stone & Dahir, 2006) and adopt a systems perspective (ASCA, 2005). Consequently, many school counselors struggle to understand their role and function within the school system. The purpose of a grounded theory study is to discover a theory that explains the main concern faced by people in a substantive area, and how they are attempting to resolve this concern (Glaser, 1978, 1998). The purpose of this particular study was to understand the main concern of school counselors as they attempted to meet the aforementioned demands and obligations within the complex ecology of school systems amidst challenging times.

Methodology

Grounded theorists seek to develop a theory that explains a pattern of behavior "which is relevant and problematic for those involved" (Glaser, 1978, p. 93). This emerging theory is one of related abstract concepts, not descriptions of people, incidents, or results (Glaser, 1978, 2002). Starting with as few preconceptions as "humanly possible" (Simmons, 2008, p. 13), researchers systematically follow the data from the first data source, and, through theoretical sampling, decide where to go next to retrieve additional data, and see "what is there and emerges" (Glaser, 1998, p. 4). As the interrelatedness of concepts takes shape, grounded theory researchers discover, and then expand, a core variable that explains the main problem that people in a substantive area are facing and how they are attempting to resolve this concern. Researchers must continually ask of the data: First, does it "fit?" (Glaser, 1978, p. 4). Do the concepts derive directly from the data and skillfully reveal patterns? Second, does it "work?" (Glaser, 1998, p. 4). Do the concepts adequately explain the main concern of the participants and their resolving process, and third, does it have "relevance" (Glaser, 1978, p. 5), thereby provoking "grab" (Glaser, 1998, p. 18) because it is accurate and meaningful? Finally, does it have "modifiability" (Glaser, 1978, p. 5; 1998, p. 19)? In addition, grounded theorists seek "conceptual generality, not unit generality" (Glaser, 1998, p. 125), and, so, while starting in one substantive area, they frequently discover a basic social process that is applicable to

many different units and fields, creating a theory that has "transcending" (Glaser, 1978, p. 6) power, and is relevant to people in many different areas and walks of life. In a classical grounded theory study, the methodology consists of: 1) preparation to enter the field, 2) data collection, 3) theoretical sampling, 4) constant comparative analysis (Glaser, 1965), including substantive and theoretical coding, 5) memoing, 6) literature integration, 7) conceptual sorting of memos, 8) creation of a theoretical outline, and 9) writing up the theory (Glaser, 1978; Simmons, n.d.).

School counselors were the primary participants interviewed in this study. Six school counselors, from different geographic areas and with varying years of experience were interviewed, at length, in person, by phone, and online, before the core variable was discovered. Glaser (1978) asserted that once a core variable has emerged, the grounded theory researcher is free to use his or her theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1978) to sample other participants outside the substantive area, if the data suggest this would be useful. As patterns became evident, other participants working in different but similarly complex ecological systems, such as hospitals and non-profit boards, were also interviewed for this study. As "all is data" (Glaser, 1998, p. 8), in addition to interviews, I also used direct observations, records, literature, print and media sources as data for analysis. The rich data collected in this study from a variety of sources allowed for theoretical saturating of the codes, and the constant comparison of incidents, ideas, and properties of these concepts.

The core variable: Working the system

As the role of the school counselor has evolved in both theory and practice to be one of leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change (ASCA, 2005; Stone & Dahir, 2006; DeVoss & Andrews, 2006), the data revealed that the search for a way to accomplish these various and interconnected challenges was found to be the predominant concern for school counselors. Through theoretical sampling and constant comparative analysis, *working the system* was discovered to be the core variable, the *"what,"* or the main

concern of school counselors, who need to execute a comprehensive school counseling program within the multifaceted surround of a school system. No matter what the struggles faced by these counselors, be they role ambiguity, job losses and insecurity, high case loads, crisis management, or the obligation to implement complex and innovative program components, the overarching problem emerged as one of needing to *work the system* in myriad and interlocking ways to win support from others, overcome obstacles, and produce desired outcomes. *Working the system* was, notably, an "in vivo" (Glaser, 2002, sect. 3) concept, meaning that this phrase was used by some participants in the study to explain what they felt they were doing. Once the core variable was discovered, then, through selective coding and additional theoretical sampling, the process of "*how*" counselors resolved this main concern of *working the system* became apparent. The data showed that counselors were able to *work the system* through *aligning* in order to advantage others, to influence outcomes, and, importantly, to protect or enhance their own status.

> *Aligning to advantage: Creating a mechanism for effectively working the system*

The overall goal for individuals who *work the system* is to influence conditions to afford themselves and others the opportunity for advantaging or flourishing. Three dimensions of advantaging emerged in the data analysis. These were 1) personal advantaging, where one attempts to advance and promote oneself, although, in my data, not at the expense of others; 2) interpersonal advantaging, where one seeks connection, in an effort to assist, support, and further self and others; and 3) structural advantaging, where one works to advocate for, improve, and promote the system(s) of which one is a part. In personal advantaging, for example, one might be gaining requisite knowledge, developing professional expertise, protecting one's job, or enhancing one's career. In interpersonal advantaging, one might be developing relationships that further mutual goals, supporting clients' and colleagues' growth, or assisting others in overcoming obstacles. People advantaging on a systemic level might develop programs, resources, tools, and strategies to benefit

the organization and its clients, to advocate for social justice, or to break down barriers that prevent optimum client outcomes or organizational effectiveness. *Aligning to advantage* was the mechanism used to accomplish these various goals and pursue the advantaging strategies. The data show that *alignments* are the vehicles that drive the three goals of advantaging within the three stages of the *working the system* process. These stages and their alignments will be discussed in the following sections.

The stages of working the system and needed alignments

Working the system is a basic social process that consists of three stages: *accessing*, *engaging*, and *sustaining*. Each of these stages is associated with *personal*, *interpersonal*, and *structural* alignments. As stated earlier, all stages of working the system are concerned with advantaging, or the balanced promoting of self, clients, colleagues, constituencies, and programs to maximum benefit of all. I will first briefly discuss the properties of alignments and the interplay of the three stages and their alignments. Then, I discuss each of the three stages of working the system and how the alignments support the process.

The properties of alignments

Aligning behavior is the principal strategy, within each of the three stages, to accomplish the multiple goals of *working the system* to advantage. In addition to its being a potent tactic for working the system, aligning is also a motivator for and a consequence of *working the system*. Many school counselors choose to work in and on systems that satisfy their interpersonal alignment needs. For many school counselors in this study, interpersonal alignments were the most important reasons for *working the system*. Not only did participants feel that interpersonal aligning advantaged others, but they felt sustained and enriched by their relationships, which, in turn, allowed them to continue their efforts at *working the system.* Aligning was found to also be a consequence of *working the system*, because the new conditions established by successfully *working the system* afforded fresh opportunities for school counselors to deepen

their focus, build more potent relationships, and create useful structures to support their work (Stillman, 2007).

The interplay of stages and alignments

The conditions affecting the particular school system and the specific goals of school counselors *working the system* determine which stage school counselors are in and which alignments might be most useful. For instance, a student considering a school counseling career, therefore in the accessing stage, would need to use personal aligning to harness his or her personal goals and bring them into line with professional requirements and mission. An intern applying for a school counseling position or a counselor entering a new school system, also would be in the accessing stage, and would need to expend more effort on personal and interpersonal aligning than someone in the engaging stage, who already had connections to the district's powerful allies and resources, had demonstrated expertise and dependability, and had earned trust. A school counselor who has already established solid interpersonal alliances, solid programming, and a good track record of outcomes might be involved in the sustaining stage, interested in creating sustainable structural alignments to effect systemic change. In each stage, personal, interpersonal, and structural alignments are used, but the emphasis varies by conditions and context. Since the process is recursive, a school counselor may be accessing one new issue within the school system, engaging in a different one, and sustaining a third. The following sections describe, in more detail, the same three alignments within each of the three stages of *working the system*.

The accessing stage

In the accessing stage, school counselors are approaching a system or an aspect of a system for the first time. They might, for example, be looking for a new job or might be in the first years of their position. Accessing the system is also required whenever one begins a new assignment or project, regardless of years of tenure. In the accessing stage school counselors make important alignments when they seek to enter a new system or community, or, similarly, when they

encounter new conditions, such as a new school year, new building, new students, new teachers, or a new administration. In accessing, as in all three stages, people are involved in a combination of personal, interpersonal, and structural aligning.

Personal aligning in the accessing stage

When accessing a new system, school counselors usually engage first in personal alignments. They often use self-reflection and envisioning, examining and reflecting on their evolving needs, values, passions, and abilities, and how those coincide with the school system's needs. They may choose battles or even specific sub-systems within which to invest and work. School counselors align personally by accessing specific knowledge and skills needed to meet their goals, including gaining counseling and consultation proficiency and understanding the type of system, hierarchies, lines of authority, and favored types of communication used in the different subsystems of which they are or want to be a part. They frequently need to invest extra time and resources, often in the form of education and professional development to best enter the system of their choice. Many school counselors deliberate for a long time over which level (elementary, middle, or high school) they prefer to work in. Skill diversification is usually required to align properly with a given system in the accessing stage. In order to best access and enter a system or one of its parts, school counselors also need to align their unique personality, their personal mission, and their specific goals with that of the profession, the school counselors' national association, the school, and school district. Personal aligning, at the accessing stage, if often aided by interpersonal aligning, as school counselors look to others for direction, inspiration, modeling, and coaching.

Interpersonal aligning in the accessing stage

When accessing the system, school counselors always engage in interpersonal alignments, where they create a network of working relationships, extending from other school counselors, teachers, parents, and students, to the principal, administrative assistants, and custodians. Strategies to interpersonally align at the accessing stage include making

oneself easily accessible, assisting, supporting, and strengthening others, demonstrating responsiveness, expertise, and dependability, and making oneself appear valuable and even indispensable. Pursuing interpersonal alignments in the accessing stage, school counselors strategically place themselves in sight, face to face or virtually, developing and maintaining high visibility in order to "get business," as one participant noted. During interpersonal accessing, school counselors actively learn from others and engage in mentoring and coaching, both of others and for themselves. Interpersonal aligning, when successfully accomplished, along with personal and structural components, leads counselors quickly to the engaging stage.

Structural aligning in the accessing stage

Structural alignments in the accessing stage include defining technology use, time management, scheduling, public relations, and making programmatic decisions, such as deciding if and how to use the ASCA National Model (2005), which is the National Association's template for developing comprehensive school counseling programs. The structural accessing strengthens image and visibility, benefits communication, and enables the school counseling work to proceed in earnest. Structural accessing is aided by interpersonal aligning, as others, both within the school system and elsewhere, often provide suggestions, advice, and practical assistance to a newly minted counselor, or anyone entering a new system or facing a new challenge.

The engaging stage

As in the accessing stage, in the engaging stage, school counselors also use personal, interpersonal, and structural alignments and build on the alignments started during the accessing stage. During the engaging stage, school counselors are actively involved in developing, implementing, and evaluating their comprehensive programs, advocating for client needs, and using their expertise and leadership competencies to meet their long and short-range goals, as well as protect their often vulnerable positions. Anyone in the engaging stage of a complex project or advocacy effort must rally their personal commitment and zeal, accumulate

program resources, and connect with would-be supporters, whether working a room, working a crowd, or, in this theory, *working a system*. The engaging stage consists of alignments wherein school counselors, who are comfortably accessing the system, are now actively and rigorously pursuing their personal, interpersonal, and programmatic objectives.

Personal aligning in the engaging stage

When school counselors personally align at this stage, they clarify their purpose, prioritize, focus, make decisions, and demonstrate assertiveness. Following the previous stage's initiation to the system, in the engaging stage, they professionalize and develop the personal dispositions and capabilities needed for leadership (DeVoss & Andrews, 2006), which become especially necessary to get the job done. Flexibility is a crucial personal engaging alignment for accomplishing one's goals (Costa & Garmston, 2002; Covey, 2004; Hatch, 2006). At this stage, school counselors must not only have an action plan going in, but also must be flexible enough to align with what is needed or demanded in the system in order to be able to work it most effectively. Additional personal engaging strategies include juggling tasks and roles, stretching beyond one's comfort zone, working around obstacles, and diversifying one's skills, knowledge, and contacts.

Interpersonal aligning in the engaging stage

When school counselors align themselves interpersonally, they communicate, nurture, provide feedback, develop and invest in others, advocate, persuade, and collaborate. Gaining trust and support are critical aspects of this stage of alignments, which sometime requires "hooking" (Stillman, 2007, p. 94) principals, colleagues, and clients, before the systemic work of advantaging can be done. Socializing was seen as a key investment in the interpersonal engaging stage, in order to "cultivate relationships" (Simmons, 1993, p. 4) needed for collaboration. Another way to cultivate relationships was found to be through brokering knowledge and assistance. For example, school counselors might support a teacher through empathy or expert handling of a student's issues, and this action strengthens the counselor's

relationship with the teacher and allows the counselor to make a deposit in a "relationship bank account" (Covey, 1998, p. 131) to be drawn upon at a later time. One school counseling supervisor said she spends her day, "insinuating" herself, wherever and with whomever she can, so she is prepared to leverage her relationships when needed for advantaging.

Structural aligning in the engaging stage

Structural aligning is a powerful practice, in the engaging stage, which involves developing processes**,** programs, and initiatives, and connecting subsystems and resources. Thus, school counselors build community, develop partnerships, educate, evaluate, and invest in systems. Many structural tools used by counselors, such as progress reports, curriculum plans, "closing the gap" action plans (ASCA, 2004); data analysis templates and other accountability measures are available to help work a school counseling system during the engaging stage. Structural aligning might also be seen in such varied public relations measures such as National School Counseling week, annual presentations to school boards, monthly newsletters, and a school counseling website. Structural aligning in the engaging stage is essential to support program development in the four obligatory domains of service delivery: responsive services, individual planning, guidance curriculum, and system support (ASCA, 2005). The data demonstrated that school counselors spent much time and effort in the details of developing these interrelated structural components of service delivery, in order to impact and advantage themselves and therefore their ability to make a difference with their constituencies: students, parents, teachers, and the system as a whole.

The sustaining stage

The final stage, sustaining, includes alignments geared to making the goals of *working the system*, or the three-tiered advantaging, last, as well as ensuring that one's own sustainability within the system is made possible. As part of the *working the system* process, the data revealed that school counselors feel the need to sustain their work, in the same

domains of the personal, interpersonal, and systemic alignments. Many school districts faced with budget cuts are having to eliminate school counseling positions, and school counselors must work hard to maintain their focus, relationships, and programs, while stress levels are high (McCarthy, Van Horn Kerne, Calfa, Lambert, & Guzman, 2010). In the sustaining stage, school counselors are equally concerned with their own long-term personal alignment and growth as school counselors, as well as their interest in preserving long-standing relationships, helping build capacity in others, and insuring their programs will be maintained for the future.

Personal aligning in the sustaining stage

In personal aligning during the sustaining stage, school counselors persist in overcoming newly arisen obstacles and continue to feel an authentic passion for the work. Transitioning is often necessary, however, for dealing with change so that one's goals and abilities for *working the system* are not disrupted, although they may re-emerge in a new system, position, or challenge. Many school counselors engage in ongoing professional development, attend state and national conferences, and pursue advanced degrees to maintain and enhance their skills for same positions or for new challenges such as administration or counselor education. School counselors and other participants spoke of the need to continue to feel an authentic joy and passion for their work.

Interpersonal aligning in the sustaining stage

Like the old adage about teaching a person to fish instead of just providing a fish, in interpersonal sustaining, school counselors focus on providing autonomy, self-direction, and choice to constituents, thereby developing adaptive capacities for them to be able to "work the system" for themselves. As Stone (2005) wrote, "self-awareness, autonomy, and independence are watchwords for school counselors who value their role in helping students move toward functioning, self-directed adults" (para. 3). This aspect of interpersonal aligning through supporting autonomy is at the core of school counselor ethical standards, which state that counselors have

an obligation to move students toward self-direction and self-development. School counselors also consider their work with parents to be crucial for the long-term impact on their students, and understand that making collaborative alignments with parents is critical for supporting students' sustained positive outcomes. At the same time, in interpersonal aligning in the sustaining stage, school counselors, themselves, continue to align with peers—in order to maintain their energy to work the system in order to get results for students. People who interpersonally align in the sustaining stage, connect to other people and groups, sometimes within and often outside the system, sometimes branching out, such as changing levels or schools, becoming counselor educators, or serving on school counseling association boards. The focus is always on helping to sustain their own interest, while supporting the autonomy and development of others. School counselors at the sustaining stage find that the directive for collaboration and teaming (ASCA, 2005) in accomplishing the systemic program goals is of paramount importance at this sustaining stage.

Structural aligning in the sustaining stage

In structural aligning in the sustaining stage, school counselors find resources for ongoing projects, as well as investigate diversification and program flexibility, which allow them and the school counseling programs to sustain for the long-term. Flexibility and adaptability are needed in the sustaining stage, to nourish one's program during organizational change and to be "comfortable with the ambiguities of organizational life" (Goleman, 1998, p. 254). School counselors often use the aforementioned accountability tools as additional structural sustaining efforts. Technology is a useful structural tool that is utilized in sustaining alignments to help extend the reach of the program and deliver ongoing services in a changing environment. Sustaining alignments are used for the long term "institutionalization of an innovation" (ASCA, 2004, p. 4), such as a comprehensive school counseling program, and for permanent advantaging and removal of barriers to academic and life success for clients within the system.

Discussion

Several grounded theory researchers have explored the area of school counseling (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Brott & Meyers, 1999) however, what distinguishes this study is that it is the only classical grounded theory (Simmons, 2008) study in the substantive area of school counselors. As distinct from a descriptive study where the researcher talks about individual events, elicits descriptive themes, and gives participants "a voice," (Glaser, 2002, Sect. 3) the data from this study was studied using constant comparative analysis to reveal the core variable and the theoretical relationships between incidents, between incidents and generated concepts, and between concepts and their properties. The data revealed complex and abstract processes at work as people endeavor to accomplish their vital goals within a system. The analysis further demonstrated the interrelated patterns within systems, where personal, interpersonal, and structural alignments intertwine and coalesce in the service of resolving the main concern, perpetuating a workable plan to advantage self, others, and the organization.

As the study unveiled conceptual properties that capture a behavioral pattern evident when people work their respective systems, the study is useful not just for school counselors, but also for others working in complex organizations. As is required in a classical grounded theory study, the results, while fitting the realm of school counselors, also transcend the substantive area, and are thus "abstract of time, place, and people" (Glaser, 2002, Sect. 3). Benefits of this study may be of use to scholars studying educational leadership (DeVoss & Andrews, 2006, Elias, O'Brien, & Weissberg, 2006; Patti & Tobin, 2003); emotional intelligence (Druskat, Mount, & Sala, 2005; Goleman, 1995; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Mayer & Salovey, 1997); systems thinking (Laszlo, Gregory, & Raffanti, 2006; Stillman, 2006; Vander Linden, 2006); curriculum and instruction (Palloff & Pratt, 2005), advocacy (Chears, 2008; Kiai, 2007), working relationships (Glaser, 2010; Simmons, 1993), and systemic change (Maddy, 2007; Raffanti, 2005).

Many directions for further research can be derived from

this grounded theory study. Research related to the theory of *working the system* might be carried out through studies focusing on particular dimensions, stages, and strategic processes such as accessing a system, interpersonal aligning, advocating, community building, or authenticating for sustainability. While staying open to the discovery of new variables, researchers who are starting off with specific concepts in the theory of *working the system* have many directions in which to focus their attention, furthering knowledge of how to effect change in complex ecological systems. For example, Cicero (2010), in her phenomenological study of school counseling supervisors' leadership awareness, acknowledged the power of the *working the system* theory in her own work. Other researchers in diverse fields have suggested to me that the core variable, *working the system,* helps sensitize them to processes in their own research areas or systems, such as parents battling school policies or young officer candidates entering a military training program. As stated previously, researchers studying any problems in organizational or educational systems can benefit from attention to the stages and dimensions of *working the system.*

One can also infer many implications for practice, for school counselors and for all those endeavoring to succeed in any given organizational system. School counselors face numerous challenges as they strive to do their best work while implementing sustainable comprehensive school counseling programs. While guidance is available for school counselors on the elements and themes of the National Model (ASCA, 2005), the theory of *working the system* may assist school counselors in identifying the personal, interpersonal, and structural attitudes and values they need to implement it, as well as the alignments they must seek. The theory may assist school counselors in identifying what stage of the process they are in and what alignments they might need to strengthen in order to meet their goals. All school counselors, as well as most people in organizations must be prepared to encounter obstacles to successfully *working the system* of their school or organization. This study may help them to identify their current alignments, or what they are already doing well, and see areas where they could grow by

strengthening alignments detailed in this study.

As stated before, the theory of *working the system* fits the substantive area of school counselors but does not reside there. When the alignments discovered in *working the system* are used strategically and in concert with each other, any system and its stakeholders are advantaged, and results are sustainable. I have used concepts from this theory, not only in presentations to school counselors, but also to coach my own doctoral students, who are diligently working multiple interlocking systems, such as their dissertations, their committees, their work, their families, and their various institutions. When all people who are *working the system* are personally aligned with their work and see the positive outcomes of their actions, and when they feel connected to others and find meaning in what they do, they are personally advantaged and find they can sustain their work. When people feel personally and interpersonally aligned, they also have more motivation and attention for creating structural alignments. These structural alignments, in turn, may present important tools for connecting with others, using resources strategically, forming partnerships, and building community.

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