- Attending to actions and processes as well as to words
- Delineating the context, scenes, and situations of action carefully
- Recording who did what, when it occurred, why it happened (if you can ascertain the reasons), and *how* it occurred
- Identifying the *conditions* under which specific actions, intentions, and processes emerge or are muted
- Looking for ways to interpret these data
- Focusing on specific words and phrases to which participants seem to attribute particular meaning
- Finding taken-for-granted and hidden assumptions of various participants; showing how they are revealed through and affect actions.

Grounded Theory in Ethnography

Ethnography means recording the life of a particular group and thus entails sustained participation and observation in their milieu, community, or social world. It means more than participant observation alone because an ethnographic study covers the round of life occurring within the given milieu(x) and often includes supplementary data from documents, diagrams, maps, photographs, and, occasionally, formal interviews and questionnaires.

Participant observers may limit their focus to one aspect of daily life. In contrast, ethnographers seek detailed knowledge of the multiple dimensions of life within the studied milieu and aim to understand members' taken-for-granted assumptions and rules (Ashworth, 1995; Charmaz & Olesen, 1997).

What should an ethnographer study in the field? Whatever is happening there. By remaining open to the setting and the actions and people in it, ethnographers have the opportunity to work from the ground up and to pursue whatever they find to be of the greatest interest.

Research participants allow ethnographers to see their worlds and their actions within them. The goal of much ethnography is to gain an insider's depiction of the studied world. Nonetheless, like other researchers, ethnographers bring their theoretical training and methodological tools to their work. From the research participants' standpoint, the ironic outcome may be an outsider's report (Pollner & Emerson, 2001).

Although standard textbooks call for an open mind and accepting demeanor in the field, ethnographers bring divergent styles to their studies. The research problems they address, the participants they meet, and the constraints they encounter all shape their involvement. In one setting, an ethnographer may find participants eager to tell their personal and collective stories. In another, the ethnographer may remain welcome only if he or she provides a novel presence in the setting. The extent to which ethnographers move from passive observation to full participation depends on the specific study, including its objectives, agreements about access, involvement, reciprocities, and emergent relationships with members. Quite possibly, an ethnographer may become more involved in the scene than anticipated. Similarly, he or she may find this involvement to be of a

different order than expected. As a naïve ethnographer in an institutional care facility, I thought I would be able to slip back to my room and write notes at times during the day. The administrator who had given me permission to live there held quite a different view: institutional life trumped research roles. He insisted that I spend the days–and most evenings–participating in the residents' activities. He informed me, 'Everyone is a therapist here.'

What's basic in a setting depends on participants' positions, actions, and intentions. Actions may defy stated intentions. Different participants have different vantage points–and, sometimes, competing agendas. Do they realize when they hold competing agendas? How do they act on them? When, if ever, does conflict emerge?

If you happened to read fieldnotes of observations in a grounded theory project, you might find that these notes:

- Record individual and collective actions
- Contain full, detailed notes with anecdotes and observations
- Emphasize significant processes occurring in the setting
- Address what participants define as interesting and/or problematic
- Attend to participants' language use
- Place actors and actions in scenes and contexts
- Become progressively focused on key analytic ideas.

From the start, a grounded theory study takes a different form than other types of ethnographies. Grounded theory ethnography gives priority to the studied *phenomenon* or *process*–rather than to a description of a setting. Thus, from the beginnings of their fieldwork, grounded theory ethnographers study what is happening in the setting and make a *conceptual* rendering of these actions. A grounded theory ethnographer likely moves across settings to gain more knowledge of the studied process. Other ethnographic approaches often focus on topics such as kinship networks, religious practices, and the organization of work in a specific community. Subsequently, these ethnographers provide full descriptions of these topics in the studied setting and usually take a more structural than processual approach.

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To the extent that ethnographers treat their topics as separate segments of the studied world or as structures but not processes, completing a grounded theory analysis poses difficulties. Their fieldnotes may describe the topic as a thing, an object, without showing the actions and process that construct it. The ethnographer as well as the participants may take the processes for granted that construct the studied topic or structure.

On another level, consider the relative congruence between your overall research goals and the data you gather and record. Be open to what you have and where it takes you (Atkinson, 1990). Exciting new horizons may appear. Sometimes, however, you may need to expand your access within a setting. If you wish to write about how an organization processes people, you will need

to show how people move through the organization–or are moved through it. Organizational spatial allocations and arrangements may provide telling data. For example, if you want to know when, how, and why staff in a retirement facility assign and reassign residents to spatial areas with different levels of care, you need to do more than discover how residents use social areas such as the television lounge. Certainly residents' use of the lounge may yield telling observations about certain constraints due to the physical setting but provides no information on staff decisions about levels of care.

A potential problem with ethnographic studies is seeing data everywhere and nowhere, gathering everything and nothing. The studied world seems so interesting (and probably is) that the ethnographer tries to master knowing it all. Mountains of unconnected data grow (see also Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) but they do not say much. What follows? Low level description and, if a bit more sophisticated, lists of unintegrated categories. Ethnographers who leave data undigested seldom produce fresh insights and, sometimes, may not even complete their projects, despite years of toil.

Enter grounded theory. Paradoxically, concentrating on a basic social process can help you to gain a more complete picture of the *whole* setting than the former approach common in earlier ethnographic work. Ethnographers can make connections between events by using grounded theory to study processes. A grounded theory emphasis on comparative method leads ethnographers 1) to compare data with data from the *beginning* of the research, not after all the data are collected, 2) to compare data with emerging categories, and 3) to demonstrate relations between concepts and categories. Grounded theory strategies can increase ethnographers' involvement in their *research inquiry*, despite pressures they might face to be full participants in their research settings. In this sense, grounded theory dispels the positivist notion of passive observers who merely absorb their surrounding scenes. Grounded theorists select the scenes they observe and direct their gaze within them. If used with care and thoroughness, grounded theory methods provide systematic guidelines for probing beneath the surface and digging into the scene. These methods help in maintaining control over the research process because they assist the ethnographer in focusing, structuring, and organizing it.

Grounded theory methods move ethnographic research toward theoretical development by raising description to abstract categories and theoretical interpretation. In the past, ethnography suffered from a rigid and artificial separation of data collection and analysis. Grounded theory methods preserve an open-ended approach to studying the empirical world yet add rigor to ethnographic research by building systematic checks into both data collection and analysis. The logic of grounded theory entails going back to data and forward into analysis. Subsequently you return to the field to gather further data and to refine the emerging theoretical framework. This logic aids you in overcoming several ethnographic problems: 1) accusations of uncritically adopting research participants' views, 2) lengthy unfocused forays into the field setting, 3) superficial, random data collection, and 4) reliance on stock disciplinary categories.

Thin, unfocused data may tempt ethnographers to fall back on lifting stock concepts from their disciplinary shelves. Grounded theory prompts taking a

fresh look and creating novel categories and concepts. That is the strength and the core of the method. Moving back and forth between data and analysis also helps you from feeling overwhelmed and to avoid procrastinating (see also, Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Both can happen when researchers collect data without direction.

Current trends toward limited data and 'instant' theorizing[3] have long been associated with grounded theory and now permeate other methods, including ethnography. A competent ethnographic study demands time and commitment. Grounded theory can help you trim excess work but the core tasks still need to be done. Gathering rich ethnographic data means starting by engaging the studied phenomena–get involved!

You can make the most of what you bring to the setting. Novices often bring energy and openness. Some experienced ethnographers may be so imbued with disciplinary ideas and procedures that they have difficulty moving beyond them. Other experienced ethnographers sense areas to pursue without articulating them and, moreover, without being wedded to them. Novices may flounder. A few guidelines can turn floundering into flourishing. Mitchell (in Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001) has found that student ethnographers flourish with a little help. He asks students to study actions and actors and provides the questions below to spark their thinking. You may find several questions that help you to view the events in your research setting. If so, adopt them, but follow what you observe in the setting first. We can use Mitchell's questions to initiate inquiry, not to substitute a formula for it.

- What is the setting of action? When and how does action take place?
- What is going on? What is the overall activity being studied, the relatively long-term behavior about which participants organize themselves? What specific acts comprise this activity?
- What is the distribution of participants over space and time in these locales?
- How are actors [research participants] organized? What organizations effect, oversee, regulate or promote this activity?
- How are members stratified? Who is ostensibly in charge? Does being in charge vary by activity? How is membership achieved and maintained?
- What do actors pay attention to? What is important, preoccupying, critical?
- What do they pointedly ignore that other persons might pay attention to?
- What symbols do actors invoke to understand their worlds, the participants and processes within them, and the objects and events they encounter? What names do they attach to objects, events, persons, roles, settings, equipment?
- What practices, skills, strategems, methods of operation do actors employ?
- Which theories, motives, excuses, justifications or other explanations do actors use in accounting for their participation? How do they explain to each other, not to outside investigators, what they do and why they do it?
- What goals do actors seek? When, from their perspective, is an act well or poorly done? How do they judge action–by what standards, developed and applied by whom?
- What rewards do various actors gain from their participation?[4] (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001, p. 163)

An ethnographer may invoke such questions when learning about context and content, meaning and action, structures and actors. Grounded theory can expedite ethnographers' delving into problematic topics that emerge in the field. A grounded theory strategy: Seek data, describe observed events, answer fundamental questions about what is happening, then develop theoretical categories to understand it. This approach also remedies weaknesses in grounded theory studies, especially those that rely on single accounts given to field investigators. How people explain their actions to each other may not resemble their statements to an interviewer. Moreover, participants' most important explanations may consist of tacit understandings. If so, then participants seldom articulate them out loud among themselves, let alone to non-members.

Understanding derives most directly from the immediacy of our participation in social actors' shared worlds (Prus, 1996). In practical terms, this means the researcher needs to share some experiences, but not necessarily all viewpoints, with those being studied. Bergson states, 'Philosophers agree in making a deep distinction between two ways of knowing a thing. The first implies going all around it, the second entering into it' (Bergson, 1903: 1). The ethnographer's job is to explore the second way. Grounded theory studies often move around an object; these methods generate a map of the object of study from the outside, but may not enter it. Such studies may look at phenomena from a variety of locations and standpoints (see, for example, Glaser & Strauss, 1965, 1968). Yet grounded theory ethnographers can go deep into experience to make an interpretive rendering (see, for example, Baszanger, 1998; Casper, 1998; Timmermans, 1999).

Intensive Interviewing

The Interview Conversation

Intensive interviewing has long been a useful data-gathering method in various types of qualitative research. Most essentially, an interview is a directed conversation (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, 1995); intensive interviewing permits an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience and, thus, is a useful method for interpretive inquiry. Other forms of interviewing, such as informational interviewing, might be indicated for certain grounded theory projects, particularly those with an objectivist cast (but see Hermes, 1995).

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The in-depth nature of an intensive interview fosters eliciting each participant's interpretation of his or her experience. The interviewer seeks to understand the topic and the interview participant has the relevant experiences to shed light on it (see Fontana & Frey, 1994; Seidman, 1997). Thus, the interviewer's questions ask the participant to describe and reflect upon his or her experiences in ways that seldom occur in everyday life. The interviewer is there to listen, to observe with sensitivity, and to encourage