Clarification of the Blurred Boundaries between Grounded Theory and Ethnography: Differences and Similarities

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Abstract

There is confusion among graduate students about how to select the qualitative methodology that best fits their research question. Often this confusion arises in regard to making a choice between a grounded theory methodology and an ethnographic methodology. This difficulty may stem from the fact that these students do not have a clear understanding of the principles upon which to select a particular methodology and / or have limited experience in conducting qualitative research. Addressed in this paper are three questions that will help students make an informed decision about the choice of method. The answers to these questions constitute key elements in the decision-making process about whether to use a grounded theory or an ethnographic methodology.

Keywords: *Ethnography; Grounded Theory; Qualitative Methodology; comparison; nursing*

A Clarification of the Blurred Boundaries between Traditional Grounded Theory and Ethnography

For many graduate students in nursing, the selection of which qualitative methodology to employ to answer their chosen research question is a challenging one (McCaslin & Scott, 2003; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). The primary reason for this challenge is that graduate students may not have a clear understanding of the principles upon which to select a particular methodology (Morse & Niehaus, 2009; Thorne, Kirkham, & MacDonald-Emes, 1997) and / or have limited experience in conducting qualitative research (Cobb & Hoffart, 1999; McCaslin & Scott, 2003).

In this paper we present a comparison of two commonly used methodologies in qualitative research among graduate students in nursing: ethnography and traditional grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Thorne, Kirkham, & MacDonald-Emes, 1997). The intent is to help novice qualitative researchers in graduate programs so that they can identify which of these two methodologies is more appropriate for their study. This will be done by addressing three questions:

1. What are the goals / phenomena of interest for researchers who use these two methodologies?
2. What are the philosophical underpinnings of these methodologies?
3. Are there salient differences and similarities between these methodologies in the remaining steps of the research process?

Prior to answering these three questions, it is important to provide an overview of qualitative methodologies so that a context is laid for answering them.

An Overview of Qualitative Methodologies

Qualitative researchers share a similar goal in that they desire a methodology that allows them to arrive at an understanding of a particular phenomenon from the perspective of those experiencing it (Woodgate, 2000). Boyd (2001) worded this goal more precisely when he wrote that the salient shared purposes of qualitative studies are "instrumentation, illustration, sensitization, and conceptualization" (p. 68). To achieve the goal of instrumentation, qualitative researchers collect in-depth descriptive data about a particular topic that could be subsequently used in a quantitative study for instrument development. To achieve the second purpose of qualitative research indicated by Boyd, that of illustration, the researcher may use one or more qualitative data collection approaches (e.g., in-depth interviews, field notes, and observation) to provide greater understanding of the phenomenon under study. For qualitative researchers, sensitization is achieved when the data obtained from the participants helps the researcher to understand participants' experiences and subsequently assist them to identify appropriate interventions. Boyd's fourth purpose, that of providing a fuller conceptualization of a phenomenon, is illustrated in the richness of theory afforded by the thick description that is evident in studies using a grounded theory methodology.

Although there are numerous qualitative methodologies (e.g., phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, historical, participatory action, and interpretive description (LoBiondo-Wood, Haber,Cameron, & Singh, 2005; Thorne, Kirkham, & MacDonald-Emes, 1997), we have chosen to focus on two specific methodologies, ethnography and grounded theory in this article. The reason for this choice is based on our experience over the past 4 years noticing that many graduate students appear to have difficulty in determining the salient similarities and differences between these two research methodologies, and ultimately, deciding which one would be better to use for a particular study. For example, many graduate students asked the first author why he did not consider doing an ethnographic study given that his research question pertained to understanding smoking behavior among Jordanian psychiatric nurses. His response to their question was stimulus for this paper.

What are the Goals/Phenomena of Interest for Researchers who use these Two Methodologies?

The principal goal of grounded theorists and ethnographic researchers is to conduct an in-depth study about the phenomenon as it occurs normally in real life (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). Traditional grounded theorists and ethnographic researchers have a broad scope in that their aim is to understand events, behaviors, and the cultural meanings human beings in a specific culture use to interpret their experiences (Parse, Coyne, & Smith, 1985). In other words, the ethnographer aims to collect data that describe the meanings, organization, and interpretations of culture (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). For example, Pirner (2006) used an ethnographic methodology to gain insight into the pattern of cultural beliefs, values, attitudes, and meanings among holocaust survivors who voluntarily decided to enter a retirement home. As Morse (2001a) has implied, one can use aspects of an ethnographic method in a grounded theory study. For example, Morse discussed a grounded theory study that she did with another researcher to investigate how older Chinese immigrants go about seeking health care. She subsequently developed a research design to make the findings a culturally-sensitive grounded theory.

Despite the similarities between these two research methodologies, there are some primary differences. Whereas the grounded theorist aims to generate theory that describes basic psychosocial

phenomena and to understand how human beings use social interaction to define their reality (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hutchinson, 1986), the ethnographers' primary goal is to provide a thick description of the cultural phenomenon under study (see subsequent section). The following sections contain an overview of several studies that illustrate salient differences between these two methodologies beginning with the grounded theory methodology.

Grounded Theory Methodology

The product of traditional grounded theory methodology is an abstract, substantive, mid-range theory that focuses on process, and has a core category that connects the stages of theory together (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For example, Thannhauser (2009) used a grounded theory methodology to gain an understanding of the psychosocial experiences of adolescents who were diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. She found that the experience involved grief and relationship dynamics. More specifically, Thannhauser concluded that peer relationships "play both direct and indirect roles in the grief experience and subsequent psychosocial development" (p. 770**)** of adolescents with multiple sclerosis**.**

A second example of grounded theory methodology was provided by Walsh and Horenczyk (2001) who used this methodology to investigate the process of immigration of young immigrants to Israel from English-speaking countries. These researchers reported that the core category (the basic social process) that made a successful immigration process was "the self need". That is, immigrants need to re-establish their career and financial competency in the new society and to feel that they are accepted and belong to the new place. A third example of how this methodology has been used was provided by Kim (2004) who wanted to build a grounded theory about the adaptation process of Korean immigrants in the United States. Kim found that immigrants adapted to Western culture after they engaged themselves "in the process of negotiating social, cultural, and generational boundaries" (p. 517).

In summary, the traditional methodology of grounded theory helps the researcher to understand participants' behavior, regardless of their cultural background, from a social interaction perspective. In other words, this methodology is suited to address research questions not only about "change within social groups [which is the focus ethnographers], but [also] understanding the core processes central to that change" (Morse et al., 2009, p. 13).

Ethnography Methodology

For ethnographic researchers, the end products of their studies are dependent upon the purpose of their investigation. We believe that there are three reasons for choosing to do an ethnographic study. First, it helps the researchers to document, understand, and describe alternative realities from the participants' points-of-view, which are salient to understanding the range of events and behaviors of people in a particular culture. Second, it allows these researchers to subsequently to build a substantive grounded theory, should they so desire, "that advances the description and interpretation of cultural observations to a level that yields a description of the basic social-psychological process" (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999, p. 151). In addition to grounded theories based on the empirical data of cultural description, some ethnographers may develop cultural hypotheses that can be tested through quantitative research designs (Germain, 1986). Some ethnographers have been criticized because they leaped from description to abstraction; therefore, they have been advised to focus only on description, compared to analysis or interpretation (Stewart, 1998). In a similar manner, Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) insisted that the methodology of ethnography involves only the development of a thick description about how people in a certain culture live their lives.

Third, ethnographers believe that ethnographic studies are ideally suited to understand complex cultures. In other words, ethnography helps us understand the participants' behaviors from a cultural perspective, that is, the shared patterns of beliefs, values, and behaviors of a particular group (Edleman & Mandle, 2002). Understanding the participants' behaviors in a certain culture assists nurses to identify and to meet their needs (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). It is often used to study immigrants behavior in their new host society..

What are the Philosophical Underpinnings of these Methodologies?

According to Speziale and Carpenter (2007), it is essential for researchers to understand the philosophical underpinning of each methodology. This knowledge affords insights into what factors to consider when deciding upon the best methodology to answer a research question. Munhall (2001) encouraged qualitative researchers to understand the philosophical underpinnings of their research tradition before using the methodologies that arise from this tradition. The philosophical stance of the qualitative paradigm with its ontological and epistemological beliefs will influence the researcher's understanding regarding the nature of reality, or what can be known and how it can be known (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). For example, if a student is finding it difficult to decide between whether to select a grounded theory or an ethnographic methodology to study socialization among older people living in a nursing home, the researcher needs to understand the philosophical underpinnings of both methodologiess so that an informed choice can be made.

The philosophical orientation of grounded theory and ethnography is symbolic interactionism (SI) (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986; Glaser, 1992; Prus, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Wuest, 2007). It was not until the beginning of the 1990s that Glaser (1992) provided a very clear account about one central assumption of grounded theory methodology: that symbolic interactionism directs human beings to shape the world they live in. However, Glaser (2004) argues that although symbolic interactionism is part of grounded theory methodology, it is not part of the substantive theory that is generated by this methodology. That is, Glaser did not deny that symbolic interactionism is the underpinning philosophy of grounded theory *methodology* (emphasis added), but he emphasized that symbolic interactionism is not a principal theoretical code to direct analysis (Wuest, 2007). Accepting SI as a belief, the researcher can use grounded theory methodology as a approach to identify what data must be collected and where to find it "to derive theories that illuminate human behaviour and the social world" (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986, p. 7).

Another way that grounded theory methodology has been influenced by symbolic interactionism is in terms of showing the relationship between human beings and their society (Milliken & Schreiber, 2001). According to Milliken and Schreiber, the grounded theorist's task is to gain knowledge about the socially-shared meaning that forms the behaviors and the reality of the participants being studied. For example, a substantive theory of the meaning of drug use among a homeless population would involve understanding the experiences of other homeless people, with whom they interact, how they interpret drug use, and their subsequent behavior based on this meaning of drug use.

Prus (1996) added to the discussion of the relationship between symbolic interactionism and ethnography. He provided a concise and precise overview of four shared assumptions between ethnography and symbolic interactionism. First, the researcher values the actual meaning and the inter-subjective nature of human behavior. Second, the researcher must develop knowledge and awareness with the phenomenon being studied, including the participants' perspectives and interpretations regarding themselves, other objects, and the situation. Third, the researcher needs to use sensitizing concepts, which have been described by Blumer (1954) as initial ways of focusing on

and organizing data. He contended that this approach facilitates the subsequent identification of *a definitive* concept, which refers to "…what is common to the class of object by the aid of clear definition in terms of attribute or fixed bench marks" (p. 7). Fourth, familiarity with the phenomenon cannot be achieved without understanding the process of communication; thus, the researcher must know the social relationships among the participants and the sequences of interaction. In conclusion, the same philosophical underpinning for both methodologies explains the similarities between their ontological and epistemological assumptions, which are discussed next.

Grounded theory and ethnography can be understood through the ontological beliefs regarding what reality is, the epistemological beliefs regarding how the grounded theorists and ethnographers come to know about the world, and the beliefs about the methodological processes of both methods. Guba and Lincoln (1994) provided a definition regarding the nature of the world through answering questions such as "What is the form and nature of reality?" and "What is the relationship between the knower and what can be known?" and "What strategies need to be used to discover what there is to be known?" (p. 108). The ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying both methodologies, as well as the philosophical orientations guiding them are discussed in the next sections, whereas the methodological aspects are discussed later in this paper.

Ontological Beliefs of Grounded Theory and Ethnography

The philosophical roots of grounded theory and ethnography derive from the Chicago School of symbolic interactionism and pragmatism (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). Annells (1996) argued that grounded theory is based on a symbolic interactionist's and pragmatist's ontological belief regarding the nature of reality. That is, followers of this belief agree that the social and natural worlds have different realities that "are probabilistically apprehensible, albeit imperfectly" (p. 385). Glaser (1978) has taken this belief under consideration and assumed that the world is a subject that can be studied and understood if the researchers go there and look for the reality. For elaboration, grounded theorist adopted the pragmatic view that is the empirical truth of reality can be emerged only by visiting the research field, observe the participants, and analyze their actual meanings in the real setting (Glaser, 1992).

In the same manner, ethnographers have an ontological belief that there are multi-truths and alternative realities in a particular culture that must be described in terms of the people studied (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006; Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). For ethnographers, a description of multi-realities was derived from the Chicago School of philosophy to "gain an understanding of meanings a culture group attaches to symbols in organizing and interpreting their life experiences" (Parse, 2001, p. 127). Therefore, ethnographers tend to conduct their research in the natural setting (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007), and generally spend long periods of time in this setting to develop an in-depth understanding of the cultural group(s) being studied (Morse & Field, 1996). For example, studying drug use among the homeless population from a classical/traditional grounded theorist's perspective and/or from an ethnographer's viewpoint compels the researcher to go to the natural field where the phenomenon of drug use takes place to capture and understand the multiple realities that are associated with this phenomenon.

In summary, both grounded theory and ethnography researchers believe that various realities are salient to create meaning of events (Boyd, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). They have similar ontological beliefs regarding the nature of reality because both of them are derived from symbolic interactionism. However, this similarity of ontological belief requires researchers to study in-depth the epistemological beliefs of both methodologies before they decide which one better addresses their research question.

Epistemological Beliefs of Grounded Theory and Ethnography

According to Annells (1996), following the clarification of ontological thoughts as discussed above, nursing researchers must clarify their epistemological beliefs as a final step in choosing their research tradition. Epistemological beliefs consist of different assumptions regarding the nature of knowing, of what can be known, and who can be the knower (Milliken & Schreiber, 2001). Following Glaser and Strauss (1967), Annells (1996) described the central assumption of the traditional grounded theory as involving a need for an objectivist, post-positivist epistemology, and that the grounded theory methodology "is independent of the researcher and has a separate existence" (p. 386). In other words, an objectivist epistemological view determines the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known. For example, the nature of traditional grounded theory procedure directs the researcher toward this level of objectivity (Glaser, 1978).

The above point merits elaboration. Because grounded theory is based on symbolic interactionism, it is used to understand the inner (emic) aspects of human behaviors; in other words their subjective reality. To study such aspects, grounded theorists often use data collection methods that involve interviews and thick descriptions in their field notes about how human beings interact with each other, their patterns of interaction, their definition of the shared meanings, and related contextual circumstances (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986).

In ethnography, the key epistemological assumption involves knowing and understanding human behavior within the cultural context in which it occurs (Omery, 1988). They are "focusing on the exploration of symbols, rituals, and customs of a cultural group" (Parse, 2001, p. 128). In other words, ethnographers are committed to understanding the meaning of actions and events of people in that culture (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). To achieve this commitment, they immerse themselves in the culture being studied often for long periods of time (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007).

In regard to the extensive field work implied immersion into a culture, the "struggle for objectivity in collecting and analyzing data while being so intimately involved with the group is a unique challenge for Ethnographers" (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999, p.150). This struggle is caused by the divergence between the two epistemological assumptions related to the "*emic*" and "*etic*" views (Omery, 1988). The *emic* view is the insider's view, meaning that interpretations, beliefs, and experiences come from the participant's description of the phenomenon under study (Parse et al., 1985; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). The ethnographer believes that participants know best their own inner state and that knowledge regarding reality can be accomplished only when the participants express their own perceptions and interpretations about the reality (Omery, 1988).

In contrast, the *etic* view is an outsider's interpretation of the culture (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). Adherents of an *etic* view believe that ethnographers are the most appropriate researchers to interpret, understand, and describe the reality of the phenomenon (Omery, 1988). However, according to Omery, using only one view leads to loss of data that affects understanding the reality. Parse (2001) encouraged ethnographers to integrate both *etic* and *emic* epistemological views to gain knowledge and understanding of a cultural group's language, beliefs, and experiences.

In summary, grounded theory shares the ontological and some epistemological assumptions with ethnography. Grounded theorists and ethnographic researchers need to investigate the phenomenon subjectively; that is from the *emic* (participants') perspectives. To illustrate, grounded theorists and ethnographic researchers agree to view and portray realities that are salient to participants, not to the researchers (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). This view helps the researchers to both access the lived reality of and to understand clients' internal constructions of their worldviews. For example,

investigating drug use from the perspective of the homeless population is fundamental to the researcher who wishes to explore the contextual influences that may influence the behaviors of this group.

An example of the importance of an emic view was provided by Cutcliffe, Stevenson, Jackson, and Smith (2006). They insisted that investigating the phenomenon subjectively from the participants' perspective is a necessary claim for qualitative researchers. In their grounded theory study, the researchers aimed to determine how primary mental health nurses in the United Kingdom care for persons who are suicidal. They interviewed 20 participants who had made suicidal attempts. The grounded theory generated from collecting and analyzing the emic view of the participants was "reconnecting the person with humanity" (p. 796). Throughout this theory, nurses revealed that suicide among suicidal persons can be prevented if the nurse understands their suicidal beliefs and builds a therapeutic relationship with them.

Are there Salient Differences and Similarities between these Methodologies in the Remaining Steps of the Research Process?

The third question to address pertains to a discussion of the salient differences and similarities in the remaining steps of the research process (i.e., sample selection, data collection, data analysis, and describing the findings). An answer to this question should further assist students, as novice researchers, to make the decision as to which methodology would best answer the research question.

Salient Differences between Grounded Theory and Ethnography.

A salient characteristic that differentiates grounded theory from ethnography is that the latter entails a realistic, very broad, and full description of a specific culture (Germain, 1986). For these reasons, ethnographers focus their inquiry on only one part of reality, rather than the whole context (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). For example, when ethnographers observe participants in a natural field they "may focus on an aspect of the scene, rather than an entire setting, and may not entail the extent or depth of involvement of an ethnography" (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001, p. 161)

In contrast, grounded theorists try to explain the major concern (core category) and the surrounding context of participants who engaged in the activity under the study by interweaving activities of observing, listening, and asking to achieve a deep description of the entire reality (Davis, 1986).

A second difference between these two methods pertains to when the literature should be reviewed: that is, prior to the data collection phase or following it. Glaser (1978) recommended that grounded theorists not consult the literature before conducting fieldwork in order to avoid constrained coding and memoing. He suggested that researchers read widely, but not in studies directly related to the research topic. By contrast, ethnographers can consult the conceptual literature before conducting the study in which the problem to be studied is presented (Germain, 1986).

The sample selection procedure constitutes a third difference between the two methods. The grounded theory method has been distinguished by the theoretical sampling technique that aims toward theory building (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The grounded theorist concurrently collects, codes, and analyzes data and decides what data to collect next to facilitate the emergence of the theory from the data (Glaser, 1978). Therefore, data collection and participants are purposefully chosen as needed based on outcomes of emerging analysis (Morse & Field, 1996). Theoretical sampling helps grounded theorists to saturate their categories; that is, saturation is

reached when there are no new ideas or thoughts to add to the categories (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001).

By contrast, ethnographic researchers aim not to generate theories, but to understand the cultural meaning that human beings use to organize and interpret their experiences (Parse et al., 1985; see also Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). Hence, given their interest in a particular aspect of culture, they often use a type of purposive sampling that Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to as *multiple case sampling*, which involves focusing on "a range of similar and contrasting cases in order to understand a single case finding" (p. 29).

A fourth difference between these methods pertains to the purpose of writing memos (analytic notes by the researcher during the data collection and analysis phase). Memo-writing is salient in grounded theory because it helps the researcher connect between coding data and writing the theory (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). To rephrase, memoing is vital to raise the empirical data from the description state to theoretical one (Hutchinson, 1986). By contrast, ethnographers use memoing to derive the meaning of the actions in certain cultures and thereby enrich the level of thick description in their discussion of the findings (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001).

A fifth difference, albeit not a major one, between two these methods pertains to how to do data analysis. Grounded theorists organize their data collection and analyses by using the constant comparative strategy (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). In this strategy, the researcher compares one piece of data to all other pieces of data. Because ethnography lacks this strategy, ethnographers may be overwhelmed by huge quantities of disconnected data that often results in "thin" description or perhaps lists of unrelated categories (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). This gap is closing as in recent years ethnographers are increasingly using the constant comparative strategy in their studies.

A sixth difference between these two methods pertains to the process of transforming data into findings. Whereas grounded theory researchers use the data to generate the findings, the ethnographic researchers sometimes use–predefined concepts (e.g., coping with chronic illness) or develop a range of cross case displays such as matrixes and/or ideal type typologies (Le Navenec, 1993).

The seventh difference between these research approaches pertains to the nature of discussion of findings. According to Charmaz and Mitchell (2001), "Ethnographic writings vary, depending on research objectives, reporting style, and potential audiences. Ethnographers can use description to tell stories, form scenes, describe players and demonstrate actions" (p. 170). Conversely, grounded theorists focus their final report primarily on discussion of the conceptual analysis and the substantive theory that was generated from the data (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007).In conclusion, whereas Ethnographers discuss their findings using fin primarily narratives, the grounded theorist focuses instead on the theoretical framework that has emerged from the data.

Salient Similarities between Grounded Theory and Ethnography.

Five similarities regarding settings of the study, data collection and analysis approach, the researcher role, and reporting the findings are discussed next. First, grounded theorists and ethnographers study the phenomenon in the natural context without interrupting the natural settings. Human behavior can be understood within the natural, everyday context in which the phenomenon occurs (Chenitz, 1986; Omery, 1988). Therefore, both grounded theorists and ethnographers emphasize that beliefs, values, and context afford a holistic approach to study the phenomenon (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). Although researchers from both these traditions share this similarity, they perceive these aspects from

their own perspectives about the aim of the study. Grounded theorists focus more on the natural social world (context) to understand the behavior of individuals engaging in the phenomena under study; that is, the researcher must collect data about action and interaction between the individuals in the context (Chenitz, 1986). On the other hand, ethnographers give more attention to understanding behavior within natural functional, cultural, or social contexts to describe the cultural meaning that individuals use to organize and interpret their experiences (Omery, 1988; Parse et al., 1985). Grounded theorists and ethnographers believe that to discover the nature of the phenomenon as experienced by those who live it, data collection should utilize a variety of approaches (e.g., focus groups, in-depth interview, observation, field notes) (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). Omery (1988) emphasized that the general goal of grounded theory and ethnography is to understand the phenomenon through providing a description with enough data to realize or perceive that phenomenon. According to Calvin (2004), in interviews researchers gain personal perceptions and beliefs regarding the phenomenon and through field notes researchers collect further data to understand how participants live the phenomenon. For example, to understand the phenomenon of drug use among the homeless population, the researcher may collect the data through triangulating in-depth interviews with participants, non-participant observation, and compilation of field notes.

Using more than one data collection approach in grounded theory or ethnography is essential for nursing science for two reasons (Mariano, 2001). First, triangulation of the data collection approaches provides multiple interpretations and achieves fuller understanding of the same phenomenon from different perspectives. Second, this technique of triangulating different sources of data helps to achieve the methodological rigor (accuracy and credibility) of the study (Maggs-Rapport, 2000; Mariano, 2001).

When the data collection occurs is the third difference between these two methods. Glaser and Strauss (1967) distinguished the grounded theory method by its concurrent involvement in data collection and analysis. Grounded theorists have the flexibility to collect data from the field and start their analysis immediately, then go forward and backward between the data analysis and the field to collect further data in order to develop their substantive theory (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). By contrast, Ethnographers lack this reciprocal relationship between data collection and analysis. According to Charmaz and Mitchell (2001), "Ethnography suffered in the past from a rigid and artificial separation of data collection and analysis" (p. 162).

Omery (1988) holds a different perspective than Charmaz and Mitchell (2001). She insisted on a cyclic relationship between data collection and analysis in ethnographic studies until ethnographers reach a thick description of the culture. In other words, using a spiral technique of data collection and analysis encourages new levels of understanding and new verifications of the findings (Parse et al., 1985). Therefore, integrating data collection and analysis in grounded theory leads to more theoretical abstraction, whereas in ethnography it leads to a more enriched description of the culture.

Fourth, qualitative nurse researchers using grounded theory and/or ethnographic methods adopt roles as an observer, interviewer, and interpreter (Germain, 2001; Hutchinson & Wilson, 2001). Both traditions involve the researcher-as-instrument to collect and analyze data from the participants in the field (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). According to Streubert and Carpenter (1999), the researcher-as-instrument in naturalistic research must have excellent communication and observational skills to help participants share their insider perspectives and experiences. For example, to enter the inner world of drug users who are homeless and to be close to and understand their subjective experiences, the researcher has a responsibility to use the communication, observation, and interpretation skills that one has already learned through use of the nursing process and qualitative research process. Therefore, grounded theorists and ethnographers assume that the only way they can begin to access

the inner world (emic view) of the participants is by applying researcher-as-instrument skills (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007).

Fifth, regardless of the purposes and results of grounded theory and ethnography, researchers in both traditions report the results from the perspective of the participants who have experienced the phenomenon. Streubert and Carpenter (1999) argued for reporting the findings of both traditions in a rich literary approach including "quotations, commentaries, and stories [that] add to the richness of the report and to the understanding of the social interactions" (p.17). For example, regardless of the qualitative method used to study drug use among the homeless population, reporting the results will reflect the participants' experiences by involving their quotations and stories to understand the experiences and the context in which they occur.

Conclusion

The similarity of the characteristics of traditional grounded theory and ethnographic methodologies has led many researchers to ask "but are they not the same?" (Stewart, 1998, p. 8). According to Charmaz and Mitchell (2001), both methodologies share common criteria, ontological and epistemological assumptions, and some similarities in their data collection and analysis. In other words, both methodologies are used to investigate the phenomenona in naturalistic settings, both have been derived from Symbolic Interactionism, participant emic view and observation are salient in both of them, and researchers in both methodologies select their sample as data emerge through data analysis (Pettigrew, 2000).

Differences in the approaches between these two traditions arise from the different purposes of each one, which in turn, affects data collection and analysis procedures, and the end products. Whereas a grounded theory researcher ends by reporting a substantive theory that explains the patterns of the phenomenon under study, an ethnographic researcher ends by reporting a rich description of the cultural meaning of the phenomenon in a particular culture.

The selection of either an ethnographic or grounded theory methodology is guided by addressing three questions: What are the goals / phenomena of interest for these two methods?, What are the philosophical underpinnings of these methodologiess?, Are there salient differences and similarities between these methodologiess in the remaining steps of the research process? The answers to these questions will clarify what some graduate students refer to as the blurred boundaries between grounded theory and ethnography. The outcome of which will be informed student researchers who select the qualitative method that best addressed the research question of interest.

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