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The Analytical Procedures of Grounded Theory Methodology in Research on the Human Body

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to look into the problem of grounded theory methodology (GTM) application in social research on the human body. First, the theoretical roots of GTM in symbolic interactionism are enumerated and their consequences for applying the research strategy are described. The author presents examples of her research as an illustration of how GTM procedures enable the researcher to ingrain the body in social processes, and explains what it actually means to embed physical body in social phenomena and processes. The conclusions concerning the practice of GTM research are based on a series of empirical studies conducted by the author in the fields of dance, physical therapy, and medical work.

The author argues that GTM expounds on specific procedures, which offer both methodological discipline and flexibility that is necessary for studying as challenging phenomenon as that of the human body.

Keywords grounded theory methodology, sociology of the body, analysis, axial coding, conditional matrix

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The body has been a domain of medical and biological sciences predominantly. In social sciences, the 'somatic turn' has been taking place for the last three decades. The result is that one can observe a growing interest in the human (and non-human) body among social scientists. The number of body-themed publications, research projects, and conferences within sociology, anthropology, or pedagogics is increasing.

Sociological research has been focusing on the human body due to certain cultural changes. The amount of research projects and questions that include the bodily aspect of human action is now considerable. The spheres of life and human activity in which social norms and processes influence our physicality include technology, medicine, globalization, economy and marketing, media, ecology, art, etc. As Bryan S. Turner puts it, "The body is thus crucial to both the micro and macro orders of society" (2008:41).

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the usefulness of grounded theory methodology as a research strategy adequate for studies on the social aspects of the human body, conducted with the use of qualitative methods. As GTM is rooted in the interpretative paradigm and symbolic interactionism, it is significant to investigate the human body (and any other subject of research, for that matter) as perceived and acted upon according to the meanings that an individual ascribes to it. This is dependent on the course of the socialization process, when individuals were taught by their significant others how to perceive, judge, treat, and present their bodies (Turner 2008:40).

Therefore, the aim of this article is not to consider or address doubts and criticism regarding particular GTM procedures, which have been present in various publications in the recent years (e.g. Gorzko 2013). Though being aware of the controversies, in this paper I intend to focus on the research practice with regard to the body as carried out through grounded theory methodology.

The Symbolic Interactionist Roots of GTM and Research on the Human Body

As GTM grew out of the symbolic interactionist tradition, they both focus on a dynamic, processual charac-

teristic of social reality and crucial meaning of interaction in constructing everyday human action (Charmaz 2014: ch. 10; Konecki 2000:33-36; Oktay 2012:12-13). Although Bryan S. Turner (2008:34) states that "symbolic interactionism reinforced the more widespread sociological perspective in which corporality of social actors was relatively insignificant in social action," and cites George Herbert Mead's statement (Turner 2008:41) that "we can distinguish very definitely between the self and the body," research practice shows that there is a significant number of researchers who successfully apply the sociological perspective in their studies on the human body (e.g. Becker 1953; Byczkowska 2012; Konecki 2016; Kowal 2012; Longmore 1998; Plummer 2012; Scott 2010; Ślęzak 2018; Wacquant 2004; Wojciechowska 2015; Frost 2005).

The first assumption of symbolic interactionism concerning human nature is that individuals act consciously, i.e. not only as objects influenced by impulses, social norms, roles, or biological factors. Human beings react to objects and phenomena based on the meanings that these objects and phenomena have for them. This means that everything can become an object of interpretation, including intangible and imagined phenomena (Blumer 2007:5-7; Hałas 2006:55). This is important in social studies investigating the body, because the question of perception of one's own body is of utmost importance when it comes to attempting to understand human actions. Therefore, no 'objective' body exists; there are only bodies as experienced and perceived by individuals (see also: Schilling 2010).

Second, the meanings of objects are derived from social interactions. This means that the way that

others react to a given object or phenomenon (e.g. their own body or the body of another being) is crucial, as it determines the way of defining this object or phenomenon (Blumer 2007:5-8; Hałas 2006:55; Woroniecka 1998:24). Bodily sensations can be objects of interpretations, too. Phenomena such as pain or sexual pleasure are not accessible to people's experience in a merely physical way, but they are interpreted conceptually as well (Becker 1953; Frank 2003; Hoffmann-Riem 1994; Plummer 2012).

Third, people use meanings and modify them in the course of interpretation. Therefore, the meanings of objects are never explicitly determined in advance, but are recognized each time and undergo a modification during the very interpretative process. The action in relation to a given object is always dependent on the definition of the situation that the acting individual adopts (Hałas 2006:55; Bokszański 1989:128; Piotrowski 1998:18). This is why the one and only real phenomenon that is observable to a researcher is the social behavior of an individual. Social norms – also those referring to the body – function through action. Social control over the human body is internalized by its owner (Foucault 1977).

Obviously, every social actor is influenced by the patterns of the culture they live in as well as by the social awareness and the rules within their particular society. These are causal conditions that underlie the conscious action of individuals. What it means is that in order to understand a functioning subject, it is necessary to make a cultural identification of the activity and, thus, to capture its culturally-defined meaning as well as identify the action through the prism of a given culture or the specific context in

which it occurs (Piotrowski 1998:14-15, 19; Bourdieu 1977; Schilling 2010).

As Herbert Blumer states (1986:85), only human action is observable. For this reason, it is worthy to devote research efforts mainly to what people do rather than what they say. This can be done by using GTM procedures in order to 'ground' the human action. What is more, the body is not an entirely intersubjectively communicable phenomenon; therefore, it is methodologically recommended to apply various research methods, also those which do not only operate with narrative.

There are also many other references to methodology in Herbert Blumer's texts, all of which would allow for a proper study of social phenomena. The most important methodological requirements are: using various observational positions (i.e. data triangulation, researcher triangulation); using many lines of research (initially broad ones and gradually narrowing the researcher's focus); applying every research technique that is ethically suitable; being constantly open to the revision of the research ideas, concepts or beliefs regarding the studied phenomenon); saving – and searching for – data that is not compatible with the existing theories; carrying out an in-depth and focused analysis of phenomena occurring in the studied area; discovering general relationships; clarifying concepts; and, finally, formulating theoretical assertions (Blumer 2007:34-36).

The Invisible Analysis of Data

The works of Anselm Strauss, Howard Becker, Barney Glaser, Juliet Corbin, and their associates on the

process of dying and on medical work are considered fundamental both for symbolic interactionism and grounded theory methodology (Becker et al. 1961; Corbin and Strauss 1985, 1988; Glaser and Strauss 1965; Strauss and Glaser 1975). In a sense, the outcomes of their research refer to the perception of the human body, as they were working on and through the body. Although today the works remain inspiring for the sociologists of the body, one should not consider them as typical examples of studies within this branch of sociology. They do not, for example, include specific terms or concepts, i.e. those that the sub-discipline developed in the 1980s.

Generally, the recent source literature shows that GTM-based research on the body revolves around the following subjects: the work of medical staff (Smith, Leslie and Wynaden 2015); the perception and experience of the sick (Renolen et al. 2018; Matheson et al. 2016); recovering (Shaw, Sherman and Fitness 2016); the disabled body (e.g. blind- Ball and Colette 2015); dying (Ahaddour, van den Branden and Broeckaert 2017); and culturally-influenced organ donations (Yeun, Kwon and Kim 2015). The question of psychological health is another subject of GTM-based research, e.g. with regard to selfharm and self-injury (Horne et al. 2009; Long et al. 2016). Various researchers conduct their studies on physical activity, such as sport (Knight and Holt 2014; Massey, Meyer and Naylor 2013), yoga (Konecki 2016), tourism (Gorzko 2009), or dancing (Byczkowska 2012).

Sex and gender issues are among the subjects undertaken eagerly, too. These include the maturation of girls (Murphy 2011), menopause (Yazdkhasti,

Negarandeh and Behboodi-Moghadam 2016; Sergeant and Rizq 2017), menstruation (Allen et al. 2011; Barthalow-Koch 2006), prostitution (Wojciechowska 2015; Ślęzak 2018; Ślęzak 2017), circumcision (Newman and Carpenter 2014), the objectification of the female body (Watson et al. 2012), the social aspects of childbirth (Meyer, et al. 2016; Borrelli, Spiby and Walsh 2016), or breastfeeding (Newman and Carpenter 2014).

In most of the above-mentioned articles, the methodological issues are merely presented as a part of general information about the research; they are not described in a detailed or guide-like manner. In cases when methodology is elaborated on more broadly, the materials focus on the used techniques of data gathering (semi-structured interviews above all) or the type of CAQDAS used. Presumably, the cited studies vary with regard to the extent to which they use GTM explicitly. Most readers of research-themed articles are, in fact, interested in the analysis and findings primarily. The included methodological issues are often limited to a note about how the data was obtained. The fact remains that research articles offer little information concerning the methodological strategy - which would include more elaboration on techniques - as authors tend to focus on presenting their outcomes and not procedures. Additionally, some qualitative researchers refer to the GTM logic rather than use its detailed procedures. This being the case, information about applied methodology is not presented and remains invisible despite the growing number of articles on this subject. All this into account, there exists a gap in the source literature and this article is aimed at filling it with practical methodological information

concerning the usage of two GTM procedures in sociological research on the body.

Embedding the Human Body in Social Reality

By means of the grounded theory methodology procedures, a researcher can embed the human body in social processes; therefore, it is possible to investigate actual social processes (e.g. socialization, institutionalization, interpretation, perception, work, etc.) through which the society and groups influence individual actions, affecting the human body directly or indirectly. GTM offers a number of procedures that are both disciplined and flexible. This means that they are designed to be adjustable to the researched phenomenon, not leaving the process of analysis only to the researcher's creativity.

Clearly, GTM is not limited to procedures, as it provides a general way of conducting research with open-mindedness. Also, the flexibility of procedures is visible as they are not restricted to the analytical ones, but also include data-gathering and theory construction. Triangulation is one of the procedures inscribed on grounded theory, giving the researcher a possibility of getting acquainted with the studied phenomenon through a variety of research tools. In one of my previous articles (Byczkowska 2009), I provided an overview of qualitative research techniques in studies on the body, while here I intend to focus on procedures with regard to data analysis.

In the following part, I will give two examples of GTM procedures, which I have used in two research projects on the body. My studies were conducted by

means of GTM coding procedures (open/substantial, selective, and theoretical), the preparation of theoretical memos, theoretical sampling, triangulation, the constant comparative method, *in vivo* codes, diagrams, and the two procedures presented below.

The first procedure, called 'conditional matrix' (Strauss and Corbin 1990:168; Konecki 2000:49-51), was designed with the aim of acknowledging the diverse existing conditions that influence the phenomenon under scrutiny. According to Anselm Strauss (1993:60 as cited in Hildebrand 2007:546), each research should include all the below-mentioned levels, which will allow the researcher to find specific characteristics, generalize, and incorporate the reciprocity of conditions influencing the studied phenomenon.

The example comes from a study on the social world¹ of ballroom dancing. In this subculture, the dancer's body undergoes multiple changes due to the requirements of institutional, group, and individual actors of this social world. The actions undertaken by the dancers are considered to be an interpretation and a response to the challenges of each level of causal, contextual, and intervening conditions that influence the perception, assessment, construction, and usage of their bodies in the most physical sense. The 'conditional matrix' includes several levels of possible social influence, which are presented below, followed by the examples from the research on the social world of ballroom dancing, conducted with the use of GTM procedures.

¹ The concept of the social world refers to certain social entities, whose boundaries are determined by effective communication, discourse, constant interactions between its members, as well as their reactions to each other (Clarke 1990:18-19; Kacperczyk 2005:169-170).

Table 1. Conditional matrix in researching ballroom dance practices.

	Total desired to the second of
International level	 International tournaments (the most prestigious ones are in Blackpool, UK); International dancers' careers; Membership of the Polish Dance Association in international dance organizations, such as the World DanceSport Federation or the International Dance Organization; Rules set on the international level (e.g. the division into standard and Latin dances, the 'skating system' of notes).
National level:	 The normative monopoly of the Polish Dance Association; The national scope of the tournaments; The organization of Polish Championships; The history of ballroom dance in Poland.
Community level	 The specific norms concerning femininity and masculinity; The specific perception of children; The sense of uniqueness (of the very dance as well as among dancers).
Organizational and institutional level	 Obligatory affiliation with the Polish Dance Association as well as a magnetic ID book and a magnetic card necessary to obtain in order to participate in tournaments; Obeying the formal regulations of the PDA, and the institutional and organizational formation of judges and trainers; Institutionalized awarding of subsequent classes in ballroom dance; Making the cycles and content of the trainings sessions dependent on the criteria of judgement.
Inner-organizational level	 The relationships between cities and regions; Trainers from various dance clubs; Competition between clubs.
Group and individual level	• The skills of individuals, including dancers, parents, judges, trainers as well as popular and respected trainers and dancers (who become significant others for young dancers).
Interactions	 The cooperation with: partner (without whom the primary activity is impossible), mentor (a parent-like relationship with one's own trainer); The practice of judging and the contact with judges; Commitment (also financial) of parents as well as their cooperation with trainers; Relationships with other pairs (fair and unfair competition); The ability to build rapport with the audience.
Actions	• Planned and strategic pursuing of the achievement of higher institutional places and notes in ballroom dancing.

Each of the above-mentioned levels has its specific social influence on the dancers' bodies. The international and national levels provide a more general context of situation, imposing universal rules of the body usage (e.g. an exact pace, in which a particular dance should be performed). On the community level, specific and stereotypical ideals of feminine and masculine bodies affect the perception of one's own embodiment as well as they provoke certain actions – both on the part of dancers and their parents - with the purpose of conforming to these stereotypes (make-up, artificial hair, or inserts imitating the bust are all examples with regard to girls, while the issue of stereotypization of boys is more complicated and was referred to in detail in: Byczkowska-Owczarek 2019 and Jakubowska, Byczkowska-Owczarek 2018.

The organizational, group, and interactional levels give even more direct definitions and instructions with regard to how to use one's own body. Norms and regulations result in a characteristic movement, apparel, and perception of the bodies, which, in turn. is an effect of particular actions undertaken by the social actors. These include controlling one's own moves, using certain body parts in a specific manner, or adjusting appearance to the norms of Latin and standard styles (hairdo, make-up, figure, etc.).

The level of interactions refers mostly to the cooperation with the partner, to whom a dancer must adjust their body. Two dancers should practice for at least 2-3 months before they participate in a tournament, as this mutual physical adaptation

needs to become incorporated. The cooperation with a dance trainer is also vital for a dancer's skills and development. It is the trainer, whose body serves as an example of the desirable technique and aesthetics. By observing the trainer, young dancers learn what it means to perform certain techniques correctly. Additionally, trainers act as significant others in that they influence dancers' self-perception concerning femininity and masculinity. The competition between dancing pairs generates strategies of effectiveness that include not only the development of skills, but also the sexualization as a way of attracting the judges' attention.

The 'conditional matrix' is a coding device, created to reveal the intersections of micro and macro conditions as well as the consequences of actions. Its other role is to clarify the connections between them. Its major purpose, in turn, is to make the researcher think beyond micro structures and interactions, and relate to macro structures. Additionally, it could be helpful for making theoretical sampling decisions as well as for contextualizing the phenomena (Charmaz 2014: Glossary), mapping pertinent social processes.

As such, some researchers can use conditional matrix as a specific tool, which operates with deductive theorizing as opposed to the general GTM inductive logic. Its limitation – as Kathy Charmaz (2014) claims from the constructivist GTM point of view – is the fact that it is rather applied to data, not emerging from it, which involves the risk of forcing the analytical process into a pre-established direction.

The second GTM procedure that I would like to present is the 'axial coding paradigm' (Strauss and Corbin 1990:96-115; Konecki 2000:48-49), which refers to the process of establishing relations between codes, categories, and concepts. This process consists of interrelations between the following elements of the research under scrutiny: causal conditions, phenomenon, context, intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies, the consequences of these actions (Strauss and Corbin 1990:97-98). It has been designed in order to delineate the relations between data after previous coding procedures, and explore the processual character of the phenomenon, including all types of conditions which 'bond' it with other social processes (Bryant and Charmaz 2007:603).

The procedure a phenomenon from a research on the process of work of hospital physicians – which was held at a university hospital in a Polish city – will serve as an example. The research was conducted within three hospital wards: intensive care, neurosurgery, and otolaryngology. It focused on the relations between the medical staff and the course of their work.

The research process featured particular elements of the axial coding paradigm; they influence both the bodywork of the medical staff and the bodies of their patients. The elements are presented in the table below, followed by the exemplifications from the research field.

Table 2. Axial coding in researching medical work

Causal conditions	a relatively invariable/unpredictable character of the human body
Phenomenon	'doing by the book' (in vivo code)
Context	the uncertainty of consequences; action based on insufficient information; the risk of legal consequences
Intervening conditions	legal system, social status of the physician, healthcare system, medical procedures
Action and interaction strategies	strategies of assurance (bureaucratic, interactional, medical)
Consequences	the emotional distancing of the personnel from their work and patients, the institutionalization and proceduralization of the distance between patients' and personnel's bodies, the objectification of the patients' body, the over-proceduralization of the relations between the personnel and the patient, the non-medical causes of medical procedures application (e.g. legal).

The phenomenon 'doing by the book' refers to all the medical staff's activity and practices that are an implementation of a written procedure: medical, legal, bureaucratic, etc. The formalization of medical actions performed by doctors and nurses has various conditions and consequences both for the physician's and the patient's bodies. The procedures are an effect of a global trend in medical sciences, namely the 'evidence-based medicine', which is a set of conditions that each medical substance, procedure, research, etc. must fulfil (see also: Bensing 2000).

Decision-making in medical practice is not limited to the theoretical and practical knowledge or experience of the physician, but is also influenced by all the above-mentioned conditions. In certain situations, a less or more risky decision can be taken in an attempt to avoid possible legal or bureaucratic consequences. For example, the usage of gloves and surgical masks (as a strategy of both legal and biological assurance) has influenced the actual amount of transmitted infections. Additionally, the formal nursing procedure of triple-checking the served medications has lowered the risk of administrating the wrong drug. Concurrently, the emotional distance (initiated by the institutional lack of time, technical advancement, and a risk of legal consequences) causes the objectification of the human body, which results in a specific treatment of body parts (not the whole body or a human being as a whole). This can affect the clinical results as well. Therefore, this phenomenon has influenced the treatment of the human body both in positive and negative ways.

Axial coding was created by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1990) in order to relate categories to subcategories in a systematic way, and specify the dimensions and properties of a category. It helps to systematize, organize, and sort bigger amounts of data after open coding. This procedure puts the 'divided' data back together (Bryant and Charmaz 2007:603-604). It helps to answer questions about who, when, where, why, how, and with what consequences, which enables a more comprehensive description of the studied phenomenon. An advantage of this tool is that it helps to clarify and enhance the researcher's analysis, allowing for a more complete grasp of the studied process.

Similarly to conditional matrix, axial coding provides a frame for analysis and is applied to data. As such, it can "extend or limit your vision," as Kathy Charmaz puts it (2014: chapter 5; see also: Flick, Kardoff and Steinke 2004). Additionally, the author states that axial coding is redundant in one's research if one prefers simple guidelines and tolerates ambiguity. It can potentially become cumbersome, as it requires a careful application of the model. In case of some researchers, this can shift their focus from the data to the model (Charmaz 2014: chapter 5).

The two presented procedures demonstrate what it means to embed the body in social processes in a research practice. The theory concerning the cultural, group, or interactional influence on the body should be grounded in reality, which is empirically approachable only through a variety of research techniques and the openness of an analytical method. By embedding human actions towards the body in social processes – which take place on various levels of social actions – and by understanding the conditions on which the prag-

matic decisions concerning the use of the body depend, a researcher can explain the mechanism of the social influence on the human body more adequately and fully.

Both procedures – namely the 'conditional matrix' and the 'axial coding' - seem to be at the intersection of the Glaserian and Straussian versions of GTM. The two procedures under scrutiny are blamed for forcing data and analyses into preconceived categories. Conversely, Strauss and Corbin (1990) state that in case of the lack of a structured process of analysis it is difficult to make sense of data and develop a theory (Alammar et al. 2019). The way I see it, it is not necessary to choose or reject any of the presented GTM procedures in advance. A researcher should treat them as tools and decide in the course of the research – or even after using them – if they were useful in this particular analysis. The researcher themselves could observe in order to recognize whether the procedures limit their vision of the phenomenon under scrutiny, or perhaps enable them to develop a more disciplined and structured investigation. It seems that any type of tool which makes GTM procedures more systematic and disciplined (Straussian axial coding or Glaserian coding families) encounters a critique relating to forcing data, limiting the researcher's view, etc. (Gorzko 2013).

Practical Remarks

When applying axial coding and conditional matrix, it could be useful to consider several practical clues with regard to when and how to introduce the procedures into one's own research routine. These methodological hints would include:

- finding a pre-existing order or pattern in data (due to these tools, numerous elements of data – divided by earlier procedures – become coherent again);
- referring to and relating to other substantial areas that constitute a more general theory on a given subject, e.g. sociology of dance and, more generally, of the body;
- relating bodily actions to certain social phenomena, such as identity, socialization, social control, normalization, etc. (contributing to general sociological theory abstracted from substantial area, but still grounded in data);
- not limiting research to individual actions and their cause and effect, but including the whole social, group, and interactional universe in which the action is contextualized;
- searching the data, but being careful about acknowledging only that which really resides in it, not what should be found according to the scheme of each analytical tool; thinking analytically, observing the relations of subsequent processual stages (these procedures are supposed to help the researcher contextualize the process and phenomenon, not force data);
- writing and drawing (with pen and paper) in order to easily and quickly change the order or direction of the dependencies between the phenomena and their processual relation;

 involving the study participants (when a model is ready, it could be presented to the participants and the researcher should tell them about it and ask for opinion); it is advisable to look for the most assertive participants, who have enough confidence to object to the proposed scheme if/when it does not reflect their experience. However, the researcher should not follow the participants' words without any theoretical reflection; the differences between the model, the participants' experience, and insider knowledge should all be considered first. All this should provide a researcher with a more complete understanding of the topic and of the person under scrutiny.

Conclusions

The body – as a non-entirely perceptible and intersubjectively communicable phenomenon – should be studied through a processual recognition, and from the perspective of experiencing and constructing it. What is extremely helpful in social research on this subject is the usage of a variety of data-gathering techniques and theoretical concepts. This allows the researcher to understand the most significant social aspects of human embodiment as well as the incorporated cultural sense and knowledge.

In this article, I have depicted only two procedures. The aim was not to provide readers with a guide through grounded theory, nor was it to given them an instruction on how to apply the methodology. Such considerations can be found

in various publications, both classic and more contemporary. Axial coding and conditional matrix are two analytical tools which vividly demonstrate how to search for relations and dependencies between bodily and social phenomena. Therefore, the purpose of this article was to demonstrate the usefulness of grounded theory methodology in sociological research on the human body and present examples of two analytical procedures that embed the human body in social processes. As stated before, GTM is not limited to procedures; rather, it is a profound research methodology, which shapes each phase of research and derives from the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. The assumptions that underlie both symbolic interactionism and grounded theory make social theorists and researchers treat the human body as a unique phenomenon that is available to individual experience. At the same time, the human body is constructed by and through interactions and cultural influences. GTM procedures, which have been depicted in this paper, give the researcher a possibility to investigate the relations between the body, numerous levels of social reality, and the conditions in which the body is constructed.

Grounded theory methodology is a research strategy that reflects the processual nature of social reality, which is vital in studies on the human body. Additionally, its general logic is always superior to its procedures, which should be regarded as tools on a path to achieving grounded theory. It consists of concrete procedures, but at the same time it is flexible and does not force any pre-existing theories.

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