



Qualitative Sociology Review

Volume II, Issue 3 – December 2006

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Editorial: From “a defense of doubting” to concept grounding

We have the pleasure to present a new issue of the “Qualitative Sociology Review” concerning concept creation in qualitative studies.

The construction of concepts is rooted in an intellectual tradition dating as far back as the ancient Greeks. In the opening article Robert Prus suggests that early philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle laid the epistemological groundwork for concepts that describe and explain the social world. He argues for “a defense of doubting” as a general strategy, which prepares social researchers to construct, clarify, and sharpen the categories that become sociological concepts. A general skepticism of knowing, he maintains, may help to better understand human acting.

As Thomas Scheff points out in his article on the Goffmanian strategy of concept building, concepts come often from vernacular language and are linked with the meanings coming from this language. He indicates that concepts should be grounded in the analysis of particular and concrete empirical examples that connect them with, and are described by, people in their everyday life-worlds. It is also argued that we should analyze all connotations of the concepts and their cognates. Cicero defended the power of doubting as a technique through which to assess and ground our concepts, a form of analysis which Scheff builds on.

Ethnographic research is one of qualitative strategies used to acquire direct data about the social world. A researcher can develop concepts adapting and transforming *a priori* theoretical categories that are external to a field of research. However, in his paper elaborating on the ethnomethodological technique known as “Rose’s Gloss,” Andrew Carlin suggests that we can elicit “information from members of society without imposing methodologically ironic categories onto members’ responses.” He argues that the researcher should not only get close to social actors as they go about their everyday lives, but also seek to understand their natural schemas of world perception and how they explain and make sense of the world.

Moreover, as shown in the article by Izabela Wagner, concepts can be formulated inductively out of the research. Building on Robert Merton’s notion of the “Matthew effect” and the symbolic interactionist concept of “career,” Wagner coins a new concept termed “career coupling.” The concept arises out of her qualitative research with musicians and scientists and is analytically grounded in their everyday life experiences. As shown by Wagner’s work, concepts are not static. They develop by exploring their applicability to new empirical situations and by connecting them with other categories that are theoretically relevant to the context. Comparative

analysis of human group life in a wide range of empirical contexts is needed to sharpen the categories and make them theoretically saturated.

We may treat concepts as historically embedded and based on a strategy of doubting (Prus), as linked to common language (Scheff), as natural schemas of world perception (Carlin), and developed inductively by scientists in the research process (Wagner). In an interview published in the current issue, Kathy Charmaz suggests that, regardless of epistemological tradition, the construction of concepts demands that researchers be aware of the sources of their own terminology used in the formation of a new concept.