

# Theory and Theorizing as Stunning Confusions in the Fieldwork. Analytical and Constructional Theorizing in Ethnographic Research

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## Abstract

*This study is a review of two categories in social science and qualitative, ethnographic researches as theory use and theorizing activity.*

**Keywords:** Theory, theorizing, social sciences, qualitative research, field research, ethnographic research, educational research, analytical theorizing, constructional theorizing.

## Introduction

**Theories and Theoretical Stunning Confusion:** While methodological analysis of literature in the social sciences, qualitative research reports: sociological, psychological, educational or anthropological, the readers can observe the diversity of both understanding and defining the concept of theory. In addition, the authors of publications show the ambiguity of what happens at the interface between theory and research in the social sciences, theories and research induction. Babbie<sup>2</sup> organizes theories in social sciences according to paradigms. The author indicates deductive and inductive theories and writes that "theory and research in the social sciences are connected via two methods of logic: deduction (derivation from the theory predictions and hypotheses) and induction (formulation of generalizations based on observations)". The author claims that in practice there are many different links between theory and research and many ways to implement social research.

Charmaz<sup>6</sup> stands out also for the paradigms of social sciences, positivist theories and theories of interpretation. The author devotes attention to theories of interpretation. Such theories of interpretation, according to the author put more emphasis on understanding than explaining. The theory of creative interpretation requires understanding the phenomenon studied. This kind of theory presupposes the existence of emergent, complex reality, uncertainty; also it assumes that facts and values are inextricably linked that the truth is temporary and that social life is a process.

## Multiplicity of Theories in Qualitative Research

**Theories as the initiator and product after the research:** The analysis of foreign and Polish scientific and methodological literature, oriented theories and their application in the study of social sciences, despite the diversity, suggested that in principle two concepts turn theory into qualitative research. Rationale is therefore analogy: the theory most widely understood serving as reviewing the literature and theory, as the product of the

research. This type of bipolarity concept of the theory was pointed by Babbie<sup>2</sup>, Creswell<sup>8</sup>, Charmaz<sup>6</sup>, Flick<sup>9</sup>, Rubacha<sup>16</sup>, Stasik, Gendźwiłł<sup>19</sup>, Urbaniak-Zajac<sup>21</sup> and many others.

Glaser and Strauss<sup>11</sup> theory in qualitative research of various coverage is possible as the target product of research. Such opinions express Rubacha<sup>16</sup> while discussing the study embroiled in context to Urbaniak-Zajac<sup>21</sup>. Similarly theory in clinical research of Flick<sup>9</sup> indicates the possibility of using the theory while receiving a research perspective, showing the background. It can develop inductive or deductive processes in qualitative studies. The author distinguishes the prospect of "bottom-up" (from phenomena and practices to theory and explanation) and as the example of a well-established theory. The author also discusses the prospect of "top-down" (from concepts and theoretical models to everyday practice) and as the example shows the theory of social representations. Flick<sup>9</sup> discusses the concept of Glaser and Strauss<sup>12</sup> claiming that qualitative research is not based on theory. He believes this way of thinking as an anachronism and mythologizing the role of theory in qualitative researches.

The author continues that today, in contrast to the 60s, the theory has become much more diverse which is associated with the development of the theory of medium and short-range (sometimes, as the results of qualitative research). There was, according to the author necessity reference to the issue of reviewing existing theories in qualitative research and the results of previous studies in order to avoid the "sin of naiveté". It is difficult to disagree with these clear issues.

Flick<sup>9</sup> indicates several variants and aspects of the theories faced by the qualitative researchers. According to Flick<sup>9</sup>, there are theories based on the assumptions of epistemological options in the research, to adopt a research perspective (e.g. biographical, social representation). In addition, other variants of contact with the theory apply theoretical knowledge related to the review of literature and existing research reports. The last variants of contact with the theoretical assumptions of the theory are according to Flick<sup>9</sup> related to the methods used by the researcher.

I would like to highlight the order made by the author of options in theory and that theory understood as a review of the literature (refines ontology of the research) appears at

the Flick<sup>9</sup> on the implementation of other ways of use the theory, or epistemological assumptions prior approval and adoption prospects research. This temporal aspect seems to be significant and consistent with the model of inductive qualitative research and further consideration. In my opinion, a temporal aspect that precised the type of theorizing during qualitative research, promotes their greater transparence. Analogous ways of understanding the role of theory in the study analyze the sociologists Stasik and Gendźwiłł<sup>19</sup>.

Interesting recommendation of theoretical grounding in qualitative research indicates cultural anthropologist Angrosino<sup>1</sup> indicating that during the gradual penetration of ethnographic research to a variety of scientific disciplines, they began to combine them with a wide range of theoretical orientations. The author mentions structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, feminism, Marxism, ethnomethodology, critical theory and cultural studies, postmodernism. This means that the existing theoretical framework includes researchers to determine their own conceptual framework of research projects in qualitative studies.

A similar proposal was the theory understood both as an initiator and a product by Creswell<sup>8</sup>, Professor of school psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The first way is to use the theory on the beginning of the study thus creating the context of the conceptual framework, or of what the investigator should pay attention to and what to put as research questions. This type of application is identified by the theory of ethnographic research. The second way is a matter of theory, as the result of the work, which for the author is tantamount to applying as a strategy of grounded theory. Slightly different theory of "post-research" in ethnographic field interprets Wolcott<sup>22</sup> who believes that the classical field research differs from ethnographic research because of essay written as additional theoretical product (theory after) and the point concluding the study.

Based on my own research experience, I think properly executed ethnographic studies require both the theory after and the theory of initiating them understood, as a report and ethnographic essay. Proposition shown above and made by Wolcott<sup>22</sup>, Flick<sup>9</sup>, Angrosino<sup>1</sup> and Creswell<sup>8</sup> is justified.

**The objectives of the use of Theory in Qualitative Research:** Creswell<sup>8</sup> also indicates a variety of objectives while using theory by qualitative researchers. First, analogous to investigators from quantitative theory, which is conceptualized as a review of the literature, is explaining the behavior and attitudes. The author cites Wolcott<sup>23</sup> and behind it indicates that the ethnographic studies activate the so-called "cultural threads" or "cultural aspects", such as social control, language, permanence and change, or the structure of social organization such as kinship, family. Wolcott<sup>23</sup> notes that "cultural threads," taken in this

context, are a source of ready-made hypotheses that are "tested" based on literature. I think that the word "test" in qualitative research can raise bad connotations. The author continues that although "cultural threads" are not elaborate theory but extensive cultural explanations are an important source of appeal anthropologists in the study of behavior and attitudes shared in a culture. Such an understanding of the theory of initiating qualitative research fits and confirms the justification by Flick<sup>9</sup>.

**The Theory as a Set of Urgent Social Problems to explore:** Creswell<sup>8</sup> continues that another way to use the theory in qualitative research is popularized by the 80s of the twentieth century, as the trend of research related to the fixed set of theoretical problems focused on the study of issues relating human rights. They were among the problems of gender discrimination, racial and class inequalities and social marginalization. It is not difficult to see that it is a theory using and relating to burning social problems, the groups of discriminated people, marginalized or excluded. The theory use in this way is understood as a somewhat socially valuable indicator when formulating research problems and creating the qualitative research projects.

Among other types of contemporary theoretical perspectives to guide qualitative research, Creswell<sup>8</sup> indicates the prospect of feminist discourses, of racial perspective, of critical theory, the theory of gender difference (queer) and the perspective of the disability (disability inquiry). The third way to use the theory in the research, indicated by J. Creswell<sup>8</sup> illustrates analogy to Flick<sup>9</sup>, Rubacha<sup>16</sup>, Kubinowski<sup>13</sup> and Urbaniak-Zajac<sup>21</sup> meant as the research product.

**Theory as a product of the Research:** The theory understood as a product of research, formed by a process of induction, characterizes process that begins according to Creswell<sup>8</sup> from the collection of data by creating category broader range of thematic patterns and ends with a generalized model or theory. Another meaning of theory as product is seen by grounded theory researchers which relates to the fact that the researchers seek to discover theory grounded in the data<sup>7</sup>.

**Theory of Designs:** Another type of theory of the qualitative research is "theories of designs" indicated by Angrosino<sup>1</sup>. Neuman<sup>15</sup> characterizes it as follows: "the theory of design does not rely on logical deductive reasoning. As a causal theory is a set of interrelated concepts of relationships, but it requires that a causal relationship. Theory uses metaphors and analogies, however, to "give meaning" relationship. Theories design ideas and create systems that provide knowledge. The concepts and the relationships form a closed system of mutual reinforcement. They define the phase sequence or combine elements of the whole."

Creswell<sup>8</sup> sees the creation of the theory of the research including the entire process off-road, starting with data collection. Such a position is no stranger to the cultural anthropologists or educators perceiving the process of creating theory already during the completion of the pre-recording data from the field.

**Faces of the Theories in Educational Research:** Ways of using the theory in educational research also discuss Polish educators Rubacha<sup>16</sup>, Urbaniak-Zajac<sup>21</sup> and others. The authors analyze the educational research conducted in different paradigms: positivism and constructivism. Rubacha<sup>16</sup> discusses the correctness of the creation of educational knowledge taking as a starting point of methodological procedures of such creation. The author clarifies the details of the procedures in the second part of the text as the testing procedures quantitative and qualitative referenced to the positivist and constructivist paradigms. Rubacha<sup>16</sup> is a researcher from the deep quantitative ground and positivist. He notes that the criterion of the creation of educational knowledge is in his opinion based on the line type of explanation which will be based on methodological procedures called idiographic or nomothetic. This division according to the author clearly divides the creations of research and educational knowledge generated on idiographic - set in the context of (constructivism) and nomothetic - rooted in the regularities (positivism).

The author clearly identifies theoretical knowledge as idiographic theory after the tests, according to the grounded theory in the data of Glaser and Strauss.<sup>11,12</sup> The author skips the threads and the feasibility of qualitative research understood as nomothetic. His statement seems very narrow and incomplete. Considering with attention this questionable issue, I think it is essential to consider that qualitative research can be designed (in addition to their idiographic nature), as well as the nomothetic study, seeking broader cultural patterns and regularities in the culture, the way of field studies, comparative or qualitative research conducted with the participation of large samples targeted.

What I think happens accepting to only idiographic way of performing qualitative research may be a kind of drawback of qualitative studies, in the context of contact with the theory. Such narrow view applies to identify it only with the category called theoretical knowledge related to the analysis of the theory and analysis of research reports, a review of the literature. In other words, losing the variant of a theory production (different range) after studies meant nomothetic.

Urbaniak-Zajac<sup>21</sup> rightly points out that understanding the theory depends on the understanding of science and consequently indicates a reference to the positivist and constructivist paradigms. The author identifies science traditionally understood as a value in it isolated from the

social influences and science as a field of culture and subject to social influences. Moreover, Urbaniak-Zajac<sup>21</sup> critically examines how the theory used by Polish educational researchers, concluding with an existing field of imprecise methodology for understanding the function of theory in research, in disciplines such as psychology, sociology and education. As an example of the lack of precision and specific methodological confusion, the author summoned analysis made by sociologist Sztompka<sup>20</sup> on the understanding of the concept of theory in sociology. According to the sociologists', use the term theory interchangeably with the history of social thought, methodology, sociology, detailing the orientation problematic for the researcher during the research towards issues worth examining.

**Criticism of the use of Theory in the Polish Educational Research:** Urbaniak-Zajac<sup>21</sup> also made a critical analysis of Polish scientific papers and theories used in the research reports, most likely carried out in different methodological procedures (quantitative and qualitative) in education. The author pointed to the different variants of the use of the theory, giving the name of category as given type of research. Urbaniak-Zajac<sup>21</sup> pointed a theoretical research (unguided by theory and not leading to the theory, as a result of research), mentioning research (one that refers to the theory of the phenomenon studied), research as a source of terms used in the empirical part. The theory, according to the author, can be used also during the construction of research tools connected to the conceptual set of tool. Unfortunately, some researchers omit this option which the author also stressed.

Moreover, the application of theory, can mean acceptance of terms and concepts from theoretical ground, in order to plan own research. The author also pointed out the negative impact of elements of theory in the studies of low degree of standardization which are understood as qualitative, consisting of "blocking chance to perceive anything other than provide theoretical position".

This, what seems to me valuable from the point of view of criticism of qualitative research by Urbaniak-Zajac<sup>21</sup> is, subtly accented noticing a certain mental slavery to theoretical positions meant as a literature review. It means some cognitive limitations after conducting a literature reviews. I call it a kind of "cognitive blindness" of the researchers to discern the phenomena studied in the real cultural scene. This could reduce appropriate constructs of the generated knowledge and the theory after the research.

### Theorizing as the activity

**Analytical and Constructional Theorizing:** Researcher while implementing qualitative, ethnographic research should respond, in my opinion, both to variant issues of theory and contact with in formulating and implementing the research project, as well as the activities understood as theorizing.

To bring more transparency and understanding the both aspects of involving and using theory and theorizing to the research, I thought to introduce, as distinguished, two types of theorizing in social sciences by the researcher leading qualitative study. These two separate types of activity that academic work contains, I called due to the type of cognitive activity: analytical theorizing and constructional theorizing. I suppose that this manner of arrangement will reduce the areas of methodological fog and muddle, unsaid during the drafting and implementation of qualitative research.

**Analytical Theorizing:** Analytical theorizing considers the theory and available research reports, concerning the subject and the problem of research while the constructional theorizing led the researcher to designs the theory of his/her own. This is attempt at theorizing by researcher on the long road while using analytic induction. These two theorizing activities are complementary and to some extent inseparable, in my opinion. They are a constant part of both types theorizing in the field, ethnographic research and both are important although their presence on the set of the research project needs to be clarified.

**Metaphorical Aspects of Analytical and Constructional Theorizing:** Analyzing art, especially the painting title: Portrait of a Woman (Dora Maar) painted by Pablo Picasso in 1937, one can see a beautiful woman in a blue-violet dress on the dark-green background. Pablo Picasso joined on the woman's face phenomena of items simultaneity taken from of image en-face and profile. This apparent contradiction and simultaneity shows subtly the logical impossibility of both perspectives. It gives an impression of "stunning confusion" of that portrait; however, such original artistic idea gives also a new quality of the portrait. It refreshed the way of view and understanding in art.

A similar and metaphorical situation to the Pablo Picasso's artistic idea appears when researcher tries to theorize in qualitative researches which is considered and applied as both: analytical theorizing and constructional theorizing. It is easy to notice the analogy that in the qualitative research project the simultaneity of both types of theorizing is essential, however difficult to perform, taking into account every assumption and quality of qualitative research. Some researchers and practitioners understand this difficult mental research position without any doubt. Indeed difficulty and apparent inability lies in reconciling the depth of initial analysis of a literature review in the research project inductance. Analogous to the portrait painted by Pablo Picasso the researcher faces the apparent impossibility as simultaneity logic to perform both types with quality and considering all issues in inductive research process.

What seems particularly uncomfortable for researchers is associated with the limits and achievement of the

appropriate balance between the initial review of theory and research (analytical theorizing) and the appropriate constructional theorizing in the field with freedom from entire concepts and data already known from the analytical theorizing. These processes, in my opinion, are placed in certain moment in phases of simultaneous studies.

**Most Confusing Issues and Dilemmas- The Temporal Aspects of Theorizing:** The solution to reconcile the tensions and contradictions is perceived in the temporal aspects of particular theorizing. This means that researcher should consider the optimal period of implementation of both analytical and constructional theorizing. This would mean that the researcher would transform the seeming impossibility combination of the two in-depth theorizing, embedded in de facto separate epistemologies and paradigms, to achieve a new quality of the final product of research - theory. Category, which favors dissolution, without compromising the core of inductance process of fieldwork (ethnography), seems to be just a temporal aspect, understood as the duration and discovering a proper moment of performance in a given type of different theorizing.

What I mean is that the investigator should consider the most appropriate time while the research in which he/she devotes attention to the nature of qualitatively distinct theorizing. This would entail deciding when, in the project field researcher should pursue analytical theorizing (along with that of his depth), a review of theories, analyze other research reports, explore the contexts of epistemological and ontological basis and when the researcher should start constructional theorizing based on collected field data?

The answer does not seem to be simple, since it comes to this kind of temporal involvement in research. On the one hand, such temporal approach and precision would minimize the risk of unconscious subordination of exploration in the field to data of the existing literature, concepts or theories. Besides, it is difficult to find the answer in qualitative reports considering the very first and clear moment of particular theorizing in qualitative research rooted in anthropology or education. Although scholars especially approaching from the ground of cultural anthropology, ranging from Franz Boas, emphasize natural and disciplined way of theorizing, which also can be called conceptual and equivalent reference to theory after (concept after) the anthropological and ethnographic researches.

**When theorize analytically and when constructively in Qualitative Research?** So when the researcher should begin analytical theorizing and when constructional theorizing in the educational field studies (ethnography)? I think some senses a hint proposed Flick<sup>9</sup>. Based on the concept of contact theory and qualitative research, which was previously explained, I believe that analytical theorizing precedes constructional. Preliminary analytical

theorizing will be sustained, in my opinion, to the following designs of the studies: theoretical analysis allows the researcher to generate epistemological assumptions, knowledge and consider and adopt optimal (for him/herself and the project) research perspective and method selection.

At the same time theorizing as preliminary analysis will examine such "cultural topics" and "cultural aspects" in relation to the problem formulation and to refining the research questions. After such preparation of theorizing, the qualitative researcher usually negotiates the terms of field access and if it obtains the necessary approval, enters the cultural scene. Entry into the field for some researchers seems clear as a starting point to theorizing, meant as theory building. Such theorizing begin researchers who understand it as the creation of the cultural record (inscriptions, transcription and of descriptions).

However, it is still not clear to me how much of the creation of such initially conceptualized descriptions will meet the qualifications of the theory of the qualitative research? Geertz<sup>10</sup>, Spradley<sup>17-18</sup>, Wolcott<sup>22</sup> and others wrote that even thick description, as the product of research does not define good quality of the theory after.

**The Optimal Time for Theorizing:** If the researcher takes into account the following elements of regular fieldwork, semantically similar and indicated by Flick<sup>9</sup>, Angrosino<sup>1</sup> and others such as: coding - categorization - generating cultural themes – generating patterns - the theory after, in my opinion, should clarify the temporal aspect of constructional theorizing. I reserve that this model is not linear but circular, spiral or funnel which seems to be obvious to practitioners of qualitative research. Angrosino<sup>1</sup> indicates the temporal clear signal. It should be pointed out that the author is the representative of nomothetic ethnographic research.

On the basis of completed research projects and many doubts concerning refine of the actual time of constructional theorizing, I think that the actual construction did not start when researcher was carrying out the first field notes, the first fixations and even not starts while preliminary data encoding. I also think that it commences no earlier than after determining categories, i.e. after categorizing data. This means that only rational and real moment for constructional analysis appears while the research generates cultural themes, broader patterns until the theory after research is formulated.

I want to add that during the whole process of the research, I see also a second separate point (time), which researcher after leaving the studied cultural scene (after collecting the data) may also spend on supplementary analytical theorizing, serving to shape the future of the scientific publication, as the research report or a full monograph. In terms of the practical importance of keeping his/her distance from a literature review of data and conscious

recognition of the primacy of the data collected in the field and constructional theorizing as constructs theory "after". I think that complementary analytical theorizing can be undertaken after leaving cultural scene. Such theorizing, in which the researcher theorizes consciously analytically and constructional is called simultaneous theorizing. In conclusion this means that the complex process of theorizing activities by investigator in qualitative researches can be saved in the following phases: Phase 1: analytical theorizing, Phase 2: constructional theorizing, Phase 3: analytical and constructional theorizing (performed simultaneously) = simultaneous theorizing, Phase 4: theory after the research.

**Constructional Theorizing:** Following induction thoughts towards the creation of the theory after the qualitative study, I believe that the investigator should consider both skillful distinguish and link of the two previously mentioned core processes of theorizing throughout the research process. This means the researcher should take into account the simultaneity of the two theorizing processes thought both as deductive and inductive. Partially such distinction was pointed by Barth<sup>3</sup>. I want to note that a significant part of social scientists gently passes over the problem of understanding the exact location of two theorizing moments in their fieldwork projects stating tersely that the theory is essential and its absence would reduce the scientific value of a research project.

Indirectly, this issue pointed Flick<sup>9</sup> writing about the trivialization of qualitative research as I mentioned previously. Polemics with the thesis would be difficult and unfounded. I want to add that while foreign and Polish educational publications give a clear picture of the methodology and analytical theorizing examples starting points, the researchers devote less attention to the constructional theorizing by the researcher during and after the qualitative fieldwork.

An interesting example and condition of constructional theorizing by the researchers in the field was pointed out by Norwegian anthropologist Barth<sup>3</sup>. Barth<sup>3</sup> seems to accept the analytical theorizing, as prior to constructional. The author cited by Krzyworzeka and Krzyworzeka<sup>14</sup> writes, "knowledge" is the starting point for the researcher and the material of reflection". Barth<sup>3</sup> however, suggests in contrast a different kind of theorizing than analytical that I consider constructional.

The author believes that the very concept of culture contains two dimensions. Culture includes semantically the effects of reflection and action of the researcher. This explanation leaves no doubt that it is a constructional theorizing. Barth<sup>3</sup> believes that theorizing researcher during fieldwork, has a fixed structure and three dimensions. The author names his own concept of "three faces of knowledge" which created the theory and suggests "knowledge" to understand the cultural threefold. "First of

all, knowledge is a set of specific claims and ideas about different aspects of reality. Second - because knowledge is an inherent aspect of communication – its "face" is also way of communicating and creating knowledge through one or more media such as words, gestures and symbols.”

The author also draws attention to the fact that communication - distribution of knowledge - takes place within established social relations that constitute the third "face" of knowledge. The perception of these different aspects of the structural forming the background of constructional theorizing by researcher in the field, is giving in author's opinion, typical ethnographic insight into social reality, combining elements of seemingly distinct nature.

Barth<sup>3</sup> believes that those three "faces" of knowledge are interconnected and influence each other. "If you analyze specific issues relating to knowledge, we consider forth above three aspects, we can discover the key constraints analyzed the case". What, in my opinion, seems to be the essence of constructional theorizing of qualitative researchers Sociologists Krzyworzeka and Krzyworzeka<sup>14</sup> while analyzing the concept of "three faces of knowledge" by Barth<sup>3</sup>, in ethnographic research, have reduced them to the following corresponding categories of theorizing.

These are the body of assertions, medium and the framework of social relations. I would add that the statements in the body of assertions from the cultural scene might be, according to J. Spradley<sup>17,18</sup> expressed as a cultural theme which would confirm my previous conclusions on the real-time of constructional theorizing by the qualitative investigator performing the fieldwork called ethnographic research.

## Conclusion

Performed analysis and review does not exhaust the issue of untangling doubts around two categories: theory and theorizing in the educational qualitative research and field studies. It is a voice in the current discourse concerning different ways of conceptualizing the theory as the review of existing data and theory created by the researcher during study together with a proposal of distinguishing between two types of theorizing carried out by the fieldworker, called by me analytical and constructional theorizing.

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