Qualitative Health Research
Volume 17 Number 8
October 2007 1137-1148

10.1177/1049732307308450
http://qhr.sagepub.com
hosted at
http://online.sagepub.com

Theoretical Sampling and Category Development in Grounded Theory

Claire B. Draucker
Donna S. Martsolf
Ratchneewan Ross
Thomas B. Rusk
Kent State University

Theoretical sampling is a hallmark of grounded theory methodology, and yet there is little guidance available for researchers on how to implement this process. A review of recently published grounded theory studies in *Qualitative Health Research* revealed that researchers often indicate that they use theoretical sampling to choose new participants, to modify interview guides, or to add data sources as a study progresses, but few describe how theoretical sampling is implemented in response to emergent findings. In this article, two issues that arose relative to theoretical sampling in an ongoing grounded theory study are discussed. A theoretical sampling guide that was developed by the authors' research team to facilitate systematic decision making and to enhance the audit trail relative to theoretical sampling is described, and an example of how the guide was used to develop a category is presented.

Keywords: *theoretical sampling; grounded theory; sexual violence*

Theoretical sampling, the process of data collection directed by evolving theory rather than by predetermined population dimensions (Strauss, 1987), is a pivotal strategy in grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2000). The term grounded theory is often used in the research literature to refer to a variety of processes by which theory is derived from empirical data. Grounded theory methodology, however, as conceptualized by founders Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), refers to a highly systematic set of procedures used to develop substantive theories of psychosocial phenomena (Schwandt, 2001). Schwandt described the process of grounded theory analysis, including the role of theoretical sampling, in theory development:

> Grounded theory requires a concept-indicator model of analysis, which in turn employs the method of constant comparison. Empirical indicators from the data (actions and events observed, recorded, or described in documents in the words of interviewees and respondents) are compared, searching for similarities and differences. From this process, the analyst identifies underlying uniformities in the indicators and produces a coded category or concept. Concepts are compared with more empirical indicators and with each other to sharpen the definition of the concept and to define its properties. Theories are formed from proposing plausible relationships among concepts and sets of concepts. Tentative theories or theoretical propositions are further explored through additional instances of data. The testing of the emergent theory is guided by theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling means that the sampling of additional incidents, events, activities, populations, and so on is directed by the evolving theoretical constructs. Comparisons between the explanatory adequacy of the theoretical constructs and these additional empirical indicators go on continuously until theoretical saturation is reached (i.e., additional analysis no longer contributes to anything new about a concept). In this way, the resulting theory is considered conceptually dense and grounded in the data. (pp. 110-111)

Theoretical sampling is often distinguished from selective sampling. Whereas theoretical sampling is guided by emerging theory, selective sampling is the identification of populations and settings prior to data

Authors' Note: This study was funded by the National Institute of Nursing Research [R01 NR08230-01A1]. Claire B. Draucker, PhD, Principal Investigator. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Claire B. Draucker, College of Nursing, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio 44242, e-mail: cdraucke@kent.edu.

collection (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). Thompson (1999) referred to data collected via selective sampling as "tentative theoretical jumping off points from which to begin theory development" (p. 816). Sampling in grounded theory is thus sequential, beginning with selective sampling and moving into theoretical sampling when concepts begin to emerge. Researchers must decide when to shift from selective to theoretical sampling.

Glaser (1978) indicated that theoretical sampling occurs when "the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges" (p. 36). Initial sampling decisions are based on a general sociological perspective and a general problem, but once data are collected and coding begins, the researcher is led in "all directions which seem relevant and work" (p. 46). Glaser presented recommendations for data collection strategies related to theoretical sampling, including staying open by changing interviewing styles, sites, or participants; follow up on recurring patterns in participant data; and asking key participants to give more information on categories that seem central to the emerging theory. Glaser also advised jotting down ideas that direct data collection, sampling for incidents of new categories when one has the sense in the field that a category has been saturated, and analyzing secondary data (i.e., data collected for any purpose) as a source of comparative analysis.

Coding processes are closely tied to theoretical sampling in grounded theory. Grounded theorists have identified three types of coding: open, axial, and selective (Strauss, 1987). Open coding is the initial close, line-by-line or word-by-word examination of the data for the purpose of developing provisional concepts. Through the process of constant comparison, these concepts are collapsed into categories. In axial coding, the analysis is specifically focused on an emerging category. Selective coding is the examination of the data for the purpose of unearthing the core category and achieving the integration of the theoretical framework.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) connected specific theoretical sampling strategies to the three types of coding. They suggest that open coding requires open sampling in which data are gathered to uncover as many relevant categories as possible. Open sampling can be done purposefully, by choosing sites, persons, or documents deliberately to gain the maximum amount of data needed to unearth potential categories and their dimensions; systematically, by moving from one person to another on a list to uncover subtle differences; and fortuitously, by gathering data during field observations that were unexpected but are seemingly relevant to category development. Axial coding requires relational, or variational, sampling, in which data are gathered to uncover and validate the relationships among categories that have been discovered. This type of sampling can also be done purposefully or systematically. Selective coding calls for discriminate sampling, in which data are gathered to verify the emerging theory and to further develop categories that have not been well saturated.

Strauss (1987) stressed that theoretical sampling "involves . . . much calculation and imagination on the part of the analysts . . ." (p. 39). As theoretical constructs evolve, precise information is sought to refine emerging ideas. When doing theoretical sampling, researchers must determine what data sources (e.g., groups of people, documents, bodies of literature) could yield the richest and most relevant data, and what cases (e.g., individuals, particular settings, specific documents) drawn from these sources are most likely to provide empirical indicators needed for category development. These decisions, like all methodological procedures, should be reflected in an audit trail.

Because selective sampling procedures are delineated prior to the start of data collection, researchers are able to clearly describe these procedures when describing their methodology. Discussion of selective sampling procedures typically includes descriptions of the population of interest, the sampling area or site, and recruitment strategies. Presenting theoretical sampling procedures is more difficult. Wuest (2001) conducted a grounded theory study with the aim of developing an explanatory framework of the processes of women's caring in diverse circumstances, thus moving toward a formal grounded theory. The author had conducted studies of caring with three diverse groups: women caring for children with otitis media with effusion, women caring for family members with Alzheimer's disease, and women who were leaving abusive relationships. Theoretical sampling for developing a formal theory involved obtaining data from new participants, previously conducted interviews, additional contacts with participants, observations of participants, and the literature. Wuest spoke to the difficulty of documenting "this recursive process of discovery, questioning, and theoretical sampling in a linear fashion" (p. 172). She nonetheless provided a figure that depicted theoretical sampling with a flow diagram reflecting the interplay among sampling choices, discoveries, and questions and hypotheses. The figure depicts, for example, how data from women of childbearing age (sampling choice)

revealed issues of competing demands and dissonance (discoveries) that led to questions such as "Are there other problematic properties of demands?" or "Does dissonance increase with more demands and decrease with fewer demands?" (p. 173). These questions led to the sampling of groups such as mothers of disabled children, widows with adult children, and single women on welfare. Each of these groups led to more discoveries, which in turn led to more questions, circling back to more sampling choices, and so on.

Although grounded theory methodologists emphasize that theoretical sampling is critical to the development of a conceptually-dense and complex theory (Charmaz, 2000), little guidance is available for researchers who need to make "real-life" theoretical sampling decisions. This article will discuss the implementation of theoretical sampling procedures in practice. Recently published grounded theory research reports will be reviewed to determine how the implementation of theoretical sampling procedures is typically described in the literature. A theoretical sampling guide was developed by the authors' research team to facilitate systematic decision making and enhance the audit trail for a grounded theory study of women's and men's responses to sexual violence. This guide will be presented, and its use in developing a category will be described.

Theoretical Sampling in Published Grounded Theory Studies

To gain a better sense of how theoretical sampling is currently discussed in published reports, the authors conducted a review of empirically-based grounded theory research that appeared in *Qualitative Health Research (QHR)* between January 2001 and July 2006. Using the Electronic Journal Center of the Ohio Library and Information Network (OHIOLINK), we accessed 46 articles that reported the findings of a grounded theory study, and determined that 29 referred to theoretical sampling. In many of these articles, theoretical sampling was referenced if data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously (Ford-Gilboe, Wuest, & Merritt-Gray, 2005; Johansson & Winkvist, 2002; Leipert & Reutter, 2005; Martyn & Hutchinson, 2001; Meyer, 2002; Peters & Pinkston, 2002; Sword, 2003). Some articles indicated that theoretical sampling was used to select participants with certain demographic characteristics or life experiences (Beck, 2002; Borrayo & Jenkins, 2001; Honey, 2004; Leipert & Reutter, 2005; McNeill, 2004; Meeker, 2004; Weaver, Wuest, & Ciliska, 2005), although only a few revealed how specific emergent findings called for the sampling of certain groups of participants (Beck, 2002; Meeker 2004).

Several authors indicated that they used theoretical sampling by modifying data collection procedures—most often interview questions—as their study progressed. Theoretical sampling was said to occur when: (a) interview questions were refocused to gain specific information regarding an emerging concept (Borrayo, Buki, & Feigal, 2005; de la Cuesta, 2005; Sandgren, Thulesius, Fridlund, & Petersson, 2006; Small, Brennan-Hunter, Best, & Solberg, 2002), (b) interviews were redirected as some categories became saturated and participants introduced new concepts (Milliken & Northcott, 2003), and (c) interviews were modified to test working hypotheses (McNeill, 2004) or validate theoretical concepts (Milliken & Northcott, 2003). Authors often did not detail how emerging concepts necessitated a change in interview strategies or how the interview questions were actually modified according the stage of analysis. An exception is a report by Caron and Bowers (2003) on decision making involved in providing care to an older family member. After analyzing the first three interviews with caregivers, the researchers determined that caregiving decisions were influenced by the caregivers' relationship to the care recipient. They then added questions to their interview guide to explore this topic. The authors provided a table that illustrated how questions were revised and demonstrated how these questions increased the complexity of the analysis. Several reports indicated that theoretical sampling was used to direct researchers to sources of pertinent information (e.g., articles in the popular press) to supplement participant interviews, but did not describe how the development of theoretical constructs were enhanced with these additional data (de la Cuesta, 2005; Hauck & Irurita, 2002).

We found only one article that reflected a major shift in emphasis because of emergent findings and theoretical sampling. In a study of HIV symptom management, Wilson, Hutchinson, and Holzemer (2002) indicated they used theoretical sampling "in its true sense" (p. 1312) by shifting the emphasis of the study from HIV symptom management to antiretroviral (ARV) adherence in response to early findings.

Our review suggests therefore that although authors frequently indicate that theoretical sampling was used to choose new participants, modify interview guides, or direct researchers to data sources other than participant narratives, they infrequently

discuss how these activities are connected to the theoretical constructs being developed at a particular stage of analysis. Although it is not feasible to present all methodological decisions in published reports, the absence of descriptions of the planning and implementation of theoretical sampling, and the scarcity of robust examples of theoretical sampling procedures, leaves the reader without a full appreciation of how theoretical sampling is carried out in practice.

Theoretical Sampling in a Study of Women's and Men's Responses to Sexual Violence

The purpose of our study, funded by the National Institute of Nursing Research, National Institutes of Health, is to develop a midrange theory that describes, explains, and predicts women's and men's responses to sexual violence. The team is currently using two primary sources of data to develop the theoretical framework. The first includes narratives and documents obtained from a community-based sample. Community recruitment procedures designed for hidden or hard-to-reach populations (Campbell, Sefl, Wasco, & Aherns, 2004; Martsolf, Courey, Chapman, Draucker, & Mims, 2006) are being used to recruit women and men over the age of 18 living in the greater Akron, Ohio, area who have experienced sexual violence at any time in their lives. The second data source includes published research reports obtained for the purpose of a qualitative meta-synthesis, the results of which will be integrated with participant data to develop the theoretical framework. Seventy-three qualitative studies focusing on adults' descriptions of experiences with sexual violence were retrieved. The articles appeared in peer-reviewed journals prior to January 1, 2006.

Two particular methodological issues related to theoretical sampling have arisen in this project. First, the investigators needed to make difficult choices regarding a balance between selective sampling procedures and theoretical sampling procedures. Second, when we began theoretical sampling, we identified the need for guidance relative to systematic case selection (Strauss, 1987) to efficiently obtain the concept indicators we needed to develop emerging categories. We will discuss how we resolved the first issue and, with regard to the second issue, we present a theoretical sampling guide that was developed to facilitate our sampling decisions and maintain our audit trail. We will then provide an example of how we used this guide to develop an emerging category.

The Selective Sampling–Theoretical Sampling Dilemma

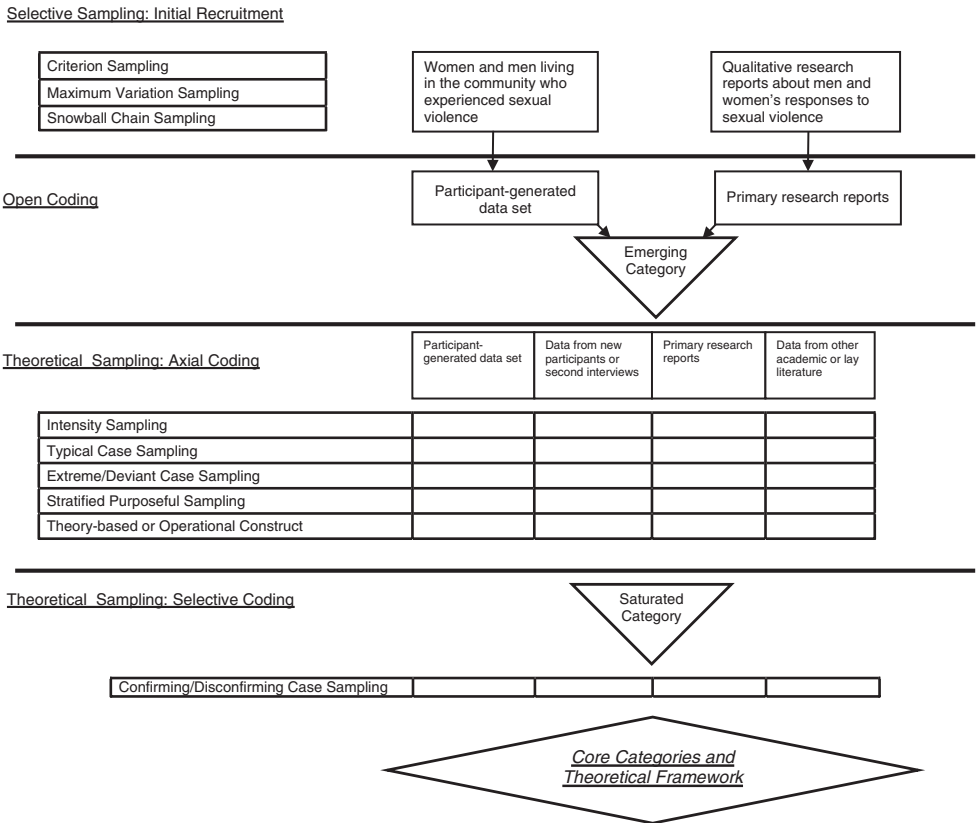
Selective sampling decisions had been outlined in our grant proposal. We had determined that we would recruit men and women over the age of 18 living in the Akron, Ohio area who had experienced sexual violence. We argued that by recruiting those who had experienced sexual victimization by strangers, acquaintances, and/or intimates at any time in their lives, we could obtain the breadth of information needed to develop a refined typology of lifespan sexual victimization. We determined that metropolitan Akron was an appropriate locale for selective sampling because it is a city of considerable socioeconomic and ethnic diversity and is in close proximity to our university.

Community-based recruitment was used for selective sampling (Campbell et al., 2004; Martsolf et al., 2006). Demographic information was collected from census data for each zip code in metropolitan Akron. Because individuals with limited economic resources and adverse life circumstances (e.g., individuals who were homeless, individuals involved in prostitution) had been underrepresented in sexual violence research, we began recruitment in the most densely populated and impoverished areas, which included zip codes of "downtown" Akron. We considered this our selective sampling "jumping off point" (Thompson, 1999). We later sampled other zip codes of different demographic profiles to obtain a diverse sample.

Research associates conducted structured community assessments, as practiced by community health nurses, and visited targeted neighborhoods in pairs to became familiar with community features and network with residents, community leaders (e.g., clergy, directors of social agencies), and business proprietors (Martsolf et al., 2006). Study flyers were posted where individuals were likely to gather (e.g., bus stops, shops, community bulletin boards in businesses). The flyers invited those who had experienced sexual violence at some point in their lives to call a toll-free number to arrange for an interview. Some community leaders were enlisted to help with recruitment. Several clergy, for example, distributed flyers to their congregations and encouraged participation.

When these selective sampling procedures were initiated, the investigators intended to abide by the tenets

Figure 1
The Theoretical Sampling Guide



of constant comparison analysis; that is, to collect and analyze data simultaneously and begin theoretical sampling as soon as early categories begin to emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Soon after we distributed our initial flyers ($n = 24$), requests for interviews came rapidly; we received an average of 3.5 calls per day, and a total of 110 calls in the first month of recruitment. We quickly realized that we had underestimated the effectiveness of our initial recruitment efforts and were faced with a difficult methodological decision. If we interviewed all those who had called the toll-free number in a timely manner, it would not be possible to analyze the data as it became available. If we delayed the interviews, participants might become discouraged and lost to the research. We knew from participants in our prior studies that making the initial call is difficult, and realized that long delays in scheduling interviews while we analyzed data could be disheartening to those who called. We therefore opted to interview callers who met study criteria as quickly as we could. Our college of nursing provided us with additional research associates qualified to conduct the interviews. By respecting the needs of the study participants, we violated traditional theoretical sampling principles, as our data collection was clearly well ahead of our data analysis. As a result of this decision, we began open coding on 43 transcribed interviews, rather than just the few recommended by grounded theorists.

Developing a Theoretical Sampling Guide

The initial open coding of the first "wave" of transcripts ($n = 43$) yielded several emerging concepts and codes, and the need to begin theoretical sampling was apparent. We had to decide which available data sources could provide the richest and most relevant information, and which cases (e.g., participants, documents, articles) drawn from those data sources would yield the strongest empirical indicators for category development. The research team decided to develop a guide to facilitate and document decisions related to theoretical sampling. The guide, presented in Figure 1,

is to be used for each emerging category. Each component of the guide is discussed below.

Coding Stages

Because theoretical sampling serves different functions for each type of coding, we divided the guide into three primary sections representing open, axial, and selective coding. Because we were most concerned with theoretical sampling for initial category development, the most emphasis was placed on the axial coding section. Sampling strategies applicable to selective sampling and selective coding are also represented on the guide, so that theoretical sampling strategies for category development are considered in context. The guide, therefore, reflects sampling strategies to be used across the study.

Data Sources

The two data sources produced by initial data collection procedures were: (a) a participant-generated data set, which included the interview transcripts from participants recruited in the community, and (b) a primary research reports data set, which included the findings of the qualitative research reports obtained for the meta-synthesis. For axial coding, two additional potential data sources were available to us: (c) information that could be provided by additional recruitment of participants or second interviews with enrolled participants (most had agreed to be recontacted by the researchers), and (d) other academic (e.g., philosophy, sociology, psychology) or lay literature related to the emerging category. These four data sources are represented as rectangular boxes on the grid in Figure 1.

Case Selection

Systematic case selection from our available data sources posed a challenge. We needed to answer the question: Given the emerging concept, what is the best data source to sample, and what case within that data source would provide the most useful concept indicators for further category development?

We turned to the classic sampling framework presented by Patton (1990) to obtain guidance on case selection. Patton had outlined 16 different strategies for purposefully selecting information-rich cases, providing the logic for each strategy. The wide variation and specificity of the strategies in this framework allowed us to choose those most consistent with our sampling goals at different stages of data collection and analysis.

Selective sampling: Initial recruitment. Our initial selective sampling had been completed by the time we developed the guide. However, we noted that some of Patton's (1990) sampling strategies reflected procedures we had used to obtain our initial sample. As described above, we had developed predetermined criteria for our original sample, recruited participants with community advertising and referrals from community leaders and other participants, and obtained a socioeconomically diverse sample by planned recruitment in zip codes of varying demographic profiles. We had obtained qualitative sexual violence research reports based on predetermined criteria, and supplemented those reports with other sexual violence literature cited in the reference lists of the original set of articles. These selective sampling strategies were used to gain the maximum amount of data to unearth categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Three of Patton's strategies closely reflected our procedures in obtaining our initial sample, and were added to the guide as strategies for selective sampling. The three strategies and our corresponding procedures (in parentheses) were

1. Criterion sampling: Selecting cases that "meet some predetermined criterion of importance" (p. 176; initial recruiting based on our original sample criteria)
2. Snowball sampling: Identifying cases from "people who know people who know people who know what cases are information-rich" (p. 182; adding participants referred by the community leaders and other participants)
3. Maximum variation sampling: Selecting participants for "capturing and describing central themes . . . that cut across a great deal of participant . . . variation" (p. 172; using community census data to ensure socioeconomic diversity)

Theoretical sampling: Axial coding. Our selective sampling procedures yielded a large amount of data, and open coding provided a number of emerging concepts and codes. The team discussed what case characteristics would yield the most pertinent information to develop the categories. We determined that we needed to closely examine those cases that had "a lot to say" about the phenomena reflected in emerging categories (e.g., common responses to sexual violence). In addition, cases that represented common manifestations of a phenomenon, as well as those that represented atypical manifestations, would be needed to identify the dimensions and properties of the categories. To meet our study goals, we needed to examine the influence of the type of sexual violence (e.g.,

discrete, one-time incidents of violence versus episodic violence occurring across time) on the categories. Finally, we needed data to move the categories from substantive to abstract levels.

The team determined that five of Patton's (1990) strategies were particularly relevant to our theoretical sampling needs for axial coding and category development. These strategies would lead us to cases most likely to have relevant concept indicators, which we would then subject to constant comparison analysis according to the tenets of traditional grounded theory methodology (Glaser, 1978). Given our large data set, we wished to identify those cases most likely to yield rich and relevant indicators. Five of Patton's strategies that could lead us to the most "indicator rich" cases were identified. They were

1. Intensity sampling: Selecting "information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely . . ." (p. 171),
2. Typical case sampling: Selecting cases that "illustrate or highlight what is typical, normal, or average" (p. 182),
3. Extreme or deviant case sampling: Selecting cases that are "rich in information because they are unusual or special in some way" (p. 169),
4. Stratified purposeful sampling: Selecting cases that "illustrate characteristics of certain subgroups" (p. 182), and
5. Theory-based or operational construct sampling: Selecting cases that manifest "theoretical constructs of interest" (p. 183).

The grid included in the axial coding section on the guide has 20 cells that depict the intersection of four types of data sources and five types of case sampling strategies. Researchers can use this grid to record cases that are theoretically sampled and examined for indicators of emerging categories. The results of this process is a saturated category.

Theoretical sampling: Selective coding. To complete the guide, the team discussed Patton's (1990) strategies relative to selective coding, although we have not yet reached this stage of analysis. The purpose of selective coding is to identify a core category, the category which accounts for most of the variation in the data (Strauss, 1987), and to propose plausible relationships among categories to integrate the theoretical framework. Theoretical sampling at this stage of analysis, therefore, would require the deliberate selection of cases to determine whether the theory holds up under a variety of circumstances (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). One Patton strategy was particularly well suited to this aim:

> Confirming and disconfirming case sampling: "Selecting cases for the purpose of elaborating and deepening initial analysis, seeking exceptions, testing variation." (p. 182)

This strategy is listed on the guide under "selective coding."

Although Patton's (1990) framework is often used for purposive sampling at the outset of studies, we found the framework provided case selection guidance for both selective sampling and theoretical sampling. For theoretical sampling, the strategies led us to cases that had the greatest "theoretical relevance and purpose" (Glaser, 1978, p. 42) because they yielded the best concept indicators for comparison and category development.

Using the Guide to Develop a Category

During the open coding process, many concepts reflecting particular responses to sexual violence began to emerge. Hundreds of text units (i.e., segments of data capturing a complete incident, fact, and so forth) reflecting empirical indicators of those concepts were coded using the N6 qualitative software program (QSR, 2002). Team members were assigned to guide and track the development of particular categories. The team member in charge of each category brought data, memos, and theoretical questions to the team for discussion as the category was being developed.

The development of one emerging category, originally called "telling others about the violence," will be described to exemplify how the research team used the newly developed theoretical sampling guide. Cases (e.g., transcripts, primary research reports) selected by theoretical sampling were placed in the appropriate cells in the guide. Transcripts were indicated by their numerical project tracking numbers, and primary research reports were indicated by author and date of publication. Although the development of the category is described as a linear process, it is iterative; we move between concept indicators and concepts and among the five coding strategies. Because our aim is to discuss our use of the theoretical sampling guide, and the category is still tentative, the dimensions and parameters of the category are not discussed here; rather, we outline how we arrived at the category's name and preliminary description.

As mentioned above, the research team had 43 interview transcripts from participants and the findings of 73 primary research reports to use for open coding. All initial participants' transcripts had some

references to revealing to or hiding from another person their experience(s) with sexual violence. The majority of the primary research reports had some references to telling or not telling others about sexual violence as well. The researchers determined that "telling others about the violence" as a response to sexual victimization was a concept that warranted consideration as a category.

To develop the category and determine its properties and dimensions, we began axial coding, which had been defined by Strauss (1987) as "intense analysis done around one category at a time in terms of paradigm items. . . . " (p. 32). Our theoretical questions, based on Strauss's paradigm items, were: (a) Under what conditions does telling occur? (b) What are the consequences of telling? (c) What strategies or tactics are used for telling? and (d) What interactions comprise telling? To aid with axial coding, we used intensity, typical, extreme/deviant, stratified purposeful, and theory-based or operational construct sampling, with the aid of the grid.

Intensity Sampling

We first conducted intensity sampling by identifying those participants and primary research reports with "a lot to say" about telling or, just as important, not telling. We identified participant transcripts that provided a significant number of text units to the telling code. These cases were recorded on the participant-generated data set x intensity sampling cell in the axial coding section of the theoretical sampling guide. Because some participants revealed relevant information about telling in a concise manner not reflected by the number of text units, the first author read all transcripts carefully and added any cases with information deemed significant. This procedure was repeated as the interviews continued. A similar procedure was followed with the primary research reports. All were read thoroughly for any findings related to telling, and those with particularly relevant or robust findings related to telling (e.g., Alaggia, 2004; Armsworth, 1990; Baker, 2003; Bletzer, 2003; Bletzer & Koss, 2004) were added to the primary research reports data set x intensity sampling cell of the grid. The cases were examined for empirical indicators of telling, and those indicators were highlighted and discussed by the team.

After conducting constant comparison with those indicators, the team reached four conclusions: (a) Telling is a complex, social interaction occurring across time; (b) Whereas some telling serves a pragmatic purpose (e.g., stopping the abuse, having the perpetrator brought to justice), seeking and/or obtaining a different or clearer understanding of the violence was a crucial element of most telling experiences; (c) Telling is best understood as a mode of being, a general attitude about how much one wishes to share one's experiences with violence rather than as a point-in-time event; and (d) The talk that occurred after the telling of the violence was the focus of most of the telling narratives. These conclusions directed future case selection.

Typical Case Sampling

As we examined the intensity-sampled cases in greater detail, and patterns began to emerge, the team identified transcripts and primary reports (e.g., Alaggia, 2004; Donalek, 2001; Tyagi, 2001: Washington, 2001) that we deemed to be typical insofar as they reflected common patterns of telling and reflected shared conditions, consequences, interactions, and strategies (Strauss, 1987). These typical cases were placed in the participant-generated data set x typical case sampling cell, or in the primary research reports x typical case sampling cell.

Empirical indicators of telling were identified and compared in these cases and typical patterns of telling were identified. For example, a typical pattern occurred when participants experienced childhood sexual abuse and did not tell anyone about it because they had been threatened by the perpetrator or believed their families would not support them. Another typical pattern occurred when participants told someone about the violence and the other person stressed that it was not their fault, leading the participant to look at violence in a different way. Several primary research reports also addressed these common scenarios.

Extreme or Deviant Case Sampling

To further understand the conditions, consequences, interactions, and strategies (Strauss, 1987) related to telling, the research team decided to identify and discuss extreme cases of telling. Extreme cases were participants who had (a) never told anyone (with the exception of the interviewer) about the violence, (b) engaged in frequent or public telling, and/or (c) experienced very positive or very negative consequences from telling. These cases were recorded in the participant-generated data set x extreme case or deviant sampling cell. A second interview was conducted with one participant who had an extremely negative experience when telling his experience of sexual violence; this transcript was recorded in the new participants and second interview x extreme or deviant case sampling cell. At the time we

were developing this category, a celebrity revealed publicly that she had experienced childhood sexual abuse. She had maintained this secret throughout her life. The magazine article that tells her story (Bennetts, 2006) was entered in the academic or lay literature x extreme or deviant case sampling cell. Again, empirical indicators of telling were highlighted and compared.

Additional conclusions were reached during our examination of indicators from both typical and extreme cases. Two conditions that influenced telling experiences were how participants understood the nature (e.g., "What was it?") and cause (e.g., "Why did it happen?") of the violence, and their perceptions of how their environment made telling possible. Common consequences of telling were having their initial understanding of the violence confirmed or challenged. Participants used a wide variation of telling strategies, often involving "testing the waters"; that is, determining whether others in their world were open to hearing about the violence. The interactions of telling were complex, often involving a negotiation of the nature and cause of the violence with others.

Stratified Purposeful Sampling

As our study aims specified that we would examine the influence of the type of sexual violence on individuals' responses, we compared telling narratives across four subgroups: (a) those who experienced ongoing violence (referred to as episodic violence) as children, (b) those who experienced only a single incident of violence (referred to as discrete violence) as children, (c) those who experienced episodic violence as adults, and (d) those who experienced only a discrete episode of violence as adults. Highly intense cases fitting into the subgroups were entered into the participant-generated data x stratified purposeful sampling cell. Although examining group differences is an aim of our research, comparing telling indicators across groups suggested that how individuals understand the nature (e.g., "What is it?") and cause (e.g., "Why did it happen?") of the violence is more important than the type of violence experienced in influencing how telling occurred.

Operational Construct Sampling

The strongest theoretical construct to emerge related to telling is understanding the violence. Participants indicated that telling could serve practical purposes, such as stopping the violence, or cathartic purposes, such as "getting it off one's chest." For the most part, however, participants described telling about the violence as a way of understanding it. Therefore, theory-based or operational construct sampling involved selecting cases of those who spoke in depth about the importance of understanding the nature or cause of the violence. These cases were recorded in the participant-generated data set x operational construct sampling cell. In addition, we examined three sources of academic literature that we believed would help us refine and expand this category theoretically. These sources were classic literature on hermeneutics (e.g., Heidegger, 1927/1962), symbolic interaction (e.g., Blumer, 1969), and life narratives (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Frank, 1992); Ricoeur, 1986; Schafer, 1992, p. 32). These references were recorded in the academic and lay literature x operational construct sampling cell. Indicators of telling as understanding were highlighted and compared.

The Category: Storying the Violence

As a result of axial coding and theoretical sampling, the telling category was now called storying the violence. Data revealed that the phenomenon originally labeled telling is actually a lifelong process of engaging with one's social world to enrich one's evolving interpretation of the life experience of violence. When those who experienced sexual violence discussed it with another, their assumptions of the nature and cause of the violence were either confirmed or, more often, altered; they viewed the violence in a new way. Through a series of interactions, they incorporated new vantage points (Gadamer, 1960/1996) into their interpretation of their experiences with violence.

A life trajectory, based on a compilation of several participant narratives, is provided as an example. A young girl believes that her experience of childhood sexual violence is a punishment for being a "bad" child, an explanation given to her by the perpetrator. When she tells her family of her abuse, her view of the violence is reinforced, as her family blames her rather than the perpetrator for the violence. She then chooses to keep her abuse a secret and therefore is not exposed to views that might challenge her understanding of the nature (e.g., punishment) or cause (e.g., her own conduct) of the violence. When she becomes an adult, a friend remarks in passing that child abuse is never the fault of the child. The woman does not reveal her own personal experiences to her friend, but the woman's interpretation of her abuse is challenged. Later, she "tests the waters" with a therapist to see if the therapist is open to discussing abuse

by hinting that "something" happened to her as a child. The therapist does not pick up on her cue so the woman does not discuss the abuse, but continues to question her childhood interpretation of it. At a family reunion she decides to ask her sister if she also experienced abuse. Her sister reveals that she was in fact abused by the same perpetrator and had always wondered if she had been the only one. As the sisters discuss their shared experience, together they conclude that the perpetrator was a "sick" person who took advantage of their chaotic family. The woman's telling is not a single event, but rather a series of complex social interactions over the course of her life, through which her understanding of her childhood sexual abuse evolves.

The team determined that the label for this category needed to reflect a series of interactions that occur across time, and result in an evolving understanding of one's sexual violence experience. We concluded that individuals' interpretation of sexual violence is a co-constructed life narrative. Telling entails testing one's assumptions (Heidegger, 1927/1962), and inevitably creates a new account of the violence. The phenomenon is best understood as storying the violence. The category reflects the theoretical tenet that those who have experienced violence story their experience; that is, they recreate their understanding of the past in light of the present (Bruner, 1990) and in doing so recreate their selves (Schafer, 1992, p. 32).

Conclusion

The authors were faced with two challenging issues related to theoretical sampling in our ongoing study of sexual violence. The first issue arose because early in the project we could not collect and analyze data simultaneously because of unanticipated success with community recruitment. Although we recognize that we violated a tenet of grounded theory analysis, we do not believe that our analysis was compromised.

Because we had a rather large data set on which to begin open coding, we could select particular concept indicators from this existing data, rather than seek new cases. Our experience supports the recommendation of Charmaz (2000; p. 520):

> Strauss (personal communication, February 1, 1993) advocates theoretical sampling early in the research. I recommend conducting it later in order that relevant data and analytic directions emerge without being forced. Otherwise, early theoretical sampling may bring premature closure to the analysis.

The second challenge was the need for direction in decision making and documentation relative to theoretical sampling. The guide we developed facilitated the selection of cases that contained the most information-rich and relevant concept indicators needed to develop an emergent category. We did not rely on this guide in a prescriptive manner, but rather used it to help us consider broadly all available data sources, including data we had already collected, and select from among those sources the cases that would yield the most robust indicators for comparison. The main analytic activity was the constant comparison of concept indicators, as is consistent with the tenets of grounded theory. We were, as Glaser (1978) described, "barraged with data and ideas for codes to be saturated and checked" (p. 46), and the guide helped us to theoretically sample in "conceptually elaborated directions" (p. 46). We anticipate using the guide as we theoretically sample to determine the core category and develop the theoretical framework as well. Our audit trail will be strengthened by having a theoretical sampling guide for each category we develop.

References

Alaggia, R. (2004). Many ways of telling: Expanding conceptualizations of child sexual abuse disclosure. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 28*, 1213-1227.

Armsworth, M. W. (1990). A qualitative analysis of adult incest survivors' responses to sexual involvement with therapists. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 14*, 541-554.

Baker, S. (2003). Lesbian survivors of childhood sexual abuse: Community, identity, and resilience. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health, 22*(2), 31-45.

Beck, C. T. (2002). Releasing the pause button: Mothering twins during the first year of life. *Qualitative Health Research, 12*(5), 593-608.

Bennetts, L. (2006, April). Terri Hatcher's desperate hour. *Vanity Fair,* 190.

Bletzer, K. V. (2003). Risk and danger among women-who-prostitute in areas where farmworkers predominate. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly, 17*(2), 251-278.

Bletzer, K. V., & Koss, M. P. (2004). Narrative constructions of sexual violence as told by female rape survivors in three populations of the southwestern United States: Scripts of coercion, scripts of consent. *Medical Anthropology, 23*, 113-156.

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspectives and methods.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Borrayo, E. A., Buki, L. P., & Feigal, B. M. (2005). Breast cancer detection among older Latinas: Is it worth the risk? *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(9), 1244-1263.

Borrayo, E. A., & Jenkins, S. R. (2001). Feeling healthy: So why should Mexican-descent women screen for breast cancer? *Qualitative Health Research, 11*(6), 812-823.

Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Campbell, R., Sefl, T., Wasco, S. M., & Aherns, C. E. (2004). Doing community research without a community: Creating safe space for rape survivors. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 33,* 253-261.

Caron, C. D. & Bowers, B. J. (2003). Deciding whether to continue, share, or relinquish caregiving: Caregiver views. *Qualitative Health Research, 13*(9), 1252-1271.

Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed., pp. 509-536). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

de la Cuesta, C. (2005). The craft of care: Family care of relatives with advanced dementia. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(7), 881-896.

Donalek, J. (2001). First incest disclosure. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 22*(6), 573-591.

Ford-Gilboe, M., Wuest, J., & Merritt-Gray, M. (2005). Strengthening capacity to limit intrusion: Theorizing family health promotion in the aftermath of woman abuse. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(4), 477-501.

Frank, A. W. (1997). *The wounded storyteller: Body, illness, and ethics.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gadamer, H. (1996). *Truth and method* (2nd ed. Revised; J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall, Trans.). New York: Continuum. (Original work published in 1960)

Glaser, B. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity: Advances in grounded theory.* Mill Valley, CA: The Sociology Press.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory.* Chicago: Aldine.

Hauck, Y. L., & Irurita, V. F. (2002). Constructing compatibility: Managing breast-feeding and weaning from the mother's perspective. *Qualitative Health Research, 12*(7), 897-914.

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). San Francisco: Harper. (Original work published in 1927)

Honey, A. (2004). Benefits and drawbacks of employment: Perspectives of people with mental illness. *Qualitative Health Research, 14*(3), 381-395.

Johansson, E. & Winkvist, A. (2002). Trust and transparency in human encounters in tuberculosis control: Lessons learned from Vietnam. *Qualitative Health Research, 12*(4), 473-491.

Leipert, B. D., & Reutter, L. (2005). Developing resilience: How women maintain their health in northern geographically isolated settings. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(1), 49-65.

Martsolf, D. S., Courey, T. J., Chapman, T. R., Draucker, C. B., & Mims, B. L. (2006). Adaptive sampling: Recruiting a diverse sample of survivors of sexual violence. *Journal of Community Health Nursing, 23*(3), 169-182.

Martyn, K. K., & Hutchinson, S. A. (2001). Low-income African American adolescents who avoid pregnancy: Tough girls who rewrite negative scripts. *Qualitative Health Research*, *11*(2), 238-256.

McNeill, T. (2004). Fathers' experience of parenting a child with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. *Qualitative Health Research, 14*(4), 526-545.

Meeker, M. A. (2004). Family surrogate decision making at the end of life: Seeing them through with care and respect. *Qualitative Health Research, 14*(2), 204-225.

Meyer, G. A. (2002). The art of watching out: Vigilance in women who have migraine headaches. *Qualitative Health Research, 12*(9), 1220-1234.

Milliken, P. J., & Northcott, H. C. (2003). Redefining parental identity: Caregiving and schizophrenia. *Qualitative Health Research, 13*(1), 100-113.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods.* (2nd Edition). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Peters, C. M., & Pinkston, E. M. (2002). Controllers and noncontrollers: A typology of older Americans and their caregivers' approaches to managing the private funding of long-term care. *Qualitative Health Research, 12*(9), 1161-1183.

QSR (2002). N6 qualitative data analysis software. QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 6, 2002.

Ricoeur, P. (1986). Life: A story in search of a narrator. In M. C. Doeser & J. N. Kray (Eds.), *Facts and Values* (p.132). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martin Nijoff Publishers.

Sandgren, A., Thulesius, H., Fridlund, B., & Petersson, K. (2006). Striving for emotional survival in palliative cancer nursing. *Qualitative Health Research, 16*(1), 79-96.

Schafer, R. (1992). *Retelling a life: Narration and dialogue in psychoanalysis*. New York: Basic Books.

Schatzman, L., & Strauss, A. (1973). *Field research.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Schwandt, T. A. (2001). *Dictionary of qualitative inquiry.* (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Small, S. P., Brennan-Hunter, A. L., Best, D. G., & Solberg, S. M. (2002). Struggling to understand: The experience of nonsmoking parents with adolescents who smoke. *Qualitative Health Research, 12*(9), 1202-1219.

Strauss, A. L. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Sword, W. (2003). Prenatal care use among women of low income: A matter of taking care of self. *Qualitative Health Research, 13*(3), 319-332.

Thompson, C. (1999). Qualitative research into nurse decision making: Factors for consideration in theoretical sampling. *Qualitative Health Research, 9*(6), 815-828.

Thulesius, H., Hakansson, A., & Petersson, K. (2003). Balancing: A basic process in end-of-life cancer care. *Qualitative Health Research, 13*(10), 1353-1377.

Tyagi, S. V. (2001). Incest and women of color: A study of experiences and disclosure. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 10*(2), 17-39.

Washington, P. A. (2001). Disclosure patterns of black female sexual assault survivors. *Violence Against Women, 7*(11), 1254-1283.

Weaver, K., Wuest, J., & Ciliska, D. (2005). Understanding women's journey of recovering from anorexia nervosa. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(2), 188-206.

Wilson, H. S., Hutchinson, S. A., & Holzemer, W. L. (2002). Reconciling incompatibilities: A grounded theory of HIV medication adherence and symptom management. *Qualitative Health Research, 12*(10), 1309-1322.

Wuest, J. (2001). Precarious ordering: Toward a formal theory of women's caring. *Health Care for Women International, 22*, 167-193.

Claire B. Draucker, PhD is a Distinguished Professor at the College of Nursing at Kent State University. Her research interests include sexual violence throughout the lifespan and adolescent mental health concerns.

Donna S. Martsolf, PhD is a Professor at the Kent State University College of Nursing. Her research interests include women's mental health and violence throughout the lifespan and in cultural context.

Ratchneewan Ross, PhD is an Assistant Professor at the College of Nursing at Kent State University. Her research interests include sexual violence, HIV/AIDS, and health promotion-risky behaviors among vulnerable populations.

Thomas B. Rusk, BA is a Project Coordinator at the College of Nursing at Kent State University.