Grounded Theory

Coding Notes, Qualitative Software, and Inductive Research
What is Grounded Theory?

Grounded Theory “investigates the actualities in the real world and analyses the data with no preconceived hypothesis.”

(Allan 2003; Glaser and Strauss 1967)
What is Coding?

Codes are Labels embedded in Your Data:
   – Identify themes
   – Trace usage of words or ideas
   – Create theory versus testing theory
   – Test research validity

It’s very simple to do!
   (But it takes practice to do well)
You Already Code Your Notes (in your head)

- Theory building and analysis "start with the first interview" (Allan 2003)

- In fieldwork, "multiple hypotheses are pursued simultaneously" (Glaser and Strauss 1965)

- "There are as many ways of 'seeing' the data as one can invent" (Dey 1993)
Out of Your Head and into a Codebook

The key is to make the analysis you already do more systematic:

– Develop consistent codes
– formally analyzing all of your data with the same tools

Benefits of Systematic Coding:

– Provides checks for researcher bias
– Identifies new areas of inquiry
How to Use Coding Deliberately

You don’t always know what you’re looking for!

• Record EVERYTHING potentially relevant in your field notes
  – how old were the GCs you interviewed?
  – What did they look like?

• Because you don’t know what will become useful later!

• Then code your notes sentence by sentence.

• At the same time, code for larger concepts...

• And, when you’re done, go back and code again!
“Grounded theorists begin with a line-by-line analysis, asking,

What is this sentence about?

and

How is it similar to or different from the preceding or following statements?”

(Ryan and Bernard 2003)
you are the garden coordinator - what does the garden coordinator do?

A: well, what my job is, is getting the garden up and running in the spring. while there is a whole group of people who help, my job is it to coordinate it. the first thing we do is a letter that goes out welcoming everybody back. that letter goes out february. so every year we change the letter, write the letter again or something. so, i am the one who sends the email out: the letter needs to go out. there is another who does all the labels to mail it out. so i just keep on top of that, i have everybody over to my house, and we do the envelope stuffing.

<br>

you know, in some way it would make sense to email it to everybody, because there are so many papers - the welcome letter, the rules, the invoice for lot payment, the introduction letter, a schedule for all the cleaning times, there is a list of specialty jobs (if you cannot come to the cleanup but you really want to take care of stuff you can get one of those), and there is usually some kind of notice i.e. for fundraising ... so it is a nice big package. but, what i have discovered regarding email - there are some people volunteer, who never show up at the garden and everything is done on email, but the purpose of the garden is that it is a community. by having everyone come over and stuffing envelopes, we spend two hours together, we reconnect. it is really very helpful, it sets the stage for the whole year. once people start talking to each other. by the time they get to the summer, they have already been developing friendships and everything is moving very smooth.  

<br>

Q: this is the time when lots get assigned?

A: no, this is the time everyone gets back and use their plot. we have a little area set up for the renewals, there are more handouts. and everything has to be translated.

Q: Translated?

A: into chinese.  

<br>

So, we did that in february. april 9th over here at the ywca we will have what is called the renewal.

Q: is mid-may not quite late for starting the garden season?

A: no -- you could put in peas and similar things now, but tomatoes, lettuce and all the rest ... at may 7, you have to start to garden, because if you come back in august ...

(Dietmar Offenhuber; interview with Sarah Hutt)
How to Develop a Codebook

Two Types of Codes:

• "inductive" - arising from the data

• "a priori" – based on the "investigator's prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study"

(Ryan and Bernard 2003)
What to look for in "open coding”:

- Repetitions
- Indigenous typologies or categories ("native" language)
- Metaphors and analogies
- Transitions
- Similarities and differences
- Linguistic connectors
- Missing data
- Theory-related material

(Ryan and Bernard 2003)
Building Theory from Coded Data

Codes ➔ Concepts ➔ Categories ➔ Theories

- Community
- Vandalism
- Participation
- Stealing Vegetables
- Sharing Tools
- City Government
- Garden Governance
- Kids (participation)
- Kids (nuisance)
- Neighborhood
- Boundaries and Fences
- Physical Design
- Individual Plots
- Definitions of Nature
- Plant metaphors
- Plant talk
- Plot neglect
- Competition (friendly)
- Competition (tense)
- Inclusion
- Exclusion
- Diversity
- Language barriers
- Garden philosophy
- Demographics
- Education
- Tenure
- Garden norms

- Evidence of Neighborhood Tensions
- Garden Community Creation
- Diverse Meanings among Different Groups
- Potential Challenges to Community Building
- Each Garden has Unique Characteristics
Building Theory from Coded Data

Codes ➔ Concepts ➔ Categories ➔ Theories

Evidence of Neighborhood Tensions

**Theory:** Community Gardens facilitate the use of public spaces in locally determined ways, creating in the process a coherent community with a distinct culture and governance style that, on the one hand, bridges neighborhood diversity, but, on the other, creates expectations and norms that may be further contested by those it (intentionally or unintentionally) excludes.

Each Garden has Unique Characteristics

Distinct Garden Cultures

Local Design and Creativity
Strengths of Grounded Theory

• Managing complex projects:
  – Mixed-methods research
  – Large projects / multiple researchers

• When you are looking for trends:
  – Identifying new hypotheses
  – Charting a path for future research

• Building explicit models and linkages (i.e. not just descriptive)
Advantages of Qualitative Software

• What did people do without it?
  – Index cards and piles
  – Highlighters and scissors
  – Reliance on memory, continuous sorting through research notes

• There are a bunch of different programs to choose from: Nvivo, Atlas.ti, Dedoose, etc.
Things to Think About in Choosing Qualitative Software

- Does it run on your computer?
- How much does it cost?
- What media / formats can it work with?
- What are its other capabilities (e.g., transcription software, survey tools, etc.)?

We’re going to play with Dedoose, because it runs on my Mac and is free
Helpful Hints

• Reread your notes and recode multiple times
• Have a “Good Quotes” code
• Don’t just rely on your codes – always double check that your theories make sense!