

---

# *Symbolic Interactionism in Grounded Theory Studies: Women Surviving With HIV/AIDS in Rural Northern Thailand*

Areewan Klunklin, PhD, RN

Jennifer Greenwood, RN, RM, DipN, RNT, DipEd, MEd, PhD

*Although it is generally acknowledged that symbolic interactionism and grounded theory are connected, the precise nature of their connection remains implicit and unexplained. As a result, many grounded theory studies are undertaken without an explanatory framework. This in turn results in the description rather than the explanation of data determined. In this report, the authors make explicit and explain the nature of the connections between symbolic interactionism and grounded theory research. Specifically, they make explicit the connection between Blumer's methodological principles and processes and grounded theory methodology. In addition, the authors illustrate the explanatory power of symbolic interactionism in grounded theory using data from a study of the HIV/AIDS experiences of married and widowed Thai women.*

**Key words:** *symbolic interactionism, grounded theory, HIV/AIDS in Thailand, HIV/AIDS in women*

It is generally acknowledged that symbolic interactionism and grounded theory are connected (Benotliel, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), but the precise nature of such connections remain implicit and unexplained. In this report, the authors make explicit and explain these connections. First, they make explicit the connection between Blumer's (1969) methodological principle of direct examination of the social world and the methodological components of grounded theory. Second, the authors make explicit the connections between Blumer's methodological

processes of exploration (depiction) and inspection (analysis) and constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling, and the development and validation of codes, categories, and theories. Third, using data derived from a symbolic interactionist grounded theory study into the HIV/AIDS experiences of married and widowed northern Thai women, the authors show the utility of symbolic interactionism as an explanatory framework in grounded theory.

Symbolic interactionism allowed the authors to explain rather than merely describe the relationship of the preemptive strategies used by participants to avoid hurtful discrimination and the distancing strategies used by noninfected people to protect themselves from potential infection. In addition, symbolic interactionism reminded the authors, with considerable force, of the importance of symbolic meaning in social life and that symbolic meaning attaches to differential value systems rather than to social facts, events, and actions per se.

## **Symbolic Interactionism**

The theoretical basis for grounded theory is derived from the social psychological theory of sym-

*Areewan Klunklin, PhD, RN, is in the Faculty of Nursing at Chiang Mai University, Thailand. Jennifer Greenwood, RN, RM, DipN, RNT, DipEd, MEd, PhD, is adjunct professor of nursing at James Cook University, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.*

bolic interactionism (Benoliel, 1996; Chenitz & Swanson, 1986; Holloway & Wheeler, 1996; Morse & Field, 1996; Stern, 1994), which is a theory of human group life and human conduct (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionism and its related research methods were developed at the University of Chicago School of Sociology between 1920 and 1950. Symbolic interactionism constituted a challenge to the "hegemony of functionalism" (Bowers, 1988; p. 33).

Functionalism views the social world as a whole unit or system composed of interrelating, functioning parts. Parts are generated and adapted based on their functional utility to the whole. Analysis of parts (e.g., individual roles, social groups, and organizations) is significant only in relation to their consequences for the whole. Individuals learn or internalize their functional expectations (roles) through socialization; individuals are determined, therefore, rather than determining (Merton, 1973).

Researchers in the functionalist tradition frame their studies on the functionalist theory of social life; in other words, they begin with a theoretical framework, posing their research questions or problems in terms of the theoretical framework. These questions or problems are then converted into hypotheses, and a study is designed to test these hypotheses (Blumer, 1969). Theories in the functionalist tradition, therefore, are hypotheticodeductively derived from grand theories that are logically derived (what researchers now term *armchair theorizing*).

Social interactionism, a "barbaric neologism" first coined by Blumer in 1937 (Blumer, 1969, p. 1) differs substantially from functionalism in both theoretical perspective and research methods. Symbolic interactionism is theoretically focused on the acting individual; the individual is regarded as determining rather than determined and society is constructed through the purposive interactions of individuals and groups. The theories of symbolic interactionism are empirically and (primarily) inductively derived. The central concepts of symbolic interactionism include the self, the world, and social action (Charon, 1995).

### The Self

The self is constructed through social interaction, first with significant others (i.e., those directly re-

sponsible for socialization) such as mother, father, and then others in progressively widening social circles. Significant others are important to self-concept because of their confirmatory and validatory feedback on actions and responses (de Laine, 1997). Through interaction with people more generally, the attitudes of the wider community are internalized as the "generalized other," and these interactions then function as an instrument of the self's social control. Religious systems, the legal system, and social norms are elements out of which the generalized other is constituted (de Laine, 1997). Such systems or norms are historical creations linked to contemporary situations; they are therefore subject to social change (de Laine, 1997). For instance, community attitudes to HIV infection change as the community's HIV-related knowledge increases.

Self identity emerges in and through social interaction and is modified as definitions of self, the other, and the situations encountered change (de Laine, 1997). The self is composed of two components, the "I" and the "Me" (Mead, 1934). The I is the active, dynamic interpreting component of the self; it is the reflector, interpreting cues and synthesizing them with the other components of the self. The I relates cues to components of the Me (Bowers, 1988).

The Me is the object of self-reflection, which can be defined to "myself" and others. It is the object of personal, internal conversations and represents "my" self-image. Each individual has multiple Me's, such as mother, person with AIDS (PWA), daughter, seamstress. These multiple Me's can exist simultaneously or consecutively and change over time. Who "I" am at any given time depends on the Me that is called forth by the context in which the I finds itself. (For example, when the child of a Me is diagnosed as HIV-positive, the Me that is mother becomes dominant).

### The World

The world in social interactionist theory refers to a world of symbols, but this world is the "object world" (Blumer, 1969). Not all objects are symbols; objects become symbols when meaning is assigned to them by the designator, I. An object is anything that can be designated to the self and reflected upon, such as physical objects (e.g., houses), social objects

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/2659240>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/2659240>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)