

5-1-2010

A Hockey Night in Canada: An Imagined Conversation between Theorists

Curtis Fogel

University of Guelph, cfogel@uoguelph.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>

 Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#), and the [Social Statistics Commons](#)

Recommended APA Citation

Fogel, C. (2010). A Hockey Night in Canada: An Imagined Conversation between Theorists. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(3), 658-674. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol15/iss3/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.



Qualitative Research Graduate Certificate
Indulge in Culture
Exclusively Online • 18 Credits

NSU
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY

LEARN MORE

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN

A Hockey Night in Canada: An Imagined Conversation between Theorists

Abstract

In this paper, various methodological issues surrounding the sociological study of sport are explored. Through an imagined dialogue between two graduate students at a hockey game, this work brings together three divergent approaches to social enquiry: Positivist Grounded Theory, Constructivist Grounded Theory, and Actor-Network Theory. This paper challenges conventional writing on method in two ways: (a) assembling three divergent approaches within a single work, and (b) employing a scripted narrative as a means of exploring methodological issues. Through this innovative approach, many of the overlaps and tensions between these theories/methods are captured. In so doing, numerous methodological questions about the sociological study of sport, as well social science research more generally are raised.

Keywords

Grounded Theory, Actor-Network Theory, Sport, Constructivism, and Qualitative Research

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

A Hockey Night in Canada: An Imagined Conversation between Theorists

Curtis Fogel

University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada

In this paper, various methodological issues surrounding the sociological study of sport are explored. Through an imagined dialogue between two graduate students at a hockey game, this work brings together three divergent approaches to social enquiry: Positivist Grounded Theory, Constructivist Grounded Theory, and Actor-Network Theory. This paper challenges conventional writing on method in two ways: (a) assembling three divergent approaches within a single work, and (b) employing a scripted narrative as a means of exploring methodological issues. Through this innovative approach, many of the overlaps and tensions between these theories/methods are captured. In so doing, numerous methodological questions about the sociological study of sport, as well social science research more generally are raised. Key Words: Grounded Theory, Actor-Network Theory, Sport, Constructivism, and Qualitative Research

Introduction

This paper represents the struggle of one researcher, a graduate student in sociology, to decide on the appropriate approach to take in studying the legal notion of consent in violent Canadian sport. The competing interests of three exploratory methods are placed against one another. A Grounded Theorist and Actor-Network Theorist volley critical methodological comments back and forth throughout the dialogue before a mystery person, an *Constructivist Grounded Theorist*, steps in to offer further critical insights to the methodological and theoretical mix. In so doing, this dialogue reveals various strong points and shortcomings of these approaches in specific relation to studying the legal issue of consent in sport. Constructing this imaginary dialogue between theorists allowed for the later development of a creative and flexible theory/method that integrated aspects of each of these approaches (see Fogel, 2009). Constructing critical dialogues, whether with others or on one's own, can be a useful approach in developing effective and appropriate approaches that are specialized to a given research project.

...With a few minutes to spare until the puck drops, two graduate students climb the seemingly endless steps to their third-tier seats. Once there, they both try to catch their breath. From this view, the players look like specks, hardly discernable from one another. The students are elated to be at the game amidst the 18,000 people who were able to get tickets, instead of the millions of viewers watching from home. Despite their varying viewpoints on methodological and theoretical approaches, the two graduate students share a substantive interest in the sociology of sport. It is this shared interest that drew the students to the game. One student has orientations towards Positivist Grounded Theory (GT), while the other is a developing Actor-Network Theorist (ANT). As such,

the two students come from seemingly opposing sociological traditions: Postivist Grounded Theory is focused on ordering the world (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) while Actor-Network Theory aims to convey complexity or chaos (Law, 2004). The two traditions do, however, share many similar methodological issues since both can be regarded as exploratory methods. With the game about to start, the students enter into conversation, shedding light on some of these issues...

ANT Student: So how is your PhD work coming along? You are studying something on deviance in sport, right?

GT Student: Yes, my topic is consensual crime in Canadian sport. I am exploring the question, how and why do athletes consensually engage in violence, hazing, and performance-enhancing drug use?

ANT Student: Why study that?

GT Student: I began with a basic interest in both deviance and sport. I then read a few autobiographies of athletes with controversial accounts. Then, I started to think about a possible angle that I could use to further explore my interests in a more conceptual fashion, and the notion of consensual crime came to me. This approach is consistent with Robert Stebbins's (2001) suggestion that "to understand well any phenomenon, it is necessary to start by looking at it in broad, nonspecialized terms" (p.viii).

ANT Student: Why consensual crime then? How did you decide to study that among the many possibilities? It appears to me that you have gone from non-specialized to specialized terms quite rapidly.

GT Student: Positivist Grounded Theorists like myself believe in emergence (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In its most basic sense this refers to the emergence of theory from data, because the fundamental purpose of Grounded Theory is to create both substantive and generalized theory that is grounded in data. The concept of emergence is also relevant to the other aspects of doing formal Grounded Theory research. For example, categories and themes emerge allowing data to be systematically organized, theoretical samples emerge guiding who should be interviewed, and insights emerge revealing topics of inquiry that will be fruitful for the researcher. So, I guess you could say that the topic of consensual crime just emerged.

The students are interrupted as the announcer asks everyone to rise to their feet for the singing of the national anthem. The young Grounded Theorist ponders to himself, "is he right, did I move from non-specialized to specialized terms too fast?" With the anthem and cheers that followed complete, the students sit back down in their seats...

GT Student: I think there is always a fine line that determines when it is appropriate to begin moving from non-specialized to specialized terms. Barney Glaser (1992) describes this as the difference between emergence and forcing. If researchers move too quickly and impose their own interpretations on the data they are using, it is likely that forcing will occur. Glaser suggests that this takes a level of creativity on the part of the researcher to be able to see categories emerge, connect themes, and develop substantive and generalized theory. Without this creativity, researchers will inevitably force connections onto their data. Good Grounded Theorists are creative in interpreting and interacting with their data. Developing the term consensual crime was the beginning of this creative project; it was not forced. Through the autobiographies that I read, it became apparent to me that many of the potential crimes of athletes could be considered consensual. For example, the athletes who engaged in steroid use consented to their own involvement and potential victimization. Likewise, those who hazed and were hazed typically consented to this behavior believing that it was important to the development of team camaraderie and chemistry.

ANT Student: So you see being creative as standing in opposition to forcing?

GT Student: Yes, either you can creatively reveal how the data connect or you can force a connection onto the data.

ANT Student: But to be creative is to create.

GT Student: Yes, but what do you mean?

ANT Student: You appear to be suggesting that if you are patient and creative, connections will emerge within your data. These connections will just come into fruition for you. They are either already there, existing in what John Law (2004) terms an “out-there” (p. 14) reality, or they will mysteriously emerge independent of the interpretations of researchers. Do you agree?

GT Student: To an extent I would agree with you on this; although, you underestimate the difficulties inherent in the ambiguity of data. But, as Glaser (1978) suggests, if a Grounded theorist remains patient and has a level of creativity, connections will certainly emerge out of this ambiguity.

ANT Student: But to be creative is to create!

GT Student: Create what? I am not following you.

ANT Student: You perceive yourself as being independent of that in which you are studying. For you, data exist out-there [pointing to the rink]. The players, the game, it all exists independently of you. The data are at a distance; we are sitting here far from the playing surface and the data are way down there skating around the ice. Do you think that data and fact just exist, waiting to be prodded at and studied from a distance?

GT Student: Sure, this is how objective research has to be done. This is how I interpret what Glaser and Strauss (1967) term “discovery” (p. 1).

ANT Student: Well, Actor-Network Theorists suggest that data and facts do not just exist in an empirical world for researchers to discover. Instead, they suggest that social scientists play an integral role in “the genesis and development of fact” (Fleck, 1935, p. vii). The world is not full of facts to be discovered but rather, what is considered fact is often just one possibility of the way things could be despite the controversies that went into their formation. People forget the controversies that go into the formation of particular fact. Here is a good example, you read Men’s Health magazine right?

GT Student: Yes, every month.

ANT Student: Have you ever noticed that they are always printing articles that cite conflicting facts to previous months?

GT Student: Yes, they do it all the time. One month they run an article that details the importance of vigorously washing your hands several times a day and then the next month they will run an article suggesting that it is potentially dangerous to wash your hands too much because you will lose immunity to various forms of bacteria. Or, in the issue this month there was one article stating that you should eat cereal and other carbohydrates for breakfast because this will lower the risk of heart disease, but a different article in the same issue stated that there is no conclusive evidence that saturated fats are bad for you and thus it is better to start your day with bacon and eggs. They are always providing conflicting information.

ANT Student: That is because science is not the rock-solid, objective measure that you seem to think it is. You just came up with some good examples. But, what you are not realizing is that even facts that do not appear to you to have any controversies of validity might have had various controversies that went into their development that you just do not know about. As Latour and Woolgar (1986) suggest, “an important feature of fact construction is the process whereby ‘social’ factors disappear once a fact is constructed” (p. 23). Think about the game we are watching, how did it come to be that play is whistled down for an offside infraction when

players cross the blue line without the puck, but it is not whistled down when they cross the red line? Why is that offside infractions are not called on the red line, only the blue?

GT Student: That is just the rule of the game.

ANT Student: It is a rule now but has it always been? There probably has not always even been a red line and a blue line. When these rules were being considered can you imagine the controversy that was involved? Remember the outcry last year when they made the nets bigger to allow for more scoring? Just because we probably were not born yet when the offside rules were created does not mean that controversies did not go into their formation, and that alternative ways of structuring the rules do not exist.

GT Student: Great, but what is your point? How does this relate to research data and facts?

ANT Student: My point is that data and facts do not exist in isolation of those who study them. As Latour (1999) suggests, facts are “fabricated” (p. 128). They are intricately-woven together and susceptible to change. Reality is fluid and multiple, rather than static or definite. It does not exist in a distinct world out-there for social scientists to study from a distance but rather, social scientists are part of its ongoing formation and reformation. As you have said, social scientists are creative-- they create!

GT Student: Some Grounded Theorists do reflexively acknowledge the role they play in interpreting the data. I think that they call themselves Constructivist Grounded Theorists (Charmaz, 2000a, 2006). Is this really what you are getting at? That social scientists need to be more reflexive about the role they play in interpreting data.

ANT Student: Yes, this is certainly part of it. But, there is much more to it than this. As Ian Hacking (1999), suggests, pointing to something as being constructed is becoming an empty metaphor. Instead, we must reveal how and why things have been constructed as they have, as well as the alternative ways they could have been constructed. Further to this, it is not enough to just pay lip service to reflexivity by throwing in an extra chapter that describes your thoughts and feelings that might have influenced your interpretation of the data. Constructivist Grounded Theorists still treat the data they are interpreting as somehow independent of the measures used to collect it. They are still unable to see the mediating role of the researcher, and his or her “inscription devices” (Law, 2004, p. 21), in the way that the data come to be assembled.

GT Student: Inscription devices?

ANT Student: John Law (2004) refers to inscription devices as systems or devices that researchers use to produce or trace out materials that take on other forms. Simple examples of inscription devices could include a pencil to jot down notes, an audio recorder to record, or a computer to transcribe audio to text. They are really the trade tools of social scientists that are used when they are collecting, analyzing, and disseminating their data. For Actor-Network Theorists, data are not collected and considered a definite report on a given state of affairs that are independent of the researcher (Baker, 2002). Instead, they reflexively see their mediating role in all aspects of the research project, including the collection and construction of data.

The first period of hockey comes to an end and the two students take a momentary pause in their conversation to negotiate the crowds on their way to and from the concession stand. The GT student tries to make sense in his head of what the ANT student is saying, while the ANT student tries to think of ways that he can further clarify what he is saying. Once back in their seats the conversation continues...

GT Student: I think I understand what you are saying. You seem to be suggesting a move away from objective social science research towards interpretive social science research. What you don't understand is that Grounded Theory is, according to Glaser (1992), an objective science!

ANT Student: I do not think you understand what I am saying. How is Grounded Theory objective?

GT Student: It follows systematic methodological rules of coding, categorizing, memoing, conceptualizing, and theorizing. If you follow the methodological steps, and have the patience and creative apperception to see how things fit together, facts will emerge out of the data. There is no need for the interpretations of the Positivist Grounded Theorists. And, even when some inference is necessary, it is certainly free of bias and has no bearing on the developing theory.

ANT Student: Maybe try to think about it this way: if you were to change those methodological rules slightly, would your results change? Would the data you collected change? Would your theorizations change?

GT Student: Umm....

ANT Student: Of course they would!! Given this, are you able to see the important mediating role that you have, as well as the various inscription devices that you employ, on how the data are constructed, analyzed, and subsequently theorized about?

GT Student: So you think that we should just forget about the scientific ideal of objectivity?

ANT Student: In a way I do, yes. As Bent Flyvbjerg (2001) suggests, many of the problems facing contemporary social science research have arisen from attempts to mimic the objectivism of the natural sciences. But, as Fleck (1935) reveals, the natural sciences are not as objective as they might purport to be. Why then should we try to mirror this illusion of objectivity? Latour (2005) contends that to move closer to objectivity we must become more reflexive of our interpretive practices, rather than try to hide the place of the researcher within research.

GT Student: So, you think that for me to be more objective I should acknowledge the mediating role I have in how the data from my study are collected, analyzed, and theorized about?

ANT Student: I know, it appears counter-intuitive to the scientific method but it makes sense right?

GT Student: I think it makes sense. So, do you think one way that I can do this is by acknowledging how I code the data into various categories or themes?

ANT Student: Yes, I think that it is important to allow for some transparency in your data analysis. However, I am not sure why you would want to code your data into categories or themes in the first place.

GT Student: That is how the Grounded Theorist is able to make sense of the data.

ANT Student: Why not let the actors involved in your study organize their own realities? Why privilege yourself to do it for them? It is like Latour (2005) says: "You have to grant them back the ability to make up their own theories of what the social is made of. Your task is no longer to impose some order, to limit the range of acceptable entities, to teach actors what they are" (pp. 11-12).

GT Student: What is the purpose of the researcher then?

ANT Student: Researchers are still involved in facilitating or mediating research. The aim is, however, to allow for more participant involvement in the processes of theorizing, instead of privileging researchers to tell actors who they are, what groups they belong to, and how their groups are organized.

GT Student: So you think that I should get the participants in my study to be actively involved in the categorizing of data?

ANT Student: If the actors organize themselves then yes, this might be fine. However, as John Law (2004) reveals, the world is messy. It is “ephemeral, indefinite, and irregular” (p. 4). Given this, it seems inadequate to follow rigid methodological rules of coding and categorizing, which might lead you to a false sense of order. You might want to avoid reducing the complexity and messiness of the world into what Latour (2005) terms “neat little pots” (p. 141), or what Grounded Theorists often refer to as “themes” (Karp, 1994, p. 10). As Latour and Woolgar (1986) suggest, “It is not enough simply to fabricate order out of an initially chaotic collection of observations” (p. 37).

GT Student: But a creative Grounded Theorist should be able to develop concepts and theoretical schemes that capture the complexity of the social world in an exhaustive fashion. How is this any different from what Actor-Network Theorists do?

ANT Student: What do you mean? Actor-Network theorists are not in the business of making theoretical schemes.

GT Student: What about Latour and Woolgar’s (1986) typology of scientific statements? In this, Latour and Woolgar categorize the statements that scientists make pertaining to fact into five separate types or categories based on their own criteria. This looks like Grounded Theory to me!!

ANT Student: Oh, that! Well, the first thing to note is that Actor-Network Theory was still in its early stages of development when *Laboratory Life* (Latour & Woolgar, 1986) was published. Secondly, Latour and Woolgar are not claiming that their list is exhaustive or inherently valid. They acknowledge the inscription devices that went into its formation, and they suggest that it is a claim that is open to different alternatives. For Latour and Woolgar, the typology is useful in that it reveals how scientists try to create varying levels of illusion surrounding the objectivity of their knowledge and work. However, they suggest that their typology should be seen as one among many possible typologies on the subject, and that it should not be treated as hard scientific fact.

GT Student: So you are admitting that Actor-Network Theorists are actively involved in imposing their own order onto the realities that they are studying?

ANT Student: In some sense, yes. The researcher always has a mediating role of deciding which information to include and which to ignore. The

aim of the Actor-Network Theorist is to move through the terrain of his/her study slowly and record as much descriptive data as possible. For this reason, Latour (2005) suggests that Actor-Network Theory might be appropriately termed “slowciology” (p. 122). Beyond the inclusion of as much descriptive detail as possible, the Actor-Network Theorist is also careful not to “black-box” (p. 2) their analytical processes, which Grounded Theorists often do in their distorted quest for objectivity (Latour, 1987).

GT Student: What do you mean by black-boxing?

ANT Student: According to Latour (1987), “the word black box is used by cyberneticians whenever a piece of machinery or a set of commands is too complex. In its place they draw a little box about which they need to know nothing but its input and output” (pp. 2-3). The black box is essentially a time saving device. It is “the way scientific and technical work is made invisible by its own success” (Latour, 1999, p. 304).

GT Student: How is it that Grounded Theorists engage in black-boxing while Actor-Network Theorists do not?

ANT Student: As we discussed before, this all has to do with transparency. Grounded Theorists often try to create the illusion that theorizations just mysteriously emerged from a data-set that exists independent of the researcher. When disseminating their findings, the Grounded Theorist might briefly state how the data were collected, but will then often jump to discussing the findings. There is an input and an output with little discussion of the analytical processes that occurred. This is particularly the case with the advent of new computer programs that code data for researchers. Again, there is an input and output, with little concern over what is happening in the middle. The analytical process is being effectively black-boxed.

GT Student: How do Actor-Network Theorists avoid black-boxing?

ANT Student: Just as Latour and Woolgar (1986) do in the example that you mentioned. They detail how their analysis was done, what inscription devices might have had a mediating role in how their typology was formed, and attached the caution that their typology should not be considered a definitive statement but rather, just one of many possible alternative ways of ordering the statements they are studying.

GT Student: You seem very critical of the approach that I am taking. How would you study the perpetration of consensual crime in sport?

Just as the Grounded Theorist was finishing his question the buzzer indicating the end of the second period went off. During the intermission the Grounded Theorist headed to the washroom while the Actor-Network Theorist sat and contemplated how he might approach such a study. Once the Grounded Theorist returned, the conversation continued...

GT Student: So, have you thought about it? How would an Actor-Network Theorist conduct such a study?

ANT Student: The simple answer is that an Actor-Network Theorist probably would not conduct such a study as you are proposing it. His/her concern would be less with researching what forms of consensual crime are commonplace in sport, and more with how this concept of consent comes to be assembled and held together by various actors, both human and non-human, within sport. However, an Actor-Network Theorist would probably not start with such a specialized question unless a controversy led him or her to do so (Latour, 2005).

GT Student: A controversy? Oh I see, every time a player is arrested for steroid use, or suspended for a violent body check, there is a controversy.

ANT Student: For Latour (2005), a controversy goes beyond something that just makes a little bit of news like the incidences you have suggested. Controversies cause us “to reshuffle our conceptions of what was associated together because the previous definition has been made somewhat irrelevant” (p. 6). Did you see that violent hit earlier in the game? It might have been a controversial call because it was not clear whether the player got hit from behind or not, but it was not enough to be Latourian controversy.

GT Student: Why not?

ANT Student: It is not a controversy because it did not shake things up. It did not cause a fundamental reshaping of the way the game is played or how we conceive of what is and is not considered consensual violence in hockey. The hit was within the rules of the game as they were previously established.

GT Student: It was not within the rules because the guy got a penalty.

ANT Student: It was a rule infraction, but it was still within the rulebook of the game. The referee knew exactly what to do when the hit occurred. Remember what I was saying about black-boxing? This is a good example of a black-box. The violent hit occurred, which could be considered the input, and then a penalty was called, which could be considered the output. But, what happened in the middle? What happened was that the

rulebook was invoked quickly and efficiently within the mind of the referee and a call was made. A controversy in this regard would require this black-boxed rulebook to be opened.

GT Student: How might that happen?

ANT Student: Through a controversy that is big enough to shake up the game. Do you remember the incident between Marty McSorley and Donald Brashear a few years ago?

GT Student: Of course, McSorley skated across the ice and struck Brashear in the head with his stick sending him into violent convulsions. McSorley was then arrested by Vancouver police and subsequently charged with assault with a weapon.

ANT Student: This incident changed the game. It set a new legal precedent that players could be criminally charged for their actions on the playing field of sport. This is the kind of controversy that an Actor-Network theorist would be interested in because the black-boxed rule book was opened and its contents rearranged. An Actor-Network Theorist could then observe how the contents are reassembled before the black box is closed once again. The researcher can see how groups are being “made and unmade” (Latour, 2005, p. 27).

GT Student: Interesting, but is this practical? I am doing my study right now, not seven years ago.

ANT Student: Latour (2005) suggests that one might be able to get around this through archival and other historical work. Through such work, Latour suggests that the researcher might be able to reproduce a state of crisis or controversy. In the case of hockey violence, one might be able to reproduce the controversies by scouring court records, player statements, personnel statements, and media representations. From this, it might be possible to trace associations, identify the actors involved- both human and non-human-and reveal the controversies that went into the black-boxed rules of today.

GT Student: I admit, this does sound interesting but it is just not what I want to do with my study. I want to interview players themselves about their experiences with consensual crime in their sport.

ANT Student: Why just the players? There are likely to be numerous actors, both human and non-human, involved in the assemblage of consensual crime in sport. Why not get more perspectives? How important do you think the players themselves even are in defining what is and is not considered consent? Is it possible that the perspectives of athletes are

pushed aside in how consent is legally defined in sport, in favor of other possible alternatives? What are these various alternatives? You appear to be looking at your topic from a very limited perspective!

GT Student: What alternatives? A definition is a definition.

ANT Student: A central tenant of Actor-Network Theory is that realities are multiple (Mol, 2002; Verran, 2001). Therefore, there is always competition of definition. For one perspective to be considered the singular definition on a given state of affairs, it means that other possible definitions have been pushed aside. The Actor-Network Theorist is interested in exploring which definitions have been pushed aside and what alternative realities might then be possible.

GT Student: So, how might I explore these alternatives?

ANT Student: By exploring more of the network that surrounds consensual crime in sport. This involves much more than interviewing players. What role do various governing bodies of sport have in how consent is defined? What role does the criminal justice system have? How do the media define consent in sport? How do coaches and referees?

GT Student: Why do I want to know these competing definitions? What do the alternatives matter?

ANT Student: This will allow you to not only see: (a) how consent is defined in sport, (b) how it came to be defined as such, and (c) how the fabric of this definition continues to be held together amidst the possibility of various other definitions.

Just as the Actor-Network Theorist was finishing his response the buzzer sounded signaling the end of the game. As the two students left the arena and headed into the parking lot someone approached them from behind...

Mystery Person: I could not help but to overhear your conversation throughout the game from a nearby seat. I was enthralled by the game and did not want to interrupt but given my background working with Grounded Theory, I feel that I have some things to offer to your discussion.

GT Student: Oh, so you agree with much of what I have said? Excellent, it is great to have someone on my side after all of the criticisms that I have just faced from my friend the aspiring Actor-Network Theorist.

Mystery Person: I hate to disappoint but I cannot really say that I agreed with your positivistic approach to Grounded Theory. Many of the concepts

and tenants that you have discussed are certainly central to Grounded Theory, but you have to acknowledge the developments that have been made in Grounded Theory over the past 40 years!! If there is one strong critique I would make of Grounded Theory is that many novice researchers think they can dabble in Glaser and Strauss's (1967) *Discovery of Grounded Theory* and then purport to be Grounded Theorists, without fully understanding the method and its development over the past 40 years.

ANT Student: So you agree with me then?

Mystery Person: I never said that I agreed with you either. You certainly raise some interesting ideas in relation to the methodological issues of exploratory research, but like your friend, you have not taken into account many of the tenets of contemporary Grounded Theory, particularly Constructivist Grounded Theory, which is the methodological/theoretical approach that I typically use.

GT Student: Oh, well that is why we see things differently then because I am a Positivist Grounded Theorist. I am just starting my PhD research so Grounded Theory is all very new to me.

Mystery Person: While I can appreciate that you are new to Grounded Theory, I do not fully agree that the differences in our viewpoints on Grounded Theory tie solely to our different stance. For example, when you engaged in a discussion of the hockey players as data existing external to yourself you suggested that this was part of objective, Positivist Grounded Theory research. However, in describing Glaser and Strauss's (1967) work, Suddaby (2006) writes that they "reject the notion that scientific truth reflects an independent external reality. Instead, they argued that scientific truth results from both the act of observation and the emerging consensus within a community of observers as they make sense of what they have observed. In this pragmatic approach to social science research, 'empirical' reality is seen as the ongoing interpretation of meaning" (p. 636).

ANT Student: [Laughs to the GT Student] You do not even know your own theory/approach!

Mystery Person: [To the ANT Student] Well you do not really know it as well as you think you do either.

ANT Student: Oh really, how so?

Mystery Person: I could go on and on about this but I do not have that kind of time. Given this, I will limit my contentions. First, you suggest

that Grounded Theorists do not acknowledge the mediating role they play in the construction of data. This is blatantly false. For example, Kathy Charmaz (2006) states “we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices” (p. 10). Further to this, Charmaz (2006) states: “How you collect your data affects which phenomenon you will see, how, where, and when you will view them, and what sense you will make of them” (p. 15). This suggests a clear acknowledgement of the mediating role that researchers play in all stages of research from data collection through to analysis.

ANT Student: But that is just playing lip service to reflexivity; it is not really acknowledging one’s mediating role in the research process.

Mystery Person: It is not just lip service. This ties into my second complaint that you suggest that there is no transparency in how Grounded Theorists code their data and make research decisions. Not only do they acknowledge their role in the research process, but they often reveal how they coded their data and what research decisions they made throughout the project. Both Kathy Charmaz (2000b, 2006) and Jane Hood (1983) do this at length.

ANT Student: Oh, I am not very familiar with their work.

Mystery Person: Well, I guess that explains why you frequently misspoke on the assumptions of Grounded Theory through your dated understandings of the approach.

ANT Student: But I am still correct in thinking that Grounded Theorists impose their own ideas onto those in which they study. They do not leave room for actors to organize themselves.

Mystery Person: In a sense I would agree with you, but first I would say that researchers always play a mediating role including Actor-Network Theorists and second, efforts are made to incorporate aspects of how actors organize their own worlds through the use of “in vivo” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55) codes, which employ the special terms used by participants.

ANT Student: That may be true but you are still applying your own artificial order to a complex world through whatever coding schemes you are using.

Mystery Person: The world is often an ordered place; it is deeply patterned. Look around you... how do all of these people file out of the hockey arena in such an orderly fashion? Does the world around you right

now look chaotic or ordered? It is clearly ordered. What about the hockey match we all just watched? It was governed by a variety of rules that kept it organized with little room for chaos. Just as I presuppose patterns, organization, and order in the world, you presuppose disorder. This is something that the two of you should debate in further conversation, after you have developed a deeper understanding of the advancements that have been made in Grounded Theory.

Before either of the students could ask the mystery person any further questions or make any comments, their friend pulled up to give them a ride home from the game. On the drive home, the Grounded Theory student is left to wonder how all of the criticisms, suggestions, and alternative perspectives that he has heard might lead him in new directions of research... his Actor-Network Theory friend has raised many interesting methodological issues of doing exploratory research; however, the mystery person has given him hope that he does not have to abandon Grounded Theory but, rather, can delve deeper into the methodological literature to uncover the numerous developments that have been made within his chosen approach. This hope can only reside, however, on the presumption that the world is ordered and that researchers should covey this order in their research. In contrast, if the world is a chaotic mess, then an approach premised on coding and categorizing is clearly not appropriate. With years of PhD work still ahead, the student is left to ponder these and other methodological issues further....

Concluding Remarks

The central aim of this work has been to explore various methodological issues in the sociological study of sport and in social science research more generally. While it has specifically examined three divergent methodological approaches in relation to the study of consensual crime in Canadian ice hockey, it has sought to present a more general theme of encouraging reflexive and critical methodological thought. This work has challenged conventional approaches to methodological debate by introducing an innovative structure, the scripted narrative. The dialogue represented within this narrative enabled an illustration of many of the intricacies and complexities of Positivist Grounded Theory, Constructionist Grounded Theory, and Actor-Network Theory. As the breadth of these, and other, exploratory research methods continues to expand, the need for the continued development and use of novel approaches that enable reflexive and critical thought about method increases.

Throughout this work, many of the tensions and overlaps between the three exploratory methods have been revealed. Through their initial banter, it becomes clear that the Positivist Grounded Theorist is ill-equipped to handle the volleys of Actor-Network Theorist because his approach has failed to account for contemporary methodological insights such as the mediating role of the researcher in the development of scientific evidence, the place of non-human actors or actants in networks of action, and failing to treat the studied object as external to one's self. The introduction of the "mystery person," the Constructivist Grounded Theorist, serves to illustrate the contemporary developments in Grounded Theory. The two characters, the Positivist

Grounded Theorist and the Constructivist Grounded Theorist, in combination, serve to sketch the historical roots and development of Grounded Theory, and the tensions that arise thereof. The Constructivist Grounded Theorist also introduces several new methodological issues to the debate. While this character appears to share more commonalities with the Actor-Network Theorist, a glaring contradiction still remains unsolved: is the social world inherently organized, or is it messy and complex? This incomplete ending to the dialogue is purposely used to illustrate the necessity of continued critical thought on methodological approaches to social science inquiry.

References

- Baker, C. D. (2002). Ethnomethodological analyses of interviews. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 777-795). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2000a). Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 509-539). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2000b). Qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 675-693). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory*. London: Sage.
- Fleck, L. (1935). *Genesis and development of scientific fact*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2001). *Making social sciences matter*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Fogel, C. (2009). *Discerning consent on the gridiron: Violence, hazing, and performance-enhancing drug use in Canadian football*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Calgary, Canada.
- Glaser, B. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity: Advances in the methodology of grounded theory*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B. (1992). *Basics of grounded theory analysis: Emergence vs. forcing*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. London: AldineTransaction.
- Hacking, I. (1999). *The social construction of what?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hood, J. (1983). *Becoming a two-job family*. New York: Praeger.
- Karp, D. A. (1994). Living with depression: Illness and identity turning points. *Qualitative Health Research*, 4(1), 6-30.
- Latour, B. (1987). *Science in action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Latour, B. (1999). *Pandora's hope: Essays on the reality of science studies*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the social*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Latour, B., & Woolgar, S. (1986). *Laboratory life: The construction of scientific facts*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Law, J. (2004). *After method: Mess in social science research*. New York: Routledge.

- Mol, A. (2002). *The body multiple: Ontology in medical practice*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Stebbins, R. A. (2001). *Exploratory research in the social sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Suddaby, R. (2006). What grounded theory is not. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 49(4), 633-642.
- Verran, H. (2001). *Science and African logic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
-

Author Note

Curtis Fogel is a Lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada. His research interests include sociological theory and methods, intersections of law and technology, socio-legal issues in sport, consent law in Canada, and approaches to critical pedagogy. Correspondences regarding this article should be addressed to Curtis Fogel; E-mail: cfogel@uoguelph.ca

Copyright 2010: Curtis Fogel and Nova Southeastern University

Article Citation

Fogel, C. (2010). A hockey night in Canada: An imagined conversation between theorists. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(3), 658-674. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR15-3/fogel.pdf>
