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## **'Emergent Reconstruction' in Grounded Theory: Learning from Team Based Interview Research**

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### **Abstract**

Constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methods render an interpretive portrayal, a construction of reality, strengthened when the process of construction is acknowledged. An Irish team study uses CGT to explore intergenerational solidarity at individual, familial and societal levels, and their interface. The study data comprise interviews with 100 people from diverse socio-economic and age groups. The article contributes insights on applying CGT in team based interview research on a topic with such breadth of scope. This contrasts with the more usual focused inquiry with a defined population. Adapting the method's guidelines to the specific inquiry involved challenges: in framing the topic conceptually; situating research participants in contrasting social contexts to provide interpretive depth; and generating interview data with which to construct theory. We argue that interrogating the very premise of the inquiry allowed for emergent reconstruction, a goal at the heart of the method.

**Keywords:** constructivist grounded theory, interviewing, emergent, emergent reconstruction, team research.

### **Introduction**

At its inception, Grounded Theory broke ground in its argument that theory can be discovered in qualitative data (Anells, 1996; Birks and Mills, 2011; Bryant, 2009; Bryant and Charmaz, 2007a; Glaser, 1992; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The method follows symbolic

interactionism in viewing humans as active agents in their own lives who create meaning in the processes of action and interaction. All variants of grounded theory involve: simultaneous data collection and analysis, pursuing emergent themes through early data analysis, discovering basic social processes within data, inductive construction of abstract categories to explain and synthesize these processes, sampling to refine categories through comparative processes, and integrating categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions, and consequences of the studied processes (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012: 348). While the place of extant theory in grounded theory is debated, 'abductive' reasoning involving abstract conceptualization from data, considering all possible explanations and testing hypotheses empirically to get to the most plausible explanation, critically brings theoretical sensitivity into the process (Atkinson et al, 2003; Bryant, 2009; Reichertz, 2010).

The point of departure for constructivist grounded theory relates to the place of the participant and researcher in the process of generating knowledge and what the very nature of that knowledge is (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007b; Charmaz, 2006, 2008, 2011; Clarke, 2003; Annells, 2011; Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012, Denzin, 2010). Classical grounded theory asserts that theory emerges from data separate from the researcher as scientific observer (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Constructivist grounded theory fully implicates researchers in every stage of generating data and theory *and* situates participants as active in the construction of knowledge. Grounded theories are products of emergent processes that occur through interaction, constructed by researchers from the fabric of interactions, both witnessed and lived (Charmaz, 2006: 178). Charmaz (2006) considers knowledge generated using the method is an interpretive portrayal, a construction of reality, strengthened when the process of construction is acknowledged.

### **Aims**

This article aims to acknowledge the processes of (re)constructing intergenerational solidarity through an exploration of Irish people's views, experiences and attitudes on intergenerational relations using interviews. It describes how the principles of constructivist grounded theory as articulated by Charmaz (2006) were applied in such a broad inquiry by a research team. As intensive (Charmaz, 2006) or active (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011) interviewing was used to generate data for the study, the article first attends to key debates on the interview method and argues that constructivist approaches work productively with these critiques. Discussion then turns to address key epistemological issues arising in the study design.

How the inquiry was framed is considered first. A central feature of the study was its breadth in meaning and relevance – solidarity between generations – as well as scope – individual, familial and societal levels, and their interface. Deconstructing the assumptions inherent in the very topic of inquiry was the first task the research approach set for the team. How to generate rich data capable of being placed in their situational and social contexts for interpretive depth created two further challenges. Without a defined population of interest, the team sought a sampling process with interpretive relevance. Intergenerational solidarity has a broad relevance and abstract focus which needed careful translation into an

interviewing approach that created the conditions to construct meanings with participants. The article concludes with reflexive accounts of the process of co-constructing data *and* meaning using qualitative interviews as a team. This process, termed 'emergent reconstruction', is a goal at the heart of the method. Its explication makes a novel contribution to understanding how theorizing emerges in a constructivist grounded theory interview study.

### **Constructing grounded theory using interview method**

Constructivist grounded theory rejects claims of objectivity; locates researchers' generalizations; considers researchers' and participants' relative positions and standpoints; emphasizes reflexivity; adopts sensitizing concepts such as power, privilege, equity and oppression, and remains alert to variation and difference (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007b; Charmaz, 2006, 2008, 2011; Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012). Combining empirical scrutiny and analytic precision allows the theorist to connect the social and structural with the mundane and everyday. Data generated through interviewing fit well with the principles underpinning the approach and the processes involved in constructing theory. For Charmaz and Belgrave (2012), the combination of flexibility and control inherent in in-depth interviewing techniques fits grounded theory strategies for increasing the analytic incisiveness of the understandings derived. Yet interviews as a means of generating research data have been the subject of intense debate. Critiques of the dynamics of interviewing and the nature of data interviews generate, particularly arising out of feminist (De Vault and Gross, 2007) and interpretivist traditions (Atkinson et al, 2003), demand researchers acknowledge the epistemological implications of how they generate interview data.

Focusing on the dynamics of the interviewing process, feminists critiqued the traditional interview as a mechanical instrument of data collection assigning a passive role for the interviewee and a proscribed role to the interviewer, marked by asymmetric power relations and the exclusion of emotion and reciprocity (Stanley and Wise, 1993; De Vault and Gross, 2007). In a foundational contribution, Oakley (1981) proposed an approach based on a feminist ethic of commitment and egalitarianism in contrast to the scientific ethic of detachment and role differentiation between researcher and researched. A feminist ethic redefines the interview situation, involves interviewers investing their identity, entails closer relationships between interviewers and respondents and attempts to minimize status differences and hierarchy in interviewing (Oakley, 1981). Such personalisation of the interview method makes it a site where new identities and new definitions of problematic situations are created at the level of the interview and interpretation. Through such processes, research subjects came to be repositioned as research participants to reflect their active role. However, reflections on research practice show that while these ethics are laudable, features such as mutuality, egalitarianism and reciprocity are inherently difficult to attain (De Vault and Gross, 2007).

Attention also turned to the nature of data generated in interviews. Interviews access what cannot be observed, such as attitudes, values, views, interpretations of events, understandings, experiences and opinions. How these are accessed in terms of the relations of experience, culture and language,

constitutive of interview data have come under scrutiny. Experience has been theorized as always socially and historically structured, embedded in a social web of interpretation and re-interpretation and structured within social discourses (Scott, 1991). Talk about experience is similarly discursively structured, revealing formations of power and subject positions constructed by discourses rather than providing access to unmediated accounts of 'real' experience (Scott, 1991). Atkinson et al (2003) characterize interviews as 'accounts' which are in themselves social actions revealing shared cultural understandings and enactments of the social world.

Interviewing has been critiqued as being implicated with 'the interview society' or a pervasive interview culture in the sphere of mass media (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Atkinson et al, 2003; Gubrium and Holstein, 2011). Atkinson and Silverman (1997) challenge the method on the basis that its dominance in social science mirrors and endorses the place of the interview in contemporary culture to the cost of questioning the "technology of biographical construction". Their concern is that in capitulating to the interview society, social researchers vest the interview with the capacity to reveal a private self, taking for granted an interior, stable, authentic and unitary self/subject. Rather, they argue, the interview is a setting for the active, interactional telling of biographies, reputations and identities as narrative, temporal and gestural accomplishments.

De Vault and Gross (2007) sum up critiques of the interview as bringing awareness to the method that:

"researchers are always working with accounts constructed linguistically, that experience recounted is always emergent in the moment, that telling requires a listener and that the listening shapes the account as well as the telling, that both telling and listening are shaped by discursive histories" (p. 179).

This 'interpretive turn' entails the researcher, and the context for telling, being in the frame in a process of reflexivity or active listening (Hall and Callery, 2001; Pillow, 2003). Positions and assumptions researchers bring to inquiry need interrogation so as to gain access to, and understanding of, the positions and assumptions of the participant (Rubin and Rubin, 2005; Hesse-Biber and Piatelli, 2007). Reflexive approaches locate interpretation in the contexts of data generation and recognize that researchers are part of the social events and processes they seek to observe and help to narrate (Hall and Callery, 2001; Atkinson et al, 2003; Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). The positionality of the researcher as well as the topic and wider institutional and cultural understandings and discursive regimes shaping it are all at play in the construction of interview talk.

Constructionist perspectives that construe reality as an on-going interpretive accomplishment address concerns regarding how and what data are generated in interviews. Holstein and Gubrium (2011) argue interviews are specific interactional accomplishments generating data out of interpretive practice. Interviews are construed as providing talk in the form of culturally available resources (language, gestures) for packaging experience (Silverman, 2011: 181) and the focus is on how meaning is constructed. The

interview 'subject' in the active interview creates meanings assembled in the interview encounter and are "constructors of experiential information" (Holstein and Gubrium 2011: 151). Access to culture is provided by asking about ordinary events and deducing the underlying rules, definitions or designations as well as paying attention to shared meanings (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Charmaz (2006) characterizes the researcher as engaged in active listening attending to the participant's language and bridging their experience with research questions grounded in that emergent language. The data generated are a co-construction, a "third voice" (Atkinson et al, 2003), of collaboration between participant and researcher, emerging from the encounter. Ezzy (2010) points out that embodied emotional orientations of both researcher and participant always and inevitably influence the research process and should be engaged with.

The data generated reflect both socially grounded interpretive practices and the subject matter with which the practices are concerned. Constructionists pay attention to both the content, or 'what' of the data, and the form, or 'how' the talk was accomplished, in the specific interaction (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011; Silverman, 2011). This involves examining the cultural norms at work in a narrative to understand how their power derives from both their cultural base and the participants' skills in invoking 'culture' (Silverman, 2011: 198). Constructionist perspectives can both attend to critiques of how researcher and researched are positioned in the data generation process as well as the nature of data generated, and work productively with them. We considered the constructionist interview method best suited to generating data regarding experiences, views and attitudes on relations and exchanges between people across generations that could portray intergenerational solidarity.

### **Constructing grounded theory as a team process**

Constructivist approaches acknowledge the role of reflexivity in the research process, challenging researchers to be reflexive about the constructions, preconceptions and assumptions that inform their inquiry (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012: 355). This discussion does so from a team perspective. *Changing Generations* set out to explore solidarities (or lack thereof) practiced and expressed by people in diverse generational locations at familial and societal levels. The study also explores the interface between these solidarities and the deep recession in Ireland from 2010 onwards. Intergenerational solidarity refers both to the interpersonal level regarding bonds and exchanges between people across generations and to the societal level regarding support for resource redistribution along the age axes. The *Changing Generations* team involves four researchers from two universities sited on the East and West of Ireland. In each university, a Principal Investigator and a post-doctoral research fellow are involved. All team members come from different but cognate disciplines within the social sciences making it of the 'narrow' variety of inter-disciplinarity. Constructivist positions acknowledge that researchers come to an inquiry through the lens of their disciplinary assumptions and theoretical perspectives. Researchers come with existing ontological orientations incorporating 'sensitizing concepts' that are brought to bear in the interpretive process (Charmaz, 2006). Specific questions a researcher brings to the inquiry will shape the meanings

she or he sees in the data. The approach taken in *Changing Generations* to framing the inquiry, devising an approach to interviewing and generating interpretations demonstrates how a shared ground of inquiry can be co-constructed by a team.

### **Starting before the beginning: deconstructing generation**

A central principle in constructing grounded theory is to avoid data being forced by the researchers towards conceptual categories or constructs (Charmaz, 2006). Applying that principle to this inquiry required a deconstruction of our topic 'intergenerational solidarity' at the outset to consider the epistemological implications of how it is framed. The topic suggested 'generation' as an organizing principle for sampling, but the approach required the construct be considered for meanings it carries and its effect at the empirical level. Some of the meanings we considered the term to convey include Mannheim's (1927/1952) foundational contribution to the sociology of generations which posited generation as an important social construct, with a temporal aspect (Bengtson, 1983). Pilcher (2007) explains this temporal dimension as meaning that passage of time and shared cultural experiences of dominant influences distinguishes a generation from an age group or a birth cohort with a distinctive "generational consciousness" (Pilcher, 2007). Yet, empirically, generation has been critiqued as a "synthetic concept" (Mayer, 2009) extremely difficult to apply so as to define any particular group of people as belonging to a 'generation.' The fact that generation is a term in popular use made it useful in terms of describing the research project in accessible terms to participants and general audiences. However for analytical purposes terms such as age and life stage were more useful.

Adopting a constructionist perspective posited that organizing the sample around time and events construed *by us* as dominant influences may 'push' the data towards rendering cohort, time periods or events more meaningful than they are. By 'push' we mean force the data towards these meanings rather than allow meanings emerge. This could constrain the potential of the data to reveal the multitude of sites of difference, including 'generation' that may shape people's practices and understandings. These considerations led us to sample across the age spectrum rather than along 'generational' groupings. This decision was confirmed early on in the research when socio-economic status began to emerge as an important category shaping people's perspectives cutting across age. The salience of socio-economic status, and the fluidity of any notion of generation in the data, shaped a final sample comprising an age profile scattered across the entire life course and representation across socio-economic groups, as set out in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: *Changing Generations* sample profile by gender, age and socio-economic status<sup>1</sup> (N = 100)**

Class	Men (N = 46)				Women (N = 54)				Totals
	18-25	26-50	51-74	75+	18-25	26-50	51-74	75+	
High SES	4	5	8	3	1	10	3	2	36
Middle SES	1	4	3	2	4	5	3	5	27
Low SES	6	4	5	1	6	6	4	5	37
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>100</b>

#### **Creating conditions to pay attention to context**

The breadth of the topic made every member of Ireland’s population relevant in rendering an understanding of intergenerational solidarity. Another tension in designing the study was how to create the conditions for locating the data generated in its situational and social contexts. Charmaz (2011) has argued that paying detailed attention to social and historical contexts is key to understanding central social justice axes of resources, hierarchies, policies and practices in the theory-building process. To provide for this, we anchored sampling in defined geographic areas, selected for diversity with regard to measures of social deprivation (Haase, 2010). Areas were profiled for key social, economic, political and demographic characteristics and sites comprising metropolitan, town/suburban and village/rural hinterland settings selected. This allowed researchers to become intimately familiar with local, micro contexts including how social policies, resources and hierarchies play out in participants’ local environments. When considering the meaning of people’s talk regarding resources, this could be related to the specificities of their environments, as well as to wider Irish and global contexts.

#### **Approach to interviewing: creating conditions conducive to narration**

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<sup>1</sup> SES is defined in line with the definitions used by the Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO). SES categories represent a regrouping of seven social class groups as follows: ‘High SES’ comprises Group 1 Professional workers and Group 2 Managerial and technical; ‘Middle SES’ comprises Group 3 Non-manual and Group 4 Skilled manual; and ‘Low SES’ comprises Group 5 Semi-skilled, Group 6 Unskilled and Group 7 All others gainfully occupied and unknown.



Regardless of researchers' perspectives on the role of research participants in social inquiry, when a study starts with a question formulated by a research team they shape how that inquiry is encountered by participants. The challenge we faced was to communicate the broad and somewhat 'esoteric' concept of 'intergenerational solidarity' to participants in a way that could facilitate them talking to the topic on their own terms. Providing what Holstein and Gubrium (2011) describe as an environment conducive to the production of the range and complexity of narratives that might develop raised a number of concerns given the topic. Firstly, the key concepts of 'solidarity' and 'justice' are abstract, assuming content and meaning through human interactions and transfers, and understandings of these. Using such abstract, conceptual language is both daunting and potentially loaded. We also sought to avoid placing parameters on talk or directing its scope.

Initially, the 'facet wheel' approach, successfully used by Peace et al. (2006) in their ethnographic study of the role of space and place in shaping identity in later life, was adapted by the team as a possible interviewing tool (Figure 2). Presenting an image to participants with key words arranged in a wheel format is designed to flag sensitizing concepts in a radial rather than hierarchical way. A narrative outlining the focus of the study was read to participants and they were invited to begin speaking to the topic from whatever launch point of the wheel they wished.

Figure 2: *Changing Generations* Facet Wheel



Adapted from Peace et al. (2006)

When piloting, the wheel approach was found to be a complex visual aid that daunted most participants rather than one that facilitated them engaging with the topic. Participants' response may reflect the

general public's preconceived notions regarding the social norms and conventions surrounding the research interview, echoing critiques of the method as being implicated in the 'interview society' as noted above. Our sense that the wheel was 'daunting' for participants was at odds with our concerns to generate a free-flowing discussion within which participants could teach us about their lives, experiences and views. Confirmation that the wheel was not conducive to this across three interviewers facilitated a decision to abandon the wheel approach. Such decisiveness is unlikely to have been so easily achieved by a lone researcher who, lacking the opportunity to pilot with different interviewers, may question their interviewing skills rather than the approach. .

### **Interview guide as a team resource**

We reverted to developing a semi-structured interview guide. Everyday terms of 'give and take' of 'help and support' were selected to facilitate talk about intergenerational relations at familial or interpersonal levels. For talk about the societal level, 'receiving' and 'contributing' were selected. Two 'initial' questions invited participants to introduce key elements of their life worlds to the interviewer. The first 'Tell me about the stage you are at in your life now?' took a critical approach to chronological age by allowing the person to locate their life-stage in terms of their own choosing. The second question took a critical approach to 'family', asking 'who would you say are the people closest to you?', in an attempt to allow people to define their significant intimate relationships on their own terms rather than with reference to structural typologies of 'family'.

Four 'intermediate' questions sought to tap into two types of relationships ('giving' and 'receiving') in two spheres ('private' and 'public'), using the following central questions:

- Can you tell me about the help and support, if any, you are **receiving from other people** at the moment? ['receiving – private']
- Can you also tell me about any help and support **you are giving to others** at the moment? ['giving – private']
- Thinking about Ireland as a whole, in what ways do you think that you are **contributing to Irish society**? ['giving – public']
- What do you see yourself **receiving from the State** ['receiving – public']

Through probing, interviewers introduced the passage of time into each of the above core questions, i.e. asking participants whether they 'had received' support in the past, 'anticipated receiving' support in the future, and so on. There were also questions asking participants how they *felt about* giving and/or receiving support.

Solidarity at societal level was explored by asking about 'Your thoughts on the State's role in supporting the young and the old' and 'After reflecting on the giving and receiving you are involved in as an individual, what are your views on the balance between the 'give and take' for you personally?' The guide concluded with 'ending questions' (Charmaz, 2006), inviting the participant to introduce something they consider relevant and ask questions of the researcher:

- Is there *something* I haven't asked you that you think is relevant to our topic?
- Is there *anything* you would like to ask me?

The guide's purpose was to formulate concrete terms and questions that would generate talk and communicate our shared focus to participants. Developing the guide was both useful for the team as a process and for the construction of a template that could be referred to in each interview with participants. Interviewers adapted and interpreted the questions so that while most interviews do begin with the opening two questions, they move from there through the terrain mapped out by the guide with the participant taking the lead. The principles underpinning formulation of terms informed interviewing throughout the study, rather than adherence to a rigid template. Meanwhile reviewing, refining and refocusing the guide during the data generation process allowed theoretical lines of inquiry to be pursued. For example, the following questions sought more concrete exploration of expectations for the future: 'if someone close acquired significant care needs in older age, what role would you assume in meeting their needs?'; 'As you anticipate your own ageing and care needs that might arise, how do you think those needs will be met?'

The process of formulating the guide turned out to provide an opportunity for reflexive and shared awareness within the team. The exercise involved members interrogating fully questions, positions, and assumptions each were individually, and the team was collectively, bringing to the inquiry. Compiling the guide entailed the team communicating among its members, and at a reflexive level articulating *within* each person, the orientation of the interview, research questions and overall purpose of inquiry.

### **Co-constructing theory**

Despite the imperative for reflexivity in constructivist methods, reflexive accounts of the process of co-constructing data *and* meaning in interview research are rare (Pezalla et al, 2012). We take up this challenge here by presenting excerpts from memos of three team members. The memos show what was going on in generating data and emerging interpretation both within the specific interview and at the level of inquiry. This demonstrates how our application of constructing grounded theory in the context of a team-based, broad research inquiry succeeded in achieving emergent reconstruction, a goal at the heart of the method. All memos are written in the first person and participants are given a pseudonym.

### ***Gemma and Rosalind's interpretation of emigration***

The first memo focuses on data generated in an interview between team member Gemma and participant Rosalind. It hones in on talk where Rosalind introduces emigration. Gemma had previously encountered talk about emigration both in the data and more broadly in the prevailing discourse surrounding Ireland's economic travails. However, Rosalind's talk affects a critical shift in what emigration means for Gemma. The memo also demonstrates how the researcher's interpretations are derived through her emotional response to Rosalind's material conditions of living, her demeanour and her talk. Finally, the role of disciplinary perspective, in Gemma's case political science, shaping interpretation is displayed.

I interviewed Rosalind Keeling in her house in a remote area on Ireland's west coast. Rosalind's home is cold, damp and basic. This is a temporary home. I am a little shocked by the fact that the house contains so few possessions. Rosalind has two children, but I see few toys. ... Rosalind is very friendly and confident. She takes control of the interview, leading me to areas that interest her, and correcting me if some of the questions seem repetitious. At one point she remarks: 'You've asked me that three times now!'

Though not yet thirty, Rosalind has already had a very eventful life. While she is now a student, she has been homeless in the past. Nevertheless, Rosalind is happy and hopeful for the future. When I asked her about 'give and take' in Ireland, she chose to express her disillusionment with the Irish State.

***"G: Your expectations of receiving from the State in the future are that you wouldn't really...?"***

*R: I would be gearing up for leaving Ireland so I don't expect to be keeping my contract with the State and I don't expect to be paying any tax back to them either when I do eventually start working. I think they are realising that now as a lot of people are leaving. Most people are going to Australia aren't they?"*

Emigration had arisen spontaneously in all previous seven interviews. Rosalind's frankness caused me to question my own acceptance of emigration as a natural part of life for people living in the west of Ireland. Was Rosalind choosing to leave? Perhaps she was being forced to leave as the state had, yet again, failed to protect its people from poverty? It was only through speaking with a young, energetic woman, engaged enough to join a protest movement that I began to question my preconceptions of emigration in Ireland. Was emigration more insidious than I had first thought? Rosalind helped me to link disillusionment with the state to Irish people's propensity to leave their home country. I began to interpret her views as demonstrating the role of emigration in establishing a permanently temporary social contract in Ireland. Emigration separates 'being Irish' from 'living in Ireland'. The option to emigrate is always there, having become established practice in a country that has repeatedly used emigration to survive hardships, including colonialism, famine, numerous recessions and latterly the worst negative effects of globalisation. The Irish diaspora leaves remainders: lost generations, and a fractured, temporary relationship between state and those citizens who stay behind.

### **Emergent reconstruction of obligation**

The second two excerpts illustrate how the construct of 'obligation' evolved across the data and interpretation to a point in the inquiry where 'emergent reconstruction' featured within interview talk. Within the data we were encountering taken-for-granted positions on providing elder care across all age

groups which we were framing as ‘unquestioning obligation’ and were asking how this fits with individualist notions of self-making identity and action? Meanwhile, alternative positions on obligation were emerging along class lines, specifically within talk of those from higher socio-economic groups.

### **Virpi and Fred’s interpretation of ‘obligation’**

In the first of two excerpts addressing obligation, research team member Virpi interviews Fred. This memo demonstrates how a generative question is introduced by the researcher to build on data from other interviews and how interpretations emerging across the inquiry shape the direction of the talk to deepen understanding.

Before meeting Fred, I had noted a strong ethos of self-sufficiency in interviews with older women in high SES positions. Interviewing an older man from the same socio-economic group, I was particularly keen to explore his views on appropriate sources of care.

**V: If you were to develop care needs in the future, where would you expect that care to come from?**

**F: If I needed care?**

**V: Yeah.**

**F: I don’t expect it from my children.**

**V: You don’t expect any assistance at all from your children?**

**F: No I don’t. I said we have some investments. Those investments that I have for my wife and I, in our minds they are to pay for whatever care we need for as long as the blooming investment last or how long we last. I planned to look after ourselves.**

I found it striking that Fred’s first reaction to my question about expectations regarding care was such an unequivocal rebuttal of the idea that his children are obliged to provide care. It is clear that Fred does not expect, nor does he think that anyone in his position should expect, care from either their family, or from the State. I wanted Fred to explain *why* he felt so strongly about the matter.

**V: Tell me why do you expect little or nothing from your children in this area of life?**

**F: It comes down to this word ‘expect’ again. Expect to me is close to entitlement. I am not entitled to anything from them. (...) They have their own life to live. ... It is more difficult when you have got young children to look after, to raise and to do everything for that you would wish. I wouldn’t expect any of their attention to be diverted away from their kids to have to look after me. That is just the way I feel about it.**

From earlier interviews, I had begun to theorize about ‘generational observing’, whereby family generations witness each other’s lives and adjust their expectations of intergenerational solidarity

accordingly. Here, I formulate the idea that adult children can focus on childrearing, even at the expense of looking after their ageing parents, and seek Fred's reaction to it:

**V: You think it is quite legitimate and okay for let's say people in the middle generation to be focused on their children and on their jobs rather than diverting that attention towards older parents?**

**F:** *It depends a little bit on the circumstances I feel. I wouldn't expect...children in their forties or fifties to ignore their own parents if those parents were in difficulty either financially or physically if they weren't able to look after themselves... We have provided financially to a certain extent for ourselves. .... I wouldn't be expecting too much from them but...*

**V: You would hope for involvement in your life. Would it be more in the social sense as in coming to spend time?**

**F:** *Oh yes. I would be terribly disappointed if that didn't happen. Oh yeah, very much so.*

**V: When it comes to hands-on care, cooking for you and bathing you, that is something quite different is it?**

**F:** *Yeah that is different. As long as we are able to do it ourselves or we could pay for it to be done, I wouldn't expect them to do that. ... I would be terribly disappointed if they didn't come visit or they didn't phone and things like that.*

For me, the picture is emerging of well-off middle class people expecting little from their adult children/grandchildren by way of direct care, and covering for this social risk through their own savings. This evinces lack of trust / expectations regarding both the state and family – care needs are seen as responsibility of self / spouse. However, Fred then hints that he would be disappointed and saddened if his children did nothing in the event of their parents needing care. When I ask him to be more specific, it transpires that he certainly wishes for social contact, but would be happier getting 'hands-on' care from a paid 'nursing professional'. I conclude that Fred draws a strong and clear distinction between 'hands-on' care of the body and the household, and the 'emotional care' visiting and showing concern.

### ***Catherine and Sonya's interpretation of 'obligation'***

In the second memo excerpt addressing 'obligation', an interview between team member Catherine and participant Sonya, Sonya discusses her relationship with her father and raises the construct of obligation through that. The memo excerpt focuses on how obligation is honed in on, explored and given meaning collaboratively in the interview, but critically reflecting how the construct was emerging across the study data.

The excerpt is from early in the interview. Recalling Silverman's (2011) argument that analysis should never be separate from the turn-by-turn production of identities as stories, turn taking is preserved here.

*S: My father has been in and out of ill health the last few years, but based in [my home county], so again, yea.*

**C: That is what we were, the next thing that we are interested in, is who you would say the people closest to you are? Is that, an answer to that question?**

*S: Well do I feel close to him, or is it just like obligation, family obligation thing?*

**C: Well, tell me! That's what really interests me, actually, is...**

*S: Right, ok, ahm, gosh, yea, I suppose I would, it's more like the last couple of years I would have probably started to have a better relationship with my father than I have had, but I wouldn't have felt that close to him over the last twenty years, particularly. But the last few years, maybe because of ill-health, we've sort of maybe gotten to know each other a little bit better. I would probably go home more than I've ever gone home ... And it is more obligation, I will be honest.*

**C: Is it? Yeah**

*S: Yea. But I feel, I guess I feel a bit more, I feel a bit closer to him in the last six months, I think more because as he is getting older, and maybe I feel a bit more, that it is more than just obligation any more, I feel a bit more of something else, maybe, kind of, yea.*

**C: Can you describe, I know they're kind of hard concepts, but can you describe what the difference is between the obligation and the closeness? Like when you thought of 'just obligation', what did that feel like? And what did that mean?**

*S: Well obligation is kind of "oh God I just have to do it", "are you going home?" "No, I can't, are you going" it's like a bit of a, you know, it's something you feel you have to do as a family duty, and you have to do it. But I suppose feeling a closeness is something that just kind of creeps up on you. ... So there is a sense, obligation, but it is more than that, I suppose it's a sense of maybe love, yea, he is my Dad, no matter what, so kind of, you know, a bit closer than I would have felt to him for a long time, yea.*

When Sonya herself asks 'is it just obligation?' I feel like we have struck gold and share the significance I attribute to this question back to her. Sonya conveys surprise as she gropes for words at first in answer to the request to explore her own question regarding obligation. 'Groping' for language signifies a critical moment in an interview. Moments in narration when words are searched for or struggled with by participants have been identified as instances of important insight (Charmaz, 2006; De Vault and Gross, 2007). These can be construed as moments where narrators are *locating* themselves in discourse as opposed to being *constituted* by discourse as performative versions of subjectivity would propose (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008).

Her reference to 'something else' strikes me as coming to the 'crux' of the matter. I hear this 'something else' as referring to a dimension of relations that make for coherent identity and agency while engaging in reflexive self-making. I have a hunch that the juxtaposition of her own terms, 'obligation' and 'closeness', will break open the 'something else'. I want to put Sonya's own terms back to her and signal the contribution she is making to the conceptual work of the project. As I ask questions, she watches and listens intently, remaining highly engaged and ready to answer. It feels like a shared moment of building understandings. In answering, Sonya begins with an animated account of how obligation plays out between herself and her siblings. She then slows down and moves into talk of 'feeling' that is slower and more deliberative, with less animation in her actions. Saying the word 'love' is the zenith of this tract of talk, I interpret Sonya as having fully explicated out the 'something else'. She sits back, nods 'yea' decisively at the end of her statement and signals an end to interpreting.

In this extract, Sonya contributed significantly to the theoretical direction of the project through the 'emergent re-construction' of the concept of obligation in her talk. Sonya's social locations as a childless, lesbian, professional woman challenged normative gender and sexuality scripts. This allows an exploration of how traditional normative discourses such as 'obligation' are playing out in non-traditional locations. In Sonya's talk, here and later in the interview, she re-constructs her care relationship with her father from one based on traditional norms of 'obligation' or 'having to' to a relationship based on affective values of 'love' and 'wanting to' through memory and relational work. This 'emergent re-construction' suggests a process of reworking traditional norms through relational principles to maintain a coherent sense of self.

### ***Merging emergent interpretations***

Finally, to illustrate how emergent interpretations were integrated at team level, the following extract is from Virpi's memo on obligation after reading Catherine's interview with Sonya.

Reading Sonya's interview conducted by another member of the research team, it occurs to me that how Fred's and Sonya's ideas of what 'family care' ideally is about, are quite similar. For both Sonya and Fred, it is about love although Sonya names this which Fred does not. This represents an important departure from the traditional idea, still deeply rooted in many Irish policy documents and discourses, that care (both 'hands-on' and emotional) is a responsibility of the extended family. This shared perspective in thinking about care by participants representing different generations and genders is reconstructing a societal norm. Their shared (higher) socio-economic location suggests that class is significant in shaping their thinking about, and practices of, care.



### **Interpretation as team process: bridging researcher, participant, data and interpretation**

A team research project generating data using interviews entails individual interviewers co-constructing data and knowledge in interaction with participants. Further conceptual understandings are generated with and through the data in analysis. Each member also brings abstracted conceptual understandings to a team forum. Individual researchers move between these levels to construct theory. The team can serve as a bridging process to facilitate movement of a researcher between interaction with participants, data and interpretation. As data collection progressed in this study, researchers wrote memos reflecting on emergent meanings from interviews and directions new insights suggested to the overall inquiry. Members could pose questions both of the data and of the inquiry arising from their own disciplinary, ontological and reflexive positions.

On-going discussion about theoretical discoveries across the team allowed for cross-fertilization of ideas. Multiple perspectives brought to the data illuminated the role of the researcher's perspective and positionality in how data are interpreted. When contentions posed by one member ran counter to other's interpretations of 'what was going on' in the data, the team applied the principle of deferring to the interpretation of the person who had generated the data. Thereby due acknowledgement was given to the reflexive interdependence and interconnectedness of researcher, data, method and interpretation (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). The method's iterative nature, whereby emergent interpretations are interrogated in prospective interviews, was particularly useful in resolving instances where members were divided on themes emerging from the data. While interpretations were not checked with individual participants whose talk gave rise to an emergent theme, interpretations were checked in the process of generating data *with* participants. This 'in-built mechanism' in the data meant that where different interpretations were proposed the team's common refrain was 'let's see what prospective data will yield'. This process, more usually undertaken by a lone researcher, yielded an 'open' yet rigorous approach to constructivist grounded theorizing. Having a team involved in the inquiry facilitated inductive and abductive reasoning as well as practising reflexivity. It seems Charmaz's (2006) claim that grounded theory methods expedite interpretation holds for team-based as well as individual inquiry.

Meanwhile the team's practice was that a point came where members 'returned' to their (inter)disciplinary situated locations and wrote their interpretations up as analysis, usually in a format for submission to academic journals. Drafts were circulated and other team members subjected the colleague's paper to rigorous peer review.. The practice demanded the capacity to listen to, accept or respectfully rebut colleagues' robust critiques. The logistics of the team spread across two university campuses (and even within campuses' separate buildings) could be characterized as 'collegiality at a distance.'

### **Conclusion**

This article acknowledges the processes of (re)constructing intergenerational solidarity through an exploration of people's views, experiences and attitudes on intergenerational relations and practices by a research team using grounded theory generated through interviews. Using the method in a team allowed for cross-fertilisation of ideas, multiple perspectives illuminating interpretation and expeditious decisions, all of which enriched interpretation. The forum of the team operated as a site to acknowledge the interdependence and interconnectedness of researchers, data, method and interpretation. Strategies adopted by the *Changing Generations* team contribute to understandings of how the guidelines of constructivist grounded theory can be adopted and adapted in a team-based inquiry with broad scope and relevance (Charmaz, 2006: 9). A central feature of the study was its breadth of meaning, relevance and scope which created challenges for creating conditions conducive for constructing theory. Interviews were selected as the method of generating data capable of accessing experiences, views and attitudes that could portray intergenerational solidarity. While the method is subject to debate, it is argued here that constructivist approaches can work productively with concerns about how interview data are generated, while also addressing what the data constitute. Organizing data and interpretation by generation was eschewed in order to avoid forcing the data into categories constitutive of the construct. Anchoring sampling in defined geographic areas, selected for diversity in measures of social deprivation allowed the data to be located in their situational and social contexts for interpretive depth. Developing an interview guide provided an opportunity for reflexive and shared interrogation of the positions and assumptions shaping the inquiry within and across the team. This in turn created conditions for accessing the positions and assumptions of participants. The processes of framing inquiry, generating interview data and integrating interpretations followed in *Changing Generations* demonstrate how a shared ground of inquiry can be co-constructed by a team.

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