

Second Edition

GROUND THEORY

A Practical Guide



MELANIE BIRKS & JANE MILLS

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GROUND THEORY



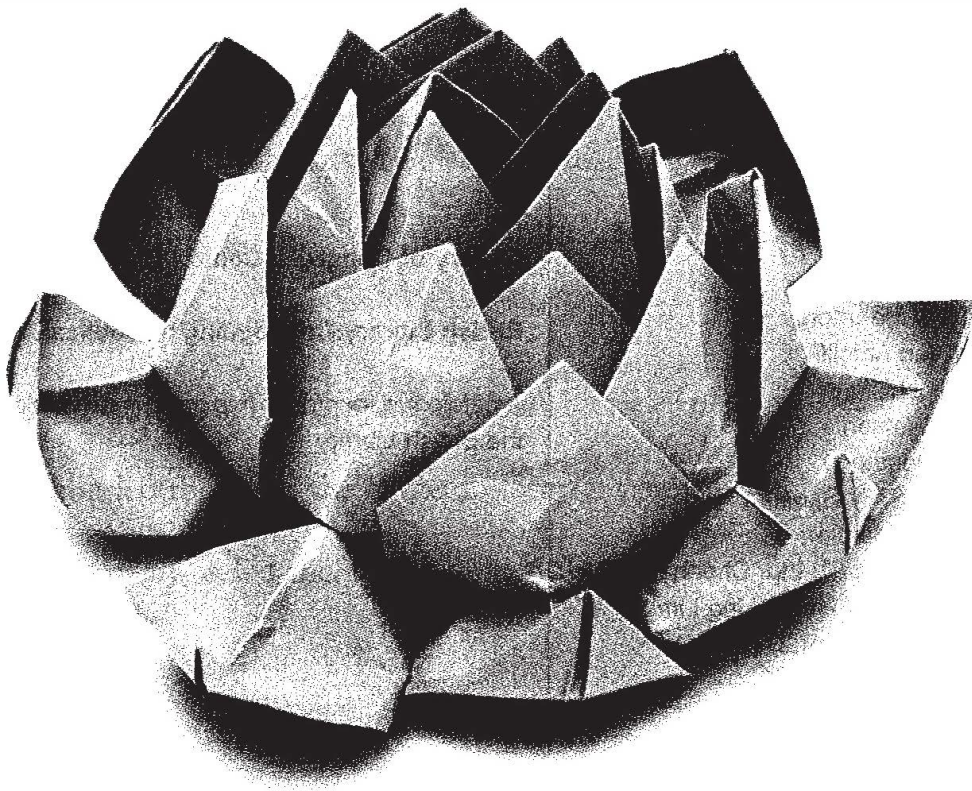
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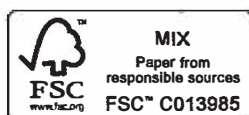
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We are delighted to have been asked to produce this second edition of *Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide* for SAGE. Our aim in the production of the first edition was to assist the reader in understanding philosophical and methodological concepts inherent in research and, in particular, demystify some of the complexities associated with grounded theory. Feedback received from students and teachers across the globe has confirmed our success in this regard. In producing this second edition, we hope to further our work in promoting the practical use of grounded theory in the conduct of research.

Once again we wish to thank our eternally patient families for their support while we worked on producing this text and acknowledge our original research mentors Professor Karen Francis and Professor Ysanne Chapman. Our thanks also go to all those who shared their experience of grounded theory in the 'Windows into grounded theory' that feature throughout the original text and this revised edition. We would particularly like to express our appreciation for the invaluable support of our research assistant, Jennifer Chamberlain-Salaun and our Dean, Professor Lee Stewart. Finally, we gratefully acknowledge the professional guidance of our publisher, Jai Seaman, and editorial assistance of Lily Mehrbod at SAGE Publications.

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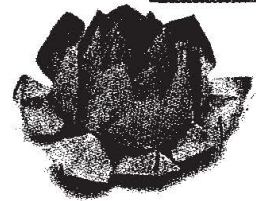
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by Melanie Birks and Jane Mills



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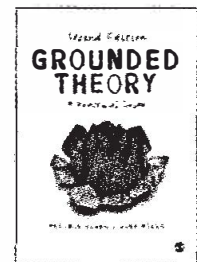
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About the second edition

'This updated new edition contains detailed guidance on all aspects of conducting a grounded theory study, from planning a study and ensuring its quality, to the presentation of results. The authors are experienced researchers who are skilled in conducting grounded theory studies, ensuring that the advice is both practical and relevant.'

Janet Anderson, Senior Lecturer, Florence Nightingale School of Nursing and Midwifery, King's College London



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ONE

ESSENTIALS OF GROUNDED THEORY

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help you to:

- Summarize the historical background of grounded theory
 - Discuss methodological influences on grounded theory as an approach to research
 - Outline key positions taken in the literature about grounded theory
 - Identify a personal philosophical position
 - Define essential grounded theory methods
-

Introduction

Grounded theory is one of the most popular research designs in the world. Not only are there thousands of publications that report on studies using grounded theory methods, but there is also a collection of seminal texts that researchers can use to guide their study and ensure the rigour of their work. So why then, you may ask, is there a need for another book on grounded theory? For beginning researchers, including graduate students, the magnitude of information that exists about grounded theory methods and findings has made engaging in a grounded theory study a complicated endeavour. Trying to understand the general principles of grounded theory in the context of the debate and discussion that is so much a part of this research tradition can be incredibly difficult. Where to start? What to read? Who to 'follow'? And why? This book aims to provide you with a place to begin as you explore the wider grounded theory literature.

An important first step in becoming a grounded theorist is deciding how you position yourself philosophically. As Birks (2014) explains, each of us has a unique conceptualization of existence and reality. How we understand the world is influenced by our history and the context in which we find ourselves. Our personal philosophy is very important because it defines what we consider to be real and how we can

legitimately acquire knowledge about the world. As such, Birks defines philosophy as ‘a view of the world encompassing the questions and mechanisms for finding answers that inform that view’ (2014: 18). One of the learning outcomes of this chapter is for you to resolve your philosophical position so that future decisions about how to use grounded theory methods are methodologically based. As you will come to understand, grounded theorists take various philosophical and methodological positions that influence the implementation of a set of essential grounded theory methods. Each chapter in this text addresses these differences and highlights the implications they may have when undertaking a study.

The grounded theory generations

In recent times, books about grounded theory have documented the beginnings of the method and the original work of Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser (Covan, 2007; Stern, 2009; Urquhart, 2013). In 1960, Anselm Strauss joined the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) School of Nursing. The UCSF School of Nursing has a proud intellectual history: Edith Bryan, the first American nurse to earn a doctoral degree, was its founding leader in 1918 (UCSF, 2007). In appointing the then 44-year-old Strauss to a professorial position, the school’s leaders were strategically investing in his intellectual capital with the aim of establishing a doctoral studies programme. Shortly after his appointment, the Department of Social and Behavioral Science was created within the school and Strauss appointed its inaugural Director.

In 1961, at the age of 33 years, Barney Glaser had completed his PhD at Columbia University in New York under the guidance of Paul Lazerfeld and Robert Merton (Covan, 2007). At this time, Strauss was successful with a grant application for a four-year funded study to examine the experience of dying, and recruited Glaser to the research team. It was during this study that the grounded theory methods we know today began to coalesce. In 1967, after the completion of *Awareness of Dying*, Glaser and Strauss published *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Together they made their scholarly motivation for this publication quite clear, stating that:

We would all agree that in social research generating theory goes hand in hand with verifying it; but many sociologists have been diverted from this truism in their zeal to test either existing theories or a theory that they have barely started to generate. (1967: 2)

The notion of generating new theory from data, as opposed to testing existing theory, resonated with other social scientists, and grounded theory as a research design became increasingly popular. For the next 10 years, Strauss and Glaser taught together at UCSF, with many of their students now forming a coterie who would carry on their legacy. While Strauss continued teaching at UCSF until 1987, and later as an Emeritus Professor, Glaser left the academy to write, publish, consult and teach around the world.

Increasingly there is a trend in the literature to categorize Glaser and Strauss as the first generation of grounded theorists. At UCSF they created a challenging and supportive teaching environment that was a crucible for many of those who have become known as second-generation grounded theorists (Morse et al., 2009). It is the second generation of grounded theorists who have written about their interpretations of Glaser and Strauss's grounded theory methods and who have in many cases used the original work as a launching pad for their own iterations (Bowers and Schatzman, 2009; Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005).

Table 1.1 Seminal grounded theory texts

Year	Author	Title
1967	Glaser and Strauss	<i>The Discovery of Grounded Theory</i>
1978	Glaser	<i>Theoretical Sensitivity</i>
1987	Strauss	<i>Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists</i>
1990	Strauss and Corbin	<i>Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques</i>
1992	Glaser	<i>Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis</i>
1994	Strauss and Corbin	'Grounded theory methodology: An overview', in <i>Handbook of Qualitative Research</i> (1st Edition)
1995	Charmaz	'Grounded theory', in <i>Rethinking Methods in Psychology</i>
1998	Strauss and Corbin	<i>Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques</i> (2nd Edition)
2000	Charmaz	'Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Methods', in <i>Handbook of Qualitative Research</i> (2nd Edition)
2005	Clarke	<i>Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory after the Postmodern Turn</i>
2014	Charmaz	<i>Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis</i> (2nd Edition)

Table 1.1 is ordered chronologically and lists those works considered by us to be seminal grounded theory texts because they are characterized by their originality of thought and subsequent influence. Making a decision about what to classify in this way is an arbitrary process; however, the citation rate of each of these works provides an indication of scholarly opinion. It is not suggested that a novice grounded theorist read the books in this list from top to bottom, even though supervisors sometimes recommend this.

Over the years, much has been made of a supposed split between Strauss and Glaser following the publication of Strauss and Corbin's text *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* in 1990 (Babchuk, 2011). Glaser's rebuttal (1992) sparked a debate among grounded theory scholars (Boychuk Duchscher and Morgan, 2004; Heath and Cowley, 2004; Howell, 2013) about the differences between each scholar's work, a debate that continues today. It is worth noting, however, that in spite of the intellectual discussion that surrounds variations

in the use of grounded theory methods, Glaser and Strauss's personal and professional relationship endured until Strauss's death in 1996.

You will frequently see reference to Glaser and Strauss's different perspectives on grounded theory in the literature. Often a researcher will demonstrate (a sometimes almost fanatical) adherence to either a traditional Glaserian or an evolved Straussian version of grounded theory. This text aims to provide a balanced view of grounded theory methods without adopting a dichotomous position. Few things are ever black and white, especially when it comes to research with an overtly interpretive component, and there is much to be learned from all antecedent grounded theorists.

Philosophy, methodology and methods

One of the key aims of a doctoral research programme, and to a certain extent other graduate programmes, is to instil in students the knowledge of various philosophies and in turn the methodologies and methods that are linked to these schools of thought. It is important to understand the difference between a methodology and a set of methods. Stemming from a congruent philosophy, a methodology is a set of principles and ideas that inform the design of a research study. Methods, on the other hand, are practical procedures used to generate and analyse data. There is a fluid interplay that occurs between methodology and method in the process of undertaking a research study. The methodological framework with its underpinning philosophy influences how the researcher works with the participants, in other words the position they take in the study. Depending on their philosophical beliefs and adopted methodology, researchers take either a position of distance or acknowledged inclusion both in the field and in the final product of the study (see Chapter 4). As well, and crucially for grounded theory, the methodology subscribed to influences the analysis of the data as it focuses the researcher's attention on different dynamics and alerts them to possible analytic configurations in the process of conceptual and theoretical abstraction. The following diagram represents each component of the grounded theory research process, including the role of philosophy, methodology and methods in a study. As you can see, philosophy and in turn methodology or the '... strategy that outlines the way one goes about undertaking a research project' (Howell, 2013: ix) are constants throughout the grounded theory research process. In order to map the grounded theory research process against the contents of the book, we have identified the chapters pertaining to each of the major phases of preparation, implementation and dissemination (Figure 1.1). Although this diagram is presented in a linear format, it is important to note that the process is actually iterative and recursive. As Rich reminds us, grounded theory 'is not a lock-step research methodology in which a researcher can only move on to the next stage after successfully completing a prior one' (Rich, 2012: 4).

In this chapter, our purpose is to discuss philosophical and methodological influences on grounded theory. For a broader and more comprehensive explanation of the

The Grounded Theory Research Process

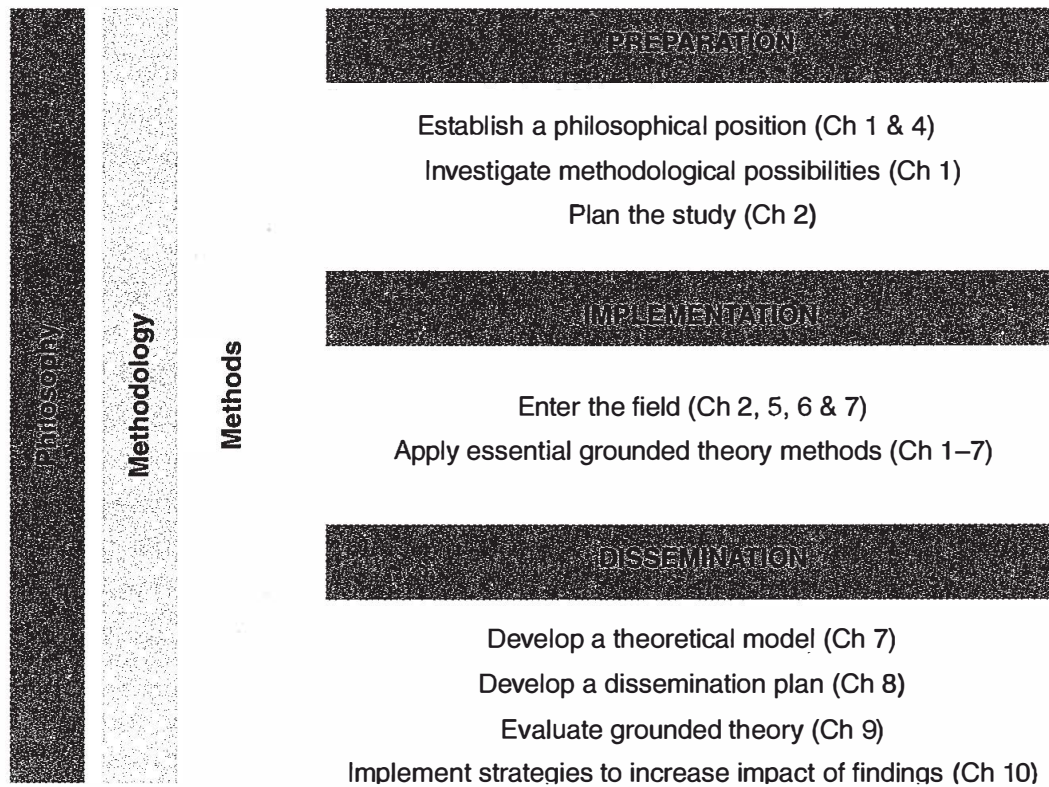


Figure 1.1 The Grounded Theory Research Process

various paradigmatic positions that can be assumed by a researcher we recommend you seek out other texts that address these issues in detail (for example, Lincoln, Lynham and Guba’s chapter ‘Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences; revisited’ in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th edn), edited by Denzin and Lincoln (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba 2011) or similar works).

One of the major criticisms of the first generation of grounded theorists, and in this we include Juliet Corbin who co-wrote some of the seminal texts with Strauss, is that they did not write about grounded theory as a methodological/methods package; rather, they wrote only about the various strategies and techniques (methods) that could be used (Amsteus, 2014). Fortunately this has been rectified to an extent in the latest edition of Corbin and Strauss’s (2008) book, which includes a chapter, absent from the earlier editions, explaining pragmatism and symbolic interactionism as the philosophies that methodologically underpin Strauss’s iteration of grounded theory methods (Chamberlain-Salaun, Mills and Usher 2013). Glaser has never really entered the conversations about grounded theory ‘methodology’, rather his writing has focused on grounded theory method and what constitutes a grounded theory itself. Conversely to Strauss and Corbin, he has dismissed the applicability of any specific philosophical or disciplinary position, including symbolic interactionism, in his belief that adopting such a perspective reduces that broader potential of grounded theory (Glaser, 2005).

Because of the language that Glaser uses when writing about emergence in the process of concurrent data collection and analysis, as well as in the later stages of analysis when the core category is also said to emerge, he has generally been considered a critical realist researching within the post-positivist paradigm (Annells, 1996). More recently however, an argument has been mounted that Glaserian or 'classic' grounded theory is consistent with the philosophy of pragmatism with Nathaniel (2011) linking the ontological, epistemological and methodological premises of this paradigm with Glaser's work over time.

Methodological gaps in seminal texts written by first-generation grounded theorists have led to students of grounded theory needing to figure out what was (to borrow a famous grounded theory mantra) 'going on' ontologically and epistemologically in order to plan and execute a rigorous study that would pass examination. Because of this, many second-generation grounded theorists developed methodological frameworks for grounded theory methods underpinned by a range of philosophies. Rather than argue for one genre of grounded theory in this book, you will note that we move across these now established methodological positions in order to demonstrate their influence on the use of grounded theory methods. We have also made an assumption, in concert with others (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007), that there is a set of methods essential to the research design that must be used in order for the final product to be considered a grounded theory.

Throughout this book, we encourage you to identify your own underlying assumptions about the world, to decide how you are positioned philosophically and in turn methodologically. To help you to achieve this we will provide you with some strategies later in this chapter. Once you have accomplished this task, you will be in a much better position to draw the best from a variety of thinkers about how grounded theory methods can be used in individual research designs. This is what many of the second-generation grounded theorists themselves have done, with the result that grounded theory research design has moved into new methodological spaces (Charmaz, 2000; Clarke, 2005).

Methodological influences on grounded theory

Grounded theory is most often derived from data sources of a qualitative (interpretive) nature. Qualitative research studies originate from early world explorers who documented their experiences of encountering the tribes of foreign lands while collecting cultural artefacts, all in the name of colonization.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) identify eight moments of qualitative research originating at different points of history and influenced by the social milieu of the time. The eight moments of qualitative research are not moments that have ever passed, rather they continue today and shape the variety of methodological positions that researchers take in their designs. Methodologically, grounded theory has been influenced by researchers situated in the second, third, fourth and fifth of these eight moments of qualitative research. The dates attached to the following explanations of these relevant moments are provided to indicate their period of dominance.

**BOX 1.1 DENZIN AND LINCOLN'S MOMENTS OF QUALITATIVE INQUIRY
(MILLS AND BIRKS, 2014A: 6)**

Years	Moment
1950-1979	Traditional
1950-1970	Modernist or 'Golden Age'
1970-1986	Blurred Genres
1986-1990	Crisis of Representation
1990-1995	Postmodernism
1995-2000	Postexperimental Inquiry
2000-2004	The Methodologically Contested Present
2005-Present	Fractured Future

The second moment (from the post war years to 1970) is known as the 'golden age of rigorous qualitative analysis' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 16) during which time Glaser and Strauss developed grounded theory methods. Philosophically the second moment is dominated by post-positivism resulting in researchers working within an ontological and epistemological frame where there is an assumed reality worth discovering as a detached objective observer.

The third moment of qualitative research dawned soon after the publication of *Discovery of Grounded Theory*, as a response to cultural ruptures in American society which took hold in 1968 (Mills and Birks, 2014a). This phase is called 'blurred genres' (1970-86) and is characterized by qualitative researchers questioning their place in research texts. Constructivist thinking became very influential in this moment, and of importance to grounded theory, as Charmaz began to consider grounded theory using this methodological lens.

It was not until the fourth moment of qualitative research (2005), dubbed the 'crisis of representation' (1986-90), that Charmaz began to publish about constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 1995). Charmaz's work is clearly influenced by the third and fourth moments in its focus on the place of the author in the text, their relationship with participants, and the importance of writing in constructing a final text that remains grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2000, 2014).

The fifth moment of qualitative research overlaps and extends the fourth and is the period of postmodernism that is also referred to as 'the triple crisis' as it adds legitimation and praxis to representation. Legitimation questioned measures for deciding on the merit of qualitative research outcomes, while the crisis of praxis provoked questions about the ability of textual analyses of society to effect change (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Postmodernist thought permeated much of this debate and influenced the next key movement in grounded theory, Clarke's work on situational analysis (2005).

In Box 1.2, Marilyn Annells discusses situating her own study within the fifth moment of qualitative research and the influence this had on establishing her philosophical position. Note how Annells supports researchers taking a broad and evolving view of grounded theory and the advice she gives for ensuring success in adopting a non-traditional position.

BOX 1.2 WINDOW INTO GROUNDED THEORY

Marilyn Annells on philosophical positioning

Although I did a small study in 1991 that I thought was grounded theory (GT) research, my first real GT study commenced in 1994 as part of my PhD research. The 1991 study included GT research processes but was descriptive, exploratory qualitative research achieving conceptual ordering but not a full explanatory scheme as per GT.

With my PhD research, fortunately a supervisor knew that in 1994 we were in the 'fifth moment' of qualitative research, which, according to Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln, was being defined and shaped by dual crises of representation and legitimation. Therefore, I was encouraged to consider in which paradigm of qualitative research my philosophical position about inquiry placed me – so I studied the writings of Egon Guba and Yvonne Lincoln to discover that I was embedded in the constructivist paradigm.

However, this led me to a dilemma. How could I do GT research that would be ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically constructivist? GT literature in that era did not satisfactorily answer the question. Disciples of Glaserian or Straussian modes of GT were polarized about 'rightness' of the modes, but mostly silent about philosophical perspectives. So I 'took the bull by the horns' and did my own extensive analysis of writings by GT's major identities, Barney Glaser, Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin. My opinion became that Glaserian GT was post-positivist and controversially that Straussian GT was leaning toward constructivism although still showing signs of post-positivism with symbolic interaction foundations. This led me to applying the Straussian mode but in an ostensibly constructivist way, and I had to write a solid defence of this choice.

What helped was meeting with Juliet Corbin in the US in 1995 to discuss my analysis of data for the study, and in 1996, prior to his death, having correspondence about my philosophical analyses of GT with Anselm Strauss. Several articles were published in the mid-1990s presenting my philosophical analyses of GT modes – this led to critical comment by others. Nevertheless, having eminent examiners of the thesis added credibility to the research and the philosophical analyses. These examiners were the qualitative research methodologist, Margarete Sandelowski, and the pioneer grounded theorist nurse researcher who worked with Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s, Jeanne Quint Benoliel.

What has remained constant is my conviction that GT can be conducted within any qualitative paradigmatic position if ensuring commensurable process and claims of outcome. This needs to be thoroughly justified when planning and reporting the study. Additionally, I believe that GT is evolving and it is not only OK but also beneficial to have multiple modes of GT from which to choose. PhD candidates who I have supervised have justifiably and successfully used quite different approaches to GT. These days there is plenty of literature about the philosophical underpinnings of GT so a student does not have to try and work it out. If there is something about GT that needs some new thought and opinion, don't hesitate to delve into it. Viva la GT!

Annell's perspective reinforces our assertion earlier in this chapter that dividing grounded theory into either traditional or Glaserian grounded theory, and evolved or Straussian grounded theory, is not very helpful. Doing so fails to account for the subtleties and differences in grounded theory research design that have developed in the third, fourth and fifth moments of qualitative research. Methodologically, there are no right or wrong approaches to using grounded theory methods; however, there are differences that need to be taken into account. It is the methodological differences in how essential grounded theory methods are used that we will explore and explain in the chapters that follow.

Discerning a personal philosophical position

You may already be very clear about how you see yourself philosophically and in turn methodologically. For some, this hard-thinking work is part of their scholarly history and training, but others may have yet to attempt this task in an orderly way. The importance of discerning a personal philosophical position before you begin to conceptualize a research study is highlighted in the following quote:

All research is interpretive; it is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied. Some beliefs may be taken for granted, invisible, only assumed, whereas others are highly problematic and controversial. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 22)

Articulating their beliefs and feelings about the world and reflecting on these equips a researcher to make decisions of a methodological nature, which in turn affects how the essential grounded theory methods are used. As to whether a researcher's beliefs and feelings are highly problematic and controversial, the question must be asked: for whom might this be the case? Chapter 4 discusses positioning the researcher at length; however, if there is some early work that needs to be done to think through a philosophical position, now is the time to 'clear a space for the writing voice, hacking away at the others with [a] machete' (Lamott, 1994) and begin to write.

ACTIVITY 1.1 IDENTIFYING YOUR UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE WORLD

Make sure that you will be uninterrupted and comfortable (get a cup of coffee and perhaps a chocolate biscuit). Prepare to time yourself to write for six minutes without stopping.

Think about the following questions:

- 1 How do we define our self?
- 2 What is the nature of reality?
- 3 What can be the relationship between researcher and participant?
- 4 How do we know the world, or gain knowledge of it?

(Continued)

(Continued)

Now write for six minutes, without stopping, about the questions listed. Do not worry about style, spelling or punctuation – just get your thoughts down on paper. Don't stop to critique your work – just concentrate on writing.

Put this piece of writing away for a couple of days and then come back to it. Print it out, get a highlighter pen and go through it. Find the gems in the dross: focus on these and write some more. Look for the gaps, reflect on what else you need to read and consider. Write some more. Never throw anything away; instead, file it carefully for another day.

Essential grounded theory methods

As will be discussed in the following chapters, many research studies purporting to be grounded theories are often a qualitative descriptive analysis (Glaser, 2007) of a particular phenomena. *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory* (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007) has brought the question of what are the salient characteristics of grounded theory research design to the forefront of contemporary discussions about grounded theory. We consider the following to constitute a set of essential grounded theory methods: initial coding and categorization of data; concurrent data generation or collection and analysis; writing memos; theoretical sampling; constant comparative analysis using inductive and abductive logic; theoretical sensitivity; intermediate coding; identifying a core category; and advanced coding and theoretical integration. The remainder of this chapter provides a brief introduction to each of these methods to create a sense of how they are used in undertaking a grounded theory study. The following chapters will examine each of these methods in relation to producing an integrated grounded theory while discussing the various debates and ideas present in the literature.

Initial coding and categorization of data

Initial or open coding is the first step of data analysis. It is a way of identifying important words, or groups of words, in the data and then labelling them accordingly.

In vivo codes are when important words or groups of words (usually verbatim quotes from participants) are themselves used as the label, while categories are groups of related codes (Holloway, 2008). Categories are referred to as theoretically saturated when new data analysis returns codes that only fit in existing categories, and these categories are sufficiently explained in terms of their properties and the dimensions.

There are various terms used to describe coding in grounded theory, which can become confusing. In the original text, Glaser and Strauss (1967) paid little attention to describing the process of coding, assuming that the reader would know what this entailed. Since then, the process of coding in grounded theory studies has had phases of being quite elaborate (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), to in more recent times becoming much more straightforward (Charmaz, 2012; Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2013).

Concurrent data generation or collection and analysis

Fundamental to a grounded theory research design is the process of concurrent data generation or collection and analysis. To achieve this, the researcher generates or collects some data with an initially purposive sample. The data from these initial encounters is coded before more data is collected or generated and the process of analysis repeated. It is this concept that differentiates grounded theory from other types of research design that require the researcher either initially to collect and subsequently analyse the data, or to construct a theoretical proposition and then collect data to test their hypothesis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Writing memos

Memos have been wonderfully described as ‘intellectual capital in the bank’ (Clarke, 2005: 85). More prosaically, memos are written records of a researcher’s thinking during the process of undertaking a grounded theory study. As such, they vary in subject, intensity, coherence, theoretical content and usefulness to the finished product. However harshly you may critique your efforts at memo writing, never throw a memo away as you cannot anticipate when it might suddenly become vitally important. Memo writing is an ongoing activity for grounded theorists as memos are generated from the very early stages of planning a study until its completion. Your memos will in time transform into your grounded theory findings. Writing consistently and copiously will help build your intellectual assets.

Theoretical sampling

Researchers use theoretical sampling to focus and feed their constant comparative analysis of the data. During this iterative process, it will become apparent that more information is needed to saturate categories under development. This often occurs when you want to find out more about the properties of a category, conditions that a particular category may exist under, the dimensions of a category or the relationship between categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). To sample theoretically, the researcher makes a strategic decision about what or who will provide the most information-rich source of data to meet their analytical needs. Writing memos is an important technique to use in this process, as it allows the researcher to map out possible sources to sample theoretically, while at the same time creating an important audit trail of the decision-making process for later use.

Constant comparative analysis

Part of the process of concurrent data collection and analysis is the constant comparison of incident to incident, incident to codes, codes to codes, codes to categories, and categories to categories. This is termed constant comparative analysis and is a process that continues until a grounded theory is fully integrated.

Grounded theory methods are referred to as inductive in that they are a process of building theory up from the data itself. Induction of theory is achieved through

successive comparative analyses. The logic of abduction is also much more apparent in the recent literature about grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006; Reichertz, 2007; Richardson and Adams St Pierre, 2005). Abductive reasoning occurs at all stages of analysis, but particularly during the constant comparative analysis of categories to categories that leads to theoretical integration. When using abductive reasoning, the researcher 'has decided ... no longer to adhere to the conventional view of things ... Abduction is therefore a cerebral process, an intellectual act, a mental leap, that brings together things which one had never associated with one another: A cognitive logic of discovery' (Reichertz, 2007: 220).

Theoretical sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity is first cited in Glaser and Strauss's seminal text (1967) as a two-part concept. Firstly, a researcher's level of theoretical sensitivity is deeply personal; it reflects their level of insight into both themselves and the area that they are researching. Secondly, a researcher's level of theoretical sensitivity reflects their intellectual history, the type of theory that they have read, absorbed and now use in their everyday thought. Researchers are a sum of all they have experienced. The concept of theoretical sensitivity acknowledges this fact and accounts for it in the research process. As a grounded theorist becomes immersed in the data, their level of theoretical sensitivity to analytical possibilities will increase.

Intermediate coding

Intermediate coding is the second major stage of data analysis following on from initial coding. In saying this, the researcher moves between initial and intermediate coding during the process of concurrent data generation or collection and analysis, and the constant comparison of data. The researcher employs intermediate coding in two ways: firstly, to develop fully individual categories by connecting sub-categories, and fully developing the range of properties and their dimensions; and, secondly, to link categories together. Initial coding is often said to fracture the data, whereas intermediate coding reconnects the data in ways that are conceptually much more abstract than would be produced by a thematic analysis. Axial coding is the most advanced form of intermediate coding and has been a feature of the work of Strauss (1987) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) over time.

Identifying a core category

Developing categories through the process of intermediate coding will increase the level of conceptual analysis apparent in the developing grounded theory. At this time, the researcher may choose to select a core category that encapsulates and explains the grounded theory as a whole. Further theoretical sampling and selective coding focus on actualizing the core category in a highly abstract conceptual manner. This is achieved through full theoretical saturation of both the core category and its subsidiary categories, sub-categories and their properties.

Advanced coding and theoretical integration

Advanced coding is critical to theoretical integration. Theoretical integration is the most difficult of the essential grounded theory methods to accomplish well. A grounded theory generally provides a comprehensive explanation of a process or scheme apparent in relation to particular phenomena. It is comprehensive because it includes variation rather than assuming there is a one-size-fits-all answer to a research question. Advanced coding procedures include the use of the storyline technique (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) as a mechanism of both integrating and presenting grounded theory. Glaser (2005) employs theoretical coding during the advanced coding stage. Theoretical codes can be drawn from existing theories to assist in theoretical integration while adding explanatory power to the final product of a grounded theory study by situating it in relation to a theoretical body of knowledge.

Generating theory

The final product of a grounded theory study is an integrated and comprehensive grounded theory that explains a process or scheme associated with a phenomenon.

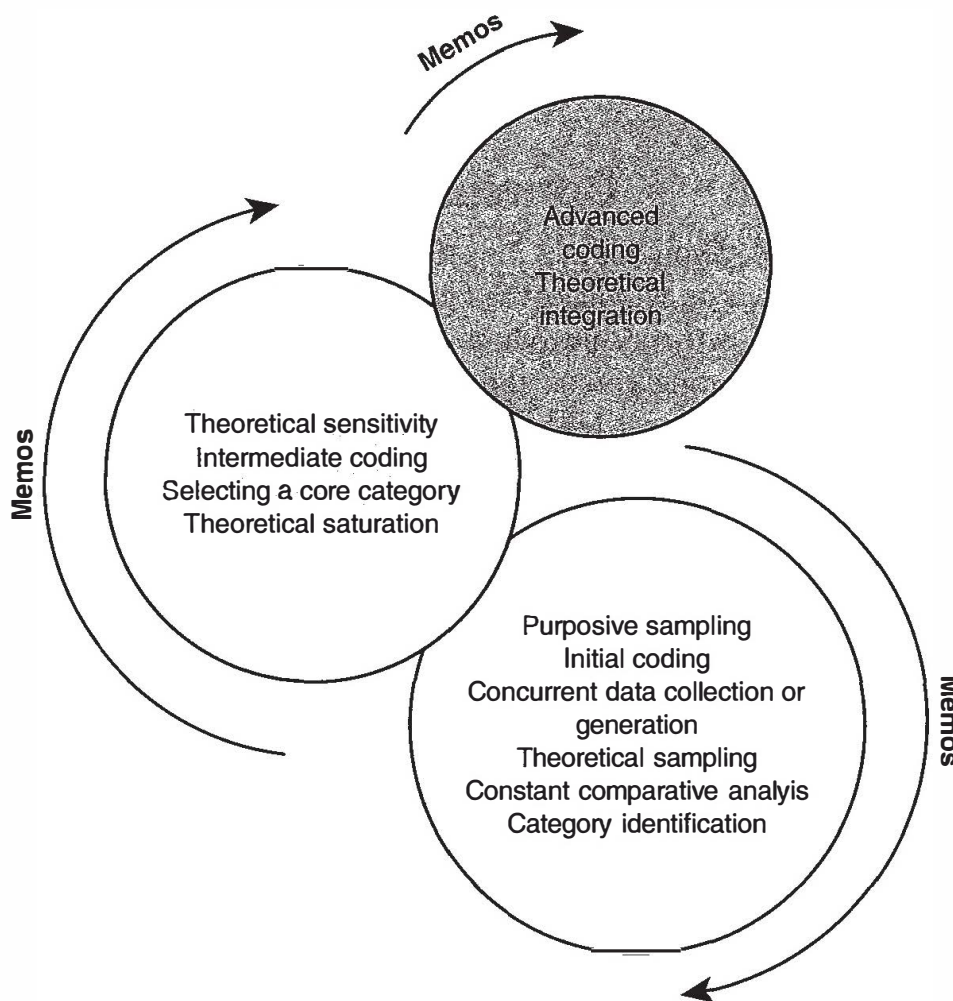


Figure 1.2 Essential grounded theory methods

This theory is generated by the researcher (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) using the methods we have just provided an overview of. Figure 1.2 illustrates how the essential methods fit together during the process of grounded theory research.

We have purposely grouped essential grounded theory methods into three wheels that can drive a machine (you) to generate grounded theory. The largest wheel includes purposive sampling, initial coding, concurrent data generation and collection and analysis, theoretical sampling, constant comparative analysis and category identification. This wheel constitutes the most straightforward and easiest to accomplish of the methods. Together, large wheel methods form the powerhouse of grounded theory research design, enabling you to both generate and refine data. The two smaller wheels include concepts and techniques that are no less important. Rather, small-wheel methods take your study to a level of sophistication that will lift your analysis beyond qualitative description. The lower of the small wheels includes theoretical sensitivity, intermediate coding, identifying a core category and theoretical saturation. Engaging in these methods will further refine your analysis while increasing the comprehensiveness of the final product. The upper small wheel includes complex methods of advanced coding and theoretical integration. This is where a grounded theory either comes together, or not, as the case may be. Writing memos lubricates each of the wheels as they rotate around each other during the grounded theory research process. Without high-quality memos, the machine will very quickly grind to a halt. If one of the small wheels becomes jammed, or has absent components, then a grounded theory will never be produced. It is as simple as that.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided you with an introduction to grounded theory research. In the chapters that follow, you will have the opportunity to explore in detail the critical elements of grounded theory introduced so far. By now, you will have written your first memo documenting how at the beginning of your study you understood reality and how human beings can both acquire and develop knowledge, an extremely important task to have accomplished before you begin to plan your grounded theory study, which is the subject of Chapter 2.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

- 1 How important do you think the prevailing research culture was in shaping Glaser and Strauss's original work on grounded theory?
 - 2 Consider second-generation grounded theorists. What do you think were the most important influences on their work?
 - 3 Essential grounded theory methods are multi-faceted. Identify the purposes of each of these.
 - 4 Reflect on the different methodological influences apparent in grounded theory research. What type of language would you expect each of the seminal authors to use in relation to both participants and their findings?
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WORKING GROUNDED THEORY

Review the 'Working grounded theory' example presented in Appendix A. Note:

- The preconceptions this researcher held about grounded theory prior to commencing the study.
 - The relationship this researcher had with the seminal works on grounded theory.
 - The personal philosophical position of the researcher and how this was expressed.
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