
NOTES TAKEN FROM THE GROUNDED THEORY WORKSHOP

INTRODUCTION

Some Workshop Processes¹

- **Our goal:** We are here to jump-start your work: giving you a push for the next problem. To give comments and help you move forward: We will be “tough in a sweet way” (to get your degree, to publish, to move on...)
- **Humor:** We will use Reversal-Humor
- **Atmosphere:** We are “Atmosphering” – we will set a tone (relax, open, tolerance to confusion, etc)
- **Intelligent People:** Remember GT is excellent methodology for very intelligent people – which just want to keep learning and going deeper (...for the rest of your life)
- **Confidence:** everything we say won't leave the room

I. GROUNDED THEORY LECTURE

A. General Introduction:

1. Remember:

- **Goal:** The workshop goal is troubleshooting. It does not matter where you are in your research; we want to get you to the next level.
- **Data:** Everything is data and we all are all analysts
- **Jargoning:** Grounded Theory is composed of a methodology, a product and a jargon. The Grounded Theory vocabulary can be used all over the world, because a vocabulary (“jargon”) is needed, but Grounded Theory argon alone is not necessarily GT Methodology

2. We will be empowered through:

- **Feeling “Powerless”:** Initially we feel “powerless” and “overwhelmed” and this is normal.

¹ **Key works:** discovering, uncovering, deciphering.... Core Processes: Me-fitting, Survivalising, etc. **Good example to read:** Magdalena Whoolery (2007) Survivalising Among Homeless People with Tuberculosis: A Grounded Theory Study.

- **Networking:** we can support each other
- **Seed-Planting:** “aha moments” – these are seeds that will continue to develop
- **Credentialed:** Just being here, you will be “credentialed” as a Grounded Theory specialist (people will ask you questions about GT).
- **Confidence building makes you young:** GT will give you the energy, curiosity, sense of discovery, etc.

3. Grounded Theory is Experientially Learned

- You have to do it
- By doing it, it will grow in you
- We will start here in this workshop, by listening how others are doing it

4. Grounded Theory will give you a sense of discovery and realization

- You keep coding and all of a sudden you will realize you will see a pattern and you will name it (that is all GT is)
- These are pre-conscious process (of identifying patterns and)—these are not “insights” (conjecture, speculations, etc.), rather they are patterns grounded in the data
- Delayed action phenomena: you will not see or know everything at the same time: there is an assimilation period

5. Grounded Theory is About a Concept (with important “general implications”)

- There are important core variables that are discovered which are useful everywhere: e.g., “assisted residuals” (discovered in studies of Parolees, but it happens to all of us)
- We are going to into a conceptual level: how do we do this?

6. Latent Vs. Manifest Lesson: We are here for the latent lessons

- **Patterns:** Grounded Theory is a simple method of pattern building grounded on data. We are all building patterns – we are re-routing, finding the route, shifting the route based on data, etc.
- **Not accuracy:** when a contradictory data comes up is incorporated into the building of properties
- **Not testing:** We are constantly conceptualizing around across variable – we are not testing or validating.

- **Relevant and applicable:** Grounded theory can help with personal, utilization focus problems. Start looking for patterns, to find the solution, etc.

B. Description versus Conceptualization

1. Description runs the world

- Description and conjecture runs the world (insights, speculation, un-grounded conceptualization)
- Why spend our time “describing” when it already “runs the world” (everyone does it)
- We need to shift to become a “theorist” with a grounded concept (based on data)

2. How do we conceptualize?

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- **Get Abstract:** We need to focus on getting a conceptual perception of a description
- **We get conceptual and general by:**
 - **“Interrupting”:** What you are saying is X (raise it conceptually)
 - **Don’t get caught in a dialogue** (e.g., “that happened to you, this happened to me”! Rather interrupt the participant, conceptualize – go general and abstract: e.g., “moment capture”)
 - **Identity loss:** change you to open you up to build conceptually

3. Core and Dependent variables:

- **Core Variable:** In going conceptual we need a core variable/process: Grounded Theory is a set of interrelated concepts to a core variable—to constantly resolved a main concern
- **Main concern:** We need to forget conceptualization, to focus on the main concern. If we pre-conceived we alienate the person from their main concern: a core variable constantly reform a main concern.
- **There is no accurate description:** nothing is right or wrong—we only have concepts that help understand the variation around a main concern
- **High impact dependent variable:** it is important because professionals and practitioners want to have an impact on the work they do (especially professional fields in medicine, education, business, etc. Probably not as “popular” with non “high-impact” fields, where “impact” may not be imconvey such as sociology, etc.)

- **Reversibility of interchangeability of indicators:** Everyone will convey start given you examples of what your core variable mean. These examples are just indicators of the patterns of the indicators. For example, let's see the concept "routing". When people hear "routing", everyone will give you examples—but the main meaning is "getting from here to there". It doesn't matter where it gets discovered (rerouting was discovered in a study of emphysema, but we are all routing in different ways)

4. Importance to Continually Write

- **Write up memos:** You don't need to (you can't) have it all your in your head. You have it in your Memo bank
- **Getting out of the data with concepts** – comes up from people's comments and EMS (this is all data).
- **Note on Editing:** language editing (grammar, etc) is fine, but be careful with professional editing (may change your meaning, jealousy, etc.)

5. Area of Study Interest

- **There is always an area of study:** Some areas of interest may see non-important and others very important (e.g., death and living).
- **Don't worry about the initial problem.** We begin with an area of interest that is very empirical (e.g., why people do not like long-distance education, but found out they do. Then Study why they do).
- **Reasons to Avoid the Literature.** Don't preconceive yourself by studying the literature first, when it may not have nothing to do with what you discover. Later you can bring it in to show how it relates to what you discovered (the literature is not going anywhere, and you actually do not know what literature will be relevant).

C. What is Grounded Theory?

- **Simply What Is Grounded Theory?** Grounded Theory is just a concept indicator method (patterns of how people are acting in a situation, trying to resolve a main concern). A set of procedures make the methodology.
- **It does not refer to an Epistemology:** not related to a specific form of science that we buy.

- **No particular theoretical perspective:** for example, not just for “symbolic interactionism” or any other theoretical perspective. It is not necessary to “dress up” Grounded Theory with theoretical perspectives.
- **It is not to study only one type of basic social process:** GT is not the study of a basic social process. It develops all type of patterns (or theoretical codes): ranges, processes, causal looping (cause-consequence-cause, which continues to amplify), etc.
- **It is not hypothesis testing.** Useless to test – because anything that varies gets conceptualize into the properties of the variables or new variables. We can identify some variables that sound very important, but we do not test it (e.g., homeless that get sick get rescue, but we will not get everyone sick to get them rescue). **Class comment:** GT is not reductionist; you name all the variations and how they relate to one another. The core variable is what is most important to your case/your participant.
- **GT is an inductive method.** GT is just a method, an inductive method—which applies to all data (patters are in all data – interviews, other qualitative, and quantitative, etc.). Conceptual explanation of what is going on in a substantive area.
- **All is data.** There is no such thing as interpretation – interpretation is also data. Accurate and inaccurate, it does not matter; this is just what you are being told. The goal is to conceptualize it. Just run all data and see what comes out of it (not test a hypothesis).

II. DISSERTATION WORK FEEDBACK

In this section, individual attendees presented their work to the group for comments. For the purpose of this thesis, comments relating to other people’s work have been removed. The comments below refer to my theory in development only. These were recorded using an audio recorder, and a member of the group took written notes during my presentation/feedback.

1. **Phenomena of interest #3: Relationships between how knowledge about health care ethics is conveyed by the educator in and through their academic activity**

Background: Looking at how the teachers of health care ethics know and use their understanding in their teaching (which is part of my personal experience). A lot of assumptions of how students should learn ethics, plus theories of what ethics is. However, less of how is done. Interview 20 professors in UK universities. The data was use was to see what was going on. It seems that the understanding of ethics is related to the purpose placed on ethics by the educator (for example, philosophy or a professional background of the educator, then preempts the tools of this background to teach) – but not on what actually should be taught, and how to teach, ethics.

Feedback the researcher requested:

- **Identifying the important concepts and core variable**
- **I want to do “classic grounded theory” right (not just data analysis)**

Summary of Comments and Feedback	
Theme/Source	Comment
Dr. Barney Glaser	
On identifying the important concepts/variables	Seems educators are “personalizing” or “internalizing” what ethics is. “Proximity Ethics” was studied where instructors understand and teach “ethics” based on what they know and have experienced. Not from an universal code of ethics. Personal or proximity ethics, are then taught as universal ethics
On core variable	The core variable or process seems to be: Professionalizing a personal perspective of ethics (out of experience or conceptual learning). “Professionalizing” seems an important conceptualization. Or even “retrospecting personalized ethics as professional ethics”.
On properties of the core variable	The properness of behaviour--fanning behavior—seems to be another property of the core variable. Also “falling into teaching” may be another property.
On application	Mixing professional and medical ethics? Do you need to use both? (Researcher: yes came up from the data). Also it seems ethics may not be gender neutral.
On doing grounded theory	You have to start doing it. It will be better and better with every project you do. Beginning skills are good. Grounded theory will be easier if you go in doing nothing (it is hard to suspend what we know).
Class Comments	

Grounded Theory

Notes taken at Grounded Theory Workshop led by Dr Barney Glaser

On identifying concepts/variables	Not understand the different between “personalizing” and “depersonalizing”. Educators may actually be “conceptualizing” their personal experience of ethics. Both types of educators are personalizing the ethics – rather than de-personalizing it (ethics comes from their personal experience, and they de-personalize it and make it abstract to present as “universal” or professional ethics).
On core variable	Do you see “selecting” as core variable? “Selective” may be too general.
On properties	Class size influenced the way educators taught ethics. Is coded (researcher: yes).
On graphics vs. words	The write up is much better than the graphics.
On application	Ethics boards, educators, etc. (researcher: the educators are very interested to talk about it). Lucky to have picked up a concern that was also a concern for the interviewees. Finding out what the main concern of participants is, you are guaranteed to get good data and contribute to something that is relevant.
On doing Grounded Theory	If a theoretical framework is needed, presenting a summary of the history and use of grounded theory can be useful for some. Or say it is not X (ethnography, symbolic interactionism, etc.).

Dr. Glaser’s Conclusion: You’ve got it. Write your dissertation. Go for it. You have everything you need. Remember, **one** of the tenants of QDA is full coverage. GT **does not** require full coverage; it requires a theory of confidence. In Grounded Theory there is no FULL conceptual coverage (it can go for over-ever). We saturate just on the variables close to the core variables that we delimit for our study. We are doing theory of a concept. It is more dangerous to have someone that thinks knows “grounded theory” but doesn’t. All research is “grounded”; however, not “grounded theory” is a specific methodology. Better to have someone that accepts no knowledge, but open to work with you.

ii. Saturday, May 28 2011

Opening Remarks: Grounded Theory is an experiential learning process. You will not get it at the first run. Once you get conceptual, your mind will get the concept different ways. Therefore having one core variable and 5 sub-variables can help you limit (though, there can be more). GT is a line that keeps getting closer to the line but never reaches it. You will

Grounded Theory

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continue to develop your skills in your next research and next topic. Remember that the “memo” is your memory bank – you don’t need to remember all your analysis, insights, etc.

The motivational component is strong, but don’t try to keep it forever with one topic or research project. Grounded theory should not take very long: it is a “bunch of patterns”.

Dr. Glaser Mini-Lecture: Going Back to the Basics

GT is Simple: Many have made GT complex, given our PhD Department requirements. But actually it should be simple. It is hard to suspend what we know. What we suspend does not disappear (we continue to know it). It takes intelligent people to recognize the “not knowing” phenomena. How do we do it?

The GT process. What is the process? You go into the field and take note on interchangeable indicators over and over (constant comparison). People can only talk of what they know. We name a pattern that we choose as the core variable. There may be more than one concern, but we need to choose one to build a theory.

The concept is important: We are working on a concept, not on the substantive area of where the concept comes from. For example, the term “Super-normalizing” from Cathy Charmaz in her study hard attack patients. To prove that they were alright, she saw that they did more than normal activity: “Super-Normalizing”. We now use this term “super-normalizing” outside the substantive area of health and patients (we use it in sports, etc.). Other colleagues did other studies in the same population– hard attack patients—and she came up with other “main concern” of populations: “cutting back.” Does the second study contradict Charmaz findings? NO! Each chose core variables that were significant—super-normalizing and cutting back—both were important concerns: both researchers chosen a different one to study.

You never know what you are going to find. For example your study of “self image” can shift to a study of “serving”. Or initiate with a story of “politics” and based on the data your study will be shifted to “mustang ranch”; or a study of “flying and risking their lives” to a study of “voyeurism;” or “social oppression” to just “accompanying.” By going into your population, you will discover what their concern is and this will become your study. But you have to give up your preconceptions. The grab of this study will be strong. A last example of not knowing what you are going to find: study of hippies (why they rejected their family and homes to start a hippie life) and they would not say anything: the core variable became “vaguening-out” (and it can be applied in other fields: lawyers vague out!).

But supervisors will know what you want to study. Just tell them but when you collect the data on the concern, you will be able to convince it. You will love it. Your proposal will change and your committee will not remember if your shift has a grab and if it is grounded on the data, it will have it. Once you show them the initial pattern, you can excite them—especially if your dissertation committee has a vested interest in the subject of your study. If you do GT you will have the strength to tell them what the data says, the inter-changeable indicators grounded in them, and the importance of your theoretical contributions.

III. Sunday Lecture – General Question and Answer Sessions on Grounded Theory

1. Right and Wrong Conceptualization

- **Right:** Discovering a pattern and naming it (then you will no longer need to describe the patten, and if it fits and has a general grab, will be used by others ...many others)
- **Wrong:** Summarizing what is going on Or Conjecturing
- **Better to use a different name:** best not to use “existing concepts” or “similar words” because it will bring the analysis and “intellectual baggage” of others.
 - a. For example, psychology is full of concepts (thus, it is better not to use a word that brings this other analysis – “role modeling” vs. “seducing compliance” or “engendering buy-in”
 - b. Keep a thesaurus near you to get the word that fits the best the pattern (what is going on in your data)

2. Description vs. interpretation vs. conceptual labeling

- Avoid description and interpretation by:
- **Naming vs. inferring more meaning.** There is a distinction between “inferring” (when you interpret you infer) and “naming” and you do the best you can (is this really going on in your data? And question yourself?).
- Interpretation means adding meaning –going beyond naming
- Write a memo, that says were the information is in the data and questioning ourselves
- If you are inferring, then just say it: “this may be inferring because x” – these are just nuances
- Once I “start to make a story” is probably interpreting, because for a story we need to fill in the gaps

- Radical constructivist argues (look at Astrid and Vivian) that something that covers everything, covers nothing
- **Skills:** grounded theory provides the skills for conceptualization through its steps (open, selective, coding, saturation) as well as guarding for “force fitting” – such as not preempting a theoretical framework (“grand theory”).

3. Conceptualization Process

- **Gestation:** When you hear something the patterns and connections will not be apparent in the active analysis, but on isolated “aha” moments (in the shower, in bed, etc.)
- **Gut feeling:** you can get a feeling, although the name will come later
- **Prioritize:** pick up the best five and put the rest at descriptive level. We may use some criteria for this: (i) centrality, which seems to be connected the most to the other variables; (ii) account for the most variation of the properties; (iii) importance to your original interest; and (iv) decision of what to study first. The variables not prioritized, you bring them down to the descriptive level.
- **Try out different cores.** You also need to select your core variable out of the limited number of variables you prioritize. This is the one that relates the most to other and core to your study interest. You may have more than one core indicator and must choose one – for this study; others will be other chapters.
- **Drawing hypothesis out of your theory** – correlations, etc. Others can do it if they want, once you finish your study.

4. Classic Grounded Theory—very focused on a “abstract concepts” that can be applied

- Feel not bounded by “qualitative research methodologies” but use, mostly, qualitative data (interviews with a population, identifying their main concerns, and their solution strategies – by talking).
- They believe the best data is what you get off the record – to conceptualize (but will not be able to show it in an “audit”). You are not writing a description of the situation, but developing a concept.
- **High level “opionizing”:** that is they mix theory from the data and opinions. Therefore it has to be grounded on the data. To confirm that is a theory and not opinion, the “concepts” have to show the theory. “Routing”, “me-fitting”, etc., you are not given an opinion or judgment, just naming the process.

5. GT as Scientific Theory

- **What theories do.** Some theories claim we need to make meaning making in the psychological field, or society makes through “symbolic interactions” which determines dialogue, conflict and consensual meaning for behavior, or constructivism which makes all of this flexible, contextual and historical based (i.e., they can change). Behaviorist thinks that meaning making is “fooling oneself” – since reality is underneath and real (what actually makes you behave: neuro-chemistry, etc.)
- **Complexity of Human Research:** it is very complex--cognitive, feel, behave—we only can observe all this pattern and try to explain them. Translated phenomenology into sociology (members test of validity, Schultz)—you must take it back to your participants. If what people say and what they feel is different, we need to explain that (like in counseling).
- **Is Classic GT Objectivist?** The claim that Glaser is an objectivist: is all about “meaning making” that tries to define what people’s main concern is, the way they resolve it.
- **Imposing theories forces the data into them.** Imposing the “basic social structure (structural functions theory—imported all that stuff)” that underlies our behavior (social vs. personal agency). Even the scientific model is simplistic: Hypothesis are generated by a nuance, develop a theory and then explain it. A lot of effort to test something that was just a conjecture.
- **The GT process is important:** You don’t start with a hypothesis (not trying to prove or disprove). Looked at patterns, and try to explain them as much as possible. They were not conjectures.

6. Legitimate GT through brief explanations.

- **For a deductive/reductionist (quantitative):** it is ok to make up a theory and then test it in the deductive methods. Systematically develop a theory (which later others can test it) is also rigorous or more rigorous. Moreover, GT has a lot of hypothetical probability statements: under these conditions this outcome is likely to occur; if this other conditions the outcome is likely to change (that is your explaining variation). This is used by constructivist to say that Glaser is objectivist, but he is not, we just are able to respond to objectivist that GT is as “rigorous” as they believe their methods are.
- **For qualitative research in general:** Each method has a purpose—to generate theory directly out of data systematically. Derived from quantitative methods (core variable was a statistically method). It is possible to generate all types of data with

this systematic process. GT remains honest to the data through constant comparison remain honest to the data.

- **For other “Spin-offs” of Classic GT.** Glaser would never say is better (see Astrid’s book) than other methods. However, what is called “constructivist GT” is an oxymoron since GT is supposed to be as non constructivist as possible. You need to minimize your assumptions (like in phenomenology) or “suspend” them. Also it is interpretative as all research is interpretation which converts data into theory. The question for GT is what comes first: the data or the theory. Classic theory is one of many “legitimate” methods. See the “roots” article and the constant comparison (chapter 7 in the discovery book).
- **For laymen.** You look for data; you discover the patterns; you name them; and then you look for the key pattern that seems to explain the most variation of the behavior/phenomena of interest.
- **What is not Classic GT.** Classic GT does not use a theoretical framework; as the product will be a theory. It does not preempt the analysis of the data with a theoretical framework, a specific theoretical code or specific core variable. It does not jump steps— memos, theoretical samples, etc. Pick your battles: don’t fight everything, there are “imposed” processes that would just take time away from you (for example, transcriptions), but others that are key to remain faithful to the methodology.
- **Modeling Grounded Theory.** What GT has done is to systematize the “discovery” process. If you can go through the process—quoting prior discoveries (like Darwin) or even from your Chair-it may convince them. Some key processes will become apparent: we start inductively (open coding and sampling) and then we go inductively (such as theoretical sampling and coding). Don’t be condescending, be open and appreciate of the questioning and concerns of your critics. What they may find out is that many of us have gone through the “discovery” process without naming it.
- **Picking the right method:** Different methods will have different issues that they will defend and criticize other methods for. Every method has a right to be judge for its own cannons. The criteria of GT are used for its own methods. Picking the wrong method and doing bad, low quality research. See if GT is the appropriate method for your research (see box below to see the functions of different methods and the important niche of GT).

Discovery (Inductive)

Verification (deductive)

Descriptive	Ethnography (inductive but not necessarily try to theorize about it – they import theories at the end, especially functional theories)	Descriptive survey
Theory/ Explanation	Grounded Theory Thematic analysis (end up with a conceptual description, rather than integrated variables that explain a core variable)	Typical research with a Hypothesis (by speculating it—making it up or pulling it out of an existing theory, just a reduced part to not have many variables)

7. Using computer and other technology

- Tactile contact with the data is important for your gestation of patterns, naming, etc
- You may use computer for “saving” and “storing” and “retrieval” the data
- Use of other technology – you need transcripts for the initial coding. Later you don’t need to , since you are focused on the meaning, core and prioritized variables, etc.
- Tape recording can limit people’s honesty. One way is giving the control to the participant to stop the tape recording (it gives a marker of personal vs. organizational, covert vs. overt, etc.)
- “Dragon” transcriptions software.

8. Theoretical Sampling and Different Populations.

- **It depends.** You want to know the reason which must be related to the emergent theory not only your curiosity. There are some Grounded Theory case studies. There is a core variable which requires to be studies within a bounded case (for example the study of “hojo” in Navajo culture and “losing of a core cultural value”).
- **Only one population’s concern and solution.** Your key process starting with your main populations (for example, students) is what is their main concern, how do they go about resolving it. If you go to another population, you must not get lost by seeing how that population is resolving the same concern (you would go astray, for example if a study on “mentoring culture”, would go and interview disgruntled employees that have a negative view of mentoring that is working for others—that is valid, but would be another study).