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Grounded Theory's Contested Family of Methods: Historical and Contemporary Applications

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Abstract for DBER Group Discussion on 2015-11-12

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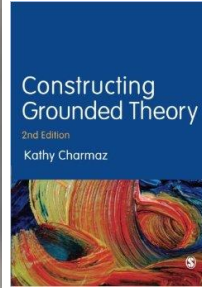
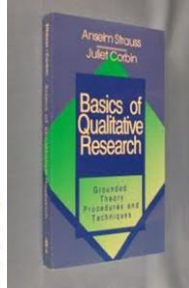
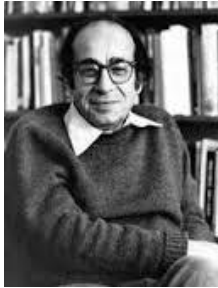
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Title

Grounded Theory's Contested Family of Methods: Historical and Contemporary Applications

Abstract

This presentation provides a concise overview of the history, development, and contemporary applications of grounded theory, a methodology originally developed in sociology but now arguably the most widely used qualitative approach across disciplines. From its early formulation by Glaser and Strauss to their contentious and widely publicized split, new epistemologically and theoretically repositioned approaches have emerged that together make up grounded theory's "family of methods." Grounded theory's shared characteristics, divergent approaches, and hybrid designs including "grounded theory ethnography" and mixed methods or "pragmatist" grounded theory are discussed.



Grounded Theory's Contested Family of Methods: Historical and Contemporary Applications

Dr. Wayne A. Babchuk

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GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS

ABSTRACT

This presentation provides a concise overview of the history, development, and contemporary applications of grounded theory, a methodology originally developed in sociology but now arguably the most widely used qualitative approach across disciplines. From its early formulation by Glaser and Strauss to their contentious and widely publicized split, new epistemologically and theoretically repositioned approaches have emerged that together make up grounded theory's "family of methods." Grounded theory's shared characteristics, divergent approaches, and hybrid designs including "grounded theory ethnography" and mixed methods or "pragmatist" grounded theory are discussed.



GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS OUTLINE

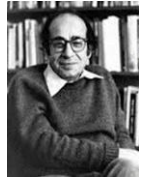
- Origins and History of Grounded Theory
- Glaser and Strauss Reinterpretations of the Methodology
- Epistemologically and Theoretically Repositioned Approaches
- Grounded Theory Ethnography
- Pragmatist Grounded Theory
- Conclusions



GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS

ORIGINS AND HISTORY OF GROUNDING THEORY

- Grounding theory traced to the collaborative research of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the mid-1960s at the University of California-San Francisco (UCSF);
- Strauss, a “Chicago School” sociologist hired to develop a doctoral program in nursing, and later sociology, recruits Glaser, a Columbia sociologist schooled by Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton in quantitative methods and middle range theory.



Anselm
Strauss and
Barney Glaser



ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF GROUNDED THEORY

- *Grounded theory refers to both the results of the research process and the research process itself;*
- It is an inductive and systematic qualitative research strategy built upon the constant comparative method and **simultaneous data collection and analysis**;
- *This method is distinguished from others since it involves the researcher in data analysis while collecting data—we use this data analysis to inform and shape further data collection.* Thus, the sharp distinction between data collection and analysis phases of traditional research is intentionally blurred in grounded theory studies.



ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF GROUNDING THEORY

Glaser & Strauss' (1967) *The Discovery of Grounding Theory*:

- Reject Suffocating Positivist Tradition of Academy,
Formalize New Approach to Scientific Inquiry Grounded in
Data
- Devise Method of “Equivalent Status” to Prevailing
Quantitative Methodologies
 - Outline “Core” Aspects of Grounding Theory
(i.e., Constant Comparative Method, Theoretical Sampling,
Coding, Memoing)

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF GROUNDED THEORY

- Glaser and Strauss take work in vastly different directions over the past forty years each championing their own version of GTM;
- Becomes hotly debated topic in the 1990s, early 2000s. Called “**Glaserian**” and “**Straussian**” grounded theory (e.g., Stern, 1995) and was the subject of my UNL doctoral dissertation in Community and Human Resources (1997).



ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF GROUNDED THEORY

- Glaser's (1992) *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis* provides a scathing critique of Strauss' (and Corbin's) remodeling of grounded theory and wants to set "the average researcher back on the correct track to generating a grounded theory" (p. 6);
- Labels Strauss and Corbin's (1990) methodology "**full conceptual description**" and claims Strauss never understood grounded theory from the beginning.

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF GROUNDED THEORY

- *According to Glaser, two separate methodologies emerge:* (1) Glaser's ("Traditional") grounded theory and (2) Strauss and Corbin's "Full Conceptual Description."
- Glaser's relentless attack on Strauss facilitated by own publishing company, **Sociology Press**. Claims his own method more inherently flexible and less descriptive than Strauss' reinterpretation of the method.

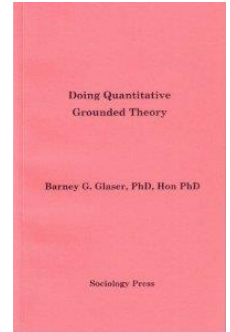
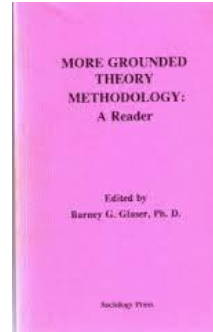
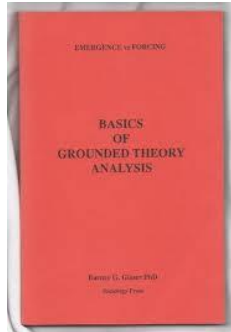
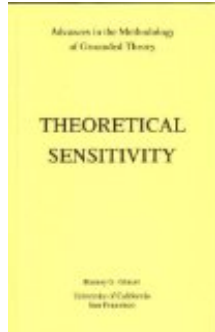
GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS
GROUNDING THEORY'S FAMILY OF METHODS

Glaserian Grounding Theory (Positivist)
“Traditional” or “Classic” GTM

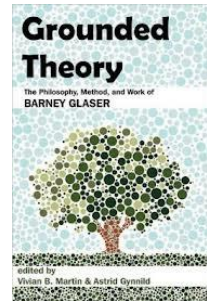
Argues for seamless development from *The Discovery* (1967),
Theoretical Sensitivity (1978), *Emergence vs. Forcing* (1992), and
several contemporary works (Sociology Press)

Theoretical Sensitivity, Substantive and Theoretical Coding and Use
of (18) **Coding Families** Presented
Champions Theoretical Sensitivity and Theoretical Coding





Some of Glaser's Texts from *The Discovery* (1967) to *Doing Quantitative Grounded Theory* (2008). Most published through Sociology Press
<http://www.sociologypress.com>



GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS
GROUNDING THEORY'S FAMILY OF METHODS

Straussian Grounding Theory (Postpositivist)

Qualitative Analysis (1987)

Basics of Qualitative Research (1990) with Julie Corbin

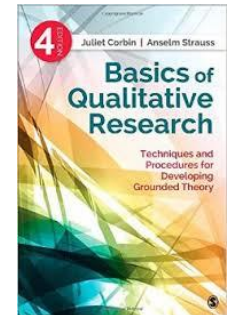
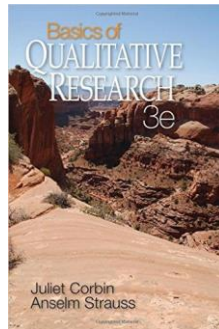
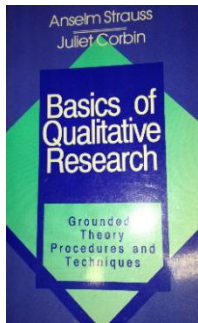
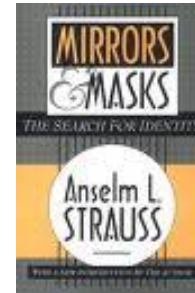
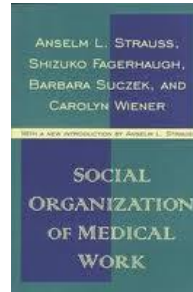
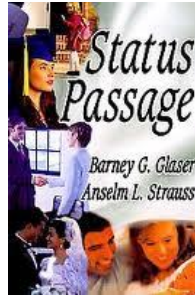
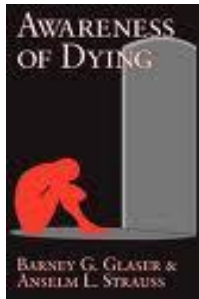
Corbin (2008; 2014) updates with “generic” GTM

Open, **Axial**, and Selective Coding and the
Coding Paradigm

Causal Conditions, Contextual and Intervening Conditions,
Consequences

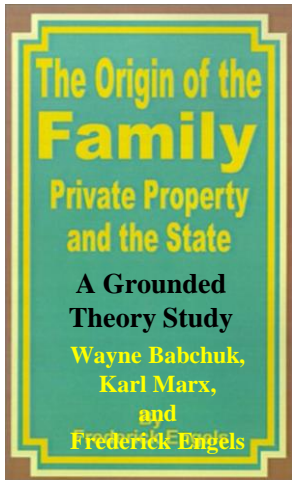
Conditional Matrix (1998)





Anselm Strauss' (1987) *Qualitative Analysis for the Social Sciences* Begins Division. The four editions of Strauss and Corbin's (1990, 1998, 2008, 2014) *Basics of Qualitative Research*. The third and fourth published posthumously ten or more years after Strauss' death.

GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS
GROUNDING THEORY'S FAMILY OF METHODS



- Babchuk, W.A., Marx, K., and Engels, F. (in preparation), *The Origin of the family, private property, and the state: A grounded theory study*;
- Babchuk, W.A., and Freud, S. (in preparation). *Categories, concepts, theory, and super-theory: Grounded themes in the construction of self*;
- Babchuk, W.A., and Skinner, B.F. (in preparation). *Operant theorizing*.

GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS
GROUNDING THEORY'S FAMILY OF METHODS

- Ultimately, others entered into the “**methodological fray**” (Charmaz, 2000; 2006; 2014) devising own interpretations with attendant epistemological underpinnings and implications for practice;
- Best viewed as a “**family of methods**” (Babchuk, 2011; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2014) sharing certain key characteristics which make it unique among qualitative methodologies.



GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS
GROUNDING THEORY'S FAMILY OF METHODS

- Creswell (2005) classifies GTM into three approaches, Denzin (2007) seven, and Babchuk (2011) into *four major approaches corresponding to epistemological/theoretical orientations* (positivist/postpositivist, interpretive/constructivist, postmodern/situational) and differences in application;
- These consist of the two “traditional” (positivist and postpositivist) versions of the co-founders (**emergent** and **systematic**) versus epistemologically or theoretically repositioned approaches of Charmaz (**constructivist** or **interpretive**) and Clarke (**postmodern/situational**).



GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS
GROUNDING THEORY'S FAMILY OF METHODS

Critical of new limitations in these approaches, a new wave of grounded theorists—some trained in the original nursing and sociology doctoral programs at UCSF by Glaser and/or Strauss—offer **epistemologically or theoretically repositioned interpretations** of the method that reflect epistemological, theoretical, and methodological developments and refinements over the past twenty years.



GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS
GROUNDING THEORY'S FAMILY OF METHODS

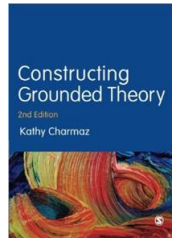
Kathy Charmaz (2000; 2014)
(Interpretivist/**Constructivist**)

Constructing Grounded Theory

Social Constructivist Perspective
“Constructivist” vs. “Objectivist” GTM

Construct rather than discover grounded theories through
mutual interaction and co-construction of reality

Use of initial and “**focused**” coding



GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS
GROUNDING THEORY'S FAMILY OF METHODS

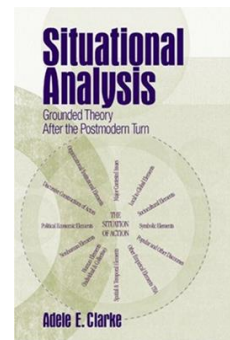
Adele Clarke (2005) (Postmodern)

Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory After the Postmodern Turn

- Reclaiming GTM from its positivist roots
- Postmodernism and Situational Analysis
- Study social situation rather than process

Cartographic Techniques (Three Kinds of Maps):

- (1) Situational
- (2) Social Worlds/Arenas
- (3) Positional



GROUNDING THEORY'S SHARED CHARACTERISTICS

- Simultaneous Data Collection and Analysis
- **Constant Comparative Method** to Develop Concepts and Categories (used throughout all phases of analysis)
- Delaying Extensive Use of Literature Until Analysis is Under Way
- **Theoretical Sampling** as a Form of Purposive Sampling for Theory Construction
 - **Memoing** to Help Guide the Elaboration of Categories and Relationships
 - Focus on Emergence of a Core Process
- **Theoretical Saturation** of Categories Signaling Stopping Point in Data Collection
- Constructing Codes and Categories from Data Rather than from Preconceived Hypotheses
 - **Emergence of Theory Grounded in Data**



GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS
GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED ISSUES

- Nature of Research Process (Inductive, Deductive, Abductive)
 - Use of Literature in Grounding Theory Analysis
 - Begin With a Research Area or a (Specific) Problem?
- Conflicting Interpretations of the Meaning of Data and Theory
 - Sample Size
- Theoretical Saturation (Knowing When to Stop Collecting Data)
- Coding Processes (Open, Axial, Selective, Theoretical, Focused)
 - Positionality of the Researcher in GTM
- What Constitutes a Grounding Theory and What Should the End Result Look Like?
 - Evaluative Criteria for GTM Research



GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS

GROUNDING THEORY ETHNOGRAPHY

- Some have argued (Babchuk & Hitchcock, 2013; Barnes, 1996; Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001; Charmaz, 2014; Pettigrew, 2000; Timmermans and Tavory, 2007, etc.) that grounding theory's theory-method package can be very useful in ethnography (i.e., the study of a culture-sharing group or some aspect of a culture-sharing group);
- Call this approach **grounding theory ethnography** or **grounding ethnography**.



GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS
GROUNDING THEORY ETHNOGRAPHY

Many similarities between grounded theory and ethnography:

- Fieldwork in natural settings;
- Influenced to some degree by symbolic interactionism;
- Inductive data analysis;
- Researcher primary data collection instrument;
- Emergent sample selection;
- Rely on participant observation;
- Obtain emic or insiders' descriptions of behavior



GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS
GROUNDING THEORY ETHNOGRAPHY

- Grounding theory useful for extending and focusing theoretical component of ethnography (description to explanation);
- Offers guidelines or procedures for conducting field research.



GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS
MIXED METHODS OR "PRAGMATIST" GROUNDING THEORY

- Most definitions of **mixed methods research** stress the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study to better understand a research problem than possible using separate methods;
- Several typologies advanced in the literature that distinguish between various factors (quantitative vs. qualitative, sequencing, etc.).



GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS
MIXED METHODS OR “PRAGMATIST” GROUNDING THEORY

At the most basic level, grouped into three basic designs:

1. The *convergent design* (in which qualitative and quantitative findings and results are compared);
2. The *explanatory sequential design* (quantitative research → qualitative);
3. *Exploratory sequential design* (qualitative research → quantitative).



GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS

MIXED METHODS OR “PRAGMATIST” GROUNDING THEORY

- Pragmatism has long been viewed as philosophical partner for mixed methods research;
- Coin term “**pragmatist grounding theory**” to refer to the use of grounding theory in mixed methods research. Reflective of this rich tradition of pragmatism in the mixed methods movement;
- Others have focused on “mixed methods grounding theory” and advantages of merging these approaches.



GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS

ADVANTAGES OF PRAGMATIST GROUNDING THEORY

- Grounding theory was originally devised to be used with both quantitative and qualitative data and is a natural fit for mixed methods research;
- Pragmatist grounding theory is an effective “transition methodology” for quantitatively trained scholars interested in expanding their toolkit to incorporate qualitative designs;



GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS

ADVANTAGES OF PRAGMATIST GROUNDING THEORY

- As in the case of mixed methods research in general, pragmatist grounding theory can yield a more robust analysis that when used as exclusively a qualitative methodology;
- In mixed methods studies, grounding theory can help foster the rigorous management of the qualitative aspect of the research;



ADVANTAGES OF PRAGMATIST GROUNDING THEORY

- Pragmatist grounding theory is amenable to collaborative forms of inquiry involving both quantitatively and qualitatively trained researchers. The iterative nature of this method can bolster collaboration in the different phases of the study and can accommodate researchers with different worldviews working together;
- Grounding theory designs yields theory that can be sequentially tested through mixed methods. Pragmatist grounding theory can enhance formal theory development through the generation and testing of theory in the same study;



ADVANTAGES OF PRAGMATIST GROUNDING THEORY

- The emerging theory is based on the experiences of the participants rather than on the testing of a priori theory, augmenting more traditional top-down quantitative approaches;
- The use of one of grounding theory's foundational concepts—theoretical sampling—can benefit the conduct of mixed methods research;



GROUNDING THEORY'S CONTESTED FAMILY OF METHODS

ADVANTAGES OF PRAGMATIST GROUNDING THEORY

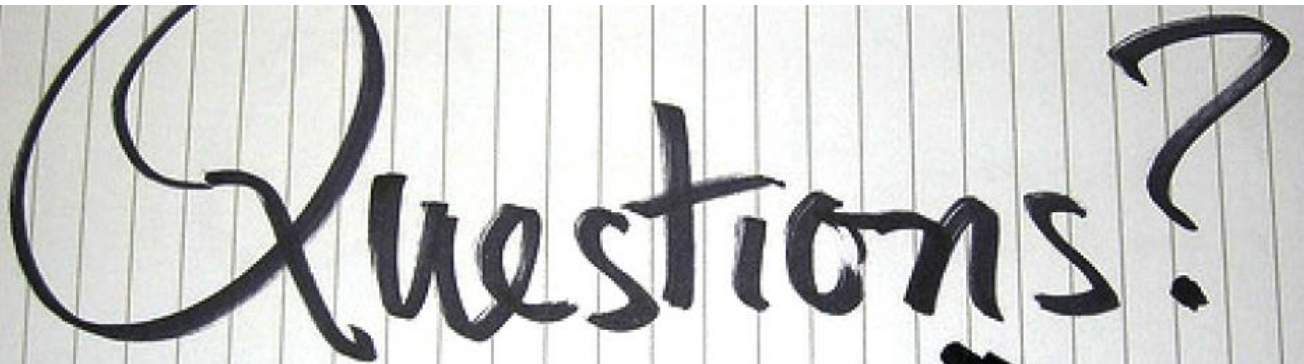
- Many fields are heavily quantitative in nature and can more readily accept the richness of qualitative approaches when combined with quantitative data. Moreover, many fields may also be more receptive to the systematic methods of grounding theory over other qualitative approaches;
- Mixed methods research may increase funding opportunities over pure qualitative designs yet still allow for a strong qualitative component in the research.



CONCLUSION

- Grounded theory has emerged as one of the most popular qualitative designs amenable to a wide range of problem areas and practice settings;
- Several versions of grounded theory with both shared and divergent characteristics have emerged and now constitute a family of methods;
- Grounded theory can also be used effectively blended or hybridized with other approaches including traditional ethnography and contemporary mixed methods designs.



A close-up photograph of a black marker writing the word "Questions?" in a large, cursive script on a piece of white paper with horizontal blue lines. The marker is positioned at the bottom right, having just finished writing the question mark.

References Available Upon Request from
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