

Growing Grounded Theory: Doing my Bit

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In Glaser's recent book, *The Grounded Theory Perspective: Its Origin and Growth* (2016), Glaser writes of how he recorded and explicated the grounded theory perspective and disseminated the perspective as the grounded theory general method of research, over a period of 50 years. During this period he has monitored its use, embracing procedural developments (e.g. Nilsson, 2011; Scott, 2011), whilst vigorously defending and differentiating the grounded theory perspective from adaptations (e.g. Glaser, 1992, 2002). A scholastic endeavour of monumental proportions.

Over the decades, his key tools in achieving the phenomenal worldwide growth of grounded theory¹ are his books and troubleshooting seminars. In this way, he empowers an army of PhD students to spread the use of grounded theory wider still. The result is the continuing diffusion of the grounded theory method geographically and across disciplines including medicine, business, technology, journalism, psychology, international relations, and education and many more substantive areas of interest, including construction, caring professions, careers advice, prison life, de-radicalisation, living on a volcano and so on.

Since learning how to do grounded theory is best achieved by experiencing the method, a key teaching technique used in both books and seminars is "examplifying". In his readers, Barney publishes grounded theories that represent the current frontier in grounded theory research. Novices are encouraged to read the theories to develop understandings about how grounded theory studies are conducted and constructed i.e. to identify the theoretical code(s) which model the substantive codes and to experience how the theoretical codes shape the presentation of the theory. In seminars, examplifying helps the novice GT researcher envision the trajectory of their own grounded theory by working with other grounded theories at later stages in the development process. Additionally, in hearing of the procedural issues of other participants, novices are able to anticipate or notice their own procedural issues. In discussion, novices also learn how the procedures support the grounded theory perspective and how modifying procedures can, wittingly or unwittingly, compromise the grounded theory perspective.

Encouraged by Glaser, several of his troubleshooting alumni now also publish books (e.g. Gynnild & Martin, 2011; Holton & Walsh 2016) and run seminars: Hans Thulesius and Anna Sandren run troubleshooting seminars in Sweden; Foster Fei runs seminars in China and Tom Andrews and I run seminars in Ireland, the UK, Malta, and Australia.

¹ Year ending 2 June, 2017, www.groundedtheoryonline.com received visitors from 199 countries who made over 150,000 page views, spending on average over 3 minutes on each page. Source: Google Analytics.

One of my problems when learning grounded theory was that coming fresh to grounded theory as a novice PhD student from a department dominated by quantitative methods, much of what I read in Glaser's writings was telling me what grounded theory was not: the issues that were being defended or differentiated were not my issues. I needed to know what grounded theory *is*. This has led me, in my methodological mentoring work to focus on the grounded theory research *process*. This approach works well and has supported my mentees in their development of some truly excellent grounded theories (Krieger, 2014; Stevens, 2015).

My natural style is one of facilitation rather than teaching and I prefer to model grounded theory practices. If a mentee feels a need to compromise a procedure (such as using a structured interview design for collecting data at interview) I take care to explain how that will inhibit development of their grounded theory and example how I would approach the issue. I focus on practical matters of progress.

Previously I have had little patience with what Glaser (1998) terms the "rhetorical wrestle" (p. 35) preferring to focus on the positive. However, reading Glaser's book (2016) has led me to understand that this impatience is not a reason for not engaging with the GT perspective and I now realise that I need to situate my explanations more securely in a discussion on perspective. I need to expand my repertoire.

What I find particularly liberating however, is that I now also have a conceptual tool for differentiating the method, for handling challenges to and questions of the method. Henceforth I shall attempt an approach of assessing and responding to an issue in terms of its impact on the GT perspective, as well as relating the issue to its impact on the progression of a study. Specifically, I shall reassess my understandings of the differences between Strauss and Corbins' and Charmaz and Glaser's works.

But what are the grounded theory perspectives?

As far as I can tell, the grounded theory perspectives include: emergence, researcher autonomy, conceptualisation, procedures, and generality. Corresponding risks to these perspectives include: forcing, compelling and rescuing, description, jargonising and perhaps specificity (unit based explanations). Are there more?

I would also like to understand more about the structure of the grounded theory of grounded theory and how the concepts relate to one another. Perhaps Dr. Glaser, you would write us another book?

References

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