

SHORT EXAMPLE

In 1967, sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss created the qualitative methodology of grounded theory (GT) to challenge those in the scientific fields who believed only quantitative research could generate valid theories to explicate human behavior (Charmaz, 2006). Their grounded theory methodology created a unique scientific method that could systematically collect, code, analyze, and compare qualitative data that could ultimately generate theories that explained studied human phenomena (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Juliet Corbin, who worked alongside Strauss for many years before his death, later perpetuated a looser use of GT that focused more on capturing “thick and rich description” of events in human life that generated concepts that could explain those events—not necessarily for the purpose of arriving at an official grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. ix). Kathy Charmaz, a student who received her tutelage of GT under both Glaser and Strauss, independently, later created a more constructivist approach to the GT methodology (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In her words, Charmaz (1990) has said that “whether addressing definitions, awareness, feeling, control, or any experience, the social constructionist attempts to find how each develops, changes and gives rise to consequences” (p. 1165). The GT methodology will be used for this proposed study because it can systematically capture and explain how the SDVs interviewed experienced the F5 tornado in question (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Charmaz’s social constructivist approach of the grounded theory methodology will be used specifically for this study as it will allow for the data gathering and analysis needed to understand how these individuals experienced and made sense of their experience of the natural disaster while attempting to understand how their personal feelings and understandings led to any PTS symptoms reported in the months following the event.

LONG EXAMPLE

Grounded theory is a weaving approach to research. A grounded theory is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), carefully related to the ecology within which it resides (McCaslin, Scott, and Carlson, 2002). “A Constructivist grounded theory assumes that people create and maintain meaningful worlds through dialectical processes of conferring meaning on their realities and acting within them” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 521). Therefore, a grounded theory is identified from the data, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertinent to the relationships of the phenomenon, the informants, and their ecology. Rather, than beginning with a theory or hypothesis, the theory inductively emerges as the data are iteratively conceptualized, categorized, and interrelated.

Grounded theory research is built on concepts. Similar data are grouped and conceptually labeled. Then concepts are categorized. Categories are linked and organized by relationship. The relationships are developed into conditions and dimensions that further describe and relate the categories, weaving them together into a new integrated tapestry of the informants and their relationship to the phenomenon and their ecology. Put another way, “the grounded theorist’s analysis tells a story about people, social processes, and situations” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 523). In the Constructivist view adopted for this study, the grounded theorist is very much a part of the process, from the selection of topic and questions, to determination of concepts and categories, and discovery of emergent theory. Recognizing the interaction and striving to convey the informant’s reality is incumbent upon a responsible researcher.

Grounded theory provides a rigorous process with five basic components: Theoretical Sensitivity, Use of the Literature, Coding Procedures, Process, and Conditional Matrices. I will

briefly describe each component in this section, and will highlight the coding procedures, which are the analysis component and the heart of grounded theory research, in the Data Collection and Analysis Design section.

Theoretical sensitivity, a very important concept in grounded theory research, is the ability to recognize what is important in the data. Glaser (1978) suggests that theoretical sensitivity helps to formulate theory faithful to the reality of the phenomenon studied. While Glaser (1978) and Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) tend toward a unidimensional or collective reality, Constructivists prefer to sensitize themselves to multiple realities allowing all voices to be heard (Charmaz, 2000). Recognizing the importance of multiple realities, it is also important to recognize that each person constructing his or her reality is doing so in a personal dance with his or her ecology. “Discovery in the human ecology can only emerge when the researcher understands and appreciates the relatedness and meaning of the data collected to the ecology itself” (McCaslin, Scott, & Carlson, 2002). Theoretical sensitivity is gained from observation and collaboration with informants in the ecology, the literature, professional and personal experience, the analytic process, and writing the research.

Use of the literature in grounded theory weaves back and forth between data and literature. Literature includes both technical and non-technical literature. Technical literature offers research background materials against which findings can be compared. Due to the wealth of self-efficacy research in the technical literature, I spent considerable time in advance of fieldwork gaining theoretical sensitivity through conducting a broad literature review. The grounded theory process typically calls for only a cursory literature review prior to data collection, but allows the researcher more extensive “steeping” when warranted by the breadth of information available. It is incumbent upon the researcher to maintain a sense of openness to

experience, rather than to become fixed on any factors, variables, or ideas discovered in the literature and thus contaminated by it, leading to insensitivity to data in the field. This became a factor, as I will later describe.

A more comprehensive review of the literature is called for during the later stages of analysis to aid with grounding the emergent theory. That second review, Chapter VII of this study, was important to both ground the emergent theory and to effectively position it in the literature gap identified in the initial review. The literature built theoretical sensitivity, provided a secondary source of data, stimulated numerous questions, guided theoretical sampling, provided a reference point for triangulation and verification, and served as a venue for grounding the theory and identifying its theoretical implications.

The Coding Procedures are the analytic processes of grounded theory research. Data are collected, fractured into categories, conceptualized, and reassembled a new way. Coding is the central process by which theories are built from the data. Coding provides an iterative means for developing rather than testing a theory, thereby providing the research process with the rigor necessary to make the grounded theory process good science (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As discussed in the assumptions, it provides methods for breaking through biases and assumptions brought to and developed during the research process. Lastly, coding provides grounding, builds density, develops sensitivity and integration to develop a rich, dense, tightly woven theory that models the informants' realities (Charmaz, 2002; McCaslin, Scott, & Carlson, 2002).

Verifying or grounding the theory is an ongoing part of grounded theory research and part of its transcending nature. "This perspective underscores the importance of fit, understanding, and utility" (Creswell, 1998, p. 209). Part of grounding the theory is describing its flexibility or Process. Process accounts for change. The concept of Process weaves together

action/ interactional sequences pertaining to the phenomenon, as they grow and change over time. In a similar sense, grounded theory changes, extends, evolves, and transcends by including and integrating new concepts, descriptions, and other theories. Grounded theory, like the ecology it strives to describe, is a dynamic process. That process begins with data collection.

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