Grounded Theory

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Outline of presentation

• Background of Grounded Theory
• Definitions of Grounded Theory
• Getting Started
  – Asking your research question
  – Theoretical Sensitivity
  – Role of Literature Reviews
• Doing Grounded Theory (an example)
  – Getting started steps
  – Coding/interpreting data
  – Theory development

Grounded Theory Background

Glaser and Strauss (1967)
Further development-Strauss and Corbin (1998)

• Roots are in Sociology
• In response to the Positivist paradigm approach:
  1. For research to be scientifically meaningful, theoretical positions should be analytically/logically derived from set of assumptions (e.g. math theorem) or be verifiable (observation & experiment)
  2. Social work researcher should be neutral and not be an advocate (arguments that no research is neutral)
  3. Purpose of GT was to advance qualitative research by making it “systematic research.” (systematically developing theory from data)

Grounded Theory: Definitions

Glaser and Strauss(1967)

• GT is the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research.
• The strategy used in this discovery process is method of constant comparative analysis.
• The purpose of GT is to explain (interpret) the data (concepts)
Grounded Theory Definition
(Strauss and Corbin 1990)
- GT is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents (instead of starting out with a theory and proving it)
- Data, analysis and theory are constantly interacting (having a “dialogue” with each other not isolated but are parts of a conversation)
- The purpose of using GT method is to develop a theory from the data being examined (theory fits what is seen in the data)

Getting Started: Theoretical Sensitivity
Theoretical sensitivity: The ability to understand what is going on with data; what is relevant and what is not; having insight; found in the researcher; it is conceptual
- Takes place both before analysis of data and during the analysis of data.

Grounded Theory: Getting Started

Getting Started: Theoretical Sensitivity
Sources of Theoretical Sensitivity:
- Professional experience
- Personal experience of an event
- Analysis process itself: become sensitive to concepts, meanings and relationships
- Literature

Getting Started: Asking the Research Question
Two concerns:
C1: Finding a researchable question that is flexible enough to allow for in-depth investigation (Broad)
C2: Narrowing down the question enough to allow us to work with it.
A: Based on the nature of grounded theory a research question starts out broadly but then in the data analysis stage (remember the “dialogue”), the question narrows and becomes a statement that specifically identifies what is being studied

Getting Started: Theoretical Sensitivity
Theoretical sensitivity is a good thing in that it helps us connect what we know to what we don’t know about what we are studying (awareness of our perspectives)
Forces us to step back and make sure what we are truly seeing is FOUND in the data.
Think of it as a “grounding tool” for conducting grounded theory…
Getting Started: The Role of Literature Reviews
Debate on whether or not to read existing literature before conducting one's study
• Most suggest reading beforehand to gain minimal knowledge in the beginning stage of your research project and increase literature reading/knowledge during the data analysis stage because the data itself will lead you to further literature about “what you are seeing” (“dialogue”)

Review of Getting Started Section
• Asking the research question - broad to narrow due to the nature of GT
• Theoretical sensitivity - to keep you on track and focused on what the data is saying
• Role of literature - can review minimally before your study and then the data will show you what to research further

Doing Grounded Theory
Two Handouts:
Article 1 = actual Research article written using Grounded Theory
Article 2 = Uses bits and pieces of actual research project (article 1) and explains coding procedures

Doing Grounded Theory: Asking the Research Question
Broad Question: RQ: What are the career experiences of women with sensory and physical disabilities who have achieved vocational success? (what does it look like)
Huge question - they have not focused on any particular factors of success (external and internal factors) although some are known from reading the literature.

Doing Grounded Theory: Theoretical Sensitivity
Theoretical Sensitivity:
• All female research team. Two members with hidden disabilities were on the team.
• Held extensive discussions as a research team on research expectations and perspectives

Doing Grounded Theory: An Example
Doing Grounded Theory: Literature Review

- Researched existing literature (prior to their study) and were aware that of little research done on the career development of women with disabilities the research focused on obstacles.

Doing Grounded Theory: Coding

OPEN CODING

First level coding - gives units meaning based on labeling concepts. Focus on the words of the participants. Unit to analyze varies from an individual word, line-by-line, several sentences or paragraphs; (circle words, reflective memos about potential interpretations of data).

Doing Grounded Theory: Coding

Three coding steps are used in Grounded Theory:

- Open Coding
- Axial Coding
- Selective Coding

Doing Grounded Theory: Text example to code

See handout for this exercise

3 different women responding to a broad question about, “How they thought about their disability.”

(Read and do open coding - underline, circle, make notes, etc.)

Participant responses

- The adjustment process is a lifetime project.
- I should have picked up the pieces and made the adjustment, and not dwell on it…You have to work through a lot of stuff in a continuing way.
- There is no adjustment process…There is no sense of not being whole if this is how you are born. (note: look for when disability was acquired)

OPEN CODING
 Doing Grounded Theory: Coding

OPEN CODING:
What they found/coded

• “adjusting to disability occurs over a lifetime” (AB, 47) (person’s initials/record #)
• “adjusting to disability is an ongoing process”
• “no adjustment process due to being born with a disability”

Example of Doing Grounded Theory: Axial Coding

AXIAL CODING
Second step of coding: Identify properties and dimensions of categories (key categories subsume sub categories & specify interrelationships). Constant comparative method used. Saturation reached when no new information appears about categories or their properties

Doing Grounded Theory: Coding

Open Coding: next step
Organize relationships among and between Categories (concepts become categories)

“Adjustment to Disability”
• Over lifetime
• Ongoing process
• No adjustment

Example of Doing Grounded Theory: Axial Coding

Previous category: “Adjustment to Disability” (result of open coding)

Due to axial coding it becomes the category:

“Disability Identity”
• Acquisition/development of disability
• Disability adjustment process

Example of Doing Grounded Theory: Axial Coding Cont.

Properties of “Disability Identity”
• “Acquisition/development of disability”
• “Disability Adjustment Process”

Dimensions:
Congenital birth ____________ Acquired in adulthood
No Adjustment ____________ ongoing adjustment
Example of Doing Grounded Theory: Axial coding Cont.

**Acquisition/development of disability” & “Disability Adjustment Process**

- Congenital birth
  - Acquired in adulthood
  - EF

- Acquired in adulthood
  - AB CD

- No Adjustment
  - Ongoing adjustment
  - EF

- No Adjustment
  - AB CD

Can see relationship and connection between properties and dimensions of acquisition and adjustment process

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**SELECTIVE CODING**

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Example of Doing Grounded Theory: Axial Coding Cont.

**Category groupings:**
- “Disability Identity” with gender identity; racial/ethnic/cultural identity
- Broader Category of “Identity constructs”
- Additional categories that were found (data)
  - Family influences, career attitudes and behaviors, and disability impact.

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Example of Doing Grounded Theory: Coding cont.

**Selective Coding**

**Final stage of coding:** Where we create substantive theory from “core” categories
- Generate category that integrates all other categories (tells the whole story)
- Theory shows up as either diagrams or narratives (**broad question now becomes your statement about what is found**)

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Example of Doing Grounded Theory: Axial Coding Cont.

These additional categories then subsumed several other categories

Continue this process until saturation is reached or in other words, until no new relationships pop up among categories

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Example of Doing Grounded Theory: Core Story of the Data

Meetings held with all research team members and they each came up with a model/theory

What they found:
- Dynamic Self was the core story (category) and it was made up of 6 domains of influence (identity categories): family, career, social, developmental, disability, and socio-political.

Final model seen as dynamic and mutual (self influences domains and vice versa) (see article1, p.71)
Example of Doing Grounded Theory: Laying out the Theory

The model of career development of women with disabilities has 6 domains of influence:
- Dynamic Self
- Family
- Career
- Social
- Development
- Disability
- Socio-political

Why do Grounded Theory: What are the real benefits?

- Although it is time consuming the explanations of the data are rich with meaning and show us what is going on and what something looks like.
- GT is “creative, fluid and dynamic”
- GT offers the opportunity for researchers to connect with participants at a human level and learn more about people.
- GT is a useful and manageable tool to better understand student learning in your classrooms. It can help change policies and practices.