Grounded Theory

“Analyzing Written and Spoken Data”
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Katina Lazarides
UW System Leadership Site

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 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 before analysis of data and during the analysis of data.

Grounded Theory: Getting Started

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

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

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 biases)
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 exemplary articles we will be looking at:


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: An Example

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 biases
• Researched literature 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

Three steps of coding are used in Grounded Theory:

- Open Coding
- Axial Coding
- Selective Coding

Doing Grounded Theory: Text example to code

Fassinger article: p. 160 upper right hand corner

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

Participant responses

Fassinger article: p. 160 upper right hand corner

- “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.”

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)

- “adjusting to disability occurs over a lifetime” (AB, 47- the way they coded answers)
- “adjusting to disability is an ongoing process”
- “no adjustment process due to being born with a disability”

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 Cont.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congenital birth</th>
<th>Acquired in adulthood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EF</td>
<td>AB CD</td>
</tr>
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<table>
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</table>

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

Example of Doing Grounded Theory: Axial Coding Cont.

Category groupings:
- "Disability Identity" with Gender identity; racial/ethnic/cultural identity
- Broader Category of **“Identity constructs”**
- Other constructs that came out of the data
  - Family influences; career attitudes and behaviors; disability impact
  - Continue this process until saturation (no new relationships among categories pop up)

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

SELECTIVE CODING
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)

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

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)

Example of Doing Grounded Theory: Laying out the Theory

Model of career development of women with disabilities that has 6 domains of influence
- (see Noonan et al. article for actual model p. 71)

Grounded Theory: Resources


Review: Grounded Theory and Content Analysis

- They are not the same but can both be part of grounded theory research.
- Suddaby (2006): “The important difference is that GT describes an overall method for systematically gathering and analyzing data, but content analysis describes a specific context within which a distinct type of data can be gathered and analyzed.”