Grounded Theory Method

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Grounded theory method

- focus on generating theoretical ideas (or hypotheses) from the data
- rather than having these specified beforehand

“A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomena it represents.”

Strauss and Corbin  . p.23

Key focus = reflective reading of text and the application of codes
Origins

- Developed in the School of Nursing, University of California San Francisco by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss – in their book: *Awareness of Dying*
Philosophical/disciplinary contexts

- Social Science Paradigm in 1960s – Quantitative, hypothesis testing, surveys
  - Lazarsfeld

- Qual Research a craft skill/apprenticeship
  - Methods = describe data collection

- Symbolic Interactionism
  - Behaviour shaped by the interactive construction of meaning.

- Phenomenology
  - Need to set aside preconceptions

- Pragmatism
  - Ideas of abduction and induction
Core elements of Grounded Theory

- Inquiry shaped by the aim to discover social & social psychological processes.

- Create analytic codes and categories from the data

- Data collection and analysis phases of project proceed simultaneously.

- Analytic process employed prompts theory discovery and development rather than verification of pre-existing theories = Inductive

- Theoretical sampling refines, elaborates and exhausts conceptual categories.

- Systematic application of grounded theory analytic methods will progressively lead to more abstract analytic levels. (Charmaz, 1983 p. 125)
Theoretical sampling

- Data analysis and data collection proceed together

- Data analysis begins to develop theories (explanations) that suggest further cases to sample.
  - Use these to elaborate and refine emerging theoretical categories
  - Develop properties till no new ones emerge
  - Involves comparison of people, places, events, conditions, settings etc.
Sequential series of stages

Three stages (in Strauss and Corbin)

1. **Open coding** - a procedure for developing categories of information

2. **Axial coding** - a procedure for interconnecting the categories

3. **Selective coding** - a procedure for building a story that connects the categories producing a discursive set of theoretical propositions.
1. Open Coding

- Examine the text for salient categories
- Applying codes to the text is labelling phenomena.
- Key is to avoid mere description.
  - e.g. “conferring” not “talked to a manager”
  - “information gathering” not “reading the schedule”
- Use **constant comparative approach** in an attempt to saturate
- **Saturation** = look for the instances that represent the category and continue looking (and interviewing) until new information does not provide further insight into the category.
Coding

- Use gerunds (doing words). (Charmaz)

- Stress on **ACTION** (Strauss)
  - Not what does this represent, but what is the person doing? What are they trying to achieve? What strategy are they using?

- Code social and psychological processes (not structures)

- Coding process is **iterative**. Builds up gradually, based on early coding.

- GTM is the study of a **concept**, not a description – Glaser.
Constant Comparison

- Maintain close connection between categories (codes) and data
- Compare data coded in the same way (same category) to develop a theoretical elaboration.
- Use Memos to do this.
Saturation

- Aka Theoretical saturation
- After constant comparison and further sampling...
- There are no new illuminations of the concept - the category is saturated
  - No new relevant data
  - Category has well developed dimensions and properties
  - Relationship among categories well established and validated
Discover categories

- Group concepts that seem to relate to the same phenomena = categorizing.

- Name the category
  - using theoretical ideas from the literature
  - informant’s terms - *in vivo*

- e.g. “tradition bearer” for the nurse on the ward who inculcates new nurses into the rules.
Approaches to open coding

- Line by line
- Sentence by sentence
- Several phrases or sentences
- Paragraph by paragraph
- Whole document
INTERVIEWER

Have you stayed in hostels for many years?

SAM

No, err but I've always moved around... since leaving school. I've always been in a partnership, err, I've always seemed to. It's been a long-term partnership so I've never been sort of out of partnerships so it's not been too bad. For years and years I've lived with people.

But when I've had domestics and things like that, well you see, I left home at fifteen years old and I've never been back to live with my mum and dad. I'm one of them sorts of people who don't like going and lying about on friends' couches or putting on people. So really, yes, if I've had domestics and that, I've gone and slept in 'car – for days on end sometimes. But really this is my first time that I've actually come away from everybody and lived by myself. I have been homeless but I've never had a place by myself. I'm just like, one of them sorts of people that doesn't like putting on other people. My problem is with me long [term] relationships. I make friends easy when I'm in relationship. I get a lot of friends but they're friends in that environment and that new place and what happens then is I'll break up with her. Me head breaks up and I

Peripatetic lifestyle
Partnership/relationship
Long term relationships
Partnerships acceptable.
Shared accomm.
Domestics
Chose independence
Characterises self as independent
Not reliant on others
Domestics
Slept in car
Hostel seen as live alone
Never lived on own
Sees self as not reliant
Relationships a problem
Make friends easily
Friends geog. limited
Break up. Mental distress
Categories have properties

= multiple perspectives of the category

- And are **dimentionalized**
  - properties presented on a continuum

- Like colour has
  - Properties - hue, tone, shade, intensity
  - Dimensions - dark, light etc. are dimensions of shade.

- E.g. ‘watching’ has frequency, duration, extent, intensity.

- ‘Information passing’ has amount of info., manner of passing etc.
Exercise 1

- Undertake a line-by-line coding
Enhancing theoretical sensitivity

Questioning.

- Who, when, where, what, how, how much, why etc?
- Immersion - See from the respondent’s point of view
- E.g.

“Pain relief is a major problem when you have arthritis. Sometimes the pain is worse than other times, but when it gets really bad, whew! It hurts so bad, you don’t want to get out of bed. You don’t feel like doing anything. Any relief you get from drugs that you take is only temporary or partial.”

Interview with a woman in a study of arthritis sufferers. Taken from Strauss and Corbin(1990) Basics of Qualitative Research (1st ed.) p. 78.
Questioning 2

Content =
- Pain experience, varying intensity, activity limitation, bed bound
- Pain relief, self administration, duration, degree.

Leads to questions like:
- Who provides relief?
- What gives relief?
- How is pain experienced? How is relief given?
- When does pain occur? When is relief taken?
- Why is pain relief important?

…in this and other cases
Analysis of word phrase or sentence

- Pick out one word (etc.) that seems significant.
- List all possible meanings.
- Validate against text.
Analysis through comparisons

Flip-flop technique

- Compare extremes on one dimension.
- Helps you think analytically rather than descriptively.
- E.g. age - compare young and old person.
Systematic comparison

- Ask what if’s
- Explore all dimensions of the 2 phenomena. How do they differ, how do people respond differently.

Far out comparisons

- E.g. weight lifter v. violinist.
Waving the red flag

- Be sensitive to phrases like “Never”, “Always”, “It couldn’t possibly be that way”

= signal to look closer. Need to know what happens when these things occur.

“Never take anything for granted”.

- These techniques especially good at the early stage or for first interviews or if you become puzzled.
Memos

- Theorizing and commenting about codes as you go along
- Notes to yourself
- Glaser’s classic definition

“… the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding… it can be a sentence, a paragraph or a few pages… it exhausts the analyst’s momentary ideation based on data with perhaps a little conceptual elaboration.”

Typical uses for memos

- A new idea for a code
- “Place holding” - just a quick hunch
- Integrative discussion (e.g. of previous reflective remarks)
- As dialogue amongst researchers
- To question quality of data.
- To question original analytic framework.
- What is puzzling or surprising about a case (??)
- As alternative hypotheses to another memo
- If you have no clear idea but are struggling to find one.
- To raise a general theme or metaphor.
Memos 2

- Memos should be dated and linked to places in field notes, case analysis discussion, case summaries, codes, documents etc.

- Write in margin or separate sheet, linked to data.

- Computers a great help with linking

See handout
Guidelines for memos

1. Always give priority to writing memos, while the flash of insight remains.
2. Jot down memo as the idea occurs
3. Begin when first field data comes in and continue till report is written.
4. Keep separate from data
5. Indicate what’s just a hunch
6. Modify memos during analysis (it’s not the data)
7. Keep list of codes handy to help
8. Consider combining codes if memos on them look similar
9. Keep people/cases out of memos - they’re about the codes/concepts/ideas
10. Make sure memos are not just examples, they are about ideas/concepts.

(Mix of Dey, Miles and Huberman, Glaser and Strauss and Corbin.)
Exercise 2

- Code a longer text
- Develop a coding scheme
- Write a memo
2. Axial Coding

- Explore the relationship of categories, making connections between them

Then apply a model to this.

Model =

- Causal conditions $\Rightarrow$ Central Phenomenon $\Rightarrow$ context $\Rightarrow$ intervening conditions $\Rightarrow$ Action/interaction strategies $\Rightarrow$ Consequences.
Look for...

- **Causal conditions** = what influences the central phenomenon, events, incidences, happenings

- **Phenomenon** = the central idea, event, happening, incident about which a set of actions or interactions are directed at managing, handling or to which the set of actions is related.

- **Strategies** for addressing the phenomenon. Purposeful, goal oriented.

- **Context** - locations of events.
Look for...

- **Intervening conditions** - that shape, facilitate or constrain the strategies that take place within a specific context.

- **Action/Interaction** - strategies devised to manage, handle, carry out, respond to a phenomenon under a set of perceived conditions.

- **Consequences** - outcomes or results of action or interaction, result from the strategies.
Parts of the model

- Each of these has properties and dimensions. Each may incorporate several concepts.

- Look for confirmations in the data, and look for possible exceptions.

- Exceptions do not necessarily refute the theory, they may be used to amend or extend it.

- The researcher creates a Coding Paradigm (= theoretical model) that visually displays the interrelationships of these axial codings.

- A theory is built or generated.
3. Selective Coding

- Identify a single category as the Central Phenomenon.

- Then construct a story around this
  - **Story line** = the conceptualization of the story = the core category
  - **Selective coding** = systematically relating the core category to other categories and filling in categories that need further refinement.
The Core concept

- Glaser - coding not a description, rather it gets to the concept/pattern

- Core category
  - Accounts for most of variation
  - Most other categories relate to it

- Glaser on “GT is the study of a concept”.
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OcpxaLQDnLk&feature=share&list=PL8CB91C62C1C2C7E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OcpxaLQDnLk&feature=share&list=PL8CB91C62C1C2C7E)
  - E.g. credentialising and supernormalising
Versions of Grounded Theory

- **Glaser**
  - Theory should emerge by constant comparison, not forced. Emergent.

- **Strauss and Corbin**
  - Prescriptive, develops categories

- **Charmaz**
  - Categories and theory co-constructed by researcher and respondent – constructivist
  - Attends to language and action
  - Examines how experience is constructed and structures are erected
Critiques of Grounded Theory

- Cannot set aside theory at the start. Theory neutral observation impossible
  - Researchers have to specify theory in bids

- Theoretical sampling takes time

- Silverman – Need to seek out Deviant Cases. – not always done.

- Coding breaks up narrative flow of data
Critiques cont.

- Realist/modernist vs constructionist/post-modernist
- Denzin and Lincoln’s critique of Modernism
  - Realist ontology
  - Epistemology—objective truths, generalisable, testable and verifiable theory
  - Place of the researched and the researcher – ‘discovery of theory’

**BUT**

- Charmaz - researchers co-construct categories.
- But N.B. G & S are interpretivists - origins in symbolic interactionism - how people construct their reality through interaction.
- Seale – GTM compatible with postmodern enquiry.
Exercise 3

- Develop coding frame
- Discuss with colleagues
- Try to identify core category
Resources

- YouTube Playlist on Grounded Theory
  - [http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8CB91CC62C1C2C7E](http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8CB91CC62C1C2C7E)
  - Contains GRG videos and Charmaz, Glaser, Bryant, Urquhart.

- The Grounded Theory Institute.
  - The official site of Dr. Barney Glaser and Classic Grounded Theory.

- Grounded Theory Online; supporting GT researchers
  - [https://sites.google.com/a/groundedtheoryonline.com/www/](https://sites.google.com/a/groundedtheoryonline.com/www/)