Grounded theory, often considered the parent of all qualitative research, is a complex approach used to develop theory about a phenomenon rooted in observation of empirical data. Widely used in nursing, grounded theory enables researchers to apply what they learn from interviewees to a wider client population.

This is a practical “how to” guide to conducting research using this qualitative design. It is part of an innovative series for novice researchers and specialists alike, focusing on state-of-the-art methodologies from a nursing perspective. International scholars of grounded theory discuss the theoretical rationale for using this design, describe its components, and delineate a plan for generating theory using grounded theory methodology. Examples from published nursing research, with author commentary, help support new and experienced researchers in making decisions and facing challenges.

The book describes traditional and focused grounded theory, phases of research, and methodology, from sample and setting to dissemination and follow-up. It encompasses state-of-the-art research about grounded theory. Varied studies range from promoting health for an overweight child to psychological adjustment of Chinese women with breast cancer to a study of nursing students’ experiences in the off-campus clinical setting, among many others. The book also discusses techniques whereby researchers can ensure high standards of rigor. With a focus on practical problem solving throughout, the book will be of value to novice and experienced nurse researchers, graduate teachers and students, in-service educators and students, and nursing research staff at health care institutions.

Key Features:
- Includes examples of state-of-the-art grounded theory nursing research with content analysis
- Describes types of grounded theory, phases of research, and methodology
- Provides studies including description, data collection and analysis, and dissemination
- Written by international scholars of grounded theory research
Nursing Research Using Grounded Theory
Mary de Chesnay, PhD, RN, PMHCNS-BC, FAAN, is professor and immediate past-director of WellStar School of Nursing, Kennesaw State University, Georgia, as well as a licensed psychotherapist and a nurse–anthropologist researcher. In her private psychotherapy practice (active practice since 1973), Dr. de Chesnay has specialized in treating sexually abused and trafficked children, has developed culturally based interventions, and has taught content about vulnerable populations for many years. The third edition of Dr. de Chesnay’s book, Caring for the Vulnerable, was published in 2012. She has also authored six book chapters and 19 journal articles. She is principal investigator (PI) or co-PI on numerous grants and has served as a consultant on research, academic, continuing education, and law enforcement projects. Recently, Dr. de Chesnay was invited to serve on the Georgia State Governor’s Task Force called CSEC (Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children). She has presented nationally and internationally in nursing and anthropology, and has published on incest and sex tourism and about applying various qualitative approaches to clinical research. She has been invited as a keynote speaker at numerous conferences including Sigma Theta Tau and the International Society of Psychiatric Nurses.
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QUALITATIVE DESIGNS AND METHODS IN NURSING

Mary de Chesnay, PhD, RN, PMHCNS-BC, FAAN, Series Editor

Nursing Research Using Ethnography: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing

Nursing Research Using Grounded Theory: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing

Nursing Research Using Life History: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing

Nursing Research Using Phenomenology: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing

Nursing Research Using Historical Methods: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing

Nursing Research Using Participatory Action Research: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing

Nursing Research Using Data Analysis: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing
For my cousin, Lisa Surtees, a fellow dog lover and woman of humor, integrity, and many skills.

—MdC
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When I was a doctoral student, I wondered whether Adler’s concept of early recollections could provide insight into how nurses respond to patients with physical pain, handicap, or imminent death. Previously, to help nurses understand their tendencies to react to such patients, exercises included the query, “How would you want to be treated if you were dying?” Yet, not a lot of research existed that would shed light on this phenomenon. Indeed, the preferred treatment assumed that the nurse would want what the patient would want.

In my research methods classes, information about Glaser and Strauss’s grounded theory approach intrigued me. Here was a method that seemed perfect for building nursing theory where none existed. I had done a quantitative study for my master’s thesis, so rounding out my research skills with a qualitative study seemed very attractive. I also liked the interpretive aspect of the approach. I brought in trained analysts to check my own interpretations. Indeed, I needed an expert in rehabilitation counseling to point out differences in the responses to the handicapped section that I had overlooked.

I combined some quantitative techniques to run checks on the theory, reflecting sustenance, which emerged from the data. This combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques was controversial at the time, but it was geared not toward theory testing, but rather, was part of validity and reliability checks. More recently, such checks include trustworthiness in different ways.

Nurses’ earliest recollections of death, handicap, and physical pain illuminate their responses to patients in these situations better than how they prefer to be treated. Nurses’ earliest recollections were differentiated by being alone or being supported in their experiences. Nurses who recalled being supported were better able to provide a wider array of responses to patients and support more autonomy for them.
The personal nature of gathering data for a study using grounded theory requires special attention to the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. The analysts in my study were not associated with the medical center from which the nurses were recruited. Each nurse was given a number that corresponded with each answer in the subsections of the study relating to directed earliest recollections, preferred treatment for self, and responses to patients in the situations of death, physical pain, and handicap. Even the words used in the study were carefully selected. For example, “handicap” was used instead of “disability” or “challenged” to provoke feelings and to use a word commonly used in the nurses’ childhoods.

I wish I had the advantage of having Dr. de Chesnay’s book while I was working on my dissertation. The book provides new pioneers in developing nursing theory a wonderful road map to an important form of qualitative analysis. In addition, it provides information about what it can do for nursing research. The book also shows the reader how to use the technique to generate theory grounded in reality. Dr. de Chesnay’s book also gives concrete examples of grounded theory’s utility in critical life situations.

Research utilizing grounded theory methodology can change how nurses manage and change care. It can enable nurses to find out just what the client has used or needs to cope with life changes. Out of grounded theory comes new information that can change practice. Using this knowledge, we can design care to improve the lives of patients and caregivers alike.

Susan Y. Stevens, PhD, APRN, PMHCNS-BC
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Dunwoody, Georgia
In this section, which is published in all volumes of the series, we discuss some key aspects of any qualitative design. This is basic information that might be helpful to novice researchers or those new to the designs and methods described in each chapter. The material is not meant to be rigid and prescribed because qualitative research by its nature is fluid and flexible; the reader should use any ideas that are relevant and discard any ideas that are not relevant to the specific project in mind.

Before beginning a project, it is helpful to commit to publishing it. Of course, it will be publishable because you will use every resource at hand to make sure it is of high quality and contributes to knowledge. Theses and dissertations are meaningless exercises if only the student and committee know what was learned. It is rather heart-breaking to think of all the effort that senior faculty have exerted to complete a degree and yet not to have anyone else benefit by the work. Therefore, some additional resources are included here. Appendix A for each book is a list of journals that publish qualitative research. References to the current nursing qualitative research textbooks are included so that readers may find additional material from sources cited in those chapters.

**FOCUS**

In qualitative research the focus is emic—what we commonly think of as “from the participant’s point of view.” The researcher’s point of view, called “the etic view,” is secondary and does not take precedence over what the participant wants to convey, because in qualitative research, the focus is on the person and his or her story. In contrast, quantitative
researchers take pains to learn as much as they can about a topic and focus the research data collection on what they want to know. Cases or subjects that do not provide information about the researcher’s agenda are considered outliers and are discarded or treated as aberrant data. Qualitative researchers embrace outliers and actively seek diverse points of view from participants to enrich the data. They sample for diversity within groups and welcome different perceptions even if they seek fairly homogenous samples. For example, in Leenerts and Magilvy’s (2000) grounded theory study to examine self-care practices among women, they narrowed the study to low-income, White, HIV-positive women but included both lesbian and heterosexual women.

PROPOSALS

There are many excellent sources in the literature on how to write a research proposal. A couple are cited here (Annersten, 2006; Maren, 2012; Martin, 2010; Schmelzer, 2006), and examples are found in Appendices B, C, and D. Proposals for any type of research should include basic elements about the purpose, significance, theoretical support, and methods. What is often lacking is a thorough discussion about the rationale. The rationale is needed for the overall design as well as each step in the process. Why qualitative research? Why ethnography and not phenomenology? Why go to a certain setting? Why select the participants through word of mouth? Why use one particular type of software over another to analyze data?

Other common mistakes are not doing justice to significance and failure to provide sufficient theoretical support for the approach. In qualitative research, which tends to be theory generating instead of theory testing, the author still needs to explain why the study is conducted from a particular frame of reference. For example, in some ethnographic work, there are hypotheses that are tested based on the work of prior ethnographers who studied that culture, but there is still a need to generate new theory about current phenomena within that culture from the point of view of the specific informants for the subsequent study.

Significance is underappreciated as an important component of research. Without justifying the importance of the study or the potential impact of the study, there is no case for why the study should be conducted. If a study cannot be justified, why should sponsors fund it? Why should participants agree to participate? Why should the principal investigator bother to conduct it?
COMMONALITIES IN METHODS

Interviewing Basics

One of the best resources for learning how to interview for qualitative research is by Patton (2002), and readers are referred to his book for a detailed guide to interviewing. He describes the process, issues, and challenges in a way that readers can focus their interview in a wide variety of directions that are flexible, yet rigorous. For example, in ethnography, a mix of interview methods is appropriate, ranging from unstructured interviews or informal conversation to highly structured interviews. Unless nurses are conducting mixed-design studies, most of their interviews will be semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews include a few general questions, but the interviewer is free to allow the interviewee to digress along any lines he or she wishes. It is up to the interviewer to bring the interview back to the focus of the research. This requires skill and sensitivity.

Some general guidelines apply to semi-structured interviews:

- Establish rapport.
- Ask open-ended questions. For example, the second question is much more likely to generate a meaningful response than the first in a grounded theory study of coping with cervical cancer.

  Interviewer: Were you afraid when you first heard your diagnosis of cervical cancer?

  Participant: Yes.

Contrast the above with the following:

  Interviewer: What was your first thought when you heard your diagnosis of cervical cancer?

  Participant: I thought of my young children and how they were going to lose their mother and that they would grow up not knowing how much I loved them.

- Continuously “read” the person’s reactions and adapt the approach based on response to questions. For example, in the interview about coping with the diagnosis, the participant began tearing so the interviewer appropriately gave her some time to collect herself. Maintaining silence is one of the most difficult things to learn for researchers who have been classically trained in quantitative methods. In structured
interviewing, we are trained to continue despite distractions and to eliminate bias, which may involve eliminating emotion and emotional reactions to what we hear in the interview. Yet the quality of outcomes in qualitative designs may depend on the researcher–participant relationship. It is critical to be authentic and to allow the participant to be authentic.

Ethical Issues

The principles of the Belmont Commission apply to all types of research: respect, justice, beneficence. Perhaps, these are even more important when interviewing people about their culture or life experiences. These are highly personal and may be painful for the person to relate, though I have found that there is a cathartic effect to participating in naturalistic research with an empathic interviewer (de Chesnay, 1991, 1993).

Rigor

Readers are referred to the classic paper on rigor in qualitative research (Sandelowski, 1986). Rather than speak of validity and reliability, we use other terms, such as accuracy (Do the data represent truth as the participant sees it?) and replicability (Can the reader follow the decision trail to see why the researcher concluded as he or she did?).

DATA ANALYSIS

Analyzing data requires many decisions about how to collect data and whether to use high-tech measures such as qualitative software or old-school measures such as colored index cards. The contributors to this series provide examples of both.

Mixed designs require a balance between the assumptions of quantitative research while conducting that part and qualitative research during that phase. It can be difficult for novice researchers to keep things straight. Researchers are encouraged to learn each paradigm well and to be clear about why they use certain methods for their purposes. Each type of design can stand alone, and one should never think that qualitative research is less than quantitative; it is just different.

Mary de Chesnay
REFERENCES


Preface

Qualitative research has evolved from a slightly disreputable beginning to wide acceptance in nursing research. Approaches that focus on the stories and perceptions of people, instead of what scientists think the world is about, have been a tradition in anthropology for a long time, and have created a body of knowledge that cannot be replicated in the lab. The richness of human experience is what qualitative research is all about. Respect for this tradition was long in coming within the scientific community. Nurses seem to have been in the forefront, though, and though many of my generation (children of the 1950s and 1960s) were classically trained in quantitative techniques, we found something lacking. Perhaps because I am a psychiatric nurse, I have been trained to listen to people tell me their stories, whether the stories are problems that nearly destroy the spirit, or uplifting accounts of how they live within their cultures, or how they cope with terrible traumas and chronic diseases. It seems logical to me that a critical part of developing new knowledge that nurses can use to help patients is to find out first what the patients themselves have to say.

In the first volume of this series, the focus is on ethnography, in many ways the grandparent of qualitative research. Subsequent volumes address grounded theory, life history, phenomenology, historical research, participatory action research, and data analysis. The volume on data analysis also includes material on focus groups and case studies, two types of research that can be used with a variety of designs, including quantitative research and mixed designs. Efforts have been made to recruit contributors from several countries to demonstrate the global applicability of qualitative research.

In this volume, grounded theory is the focus. Drawn from sociology, the design can be seen as the parent of all qualitative research in that all qualitative data are grounded in reality—whether the focus is culture, history, or the experience of a phenomenon. Widely used in nursing, grounded theory...
enables us to apply what we learn from those interviewed to a wider client population and to understand what it is like to endure those life conditions.

There are many fine textbooks in nursing research that provide an overview of all the methods, but our aim here is to provide specific information to guide graduate students and experienced nurses who are novices in the designs represented in the series in conducting studies from the point of view of our constituents/patients and their families. The studies conducted by the book’s contributors provide much practical advice for beginners as well as new ideas for experienced researchers. Some authors take a formal approach, but others speak quite personally from the first person. We hope you catch their enthusiasm and have fun conducting your own studies.

Mary de Chesnay
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In any publishing venture, there are many people who work together to produce the final draft. The contributors kindly shared their expertise to offer advice and counsel to novices, and the reviewers ensured the quality of submissions. All of them have come up through the ranks as qualitative researchers and their participation is critical to helping novices learn the process.

No publication is successful without great people who not only know how to do their own jobs but also how to guide authors. At Springer Publishing Company, we are indebted to Margaret Zuccarini for the idea for the series, her ongoing support and her excellent problem-solving skills. The person who guided the editorial process and was available for numerous questions, which he patiently answered as if he had not heard them a hundred times, was Joseph Morita. Also critical to the project were the people who proofed the work, marketed the series, and transformed it into hard copies, among them Chris Teja.

At Kennesaw State University, Dr. Tommie Nelms, director of the WellStar School of Nursing, was a constant source of emotional and practical support in addition to her chapter contribution to the phenomenology volume. Her administrative assistant, Mrs. Cynthia Elery, kindly assigned student assistants to complete several chores, which enabled the author to focus on the scholarship. Bradley Garner, Chadwick Brown, and Chino Duke are our student assistants and unsung heroes of the university.

Finally, I am grateful to my cousin, Amy Dagit, whose expertise in proofreading saved many hours for some of the chapters. Any mistakes left are mine alone.

I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life, as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed.

—Booker T. Washington, educator and author, in *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography*
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Nursing Research Using Grounded Theory: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing
CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF GROUNDED THEORY

Ellen F. Olshansky

Grounded theory is a commonly used methodological approach to conducting qualitative research. It is, in fact, arguably the most widely used qualitative design among researchers. Developed by sociologists, it is used frequently by nurse scientists, many having had the privilege of studying with these sociologists at the University of California, Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, San Francisco School of Nursing. This qualitative research method is also used by researchers and scientists in other health fields as well as fields in humanities and social sciences. Grounded theory is also, in many ways, one of the most widely misunderstood methods. This chapter presents an overview of the method of grounded theory, including its history and theoretical underpinnings, ongoing development, and clarification of many of the misconceptions.

As a starting point, it is important to clarify one major misconception of grounded theory. It is not a theory at all, but a method that strives to generate theory that is grounded in the data; hence the name “grounded theory.” Through the method of grounded theory, the researcher engages in a specific approach to qualitative data collection and analysis, ultimately generating a theoretical explanation for the phenomenon being studied. This theoretical explanation must be based on, founded on, or “grounded” in the data generated. Thus, grounded theory is a methodological approach to qualitative research as well as an outcome of such research—the development of a “grounded theory” that explains the phenomenon of interest. The actual process of conducting such a study and generating a theory that is grounded in the data is described in Chapter 3. The important message here is that there is not a theory called “grounded theory”; there are theories that are generated through the qualitative research method referred to as grounded theory. Chapter 2 describes a variety of studies that have used grounded theory.
as the method, and then Chapter 3 describes one study in depth that was guided by grounded theory.

**HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF GROUNDED THEORY**

Grounded theory was developed by sociologists Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser in the 1960s. The philosophical foundation of this method is symbolic interaction, a term coined by Herbert Blumer (1969), based on the work of George Herbert Mead in the 1930s. Blumer, a sociologist, studied with Mead at the University of Chicago. Mead was described as being from the “oral tradition” because the publication of his work was the result of the notes his students took in his lectures. It was his students, in fact, who compiled these notes that became his classic book, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Mead, 1934). The basic premise of Mead’s book was that a person (self) creates meaning (mind) based on interactions with others and with oneself within a social context (society). Blumer then wrote his now classic book, following on Mead’s work, describing symbolic interaction as the subjective process in which individuals construct meaning for their reality as a result of their interactions with others, as well as with themselves, within a social context. Blumer’s work was referred to as the “Chicago school of symbolic interaction,” as differentiated from the “Iowa school.” (Of note is that the Chicago school eventually became the Berkeley school of symbolic interaction, after Blumer took a faculty position at UC Berkeley.)

**The Chicago School and the Iowa School of Symbolic Interactionism**

The theoretical underpinnings for the method of grounded theory are derived from a social psychological theoretical framework that is referred to as symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). Blumer coined the term symbolic interactionism, and he was part of what is known as the “Chicago school of thought” in regard to symbolic interactionism. However, it is important to note that there is also another school of thought that is known as the “Iowa school of thought.” This chapter takes the perspective of the Chicago school because the grounded theory method was developed out of the Chicago school. For purposes of clarity and for better understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of grounded theory, the following section distinguishes between the two schools of thought in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the method of grounded theory.
The Chicago School

Several prominent thinkers from the University of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s were influential in developing the beginnings of a theoretical framework that would eventually be termed “symbolic interactionism” (Musolf, 2003; Reynolds, 2003). These thought leaders included William James, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, Charles Cooley, and W. I. Thomas, among others (Musolf, 2003). William James wrote about truth as something that is not static, but is dependent on what works, which was the beginning of a pragmatist view of truth and meaning. John Dewey built on James’s work and contributed his view of pragmatism that became a primary tenet of symbolic interactionism (Reynolds, 2003). W. I. Thomas emphasized the concept of the “definition of the situation,” in which the social context is critical in one’s construction of one’s self. Cooley referred to the “looking glass” self, in which a person has a perspective of himself or herself based on how he or she sees himself or herself as another might, which is similar to Mead’s notion of “taking the role of other.” Mead described the “I” and the “me” as parts of one’s self, emphasizing the notion that an individual actually interacts with himself or herself and that the self is socially constructed. All of these concepts contributed to the development of symbolic interactionism, which purported that persons construct a sense of themselves as well as meanings through interaction with others within a social context. In other words, according to symbolic interactionism, reality is socially constructed (Blumer, 1969).

The Iowa School

Two key thought leaders in symbolic interactionism at the University of Iowa, among others, were Manford Kuhn and Carl Couch (Iowa school of symbolic interactionism; Katovich, Miller, & Stewart, 2003). Kuhn believed in Mead’s more subjective approach to understanding reality (as differentiated from the positivist approach that predominated scientific thought), but differed from Mead in that Kuhn believed there were some “core” meanings that were constants in a person’s view of reality. Kuhn and McPartland (as cited in Katovich et al., 2003), developed the 20 Statements Test, which measured a person’s core attitudes and definitions of self. Thus, the Iowa school of thought consisted of a pragmatic and subjective view of reality, consistent with important tenets of symbolic interactionism, but differed from the more fluid and constantly changing view of reality that comprised the Chicago school of thought. The Iowa school believed there was more consistency and more stability in each person with less fluidity.
The Chicago School Transformed to the Berkeley School With San Francisco as the Center for Grounded Theory

At the University of Chicago, Anselm Strauss studied under the tutelage of Herbert Blumer. Taking seriously Blumer’s recommendation that the next step in symbolic interaction was to develop a research method, Strauss began to work on that very issue. Fortuitously, Strauss, along with Leonard Schatzman, was recruited to University of California San Francisco (UCSF) by Dean Helen Nahm, to teach in the newly formed Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences. At around the same time, Herbert Blumer relocated to the University of California, Berkeley, and the Chicago school of symbolic interactionism became known as the Berkeley school of symbolic interactionism. In California, Strauss began a partnership with Barney Glaser, writing their now classic book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. A few years later, Schatzman and Strauss (1973) wrote *Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology*. Glaser (1978) also wrote *Theoretical Sensitivity*. Many doctoral students in sociology and then in nursing, after the creation of the Doctor of Nursing Science program (eventually changed to the PhD in nursing program) at UCSF, studied with Strauss, Glaser, and/or Schatzman. UCSF became known as an institution in which qualitative methods, particularly grounded theory, were embraced.

ONGOING DEVELOPMENT OF GROUNDED THEORY

Over the years, Strauss and Glaser began to develop approaches to grounded theory that differed from one another. Glaser wrote a book titled *Theoretical Sensitivity*. Together with Strauss, Glaser wrote *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Strauss, in collaboration with Juliet Corbin, wrote *Basics of Qualitative Research*. The philosophical differences between them are complicated, but seem to be distilled into the question of the degree to which data that are generated are “forced” into a preconceived framework or trajectory rather than the framework or trajectory “emerging” from the data. It is beyond the scope of this chapter, however, to explain the differences, as each of these now evolving schools of thought related to grounded theory has its own views and perceptions. What is interesting is that Schatzman began to develop an even newer qualitative research method, described by some as an offshoot of grounded theory. Schatzman created “dimensional analysis,” which embraces the notion that all of us, as humans, naturally analyze things and events and ideas continually. His view
was that, for research purposes, we were simply formalizing a process that each of us does naturally every day. A few scholars have addressed dimensional analysis as a qualitative research method (Bowers & Schatzman, 2009; Kools, McCarthy, Durham, & Robrecht, 1996).

Morse, Stern, Corbin, Bowers, Charmaz, and Clarke (2009) addressed the evolution of grounded theory over the past several years. The major movements in grounded theory include the split between Glaser and Strauss’s original grounded theory method into two schools of thought, consisting of the Glaserian and the Straussian schools; Schatzman’s development of dimensional analysis as an alternative way of grounding data; Charmaz’s (2000, 2005) constructivist grounded theory; and Clarke’s (2003, 2004) situational analysis. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to describe all of these approaches in adequate detail. All of these scholars have worked with either Strauss or Glaser and are thus considered the “second generation” of scholars.

The concern as grounded theory has evolved to the “third generation” is that this new generation is removed from the original scholars and some of the basic principles of pragmatism and social construction have been diminished and the method has become too “prescribed” or has taken too much of a “positivist” perspective. Charmaz articulates well this concern and she aptly wrote about seeking to reconfirm the constructivist roots of the Chicago school of thought.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE GROUNDED THEORY METHOD**

Grounded theory consists of processes of defining a research area that involves developing a research question that seeks to understand a phenomenon of interest. Such a research question will naturally lead to an initial inductive mode of inquiry that becomes more deductive as the research process continues. Data are collected (or “generated”) through various modes, most commonly individual interviews, but could also include focus group interviews, observation, and documents (e.g., text from historical papers or journaling done by research participants).

Corbin and Strauss (2008) have outlined a guide for conducting grounded theory research. They presented a process that is described in detail in Chapter 3, again, with the caveat that their description is a guide rather than a set of rules to follow absolutely. For purposes of explanation in this chapter, the process of analysis includes open coding, selective coding, axial coding, and theoretical integration. Data analysis, however, is not
a completely separate step from data collection. The processes of data collection and analysis are simultaneous, iterative, and ongoing. This means that data analysis begins with initial data collection and initial data analysis, leading to ongoing data collection and analysis, with analysis influencing the ongoing data collection and, in turn, the ongoing data collection leading to an ongoing process of analysis. Analytic questions are generated from the beginning data analysis, which influences further data collection. Questions become more focused and deductive, based on the ongoing analysis, which leads to provisional hypotheses. Eventually, the research team generates enough data to be able to make the case for having arrived as theoretical saturation and concepts are integrated into a conceptual or theoretical scheme that reflects the phenomenon of interest.

MISCONCEPTIONS OF GROUNDED THEORY

As noted earlier, grounded theory is one of the most misunderstood of the various qualitative research methods. One reason for this could be that it is so widely used by so many people that many of the processes involved in grounded theory have been poorly communicated or understood.

One misconception is the notion, as described earlier, that grounded theory is a specific theory. As explained, grounded theory is a method for generating a theory or theoretical explanation of a phenomenon of interest. This resulting theory is grounded in or supported by the data.

Another misconception is that there is one prescribed way of doing grounded theory research. Although Glaser has noted the importance of generating a basic social process and Strauss has noted the importance of generating a trajectory, these concepts need not be “reified” such that a researcher believes this is the outcome that must be achieved. Similarly, although Corbin and Strauss have outlined a succession of steps involved in grounded theory analysis, this is really a guide to analysis. The most important point is that the researcher is actively interacting with the data, using an iterative and ongoing process of collecting and analyzing data. That is, as data are collected, analysis begins; as analysis continues, further data collection ensues, which leads to further data analysis.

A third misconception is that a researcher approaches a grounded theory study as a “tabula rasa,” or blank slate. This could not be farther from the truth. The researcher certainly has many ideas and preconceived notions; the challenge is to recognize those ideas and to separate what the participants tell the researcher from what the researcher already believes to be “true.”
This chapter has presented an overview of the qualitative research method referred to as grounded theory. Grounded theory is a systematic qualitative research method of data collection and analysis, ultimately leading to a theoretical explanation (a “grounded theory”) that is grounded in those data and that explains a phenomenon of interest. The grounded theory method was developed by Glaser and Strauss, in response to Blumer’s call for a method founded on concepts of symbolic interactionism, the social psychological theoretical framework that provides the guiding tenets of grounded theory methodology. Over the years, grounded theory has undergone an evolution of sorts. An alternate method of grounding data in qualitative research is dimensional analysis. Other scholars have developed variants of grounded theory, such as constructivist grounded theory and situational analysis.

REFERENCES


