Melanie Birks

Jane Mills

GROUNDED THEORY

A Practical Guide

3rd Edition

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The text is dedicated to our children Ben, Emma and Alec, and the students who inspire us.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Jane Mills
is currently the Dean, La Trobe Rural Health School, and is one of Australia's most experienced primary health care academics, having led and managed teams in both government and tertiary sectors. With a research portfolio focused on rural health, health workforce, health system strengthening, and nursing education, Professor Mills is considered one of Australia's top researchers in FOR1110 with a Scopus H-index of 26, a score judged as excellent in comparison to her peers. Since 2006, she has been the recipient of over $4 million in research and consultancy income, including an NHMRC Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Primary Health Care. A recipient of an Australian Government Office of Learning and Teaching National Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Learning and Teaching in the

area of teaching research, Jane has a reputation as an excellent higher degree research supervisor across a number of disciplines, including public health, dentistry, nursing, midwifery, pharmacy, allied health, and social work. [Visit Professor Mills' website at https://scholars.latrobe.edu.au/jemills]

PART I PREPARING FOR GROUNDED THEORY RESEARCH

1 INTRODUCING GROUNDED THEORY

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help you to:

- Discuss the position of grounded theory on the research landscape

- Summarise the chronological development of grounded theory

- Identify methodological influences on grounded theory as an approach to research

- Review key positions taken by grounded theorists

- Outline grounded theory methods

INTRODUCTION

If you have picked up this book, you are likely considering a grounded theory study, or are in the process of undertaking research using this methodology. For beginning researchers, including graduate students, the magnitude of information that exists about grounded theory methods has made engaging in a grounded theory study a complicated endeavour. Trying to understand the general principles of grounded theory in the context of the debate and discussion that is so much a part of this research tradition, can be incredibly difficult. Where to start? What to read? Who to 'follow'? And why? This chapter will provide you with an introduction to grounded theory by chronologically tracing the development of the methodology since its beginnings more than five decades ago. Chapter 2 examines and defines the philosophical concepts relevant to grounded theory and provides an opportunity for you to examine your personal philosophical position within this context. In this book, we discuss grounded theory from a range of perspectives, and explore its evolution over time with the aim of offering the reader the prospect of positioning themselves as a future grounded theorist.

GROUNDED THEORY ON THE RESEARCH LANDSCAPE

Grounded theory, as the name suggests, is an approach to research that aims to produce a theory that is grounded in data. It is one of the most popular research designs in the world. Not only are there thousands of publications that report on studies using grounded theory methods, but there is also a collection of seminal texts that researchers can use to guide their study and ensure the rigour of their work. Since the publication of the first seminal work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), the methodology has gained global momentum, and has evolved over decades in response to a number of paradigmatic influences (Bainbridge et al., 2019; Mills et al., 2006). As you will see as you read through this text, grounded theory is an inherently flexible methodology and the possibilities in respect to data sources, methods, and the format of generated theory are limitless. While we increasingly see great diversity in design, we recognise that grounded theory is highly valued by researchers whose work falls within non-positivist positions. It is therefore fitting to discuss the qualitative research landscape as it has evolved over the last century, before specifically considering the history of grounded theory.

> ## Grounded theory
>
> An approach to research that aims to produce a theory, grounded in the data.

ACTIVITY 1.1

WHAT BROUGHT YOU HERE?

What are your reasons for reading this text? Are you a graduate student commencing a programme or progressing to the research phase of your studies? Are you an experienced researcher with minimal experience of grounded theory? Take a moment to think about what you hope to get out of your investment of time in reading this chapter.

DENZIN AND LINCOLN'S MOMENTS

Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2000, 2005, 2011, 2017) have iteratively argued a conceptualisation of the history of the field of qualitative research in a series of moments (Box 1.1). It is during the modernist or 'golden age' (1950–1970) that grounded theory was conceived, with Glaser and Strauss influenced by the then widespread questioning of the scientific method. Linearity is not Denzin and Lincoln's intent, believing instead that each of the moments 'overlap in the present' (2017, p.9). Juxtaposing a clearly delineated timeline against this broad overarching statement of co-existence can result in confusion, unless one considers these moments not as phases, but as the point of origin for schools of thought, many of which have influenced the development of grounded theory over time.

Box 1.1

Denzin and Lincoln's Moments of Qualitative Inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017)

Years	Moment
1900–1950	Traditional
1950–1970	Modernist or 'Golden Age'
1970–1980	Blurred Genres

Years	Moment
1980–1985	Paradigm Wars
1986–1990	Crisis of Representation
1990–1995	Postmodernism
1995–2000	Post-experimental Inquiry
2000–2004	Methodologically-Contested Present
2005–2010	Paradigm Proliferation
2010–2015	Fractured Posthumanist Present
2016–Present	Critical Inquiry in the Public Arena

A pivotal time during the golden era of qualitative research was the year 1968. US engagement in the Vietnam War sparked a series of often-violent protests across the world. Dr Martin Luther King was assassinated on the 4th of April, with a subsequent wave of race riots lasting days in several major American cities. Ironically, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the US Civil Rights Act seven days later, and James Anderson, Jr., the first black US Marine, was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. In the United Kingdom, the anti-immigration speech *Rivers of Blood* was delivered in response to the

passing of an act of parliament (the *Race Relations Act 1968*), generating immense social controversy in this country. France was led to the brink of a communist revolution, with a million students and workers marching through Paris in response to Charles de Gaulle's government. Again, in the US, militant student protests occurred at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Howard University, and Columbia University in New York City. Nuclear weapons testing proliferated in the US, and France exploded its first hydrogen bomb. The US presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated in connection to the Arab–Israeli conflict in the Middle East. Saddam Hussein came into power in Iraq as the result of a coup d'état, while Pope Paul VI published the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* condemning birth control. The women's liberation movement gained traction, with a large demonstration against the Miss America pageant. CNN launched the investigative journalism television show, *60 Minutes*, Richard Nixon was elected President of the United States and *Apollo 8* orbited the moon (Dunnigan and Hartman Strom, n.d.).

The social and political ruptures of 1968 impacted profoundly on the way qualitative researchers perceived themselves during this time, including: their role, their place in the world, and the relationship they sustain with participants throughout the research process, including the presentation of findings. In 1967, Howard Becker, an eminent scholar and member of the second-wave Chicago School, presages many of the methodological dilemmas that dominate the literature to come. In his presidential address to the Society for the Study of Social Problems, entitled *Whose Side Are We On?* (Becker, 1967), he disabuses the notion that sociological researchers can be value free. The extensive critique and resultant development of Becker's original thesis (Atkinson and Delamont, 2006) – that there is no such thing as values-free research – is representative of much that has been written about qualitative research in the past four-plus decades. Many of the standards that contemporary qualitative researchers account for in the design and implementation of their studies stem from these methodological discussions and debates. Erickson (2011), in his historical account of qualitative inquiry in social and educational research, likens the 15 years from 1967 onwards to a 'firestorm of criticism of realist general ethnography' (p.49), resulting in part from the growing influence of Native American, African American and feminist

researchers concerned with power, oppression, the researcher's position in a study, and the importance of reflexivity. In particular, qualitative researchers, committed to action research, identify 1970 as a turning point when many broke away from universities as centres of research that they considered unsympathetic to understanding the world in a way outside of 'conceptions of Cartesian rationality, dualism and "normal science"' (Fals Borda, 2006, p.27). At this time, the publication of Freire's (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* provided the impetus for many qualitative researchers to reposition themselves in relation to 'how and why' they engaged in the process of inquiry. Freire's battle cry to work '*with*, not *for*, the oppressed [so as to] make oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation' (Freire, 1972, p.25) resonated with many, providing a platform for both participatory action research and critical ethnographic research. Shortly after this, Feyerabend published the seminal text *Against Method* (1975) where he argued that 'science knows no "bare facts" at all but that the "facts" that enter our knowledge are already viewed in a certain way and are, therefore, essentially ideational' (p.19), adding more fuel to the firestorm raging through the modernist landscape of research.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the conceptualisation of paradigms of inquiry gained currency, with particular paradigms delimited through answering questions of ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Guba, 1990; Lincoln et al., 2011). In the history of qualitative research, this time was dominated by the 'paradigm wars' (Denzin, 2010), with post-positivists, critical theorists, postmodernists, and constructivists all 'pushing back' against the dominant positivistic research culture, while, at the same time, competing for legitimacy and recognition. In 1989, a landmark event, the *Alternative Paradigms Conference*, was held in San Francisco, with the aim of clarifying and exploring issues of concern for scholars identifying with each of these paradigms of thought (Guba, 1990). Reflectively, Denzin (2010) identifies this process of respectful dialogue as signalling the end of the paradigm wars of the 1980s. He posits that there were two more conflicts to come: in the field of mixed methods research, where the incompatibility thesis of post-positivist and 'other' paradigms was debated in the 1990s/2000s, and

the politicised conflict about what constitutes valid evidence as an outcome of research.

In Researcher's Voice 1.1, Merilyn Annells discusses situating her own study within the fifth moment of qualitative research, or the Crisis of Representation, and the influence this had on her work. This Researcher's Voice illustrates how the different moments of qualitative research create a context that influences the questions we ask and the subsequent design and implementation of our studies. You will have the opportunity to explore these concepts further, and to consider your own philosophical positioning, in Chapter 2.

The researcher's voice 1.1

Merilyn Annells on the Crisis of Representation

Merilyn Annells is a nurse and former academic. Her work on grounded theory in the 1990s is widely cited for its significant contribution to the understanding and application of grounded theory.

Although I did a small study in 1991 that I thought was grounded theory (GT) research, my first real GT study commenced in 1994 as part of my PhD research. The 1991 study included GT research processes but was descriptive, exploratory qualitative research achieving conceptual ordering but not a full explanatory scheme as per GT.

With my PhD research, fortunately a supervisor knew that in 1994 we were in the 'fifth moment' of qualitative research, which, according to Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln, was being defined and shaped by dual crises of representation and legitimation. Therefore, I was encouraged to consider in which paradigm of qualitative research my philosophical position about inquiry placed me – so I studied the writings of Egon Guba and Yvonne Lincoln to discover that I was embedded in the constructivist paradigm.

However, this led me to a dilemma. How could I do GT research that would be ontologically, epistemologically, and methodologically constructivist? GT literature in that era did not satisfactorily answer the question. Disciples of Glaserian or Straussian modes of GT were polarised about 'rightness' of the modes, but mostly silent about philosophical perspectives. So I 'took the bull by the horns' and did my own extensive analysis of writings by GT's major identities, Barney Glaser, Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin. My opinion became that Glaserian GT was post-positivist and, controversially, that Straussian GT was

leaning toward constructivism although still showing signs of post-positivism with symbolic interaction foundations. This led me to applying the Straussian mode but in an ostensibly constructivist way, and I had to write a solid defence of this choice.

What helped was meeting with Juliet Corbin in the US in 1995 to discuss my analysis of data for the study, and in 1996, prior to his death, having correspondence about my philosophical analyses of GT with Anselm Strauss. Several articles were published in the mid-1990s presenting my philosophical analyses of GT modes – this led to critical comment by others. Nevertheless, having eminent examiners of the thesis added credibility to the research and the philosophical analyses. These examiners were the qualitative research methodologist, Margarete Sandelowski, and the pioneer grounded theorist nurse researcher who worked with Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s, Jeanne Quint Benoliel.

What has remained constant is my conviction that GT can be conducted within any qualitative paradigmatic position if ensuring commensurable process and claims of outcome. This needs to be thoroughly justified when planning and reporting the study. Additionally, I believe that GT is evolving, and it is not only OK but also beneficial to have multiple modes of GT from which to choose. PhD candidates who I have supervised have justifiably and successfully used quite different approaches to GT. These days there is plenty of literature about the philosophical underpinnings of GT, so a student does not have to try and work it out. If there is something about GT that needs some new thought and opinion, don't hesitate to delve into it. Viva la GT!

A GROUNDED THEORY TIMELINE

1960s

In 1960, Anselm Strauss joined the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) School of Nursing. The UCSF School of Nursing has a proud intellectual history: Edith Bryan, the first American nurse to earn a doctoral degree, was its founding leader in 1918 (UCSF, 2007). In appointing the then 44-year-old Strauss to a professorial position, the school's leaders were investing strategically in his intellectual capital, with the aim of establishing a doctoral studies programme. Shortly after his appointment, the Department of Social and Behavioural Science was created within the school and Strauss appointed its inaugural director (Stern, 2009).

Important to the genesis of grounded theory was the work of Jeanne Quint Benoliel who was the first graduate of the UCSF Doctor of Nursing Science programme in 1969. Prior to completing her higher degree, Benoliel published a grounded theory titled *The Nurse and the Dying Patient* (Benoliel, 1967) which transformed models of palliative care around the world. For Strauss, Benoliel provided the expert clinical input to the large funded study (Glaser and Strauss, 1965) often cited as the first grounded theory (Stern, 2012). Even though it is clear from the publications generated by the trio in the early 1960s that Jeanne Quint Benoliel was instrumental in the development of grounded theory methods, her role was never fully acknowledged or celebrated. Her legacy of 'demonstrat[ing] the usefulness of conceptualizing issues in professional practice and explicating their consequences' (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007a, p.7) using a grounded theory approach, lives on in the translatable findings of many studies.

In 1961, at the age of 33 years, Barney Glaser had completed his PhD at Columbia University in New York under the guidance of Paul Lazerfeld and Robert Merton (Covan, 2007). Strauss's successful grant application for a four-year funded study to examine the experience of dying, provided an opportunity to recruit Glaser to UCSF. It was during this time that the grounded theory methods we know today began to coalesce. For an extended explanation and discussion of the

philosophical and methodological backgrounds of Strauss and Glaser, see Bryant (2019).

In 1967, after the completion of *Awareness of Dying* (1965), Glaser and Strauss published *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, joining a chorus of sociologists pushing back against the traditional scientific method. Together, they made their scholarly motivation for this publication quite clear, stating that:

> We would all agree that in social research generating theory goes hand in hand with verifying it; but many sociologists have been diverted from this truism in their zeal to test either existing theories or a theory that they have barely started to generate. (1967, p.2)

The notion of generating new theory from data, as opposed to testing existing theory, resonated with other social scientists, and grounded theory as a research design became increasingly popular.

1970s

Strauss and Glaser taught together at UCSF for a decade following the publication of *Discovery,* with many of their students now forming a coterie who would carry on their legacy. In 1978, Glaser published *Theoretical Sensitivity*, providing further explanation of the grounded theory methods initially described in *Discovery*. In particular, Glaser focuses on identifying the unit of analysis, core variables, and a basic social or psychological process in the data (Charmaz, 2008; Noerager Stern, 2009). Importantly, Glaser uses this text to explain in detail the use of 18 sociological coding families to assist with the process of integrating a grounded theory, as well as the concept of theoretical sensitivity.

Two other important academic influencers at UCSF in the 1970s were Leonard Schatzman and Virginia Olesen (Covan, 2007) who taught a class on fieldwork that preceded Strauss and Glaser's class on grounded theory. Schatzman and Strauss were close colleagues during their long tenures as UCSF, publishing a text on field research in 1973. While Covan's account of her student experience at this time states neither Schatzman or Olesen 'exhibited any interest' (Covan, 2007, p.61) in grounded theory, Schatzman's later publication on dimensional analysis (1991) demonstrates a critical response to these developing methods. Glaser left UCSF in the late 1970s to work as an independent researcher and author, having established his publishing house Sociology Press (Rhine, 2008) in 1970.

1980s

In the previous two decades, Strauss and Glaser had created a challenging and supportive teaching environment that was a crucible for many of those who have become known as second-generation grounded theorists (Morse et al., 2009). It is the second generation of grounded theorists who have written about their interpretations of Glaser and Strauss's grounded theory methods and who have, in many cases, used the original work as a launching pad for their own iterations. However, in the 1980s these publications were yet to come. Charmaz had written a book chapter on grounded theory methods (Strauss, 1987), but at this time the majority of her publications related to her research on ageing and chronic conditions (Sonoma State University, 2020). There can be no doubt, however, that the context of the 1980s, where blurred genres led to a crisis of representation, was influencing the second generation as many of them went about applying grounded theory methods in their own studies (Clarke, 2005).

There are some who argue that Strauss stood outside the various critiques of positivistic methods in the 1960s (Strubing, 2007), intensified as they were by the cultural ruptures experienced globally at this time. Rather than focusing on the implications of conducting a post-positivist traditional grounded theory, Strauss adopted a pragmatic study of action in his work and 'understood the methodological implications of symbolic interactionism' (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007b, p.49) in relation to using grounded theory methods. Symbolic interactionism is a perspective that arises from pragmatism, a philosophy that values practical application and the adoption of a solution-focused approach. As we will explore in Chapter 2, symbolic interactionism regards reality as a constantly evolving construction that occurs in response to symbols and symbolic gestures that are evident in interactions. *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (Strauss, 1987) is the only seminal grounded theory text published during this decade, and foreshadows the publication of *Basics of Qualitative Research* with Juliet Corbin in 1990. It is in this text that Strauss' own position as a symbolic interactionist and pragmatist is most apparent.

Symbolic interaction

A philosophical perspective that regards reality as a constantly evolving construction in response to symbols and symbolic gestures that are evident in interactions.

Pragmatism

A philosophy that values practical application and adoption of a solution-focused approach.

1990s

Over the years, much has been made of a supposed split between Strauss and Glaser following the publication of Strauss and Corbin's text *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* in 1990 (Babchuk, 2011). Glaser's rebuttal (1992) sparked a debate among grounded theory scholars (Boychuk Duchscher and Morgan, 2004; Heath and Cowley, 2004) about the differences between each scholar's work, a debate that continues today. Glaser was particularly harsh in his rebuttal of both Strauss's 1987 publication and the first edition of *Basics*, stating that 'Strauss' book is without conscience, bordering on immorality' (Glaser, 1992, p.5).

In the 1990s, there was a proliferation of important grounded theory publications. In 1994, the first edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) included a chapter by Strauss and Corbin (1994). Charmaz (1995) also published a book chapter that was the first significant treatise on constructivist grounded theory.

You will frequently see reference to researchers adopting either Glaser or Strauss's different perspective on grounded theory in higher degree theses and books, largely as an outcome of this debate about the veracity and quality of the approach taken by the authors. Charmaz also inspires the same type of devotion. Often, a researcher will demonstrate a strong adherence to a particular genre of grounded theory to the exclusion of many other grounded theorists, who have also influenced the development of a particular school of thought. This book aims to provide a balanced view of grounded theory methods without adopting a specific position. Few things are ever black and white, especially when it comes to research with an overtly interpretive component, and there is much to be learned from all antecedent grounded theorists.

2000s – today

Over the past two decades, the reach of grounded theory, both as a methodology and as a set of methods, has increased. As a research design, grounded theory crosses disciplinary boundaries and is used in fields such as science, technology, engineering, medicine, nursing, health sciences more generally, and education, to name but a few. Throughout this text, we draw on examples from many disciplines to illustrate how the use of grounded theory transcends the substantive area of inquiry by providing a set of methods that can be applied in a range of contexts.

While disciplinary diversity captures one characteristic of grounded theory in the 2000s, the most important developments are in the work of the second and third generations of grounded theorists. The 21st century began with the second edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* in which Kathy Charmaz published a chapter on grounded theory (2000) that resonated with countless researchers around the world. Titled 'Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods', the chapter explored the antecedents of traditional grounded theory and explained how the researcher could take an alternative constructivist approach to their use of grounded theory methods. Charmaz's approachable writing style and the clarity of the argument presented, sparked a grounded theory renaissance, particularly for graduate students, that continues today.

In 2005, Clarke pushed grounded theory around the postmodern turn with her text on situation analysis, in which she builds on the work of Anselm Strauss to demonstrate a new approach to grounded theory (2005). Clarke's iteration of grounded theory relies on 'the situation of inquiry broadly conceived becom[ing] the key unit of analysis' (Clarke et al., 2015, p.12). Clarke (2005; Clarke et al. 2018) developed three types of maps to analyse a situation of inquiry: situational maps, social worlds/arenas maps and positional maps (see Chapter 8).

The publication of Clarke's original text on situational analysis was closely followed by Charmaz's (2006) landmark text *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*, which

expanded her original treatise on constructivist grounded theory. Bryant and Charmaz reflect on the influence of social constructionist and ethnomethodological thinking on research over time and conclude that the key message was that 'data don't speak for themselves. The cognizant other (the researcher) engages data in a conversation' (2007b, p.38).

In 2007, a one-day grounded theory symposium was facilitated by the University of Alberta's International Institute for Qualitative Methodology. Led by Jan Morse, this gathering of second-generation grounded theorists provided an opportunity to reflect on the question that has perplexed grounded theorists from the different schools of thought since the original publication of *Discovery* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). At what point does a method evolve to become something different? Morse sums up the common ground identified by the second generation at this symposium and in the subsequent book, stating that 'grounded theory is a way of thinking about and acting toward a research question or problem' (Morse et al., 2021, p.5).

In the most recent edition of the *SAGE Handbook of Current Developments in Grounded Theory*, Clarke provides a genealogy of grounded theory and situational analysis that moves beyond first- and second-generation grounded theorists, to identify a third generation of grounded theorists, which includes the work of Birks and Mills (Clarke, 2019). The third generation continues to build on both the original grounded theory methods, but also the innovative thinking of second-generation grounded theorists that was and is reflective of the moment of qualitative inquiry from which they operate. Grounded theory is one of the most important contemporary research designs, but it isn't immune to the wider societal context in which researchers find themselves. The current moment, Critical Inquiry in the Public Arena, is strongly reflected in the work of third-generation grounded theorists who practise from a range of philosophical positions (see Chapter 10).

ACTIVITY 1.2

GROUNDED THEORY GENERATIONS

Have you already aligned yourself with a particular approach to grounded theory? Or is this book your first foray into the methodology? In the following chapters, we encourage you to keep an open mind and ensure that your approach is anchored in your philosophical position. What thoughts do you have at this stage about where you might sit in respect of grounded theory generations?

PHILOSOPHY, METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

One of the key aims of higher degree research programmes is to instil in students a knowledge of various philosophies and in turn the methodologies and methods that are linked to these schools of thought. It is important to understand the difference between a methodology and a set of methods. Stemming from a congruent philosophy, a methodology is a set of principles and ideas that inform the design of a research study. Methods, on the other hand, are practical procedures used to generate and analyse data. There is a fluid interplay that occurs between methodology and methods in the process of undertaking a research study. The methodological framework, with its underpinning philosophy, influences how the researcher works with the participants, in other words the position they take in the study. Depending on their philosophical beliefs and adopted methodology, researchers either assume a position of distance or acknowledged inclusion both in the field and in the final product of the study. As well, and crucially for grounded theory, the researcher's philosophical position influences the analysis of the data as it focuses their attention on different dynamics and alerts them to possible analytic configurations in the process of conceptual and theoretical abstraction. Philosophy, methodology and methods are concepts we will define and examine further in Chapter 2, but it is the combination of these three elements that make up a research design.

> ### Research design
>
> The choice of philosophy, methodology and methods used in a grounded theory study.

One of the major criticisms of the first generation of grounded theorists is that they did not write about grounded theory as a research design or package including philosophy, methodology and methods; rather, they

wrote only about the various strategies and techniques (methods) that could be used (Amsteus, 2014) in a study. Fortunately, this has been rectified to an extent in the last two editions of Corbin and Strauss's (2008, 2015) book, which includes a chapter, absent from the earlier editions, explaining pragmatism and symbolic interactionism as the methodological underpinnings of Strauss's iteration of grounded theory methods (Chamberlain-Salaun et al., 2013). Glaser has never really entered the conversations about grounded theory methodology; rather, his writing has focused on grounded theory methods and what constitutes a grounded theory itself. Instead, he has dismissed the applicability of any specific philosophical or paradigmatic position, including symbolic interactionism, in his belief that adopting such a perspective reduces that broader potential of grounded theory (Glaser, 2005). Because of the language that Glaser uses when writing about emergence in the process of concurrent data collection and analysis, as well as in the later stages of analysis when the core category is also said to emerge, he has generally been considered a critical realist researching within the post-positivist paradigm (Bryant, 2019).

Methodological gaps in seminal texts written by first-generation grounded theorists have led to students of grounded theory needing to figure out what was (to borrow a famous grounded theory mantra) 'going on' ontologically and epistemologically in order to plan and execute a rigorous study that would pass examination. Because of this, as we have discussed, many second-generation grounded theorists developed methodological frameworks for grounded theory methods, underpinned by a range of philosophies (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007a, 2019). Throughout the book, we move across these now established methodological positions to demonstrate their influence on the use of grounded theory methods. We have also made an assumption, in concert with others (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007a), that there is a set of methods essential to the research design that must be used in order for the final product to be considered a grounded theory.

GROUNDED THEORY METHODS

As will be discussed in the following chapters, many research studies purporting to be grounded theories are often a qualitative descriptive analysis (Glaser, 2007) of a particular phenomenon. We consider the following to constitute a common set of grounded theory methods: initial coding and categorisation of data; concurrent data generation or collection and analysis; writing memos; theoretical sampling; constant comparative analysis using inductive and abductive logic; theoretical sensitivity; intermediate coding; identifying a core category; and advanced coding and theoretical integration. Without using the full set of grounded theory methods with care and diligence, it is nearly impossible to reach the level of conceptual abstraction that characterises a fully integrated grounded theory. The remainder of this chapter provides a brief introduction to each of these methods to create a sense of how they are used in undertaking a grounded theory study. The following chapters will define and examine each of these methods in relation to producing an integrated grounded theory, while discussing the various debates and ideas present in the literature.

Initial coding and categorisation of data

Initial or open coding is the first step of data analysis. It is a way of identifying important words, or groups of words, in the data and then labelling them accordingly. We define a code as a form of shorthand that researchers repeatedly use to identify conceptual reoccurrences and similarities in the patterns of participants' experience. *In vivo* codes are participants' words used as a code that encapsulates a broader concept in the data. Categories are a higher-level concept that represents a group of codes. Categories are referred to as theoretically saturated when no new codes are identified pertaining to a particular category. Well-developed categories are clearly articulated with sharply defined and dimensionalised properties.

There are various terms used to describe coding in grounded theory, which can become confusing. In the original text, Glaser and Strauss (1967) paid little attention to describing the process of coding, assuming that the reader would know what this entailed. Since then, the process of coding in grounded theory studies has had phases of being quite elaborate (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), to, in more recent times, becoming much more straightforward (Saldaña, 2021).

Concurrent data generation or collection and analysis

Fundamental to a grounded theory research design is the process of concurrent data generation or collection and analysis. To implement this method, the researcher generates or collects some data with an initially purposive sample. This purposive sample is chosen to ensure as much variation as possible across age, gender, ethnicity, and context. The early data generated is coded before, guided by this initial analysis, more data is collected or generated, and then the process of analysis repeated. It is this method that differentiates grounded theory from other types of research design that might require the researcher to collect all their data prior to analysis, or to construct a theoretical proposition and then collect data to test their hypothesis.

Writing memos

Memos have been wonderfully described as 'intellectual capital in the bank' (Clarke, 2005, p.85). Memoing is a fundamental analytical process in grounded theory research that involves the recording of processes, thoughts, feelings, analytical insights, decisions, and ideas in relation to a research project. Memos will vary in subject, intensity, coherence, theoretical content, and usefulness to the finished product. However harshly you may critique your efforts at memo writing, never throw a memo away as you cannot anticipate when it might suddenly become vitally important. Memo writing is an ongoing activity for grounded theorists as memos are generated from the very early stages of planning a study until its completion. Your memos will in time transform into your grounded theory findings. Writing consistently and copiously will help build your intellectual assets.

Theoretical sampling

Researchers use theoretical sampling to focus and feed their constant comparative analysis of the data. Theoretical sampling is the process of identifying and pursuing clues that arise during analysis in a grounded theory study. During the process of concurrent data collection or generation and analysis, it will become apparent that more information is needed to saturate categories under development. This often occurs when you want to find out more about the properties of a category, conditions that a particular category may exist under, the dimensions of a category or the relationship between categories. To sample theoretically, the researcher makes a strategic decision about what or who will provide the most information-rich source of data to meet their analytical needs. Writing memos is an important technique to support this process, as it allows the researcher to map out possible participants to sample theoretically, while, at the same time, creating an important audit trail of the decision-making process for later use.

Constant comparative analysis

Part of the process of concurrent data collection and analysis is the constant comparison of incident to incident, incident to codes, codes to codes, codes to categories, and categories to categories. Constant comparative analysis is a method that compares incoming data with existing data in the process of coding and category development. Constant comparative analysis continues until a grounded theory is fully integrated.

Grounded theory methods are usually referred to as inductive in that they result in the development of theory from the data itself. Induction of theory is achieved through successive comparative analyses. However, deduction and abduction also have a role to play in the analytical process. Abduction is a form of reasoning that begins with an examination of the data and the formation of several hypotheses that are then proved or disproved during the process of analysis, thus aiding inductive conceptualisation. Tavoy and Timmermans describe abduction as 'the form of reasoning through which we relate a surprising, unexpected, or anomalous observation to other observations by specifying the grounds of a plausible relationship' (2019, p.537).

Theoretical sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity is the ability to recognise and extract from the data elements that have relevance for a developing theory. Theoretical sensitivity is first cited in Glaser and Strauss's seminal text (1967) as a two-part concept. Firstly, a researcher's level of theoretical sensitivity is deeply personal; it reflects their level of insight into both themselves and the area that they are researching. Secondly, a researcher's level of theoretical sensitivity reflects their intellectual history, the type of theory that they have read, absorbed, and now use in their everyday thought. Researchers are a sum of all they have experienced. The concept of theoretical sensitivity acknowledges this fact and accounts for it in the research process. As a grounded theorist becomes immersed in the data, their level of theoretical sensitivity to analytical possibilities will increase.

Intermediate coding

Intermediate coding is the identification of properties, dimensions, patterns, and relationships during the process of category development. While intermediate coding follows initial coding, the researcher moves between both forms of coding during the process of concurrent data generation or collection and analysis, and the constant comparison of data. The researcher employs intermediate coding in two ways: firstly, to fully develop individual categories by connecting sub-categories, and their properties and dimensions; and, secondly, to link categories together. Initial coding is often said to fracture the data, whereas intermediate coding reconnects the data in ways that are conceptually much more abstract than would be produced by a thematic analysis. Axial coding is the most advanced form of intermediate coding and has been a feature of the work of Strauss and Corbin (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 2015; Strauss 1987; Corbin and Strauss 2008, 2015) over time.

Identifying a core category

The core category of a grounded theory is a concept that encapsulates a phenomenon apparent in the categories and sub-categories constructed and the relationships between these. Developing categories through the process of intermediate coding will increase the level of conceptual analysis apparent in the developing grounded theory. Further theoretical sampling and selective coding focus on actualising the core category in a highly abstract conceptual manner. This actualisation is achieved through full theoretical saturation of both the core category and its subsidiary categories, sub-categories, and their properties.

Advanced coding and theoretical integration

Advanced coding is critical to theoretical integration, providing techniques to facilitate integration of the final grounded theory. Theoretical integration is the most difficult grounded theory method to accomplish well. A grounded theory generally provides a comprehensive explanation of a process or scheme apparent in relation to phenomena. It is comprehensive because it includes variation rather than assuming that there is a one-size-fits-all answer to a research question. Advanced coding procedures include the use of storyline and theoretical coding. Storyline is a technique used to both integrate and present a grounded theory (Birks and Mills, 2019). Glaser (1978) was the first grounded theorist to discuss theoretical coding during the advanced coding stage. Theoretical codes can be drawn from existing theories to assist in theoretical integration, while adding explanatory power to the final product of a grounded theory study by situating it in relation to a theoretical body of knowledge.

Generating theory

The final product of a grounded theory study is an integrated and comprehensive grounded theory that explains a process or scheme associated with a phenomenon. This theory is generated by the researcher using the methods we have just overviewed. Figure 1.1 illustrates how grounded theory methods fit together during the research process.
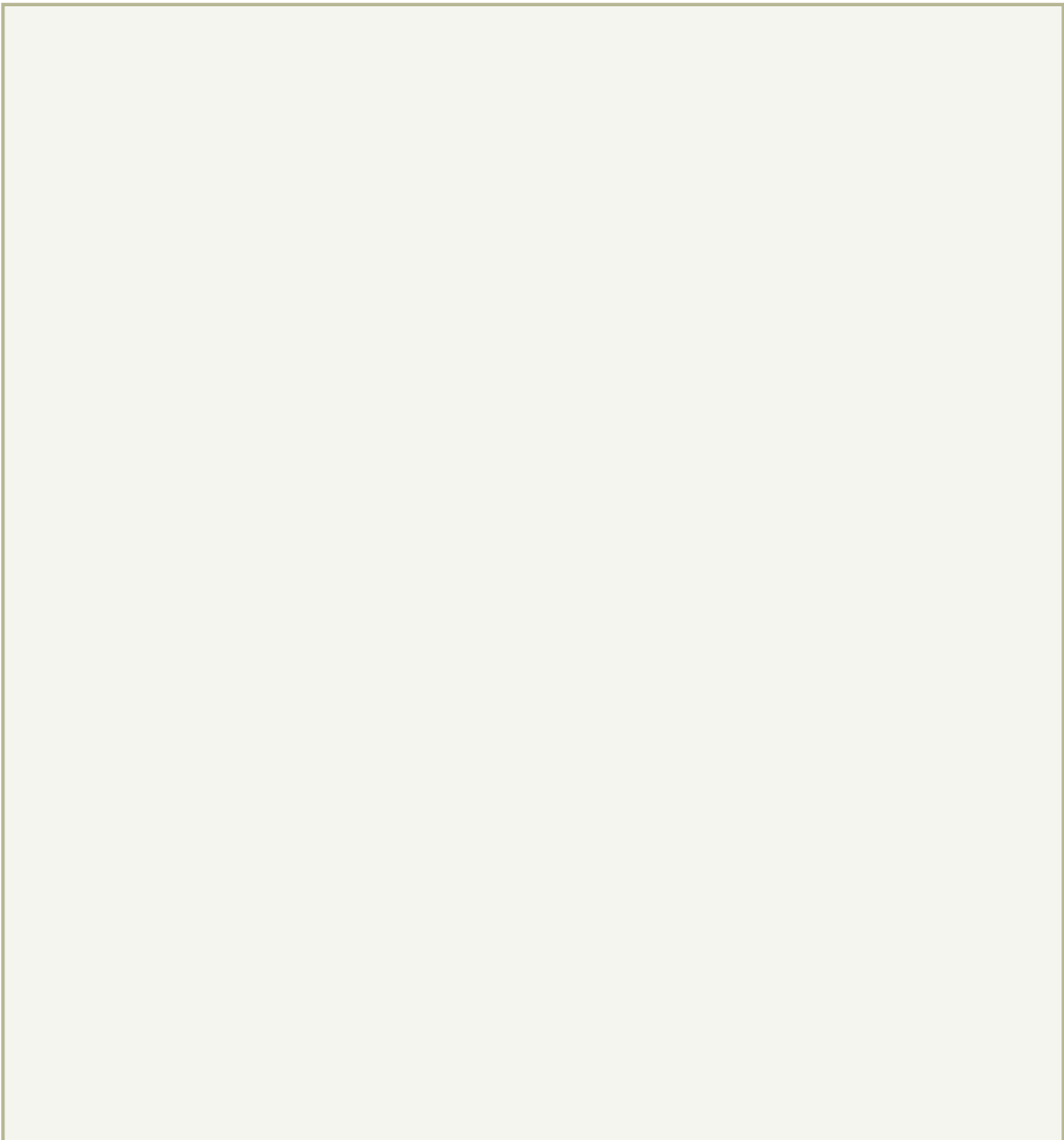
ACTIVITY 1.3

GROUNDED THEORY METHODS

Reflect on what you know about research generally. What is unique about the methods that are essential to a grounded theory study? Which of these methods do you feel confident about? Are there any that you think will be particularly challenging?
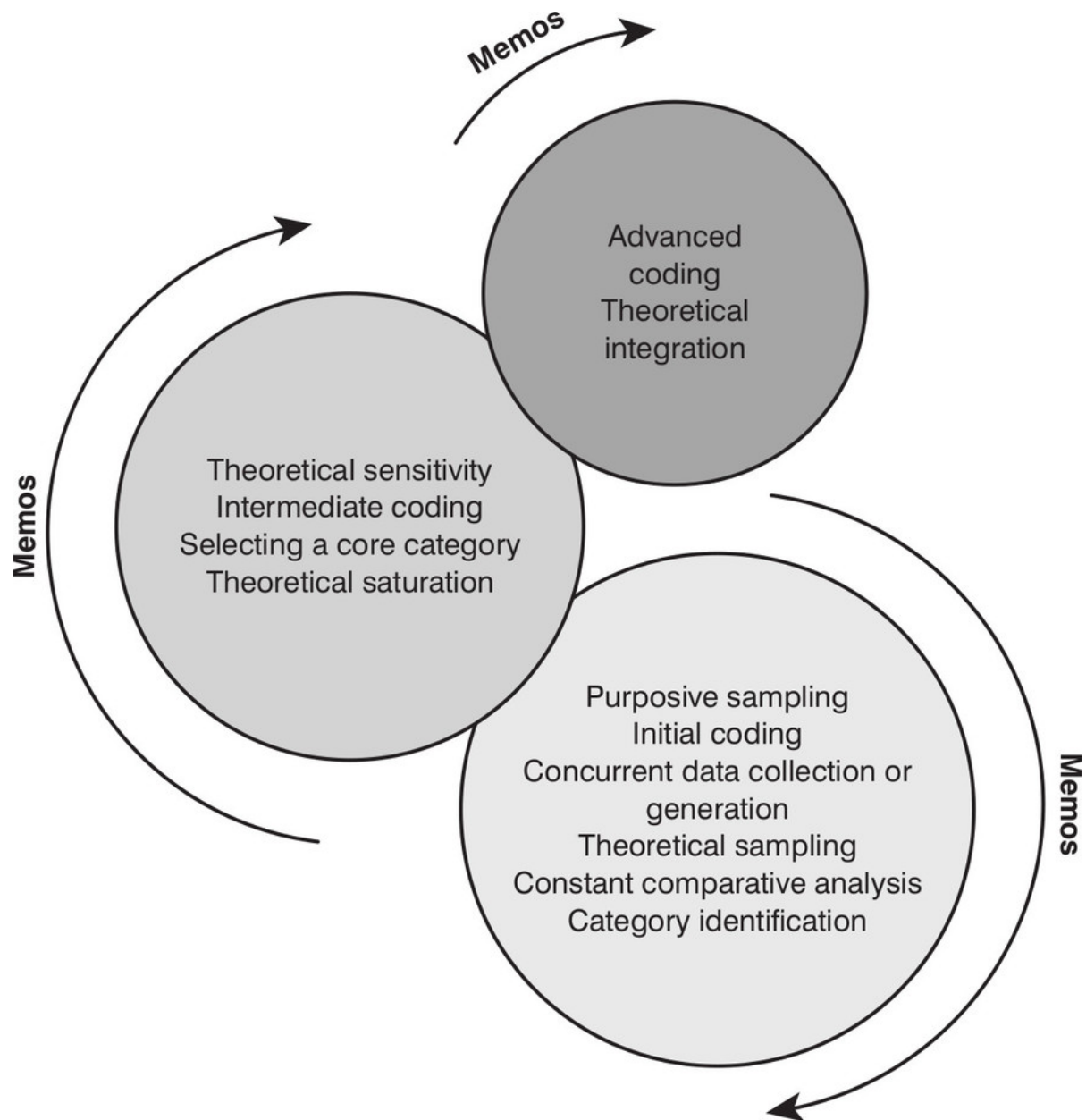
Figure 1.1 Grounded theory methods

We have purposely grouped grounded theory methods into three wheels that will work together to generate a grounded theory. The largest wheel includes purposive sampling, initial coding, concurrent data generation and collection and analysis, theoretical sampling, constant comparative analysis, and category identification. This wheel

constitutes the most straightforward and easiest to accomplish of the methods. Together, large wheel methods form the powerhouse of grounded theory research design, enabling you to both generate and refine data. The two smaller wheels include concepts and techniques that are no less important. Rather, small-wheel methods take your study to a level of sophistication that will lift your analysis beyond simple description. The lower of the small wheels includes theoretical sensitivity, intermediate coding, identifying a core category, and theoretical saturation. Engaging in these methods will further refine your analysis while increasing the comprehensiveness of the final product. The upper small wheel includes complex methods of advanced coding and theoretical integration. This is where a grounded theory either comes together, or not. Writing memos lubricates each of the wheels as they rotate around each other during the grounded theory research process. Without high-quality memos, the machine will very quickly grind to a halt. If one of the small wheels becomes jammed, or has missing components, then a grounded theory will never be produced.

CONCLUSION

An understanding of the genesis of grounded theory is an important foundation for undertaking a research study using this approach. As a backdrop to this discussion, this chapter identified key milestones in the evolution of qualitative research, using Denzin and Lincoln's heuristic of the moments of qualitative inquiry. The history of grounded theory has been presented, with reference to the significant impact on the three generations of grounded theorists. Finally, an overview of grounded theory methods, common to both traditional and non-traditional grounded theory, was provided as a basis for more detailed discussions in the chapters to come.

Critical thinking questions

1. How important do you think the prevailing research culture was in shaping Glaser and Strauss's original work on grounded theory?
2. Consider second-generation grounded theorists. What do you think were the most important influences on their work?
3. Grounded theory methods are multi-faceted. Identify the purposes of each of these.
4. Reflect on the different methodological influences apparent in grounded theory research. What type of language would you expect each of the seminal authors to use in relation to both participants and their findings?

Working grounded theory

Review the 'Working grounded theory' example presented in the Appendix. Note:

- The focus of her doctoral research

- The preconceptions this researcher held about grounded theory prior to commencing her study

- What drew this researcher to the methodology

2 PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE IN GROUNDED THEORY

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help you to:

- Define philosophical concepts relevant to grounded theory research

- Examine the significance of positioning the researcher in a grounded theory study

- Explore the role of reflexivity and reciprocity in grounded theory research

- Articulate your personal philosophical position

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we examine philosophy and its relationship to grounded theory research. Philosophy is recognised as a specific area of study, yet it permeates our everyday existence. In grounded theory, the researcher's personal philosophical position is critical in promoting congruence between research question, methodology, and the conduct of a study. Several factors inform this philosophical position, however many of these concepts are difficult to grasp. We hope to demystify them in this chapter and encourage you to examine your own philosophical position, with a view to developing a reflexive approach to your grounded theory research.
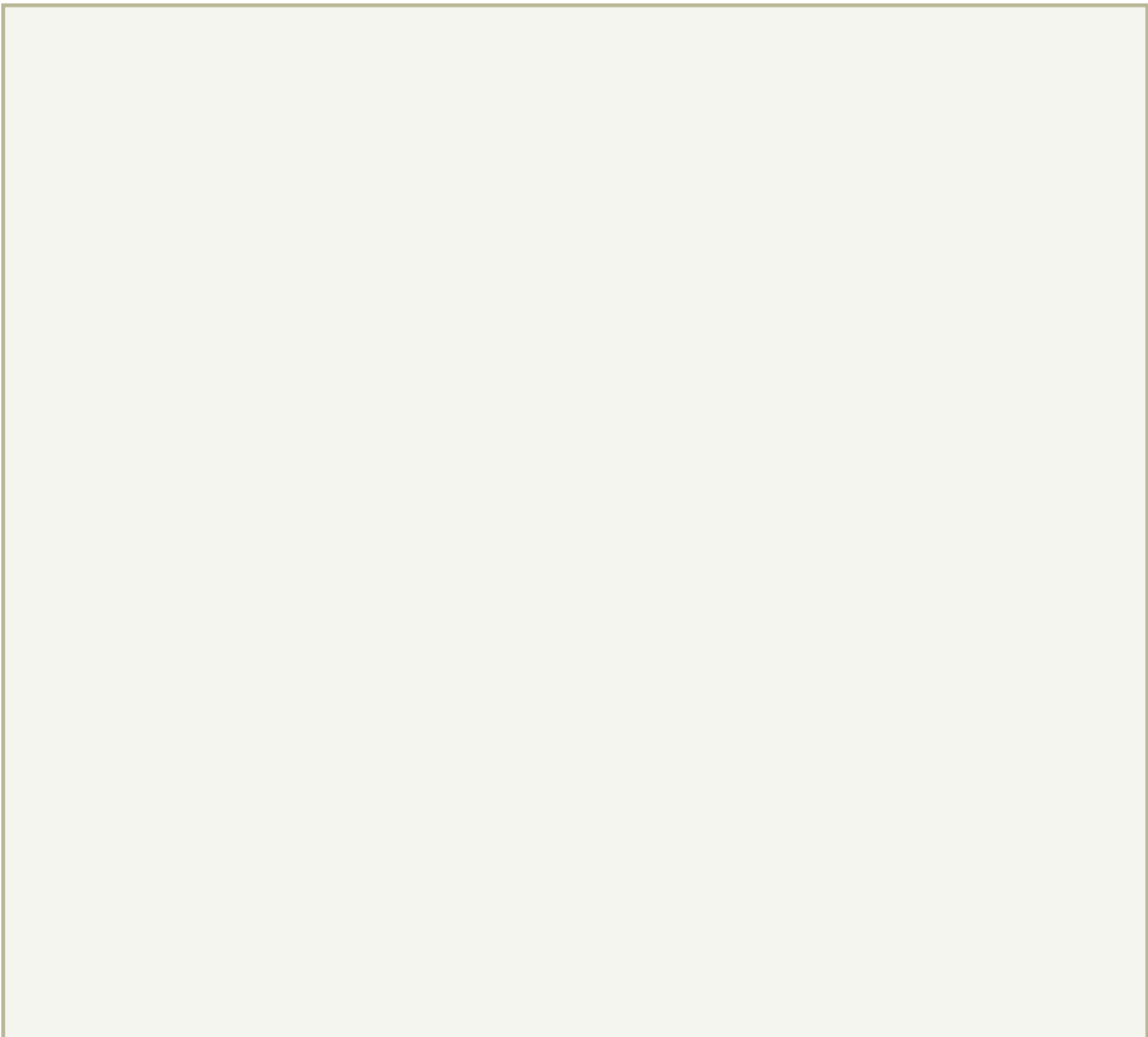
ACTIVITY 2.1

WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

Before commencing your reading of the following section, think about what the term 'philosophy' means to you. Consider the ways in which it is used in everyday language. How does your understanding of the term fit with your idea of research?

PHILOSOPHY AND RESEARCH

The term philosophy is both a noun and a verb, derived from the Greek, meaning 'love of wisdom' (Munro, 2020, p.39). Philosophy can be seen as the consideration of higher-order problems and how we attempt to solve them, such as *what is the meaning of life? Is there a god?* (Wilson, 2002). The questions that attract philosophical thinking can be both theoretical and practical (Brinkmann, 2017). While the inherent complexity of such concepts makes engaging in philosophical thought a daunting prospect, we need not think of philosophy as an estranged and ethereal concept. We draw from contemporary thinking on philosophy to define it simply as a view of the world encompassing the questions and mechanisms for finding answers that inform that view.

> ### Philosophy
>
> A view of the world encompassing the questions and mechanisms for finding answers that inform that view.

Philosophy is concerned with acquiring wisdom through knowledge. Research is an attempt to generate knowledge and fill the gaps in what is known in our world. It is therefore easy to recognise that philosophy is inextricably linked to research. Don't be concerned if you struggle with understanding the concepts that comprise philosophical thinking – they are complex. They are, however, important elements in grounded theory research, as philosophy cannot be extricated from a grounded theory study without removing substance.

Philosophy is what makes a set of methods a methodology – in other words, methodology is the philosophy of method. Novice researchers are often confused by the difference between methodology and methods and may use the terms interchangeably. Methodology is the lens a researcher looks through when deciding the types of method they will use to answer their research question, and how they will use

these for best effect. Methods, on the other hand, are the practical procedures, strategies, and processes employed in conducting research. While different researchers may employ the same methods in conducting a study (for example, how they recruit participants, undertake sampling, generate data, undertake fieldwork, or conduct analysis), the way in which they use these strategies and techniques will vary depending on each researcher's philosophical position and the paradigm within which they function. A person's philosophical position reflects their beliefs about reality that in turn guide thinking about how legitimate knowledge can be acquired. From this position, the role of the researcher is to describe, explain, and justify the use of the methods employed in their work (Carter and Little, 2007).

Methodology

The philosophy of method; the lens through which the researcher looks when choosing and employing research methods.

Methods

The practical procedures, strategies, and processes employed in conducting research.

Philosophical position

The personal beliefs about reality that guide thinking about how legitimate knowledge can be acquired.

Philosophy consists of several branches of study. Broadly, these can be categorised as *metaphysics, ethics, politics, science, logic,*

mathematics, language, law, and *art* (Teichman and Evans, 1999). The extent to which individuals will apply themselves to a specific area of study will vary depending on the purpose and priorities of the philosopher. Those who concern themselves with human values, for example, will explore concepts relevant to ethics, while those concerned with social justice will place greater emphasis on political philosophy (Stewart et al., 2010). The exploration of all branches of philosophy is beyond the intent and scope of this chapter, and thus we will focus on the metaphysical philosophical concepts relevant to the conduct of research – ontology and epistemology.

Ontology

Ontology is the study of being. The potential practical application of philosophical concepts is evident in one of the most simplified explanations of the term originating from the discipline of information technology (IT). Gruber (1993) describes ontology as an abstract representation of the world conceptualised either implicitly or explicitly. With such conceptualisation, a shared understanding of a particular subject is secured through a common world view (Gruninger and Lee, 2002).

Undertaking research requires an understanding of the ontological concepts of *existence* and *reality*. Greek ontology, as espoused by Plato, identifies things in nature to be distinguishable by existence (whether it is or is not) or essence (what it is) (Feenberg, 2003). These concepts as defined may seem obvious, but in the context of research they are significant. The distinction is most palpable when examining the research traditions of quantitative and qualitative inquiry. Quantitative researchers are more concerned with proof 'that' a natural phenomenon exists, whereas qualitative researchers concern themselves more with 'how' and 'why' situations occur in the social world. The distinction is particularly evident when we explore perspectives of truth and reality.

> ### Ontology
>
> The study of being, concerned with concepts of existence and reality.

The positivist underpinnings of quantitative research drive the use of scientific method to identify 'facts' and proffer explanations and make predictions based on these findings. A fact is considered to be a single objective reality that can be measured consistently (Petty et al., 2012). From this perspective, the reality of a concept is linked to its existence in a physical sense (Nicholls, 2009). The 'realist' perspective, therefore, argues that there are elements of our world that exist in their own right,

independent of how they might be conceived or perceived by individuals (Miller, 2019). Philosophical movements over the last century saw a turn away from positivist concepts, establishing foundations upon which many qualitative research methodologies were to evolve. These paradigmatic moments reject the concept of a single objective reality and propose the existence of multiple realities that acknowledge the significance of subjective interpretation. From such a 'relativist' perspective, truth is not a black and white entity, but is subject to various interpretations as a social construct.

Epistemology

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with knowledge. While ontology explores the concept of reality, epistemology examines 'the ways in which it is possible to gain knowledge of this reality' (Petty et al., 2012, p.270). We know something when what we believe coincides with our reality (Stewart et al., 2010). We can believe many things, true or false, but only belief that is true can be considered knowledge (Teichman and Evans, 1999). For example, historically, people believed that the world was flat. This was not a truth and thus they could not assert that they *knew* this to be the case.

> Epistemology
>
> A branch of philosophy concerned with the study of knowledge.

Often, when we consider knowledge, we think of logic. Logic is 'the study of correct thinking' (Stewart et al., 2010, p.2). Logic employs a systematic approach to thinking to ensure arrival at knowledge that we know to be truth. Logic enables us to establish the truth of knowledge in that it provides proof of that knowledge. In lay terms, we consider this proof to be some form of evidence, and empirical scientists will seek to establish the truth of knowledge through deductive processes (Teichman and Evans, 1999). Deductive approaches aim to generate knowledge through testing an existing theory. Data is collected with the aim of proving, or otherwise, the established theory. Inductive approaches, on the other hand, build knowledge from data. In grounded theory research, this involves generating knowledge in the form of a theory that is 'grounded' in the data.

RESEARCH PARADIGMS

Having developed an understanding of the concepts of ontology and epistemology, you will now be aware that there are many ways to view the world, and equally many ways that we can learn from those observations. While every individual brings their unique perspective, there are a number of broadly shared ontological and epistemological positions known as *paradigms*. Paradigms are collective ways of thinking that are variously defined as models, patterns, or exemplars. Religions, for example, are paradigms in which a group of people have the same values and beliefs.

In respect of research, paradigms are a shared way of looking at the world. Researchers functioning within a given paradigm hold similar views on how knowledge can be generated. In Researcher's Voice 2.1, Simon Burgess provides an overview of major philosophical developments in history and their contribution to the research traditions that have evolved in concert with these developments.

Paradigms

Frameworks that represent collective ways of thinking about and viewing the world.

The researcher's voice 2.1

Simon Burgess on major philosophical developments

Simon Burgess is a Lecturer at the University of New England. He has worked in management, policy development, and academia. His PhD was in ethical theory and he currently teaches business ethics and leadership within the University of New England Business School (www.une.edu.au/staff-profiles/business/simon-burgess).

The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates (469–399 B.C.E.) was eccentric, challenging, and sometimes maddening. He was always questioning people about their assumptions concerning justice, courage, temperance, and wisdom, and he invariably showed that their initial statements were actually rather difficult to defend. Socrates knew that his habit of questioning everything could seem impious and even dangerous to many people. In fact, he ultimately paid the supreme price for it; the people of Athens convicted and killed him for being irreverent towards the gods and corrupting the youth. But of course Socrates has certainly not been forgotten. His dialectical approach to the clarification and refutation of assumptions and ideas is often loosely referred to as the 'Socratic method', and he is rightly regarded as being central to the Western philosophical tradition.

The branch of philosophy concerned with the study of knowledge is known as epistemology, and it has featured various schools of thought since ancient times. Roughly speaking, there are the rationalists who argue that at least some forms of knowledge can be gained simply through reasoning; and then there are the empiricists who argue that all knowledge is really dependent on observations, experiments, and other forms of sensory experience. Rationalists point out that many truths of logic, mathematics, and geometry, for example, appear

to be provable through pure reasoning. The great French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) argued that each of us can also know about our own existence through a process of pure reasoning – 'I think, therefore I am', he declared. Yet empiricism has remained popular down the ages. By emphasising the role of observation and experience, empiricism helped provide the philosophical underpinnings of the scientific revolution, and for many it gained further credibility in the process.

The burgeoning success and prestige of science in the 18th and 19th centuries prompted many to think that the empirical methods of science should be applied to our understanding of society. Positivists such as Auguste Comte (1798–1857) were particularly enthused by this line of thought. Yet, there have always been sceptics about the idea that moral, social, and political questions can be solved by science alone. According to the great Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776), an essentially scientific line of inquiry can help us to understand the way the world is; working out how the world ought to be, however, requires something more. In his view, our decisions about social policy, for example, require us to draw upon our moral and political values, and there is no purely scientific way of saying what these should be.

Not all philosophers particularly care for a sharp distinction between the purely descriptive and scientific questions of what is, on the one hand, and evaluative questions of what ought to be, on the other. Nonetheless, something that roughly corresponds to this contrast is the methodological division between naturalism, on the one hand, and interpretivism, on the other. Methodological naturalism can be thought of as being essentially scientific, and it is often of great assistance in gaining a better understanding of particular aspects of human life and human society. For example, in many cases it can be used to quite conclusively demonstrate the effects of certain specific social policies, therapeutic remedies, and dietary choices that may be available. In and of itself, however, methodological

naturalism will not determine which of these responses is the most ethically sound, wise, or desirable.

Interpretivism draws upon a tradition in philosophy that owes much to thinkers such as Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), and Max Weber (1864–1920). It plainly recognises that human beings are not simply thoughtless and helpless; our actions are the product of our judgements, reasons, and intentions. So, unlike ordinary billiard balls, for example, human concerns and human behaviour cannot be explained simply as the result of various external causes. With such considerations in mind, interpretivism is a methodology that is much narrower in scope than naturalism. It deals with human beings, human society, our stories and cultural artefacts, and a host of human problems, but it does not pretend to provide any insights into physics, chemistry, or biology. Most importantly, interpretivism allows its descriptions and explanations of human beings and their concerns to be subtly and thoughtfully imbued with human values. Many historians, psychologists, and social commentators are quite happy to be regarded as adherents of methodological interpretivism. The fact that their work is imbued with complex human judgements and values may mean that their explanations and conclusions are forever open to reinterpretation and social critique. In the context of their discipline and the tasks that they have set for themselves, however, many accept that this is entirely as it should be.

In Researcher's Voice 2.1, Burgess makes reference to the broad philosophical traditions of naturalism and interpretivism. These philosophical positions align with the research traditions you know as quantitative and qualitative. Research traditions are influenced by paradigms, each of which share ontological and epistemological perspectives that function as the lens through which reality is determined and knowledge is generated. Figure 2.1 presents these paradigms along a simplified chronological continuum. This figure indicates a chronological evolution of major paradigms that are relied on in research. As we will discuss, an important feature of this evolution is

the extent to which subjectivity is embraced as we move along the continuum.
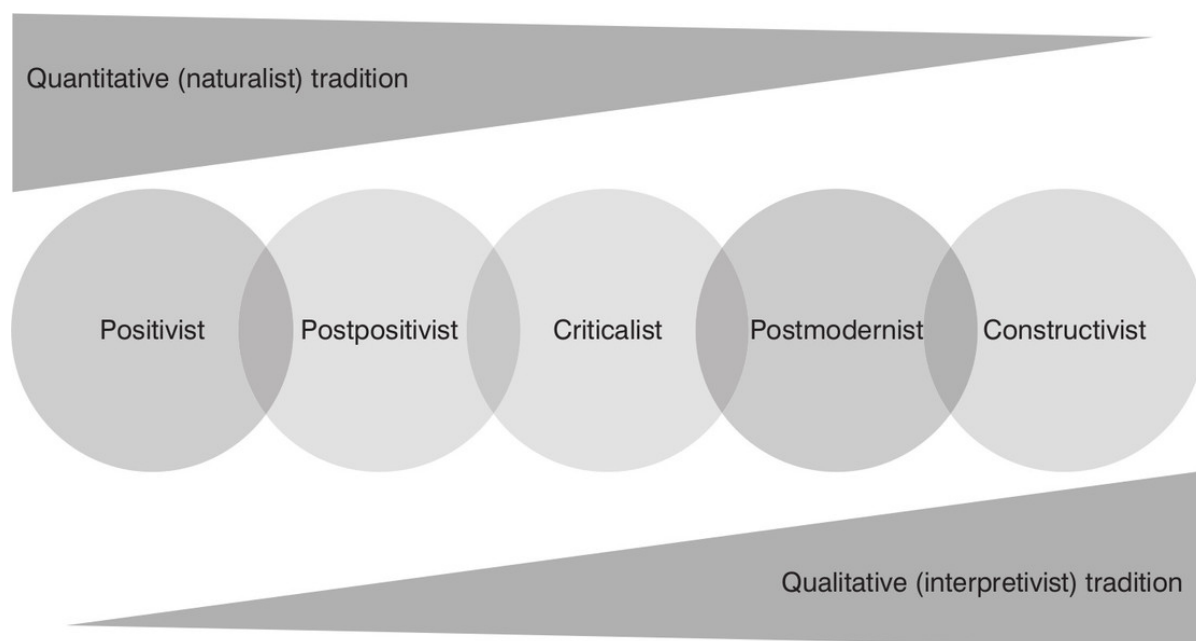
Figure 2.1 Research traditions and paradigms

Figure 2.1 presents quantitative and qualitative research traditions as dichotomous. This distinction represents the differing positions in respect of reality and how it can be determined. This is not to suggest that one tradition brings greater value in respect of how knowledge can be generated through research. Both serve specific purposes, and together they can produce powerful research outcomes. As we will discuss in Chapter 7, a grounded theory can be developed using both quantitative and qualitative forms of data. We acknowledge, however, that many researchers working in the social world, and therefore seeking answers to questions best addressed in the qualitative domain, are drawn to grounded theory as a practical approach to conducting a study. Note that the borders between these paradigms are not necessarily rigid; they have evolved over time and so it is expected that each movement will bring some characteristics of its philosophical underpinnings into the next.

At the far left sits positivism. Positivism embraces a realist philosophy, which asserts that there is a single, objective reality (or 'truth') that is waiting to be discovered through the application of scientific method. Around the mid-20th century, however, questions were raised about whether anything could actually be known with certainty. Here we started to see the emergence of post-positivism. Within this paradigm, relativism is emphasised, as the position of the observer is recognised as influencing what is perceived as 'real'. These paradigms failed, however, to adequately address issues of voice and representation (Lincoln et al., 2018), thus we see the evolution of the criticalist paradigm. Within the criticalist paradigm, knowledge is seen to be constructed historically by those who hold power. Criticalists seek to address any resultant social injustice through their work (Kincheloe et al., 2018).

Positivism

A paradigm that asserts there is a single objective reality that is there to be discovered.

Post-positivism

A paradigm that recognises the position of the observer as influencing perceptions of reality.

Criticalism

A paradigm in which knowledge is seen to be constructed by those who hold power.

The subjectivity that began to arise with post-postivism and the scepticism of the critical paradigm evolved into the postmodernist movement. Postmodernism recognises that an experience is subjectively relative to those who experience it. Within this paradigm, no single source, method, or perspective is considered superior to any other (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Postmodernism is sometimes considered synonymous with poststructuralism. While both these paradigms extend post-positivist thinking, most commentators agree that poststructuralism is a form of postmodernism that is largely concerned with theoretical constructs.

> ## Postmodernism
>
> A paradigm that posits that reality is subjectively relative to those who experience it.

At the far end of the continuum, we see the articulation of constructivism. In recent decades, the constructivist paradigm has been embraced broadly in the research community. This is particularly the case in grounded theory because of the extensive work of Charmaz (2000, 2006, 2014). Constructivism asserts that reality is not there to be discovered, either as an absolute or a positional 'truth'. Rather, within the constructivist paradigm, reality is constructed by those who experience it and is reconstructed through the research process. Ward et al. (2015) suggest that the term 'constructionist' is more appropriate in such cases as 'constructivist' does not account for the role of the researcher in the research process. These authors encourage us to consider which term best accounts for the social construction of knowledge through research.

> ## Constructivism
>
> A paradigm that asserts that reality is constructed by those who experience it.

ACTIVITY 2.2

RESEARCH PARADIGMS

Reflect on the preceding discussion. How comfortable are you with your understanding of the traditions and paradigms of relevance to research? Make a list of any unanswered questions and use them as a source of discussion with colleagues and supervisors.

The preceding discussion is provided for the purpose of considering where grounded theory fits philosophically as a research methodology. This discussion is presented from a Western perspective, representing the context within which grounded theory has evolved. You may wish to read beyond this text to fully explore these philosophies, along with their position in respect of more holistic Eastern and Indigenous philosophies, which are assuming increasingly greater significance in the research community.

WHERE DOES GROUNDED THEORY SIT?

As we have stated, methodology is the philosophy of method. Schwandt (2007, p.193) describes methodology as 'a particular social scientific discourse (a way of acting, thinking, and speaking) that occupies a middle ground between discussions of method (procedures, techniques) and discussions of issues in the philosophy of social science'. Methodology determines how the researcher thinks about a study, how they make decisions about a study, and how they position themselves to engage firstly with participants and then with the data generated/collected.

Research methodologies are distinguishable from each other because of the major philosophical foundations that underpin them. Grounded theory is a methodology that can be aligned with several different ways of thinking. The ontological question of 'truth' or the nature of reality lies at the heart of a discussion about such alignment. As Guba and Lincoln (2008, p.268) argue, 'whether or not the world has a "real" existence outside of human experience of that world is an open question'. The methodological schools of thought that shape the use of grounded theory within a given paradigm are clearly divided on the question of reality. A traditional, post-positivist approach to grounded theory posits that there is an objective reality that exists outside of human perception but that it is only ever imperfectly perceived. Grounded theorists functioning within this paradigm seek an approximation of truth through a research process that allows theory to emerge from the data. Non-traditional grounded theorists, on the other hand, assume a position where reality is understood as being 'relative to a specific conceptual scheme, theoretical framework, paradigm, form of life, society or culture' (Bernstein, 1983, p.8).

In their original work, neither Glaser nor Strauss (1967) attended to how they influenced the research process, collected data, or represented research participants. For a traditional grounded theorist who supposedly enters the field as a 'blank slate' (Glaser, 1978), data collection is straightforward, and data are self-evident with the analysis of these providing explanations and predictions. Participants' words and

actions are data that need to be obtained in as objective a manner as possible (Glaser, 1978; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Glaser (1978, 1992), as a traditional grounded theorist, is influenced in his thinking by mid-20th-century post-positivism, which results in him seeking general explanation and prediction that is not context-specific to a research site. While enrolled in his PhD at Columbia University, Glaser underwent rigorous quantitative research training, which influenced his approach to the use of grounded theory methods. The concept of emergence has a strong presence in traditional grounded theory, with the idea that, given time and the correct application of grounded theory methods, a theory will emerge from the data that is representative of an external reality.

As discussed in [Chapter 1](), while Strauss did not engage in philosophical debates at the time, his work did reflect pragmatic perspectives. Strauss studied and taught at the eminent Chicago School of Sociology at Chicago University and was a student of George Herbert Mead who first described the principles of symbolic interactionism, a theory later developed by one of his colleagues, Herbert Blumer. Philosophically, pragmatism assumes that reality is an indeterminate concept, created by individuals as they generate meaning in their world (Bryant and Charmaz, 2019).

Symbolic interactionism extends pragmatic philosophy to assume that society and self are constructed through interaction – relying on language, communication, and the social group in this process. The literature on symbolic interactionism does, however, present mixed views on the nature of reality. Early interpretations of Blumer's seminal work *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (1969) view his discussion of an 'obdurate reality' as indicative of a post-positivistic position (Annells, 1996; Charon, 2001). Blumer argues that the empirical world offers points of resistance and so is obdurate in nature. Charmaz (2000, p.523) proposes a reinterpretation of Blumer's obdurate reality to 'change our conception of it from a real world to be discovered … to a world *made real* in the minds and through the words and actions of its members'. This reformulation provides for symbolic interactionists to assume a relativist position where reality is constantly

reformulating as a fluid construction of individuals and, in turn, their social reference groups.

Critical realism has been influential in the reinterpretation of Blumer's obdurate reality in terms of social structure bound by time and context (Redman-MacLaren and Mills, 2015). Within these fixed societal structures, individuals construct their own reality to effect change. Critical realism thus takes the middle road through positivism and constructivism in asserting the existence of fixed structures within which society functions, while acknowledging that we have the capacity to exert influence through the constructions that result from social interaction (Reed, 2009). Parker (2018) produced the grounded theory of 'stigma' to explain barriers to the prevention of self-harm in Welsh secondary schools. Using critical realism as an ontological framework, she was able to identify the influence of the institutional context on adolescent self-harm behaviours. This example reinforces the limitations of symbolic interactionism from a critical realist perspective, as it fails to take account of the entities within which interaction takes place (Reed, 2009).

> ### Critical realism
>
> A paradigm that asserts the existence of fixed societal structures within which individuals construct their own reality to effect change.

Symbolic interactionism is inextricably linked with constructivism as it 'views human actions as constructing self, situation, and society' (Charmaz, 2014, p.262). Constructivism assumes a clearly defined relativist position. Constructivist grounded theorists acknowledge that they enter a field of inquiry with their own histories and theories, which require scrutiny during the research process. Charmaz's (2000, 2006, 2014) work in establishing constructivist grounded theory was ground-breaking. She 'brought relativity and subjectivity into the epistemological discussions of grounded theory' (Charmaz, 2014, pp.13–14). Her work draws on the basic tenets of symbolic interactionism in that she

recognises the generation of data as a process of co-construction with participants. Constructivist grounded theorists do not assume that theory emerges from data; analysis is itself a process of construction and thus the categories and core category that eventually make up a grounded theory are products of this construction.

So we can see that while Glaser was not too far removed from positivism, Strauss's evolved work moved grounded theory towards a more postmodern position (Charmaz, 2000). The constructivist approach extends the methodology along the continuum presented in Figure 2.1, to acknowledge and embrace the role of researcher as an integral part of their work. Regardless of the philosophical position held by a researcher, when undertaking a grounded theory study they must think about what they themselves are doing, be explicit about how and why they are doing it, and consider the effect they are having on the data that are generated and the eventual findings. In order to do this, they must establish from the outset their philosophical position in respect of their research.

POSITIONING YOURSELF AS A GROUNDED THEORIST

In this chapter, we are exploring philosophical concepts relevant to grounded theory research. Research requires an investment of self and it is therefore critical that the researcher understands their world view and how this impacts their work. You may already be very clear about how you understand yourself philosophically and in turn methodologically. For some, this hard-thinking work is part of their scholarly history and training, but others may have yet to attempt this task in an orderly way. Articulating your beliefs and feelings about the world and reflecting on these is an essential first step in undertaking grounded theory research. Some people get very uncomfortable when thinking about ethereal and abstract concepts, particularly when the subject of consideration is themselves. This self-exploration is necessary, however, as you cannot be aware of the impact of your philosophical lens until you are able to acknowledge and describe the assumptions that have led to its formulation.

ACTIVITY 2.3

PERSPECTIVES OF EXISTENCE AND REALITY

Review the preceding discussion about ontology. How do you define reality?

Based on this definition, what do you think can be known about the world, and how can that knowledge be gained?

What implications do your perspectives have for your research?

When considering the question of how we define ourselves, think about the various roles that you engage in daily. You might consider yourself an expert in your chosen professional field, but a novice researcher. In addition, you may have other 'selves' where you are a member of a religious congregation, or a particular cultural group; you may play a team sport, parent young or older children, be a spouse, a daughter, a son. All of us have multiple selves that we live out, and all of these roles impact how we think about the world. When we begin a research study, we do not only think about this work as a novice researcher – rather, we draw upon the totality of our life experience in deciding how to proceed.

The multiple selves that we live out, or the many 'hats' that we wear, influence the research questions we ask, the philosophical lens we adopt, and ultimately how we conduct a grounded study. For example, if you come to grounded theory as an experienced architect who relies upon exact, reliable measurements to carry out your work, your methodological preference may well be for a post-positivist approach. This is because your experience tells you that there is a fundamental truth about the concept of measurement that you use in your everyday life, therefore surely this same principle applies to discovering 'a' fundamental process that individuals draw upon to manage their lives. A

world governed by fundamental truth is for you a possibility, so therefore it influences how you approach your grounded theory study. Conversely, if you are a social worker who believes that a phenomenon can only be understood from the perspective of those who experience it, you are likely to undertake your research from a constructivist position.

ACTIVITY 2.4

IDENTIFYING YOUR MULTIPLE 'SELVES'

Make a list of the multiple selves that comprise your total person. Consider the complexity of your life from this perspective. How might this influence your philosophical perspective?

You will have gleaned from the discussion earlier in this chapter that ontology and epistemology are intrinsically linked. We asked you to interrogate your own philosophical position in Activity 2.3 by thinking through what you believe to be true about the nature of reality and how knowledge about the world can legitimately be obtained. But what does this mean in practical terms? The short answer to this is that your philosophical position dictates the relationship you have with the sources of data you use in your research, as well as the data itself. Simply put, you might consider yourself an objective instrument of data collection *from* participants, or a subjective active participant in data generation *with* participants.

Ultimately, in order to be methodologically congruent in your research design (as discussed in Chapter 3) you need to be conscious of your philosophical position. We cannot meaningfully separate ourselves from our grounded theory study when our view of the world (philosophical position) determines our patterns of thinking (paradigm) that in turn dictate the framework for decision making (methodology), which ultimately directs the strategies we will use to conduct our research (Figure 2.2). It is not only important to be aware of your philosophical position, however; you must also remain responsive to how this position impacts on the conduct of your research through the process of reflexivity.

PHILOSOPHICAL POSITION
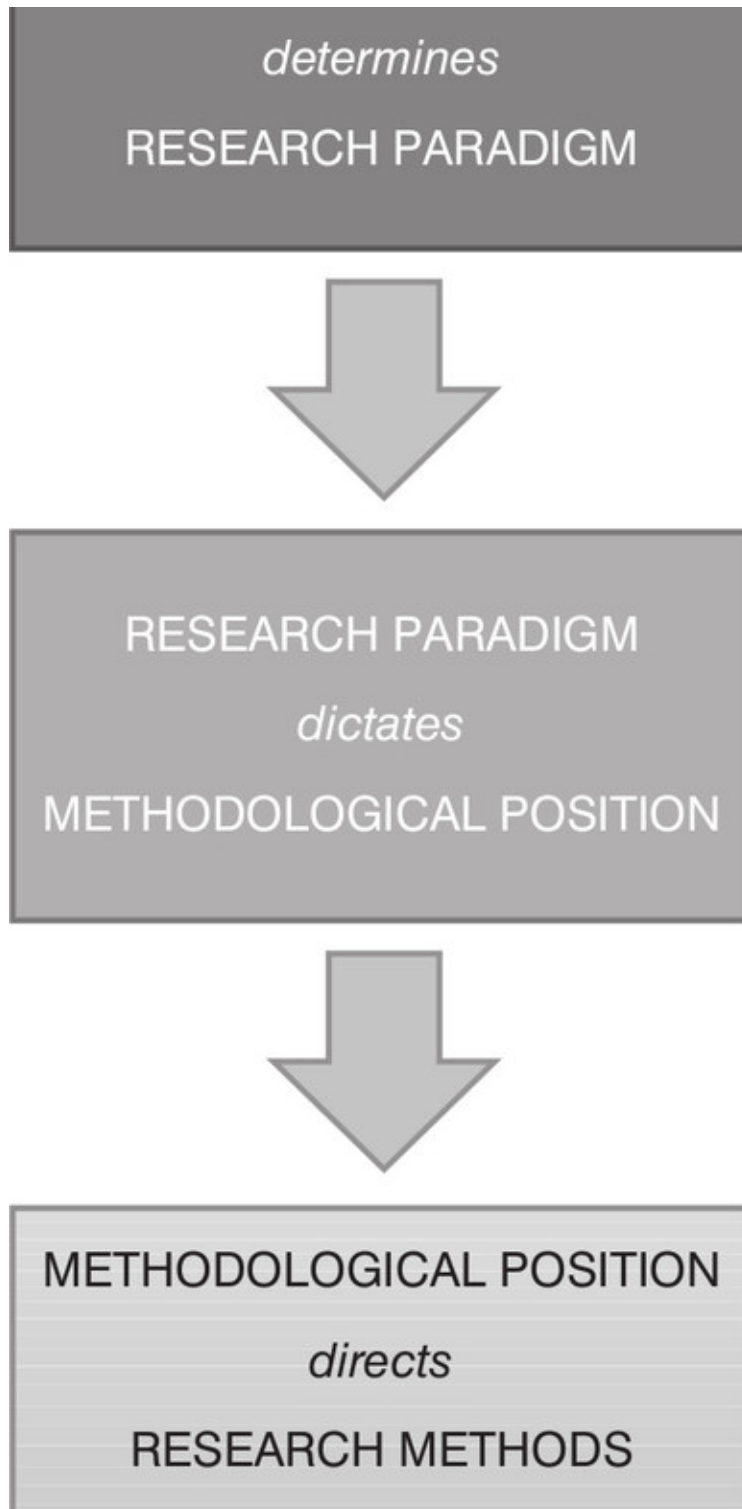
Figure 2.2 Influence of philosophical position

REFLEXIVITY

Reflexivity is an active process of systematically developing insight into your work as a researcher to guide future actions. When we consider the influence of an individual's ontological and epistemological lens, it is easy to appreciate the imperative for all grounded theorists to be reflexive researchers. Reflexivity enables the researcher to maintain awareness of their philosophical position and its impact on their work. Note that reflexivity does not necessarily aim to limit or control that impact; rather, it can be a powerful analytical tool for understanding and progressing a study.

> ## Reflexivity
>
> An active, systematic process used by the researcher to develop insight into their work and guide future actions.

While the term 'reflexivity' is not apparent in the early seminal grounded theory texts, Strauss (1987), as a symbolic interactionist, clearly identified that researchers' biographies exert influence on how they conduct a grounded theory study, and the need for this to be accounted for during the research process. Strauss and Corbin (1998) later advocate that researchers keep a written record of their metaphorical journey, usually in the form of a reflective journal, with the aim of learning from their experiences. Glaser (2001), however, rejects reflexivity as an appropriate strategy to include in a grounded theory research design, warning that it will lead to 'reflexivity paralysis' (p.47) in relation to analysis. Later readings of Glaser's position suggest that in making this statement, he is not rejecting the development of a researcher's self-insight; rather, he is rejecting a researcher's desire to locate their work in a particular theoretical construct (McGhee et al., 2007). In her work, Charmaz (2006, 2014) promotes the use of reflexivity as a critical strategy in constructivist approaches to grounded theory. She suggests that being reflexive is key to acknowledging

beliefs we may take for granted, and to recognising how these assumptions influence the processes and products of our research.

In Researcher's Voice 2.2, Kris Deering describes reflexivity as a useful tool in his PhD research.

The researcher's voice 2.2

Kris Deering on reflexivity

Kris Deering is a senior lecturer in Mental Health Nursing at the University of Exeter in the UK, and a registered psychiatric nurse. Kris has a keen interest in how service users might engage in their own personal interpretations of recovery. His PhD study is examining the processes of recovery in the context of risk management on a psychiatric hospital ward (https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kris-Deering).

Here I reflect on reflexivity within a doctoral grounded theory study. The study aimed to theorise the social processes of engaging recovery in the context of risk management on a psychiatric ward. Recovery involves personal ways to develop a meaningful life, even with mental illness, while risk management aims to minimise risks like suicide. Despite paternalistic risk management practices seen to impede recovery, patients engaging in their recovery can be a beneficial element of risk management. With limited studies in the field, the purpose of the research was to conceptualise how engaging recovery might occur.

Through reflexivity, I came to realise that my analysis was based on my preconceived ideas. Reflexivity can be more than appraising the use of research methods; it involves developing a self-awareness about the relationship with the explored phenomenon. I had felt immense guilt about engaging in some risk management practices as a psychiatric nurse, and so brought about what I call my 'rebellious self' to challenge practices I engaged in, and ideally, undo past wrongs. Initial analysis indicated a dichotomy with risk management entailing unhelpful clinical practices and recovery offering the opposite. The outcome was as I expected, so where was the 'surprise' that grounded theory literature suggests will be evident in my

findings? Although I was prepared to conduct further data generation, I could not see a way forward, as conceptually, recovery and risk management were poles apart.

Despite contention about the use of literature in grounded theory, in this study it was explored to help engage reflexivity. One notable finding was the 'shadow self' and how one may project critique on others and their practices based on negative views about the self. Such reading occurred because contradictions were found in the literature review, with helpful risk management practices aligning to an extent to participant narratives about recovery. Exhausting reasons and leaving PhD supervisors exasperated led to the obvious yet hidden conclusion – I was shaping findings entrenched in my past experiences. I had my surprise, albeit not a pleasant one. However, it felt as if a veil had been lifted as I could now see data previously concealed from my view. Amid problems about risk management was also wonderful data about engaging recovery, or ideas in how it could work. This also led to questioning my interviewing technique, finding that I focused on negative aspects of risk management. Hence, reflexivity allowed me to see the self-fulfilling prophecy I had created, challenging my view that recovery and risk management were poles apart.

So, practically, how do you 'do' reflexivity? We included the word 'systematically' in our definition of reflexivity as a reference to assuring the quality of your work as a grounded theorist. It is a continuous activity that permeates the entire research process (Dodgson, 2019), rather than simply being an activity that is undertaken at the outset of the research (although it is critical that reflexivity commences at this early stage) and then forgotten. Being present in your research, acknowledging the conscious and unconscious responses to your work, and understanding how these may influence the direction and outcome of your study, are reflexive behaviours. Maintenance of a journal and the writing of memos (as discussed in Chapter 4) can provide a written record of reflexivity, but such work requires an honest and critical lens. Through journaling and memo writing, you produce a valuable textual documentary of your lived experience as a grounded theorist.

Regardless of how you choose to do it, consciously creating a record of *how you feel* is a process of reflexive analysis that will result in much more than just an audit trail of operational and analytical decisions. Who you are, what you believe, and the things you value cannot be separated from your research (Mruck and Mey, 2019). Charmaz (1991, p.72) defines self as 'the organised set of internalised attachments, commitments, attributes, images and identifications with which a person creates a concept of self'. Shibutani (1962, p.128), an early symbolic interactionist, suggests that individuals exist at the centre of their environment, surrounded by social worlds that act as 'reference groups' for the formation of concepts of self. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, individuals have multiple 'selves', a conceptualisation that resonates with Charmaz's (2014, p.260) statement that we are '*part* of our constructed theory and this theory reflects the vantage points inherent in our varied experience, whether or not we are aware of them'.

In Researcher's Voice 2.2, Deering discusses bringing about a 'rebellious self' as a result of engaging reflexively with the research process. In doing so, he reinforces the notion that understanding multiple perspectives of self is not only important in managing preconceptions (a concept discussed further in Chapter 4), it also provides different vantage points that inform the research. This researcher demonstrates a degree of reflexivity that Charmaz refers to as 'methodological self-consciousness' (Charmaz, 2017, p.36). Being methodologically self-conscious is particularly important with respect to the relationship the researcher has with participants. Traditional grounded theorists holding an objectivist position focus on relationships with participants for the purpose of establishing access to data only, and do not consider the impact of those relationships on the process used to obtain that data (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2019). Conversely, as we move philosophically along the continuum presented in Figure 2.1, approaches to grounded theory that accept reality as positional recognise that all players in the research process contribute to the construction of the data.

ACTIVITY 2.5

REFLEXIVITY IN RESEARCH

Refer back to the list of your multiple selves that you constructed in Activity 2.4. Using a reflexive approach, consider how the nature of research you undertake might dictate which of these 'selves' is in play. Which might you engage at different stages of the research process?

In Chapter 7, we will examine data in grounded theory, their collection, generation, and analysis. Traditionally, interview is the preferred method of data generation in grounded theory studies (Ralph et al., 2014). Working directly with individuals who experience a phenomenon of interest can yield valuable data, however it relies on the ability of the researcher to develop a relationship with participants. Individuals are complex beings; both the researcher and the participants are products of their biology and history, and thus should be understood from the perspective of their broader context. Using the techniques discussed earlier can assist you as a researcher to respond to the influence of your own biography.

It is also critically important that you strive to understand your participants, to build a level of trust that extends beyond rapport, and that you work to mitigate any factors that may confound your research. When working with people of different age, gender and social status, there is a risk that 'interactional power differences' may occur, resulting in socially accepted hierarchical differentials playing out in the process of data generation (Charmaz, 2014, p.73). Remember the tenets of symbolic interactionism discussed above: how a researcher presents themselves when engaging with participants sets the tone for every action and interaction that follows.

Incorporating a reflexive agenda means seeking to understand multiple perspectives of self and others. It enables the identification of the vantage points of influence on a research study. Such positionality may, at first glance, seem methodologically consistent only with non-traditional grounded theorists. We would argue, however, that this is

also important work for those who consider themselves to be traditional grounded theorists, as the idea of maintaining objective separation without a mechanism for monitoring behaviour, feelings, and thought is impossible. Ralph et al. (2014, p.1) propose that, even when working with non-human data sources, such as static documents, 'contextual positioning' is essential to ensure a reflexive approach. Regardless of how you collect or generate data, or the sources you access to do so, analysis of your subjectivity by way of the judicious process of reflexivity can guide your own actions in a more insightful way.

While we understand that there are moments of analysis where the elements of a theory do appear to 'emerge' from the data as a result of constant comparative analysis, our firm belief is that critically analysing these flashes of brilliance/emergence in light of your own history, context, and culture remains extremely important. Even if you believe that the data have a life of their own that you are uncovering through the use of grounded theory methods (Glaser, 2001), you need to be accountable for your actions and decisions as the researcher facilitating this process. Being reflexive in your approach is the most truthful and methodologically congruent way to meet this need.

CONCLUSION

Research is a philosophical endeavour. Knowledge produced from research reflects your perspectives of reality. Becoming a successful grounded theorist requires a high level of self-insight and understanding of your ontological and epistemological position. Positioning yourself as a researcher therefore requires developing awareness of your philosophical preferences and methodological alignments. The way you use grounded theory methods is shaped by the philosophical position you assume. Using techniques to promote a reflexive approach to your research will assure the quality and integrity of your work. Be prepared, however, to do the enlightening work of examining how you, and your history, are present in the research process.

Critical thinking questions

1. Reflect back on the first activity in this chapter. Has your understanding of the concept of philosophy changed? Have you adopted a new way of thinking about the importance of philosophy in research, or perhaps integrated it into your existing perspective?
2. The next time you are in a group situation, take a moment to reflect on the presentation of other people in the group. Consider how their dress, stance, body language, and use of voice influence the way they are perceived. How do these different aspects of self symbolically speak to others in the group? How might they be perceived in different contexts with individuals of different backgrounds? What are the implications of these perceptions when working with research participants?
3. Think about the relationship between researcher and participant in the conduct of research. Do you believe that all forms of power imbalances can be effectively reduced or eliminated? What strategies or alternative data generation

methods might be employed to reduce the potential impact of differences between the researcher and the participants?

Working grounded theory

- Review the 'Working grounded theory' example presented in the Appendix. Note:

- How the researcher positions herself in her study

- How she came to arrive at this position

- The process and impact of becoming reflexive for this researcher

3 QUALITY GROUNDED THEORY PROCESSES AND PRODUCTS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help you to:

- Define the term 'quality' in relation to grounded theory research

- Describe personal, methodological, and procedural strategies that promote quality in grounded theory research

- Outline criteria for evaluating a grounded theory study

- Employ flexible criteria to evaluate a grounded theory produced by yourself and others

INTRODUCTION

Conducting research can be daunting for the novice researcher and it is expected that a conscientious beginner will have questions and concerns, particularly in the early stages of a project. Can you be sure that you are doing research 'properly'? Is your application of grounded theory methods appropriate? Will your study stand up to close scrutiny from others? How do you ensure that your efforts will produce 'good research'? In this chapter, we will discuss strategies and techniques that you can employ in the *process* of conducting your research to ensure quality. We will then turn our attention in the latter part of this chapter to the evaluation of the *products* of grounded theory. You will find the concepts discussed in this chapter useful for evaluating your own work, as well as grounded theories produced by others.

QUALITY IN GROUNDED THEORY RESEARCH

What do we mean when we talk about quality in relation to research? Quality is a characteristic of both research processes and outcomes. The concept of quality receives a good deal of attention in the literature, including considerable debate surrounding how quality can and should be evaluated with respect to research undertaken within various paradigmatic frameworks. Prior to commencing your grounded theory study, it is important that you understand what constitutes quality in research. Regardless of the philosophical position you assume, the credibility of your research outcomes is dependent on your employing measures to ensure quality throughout the entire process. In other words, you must be able to demonstrate *rigour* in the conduct of your grounded theory study.

In the context of research, the concept of quality is synonymous with rigour. Often, perceptions of rigour involve images of severe or difficult situations. The weather may be described as rigorous, as may military training or academic assessment. In such circumstances, there is a high degree of control and limited room for error. Conceptualising rigour in this way is appropriate when considering quality as it applies to the conduct of your research. This is not to suggest that you should stifle the creativity that is essential to the generation of a quality grounded theory. Rather, you must be sufficiently in control of the processes that you employ in order to accommodate or explain all factors that can impact on, and thereby potentially erode, the value of your research outcomes.

> ## Quality
>
> A characteristic of research processes and outcomes that results from the application of rigour throughout all stages of a study.

> ### Rigour
>
> Control of processes employed in a research study to account for factors that can impact outcomes.

The growing popularity of grounded theory methods over recent decades can be tied to its greater attention to procedural detail, particularly following publication of the more prescriptive guidelines devised by Strauss and Corbin in 1990 (and subsequently Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 2015; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Other researchers may employ a grounded theory design in their study because they see it as offering a smörgåsbord from which they can pick and choose what methods to use and how to use them. In conducting your research, regardless of how flexible, ethereal, or intangible you consider your philosophical position, research topic, or methodological interpretation to be, you must be rigorous in conducting your study if you wish to produce a credible outcome.

A number of factors influence quality in the conduct of grounded theory research. For convenience, we categorise these determinants as *researcher expertise*, *methodological congruence*, and *procedural precision* ([Figure 3.1](#)).
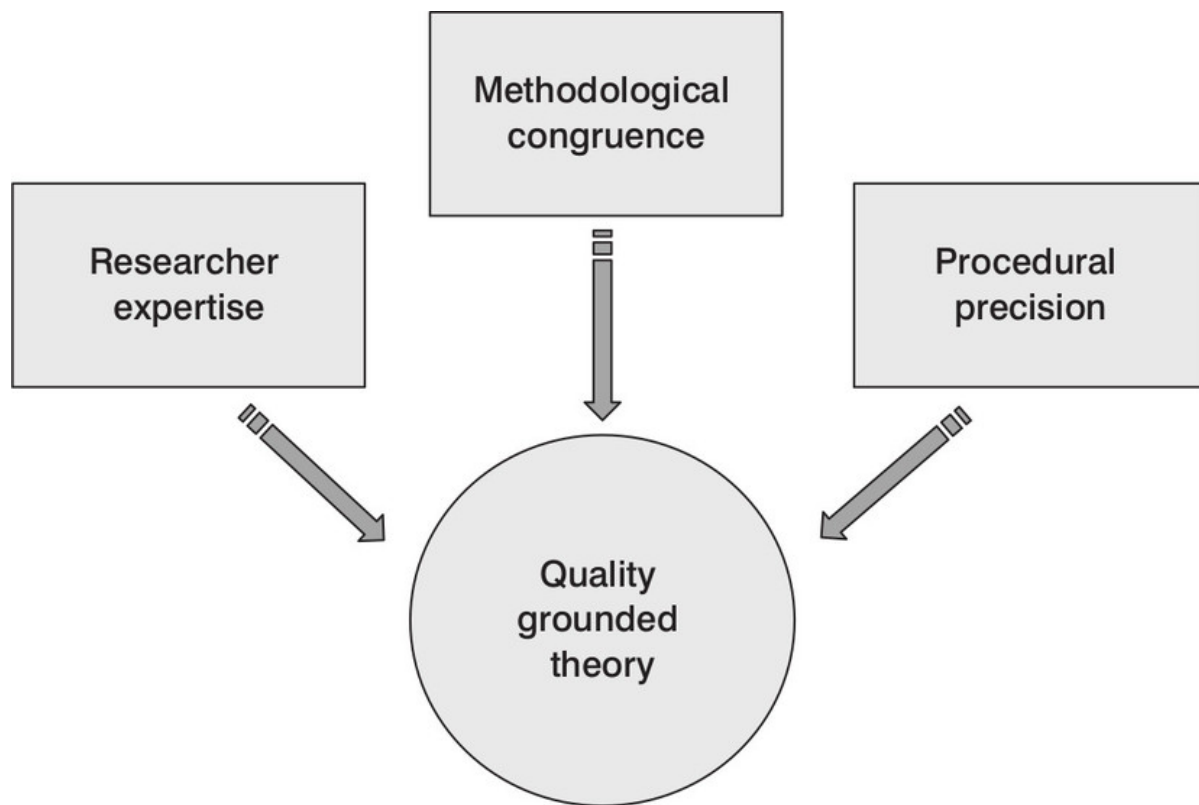
Figure 3.1 Factors influencing quality in the conduct of grounded theory research

Researcher expertise

The fact that you are reading this text suggests that you do not have extensive experience in undertaking research, or perhaps are an experienced researcher who is a newcomer to grounded theory. The complexities of grounded theory terminology and some of the original works on the topic can leave a novice researcher a little overwhelmed when commencing a study (and often throughout the later stages). Take comfort in the reassurance provided by renowned grounded theorist Phyllis Noerager Stern (2007), who confesses that even she did not truly understand grounded theory until she had been through the process of producing one herself. This phenomenon is common to many aspects of personal and professional life. In scholarship, if we view a doctoral degree as a 'research apprenticeship', we recognise this as a process of knowledge acquisition and skill development. In many cases, therefore, a researcher may have limited research experience when commencing a grounded theory study. Nevertheless, most will possess experiential knowledge that will make an important contribution as they undertake their research. Even the neophyte researcher is likely to have several generic skills that will contribute to their research endeavours. Skills in scholarly writing, accessing resources, and the ability to manage a project are examples of such abilities.

> ## Researcher expertise
>
> The skills, knowledge, and abilities that a researcher brings to the conduct of their study.

You may draw comfort from the preceding discussion and our assurances that your generic skills will stand you in good stead as you undertake your grounded theory study. Nonetheless, you will need to acquire considerable knowledge about grounded theory methods from the beginning phase of the conceptualisation of your research design through to theory generation. This can be achieved through a variety of

means and should be consistent with your resources and preferred scholarly style. In choosing to read this text, you are no doubt aware that there are a number of grounded theory publications that will aid you in knowledge development. While you need not read all from cover to cover, there is enormous variation in the style and content of these resources and you should seek them out in order to establish what they are able to offer you in terms of understanding grounded theory methods and processes from your own methodological perspective.

In most instances, it is the philosophical position of the author(s) of these texts that will determine their approach to grounded theory. The stage at which a given text was written determines the author's focus and reflects major developments in grounded theory at that time (see Chapter 1). Grounded theory is, and will continue to be, a work in progress and you should be sure to access all editions of a title – do not assume that later editions are essentially the same as earlier ones. Whether or not you choose to align yourself with a given author or approach to grounded theory, be sure to read widely and with purpose. Keep an open mind and be willing to learn from the various grounded theorists who have contributed to the literature. You will be doing yourself a disservice to avoid scholarly contributions from authors who you feel do not subscribe to your adopted position on grounded theory. You may also find that colleagues and supervisors may attempt to steer you in one direction or another. Be sure to listen to all such advice, but do not feel obliged to take a direction that shuts you off from alternative views.

In addition to extensive reading of the available literature, you should explore other options to develop your knowledge, skills, and understanding of research methods. Opportunities to participate in workshops that specialise in grounded theory should be seized; however, these are often limited. You should nevertheless seek out conferences, workshops, and seminars that address research issues generally as these provide an opportunity to discuss your research activities with other researchers who have varying levels of experience and expertise. There are a range of resources available on the internet, including articles, special interest groups, and forums that will promote your engagement with the research community and provide you with a wealth of resources. In Researcher's Voice 3.1, Jenna Bradford

discusses how she addressed the limitations in her level of expertise using various strategies.

The researcher's voice 3.1

Jenna Bradford on developing researcher expertise

Jenna Bradford spent 12 years as a primary school teacher and leader. She has a particular interest in the experiences, motivations, and feelings of primary school teachers. Her PhD is based on examining, and providing a platform for, teacher voice, with reference to the attrition and retention of primary teachers in England.

After refining my research questions, I settled on a constructivist approach to grounded theory. Reading about the work of Kathy Charmaz influenced my decision; I felt there was resonance between the philosophical position of Charmaz and the values – such as empathy – that I embrace and endeavour to represent through the research process. Though my career has previously been in primary school teaching, I concurrently studied for a counselling qualification – this undoubtedly influenced the selection of this interpretivist methodology that would place participant voice front and centre, while acknowledging that perceptions of reality are subjective. I should also state that the methodology worked to answer my research questions! When deciding on a constructivist approach, I recognised that I was in the 'unconscious incompetence' phase of my initial year of research. This was a comfortable place to be as confidence built in my previous career was still palpable.

Working with grounded theory became more uncomfortable as I began to uncover just how little I knew about the methodology – in particular, its history, guidance for data collection, and analysis. Nagel et al. (2015) present a comprehensive and reassuring account of difficulties encountered by researchers using a constructivist approach to grounded theory – this was incredibly useful and a resource I wish I had discovered sooner!

One such difficulty I encountered was an inability to articulate the differences between the different approaches to using grounded theory. In overcoming this difficulty, I employed a range of strategies:

- I returned to specific grounded theory texts or chapters, which was invaluable for troubleshooting

- I drew on the support of my supervisor who was sympathetic to my struggle, though their expertise does not lie in this paradigmatic perspective

- I began to seek greater opportunity to review the difficulties faced by others (to contextualise the difficulty and begin to work through solutions). Engaging with practical online resources such as Twitter feeds, videos, websites, and blogs proved useful

- I sought out and familiarised myself with recent theses, which employ a constructivist approach to grounded theory

Encountering difficulties can lead to crises of confidence, in turn resulting in procrastination and task avoidance for novice researchers. Using the above approaches in tackling future difficulties, or when battling crises of confidence, would prove useful. Seizing opportunities to acknowledge research strengths can also expedite the journey through any crisis of confidence. Strengths could lie in diverse pockets of the research venture, such as ensuring philosophical alignment with personal values and being reflexive throughout the research process. Furthermore, conversations with participants can fuel motivation to provide a platform for their views to be heard, serving to augment and highlight the value of the research.

In my case, these strategies proved to drive my research forward, enabling me to abscond from the insecurity I had felt. Noting positive experiences through the grounded theory process can build researcher confidence, enable expertise to be

recognised and monopolised, and allow a movement from conscious incompetence to conscious competence in the use of this methodology.

ACTIVITY 3.1

SEARCH FOR INTERNET RESOURCES

Conduct an internet search for resources to assist in developing your expertise in grounded theory research. Don't limit your search to documents – there are several short courses, social media pages, and videos that you may find valuable.

Identify and sign up to online research communities to engage in discussion with researchers from a broad range of disciplines with varying levels of expertise.

Corbin and Strauss (2015) identify conditions that foster quality in research, the majority of which relate directly to personal and professional researcher characteristics. Clarity of purpose, commitment to hard work, and internal motivation to do research are examples of these characteristics. Note that these are largely a manifestation of individual attitude. Your attitude will determine how successful you are in achieving the personal and professional goals that are tied to your research. We often hear potential researchers lament that they have yet to find a topic that they feel intensely passionate about. We often advise novice researchers that their research study should be managed as a *project*. You need to have an appreciation of the importance of your study, you need to feel an affinity for the topic area, and you must be committed to achieving quality outcomes. These characteristics are more important than a romanticised attachment to an idea of research.

Methodological congruence

Throughout this text, we emphasise the importance of acknowledging your personal philosophy and relating this position to your study area. How you see the world will influence how you approach your study and the techniques that you choose to achieve your research goals. Methodological congruence occurs when there is accordance between:

- your personal philosophical position

- the stated aim of your research

- the methodological approach you employ to achieve this aim.

Methodological congruence is the foundation of a credible grounded theory study. Goulding (2017, p.66) advises that it is important to avoid 'methodological ambiguity' in grounded theory, urging that researchers ensure alignment between the underlying philosophy, aim, and methodology employed in a research design. This alignment needs to not only be assured in the process of conducting research, it needs to be visible in the reporting of a study. Zamani and Babaei (2021) conducted a systematic review of urban planning and design research purporting to use grounded theory. Of the 42 studies examined, 34 failed to articulate the position of the researcher in relation to the work. In an earlier study exploring research in the area of software engineering, Stol et al. (2016) found that only 16 of 52 papers claiming to use grounded theory adequately described their use of the methodology. As few as five of the articles reviewed made any reference to the philosophical position underpinning the study. Often, factors such as a lack of understanding of grounded theory methodology, or a desire to confer legitimacy on a piece of research (Stol et al., 2016), can lead to such methodological appropriation. Regardless of the reason, in cases such as these, where methodological intent is not borne out, congruence is likely lacking.

Methodological congruence

Accordance between the researcher's personal philosophical position, the stated aims of the research, and the methodological approach.

Failure to demonstrate methodological congruence will bring into question the quality of your research. Invest time, prior to the commencement of your research, in establishing methodological congruence. You need to be able to engender trust (in both yourself and the outcomes of your study) among those most likely to benefit from your research efforts. Do not make promises that you do not keep in conducting your research. Do not describe your study as grounded theory when it does not achieve this status. Do be honest about the limitations of your research. Do acknowledge and rectify any philosophical and methodological inconsistencies as they arise. Your research design will no doubt continue to evolve; such is the nature of grounded theory. The construction of a sturdy anchor will ensure that you do not drift too far off course as your study progresses.

Procedural precision

As you read through the following sections of this text, you will come to appreciate that the process of undertaking grounded theory research is iterative and evolving. Unlike many other approaches to research, it is not possible at the outset of your study to identify exactly where you will be led by your data and concurrent analytical developments. This is not to suggest that you are at the mercy of forces beyond your control in the implementation of your study, but it is here that your expertise as a researcher will be tested (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Careful attention paid to the rigorous application of grounded theory methods is critical if you wish to develop theory that will be judged as a quality product (Glaser, 2004). Procedural precision is the deliberate, planned, and consistent application of grounded theory methods in the conduct of research.

> ### Procedural precision
>
> The deliberate, planned, and consistent application of grounded theory methods in the conduct of research.

Burns (1989, p.49) discusses the similar concept of 'procedural rigour' in respect of qualitative research in particular. In this work, she focuses almost exclusively on processes related to the generation and collection of data. This perspective is limited for our purposes, in that it does not address the fact that grounded theory involves complex processes that precede and surpass the gathering of data.
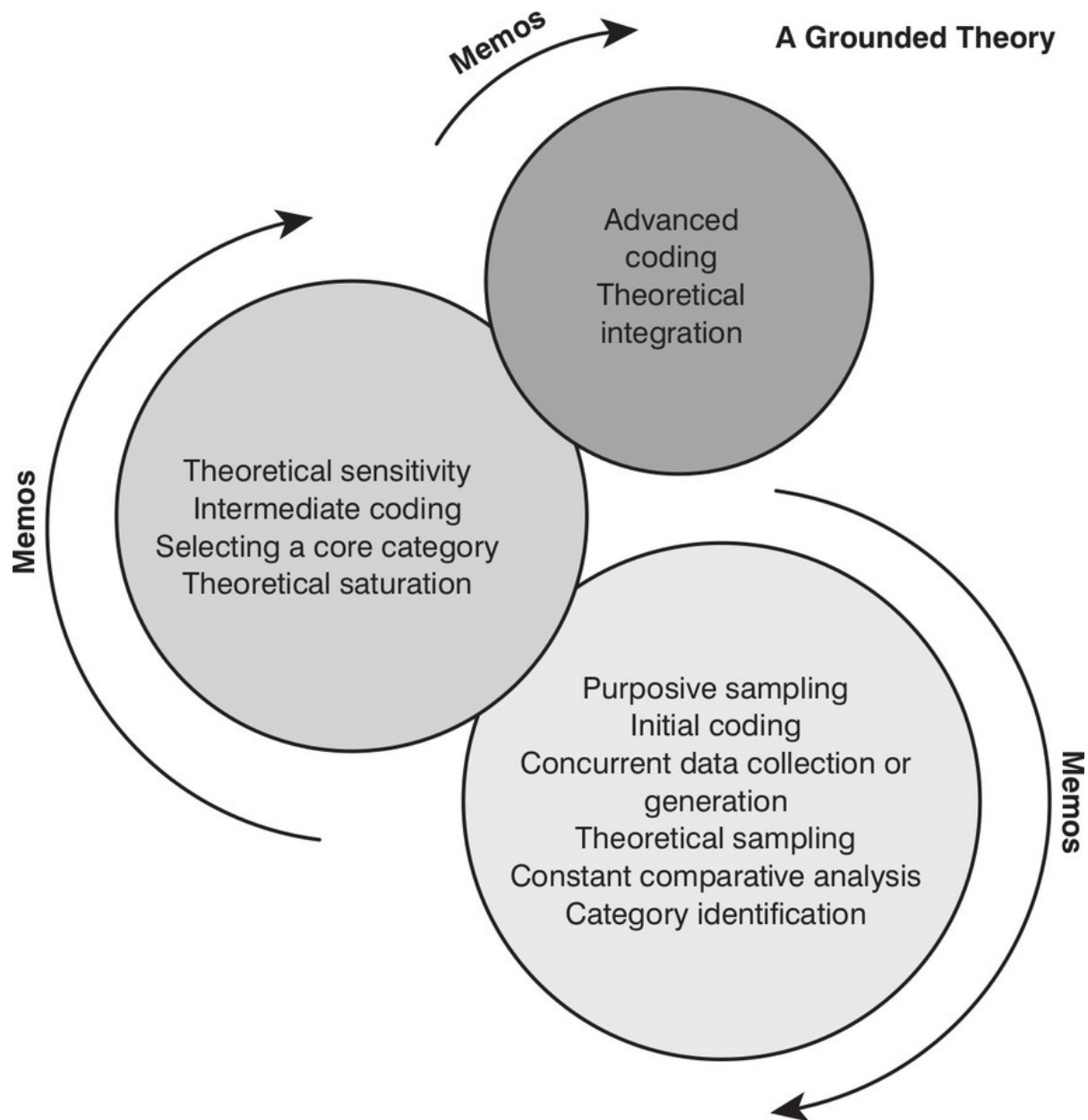
Figure 3.2 Essential grounded theory methods

As you read through this text, you will see the use of grounded theory methods (presented in Figure 3.2) described in practical terms, with the intent of developing your skills in their use and your appreciation of the importance of meticulous application. The use of memos, as a key strategy in grounded theory research, is given special attention in

. In the meantime, we will examine some general concepts that permeate the entire grounded theory research process. To ensure procedural precision, you must pay due attention to:

- maintaining an audit trail

- managing data and resources

- demonstrating procedural logic.

Maintenance of an audit trail is essential in a grounded theory project. The decisions that you make in relation to your research need to be captured as you carry out your research activities. Analysis is a process of abstraction that requires attention to be paid to subtle nuances and ethereal relationships. No matter how good your memory, it is unlikely that you will be able to recall at later stages of a project the conceptual connections you made following an intense analytical session. Maintaining a record of research activities, changes in research direction, and a rationale for choices made can protect you from loss of confidence and prevent you from 'second guessing' the decisions made. Developing confidence in your own actions is a prerequisite for securing the confidence of those who may judge the products of your research. How you record events and decisions throughout your study is a personal choice. You may retain a log book, a diary, or an electronic file for this purpose. Incorporating this process into memos, as discussed in , is a practical approach and one that we recommend.

> ## Audit trail
>
> A record of decisions made in relation to the conduct of research.

Cutcliffe and McKenna (2004, p.129) argue that audit trails are the result of 'positivistic concerns' that are not consistent with the

philosophical foundations of interpretivist perspectives. These authors reject the value of audit trails, particularly if the researcher is an 'expert', and instead refer readers to outcome criteria for evaluating research, such as those discussed later in this chapter. We, on the other hand, contend that a requirement for transparent accountability, whether in professional or scholarly activities, is incontrovertible. One cannot argue that experience negates the need for demonstrating procedural precision in research work. Research conducted within the qualitative tradition may result in the generation of concepts through more ethereal means. This does not mean that the tangible processes that foster and engender such intuitive renderings cannot be articulated. In contrast to Cutcliffe and McKenna (2004), Burns (1989) argues that audit trails should be so detailed as to result in other researchers being able to take the same data, replicate your processes, and reach similar conclusions. As we emphasise throughout this text, each grounded theory researcher will have an individual perspective on a piece of research and a unique relationship with the data, including that which was gathered by someone else. In such cases, the outcome of a second researcher's experience with the data is unlikely to exactly mirror that of the first; however, in our experience, the process of abstraction produces findings that reflect analogous concepts.

When planning your study, you should make decisions about how you intend to manage the data that you collect. Qualitative data, for example, is often obtained from a relatively small number of sources, yet the amount of data generated from even a single interview can be extensive. You need to establish mechanisms to record, store, retrieve, analyse, and review data and other resources that you will generate and collect while undertaking your research. As we will discuss in Chapter 5, various software programs are available that will help you to organise and manage your data. These range from simple word-processing and spreadsheet applications, through common quantitative data analysis systems, to powerful qualitative data management programs that can store digital voice recordings, interview transcripts, images, and memos. Whatever system you decide to use, remember that these are tools to assist you in the conduct of your research. It is not what approach you use, but rather how you use it that will determine how effective your data management procedures will be.

Regardless of how you choose to manage your data, your system should be logical and secure, and your files should be backed up frequently. An awful lot of analytical products can be produced in a single day of intense activity, products that can be wiped away in seconds because of a virus or system failure. The way you store your data, the duration for which you retain it, and whether it may be used for secondary analysis in a future study (as discussed in Chapter 7) will be governed by the prescriptive policies of institutional bodies (such as review boards and ethics committees) and you should therefore be familiar with these.

Grounded theory methods are inherently logical, which is often a factor that many researchers find attractive. In this chapter, we emphasise the relationship between rigorous use of these methods and a quality end product. Correct application of essential grounded theory methods will safeguard this procedural logic, thereby preventing credibility gaps in your research. You will no doubt experience analytical breakthroughs while working with your data. The generation of abstract theory from concrete data is dependent on conceptual leaps, many of which may occur at unexpected times, such as when you are asleep (Burns, 1989). Our own experience is that analytical breakthroughs are most likely to occur when pen or computer keyboard are inaccessible, such as in the shower or while driving! Despite the disregard your subconscious self may have for due process, you must be careful to preserve procedural logic by returning to your original data to ensure that conceptual leaps can be supported by your analysis, thus avoiding bringing into question the grounding of your theory.

ACTIVITY 3.2

MANAGING ANALYTICAL BREAKTHROUGHS

Do you experience epiphanies at inconvenient times? Do you have processes for recording these? Some people report keeping a notebook by their bedside or tracing diagrams on steamy shower screens! As you progress in a research study, you are likely to find that your subconscious may be working overtime and solutions to procedural and analytical problems may arise unexpectedly. Give some thought to how you might capture these breakthroughs when they occur.

Keeping track of the processes used in your research is an investment in your credibility. In so doing, you are positioning yourself well to respond to questions relating to how you came to the end point of your analysis, such as may be required, for example, when presenting an oral defence of your dissertation or when publishing your theory. While publication constraints in scholarly journals may limit your ability to articulate fully the measures that you employed to preserve quality, you should nevertheless endeavour to refer to these, where possible, in the reporting of your methods. Remember that procedures to ensure quality must not only be done, they must also be seen to be done.

EVALUATING THE FINAL PRODUCT

To this point in the chapter, we have discussed the importance of ensuring quality throughout the grounded theory research process. Once a grounded theory study is complete, an evaluation of the final product can establish whether efforts to ensure quality have been effective. Evaluation is the process of judging research outcomes using the criteria established for that purpose. In most instances, the only opportunity to evaluate the products of a research study is based on what is presented in published articles and summary reports. Many textbooks provide guidelines for the critique of published research studies. These guidelines tend to focus on whether there is evidence that the strategies and techniques associated with a given research paradigm were correctly applied by the researcher when conducting the study.

> ## Evaluation
>
> The process of judging research outcomes using criteria established for that purpose.

In the positivist paradigm, the prescriptive objectivity required of the traditional scientific method dictates a highly structured framework for the evaluation of studies in which numerical data is the unit of analysis. In non-positivist approaches, studies relying on textual data require more flexible criteria, often tailored to the specific methodology employed. This flexibility and acceptance of subjectivity in the research process can lead to suggestions that studies based in the positivist paradigm are more likely to demonstrate rigour. Debates about the relative value of research drawn from each paradigm are beyond the scope of this text. However, it is worth noting that concerns about quality in research were the impetus behind the development of grounded theory methods.

With the publication of their seminal text *Discovery*, Glaser and Strauss (1967) heralded a body of work that demonstrated how rigorous processes could be applied to research that did not fit a positivist model (Fielding, 2005; Wasserman et al., 2009). Half a century later, the battle of paradigmatic superiority, at least in respect of grounded theory, has largely been settled. Rolfe (2006) argues that it is not constructive to dichotomise quantitative and qualitative research traditions for the purpose of evaluating the quality of a study. Perhaps this is no more evident than in the conduct of grounded theory research. While most grounded theory research tends to be qualitative, the methodology 'works with any data' (Glaser, 2004, p. 12) and we see quality studies being produced using both numerical and textual data. McBride and Kevern (2018) analysed documents and literature to investigate China–US intercountry adoption. These authors used the flexibility inherent in the methodology to generate theory grounded in both quantitative and qualitative data. This study reinforces the point that we made earlier; researcher expertise, methodological congruence, and procedural precision, ultimately determine quality outcomes in grounded theory research.

When you attempt to judge the quality and value of a grounded theory produced by others, or indeed when others evaluate the theory generated by you, certain specific criteria can be applied to aid in this process. In the following section, we will discuss three approaches to evaluation that can assist you in judging the worth of a grounded theory: prima facie evaluation; evaluation using classic criteria; and comprehensive evaluation. Whether you are evaluating a grounded theory as a scholarly exercise or for the purpose of practical application (as discussed in Chapter 10), you will find that these guidelines will assist you. You need not apply them in a rigid or ordered manner; their value will be determined by the specific nature of the research and its intent (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Draw from the following discussion what you need to enable you to appraise critically a grounded theory for your specific purpose.

Prima facie evaluation

Before we discuss more formal approaches to evaluation, it is useful to examine the assessment of a grounded theory on the basis of face validity. From your own experience, you will be aware that your approach to reading and reviewing research and other published work is dependent on your reason for doing so. Some articles may require a cursory review of the abstract, while others require a thorough critical appraisal. This is also the case with the evaluation of a grounded theory. Prima facie evaluation may be undertaken as a precursor to more formal evaluation, using approaches such as those described below, or you may use it to make a preliminary judgement about the value of a given study before investing further time in its review. Either way, you will find prima facie evaluation useful in that it will give you an overall feel for the quality of a piece of grounded theory research, either your own or that of another researcher.

Research that has been peer reviewed is, of course, likely to be more reliable than that which has not, yet do not assume that simply because a paper is published, it is credible. The pressure on researchers to publish has seen a surge in the number of disreputable predatory publishers offering authors opportunities to publish their work, with limited scrutiny and usually for a price. Even reputable publication houses can sometimes publish work of dubious quality and a lot of information can be gleaned from a prima facie evaluation. Review the overall quality of writing and expression. A lack of attention to detail in presentation can suggest similar failings in the actual conduct of the research. As discussed earlier in this chapter, many published articles described as grounded theory research cannot legitimately make this claim. Most often, while the researchers may have employed grounded theory methods, there is a clear failure to move beyond a fundamental description of phenomena.

ACTIVITY 3.3

PRIMA FACIE EVALUATION OF GROUNDED THEORY

Conduct a search of the literature for a study claiming to be grounded theory research, or refer to one you may have already collected. What is your initial perception of the value of this research? Does the general style and tone suggest a quality piece of work? On the face of it, do the stated aims seem appropriate for a grounded theory study? Do the researchers present a final theoretical scheme or at least indicate intent to generate theory? Is the explanation of phenomena a key objective of this study or do the researchers simply state that their intention is to describe and/or explore?

Classic criteria

Glaser and Strauss's (1967) intent to address the perceived lack of rigour in research aiming to generate theory is evident in their identification of specific criteria for the evaluation of a grounded theory. In this seminal text, these authors question the value of existing criteria for judging the credibility of theory generated directly from the data. As was discussed in Chapter 1, grounded theory has established itself as a distinct paradigm in the broader research context (Holton, 2007). Recognition of this fact has seen evaluation criteria evolve with the work of grounded theorists in recent decades. The most cited approaches to judging grounded theory research, which we refer to as 'classic criteria', are summarised in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Classic approaches for judging grounded theory research

Glaser and Strauss (1967): Fitness Understanding Generality Control	Glaser (1978): Fit Work Relevance Modifiability		
	Glaser (1992): Fit Work Relevance	Strauss and Corbin (1990): Data Research process Empirical grounding	

		Strauss and Corbin (1998):	Charmaz (2006):
	Modifiability Parsimony Scope	Data Theory Research process Empirical grounding	Credibility Originality Resonance Usefulness
		Corbin and Strauss (2008): 10 basic criteria 13 additional criteria	
		Corbin and Strauss (2015): 16 methodological consistency checkpoints 17 quality and applicability checkpoints	**Charmaz (2014):** Credibility Originality Resonance Usefulness

Glaser and Strauss (1967) discuss evaluation in broad terms in their original work. Their emphasis on judging credibility, as is the case throughout the text, is on rigour in the application of strategies, techniques, and methods for the purpose of producing theory that is

accurately grounded in the data. Presentation of a clear, integrated theory that draws the reader in and provides evidence of logical conclusions and their relationship to the data, is seen by these authors as the key element of a credible grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) do, however, acknowledge the difficulty that the researcher often faces in presenting a theory that can withstand critical appraisal within the limitations of standard publication parameters. They believe that the onus rests with both the researcher and the readers to use appropriate judgement to ensure that an accurate appraisal of published research is possible.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) discuss the criteria presented in Table 3.1 in the context of the application of grounded theory. As the practical applicability of a grounded theory is the ultimate measure of its value, appraisal in this context is appropriate. These authors suggest that the theory should demonstrate *fitness* for the field of its intended use, will facilitate *understanding* in those who work in the area, and have sufficient *generality* that it can be flexible in application while allowing the user *control* over its use. Glaser (1978) speaks of the need for a grounded theory to have *fit* with respect to the theory fitting the data, and states that the theory must also *work* in that it should possess explanatory and predictive power, therefore demonstrating *relevance*. These three criteria were presented in the first chapter of *Discovery*, although not addressed in the level of detail that Glaser (1978) later devotes to their discussion. The criterion of *modifiability* was also added at this stage to accommodate later variation and ensure the continued relevance of a theory.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) provide a comprehensive discussion of evaluation in their initial text. These authors identify *data*, the *research process*, and *empirical grounding* of the final theory as being key elements for judgement, with several specific criteria being provided in relation to the latter two points. This discussion did not escape critique in Glaser's (1992) rebuttal, in which he restated his earlier four precepts as the essential criteria for evaluating a grounded theory. He also included concepts of *parsimony* and *scope* in explanatory power as additional criteria, elements that had also been touched on in a broader context in earlier work.

In the follow-up edition of *Basics of Qualitative Research*, Strauss and Corbin (1998) expand on their previous work in relation to evaluation, adding the criterion of making judgements about the theory itself and extending the discussion of empirical grounding to include the need for the theory to stand the test of time. It is interesting that Corbin's treatment of the issue of evaluation in the third and fourth editions (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 2015) is different from that of the earlier versions when Strauss was at the helm. Greater attention is given to the concept of quality in research, particularly in respect of process and researcher attributes. In the 2008 edition, new criteria are presented for judging grounded theory research and the lists of criteria presented in the first and second editions are combined to form additional criteria. By 2015, these criteria had evolved into 'Checkpoints' for evaluating the methodological consistency, quality, and applicability of a grounded theory. In both these later editions, Corbin described the difficulty she had in writing about evaluation and it is clear that she struggles to accept commonly used terminology. This admission is evident in the diversity in her approach to the topic across these texts.

Charmaz (2006, 2014) reasserts the importance of applying evaluation criteria in accordance with purpose and context. She simplifies the issue of evaluation by reducing the process to four criteria: credibility, which reflects logic and conceptual grounding; originality, including reference to the significance of the study; resonance, which considers the need for the theory to have meaning and scope for all those for whom it may be relevant; and usefulness, in relation to knowledge development and practical application. Consistent with her constructivist position, Charmaz goes beyond focusing on reductionist concepts in the process of evaluation. Rather, as commended by Corbin and Strauss (2015), she emphasises the importance of the creative elements brought to the end product by the researcher.

Comprehensive evaluation

The established classic criteria discussed in the preceding section vary in scope from few overarching domains proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), through extensive lists of checkpoints suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2015), to more abstract categories of questions proposed by Charmaz (2014). You will find these works useful resources to evaluate your own work and that of others. As a novice researcher, however, you may feel overwhelmed by the breadth and complexity of these approaches. We suggest that a comprehensive evaluation can be effectively achieved through a focus on the factors discussed earlier in this chapter as being critical to quality in grounded theory research (Figure 3.1). To assist you in applying these criteria, questions addressing each domain are presented in Table 3.2. Your use of these questions should be modified in accordance with the purpose of your evaluation and the nature of the study you are examining. A study purporting to have generated a grounded theory, for example, will have a greater obligation to respond positively to the questions posed than one that employs grounded theory methods in the context of a diverse study design.
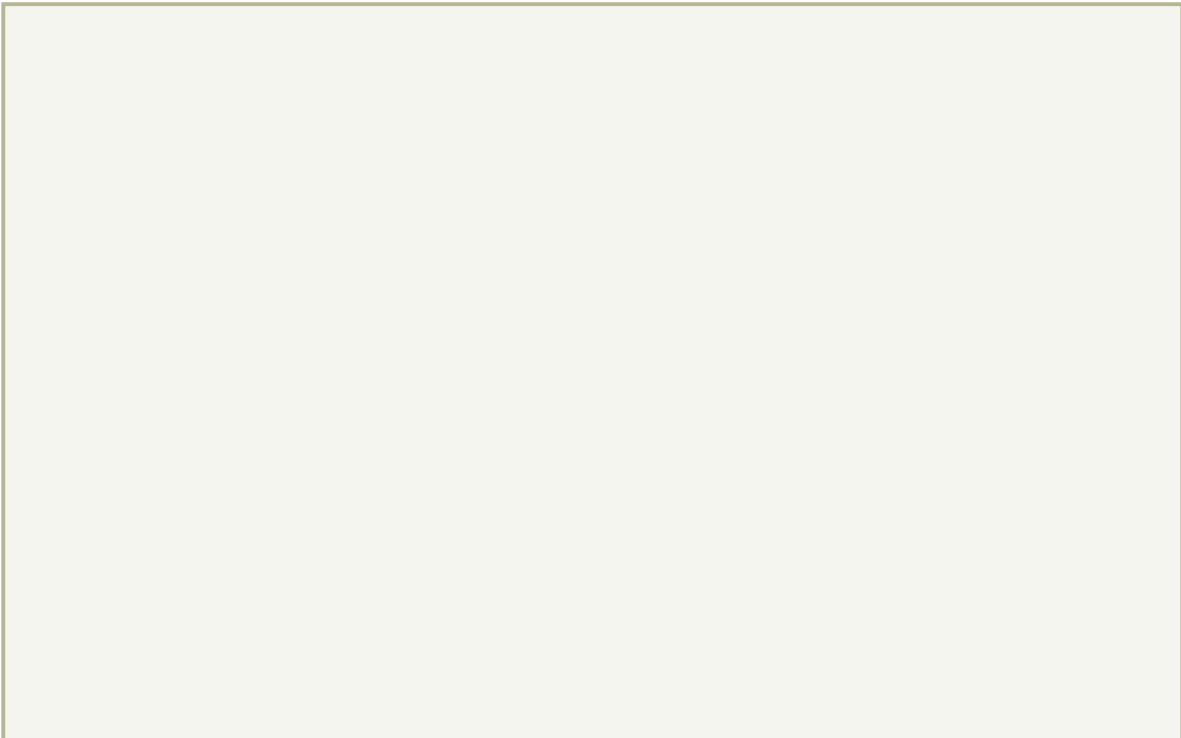
ACTIVITY 3.4

Table 3.2 Criteria for evaluating grounded theory research

Domain	Criteria	Yes/No
Researcher expertise	Does the researcher demonstrate skills in scholarly writing?	
	Is there evidence that the researcher is familiar with grounded theory methods?	
	Has the researcher accessed and presented citations of relevant methodological resources?	
	Are limitations in the study design and research process acknowledged and addressed where possible?	

Domain	Criteria	Yes/No
Methodological congruence	Has the researcher articulated their philosophical position?	
	Is grounded theory an appropriate research strategy for the stated aims of the study?	
	Do the outcomes of the research achieve the stated aims?	
	Is a grounded theory presented as the end product of the research?	
	Are philosophical and methodological inconsistencies identified and addressed?	
Procedural precision	Is there evidence that the researcher has employed memoing in support of the study?	
	Has the researcher indicated the mechanisms by which an audit trail was maintained?	

Domain	Criteria	Yes/No
	Are procedures described for the management of data and resources?	
	Is there evidence that the researcher has applied grounded theory methods appropriately in the context of the study described?	
	Does the researcher make logical connections between the data and abstractions?	
	Is there evidence that the theory is grounded in the data?	
	Is the final theory credible?	
	Are the potential applications examined and explored?	

Undertaking an evaluation of the work of others is not only necessary when considering the potential application of a grounded theory, but is also an important exercise in developing your skills as a researcher. Be constructively critical in your appraisal of the work of others, but also remember that reflexive evaluation of your own work is necessary to ensure that the grounded theory you produce has merit and potential practical value. While research reports, dissertations, and theses often include an evaluation of the completed grounded theory, constraints of space in professional journals limit the potential for the inclusion of self-

critique in most publications. You may, however, see papers discussing research methods that address the issue of evaluation in more depth. One such example is provided by Jovanović et al. (2017), who investigated role transition in a software organisation in Spain. The publication produced by these authors includes an extended discussion evaluating their work. Through such transparent reporting, these researchers demonstrate accountability of themselves and the credibility of their study. Adopt this level of transparency in your own research. Be your own critic first, address the limitations of your work and produce research outputs that are credible, and engender respect from others and pride in yourself.

CONCLUSION

Quality is important in many aspects of our personal and professional lives. In regard to research, quality is critical if the outcomes of a study are to be respected. In grounded theory research, quality is dependent on attention to several factors that can influence the potential value of the resultant theory. Researcher expertise, methodological congruence, and procedural precision are required if both the researcher and study outcomes are to be deemed credible. Your perception of quality, and your attitude to it in your own research, will determine how successful you are in producing a grounded theory. Quality in research is not simply an afterthought to be considered once the analysis is complete; rather, it must be at the forefront of your thinking during the conduct of your study. This chapter has provided guidance for the production and evaluation of a quality grounded theory to assist you in ensuring that the outcomes of your research will have value for the individuals and environments most likely to be affected by your work.

Critical thinking questions

1. Consider your own definition of the word 'quality'. How often do you see reference to quality in everyday life? In what contexts is quality most likely to be an important consideration? How does your conceptualisation of quality impact on your feelings in relation to your own research?
2. What characteristics do you possess that may affect the quality of your research? Think about both the strengths and weaknesses that you have that may impact on how you conduct your grounded theory study. What resources or strategies could you employ to enable you to capitalise on the strengths and overcome your weaknesses?
3. Identify some experienced grounded theory researchers that you have access to who have demonstrated quality in the conduct of research. Consider what you may ask them,

given the opportunity, about their perception of quality and rigour in their own work.

4. Consider the criteria for evaluating a grounded theory outlined in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 of this chapter. Note how these criteria have evolved over the decades. What influences do you think have driven this evolution?

Working grounded theory

Review the 'Working grounded theory' example presented in the Appendix. Note:

- The attitude of this researcher towards issues of quality from the outset of her study

- The personal, methodological, and procedural strategies that she relied on to promote quality in her grounded theory research

- The alignment of these strategies with her chosen methodological approach

PART II PLANNING A SUCCESSFUL GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

4 THINKING LIKE A GROUNDED THEORIST

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help you to:

- Define the term 'theoretical sensitivity'

- Describe strategies and techniques that can be used to raise your theoretical sensitivity

- Outline processes for managing the impact of preconceptions on your research

- Discuss the significance of memoing as an essential grounded theory method

- Begin to think like a grounded theorist

INTRODUCTION

Students and novice researchers embarking on a grounded theory study are often concerned at their ability to think in the abstract and conceptual ways that are necessary for developing theory from data. The terminology itself can be overwhelming, driving those new to the methodology to seek comfort in aligning themselves with one of the seminal grounded theorists. As we reinforce throughout this text, specific dedication to a particular genre or generation of grounded theory is not essential. Rather, possessing an understanding of the methods that characterise grounded theory is critical. Through such understanding, you will be prepared to undertake research that aims to develop theory from data. In this chapter, we address three elements critical for theory development – theoretical sensitivity, managing preconceptions, and memoing. Embracing these elements from the outset of your research will have you thinking like a grounded theorist, enhancing your confidence in your ability to produce a grounded theory.

THE GROUNDED THEORY DIFFERENCE

The choice of any research design is determined by the aims of the particular study. Many qualitative studies seek to describe and explore phenomena. The grounded theory methods described throughout this text take research beyond simple description and exploration. Grounded theory differs from other methodologies in that it serves to explain the phenomenon being studied. The strategies used in data collection and analysis result in the generation of theory that explicates a phenomenon from the perspective and in the context of those who experience it. Theory as the product of investigative processes is the hallmark of grounded theory research. This theory is directly abstracted from, or grounded in, data generated and collected by the researcher.

Not all studies purporting to be grounded theory actually result in a theory that demonstrates explanatory power. Some may claim to generate theory, yet the process of abstraction is inadequately demonstrated, leading to doubts about how effectively this theory is grounded in the data. Grounded theory methods are inherently effective in their own right; however, simply employing these methods in a mechanistic way will not generate a grounded theory. What is likely to result is descriptive, exploratory research that has been referred to as qualitative data analysis (QDA) by Glaser (2004) and as the generic inductive qualitative model (GIQM) by Hood (2007). Descriptive, exploratory approaches have their place in research but they serve a purpose that is quite different to grounded theory. Failure to distinguish between these approaches, or worse, to suggest they are synonymous, undermines and devalues the inherent power of grounded theory (Hood, 2007).

ACTIVITY 4.1

GROUNDED THEORY OR DESCRIPTIVE, EXPLORATORY RESEARCH?

Conduct a quick search of peer-reviewed grounded theory research articles in your professional area from the past five years. Review abstracts of the first 10 articles that you find. How many of these resulted in the generation of a theory? How many would more aptly be described as descriptive, exploratory research?

Successful outcomes in grounded theory research are dependent on your ability to *think* like a grounded theorist – that is, you need to be able to think in ways that promote the formulation of theoretical elements, and be able to recognise these elements as they crystalise in your analysis. Key strategies for thinking in this way are: theoretical sensitivity, the ability to manage the impact of preconceptions on your research, and a commitment to memoing throughout your study.

THEORETICAL SENSITIVITY

Theoretical sensitivity is a difficult concept to grasp because of its intangible nature. What is theoretical sensitivity? How do you get it? What do you do with it? What is the difference between theoretical sensitivity and the ultimate crime of forcing the data (Glaser, 1992)? There is often a tendency for scholars just to 'skate over' the concept of theoretical sensitivity when these questions are posed, as many struggle to understand or express its meaning and value in grounded theory research. As we will explain, however, theoretical sensitivity is instrumental in the development of a grounded theory; not fully embracing it in your study will result in a shallow product.

Theoretical sensitivity was identified in *Discovery* as an important attribute of a sociologist who wanted to engage in grounded theory research and was contingent on 'his [sic] personal and temperamental bent' and 'ability to have theoretical insight into his area of research, combined with an ability to make something of his insights' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.46). Strauss and Corbin (1990) devote a chapter to theoretical sensitivity in their first text, recognising its importance for theory development through the researcher's insight into what is meaningful and significant in the data. In their later work, they referred to the concept simply as 'sensitivity', discussing it in contrast to objectivity (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 2015; Strauss and Corbin, 1998), possibly as a strategy to diffuse Glaser's (1992) criticism of their original discussion of theoretical sensitivity. In this text, our purpose is to transcend the debate, reduce the confusion, and increase your comfort levels in relation to theoretical sensitivity and its essential contribution to your own research.

We define theoretical sensitivity as the ability to recognise and extract from the data elements that have relevance for your developing theory. Theoretical sensitivity reflects the sum of your personal, professional, and experiential history. Note that theoretical sensitivity is not a static phenomenon; it can be enhanced by various techniques, tools, and strategies and will increase as your research progresses.

> Theoretical sensitivity
>
> The ability to recognise and extract from the data elements that have relevance for the developing theory.

Grounded theory is one of the most commonly used approaches to research in graduate studies. Graduate researchers are excited, passionate, and committed to a minimum of three years to undertake their study. One of the downsides, though, is that novice grounded theorists do not know what they do not know, and are not conscious of the importance of what they do know when they start out. In understanding theoretical sensitivity, it is important to assess what it is that you know because of your history. First and foremost, consider the characteristics of your multiple selves, as discussed in Chapter 2, and how these position you in respect of your research.

Professionally, you are probably a person in the know in your particular field, which you have now chosen to research. Undoubtedly, you will have discipline-relevant theoretical knowledge from prior learning. In the process of applying for admission to a graduate programme, you will have been required to demonstrate familiarity with the literature in the broader topic area. The combination of a priori experiential and theoretical knowledge can take these and many other forms, but, whichever way you look at it, you will have form. By identifying your baseline position before you begin, you can work at consciously developing your theoretical sensitivity during the research process.

Strategies to promote theoretical sensitivity are discussed in the seminal texts published by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998), and have evolved somewhat in the more recent editions led by Corbin (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 2015). They do, however, remain extremely contentious in the ongoing debate about what constitutes core grounded theory methods. One technique for raising sensitivity identified by these authors is the use of the literature. As will be discussed in the following chapter, there is a great deal of confusion about how to use the literature during the grounded theory research

process. Overall, there is general agreement that a systematic review of the literature relating to the substantive area of enquiry should be avoided. How then to develop your theoretical sensitivity by using the literature? Glaser suggests that you should read 'vociferously [sic] in other areas and fields while doing grounded theory in order to keep up [your] theoretical sensitivity' (Glaser, 1998, pp.73–74). Unfortunately, this statement is not terribly clear about where to draw the line between texts that might force your thinking and texts that might develop it. As Kelle (2007a, p.198) describes, the conflict between applying theoretical sensitivity and forcing the data is 'difficult to reconcile', particularly for novice grounded theorists. Reviewing the work of Strauss (1987), through to Corbin and Strauss (2015), shows these authors as being much more liberal and direct, suggesting that grounded theorists can raise their theoretical sensitivity by reading the literature. Chen et al. (2018) describe using the literature for this purpose in their study of factors that influence the sharing of knowledge in the Chinese software industry. Note that what we are discussing here is the use of the literature as a sensitising tool. We will explore the use of literature specifically as a source of data and theoretical codes in Chapters 7 and 8 respectively.

In addition to the use of the literature, Strauss and Corbin (1990) originally identified a number of specific mechanisms for enhancing theoretical sensitivity. They later renamed these 'analytic tools' (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Strauss and Corbin, 1998), and then 'analytical strategies' (Corbin and Strauss, 2015), as they removed the direct link to theoretical sensitivity. These tools (Box 4.1) can work to increase a grounded theorist's sensitivity to potential theoretical constructs in the data. Making a decision about including such strategies in your own research design will hinge upon how you have positioned yourself philosophically and methodologically. You may find that some or all of these techniques help to get you thinking like a grounded theorist, however you should employ such tools only to the extent that they aid you in your analysis.

Box 4.1

Analytic strategies

- Questioning

- Making comparisons

- Thinking about the various meanings of a word

- Using the flip-flop technique

- Making use of life experience

- Waving the red flag

- Looking at language

- Looking at emotions that are expressed

- Looking for words that indicate time

- Thinking in terms of metaphors and similes

- Looking for the negative case

- Using other analytical tools

(Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p.90)

Most of the tools listed in Box 4.1 are relatively self-explanatory, although we would direct you to the latest edition of *Basics of Qualitative Research* (Corbin and Strauss, 2015) to read about each in depth prior to thinking about including them in your research design. However, of particular relevance to thinking like a grounded theorist are 'using the flip-flop technique' and 'waving the red flag'. The flip-flop technique, as the term implies, involves viewing a concept from varying perspectives. While Corbin reduced the amount of attention paid to this

strategy in more recent editions, the intent of 'flip-flopping' is to encourage the identification of dimensions and properties of a concept by comparing it to similar, inverse, or opposite phenomena (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). As an example, imagine you are researching poor practices in the construction industry. One of your participants makes reference to the word 'negligence'. How can you unpack this term in the context of your research? Is the word used in a legal or colloquial sense? What is the opposite of negligence? Is use of the term here similar or distinct from how it might be used in another context, for example medicine? Use of the flip-flop technique can raise your thinking to a more abstract level (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) – in other words, it can get you thinking like a grounded theorist.

Waving the red flag was one of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) original techniques for enhancing theoretical sensitivity, and refers to recognising 'when biases, assumptions or beliefs are intruding into the analysis' (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p.98). This quote has an echo of a post-positivistic positioning of the researcher as an instrument of data analysis; however, if we substitute 'intruding' with 'unduly influencing', the statement becomes equally relevant to symbolic interactionist, postmodernist, and constructivist grounded theorists. We all need to be ready to wave the red flag during concurrent data generation or collection and analysis, so that we do not miss developing greater depth and higher levels of abstraction in our grounded theories. Some of the keywords and phrases that Corbin and Strauss (2015, p.98) identify as cues to stop, think, and ask another question of either participants, the data, or ourselves are: 'always', 'never', 'everyone, or 'no way'. Absolutist statements by either participants or ourselves are never definitive; rather, they should touch a theoretically sensitive nerve that prompts further investigation of why this is considered so.

ACTIVITY 4.2

In Box 4.1, Corbin and Strauss (2015) make reference to other analytical tools, although these appear to be an extension of the others they describe. We again reinforce our advice that you should only use these, or any other techniques, if they aid your analysis. What is useful for one researcher in one study may be quite different from what proves useful to another researcher in the context of their own work. In Researcher's Voice 4.1, Karen Hoare (Hoare et al., 2012) writes about her own experience of using various techniques to increase her theoretical sensitivity to the context of her study.

The researcher's voice 4.1

Karen Hoare on developing theoretical sensitivity by dancing with data

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During my doctoral candidature, my supervisor alerted me to the dearth of literature describing the attainment of theoretical sensitivity in a grounded theory study. She suggested I pay particular attention to describing the process in my thesis. Numerous authors have specified a set of defining criteria in grounded theory method, of which theoretical sensitivity and subsequent theoretical sampling are both consistent tenets (Birks and Mills, 2011; Urquhart, 2007; Wiener, 2007). Glaser (1978) devoted a whole book to the concept of theoretical sensitivity. He suggests researchers should steep themselves in literature other than in their own area, to imbue their final theory with a multivariate flavour that includes many fields. Birks and Mills (2011) and Kelle (2007b) comment on the fine line between enhancing sensitivity to developing categories in your own data and forcing your data into an existing theory. I therefore initially chose not to engage with the literature around information use by practice nurses in general practice (my PhD topic). Instead, I conducted a realist and systematic review around the role clinical governance (quality improvement programmes) played in developing the practice nurse workforce in three countries. This information provided the context for my subsequent study (Hoare et al., 2011). The constant comparative method consists of weaving data collection with data analysis and writing and

analysing memos. All of these activities enhance theoretical sensitivity and contribute to insight and illumination of areas that can be constructed into a theory. Glaser suggests that the conceptual route from data collection to a grounded theory is a set of double back steps. The route forward inevitably results in the analyst stepping back. The idea of double back steps inspired the title of 'dancing with data' for a manuscript that describes how I acquired theoretical sensitivity in my study (Hoare et al., 2012). These steps included initial ethnographic observation in one general practice that resulted in fieldnotes and memos. Subsequently, interviews with eleven practice nurses from alternate practices were conducted and the transcriptions from these interviews were coded and categorised. Dimensions of constructed categories were further explored through additional ethnographic observation and discussion with participants in the original practice. I stepped back to go forwards; I was metaphorically dancing with data. Additionally, theoretical sensitivity was further heightened through attendance at professional venues and by using the 'flip-flop' technique. This technique is when a researcher examines a category from a different perspective in order to highlight significant properties. Going forwards and backwards and side-stepping with codes and categories in my study, resulted in a pictorial image of me dancing with data.

Managing preconceptions

Most of the analytical tools proposed by Corbin and Strauss (2015) in the previous section aim to assist grounded theorists in examining their underlying assumptions about the world on an ongoing basis. As these authors point out, 'assumptions are deeply ingrained and their influence often imperceptible' (p.101). As we have discussed, your personal, professional, and experiential history informs your theoretical sensitivity. It does, however, also manifest in the way you perceive the world. The risk is that such ingrained perspectives may unconsciously cause us to 'drift into preconception' (Glaser, 1992, p.49). We define preconceptions as the assumptions, thoughts, and feelings that are informed by a researcher's personal, professional, and experiential history. We all have preconceptions that help us to navigate daily life. In grounded theory research, where the aim is to remain true to the data at all stages, right through to the development of theory, these preconceptions need to be managed to prevent them from distorting the grounding of that theory.

> Preconceptions
>
> Assumptions, thoughts, and feelings that are informed by the researcher's personal, professional, and experiential history.

Researchers will often choose an area of research because of their passion for the topic or a personal interest that stems from experience. Clearly, such interest is borne from the existence of some degree of knowledge about the intended area of study. In their original work, Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.3) declared that 'the researcher does not approach reality as a *tabula rasa* [blank slate]. He [sic] must have a perspective that will help him see relevant data and abstract significant categories from his scrutiny of the data'. The danger from Glaser's (1992) perspective is the potential for the researcher to consciously or unconsciously apply existing theoretical schemes to their own data. A balance is therefore required between maintaining an open mind and

being able to identify concepts of theoretical significance throughout the process of data collection and analysis. Garratt (2018, p.88) describes her experience of struggling with achieving a balance between utilising existing expertise and imposing preconceptions. This author describes 'being paralysed' as a result of the 'exhaustive mental processing' of managing her preconceptions. Such struggles are common in grounded theory as researchers progress through increasingly complex analytical stages. The challenge is not only manageable, it is ultimately rewarding, as the reconstruction of your existing perspective gives you confidence in the integrity of your developed theory.

How then do you effectively manage the existing experience, knowledge, assumptions, and preconceptions that you bring to your work? The correct use of grounded theory methods is key to producing a theory that remains true to the data. Adhering to methodological principles will ensure that any 'preconceived meaning by an analyst will not pattern out' (Glaser, 1992, p.49). There are, however, some specific strategies that you can employ to help in this endeavour.

First and foremost, it is important to acknowledge that your personal, professional, and experiential history is the lens through which you undertake your research. Articulating your existing assumptions, thoughts, and feelings is an effective mechanism for establishing where you stand in relation to your proposed study. Furthermore, it makes you conscious of the potential impact these factors may have, thus enabling you to manage their effect. Undertaking any type of research study, particularly for a graduate student, is a process of learning. Setting your compass points at the beginning of your project is the most effective means of making sure that you do not lose your bearings along the way. Recognising what you bring to your work ensures that you remain grounded throughout all stages of your research adventure.

While facing your assumptions and their potential to manifest as preconceptions is an important strategy at the outset of your study, ongoing reflection on your position in respect of your research is also critical. As we discussed in Chapter 2, your philosophical position dictates the relationship you have with your research. This position will evolve with your study and will need continuous re-examination as you progress with your work. Monitoring your relationship with your research

can be achieved through reflexivity, as discussed in Chapter 2. In Researcher's Voice 4.2, Nieky van Veggel discusses an interesting reflexive approach to managing preconceptions in his doctoral research.

The researcher's voice 4.2

Nieky van Veggel on managing preconceptions through the presuppositional interview

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Context/Problem

I am a senior lecturer specialising in evidence-based practice and also a higher education course leader. My doctoral research focuses on how course leaders in my institution utilise evidence-based practice in their role. I am therefore an insider-researcher: my course leader colleagues are participants in my research, and I deliver staff development sessions on evidence-based practice.

During my research, I experienced internal conflicts in my interpretation of grounded theory methodology and methods. As a Glaserian grounded theorist, the reason for not undertaking an in-depth literature review beforehand, i.e. reducing preconception, is clear to me. However, how this relates to me and my preconceptions as an insider-researcher remains unclear. There are no guidelines on how to understand preconceptions resulting from being an insider-researcher, yet I experience and live them on a daily basis. This gap in Glaserian grounded theory is a problem, and I therefore decided that, for exploring how my being an insider-researcher could be better understood in relation to grounded theory and my research problem, it was most useful to recognise and 'own' my preconceptions, rather than avoid them.

Solution

I decided on the concept of the presuppositional interview as a solution to accessing and owning my preconceptions. This idea emerged from my professional experience: in an evidence-based practice context, researchers avoid bias as much as possible. Where it cannot be avoided, potential sources of bias ought to be acknowledged in a transparent manner. To demonstrate my influence on my research as an insider-researcher, I mulled over various methods to uncover my beliefs and values. The presuppositional interview enables me to reflexively address my preconceptions in a methodologically congruent way because it fits Glaser's 'all is data' approach, and in its simplest sense this method is just a long memo. The method is also transparent because my answers to the interview questions can be reflexively analysed.

In practice

To do this, an experienced interviewer interviewed me. The interviewer used my research interview schedule and their experience to expand/further address my answers as appropriate. This made me explain my thoughts and experiences in detail. I then transcribed my interview, coded it, and am using it as data. The transcription has not been shared with anyone else – this belongs to me as the researcher to understand my preconceptions and assumptions and to learn how these might influence the research project. For example, I was able to develop a deep understanding of how my personal and professional experiences have steered the way I interview my participants, and gave me better insights on how my codes come to be. I realised that because I can get frustrated by my views on certain topics, I was sensitive to this in interviews and coded this with more ease than other elements of the interview. This reflexive analysis also demonstrated that because of my insider role, my participants identified with my course leader position and likely gave more honest answers. However, I also learnt that my insiderness led to assumptions about how participants experience course leadership. I am now better able to work to minimise this issue, and therefore collect better quality data and improve analysis.

To summarise, the presuppositional interview is a step to making preconceptions as transparent as possible. This will in turn allow the reader to make a judgement on its effect on the research findings, and enhance the quality of a grounded theory study.

One final way of ensuring that your preconceptions are not unduly influencing your research is to test your evolving analysis with others. Most researchers undertaking a grounded theory study do so as graduate students or as part of a research team. Use your supervisors, mentors, and team members to 'test' your logic. Can you provide a clear link from data to analysis? Are the evolving codes, categories, and

concepts reflective of the data sources, whether these be participants' words, observational evidence, or artefacts Are any proposed relationships between categories borne out by the analysis? What, if any, conceptual leaps fuelled by your theoretical sensitivity need further unpacking? Reviewing your work in this way has the potential to both clarify the analysis as it unfolds and give you confidence in your ability to generate a grounded theory.

ACTIVITY 4.3

REFLEXIVITY AND PRECONCEPTIONS

Are there any specific aspects of your personal, professional, and experiential history that are likely to impact your relationship with your own study? How might you use the strategies described in this chapter to manage preconceptions that may result from these established perspectives?

MEMOING

Memos in grounded theory research are records of thoughts, feelings, insights, ideas, and actions in relation to a research project. You will see from our reference to memoing through this text that it is critical to your ability to think like a grounded theorist and produce a quality grounded theory. Researchers who do not employ memoing will struggle to generate a theory that can be traced back to their data. Furthermore, the end product of their research will likely not possess the explanatory potential characteristic of the methodology. Ultimately, as your ability to think like a grounded theorist increases, it will be enhanced by, and captured in, the memos that you produce from the outset of your study.

We are confident that you will come to understand the power of memoing as a grounded theory research tool. At this stage, however, you may be unsure about the purpose and process of memoing. In this section, we will address some common questions that novice researchers often pose in relation to memoing.

Memoing

The recording of thoughts, feelings, insights, ideas, and actions in relation to a research project.

Throughout this section, we will use extracts from the raw, unedited memos drawn from the doctoral work of Róisín Farragher, a researcher with the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at the National University of Ireland, Galway. Farragher undertook a constructivist grounded theory exploring the concept of family and family relationships, as understood by young people with care experience (Farragher and Coogan, 2020). As we will discuss, memoing is a very personal activity and you may find that your memos will look quite different to the examples presented here. These extracts do, however,

provide you with an indication of the purposes and processes associated with memoing.

Why do I need to memo?

In Chapter 1, we introduced the concept of memoing as the critical lubricant of a grounded theory 'machine' (as indicated in Figure 3.2). Stern (2007) regards memos as the mortar that holds together the building blocks (data) that comprise a grounded theory. These metaphors together reinforce the importance of memos to both processes and outcomes in grounded theory research. A useful mnemonic for understanding the broad functions of memoing is 'MEMO' – Mapping research activities; Extracting meaning from the data; Maintaining momentum; and Opening communication (Birks et al., 2008).
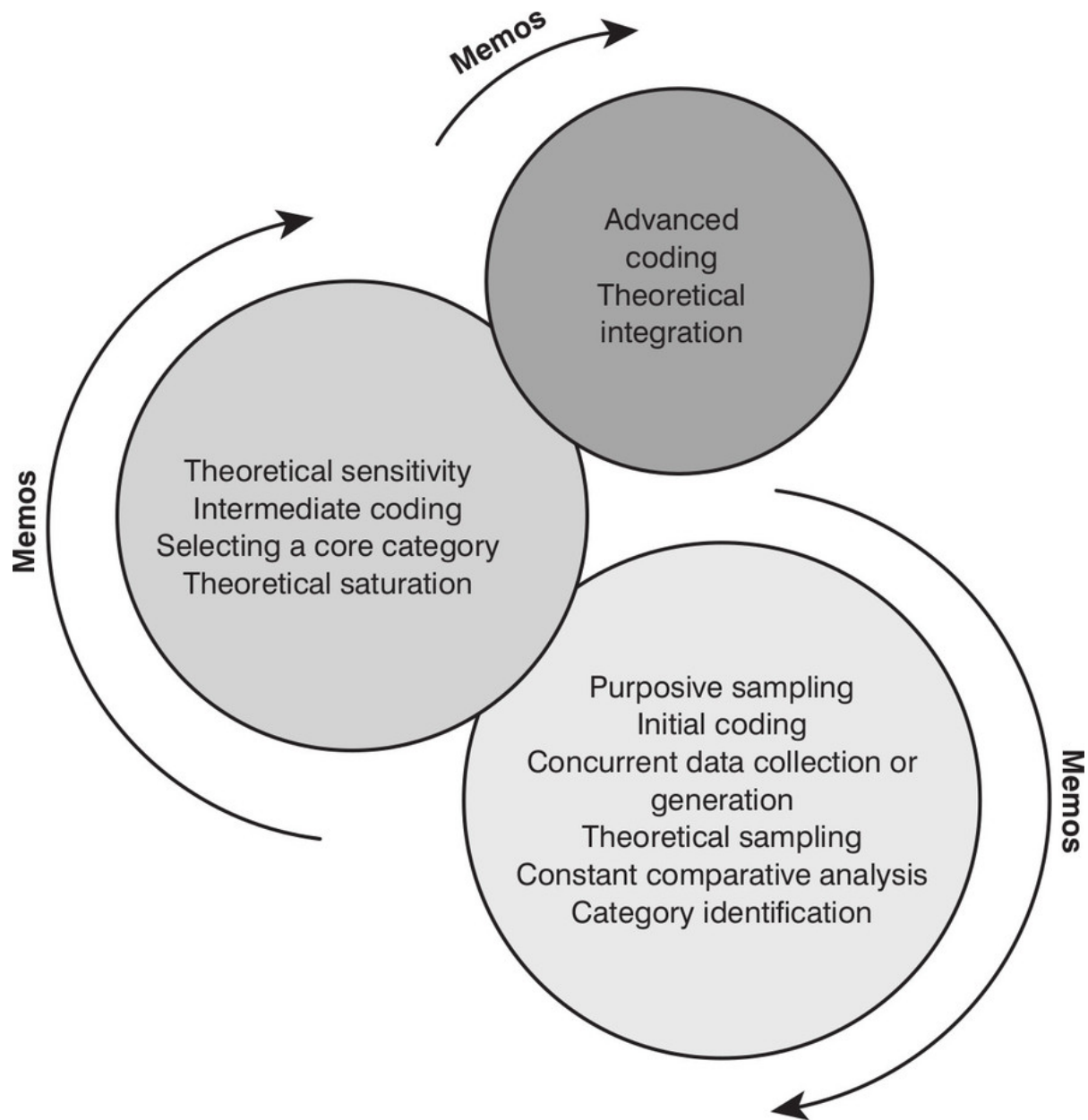
Figure 4.1 Memoing in grounded theory

Regardless of how you engage with memoing in your research, you should, at the very least, use memos to map your activities in support of maintaining the audit trail for your research, the importance of which was discussed earlier in this chapter. Planned activities, unforeseen circumstances, and changes in direction can all be considered and

recorded in the safe confines of a memo, along with your rationale for decisions made and responses to various contingencies. Even if you choose to log activities in a formal, more structured manner elsewhere, you should still use memoing to explore the meaning and consequences of events that occur along the way. In Box 4.2, Róisín Farragher provides an example of a memo written to consider the practicalities of conducting a focus group.

Box 4.2

Sample memo 1

Reflection for pilot phase, 18 August

Meeting my pilot group today for focus group. I wonder what I should wear as some of the group will just know me as their friend and not 'the researcher', yet I still want to remain professional. This is making me reflect on my role and how I am seen in the research and my boundaries and ethical stance. While I want to still be approachable and not make participants feel uncomfortable, I will have to step out of the role of having care experience to and become a bit more formal in my approach towards them. However, my participants know that I have care experience anyway as detailed on my information sheets so maybe this will reassure them that I genuinely respect their views, opinion, and time. What if I look too dressed up – will this affect the relationships and rapport building with participants that I do not know and for those who have only seen a picture of me? Maybe an icebreaker should be included too, even for the group to get to know each other too. I have already planned to carry out a contract during the pilot phase and go through the general rules of confidentiality but maybe I need to do something about how I will address them after. What if I meet them on the street – do they want to be known by their 'real name' or pseudonym will they want to acknowledge me at all? Will they want to ever speak after they divulge intimate stories about family and family relationships? Is this even important to them? Regardless, I think this conversation needs to happen with the group on the day. Also, do not forget to get snacks for the day. Food is important and I see it as an extra means of valuing their time, and participation. Also check about free rooms downstairs, have forms (and extra) printed, vouchers and Dictaphone ready.

In working with data, the researcher extracts meaning using a process of interpretation. Memoing enables you to articulate, explore, and question these interpretations as you engage with the data (Birks et al., 2008). Your theoretical sensitivity is raised, better equipping you to answer Glaser's (1978, p.57) classic question: 'What is actually

happening in the data?'. Memoing gives you the opportunity to interrogate the data, with the aim of developing the abstract concepts necessary for the construction of theory. Any deficiencies or gaps in your analytical thinking can be detected at an early stage when you are able to see these thoughts in black and white (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Most importantly, memoing is an uninhibited activity in which you are free to explore your ideas, instincts, and intuition in relation to your research. You are able to take risks without fear of being committed to your evolving thought processes (Clarke, 2005). Recording your ideas in memo form does not lock you into them; rather, it frees you up to challenge your developing analysis.

Memos provide a series of snapshots that chronicle your study experience and the internal dialogue that is essential when conducting any research, particularly that with an interpretive component. Memos are working documents that you will rely on to record and revisit earlier thinking and reorient yourself to your research when analytical processes become complex (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Goulding, 2002). Momentum is therefore maintained, as you are able to converse with yourself both in real time and retrospectively through the use of memos.

Memos also provide a mechanism for communicating with other stakeholders in a research study. As we will discuss in Chapter 6, research rarely occurs in isolation. Teams often undertake funded research and graduate students work closely with a supervisor or supervisory panel. While memoing is usually a personal process, communication with others in team research can be facilitated by the use of memos. Memos (or extracts where there is a desire to keep private any reflections of a more personal nature) can be circulated to other members, as appropriate, to share ideas and inspire thinking within a research team. Embryonic ideas can be explored and new insights gained through the contribution of all those involved in a study. Memoing facilitates and encourages this process. Beyond their value in sharing information between analytical team members, memos are themselves a potential mechanism for enhancing the value of relationships in research (Pieters and Dornig, 2011).

From the preceding discussion, you will see that memos serve both concrete and abstract purposes. They assist you in maintaining an audit trail in the form of a contemporaneous record of events, while also facilitating communication with others who may have an interest in your research processes. Most significantly, memoing is the single most effective mechanism for raising your data to a conceptual level. Through the use of memos, your concrete data are abstracted and momentum is maintained as you progress through your analysis. Ultimately, as will be discussed in Part 3, your memos will serve as catalysts in data generation and analysis, form the foundation of your final theory, and provide substance for the written presentation of your research.

When do I memo?

Corbin and Strauss (2015) propose that memoing should commence when analysis begins, reflecting a belief by some grounded theorists that memoing is purely a tool of analysis. We contend that your use of memos should commence from the time your study is first conceptualised. In so doing, you have the opportunity to benefit from memoing during the planning of your research, while also establishing the habit of memo writing at an early stage. The process will then be well established when you reach the critical concurrent data collection and analysis phase of your research. Charmaz (2014) recognises the power that writing gives the researcher and specifically acknowledges the value of memoing as a technique for initiating and maintaining productivity. Harnessing this power from the outset of your study will ensure that you maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of your research actions.

As your study progresses, you will continue to memo at every stage. You may choose to set aside a specific time of the day or week to memo routine activities and maintain a procedural audit trail, or you may establish a habit of memoing after every data collection event and coding session. For the most part, however, memoing cannot be scheduled. The timing of memo writing is as unpredictable as the nature and timing of the thoughts that spur this process. Memoing should therefore be given priority over every other activity. In working with your data, you will often find that an idea is sparked. When this occurs, you should stop what you are doing in order to write a memo, adhering to what Glaser (1978, p.83) calls his 'prime rule'. In time, you will find that the process becomes natural and spontaneous. The example in Box 4.3 reflects this, as Róisín Farrager captures her thoughts about a conversation on the topic of death. Your memo writing will continue throughout your study, and perhaps even after completion, as a form of 'debriefing'.

Box 4.3

Sample memo 2

Zoom call – 2 April

Having a conversation about death today with other care leavers. The conversation was really just meant to be a catch up but the guys knew my birth father had passed away. So they asked me how I was doing. How was I meant to respond? Do I even have a right to talk about my birth father as someone who was loved and close to me? We had not spoken in over 10 years and I did not want to have a relationship with him. God, I am glad my participants taught me that family could be more than just biological. I am glad they opened my eyes up and there is a sense of relief that others with similar experiences are changing the narrative around 'family'.

What do I memo?

In the early stages of a research study, you may be wondering what it is that you might write about in your memos. There are a number of things that can be written about in respect of your research. If you are having trouble grasping the concept of memoing, view your memos as a type of research log, diary, or journal. Initially, you may find it a little daunting writing about your study and the processes of your research. The memos written early on in your project will probably be stilted and fragmented (Charmaz, 2014; Lempert, 2007). You may find it particularly difficult to put down in words your feelings about your research. As your comfort grows with the process, you will find the depth and richness of content will increase and the ability to reflect on your experiences will prove valuable to you personally, while simultaneously enhancing the quality of your study. As your study progresses, you will likely even find that you write memos about earlier memos as your level of abstraction is raised.

Some of the things that you may choose to write about in your memos include:

- your feelings and assumptions about your research

- your philosophical position in relation to your research

- musings on books and papers that you have read

- potential issues, problems, and concerns in relation to your study design

- reflections on the research process

- procedural decision making

- codes, categories, and your developing theory

- insights and questions raised by the analysis.

Often, a memo will serve more than one of these purposes. Box 4.4 provides an example of where Róisín Farragher explores both her assumptions and feelings in respect of her research and her reflections on the research process. In Box 4.5, she describes the insights and questions raised by her analysis.

Box 4.4

Sample memo 3

Reflexivity and knowing your position in research, 13 November

Imagine not having to take note of every single ad I have seen or anything that reminded me of family as there are at least two things every day. Am I over sensitive? Why do I always think of my birth family when I hear the word family and not my partner or my very close friends? I mean if I am given time I do but initial thoughts jump to them. I wonder is it just in my head and thoughts because of my research and using CGT methods where I am starting to think a lot more about the topic? They say a PhD is hard, try immersing yourself in a topic so triggering of emotion.

Box 4.5

Sample memo 4

Zoom call (with other care leavers) reflection, 9 February

Death & Family Relationships: I wonder what it was like for my participants and other care leavers. How do they survive the awkwardness of hearing someone who they should have been close with had passed away? Why does no one talk about grief or death for children/young people in care? And what happens after care when they are not subjected to the care system any more, does life get any easier? What if they are not strong and don't have great social support? How do they mind themselves? I have noticed so much more death since COVID-19 has started and now recently my own birth father passing away. What happens whilst in care and a birth family member passes away – who tells the child in care? Who supports them? Why do we not have counsellors who are trained in this specific area?

In addition to what you write in your memos, illustrations and diagrams can be included that clarify your thinking about relationships in the data and enhance conceptualisation (these will be discussed further in later chapters). You may also wish to include raw data, such as quotations from participants or observations extracted from fieldnotes. These inclusions prove particularly important when memoing about coding and category development as they reinforce and clarify your analytical decision making. You must be sure, however, to reference such extractions to ensure that any later reading does not render unclear the distinction between your own conceptualisations and the original data (Glaser, 1978).

How do I memo?

A number of authors provide various suggestions and guidelines for memo writing (see, for example, Charmaz, 2014; Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Glaser, 1978) and all agree that flexibility and freedom are essential to the process. From these authors, we can derive two rules of memoing: that you *must* do it (for reasons that we have clearly established) and that you should find an approach that works for you. How you memo is inconsequential; that you do so is critical (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Having said that, we can proffer some advice to assist you in establishing an approach to memoing that will be most appropriate for you.

The first consideration when writing memos is that you should not be constrained by the normal conventions of writing and documentation. When writing memos, the emphasis is on spontaneity and natural flow. Charmaz (2014) describes a process of freewriting, where you are encouraged to write whatever comes into your mind without limitation. Doing so encourages you to trust the process and builds your skills in expressing your thoughts. Remember that your memos are your personal documents. They can be reproduced in a modified form at a later1 time, should you wish to share your insights with your research colleagues, as discussed earlier.

Memos may initially consist of only one or two lines and you may or may not add to them later. As Glaser (1978) suggests, your memos should remain open for as long as necessary. Closing off a memo can result in prematurely closing an analytical pathway (Lempert, 2007). Consider all memos as 'active' until your final theory is constructed. In this regard, we suggest that you view your memos as dynamic documents. Making subsequent additions to your memos is preferable to amendment in order to prevent the deletion of insights; an action that you might later regret. Rather, aim to build on or revoke earlier thinking through additional comments, as this has the added advantage of chronicling your changing thought processes.

Some authors have suggested systems for the categorisation of memos that aim to distinguish them on the basis of content, purpose, and timing

(see, for example, Birks et al., 2008; Charmaz, 2014; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998). While working this way may be valuable as you develop your skills in memoing, you will no doubt find that overlap will occur, particularly in the later stages of analysis, leading you to merge or eliminate classifications. Do not be afraid to experiment with your own system; the flexible nature of memoing makes it difficult for you to make terminal errors as you work at finding an approach that suits you best.

With this in mind, there are some practical strategies that you should put in place early on in your study to avoid confusion and problems occurring later. You should develop a system of labelling and filing your memos to facilitate easy access to them at a later date. Use short descriptive titles that reflect the content of each memo. Date each memo and each subsequent addition or amendment that reflects your developing thinking. These measures ensure that you are able to cross-reference efficiently within and between memos and data sources (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). You may be surprised at how often you will refer to other memos, particularly as your analysis becomes more complex and advanced.

How you choose to create and store memos is a personal choice. Most contemporary researchers produce memos electronically. While the handwriting of memos is a less practical option, you may find yourself doing so if inspiration hits when you are away from your computer. Voice recording of memos is also an option, although eventual transcription may be required to enable you to work with the content in a meaningful way. You can, for example, use different font styles, sizes, and colours, or you may highlight sections of your memos either on a computer or by hand. For this reason, you may also wish to print and file memos, particularly those produced during more advanced analysis, should you prefer to work with hard copies, as suggested by Glaser (1978), for the purpose of sorting, as discussed in Chapter 9.

ACTIVITY 4.4

WRITING A MEMO

Using the guidelines outlined above, write a memo about what you have learned from reading this chapter. Summarise your understanding of what it means to think like a grounded theorist.

CONCLUSION

As is the case with most approaches to research, grounded theory requires a unique skill set. Skills can of course be acquired with time and practice, however grounded theory also requires a mindset that primes the researcher to develop theory from data. In this chapter, we have introduced you to strategies that will help you to start thinking like a grounded theorist. Regardless of your personal, professional, or experiential history, you have the potential to produce a quality grounded theory that has its roots in your data. Promote development of your theoretical sensitivity through embracing yourself as the expert in your own research, manage your preconceptions through the use of techniques described in this chapter, and embrace memoing as the cornerstone of quality in grounded theory. Doing so will ensure your success as a grounded theorist.

Critical thinking questions

1. To what extent do you believe you already think like a grounded theorist? Are there any aspects of this way of thinking that you feel you may struggle with? How might you increase your confidence in developing this new way of thinking?
2. Consider the concept of theoretical sensitivity. How might a lack of sensitivity to theoretical concepts in your data impact on your final study? Are you comfortable with the concept? How might you otherwise conceptualise theoretical sensitivity? Is it akin to any other cognitive, professional, or methodological concept with which you are familiar?
3. Memoing is a non-negotiable grounded theory method. How do you feel about the prospect of writing memos as you work through your research? Do you have any reservations? Give consideration to how the process will best work for you. What skills do you have, or will you need

to develop (for example, familiarity with software programs), in order to memo effectively and efficiently?

Working grounded theory

Review the 'Working grounded theory' example presented in the Appendix. Note:

- The ways in which this researcher demonstrated her ability to think like a grounded theorist

- The process by which she developed her theoretical sensitivity

- The significance that memoing held for this researcher as a grounded theory method

- How she managed preconceptions as they arose

5 PROPOSING YOUR GROUNDED THEORY RESEARCH

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help you to:

- Describe instances where investigation using grounded theory is indicated

- Identify characteristics of a strong grounded theory research proposal

- Discuss how to use the literature in a grounded theory research proposal

- Produce a comprehensive grounded theory research proposal

- Successfully defend your grounded theory research proposal

INTRODUCTION

The process of writing your research proposal is an opportunity to clarify and consolidate aspirational thinking into a realistic plan of action. Usually, we approach a potential grounded theory study with only a loose idea of what we would like to investigate. For those considering a graduate research programme, there is often lots of romantic talk among your peers, and sometimes your lecturers and supervisors, about the importance of having a passion for your topic that will sustain you through the three-plus years that you will engage in this work. We take a much more pragmatic, project management approach to the conceptualisation and execution of a grounded theory study that will become apparent as you read through this chapter. Key to keeping your project under control, and in perspective, is a well thought-out and achievable research proposal.

In this chapter, we discuss how to produce a comprehensive grounded theory research proposal. We commence with a discussion on ensuring that grounded theory is appropriate for your study. The chapter will then focus on information that should be included in your proposal. We consider important points in the defence of your grounded theory research proposal and conclude with some reflections on the use of grounded theory methods in other research designs.

WHEN IS GROUNDED THEORY INDICATED?

How do you know whether grounded theory is appropriate for your intended study? Often, researchers are attracted to the relatively straightforward methods that characterise grounded theory and do not thoroughly consider whether it is the best approach for achieving their research aim. Because of the unique nature of grounded theory methods, we can identify the types of instances where its use is appropriate. Grounded theory is indicated when:

- Little is known about the area of study

- The generation of theory with explanatory power is a desired outcome/deliverable

- An inherent process is embedded in the research situation that is likely to be explicated by grounded theory methods.

Grounded theory results in the generation of new knowledge in the form of theory; therefore, areas where little is known about a particular topic are most deserving of research effort. Not much can be gained from investigating issues that have already been explored extensively. All researchers should be able to demonstrate that their proposed study will generate knowledge that is relevant and significant. In employing grounded theory, you should also be satisfied that your substantive area of enquiry is new and unique, although this point of difference could be the context of the planned investigation.

As identified previously, grounded theory is the preferred choice when the intent is to generate theory that explains a particular process. Innumerable descriptive, exploratory studies have been published on a vast array of topics that have contributed significant knowledge to their discipline areas. If your purpose is to describe and explore rather than explain, you are encouraged to look to other approaches to research more suited to your specific aims.

The concept of 'process' is often described as a characteristic feature of grounded theory. Some debate exists as to the significance of process in grounded theory and how this concept can be defined. While Glaser (1978) discusses the specific concept of the basic social process at length, he notes that process is a possible, although not necessarily essential, element of grounded theory. Charmaz (2014), however, believes that process is central to grounded theory and advocates the use of gerunds (the noun form of a verb) to identify action in the employment of grounded theory methods. Similarly, Saldaña (2021) makes reference to the concept of 'Process Codes' (see Chapter 8). Emphasising process during analysis forces you to identify relationships evident in your study arena (Charmaz, 2014). The value of adopting process as central to grounded theory is enhanced when we broaden our conception of what we mean by the term itself. Corbin and Strauss (2015, p.174) discuss process as giving 'life to action–interaction. It shows the ability of persons even to adjust and respond to subtle changes in what is going on around them'. Process, therefore, need not be limited to conceptions of time, phases, or stages, but can be seen as occurring in all aspects of the natural, dynamic nature of life.

Process

Dynamic activities occurring in all aspects of life, not necessarily limited to conceptions of time, phases, or stages.

ACTIVITY 5.1

PROCESS AND GROUNDED THEORY

Access a database of literature from a discipline different from your own. Undertake a search of articles using the key term 'grounded theory'. You will need to limit your search further (for example, to recent years and full-text articles) to make your results manageable. Retrieve a small selection of articles of interest to you (perhaps 10–12).

Do the authors of these articles:

- Indicate that a theory with explanatory power is the intended outcome of their research?

- Identify an inherent process that has been explicated by their use of grounded theory methods?

GROUNDED THEORY RESEARCH PROPOSALS

Grounded theory is an iterative research process that can change over time in response to the developing analysis. While the study design can therefore (arguably) be described as emergent, this is in reference to the process, rather than the products, of research. A grounded theory does not spontaneously arise; rather, it is generated, developed, and integrated by the researcher through the careful application of grounded theory methods.

Originally, Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed that even the research problem itself must emerge from the research process. Strauss and Corbin's assertion in their (1990) text that the research question be narrow and function to establish boundaries to the research was a key element in the 'emergence versus forcing' debate that underpinned Glaser's (1992) subsequent rebuttal. Glaser's (1998) stance is based on his belief that for a problem to be of relevance, it must come from those for whom it has significance. Strauss and Corbin's (1990, 1998), and subsequently Corbin and Strauss's (2008, 2015), position is typically more pragmatic and relevant to the contemporary, professional research situation.

As identified earlier in this chapter, current requirements for the conduct of research, some of which echo the dominance of the scientific method, impose a need for the researcher to provide a structured research design in their proposal. Because of the nature of a grounded theory study, it is likely that the proposed design will change as the process of concurrent data gathering and analysis unfolds. The research question and sub-questions that you ask may well change over time, as might the methods of data gathering, depending on how the analysis develops. Because of this ambiguity, the grounded theorist needs to be comfortable with refining their proposal at a later stage, and, in some cases, returning to the institutional ethics committee with required amendments. Regardless, you need to start somewhere and, while changes are anticipated, it is important to think through possible options during the planning phase and account for these in your research proposal.

There are three main reasons research proposals are written: for entry to a graduate research programme, for research ethics approval, and to secure a competitive grant. Before you begin to put together a research proposal for any purpose, the first task is to print the application guidelines and have them to hand as you write your proposal. Refer to the guidelines often and mark off when you have completed each one of the steps required for your application. Reviewers will be attuned to the required format, and you don't want to disorientate them by straying from this prescription. Following on in this theme, the use of plain English in a grounded theory research proposal works well. When writing your research proposal, the one thing you don't want to do is unintentionally mask your intent with impenetrable terminology. Remember that several reviewers will read your proposal and not all will be as familiar with the subject matter and methodology as you are. A study of approaches to improve the readability of plain English summaries of research studies, provides useful recommendations that apply equally to writing a research proposal. To improve the understandability of their writing, researchers are advised to reduce jargon and ambiguity, use sub-headings to break up the text, devise clear and engaging titles, and test the clarity of their writing with lay people (Kirkpatrick et al., 2017). If reviewers remember the aim of your proposed grounded theory research study for the right reasons and understand the difference the findings might make, your chance of success will increase dramatically.

Similarly, if your research plan is well laid out, a panel will feel more confident in recommending that your study goes forward.

The main sections of a typical research proposal are:

- front material

- background

- research plan (methods and techniques)

- reporting (timeline and budget).

Figure 5.1 provides further detail of the content of each of these sections for inclusion in a grounded theory research proposal.
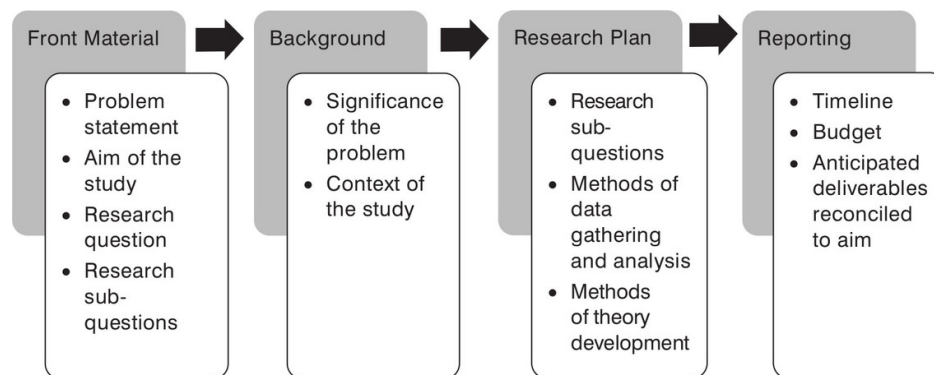

Front Material	Background	Research Plan	Reporting
• Problem statement • Aim of the study • Research question • Research sub-questions	• Significance of the problem • Context of the study	• Research sub-questions • Methods of data gathering and analysis • Methods of theory development	• Timeline • Budget • Anticipated deliverables reconciled to aim

Figure 5.1 Constructing a grounded theory research proposal

ACTIVITY 5.2

CONCEPTUALISING A GROUNDED THEORY RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Think about your own purposes for reading this chapter. Are you planning to produce a grounded theory research proposal for a specific purpose? Obtain a copy of the guidelines and, as you read through the following discussion, make notes on the guidelines to assist you when you come to prepare your own proposal.

FRONT MATERIAL

The front material of your grounded theory research proposal includes the title, keywords, the abstract, the aim of your study, the research question, and potentially any sub-questions. The front material needs to create a positive first impression that engages the reviewer's interest and makes them want to read more. When faced with a large pile of research proposals to read, it is only natural that the reviewer will not fully engage with the detail to follow if the title is confusing, or the abstract unclear.

Title

Creating a 'snappy' title for your proposal that is useful, clear, and memorable tends to be a work in progress from conception to completion. What do we mean by a useful title? In the past decade, the way people search for information, including research findings, has become reliant on the internet. Planning ahead to successfully disseminate your findings with the aim of creating impact means a title and abstract including phrases that others would likely be interested in (SAGE Publishing, 2022). Restrain any urge to write a title that is quirky; instead, choose a title in plain English that encapsulates the intent of your proposal in short, straightforward terms.

Keywords

Writing succinctly is an art, and the composition of an abstract challenges the author to balance key messages and detail in a constrained number of words or characters. You need to tie together your title and abstract by including the keywords selected in each of these elements. For those researching within health sciences, it is important to use keywords listed in the US National Library of Medicine's list of medical subject headings. These keywords are often referred to as 'MeSH' terms and are easily located by using the library's web-based database (National Library of Medicine, 2021). For other disciplines, there are alternative strategies you can employ to identify the most useful keywords for your proposal, and consulting a university librarian is helpful in developing these. Eassom (2017) recommends scanning your proposal using a word cloud generator to provide you with a list of the most prominent words in your document.

Abstract

In the guidelines for your research proposal, it is unlikely that you will be explicitly asked to include an abstract. However, the first few paragraphs of your proposal are the equivalent of an abstract, providing an executive summary of what is to follow. The abstract, or first few paragraphs of a research proposal, should define the problem you want to investigate and explain why it is important to do so, and identify the methods you would use to study the problem, along with the expected outcome of the research (McKee, 2018).

Possible uses of an abstract include focusing the researcher's thinking, communicating with other possible members of the future research team, forming the body of an expression of interest to garner an invitation to submit a full proposal for funding, or seeking a supervisor prior to applying for admission to a graduate research programme of study (Locke et al., 2013). The abstract of a research proposal requires constant revision to ensure that it remains aligned to sections of the proposal that will be written and rewritten in the iterative process of developing a final submission. The summative nature of an abstract means that you have few words to use in getting across your key messages.

Knowing your audience's priorities for action is an important factor to consider when writing the abstract of a research proposal. Understanding the reviewer's motivations and addressing these at the outset will improve your rate of success. Reminding the reviewer of the potential impact of the study throughout a grounded theory research proposal is important in getting them to remember your work when it comes to deciding whether it should go forward or not. In saying this, don't be repetitive in your writing and be careful not to duplicate sentences in different sections, otherwise you risk boring your reviewer and raising doubt in their mind as to your skills as a writer.

Problem statement

Developing a problem statement for a grounded theory study is not common practice, although Corbin and Strauss (2015) make brief reference to the importance of scoping a problem statement to frame the research question. From experience, developing a problem statement is a helpful device to clarify the researcher's thinking when writing a research proposal. J. Turner (2018, p.104) argues:

The statement of the problem must identify both the problem and who is affected by this problem as well as who benefits from this research. The *so-what?* factor comes into play in the following scenario: if no one (or no entity) benefits from the research study, then why bother?

The 'so-what' question is one that all reviewers will ask of a research proposal. Spending time on developing a well-thought-out problem statement will provide a response to that dreaded question, as well as leading to the aim of a grounded theory study. There are three main components to a problem statement:

1. Root cause of the problem
2. Characteristics of the problem
3. Impact of the problem

> Problem statement
>
> Short summary of the root cause, characteristics, and impact of a problem existing in the substantive area of inquiry.

Problems impact more than individual humans – collective groups, for example communities or organisations, are also important possibilities. Non-human actors and geographical areas are also impacted by problems that can be investigated using grounded theory.

Figure 5.2 provides an example of a problem statement developed by one of our graduate research students. Note how the statement *High rates of attrition in the rural nurse workforce led to employment shortages that resulted in reduced rural hospital and health care services* can be broken down into the three component parts.
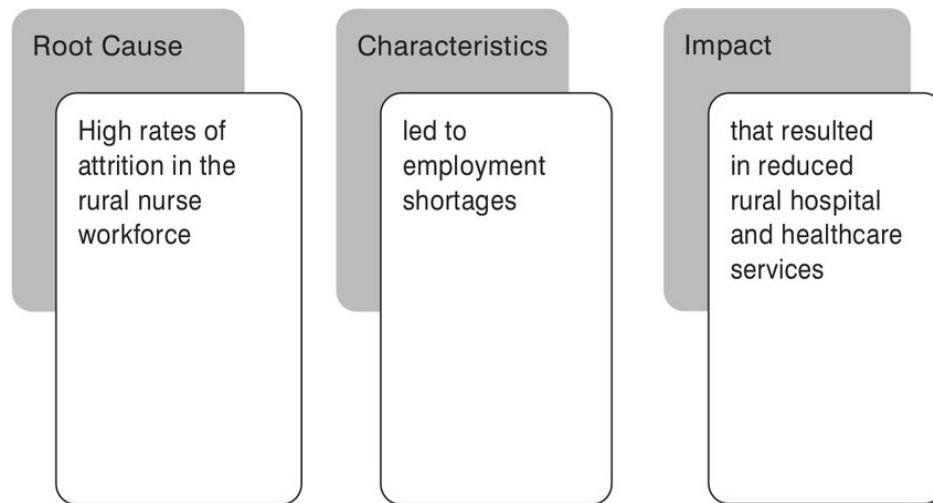
Root Cause	Characteristics	Impact
High rates of attrition in the rural nurse workforce	led to employment shortages	that resulted in reduced rural hospital and healthcare services

Figure 5.2 Example of a problem statement

Aim

The aim of your grounded theory proposal is a statement of what you ultimately want to achieve as an outcome of conducting a study. By its nature, your aim will be broad and flexible and be directly related to your problem statement. Your aim is different to the research question and sub-questions that follow, and it is these elements of your research design that will determine your chosen methodology and direct how your study proceeds. In the example presented in Figure 5.2, the aim needs to link directly to the root cause of the problem. It could therefore be presented as: *The aim of this study is to explain high rates of attrition in the rural nurse workforce and provide recommendations to mitigate levels of employment loss impacting service delivery*.

Research question/sub-questions

Your research question will be written as an interrogative statement of your aim. To provide more structure to your grounded theory research proposal, the inclusion of several sub-questions can also be helpful to structure your research plan. Developing a structured research plan before your grounded theory research proposal is even approved may seem antithetical to the methodology itself, and in some ways it is, as we will discuss in the next section. Realistically though, it is rare a grounded theorist has the luxury of being able to begin their study without this level of detail, given that most proposals will be for a specific purpose. As discussed earlier, there can be flexibility built into your design to allow for the required adjustments because of theoretical sampling and developing theoretical sensitivity. Also, there must be an understanding that you might need to return to the body which approves your initial proposal with these changes, depending on their magnitude.

Returning to our example of rural nurse attrition, you can see several ways to frame research questions to interrogate the root cause of this problem. The most obvious question is *Why do rural nurses choose to leave their employment?* While the results from such a study would describe existing pressures, it is unlikely this question would elicit responses that identify points where management could intervene to change a nurse's mind. An alternate framing of the research question might be *What process do rural nurses use to make the decision to leave their employment?* By explicitly including the word 'process' in the research question, the researcher has (a) expanded the potential scope of participants from rural nurses themselves to include others who work in rural hospitals and health care services and who interact with this group, and (b) identified action as being central to the study. If the actions a rural nurse takes in the process of deciding to resign can be explicated, there is the potential to identify points of intervention that might change their mind.

For this grounded theory research proposal, the following research question and sub-questions could be used:

What process do rural nurses use to make the decision to leave their employment?

    a *What barriers are there to rural nurses remaining in employment?*

    b *What factors enable rural nurses to continue employment?*

    c *Are there incentives that improve rural nurse retention?*

When developing the aim and research question/sub-questions for your grounded theory proposal, it is possible to find some middle ground between Glaser's (1992, p.22) suggestion that the researcher functions from a position of 'abstract wonderment', and Corbin and Strauss's (2015) more defined approach. Where possible, state your research questions broadly and in terms that reflect a problem-centred perspective of those experiencing or living the phenomenon to be studied. The research question will become refined early on in the research process (Glaser, 1992). Until that occurs, ensure that your identified area of

study is sufficiently broad to allow for the flexible and dynamic nature of the research methods to be employed, and be open to change, particularly early on in the research process.

Some further examples of how a grounded theory research question may be expressed are presented in Box 5.1.

Box 5.1

A checklist for writing the front material for a grounded theory research proposal is provided in Box 5.2.

Box 5.2

Checklist for writing the front material

Ensure that your front matter includes:

- a useful title

- keywords

- a problem statement

- the aim of the study

- a well-constructed research question

- an abstract that includes all of the above.

BACKGROUND

The background to your research proposal includes a clear and focused discussion of what is known, and what is not known, about your substantive area of inquiry. How will the proposed research study address a gap in the evidence base? It may be that you have already conducted a small study that has produced preliminary findings that you now plan to build on. If this is the case, you need to cite publications reporting these findings to demonstrate your developing expertise in the area, while explicating the need for further research to meet the aim of the proposal already stated in the front matter. As Penrod (2003) states, your goal when writing the background section of a research proposal is 'the development of an argument backed by adequate evidence to create and support a clear purpose statement that compels reviewers to consider […] the project' (p.822). Importantly, in grounded theory research proposals, you need to account for previous research designs used as well as their key findings. The mantra that the research design must fit the question is important to deliberate on when arguing for further investigation of a substantive area of enquiry already examined using an alternative research design. It may be that an additional study using a grounded theory design will more fully dimensionalise and explain the issue at hand – but you need to argue this case.

Many reviewers of proposals expect the background section to include a conceptual or theoretical framework, which 'helps reviewers to understand how the researcher is approaching the research analytically' (Penrod, 2003, p.822). Including extant theory at this point in the development of a research design is antithetical for a grounded theorist aiming to develop their own theory regarding the substantive area of enquiry. As with many things in life, however, this is a moment where a prudent compromise can be required of the researcher to progress their study. Penrod (2003) suggests that a useful approach to meeting the requirement of providing extant theory in a qualitative research proposal is to choose a theoretical or conceptual framework that is abstract, yet able to provide the researcher with a way to organise their thinking and guide their actions. Examples of this type of theoretical or conceptual framework are the broad philosophical paradigms of feminism, critical theory, post-positivism, postmodernism, and constructivism (see Chapter 2).

Literature in a grounded theory study

Use of the literature in grounded theory is perhaps one of the most contentious and misunderstood aspects of this approach to research. The literature has significance at all stages of a grounded theory study but, for convenience, we can discuss the literature as being used: to justify the need for a proposed study, to enhance theoretical sensitivity (see Chapter 4); as data during analysis (see Chapter 8); and as a source of theoretical codes (see Chapter 9). In terms of proposing a grounded theory study, it is the use of the literature to justify the need for investigation that is most pertinent.

It is the use of the literature in the initial stages of a grounded theory study that has stimulated the most debate. In traditional grounded theory, a formal review of the literature is delayed to prevent the researcher imposing existing theories or knowledge on the study processes and outcomes. Glaser and Strauss (1967) acknowledge, however, that no researcher enters the field as a blank slate. Strauss and Corbin (1990) reiterate this position, but the failure of these authors to direct the researcher away from the topical literature in the early stages of a study resulted in Glaser (1992) voraciously reaffirming the importance of avoiding reading in the substantive area completely. In saying this, Glaser does, however, encourage the grounded theorist to engage with the literature from the very beginning of a study, but outside the topic area to avoid contaminating and constraining the analysis of data with extant codes and concepts.

We would argue that there is very little difference between the positions of these authors in the early texts. Neither denies that a researcher will enter a study with a broad range of knowledge about their proposed area of study (with much of this having, no doubt, been drawn from the literature) and neither promotes a thorough review of the literature before undertaking a grounded theory study. We suggest, however, that there are many ways in which a limited and purposive preliminary review can assist a researcher in the early stages, not the least of which is the justification of a research proposal (Hesse-Biber and Flowers, 2019; Timonen et al., 2018).

Reviewing the literature on the topic of a proposed study provides an indication of the extent of current knowledge and work undertaken in the field. Charmaz, Thornburg and Keane (2018) argue that without a preliminary review, the researcher runs the risk of '"reinventing the wheel", missing well-known characteristics of the research topic, repeating others' mistakes and coming up with trivial products that simply reflect researchers' own ignorance of the literature' (p.419). These authors also support our position that engaging with the literature early on in a grounded theory study raises theoretical sensitivity and supports greater critical thinking about the developing analysis and interview schedule. The use of the literature to develop the background of a research proposal is unavoidable. Instead of considering this a limitation, we agree with Thornberg's (2012, p.249) idea of an 'informed grounded theory' where using the literature is considered a strength.

The researcher's voice 5.1

Elaine Keane on the use of literature in a grounded theory study

Elaine Keane is Associate Professor (Sociology of Education and Research Methods) and Director of Doctoral Studies in the School of Education at the University of Galway. Her research and publications focus on social class and education, teacher diversity, and constructivist grounded theory (CGT).

As a constructivist grounded theorist, I use the literature in a very particular way in a grounded theory study. Whereas in classical (or Glaserian) grounded theory, it is advised to delay the literature review until data analysis has been completed (in order to avoid being 'contaminated' by such engagement), we take a different approach in constructivist grounded theory. In recognition of the role of researchers' historicalities, positionalities, and perspectives, and the need for critical reflexivity in this regard, I conduct an initial literature review at the outset of a study to familiarise myself with the research terrain, to identify potential gaps in previous research, and to locate and, indeed, orient, my study (and my starting research questions) within this context. From a constructivist perspective, and particularly in research with a social justice orientation, there is an almost ethical obligation to have engaged with existing research to develop a critical awareness of the research field in order to advance it. However, importantly, the stance I take as a constructivist grounded theorist towards the literature and associated research findings is one of non-committal partiality and provisionality: I view previous empirical findings, and extant concepts and theories, as points of interest rather than as 'truths' to be confirmed in my study.

During my study, including during data collection and analysis, I continue to seek out, read, and file literature that is of interest, so in a sense, there is also an ongoing literature review. As constructivist grounded theory scholars have argued, this enhances our critical sensitivity as researchers to nuances in our data, and facilitates engagement in abductive reasoning. Later on in a study, when analysis has been completed, I return to the literature to compare what I have found to findings from other studies, and to relevant extant theory. If one of my findings seems to relate to or resonate with an extant concept from the literature, rather than 'pasting' that concept or theory onto my data and findings, I unpack how, in what way(s), and in which circumstance(s) my finding relates and does not relate, and work with my data to nuance and further develop the concept in order to extend conceptual understanding in the field. Of course, the beauty of grounded theory is the increased likelihood of identifying nuance and 'newness' in one's findings overall, especially at a conceptual level. In this context, literature reviewing at this point frequently takes me down new and unpredictable paths, often outside the substantive area of my (constructivist) grounded theory, to investigate how my concept 'fits' within and extends existing scholarship.

One of the greatest advantages that the literature affords a researcher in the early stages of a study is that it provides examples of how other researchers have employed grounded

theory methods. There is an abundance of literature from various disciplines on the use of grounded theory methods in whole or in part. These works provide an opportunity for you to learn from the experiences of others and can inform your study from a methodological rather than substantive position. Be sure to evaluate the quality of such work, to identify any flaws in the application of grounded theory methods that may result in a perpetuation of methodological limitations in your own work and beyond (see Chapter 3).

Box 5.3 provides a checklist for writing the background section of your grounded theory research proposal.

Box 5.3

Checklist for writing the background section

When writing your background section:

- Don't assume the reviewer is familiar with the area of enquiry; start by detailing the problem introduced earlier in the aims section while re-emphasising the significance of your proposal

- Ensure your literature review focuses on making a case for the proposed study by identifying a 'gap' in research conducted to date

- Include the findings of preliminary research studies you have conducted that led to the current proposal

- Emphasise the proposed investigators' previous work in the substantive area by citing their publications in the background to the study

- Use the device of contrasts to highlight the differences between your proposal and previous studies

- Use the device of 'yet' to communicate to the reader that you acknowledge the differences between your opinions and those of others who have published in the area.

RESEARCH PLAN (METHODS AND TECHNIQUES)

Locke et al. (2013) provide sensible advice to the novice researcher, which is to begin the research plan section of your proposal with a one-paragraph description of the overall study design. The reviewer needs to know that this is a grounded theory study from the outset. By not clearly identifying your research design as grounded theory, you can leave a less experienced reviewer grasping at the means to identify what you are planning to do. These authors also suggest that you include the parameters of the study in this opening paragraph to orientate the reviewer to the scope of the proposed research study. Continuing our rural nursing grounded theory example, the following paragraph illustrates how this might be written:

A grounded theory design will be used to investigate the research question: What process do rural nurses use to make the decision to leave their employment? A range of participants will be recruited to the study. It is anticipated that the sample will include rural nurse clinicians at different points in their career trajectory, rural nurse specialists, health service managers, and professional staff working in three rural health facilities. The main form of data generation will be an estimated 24 co-constructed, recorded interviews, using an aide memoir. In addition, up to 21 hours of ethnographic observation (and associated fieldnotes) will be conducted across the three rural health facilities and during all three shift patterns. These sites will vary according to distance from a major metropolitan centre, and case mix of acute care admissions and residential aged care. A purposive sample of five rural nurse clinicians, specialists, and managers will commence the study. After the initial coding of these transcripts, theoretical sampling will be used to recruit further participants based on the developing analysis. Intermediate coding will be implemented to support the development of theoretical concepts. Study recruitment will continue until theoretical saturation is determined to have occurred and a fully integrated grounded theory has been constructed using advanced coding methods that include developing a storyline grounded in the data. Theoretical coding will be utilised to add power to the final grounded theory explaining the process rural nurses use to make the decision to leave their employment.

Sample

A common pressure point for reviewers less familiar with grounded theory is the estimated small size of the sample required for many research designs. Even more confusing for many reviewers is the difficulty of predicting both the final size and constitution of the study sample. One way of communicating the scope of data that can be generated by a relatively small sample is to use estimated numbers of, for example, pages of transcribed text, hours of interview time, pages of documentation generated by participants such as diaries or blog entries, hours of time related to artefacts such as films, television programmes and documentaries, or digital stories created by participants. This added quantification of the sample can be considered a strategic disarmament of the reviewer in the writing of your qualitative research proposal (Sandelowski and Barroso, 2003). In this section, you will also need to address ethical issues, including recruitment strategies, potential risks to participants, and an explanation of how you will ensure informed and voluntary participation in your study. These issues will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. In Researcher's Voice 5.2, Maria Grant describes her experience of justifying her proposed sample size to a research ethics committee.

The researcher's voice 5.2

Maria Grant on addressing sample size in grounded theory proposals

Maria is a mid-career PhD researcher in the Faculty of Health at Liverpool John Moores University in England. Her PhD is focused on how academics acquire the skills to write for publication. She is author of The Grounded Theorist blog, a resource for researchers around the world.

One of the biggest challenges in my study came early while preparing my research and ethics applications. Although I had a general appreciation of grounded theory – that it builds understanding through data rather than an initial reference to previous theory – I was still learning about the methodology. I was learning that there were different schools of grounded theory, that these approaches were informed by the researcher's world view, and that there were recognised elements that needed to be present for a study to be accurately defined as a grounded theory study.

As a novice researcher, I'd learnt that because the methods used in grounded theory studies are common to other qualitative approaches, albeit used differently, the term grounded theory is an attractive but often loosely or incorrectly applied catch-all term for a range of qualitative research approaches; statements such as adapted, modified, or informed by grounded theory were ever present. My reading also suggested that qualitative studies can prove challenging for research committees who may unconsciously favour or privilege one research design (primarily quantitative) through the design of the application form that may not be a natural fit for alternative research designs (primarily qualitative). I soon discovered that grounded theory studies could take this challenge to the next level!

In preparing my applications, it was often difficult to know how to answer some questions, most notably when asked to predefine my sample size. My developing knowledge of grounded theory methodology meant I knew that if I prematurely defined an exact research population or sample size, it was likely to distort my study; this distortion occurring because it presupposed that it's possible to define what the theory will contain, where data should be collected, and what to sample to meet that expectation. However, the committees wanted numbers! Like a good grounded theorist, I started memoing. I memoed about my dilemma, about my selective reading of published grounded theories, and my reading of key grounded theory textbooks. Drawing parallels with recommendations about the need to be pragmatic in doing a literature review to satisfy research and ethics committees, I recognised a need to adopt a similar approach regarding sample size. Further searches led me to a paper by Thomson (2010) who'd analysed 100 author-defined grounded theory studies that had used the same data gathering method I'd planned – interviews. Thomson acknowledged limitations in his study, not least the lack of scrutiny of what authors defined as a grounded theory study, but indicated an average sample size of 10–30 participants. From a methodological perspective, I was reluctant to state a sample size, but from a pragmatic perspective, Thomson provided what the committees

expected as part of my application – a sample size and supporting reference. My application was approved!

Personal correspondence with Thomson and further memoing led me to conclude that a further methodological paper on sample size in interview-based grounded theory studies is needed, this time ensuring the presence of recognised grounded theory methods. Analysis of two data sets is currently underway. It's hoped that the study findings will assist future grounded theorists in planning and designing their interview-based studies, and provide a useful reference in overcoming the challenge of receiving research committee and ethical approval.

Data gathering and analysis

Following a description of the sample, you should include a detailed explanation of the process of data gathering and analysis. As experienced reviewers of research proposals, mainly for competitive grant schemes, we concur with the advice of many that it is valuable to break up the text of this section with the judicious use of diagrams, flow charts, and tables. There are several reasons for using different forms to present this information, the most compelling one being the need to economise on text, followed by your being able to demonstrate a clarity of thought through elegant and parsimonious expression. The notion that a picture speaks a thousand words can either play out extremely well in this context, or backfire badly, depending on how clearly you are able to encapsulate elements of your research plan pictorially. In deciding if your message is clear, or not, you need to rely on a panel of critical friends who are able to provide you with fearless advice on the quality of your research proposal from the beginning of writing this document. Peer review is commonly recognised as a useful strategy to strengthen a research proposal prior to submission; however, we would advise you to seek this type of feedback early on and not risk an unpleasant surprise close to the end. Illustrations of any sort require the scrutiny of several people to ensure that they all understand what you are trying to say.

Many grounded theorists choose to frame up the specifics of their research plan using research sub-questions, as opposed to objectives. A clearly articulated overall research question can lend itself to examination either way. Both objectives and sub-questions provide the reader with more concrete detail about how the researcher plans to answer the research question and achieve the aim. Whether you choose to use a research question and aim, followed by either objectives or sub-questions, will be influenced by your preference and that of your supervisors or research team members – not to mention the application guidelines provided by the body receiving your application. Regardless, the objectives or sub-research questions can be used to create a structure for your explanation of the research methods to be used. We would suggest that you consider emphasising the objectives or sub-research questions in bold or italics at the beginning of a paragraph that describes how you will collect or generate data to address this element of the proposed research study.

Sometimes the temporal flow of the research study means that different phases may meet several objectives or sub-research questions. If this is the case, then consider presenting the research plan using phases or stages as an organising framework. Again, consider whether a flowchart will capture the planned phases, allowing the reviewer a 'bird's eye view' of the proposed study. Most word-processing programs have templates that will assist you to produce a high-quality flowchart or diagram – try and use these where possible to reduce the chances of your pictorial representation losing its integrity when printed elsewhere.

In research proposals more generally, there is usually a divide between the methods of data generation or collection, and the methods of analysis. In a grounded theory research plan, this is a false separation given the centrality of concurrent data gathering and analysis. However, for the purposes of your research proposal, it may be that you need to write up these methods in a sequential manner. In saying this, you also need to demonstrate your understanding of the iterative and concurrent process of data generation or collection and analysis.

When writing up each of these components, don't assume that the reviewer understands what you mean by a particular method or technique. Provide a brief explanation of each of these, including how they will be operationalised in the context of your research plan. When defining methods of analysis, relate these to the objectives or sub-research questions and explain how the products of this analysis will integrate to address the research aims through an articulation of the findings. Techniques such as the use of computer software to aid analysis need to be described and justified, as do the management and translation of data more generally.

We agree with Sandelowski and Barroso's (2003) approach of threading methods of quality assurance in respect of data generation, collection, and analysis throughout the section describing the research plan. Using an applied approach is much more powerful than a catch-all paragraph at the end, stating, for example, that you will maintain an audit trail and document decision making. Consider the possibility of an expert panel to advise the research team and as a method of checking and balancing each phase of the study. This can be particularly valuable when investigating sensitive substantive areas of inquiry.

A checklist for the research plan section of your proposal is presented in Box 5.4.

Box 5.4

Checklist for writing the research plan section

Ensure that your research plan section:

- includes an introductory paragraph that summarises your overall plan and sets the stage for the more detailed explanation to come

- expands on the aim of the proposal by identifying specific objectives/sub-questions

- lays out your research plan in a temporal order – consider using phases or stages to describe the proposed study

- links each phase of the study to one of the objectives or sub-questions

- states explicitly what you are **not** going to do if you anticipate the reviewers may consider the scope of the study too extensive for either the funding or timeline

- uses devices such as section headings and visual displays to break up the text

- identifies how you are going to access your sample – provide organisational letters of support, if appropriate

- emphasises the volume of data to be generated with a small number of participants

- identifies methods to assure the quality of your study.

REPORTING

Outcomes and significance

The projected outcomes of your study need to be linked to the immediate aim of the study and should answer the question – 'How will you know if you have succeeded?' When discussing the projected outcomes, formulate them in terms of products and discuss the likely impact of these products on the field. In our preparation to write this chapter, we noted the differences between countries in relation to a specific section in the research proposal where the overall significance of the proposed study is argued. It may be that there is no specific requirement to summarise the significance of the study at the end of the proposal; however, like previous sections, we would advise that you weave this message into the description of the projected outcomes and their likely impact (see Chapter 10).

Box 5.5 provides a checklist for writing the outcomes and significance section of your grounded theory proposal.

Box 5.5

Checklist for writing the outcomes and significance section

When writing the outcomes and significance section:

- Prepare the section addressing the significance of your research proposal as an executive summary

- Refer to international, national, and institutional priorities when arguing for the significance of your proposal

- Identify methods of disseminating the products of your research to target a range of audiences, including policymakers and consumers.

Budget and timeline

Developing a carefully costed and logically planned-out budget and timeline for your grounded theory research proposal is a very important step in both planning for the success of your eventual study and convincing the reviewers of your ability to manage a feasible project. Part of costing a study is justifying the need for expenditure and this component of a proposal needs to be both detailed and accurate. Initially, you need to acquaint yourself with your institution's requirements for costing out a research proposal. There are a few factors for you to account for, including salary on-costs (supplementary allowances), institutional overheads and the processes for requesting waivers for these costs if appropriate, and the daily rate for compensating members of the research team who might be required to travel for fieldwork. Often, you need to cost the salary of investigators as 'in-kind' institutional contributions, even if they are not able to be requested of the funder.

There are several ways of formatting a timeline for inclusion in your grounded theory research proposal. As you can see from Table 5.1, you can use a very straightforward approach and map the steps of the research.

Table 5.1 Example timeline

Timeline												
	Jan 2023	Feb 2023	March 2023	April 2023	May 2023	June 2023	July 2023	Aug 2023	Sept 2023	Oct 2023	Nov 2023	Dec 2023
Planning Phase												
Literature Review												
Ethics Approval												
Data Collection												
Data Analysis												

Timeline											
Final Report											

Another technique for presenting a timeline is to develop one that is output based. This approach is particularly useful for contract research or consultancies where funders expect output at milestones in the study. Using an output-based timeline is also very useful for postgraduate research candidates when preparing their research proposal, as creating a self-imposed deadline for drafts of components of your thesis can keep you on track and writing throughout. When you are creating a pictorial representation of your timeline, try not to make it too complicated, do use colours that are meaningful, and consider using either a word-processing or spreadsheet template to provide a professional finish. There are several very useful resources on the internet that can assist you in using spreadsheets to create a Gantt chart that maps tasks/outputs and time.

A checklist to assist you in writing your budget and timeline section is presented in Box 5.6.

Box 5.6

Checklist for writing the budget and timeline section

When writing your budget and timeline section:

- Familiarise yourself with your institution's requirements prior to preparing your budget

- Seek assistance from your institution's research office in the development of your budget

- Ensure your budget is accurately costed and well justified

- Identify in-kind contributions and cost these appropriately

- Consider framing your timeline against the predicted outcomes from the study.

APPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER GRADUATE RESEARCH STUDY

Grounded theory research proposals that form part of an application for enrolment into a graduate research programme are generally much shorter in length than those produced as applications for a competitive grant scheme. A prospective candidate needs to complete the outline of their research proposal, including identifying a title, the substantive area of enquiry, the research question, an overview of relevant literature, the proposed methodology and methods, and a timeline and budget to be considered for admission to the degree programme. All of this information needs to be provided in as little as 600 to 1500 words, depending on the institution concerned. Writing a grounded theory research proposal for admission to a graduate research programme can therefore be a very difficult task, and one that, if possible, should be undertaken in consultation with a prospective supervisor.

We would suggest that your first task when thinking about enrolling in a graduate research programme of study is to identify your area of interest, and then to look around various universities to see who is researching in this area and, most importantly, who is publishing in this area (see Chapter 6). Choose your supervisors based on their knowledge of both your substantive area of inquiry and/or their methodological expertise. Getting your advisory team right is fundamental to having a positive experience as a graduate research candidate. Of course, your draft research proposal may be very influential in attracting the attention of potential supervisors and, as such, it is important that you invest time in each aspect of the document prior to circulation to make sure that it demonstrates your potential. The grounded theory research proposal you submit in the process of applying for admission to a graduate research programme is unlikely to be the same proposal you present for other purposes later in your candidature. Nevertheless, craft this document as carefully as you can and seek feedback from critical friends whenever possible.

ETHICS PROPOSALS

Proposals produced to satisfy the requirements of an ethics committee or Institutional Review Board (IRB) serve a very specific purpose. These committees have a very important function – to protect research participants from the potential risks that may result from their involvement in research. Ethics committees may also often concern themselves with the qualifications and experience of the researcher, as the integrity of the study reflects on the institution and has implications for the wellbeing of the participants. Any research study involving human participants, including material featuring or drawn from human participants, requires clearance from an ethics committee. In Researcher's Voice 5.3, Simon Burgess provides a window into the reasons why ethical issues require consideration when designing a grounded theory study.

The researcher's voice 5.3

Simon Burgess on the ethics approval process

Simon Burgess is a lecturer at the University of New England. He has worked in management, policy development, and academia. His PhD was in ethical theory and he currently teaches business ethics and leadership within the University of New England Business School (www.une.edu.au/staff-profiles/business/simon-burgess).

As you may have gathered, ethical considerations are taken very seriously by today's universities and research institutes. If you propose to conduct research involving human participants or animal experimentation, for example, you will need to complete a detailed application process that explains the purpose and methodology of your investigation. This will be closely scrutinised by an ethics committee, and you will have no choice but to accept the requirements that the committee imposes. Some researchers initially find this process a little frustrating. Rather than indulge in deep self-pity, however, it may be worth reflecting on some of the activities undertaken by the infamous Nazi doctor, Joseph Mengele. The Tuskegee syphilis experiments could also be borne in mind. Ethics committees were established to help ensure that such 'research' is never again permitted.

Over time, most researchers come to find that the process of gaining ethics approval can be used to their advantage. The application process generally serves as an efficient way of prompting us to think through various ethical and methodological details that we were always going to have to deal with at some stage. When a research proposal involves human participants, some of the common ethical issues to be addressed concern matters of participant risk, vulnerability, and consent; confidentiality; data security; data disposal; conflicts of interest; and differences in power between the researchers and the research participants. Measures that help to prevent sampling errors can also be important. In many cases, such measures are required simply to correct an innocent kind of methodological flaw. In some other cases, however, the ethics committee will recognise that a proposed sampling method appears to be motivated by a preference for a certain kind of result, and, in such cases, it can be reflective of a subtle kind of ethical failing.

Some scholars in the humanities (e.g., in history, literature and philosophy) rely largely on comparative analysis and other non-experimental methods, and rarely need to engage with human research participants in any direct way. As a result, some of them never need to formally gain ethics approval for the work they undertake. Yet, in all academic fields, there is an obligation to demonstrate a scholarly acquaintance with the relevant existing literature. And we all need to understand and accurately represent the views of our opponents, regardless of how profoundly mistaken we may believe them to be. It is perhaps also worth remembering that although vanity and pride are merely human, such vices can easily prompt us to write in defence of our own pet theories, even after the critics have conclusively refuted them. Researchers are seldom celebrities. Our first duty is to advance the world of scholarship through

honest, informed, and productive debate; it is not merely to gain publication, attract attention, or perpetuate discussion.

Each institution will have its own guidelines and forms that require completion to secure ethical approval to conduct the research. The processes involved in securing ethics clearance will vary from institution to institution and will also increase in complexity when dealing with particularly vulnerable participant groups such as children and the elderly. You should therefore ensure that adequate time is included for obtaining ethics clearance when planning your grounded theory study. Even if you are preparing a research proposal for purposes other than securing ethics clearance, you will need to include reference to potential ethical issues. Reviewers of applications for initial enrolment in a research programme of study, or for funding, will expect to see that you have considered such issues as they potentially impact on the viability of your project.

EVALUATION OF RESEARCH PROPOSALS

There are few explicit guidelines for grounded theorists seeking to understand the evaluation criteria used for their proposals. A search of the government research council sites for Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and Europe failed to return any specific instructions for qualitative research proposals in particular. The Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (O'Brien et al., 2014) provide a useful framework to ensure the comprehensiveness of your research proposal. Even though the 21-item list of standards is designed to evaluate the quality and transparency of a qualitative study, using comprehensive guidelines such as this to inform your grounded theory research proposal will ensure you have accounted for, or at least thought about, the key areas the reviewer of your document will require information on. Of note in the standards is the need for researchers to define specific methods. This is particularly important in a grounded theory research proposal where some of the terms such as theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling, and theoretical coding can be considered uncommon. The importance of demonstrating reflexivity in the choice of the substantive area of inquiry and the subsequent research design, is also usefully emphasised.

ACTIVITY 5.3

EVALUATING A GROUNDED THEORY RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Institutions that review research proposals for various purposes often make available de-identified examples of successful submissions to guide you in the development of your own proposal. Obtain a copy of a sample grounded theory submission. Using the checklists provided in this chapter and considering the specific requirements applicable to proposals produced for different purposes discussed previously, review the proposal to identify to what extent the author(s) of that document successfully address the various elements of each section of their proposal. What strengths and weaknesses have you noted that may influence the preparation of your own proposal?

DEFENDING YOUR GROUNDED THEORY RESEARCH PROPOSAL

There are two types of defence that an investigator is called upon to provide in relation to their grounded theory research proposal: a written rejoinder or an oral defence. Written rejoinders are often required in the process of applying for a competitive grant. Once reviewers have provided initial feedback on applications, researchers are invited to respond to their comments in defence of their proposal, and to clarify points. Sandelowski and Barroso (2003) provide a strategic treatise on their experience of defending a research proposal, which describes how they identified commonalities and differences in the reviewers' responses and then worked with these to their advantage. They began by emphasising the positives in the reviewers' commentaries, and then followed by playing off reviewers against each other where there were inconsistencies in their responses. After summarising the overall themes in the reviewers' comments, the authors then addressed individual issues – sometimes providing a counter-argument, and sometimes responding with an amendment to the proposal. If amendments were made to the original research proposal, the page number was provided to make this easier for the reviewers to track.

In addition to written rejoinders, it is becoming more common for grant review panels to request an oral presentation from shortlisted applicants, prior to their making a final decision about the allocation of funds. The oral defence of a grounded theory research proposal therefore can be part of the process of applying for a competitive grant, but, more commonly, novice researchers will be required to provide an oral defence of their research proposal to meet the requirements of confirming or progressing their graduate research candidature. There is an excellent chapter on the oral presentation of a research proposal (Locke et al., 2013) that we recommend graduate research candidates read prior to preparing for this event. However, in summary, there are a few points to consider in both the preparation and implementation of an oral defence of a grounded theory research proposal, as identified in Box 5.7.

Box 5.7

Checklist for the oral defence of a grounded theory research proposal

When presenting an oral defence of your grounded theory research proposal:

- Realise that the time allocation for an oral defence is much shorter than would be required for a reader to appraise your written research proposal

- Balance the content of your presentation so that the audience can clearly discern the research question, aim, background, and research plan

- Be discerning regarding how much of the background you present – don't overload your audience with endless references to the literature

- Ensure the audience knows what your research plan entails – focus on the methods of sampling, data generation, or collection and analysis

- Identify the expected outcomes from the study, link these to the immediate aim, and argue for the significance of these

- Don't read a script if you can avoid it – practise your delivery with your peers in advance

- If you are using presentation software, ensure your audience has a copy of the slides in handout format – this is particularly important if some attendees have English as their second language

- When fielding questions, make sure you understand what is being asked – use rephrasing techniques, if need be, to clarify the point being made.

GROUNDED THEORY METHODS IN DIVERSE RESEARCH DESIGNS

It is common for studies conducted within another methodological framework to employ grounded theory methods because of their value in the analytical process. Grounded theory methods are, in and of themselves, effective tools that can be employed in a variety of ways. The hybrid utilisation of grounded theory methods is legitimate and encouraged; however, there are problems associated with studies that claim to be grounded theory but cannot legitimately be described as such. It is important, therefore, to ensure that your use of grounded theory methods is adequately and accurately described to preserve the credibility of your work.

There are many examples of published research that have employed grounded theory methods within other research designs. Often, the researcher is using a grounded theory approach but does not aim to generate theory. A varied application of grounded theory methods and principles is used in these studies where the ultimate outcome is the description and exploration of phenomena. For example, Boe and Torgersen (2018) adopted a grounded theory approach to a descriptive study of Norway's Armed Forces' digital border defence. Findings from this study described leaders' perceptions of a leadership model implemented in the Norwegian Armed Forces Cyber Defence team.

Grounded theory methods are of value in mixed methods studies that employ broad and diverse research strategies drawn from both qualitative and quantitative domains. In mixed methods studies, grounded theory methods are often used to ensure rigorous management of the qualitative component of the research. Desborough et al. (2016) combined the cross-sectional findings of a Patient Enablement and Satisfaction Survey of general practice patients with grounded theory methods of data generation and analysis of unstructured interviews. Findings from this study evidenced the value of enhanced nursing roles in Australian general practice.

Researchers undertaking studies using a single overarching methodological framework, such as phenomenology, case study, historical research, ethnography, and action research, may choose to employ grounded theory methods to varying degrees in their research design. Hesse-Biber and Flowers (2019) promote the application of grounded theory methods with other established methodologies, providing the study is structured to accommodate the different strengths, weaknesses, and purposes of each. The extent to which specific grounded theory methods can be relied upon will be determined by how well they fit with the researcher's methodological goals and philosophical position. These authors provide a range of case studies that combined grounded theory methods with a systematic review, a feminist cross-sectional survey, and a randomised control trial.

When using grounded theory strategies and techniques in diverse research designs, the rules are quite simple:

- Identify the overarching methodological framework(s) of your study

- Be guided in your choice and application of grounded theory methods by the aims of your study; avoid selecting their use based on personal preference alone

- Ensure that you possess adequate knowledge of the principles that underlie each of the methods you intend to use

- Plan your use of each of the selected methods in the context of your whole study

- Clearly describe the modification and use of grounded theory methods in any reports or publication of your research

CONCLUSION

The novice researcher will often find the need to produce a grounded theory research proposal a daunting task. It can nonetheless be a particularly satisfying experience as they see the conceptualisation of their study unfold in a detailed form. The grounded theory research proposal provides an opportunity for the researcher to articulate the aim of their study, and enables the identification of potential gaps in planning and thinking that can be overcome in the early stages of its development. Regardless of the purpose for which you produce this outline of your proposed study, you should be aware that in preparing your research proposal, you provide the reader with an important first – and often only – impression of your grounded theory study and its potential impact.

Critical thinking questions

1. Consider your own profession. Are there any general or specific areas of knowledge that would benefit from the generation of theory through research?
2. The concept of process can potentially be defined quite broadly. Think about your everyday activities. Identify any obvious and more obscure examples of process in your daily routine. How does examining events in this way change your perspective of them?
3. Locate examples of application proformas for the conduct of research (for example, ethics applications, funding requests, course enrolment documentation). You will find examples of these on the internet or you can possibly obtain them from your affiliate organisation. Review the components of each and consider how effectively they may accommodate an application for grounded theory research.

Working grounded theory

Review the 'Working grounded theory' example presented in the Appendix. Note:

- The challenges faced by this researcher in writing her initial proposal

- The ways in which she used the literature in proposing her research

- How she addressed the evolving nature of the study design, including ethical considerations

6 MANAGING YOURSELF AND OTHERS IN GROUNDED THEORY RESEARCH

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help you to:

- Discuss the concept of self-care in respect of research

- Identify strategies to manage yourself and others specific to your type of research team

- Plan management activities in psycho-social, physical, professional, and intellectual self-care domains

- Describe success factors for grounded theory graduate research students

- Compile a list of strategies for a high-performance grounded theory team

INTRODUCTION

Grounded theory is one of the world's most recognised research designs. In this chapter, we will explore the different types of grounded theory research teams. Because grounded theory is commonly used by graduate research students, most of the chapter will focus on student-led grounded theory research that is guided by an advisory team. We begin the chapter with an exploration of the concept of self-care which we describe as having four domains: psycho-social, physical, professional, and intellectual. Self-care applies to all grounded theory researchers, however we know that graduate research students experience different stressors than established academics, so emphasis is placed on the student experience. We link aspects of self-care to the grounded theory research process, in particular the importance of reflection in raising your theoretical sensitivity and capability to effectively use the full range of methods. Practical advice is provided about how to prepare yourself to be a grounded theorist, as well as how to develop your knowledge and skills throughout the research process. We also reflect on our own supervisory experiences and outline some pragmatic strategies to help students and their supervisors progress to a successful outcome. Of course, grounded theory studies occur outside of graduate research degrees, and so we also discuss strategies for working in other types of research teams. The chapter concludes with troubleshooting tips for managing a grounded theory research team.

RESEARCH TEAMS

Research teams come in many shapes and sizes. In this chapter, we consider a research team to be a group of individuals who come together with a common goal – to design and implement a research study, including the dissemination of findings. There are two types of research teams we will consider in our discussion of how individual researchers manage themselves and others in grounded theory research: student-led grounded theory research guided by an advisory team; and research teams using a grounded theory design.

> ## Research team
>
> A group of individuals who come together with the goal of designing, implementing, and disseminating research.

Each type of grounded theory research team will need to manage different challenges as they progress through the research process. Challenges commonly arise from diverse ontological and epistemological views, different levels of expertise in grounded theory methods, openness to change in terms of the evolution of grounded theory methods, unclear or differing role expectations, prioritisation of outputs, and preferred communication styles. Understanding team dynamics, how you fit into the team, what you can offer, and what you can expect to gain from the experience of being a member of a grounded theory research team are important factors in successful self-management.

SELF-CARE

Understanding yourself as a researcher is an important first step in being able to develop and maintain a level of confidence and equanimity throughout a research study. Reflection and reflexivity (see Chapter 2) are important concepts that will assist you to develop greater insight into your work as a grounded theorist, and the contribution you can make to the larger team effort. Reflection is a process of thinking about concepts and incidents to gain insight into meaning and consequences. Reflexivity, as we discussed in Chapter 2, is an active, systematic process used by researchers to develop insight into their work and guide future actions. It is the addition of action after gaining insight through reflection that separates the two concepts. Ensuring that you consciously engage in a series of activities or actions to manage your psycho-social, physical, intellectual, and professional wellbeing, is what we define as self-care.

While the concept of self-care for qualitative researchers has been explored in relation to emotionally demanding research (Kumar and Cavallaro, 2017), it is also important for grounded theorists more generally. While this chapter has a strong focus on graduate research students undertaking a grounded theory study, self-care is important for everyone, regardless of their role in a research team.

Self-care

Activities directed towards ensuring psycho-social, physical, intellectual, and professional wellbeing throughout the research process.

Reflection

The process of thinking about concepts and incidents to gain insight into meaning and consequences.

In a grounded theory study, the concepts of reflection and reflexivity are realised through memoing (see Chapter 4). For grounded theorists, reflection is a method that individuals use to raise their theoretical sensitivity to the substantive area of enquiry and the developing analysis. Reflexivity in a grounded theory study is actuated by the research team changing something based on reflection. A grounded theory example of reflexivity is theoretical sampling. Deciding on the next data source, after reflecting on concurrent data generation or collection and analysis, is reflexivity in action.

Understanding yourself as a grounded theorist is a process of reflection to gain insights into your own philosophical position (see Chapter 2), personal strengths, and limitations. It can also be a process of reflexivity if, by clarifying these insights, a plan is then made to either play to your strengths or mitigate your limitations. Planning for self-development is a good example of tailoring self-care to your individual needs (Kumar and Cavallaro, 2017).

Some people really enjoy the process of reflection and gain satisfaction from immersing themselves in memories and records of what has either been experienced or expressed, with a view to working out what the deeper meanings and consequences of interactions might be. Others struggle with reflection and find it difficult to focus on themselves and their role in the context of a grounded theory study. For those who question the investment of time in the process of reflection, the promise of action that comes from reflexivity can be an enticement to engage in this process, with the goal of improving the quality of decisions going forward.

There are four domains of self-care which researchers need to pay attention to when working in a research team (Figure 6.1): psycho-social, physical, professional, and intellectual. It is important to emphasise the need to reflect on your strengths, as well as to assess your levels of resilience, vulnerability, and need in each domain **before** committing to being part of a grounded theory study. For potential graduate research students, enrolling in the equivalent of a four-year programme of study carries a high financial, professional, and personal cost and constitutes a major investment. Setting yourself up for success shouldn't be taken lightly and needs early, careful consideration.
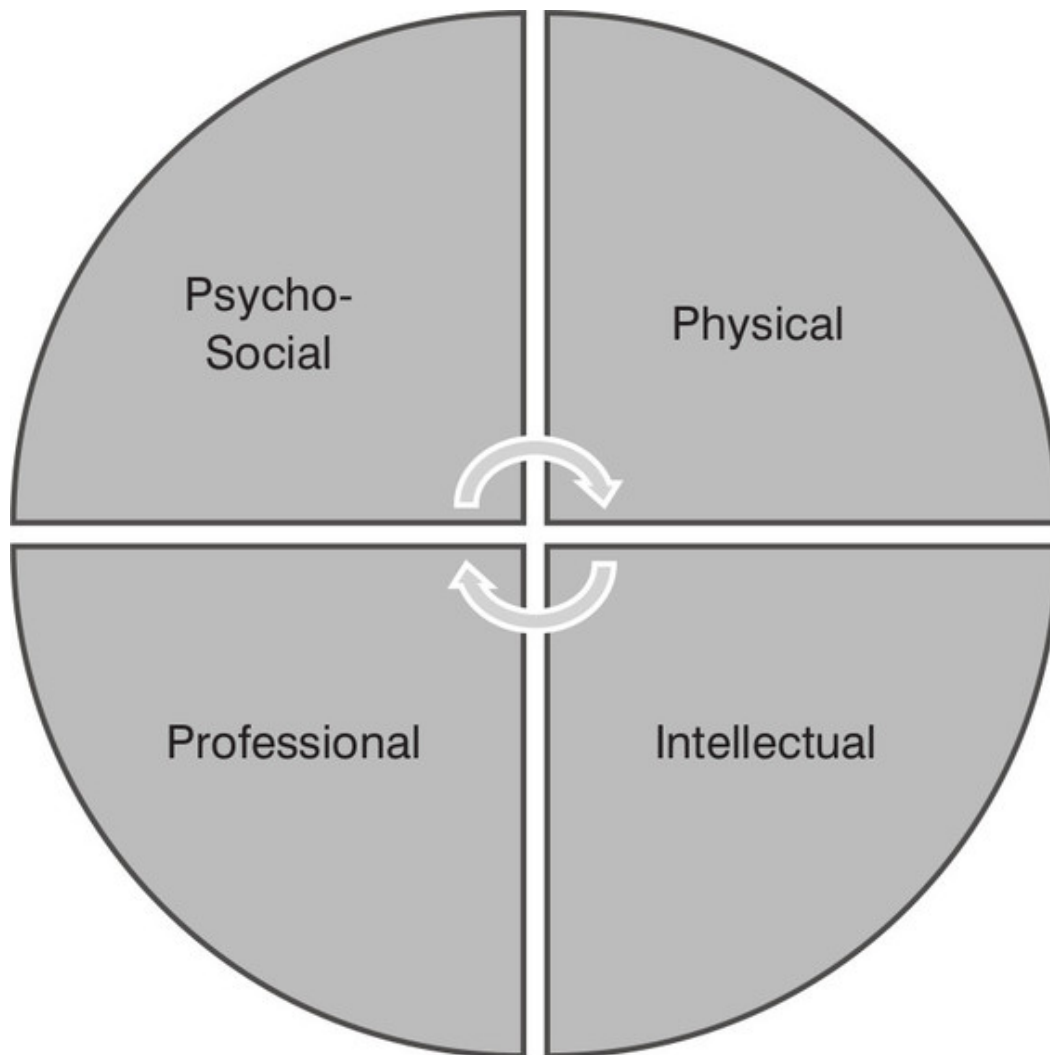
Figure 6.1 Four domains of self-care

Each of the domains of self-care are interlinked – for instance, taking good care of your physical health benefits your psycho-social and intellectual wellbeing. We have included professional self-care as a domain in recognition that your role as a grounded theorist is only one part of your self-identity (as discussed in Chapter 2). Particularly for graduate research students, maintaining and developing pre-existing professional networks is important to future-proof your career once your study is completed. In Chapter 3, we discuss how to develop researcher expertise as a grounded theorist, which is a form of intellectual self-care.

ACTIVITY 6.1

MAPPING YOURSELF AGAINST THE DOMAINS OF SELF-CARE

On a large sheet of paper, or digitally, create a mind map of your strengths and limitations against the four domains of self-care. Write a memo that describes what you have learnt from this exercise. Create an action plan for your identified limitations that includes specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timebound (SMART) goals (Elby, 2019), actions to implement to meet these goals, and the required resources.

We have provided an example of what a mind map might look like to motivate you to try this activity. Remember that you can build on your mind map over time and add in complexity. For a start, it is best to keep it simple so you don't feel overwhelmed.
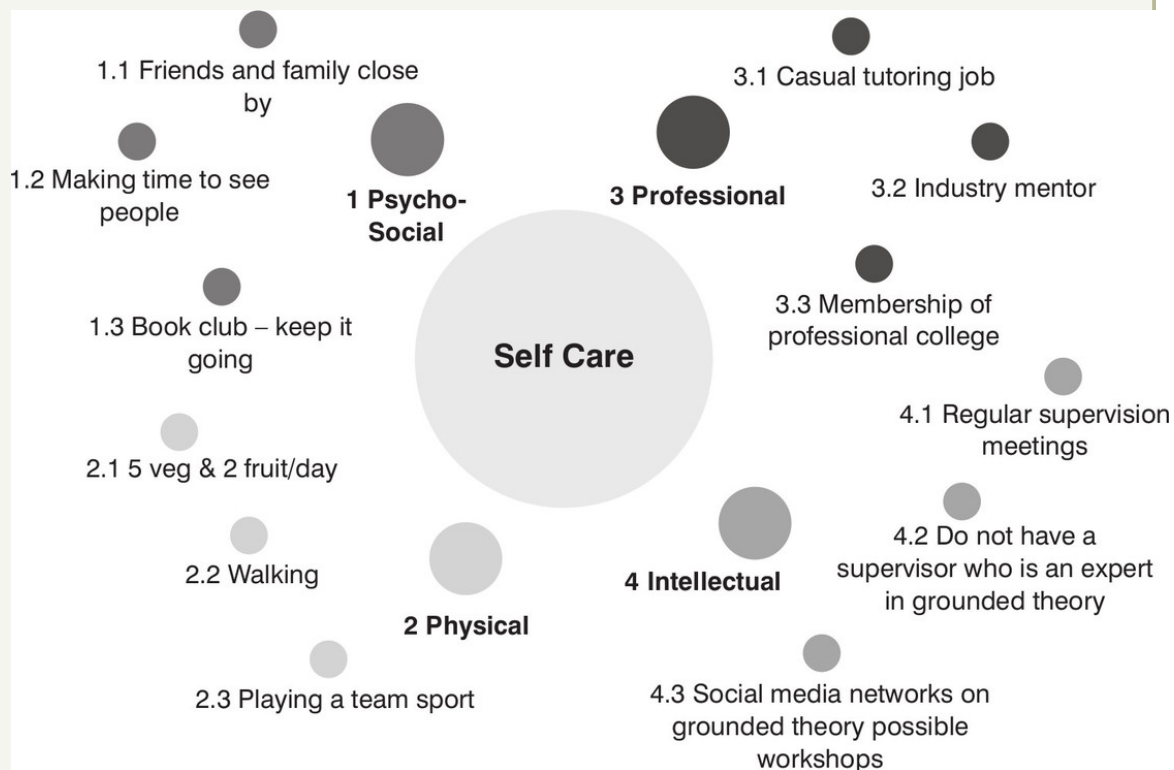
Figure 6.2 Self-care mind map example

When you consider the points we listed in our example in [Activity 6.1](#), you can see how some could be both a strength and a limitation, depending on your perspective. It is important to develop each of the points in your mind map in a memo, so that you can think through how the strengths and limitations connect to each other and are amplified in certain situations. For instance, while a casual tutoring job will develop your academic career, it can also be a time thief and result in less time for friends and family. Not having a supervisor who is an expert in grounded theory is a limitation, but it could be offset by engaging in grounded theory workshops and networking with other graduate research students. As we will go on to explore in the following sections of this chapter, achieving balance across the four domains will help you manage your own self-care and ensure your health and wellbeing throughout a grounded theory study. Developing an action plan can help buffer against the limitations that impact on your own situation.

Identifying resources to assist you in reaching your goals is essential for success as a grounded theorist. As you will have identified in [Activity 6.1](#), you already have a range of intangible resources at your disposal. These include your own levels of personal resilience and your mental health status. The escalating rates of depression and anxiety among graduate research students around the world are of grave concern to mental health clinicians, universities, and industry. A recent international meta-analysis of over 23,000 PhD students found that 24% demonstrated significant symptoms of depression, and 17% experienced levels of anxiety that were clinically significant (Satinsky et al., 2021). These very high rates of health disorders mean that a comprehensive self-assessment and, if need be, a professional assessment of your mental health status, are sensible to undertake before beginning a graduate research degree.

A study in Australia using the Job Resources and Demands theoretical framework found that graduate research students consider the most important resources to support them to be: a welcoming culture and community in the department; services including counselling; a mental health service; and strategies for balancing life and work. High quality supervision and supervisors, and peer engagement and networking, were also rated as significant resources for graduate research student success (Ryan et al., 2021). The demands of graduate research student life related

to intellectual wellbeing, such as developing new knowledge, learning a new language (the language of research), and acquiring a new skill set, were not considered major stressors. Rather, accessing adequate resources to ensure psycho-social and professional wellbeing were the top priorities.

For novice grounded theorists, the demands of mastering the methodology and methods are not insignificant, but, like other research students, the domains of psycho-social and professional self-care must be planned for and prioritised, particularly if you choose to travel to another country to study. A recent grounded theory study of South-East Asian female doctoral students found a temporary relocation to New Zealand created several unforeseen stressors, resulting in occupational and lifestyle changes (Che Arr, 2021). The grounded theory of 'gaining by losing' explained how international female graduate research students managed their everyday lives while studying overseas. Recommendations from this study focused on the availability of resources such as affordable accommodation, financial and employment support, networking, and affordances for culture and religion, as opposed to intellectual demands.

In summary, for student grounded theorists, preparing to implement self-care requires a careful stock-take of intangible and tangible resources. These resources include university culture, quality supervision, student services, the availability and accessibility of family and friends to provide moral support, scholarships, travel grants, equipment, transcription costs, office space, rent, utilities, food, transport, childcare, computer, software, and recording equipment.

ACTIVITY 6.2

In Researcher's Voice 6.1, Michael Nycyk illustrates the importance of a grounded theorist's insight into personal levels of coping and their ability to develop strategies for when they are feeling stressed by constant engagement with sensitive or challenging data and participants. In this story, Michael demonstrates psycho-social self-care through taking planned breaks and engaging in activities to distract himself from thinking about the data. This is a great example of self-care because Michael explains that it is not enough to just physically step away from the computer; you also need to step away mentally and emotionally by finding something else to occupy your thoughts. Further, it is a timely reminder of how stressful undertaking a grounded theory study can be, and why you need to be in peak condition physically and emotionally before you can begin to give yourself the best chance of success.

The researcher's voice 6.1

Michael Nycyk on self-care while undertaking a grounded theory study

Michael Nycyk is a researcher working in the School of Early Childhood and Inclusive Education at the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia. His main interest is the use of information technologies by adults in education. He is currently investigating adult cyberbullying prevention and management in higher education.

When undertaking a grounded theory study, the researcher may investigate emotionally taxing, distressing, and unpalatable topics. Researchers have studied challenging topics such as serial crime, illness, displaced people, homelessness, domestic violence, or mental illness as examples. Glaser and Strauss developed constant comparison methods during their first study together, working with dying patients. These subjects in collecting and analysing data challenge the researcher's world views and emotions. It is no longer just a person's data on a computer software program.

If the researcher experiences negative emotions while developing a grounded theory, it might be influenced by their background. Many researchers study an area they have life experience in. Perhaps it was caring for someone with dementia or a substance addiction. Exploring the data means going deeper into people's stories. Relationships between developed categories can also produce anxiety when analysing data, particularly if it feels the research is drifting from research questions. The process of analysis may trigger emotions long dormant or distressing for the researcher, reminding them of something they themselves have experienced.

There are benefits to seeing the problem from multiple viewpoints, but this is also emotionally taxing. Worrying as well about what

point theoretical saturation will be reached is another issue that concerns researchers as they ask, at what point will this study end? It is not just the data content, but also the distance and time it takes to constantly compare data. This can weary the researcher when doubts and fears set in about whether the study will develop a theory from the data.

Researchers, taxed and fatigued by analysing data, combined with meeting thesis or academic deadlines and responsibilities, need to practise self-care. While the term is jargon in the health support industry, stepping away, temporarily at least, from analysing data is advisable.

In my research, I conducted a grounded theory study into poor behaviour in the comments section on video platform YouTube. At that time, the platform had only slowly begun to attempt to stop hate speech, flaming, and unreasonable arguing. The language in the data set was discriminatory, hateful; it made fun of people's appearance, disability, culture, race, and sexuality. Delving into the data meant reading comments that were repetitive in their vitriol. Analysing them into categories took much resolve to continue so that a theory could be produced that was grounded in this data.

Self-care is a strategy that needs to be built into the research plan when undertaking a grounded theory study. The duration of that care might be a weekend, a week, or longer. If the data is distressing, or the analysis prolonged and exhausting, that is a clear signal to practise self-care. This involves closing the computer, and the mind, and doing something else so the researcher can return to finding that theory in the data. Primarily, it allows the researcher to refocus and be reminded that their topic will benefit someone in the future.

STUDENT-LED GROUNDED THEORY RESEARCH

While we consider student-led grounded theory research to be one form of team research, there are some specific nuances that need to be considered. For a student who has a potential grounded theory question, the choice of supervisor is critical. It is very difficult to undertake a grounded theory study without guidance from a person who has already acquired expertise in the methodology. Of course, it is possible that you may not have access to an expert grounded theorist to supervise your potential graduate research study. This does not make the use of grounded theory as a design an impossibility, however you will need to work hard to ensure there is congruence between the research question asked and the design developed, and that the advisory team understand the importance of this part of the design. As we discussed in Chapter 4, a grounded theory study begins with a substantive area of enquiry, with the research question and potentially sub-questions usually refined early on in the process of data generation/collection and analysis. The substantive area of enquiry needs to focus on process in some form to develop a strong grounded theory question. If the anticipated outcome of a study is to explain a process specific to a particular group of people, then the research questions developed need to reflect this aim. Grounded theory studies are not descriptive or exploratory and developing research questions of this nature can derail a study, resulting in the candidate and their advisory team getting frustrated with the methods. Clarifying research team members' expectations at the commencement of a study is important for a range of reasons, as we will explain in the following sections, but never more so than when you are devising the research question.

People considering enrolling in a graduate research degree can feel powerless to ask questions of possible supervisors. It is possible though to undertake due diligence through a combination of questions via email and an internet search. Box 6.1 contains a checklist that includes some questions to consider prior to enrolment.

Box 6.1

Supervisor checklist

Potential supervisor:

- How many other candidates are they supervising?

- How many completions have they had?

- Do they have a solid track record of thesis examination?

- Do they normally publish with their candidates? Who is first author on these publications?

- How often do they like to meet with candidates?

- How will you clarify expectations for both parties?

University:

- What are the completion rates for graduate research students at this institution?

- Is there a regular research school or seminar convened by the school or faculty you are thinking of enrolling in?

- What is the process for progressing through the graduate research programme?

- What type of institutional support is there for your study other than a full scholarship?

- Does the school or faculty provide support for open-access publishing?

A graduate research degree is a form of research training. This is particularly so for aspiring grounded theorists as a grounded theory design is unique and includes several methods not considered generic or common to other methodologies. Insufficient instruction in critical methods such as theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling, concurrent data generation/collection and analysis, coding at all levels including theoretical coding, storyline and memoing, will result in a sub-standard process that will likely result in a qualitative descriptive analysis and not a grounded theory.

A recent study of the PhD supervision process from the perspective of Russian students identified six categories of supervisory styles as opposed to previous research on the topic, which largely argued for a dichotomous categorisation of hands-off or hands-on supervision (Gruzdev et al., 2020). The six categories, some of which refer to previous published work, are *superheroes* who demonstrate involvement in all elements of the graduate research process, *hands-off supervisors* who are the direct opposite of superheroes, *research advisors* who work closely with students up to the point of preparing the thesis when they become less engaged, *research practice mediators* who don't assist with the organising of fieldwork but focus on publications, *dialogue partners* who focus on the first and last parts of the research process and are less engaged in the conduct of the study, and *mentors* who are close to dialogue partners but add in networking students with others and supporting their attendance at events that will develop their profile. The cluster analysis of what characterised each of these supervision styles included the following elements (Gruzdev et al., 2020, p.780):

- Recommends literature and research on the subject of the dissertation

- Recommends experts with whom to communicate on the subject of the dissertation

- Organises interaction with experts to discuss various tasks and issues

- Helps in the organisation of the field research

- Gives advice concerning the research methods

- Comments on results and conclusions

- Edits the text of the dissertation

- Edits the text of articles

- Informs students about scientific events related to the topic of the dissertation

- Helps to prepare publications

- Helps in finding reviewers.

We would argue that only superhero supervisors need apply to work with aspiring grounded theorists. This is not to say that grounded theory supervisors should micro-manage the research process, as it is a student-led grounded theory team. Instead, we argue that superhero supervisors adjust their level of interaction and guidance based on the novice grounded theorist's developing knowledge and skills.

A metaphor we commonly use to explain to students how this level of interaction changes over time is a Bell Curve. The normal distribution of students speaking with authority is illustrated in Figure 6.3, where the Y axis is student voice, and the X axis is time. In the first quarter of a graduate research study, the dominant voice is that of the supervisor as they teach the student how to be a grounded theorist. In the second and third quarters of the study, the student's voice dominates as they lead the discussion about implementing grounded theory methods and constructing their theory. In the last quarter of the study, the student's voice becomes less dominant as the grounded theory is disseminated and the substance of these findings dominates the discourse.

1. First quarter – I teach you how to be a grounded theorist
2. Second and third quarters – Led by you, we work together to enable you to construct a grounded theory
3. Last quarter – You disseminate a grounded theory that speaks for itself
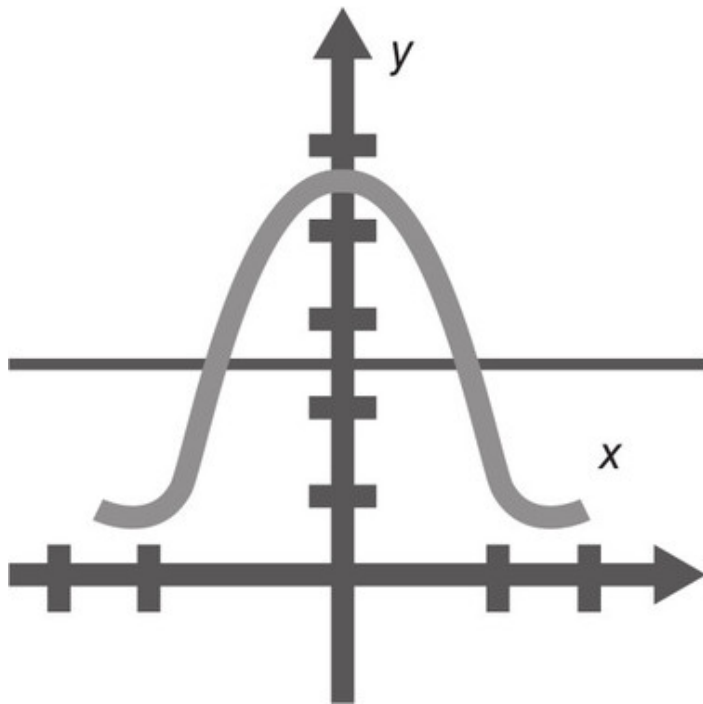
Figure 6.3 Superhero supervisor's approach

Once you commence your graduate research study, what should you expect from a superhero supervisor? Box 6.2 contains ten behaviours, drawn from our experience in research supervision, that we believe characterise a superhero supervisor.

Box 6.2

Effective supervisor behaviours

An effective supervisor will:

1. Establish realistic expectations
2. Bust imposter syndrome
3. Promote a project management mentality
4. Reduce student isolation
5. Prioritise supervision
6. Support you to publish throughout your study
7. Keep the end in mind
8. Encourage work–life balance
9. Know their limits in terms of when to counsel and when to refer on to experts
10. Have a contingency plan for student emergencies.

The number one priority for supervisors is to establish realistic expectations from the start. Students should be made aware that implementing a grounded theory study will be hard work, but also very rewarding, as they will acquire some useful and transferable skills for the future. Supervisors must also work to bust the imposter syndrome that many graduate research students experience by providing plenty of reassurance and avoiding comparisons with other students. Promoting a project management mentality with meeting agendas and notes is also crucial. Like all successful projects, access to tools and mastering software early are important to enable student success. Setting timelines and 'project' deliverables can also help keep a student-led grounded theory research team on track for success.

Supervisors need to be aware of, and prepare students for, the potential isolation they will experience, even if they are not physically isolated. Creating and supporting communities of interest, bringing students together at a departmental level in research schools and seminars, encouraging support groups, and creating a safe environment to debrief can all help to reduce this sense of isolation. In Researcher's Voice 6.2, Connie Allen and Caitlin McDowell describe how, as very proactive graduate research students, they found ways to reduce their isolation and

increase their grounded theory knowledge and skills. Superhero supervisors are there cheering this type of student on, promoting their success while finding resources to support their endeavours.

The researcher's voice 6.2

Connie Allen and Caitlin McDowell on finding support

Connie Allen PhD is a qualified wellness researcher, practitioner, and advocate with 20 years of cross-sectoral experience. She has a broad range of skills, including managing health promotion programmes and delivering wellness training to community members, professionals, and academics.

Caitlin McDowell completed her PhD at La Trobe University in 2018. She currently works as a lecturer in Youth Mental Health at the University of Melbourne, and as Occupational Therapy Research and Translation Lead at NorthWestern Mental Health.

Grounded theory research methods can be difficult to master, particularly if you are learning independently as part of a graduate research programme. Grounded theory encourages us to question fundamental assumptions about problem identification, literature reviews, data collection, analysis, and write-up. We're asked to put our preconceptions aside, trusting the process until data patterns emerge. At the same time, we discover that there are several grounded theory approaches to choose from, with very different (often conflicting) foundations, principles, and techniques. These approaches don't neatly align with university research parameters, adding to the complexity of this type of research. While mentoring and guidance are provided by supervisors, they tend to have limited time and may not have direct grounded theory research experience. In many schools/departments, it is also uncommon to come across other researchers with an interest in grounded theory.

We both felt the need to create grounded theory support systems as we completed our PhDs. Connie was based in Queensland, in a small campus outside of Brisbane. She created a small research support group, attended grounded theory workshops delivered by

Kathy Charmaz and Cathy Urquhart in Melbourne, organised Australia's first Classic Grounded Theory workshops in Brisbane (hosted by Tom Andrews and Barney Glaser), and created a Facebook group called 'Grounded Theory Australia'. Meanwhile, Caitlin established a Grounded Theory Community of Practice in Melbourne, which met every two months for two years. This Community of Practice attracted a series of small grants, which enabled them to organise annual workshops with grounded theory experts such as Jane Mills and Melanie Birks. Caitlin and Connie met at one of Kathy Charmaz's grounded theory masterclasses, and Caitlin offered to help Connie manage 'Grounded Theory Australia' (with its 650+ members).

We found the combination of expert-delivered workshops and online and face-to-face peer support to be incredibly helpful, alongside supervisor support. Grounded theory workshops don't tend to be offered often, but it can be good to look out for upcoming training, even if it is not in the exact type of grounded theory you are using. You might even want to reach out to grounded theory experts to see if they can present at your university, particularly if you can pay them through a small grant or ticket sales. Peer support is also important. Joining 'Grounded Theory Australia' and other grounded theory groups is one way to do so. These groups encourage you to ask whatever questions are coming up for you, to create some discussion with other members. Face-to-face peer support groups can also be helpful, but tend to fall to one person to organise, which can be hard to sustain over time. They may also be difficult to organise on small campuses. We encourage you to do what you can to find support, as this will be invaluable at all stages of your grounded theory studies.

The story presented in Researcher's Voice 6.2 identifies academics as often being time poor. Nevertheless, graduate research students should never feel that they are a burden; rather, supervision responsibilities should be given priority and seen as a way for academics to pay it forward. Being responsive and providing feedback within an agreed timeframe is vital to student success (Bazrafkan et al., 2019). Encouraging publication from the outset of a grounded theory study is another behaviour characteristic of effective supervisors. Publishing early not only

increases a student's feelings of achievement but also assists with an academic's key performance indicators. In saying this, it's important to take a student-centred approach to publication as recent research indicates that this is considered less important for some students than for supervisors, and too much pressure to publish can create a burden for a student (Baydarova et al., 2021).

Effective supervisors keep the end in mind, right from the beginning of the grounded theory research process. Asking the question 'is this contributing to a sustained argument?' must be at the forefront of research team meetings. Grounded theory studies generate a lot of data, and while much of it is very interesting, not all of it will contribute to a theoretical explanation of process. Keeping this aim to the forefront when implementing a grounded theory study will result in leaving some of the data behind, which can be a painful process for researchers. Glaser's description of a grounded theory as being both elegant and parsimonious (1978) helps formulate a picture of what the final product needs to look like.

Another aspect of keeping the end in mind is selecting examiners for a grounded theory dissertation or thesis. We recommend choosing examiners based on their level of expertise in grounded theory, as well as their level of expertise in the substantive area under investigation. Examiners with no experience or expertise in grounded theory won't appreciate the subtleties of the methodology and may be overly critical of methods that are not mainstream, such as literature use in a grounded theory study, theoretical sampling, and concurrent data generation/collection and analysis. In addition, the composition of the sample and the iterative process of recruitment may cause unwarranted concern.

The last three effective supervision behaviours relate to taking a student-centred approach to care. Encouraging grounded theory students to work on achieving work–life balance, knowing their limits in terms of when to counsel and when to refer on to experts, and contingency planning for the emergencies that beset students – be they related to their personal lives or technical issues – are all important tips for superhero supervisors. Student expectations of supervisors providing pastoral care have changed in recent years (Baydarova et al., 2021) and the traditional model of master and apprentice is outdated. The new generation of grounded

theorists communicate and operate in ways that were once unimaginable. Graduate research students' expectations of supervisors and the wider institution are broader and more encompassing of helping them achieve a work–life balance to support their wellbeing. Achieving work–life balance is a greater source of stress for part-time students than full-time ones (Yusuf et al., 2020).

Another potential source of stress that both students and supervisors need to consider is the potential for a conflict of interest when a student is employed on an externally funded study that also constitutes their graduate research project. There is a high risk of students not progressing at a fast enough rate to satisfy the funder's requirements for completing a study. Also, grounded theory can be somewhat unpredictable in terms of the developing theory as a consequence of concurrent data generation/collection and theoretical sampling. This can result in the student not investigating the specific phenomena that might have been outlined in a research grant application, which can be a source of tension for a student-led research team. Employment versus the independence of candidature needs to be carefully considered by all concerned before embarking on this type of arrangement.

While each of these effective supervision styles describes the obligations of supervisors, both students and supervisors each carry responsibility for ensuring their wellbeing through self-care, as does the broader research team. It is well recognised in the literature that there is both an individual and an organisational element to creating a successful graduate research environment (Kumar and Cavallaro, 2017).

RESEARCH TEAMS USING A GROUNDED THEORY DESIGN

For research teams who have chosen a grounded theory design, there needs to be agreement on the intent of the study, that being to explain a process associated with the substantive area of enquiry, as well as an understanding of the iterative nature of grounded theory practice. Grounded theory research teams should have a shared level of tolerance for ambiguity, particularly in the early stages of a study where it can feel quite messy and uncertain. As we argue elsewhere (Birks et al., 2019), a diverse team of researchers engaging in a grounded theory study will bring a range of skills, experience, and expertise to their shared endeavour. Identifying team members' strengths at the beginning of the study, and allocating roles based on these strengths, is fundamental to achieving the goal of agreed expectations. It is during the phases of data generation/collection and analysis that the collective power of a grounded theory research team is best utilised. While initially coding is an individual activity, the outcome of this process can be shared with the team before the collective adds to the richness of the analysis in the later stages of coding. Using a team-based approach to analysis is part of grounded theory history, with Glaser and Strauss explaining the advantages of working together in their original text:

> Teammates can help bring out points missed, add points they have run across in their own coding and data collection, and crosscheck his [sic] points. They, too, begin to compare the analyst's notions with their own ideas and knowledge of the data; this comparison generates additional theoretical ideas. With clearer ideas on the emerging theory systematically recorded, the analyst then returns to the data for more coding and constant comparison. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, pp.107–108)

Writing definitional statements that can be further developed as a team is an important strategy to gain consensus about tentative theoretical constructs. Definitional statements are succinct statements that define and delimit a theoretical construct. During the process of analysis, at any level,

a definitional statement can be written that explains a tentative theoretical construct, be that a code, category, property, or dimension (see Chapter 8). Sometimes definitional statements can be added together to form a fuller explanation of a concept. Memos are an important way to expand on definitional statements by situating them in the broader context of the study. In due course, both definitional statements and memos will inform your developing theory (see Chapter 9).

> ## Definitional statement
>
> A succinct statement that defines and delimits a theoretical construct.

The principles of self-care apply to research teams using a grounded theory design in the same way as they do for student-led projects. This is particularly important when teams are investigating topics that are sensitive and sometimes confronting. In Researcher's Voice 6.3, Laura Biggs describes the importance of self-care in a research team when conducting a grounded theory study that researched the complex and sensitive issue of perinatal suicide in Australia.

> ## The researcher's voice 6.3

Laura Biggs on research teams and self-care

Laura Biggs is a research fellow in the Intergenerational Health Group, Murdoch Children's Research Institute in Melbourne, Australia. She is a midwife, a researcher and an educator with a passion for the use of innovative qualitative methodologies and methods to generate deeper understandings of complex social and health phenomena, including maternal suicidality and intergenerational trauma.

We had set out to develop a theory to explain the way suicidality manifests and evolves during pregnancy and the following year. It felt like a big undertaking, even before we realised that we would be generating the theory in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The personal and professional experiences of our research team brought significant insights to the study. Although the team was small, our professional expertise included perinatal mental health, midwifery, and nursing professionals, and mental health peer support workers. The team also held diverse personal experiences of mental health and distress, including lived experience of perinatal mental illness, suicidality, gender-based violence, and loss of a mother to maternal suicide. In balance with the rich insights that these perspectives could bring, there was also a clear need for a very deliberate approach to supporting the team's wellbeing. It wasn't solely about surviving the study content and the pandemic; we wanted to have positive experiences of the research process itself.

Most of our study team were physically located in Melbourne, Victoria, so the majority of the study was undertaken in lockdown conditions. We could not come together as a team, and we undertook interviews and analysis alone in our homes. With these contexts in mind, we implemented a number of measures to promote researcher wellbeing. These included:

1. Fostering a culture within the team which normalised speaking honestly about our wellbeing as researchers.
2. Weekly reflective supervision for research assistants during periods of data generation. These sessions functioned as helpful opportunities to reflect on how interviews were going, clarify insights to inform theoretical sampling, and note whether any challenges had arisen for researchers with regards to their wellbeing or experiences within the study.
3. Implementing an individual researcher wellbeing plan that encouraged each member of the team to document what they would like to do to support their wellbeing, signs that indicated they could benefit from additional support, and a commitment to revisit the plan regularly throughout the study period. Team members could choose to share the plan with others, for example a mental health professional or a study colleague, or decide to keep the plan confidential.
4. Team meetings commencing with a researcher wellbeing 'check-in'.

I am writing this vignette as we prepare to submit our theory for publication. I strongly believe that embracing our personal and professional insights and deliberately foregrounding our wellbeing (alongside participant wellbeing) have significantly contributed to the quality of the theory we have been able to generate.

TROUBLESHOOTING GROUNDED THEORY RESEARCH TEAMS

In all grounded theory research teams, there is an opportunity to identify actions that will support self-care. Taking time to clarify expectations from the beginning and then committing to actioning these will reduce stress for each member of the team. Establishing a code of conduct for your team can be a great way to develop shared expectations and set a baseline for the way that team members will act and interact with each other. Some of the obvious, but important, parameters to be discussed include expectations regarding: communication type and frequency; maintenance of audit trails; production of meeting agendas and follow-up action minutes; synchronous and asynchronous working arrangements; and reasonable response times. Identifying productivity software that the team is happy to use can be helpful, especially when teams are working asynchronously. For many, recent changes to working conditions means researchers are often working from home. For those managing multiple commitments, this can mean working outside of office hours, so platforms such as Microsoft One Note™, Evernote™, or Microsoft Teams™ can be helpful for sharing and developing ideas and analysis. They can also be a repository for shared resources such as journal articles or web links.

Common points of tension in any type of grounded theory research team relate to team members not fully understanding the intent and application of grounded theory methods. The iterative nature of a grounded theory study can be hard to understand for researchers who come from a research paradigm which is deductive in intent. Other problems can arise from team members wanting to introduce extant theory too early in the process of analysis. Elevating the level of analysis to become more theoretical in the later stages of the research process can be challenging for those from a tradition of representing individual participants' stories in the analysis. Producing theory from data relies on the research team being able to work at a more abstract level, while remaining grounded in that data. Achieving this is easier said than done, which can be a challenge for some.

Potential solutions for these common points of tension include plenty of preparation for the team prior to commencing the study. You may want to

run a grounded theory 'boot camp' to ensure shared understanding of the methodology among all team members. Attending a grounded theory workshop, such as those described by the researchers in [Researcher's Voice 6.2](), is another option. Being positive in the feedback you provide to colleagues on their preliminary work is important to building confidence in using new methods.

DIVERSE, CULTURALLY SAFE RESEARCH TEAMS

In addition to the practical issues and solutions discussed in the previous section, there are deeper considerations that need to be explored by grounded theory research teams to ensure their success. The first of these considerations is the importance of diversity in research teams, and the second is how to create a culturally safe research environment for everyone involved in a study.

The concept of diversity is contested in terms of definition and meaning. Kuklenski (2021, p.32) argues that diversity is commonly 'used to refer to social categories or groups of people who, based on their "membership" have experienced either positive or negative consequences in the workplace and society more broadly'. This author goes on to discuss the idea of explicit and implicit diversity being defined by how easily the characteristics of diversity can be perceived. For example, explicit diversity relates to observable characteristics such as 'age, ethnicity, race, gender, or physical disability'. Implicit diversity includes characteristics not so easily observed such as 'education level, religion and sexual orientation'. Additionally, diversity can be understood as being both single dimensional for some and multi-dimensional for others, which is when one person combines several explicit and implicit characteristics of diversity. Contextual and cultural influences on constructions of diversity mean that there is no one definition of diversity that is applicable across the globe; instead, individuals define their own reality based on their specific situation.

Regardless of how individual researchers define their own sense of self, there are many benefits to diverse research teams that include members with a range of backgrounds, values, life experiences, and scholarly expertise. A recent analysis of over 9 million papers and 6 million scientists found a strong positive association between ethnic diversity and scientific impact factors. This same study found that groups of researchers outperform individual researchers (AlShebli et al., 2018). As well as research performance, there is a strong link between diversity in terms of gender, age, and education, and innovation as demonstrated by a study by Østergaard et al. (2011). These authors argue that diversity is more

important in jobs that require 'interaction and problem-solving' (p.508) as opposed to highly routinised jobs, a finding that is transferable to the research environment.

Leading diverse research teams, particularly those that are ethnically diverse, is directly related to ensuring that both team members and participants are in a culturally safe environment. Cultural safety is a concept commonly used in health care practice; however, the principles apply to all work environments, including research environments. In the following quote, we have adapted a recent redefinition of cultural safety in health care to apply it to research relationships. The reason we have adapted this contemporary view of cultural safety is because the authors include organisations as well as individual researchers, participants, and the communities they belong to. It is important to understand that cultural safety is a shared responsibility and one that requires accountability at all levels.

Cultural safety requires … [researchers] and their associated … organizations to examine themselves and the potential impact of their own culture on … interactions… [in research]. This requires individual … [researchers] and … organizations to acknowledge and address their own biases, attitudes, assumptions, stereotypes, prejudices, structures, and characteristics that may affect … [their interactions with others]. In doing so, cultural safety encompasses a critical consciousness where … [researchers] and … organizations engage in ongoing self-reflection and self-awareness and hold themselves accountable for providing culturally safe care, as defined by the … [participant] and their communities, and as measured through progress towards achieving … equity. Cultural safety requires … [researchers] and their associated … organizations to influence … [the research process] to reduce bias and achieve equity…
(Curtis et al., 2019, p.14)
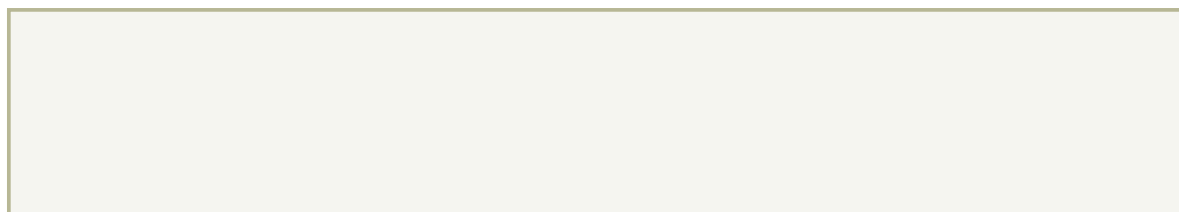
ACTIVITY 6.3

GROUNDED THEORY RESEARCH TEAMS' CODE OF CONDUCT

In conjunction with your team members, brainstorm what is important to ensure the safe conduct of your planned grounded theory study. This will vary depending on the context of the study and the levels of experience you each bring to the research process. Think about what constitutes culturally safe practice in the grounded theory study you are planning. Write SMART goals for the level of conduct that you agree is expected of everyone. Attach your code of conduct to the minutes of your team meetings as a reminder of what you have all committed to.

CONCLUSION

Being a part of a grounded theory research team can be brilliant fun. Implementing this research design is intellectually challenging, while allowing for creativity and the exercise of critical thinking. Working together as a team to construct a grounded theory can be immensely rewarding, particularly as the recommendations for practice, policy, education, and further research have the potential to create real-world impact for individuals, families, and communities. While we have outlined some of the potential pitfalls in this chapter, we have also provided a lot of strategies to help you avoid some rookie mistakes. Taking a solution-focused approach to both implementing your grounded theory study and working as a team will support you to reach your goals. Placing self-care high on your agenda is vital to your achieving success as a researcher, and key to balancing the personal and professional elements of your life.

Critical thinking questions

1. When contemplating a graduate research programme, what have been your main priorities until now? Have you fully considered all the factors that will support you to succeed?
2. Reflection and reflexivity are an integral part of the grounded theory research process. How do you feel about reflecting on your experience to date? Do you use memos to record these reflections and to work out any changes you might need to make to any aspect of your study? If you haven't been memoing, how else might you reflect and how effective is that process?
3. Have you actively considered diversity in your grounded theory study? How might you increase the diversity of your research team and participant group, and what type of effect would this have on your study?

Working grounded theory

Review the 'Working grounded theory' example presented in the Appendix. Note:

- How the researcher secured protected time to focus on her study

- The activities and hobbies she maintained to provide time out from her research and maintain balance across the four domains of self-care

- That her supervisory panel had complementary skill sets

- Her ways of working with her supervisory team, which included a regular feedback loop post-meetings

PART III PRODUCING GROUNDED THEORY

7 GENERATING AND COLLECTING DATA

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help you to:

- Discuss the significance of quality data in the production of a grounded theory

- Identify types and sources of data for use in a grounded theory study

- Define the term theoretical sampling

- Distinguish between data generation and collection

- Describe processes for accessing, generating, and collecting data in grounded theory research

INTRODUCTION

In the first two parts of this text, we introduced you to some basic methodological concepts relevant to grounded theory, and discussed strategies for preparing to undertake a grounded theory study. In many approaches to research, the next stage of a research project will be the identification of hypotheses or theoretical frameworks as a structure to guide the implementation of a study. In grounded theory, 'everything begins with the data' (Wasserman et al., 2009, p.358) and the data remain prominent throughout analysis and theory building. The nature of grounded theory research ensures that you will maintain this close relationship with the data throughout your study, rather than undertake data collection as an isolated task as is the case in many other types of research. In this chapter, the generation and collection of data from a diverse range of sources will be examined in the context of grounded theory research processes.

Data in grounded theory research

Data are the raw materials generated or collected for use in research. In the case of grounded theory, this data is subjected to analytical processes, as described in the following chapters, for the purpose of developing theory. In grounded theory research, data can take many forms. Glaser considers that 'all is data' (Glaser, 1998, p.8), a statement that has drawn criticism for being too vague (Bryant, 2003). It does, however, support a position that embraces the use of a vast array of data sources. Charmaz (2014) asserts that the credibility of your study is determined by the relevance, substance, scope, and depth of your data. Among the guidelines she proposes to ensure adequacy of data quality, Charmaz suggests gathering data that:

- capture a range of contexts, perspectives, and timeframes

- provide rich detail in respect of the views and actions of participants

- go beyond what is superficially evident

- have value for the purpose of comparison and category development.

> ### Data
>
> Raw material generated or collected for use in research.

There is enormous diversity in the potential areas of study that can be investigated using grounded theory. Similarly, exploring diversity in the use of data ensures that you do your study justice and produce a grounded theory of value. In this chapter, we refer to *sources* of data as the persons, places, or repositories from which data originate (for example, interviews, observation, publication databases, or archives). *Types* of data, on the other hand, are the forms that the data obtained from these sources take (for example, transcripts, fieldnotes, or documents). A summary of examples of the types of data that can be used in grounded theory research are presented in Box 7.1. The sources of this data and the strategies by which they can be generated or collected are discussed later in this chapter.

> ### Data sources
>
> Persons, places, or repositories from which data originate.

> ### Data types
>
> Forms of data obtained from data sources.

> ### Box 7.1

Types of data

- Transcripts of interviews and focus groups

- Fieldnotes, memos

- Journals, diaries, log books

- Questionnaires, surveys

- Governmental and organisational policy documents

- Scholarly literature

- Novels

- Articles published in popular media

- Material posted on web logs, social networking sites, and forums

- Photographic images, videos

- Artwork, artefacts, architecture

- Music

As grounded theory research often attempts to understand the world of the individual from their particular perspective, participant interviews are the most common source of data. Charmaz (2014) speaks to their increasing use and highlights their role in grounded theory, in keeping with her constructivist emphasis. We contend, however, that although interviewing is frequently used, it should not be considered the standard, or only, source of data in grounded theory research. Lowe et al. (2020) conducted a study using data beyond interview. In this research, participants wore an activity tracker and completed a daily symptom log prior to being interviewed. This approach enabled these researchers to individualise the interview process for each participant. In Researcher's Voice 7.1, Sonya Lowe discusses the value of this data in producing a grounded theory consistent with her philosophical position and research intent.

The researcher's voice 7.1

Sonya Lowe on multiple data sources

Sonya Lowe is currently a palliative care physician and Assistant Clinical Professor in the Department of Oncology, University of Alberta, Canada. She is grateful to Dr. Barney Glaser for his constructive feedback and instruction at the 2015 Grounded Theory Seminar in Mill Valley, USA. Sonya successfully defended her PhD dissertation, entitled 'Physical Activity and Advanced Cancer: A Grounded Theory Approach', under the co-supervision of Dr. Sarah Brearley and Prof. Christine Milligan at Lancaster University, UK in 2017.

The aim of my study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the emic (insider) experience of activity and quality of life in people with advanced cancer (Lowe et al., 2020). I approached my study through the post-positivist philosophy of realism, which asserts that: (1) there is more than one way to understand reality, (2) all understanding is relative to a particular perspective or world view, and (3) all knowledge is fallible and can only be partially apprehended (Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2007). Within the spectrum of realist positions, subtle realism endorses naïve realist ontology in that an independent reality is seen to exist, but this reality can only be accessed indirectly; it likewise endorses naïve realist epistemology in that reality is knowable yet contends that this knowledge is merely one representation of possible valid accounts (Madill, 2008). Subtle realism fits with my belief that activity is a tangible entity that exists independently of my view or others' view of it, although it may not be possible to directly access that reality.

My cross-sectional study comprised two phases: in Phase One, participants completed a daily symptom record and wore an objective activity monitor for seven days' duration. The activPAL™ activity monitor (PAL Technologies Ltd, Glasgow, UK) records triaxial movement and time spent supine, sitting, standing, and stepping, including volume and intensity, on a second-by-second basis (Broderick et al., 2014). In Phase Two, I conducted face-to-face, semi-structured interviews wherein the activity monitor output and daily symptom record sheets were used as qualitative probes, by informing and individualising interview questions to glean insight into what was relevant and significant from the participant's perspective. From the subtle realist lens, the activPAL™ activity monitor formed one of multiple means by which I sought to better understand the independent, tangible entity of activity in people with advanced cancer.

As per classic grounded theory methods (Glaser, 1978), I performed line-by-line, open codification on each interview transcript with integrated reference to my interview fieldnotes, the participant's activity monitor output, and daily symptom record. Selective coding followed wherein only those factors that related to the emerging core category were analysed. Constant comparative analysis of data from these multiple sources shed new perspectives from which I was able to increase my theoretical understanding of the conceptual category, its properties, and conditions. Throughout coding and analysis, I wrote theoretical memos which were printed and sorted by hand to facilitate the emergence of conceptual categories, properties, and interrelationships, and ultimate integration of the theory (Glaser, 1992).

From the positivist-empiricist perspective, objective activity monitors are considered the gold standard of quantitative assessment in physical activity research (Gorman et al., 2014). From my subtle realist lens, however, I used the activity monitor output as an interview probe to reveal the individual's pattern of day-to-day behaviour, and to explore the reasons underlying those patterns with the participant. Multiple data sources, including the participant's activity monitor output, daily symptom record sheets, interview transcripts, and fieldnotes, enabled me differing yet valid ways to access the independent entity of activity for people with advanced cancer. This was congruent with my positionality within subtle realism and my use of grounded theory methodology in this study.

In your own research, be sure to consider where you are most likely to find data of significance to your research. While theoretical sampling, as discussed later in this chapter, will determine the direction and nature of your search for data of value to your developing theory, be open to what forms the relevant data may take. The types of data that you can use are not limited to those discussed in this chapter or elsewhere; the options are endless and exciting.

The examples of data contained in Box 7.1 have traditionally been discretely distinguished as either qualitative or quantitative, by both grounded theorists and other researchers. In their seminal work, Glaser and Strauss (1967) presented grounded theory as an approach to research that embraced both qualitative and quantitative data sources. In the decades since the publication of this text, the contribution that grounded theory has made to the interpretive sciences has seen it being used most often with data of a purely qualitative nature. Grounded theory can be produced entirely from either qualitative or quantitative data (the latter being reaffirmed by Glaser (2008)). As with any form of research, however, aligning grounded theory methods to only one type of data limits the potential of a study to achieve its aims. Acun and Yilmazer (2019) combined qualitative (interview) and quantitative (survey) data in their study of the acoustic environment of an historic building in Turkey. While the authors of this work identified specific limitations associated with their use of surveys in grounded theory research, they successfully produced a conceptual framework of factors that influenced how visitors to a museum perceived the soundscape.

We suggest that you do not get bogged down in debating the relative merits of one type of data over another. Many of the types of data listed in Box 7.1 may be deemed qualitative or quantitative, depending on what you do with them (Janasik et al., 2009). Recall from earlier chapters in this text that it is your relationship with the data, how you collect, generate and manage them, that will determine their value to your final theory. As your analysis progresses, your theoretical sensitivity will be heightened, and you will find yourself directed to the sources of data that are most relevant to your developing theory, through the use of theoretical sampling techniques.

ACTIVITY 7.1

DATA IN GROUNDED THEORY RESEARCH

Review the types of data contained in Box 7.1. Think about your own profession. Which of these types of data are most likely to be of value in researching issues that arise in your work? Which are least likely to be of value? Can you identify any other potential types of data that you can add to this list?

THEORETICAL SAMPLING

In previous chapters, we have referred to the emergent nature of the grounded theory research process. While increasingly being referred to in other forms of research, theoretical sampling has its origins in grounded theory. In fact, it is the grounded theory method responsible for making the process emergent. Glaser and Strauss originally defined theoretical sampling as:

> the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his [sic] data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.45)

This definition remains quite accurate for the contemporary grounded theorist, in spite of the fact that, as Kathy Charmaz suggested, theoretical sampling is interpreted differently by different researchers (email communication, 23 January 2006). We define theoretical sampling as the process of identifying and pursuing clues that arise during analysis in a grounded theory study. The strategies for raising theoretical sensitivity described in Chapter 5, will make you more attuned to these clues and their significance for your developing theory.

> **Theoretical sampling**
>
> The process of identifying and pursuing clues that arise during analysis in a grounded theory study.

Theoretical sampling is different from the sampling strategies used in other types of research. In other research designs, the researcher usually makes decisions in relation to who, what, where, when, and how to sample during the planning phase. This is particularly the case when the intention is to test theory or describe phenomena, and sampling is therefore directed at securing a representative data profile. In grounded theory research, the aim is to build theory through the construction of categories directly from the data. Through 'theory-directed' sampling, you are able to examine concepts from various angles and question their meaning for your developing theory (Strauss, 1987, p.276). What is obvious? What is notably absent? Is something more obscure being suggested? Questions such as these are raised through the process of constant comparative analysis, as discussed in the following chapter, and answered by theoretical sampling. Because of the unique characteristics of theoretical sampling, it is not possible to know at the outset of your study:

- the sources and types of data that will be needed to develop your theory

- how many participants or data sources you will need to access

- when, where, or how you will generate or collect data.

How, then, in practice, do you employ theoretical sampling in your own research? Initially, your sampling will be purposive. You will identify a source of data that is relevant to your area of study. You may, for example, conduct an interview with a participant who is experiencing the phenomenon that is the focus of your research. Your engagement with the data generated from that interview in the process of analysis will make you aware of issues that require expansion, clarification, or confirmation. Theoretical sampling provides direction for your next stage of data collection in a process of concurrent analysis that continues cyclically until your categories are fully developed or 'saturated' (a concept that is further discussed in later chapters).

Theoretical sampling is not just about *what* you do next; it is also about *how* you do it. Imagine that you are researching vaccine hesitancy in teenagers. During one of your interviews, you learn that some young people are accessing social media sites that promote discussion on vaccine safety. You then decide to seek approval to recruit additional participants through these sites and change your interview questions to specifically seek information about the influence of this information on intention to become vaccinated. Wilson et al. (2021) describe a similar approach to the use of theoretical sampling in their study of lower back pain in competitive rowers in Ireland and Australia. These researchers recruited specific participants and modified their interview questions to develop a theory around core categories of concealment and openness in how rowers deal with pain.

Charmaz (2014) asserts that theoretical sampling only becomes of value once your categories have been developed, as it enables you to confirm, clarify, and expand these categories. In contrast, we believe that theoretical sampling should be employed from your first interview or data collection event, as concepts will begin to take shape even from these earliest stages of analysis. You may then seek broader and more diverse sources and types of data or, alternatively, attempt to tease out a specific issue. You might find the need to follow specific leads that may or may not develop. However you proceed, you will do so in response to your use of theoretical sampling. Elliott et al. (2020) describe their use of theoretical sampling in a study exploring how girls were attracted to, and retained in, Australian football. These authors commenced with a purposive sample of girls experienced in playing football and were subsequently directed to shift their focus to those playing football for the first time. Eventually, these authors followed leads generated through their analysis to included parents in their sample.

Later in your analysis, theoretical sampling will address gaps identified within and between your categories up until the production of your final grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Bazrafkan et al. (2019) provide an example of using theoretical sampling in this way in their study of the development of expertise in thesis supervisors in Iran. These researchers followed leads arising during analysis to validate and enhance their final theory.

Figure 7.1 Theoretical sampling

Figure 7.1 illustrates the process of theoretical sampling. As presented in this figure, theoretical sampling occurs following an episode of data collection and its subsequent analysis. In reality, this may not always be possible. Geographical constraints, the availability of participants, and other access

issues may limit your ability to conduct analysis intermittently with every episode of data generation or collection. Consider, for example, the researcher who wishes to conduct a study with engineers working on an oil rig, including individual interviews and fieldwork observation. The logistics associated with transport to, and accommodation within, the study setting may reduce the opportunities for data analysis between interviews. In unique situations such as this, the principles of theoretical sampling can still be applied. While the full transcription of interview recordings may be impractical in the study setting, preliminary analysis of interview recordings and fieldwork notes is not only possible, but, in fact, likely to be more effective, when undertaken within a short timeframe. Allow enough time between each data generation or collection event to consider the meaning of that data. How does it relate to your developing analysis? Does it confirm, contradict, clarify, or expand your evolving theory? What direction does it now suggest?

At times, in spite of careful planning and a vigilant adherence to the principles of grounded theory research, circumstances beyond your control may intervene. Often, you will find that limited access to data sources can impede attempts to employ theoretical sampling, however this is not always the case. Draucker, Martsolf, Ross, and Rusk (2007) were unexpectedly inundated with calls from prospective participants in their study of responses to sexual violence. These researchers, in recognising how difficult it can be for victims of sexual violence to respond to recruitment efforts, had to compromise their planned theoretical sampling approach in order to respond in a timely manner to those who had made contact. Sometimes, events in the broader environment can require changes to be made to research activities. During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of researchers experienced disruption to their plans for data collection, requiring them to seize opportunities to capture data when these arose. At times, this may have meant conducting consecutive data collection episodes with limited, if any, opportunity to analyse data in between.

When it is not possible to apply theoretical sampling in its purest form, ultimately what matters is that you produce a theory that is grounded in the data (Timonen et al., 2018). Theoretical sampling is inherently flexible and thus can be applied in innovative ways to support this endeavour. Draw on your theoretical sensitivity and use techniques such as storyline (both discussed in Chapter 5) to identify gaps in your analysis. Think broadly about alternative sources and types of data that might answer questions raised during this process.

ACTIVITY 7.2

PRACTICAL ISSUES IN THEORETICAL SAMPLING

Think about a grounded theory study that you may be about to embark upon, or a research topic of interest to you that could be investigated using grounded theory:

- How would you access your initial sources of data?

- What problems do you anticipate?

- How might you overcome any issues that arise as you attempt to employ theoretical sampling in your study?

In your reading of published work claiming to be grounded theory, you will often struggle to find evidence of theoretical sampling in a given study. Theoretical sampling is one of the most overlooked methods. Often, a researcher may not appreciate the significance of theoretical sampling in grounded theory research, or perhaps they are entrenched in sampling techniques drawn from another paradigm. In some instances, it is for purely practical reasons that a researcher may choose not to employ theoretical sampling. The security of knowing how you will be undertaking data collection, when and with whom, and what resources will therefore be required, may be reassuring in the short term. Generating and collecting data up front, then analysing them separately, however, contradicts grounded theory principles. Your analysis and consequently your grounded theory will suffer in the long term.

Be confident in your ability to employ theoretical sampling in your study. Familiarise yourself with grounded theory methods and plan your study meticulously using the guidelines contained in Chapter 6. Grounded theory is a self-correcting approach to research. Any errors in your data collection and analytical processes will eventually be extinguished if you employ grounded theory methods correctly and consistently.

DATA GENERATION OR DATA COLLECTION?

In Chapter 2, we discussed the position of the researcher in relation to their grounded theory study. The position of the researcher impacts on the entire research process, from conceptualisation to presentation of the final theory. It is most evident, however, in the relationship that the researcher has with the data. In reading published research, you will often see reference made to the *collection* of data. In grounded theory, we refer to both data collection and *generation* to acknowledge the different roles that the researcher has in relation to the process of data acquisition. Data generation involves the researcher directly engaging with the data source (for example, a participant) to produce materials for analysis. Conversely, the researcher has limited influence on the data source in the process of data collection. While the distinction is arguably arbitrary, it is convenient for the purpose of discussing the acquisition of data in grounded theory and the role of the researcher in this process (as illustrated in Figure 7.2).

Data generation

The process by which a researcher directly engages with a data source to produce materials for analysis.

Data collection

The process of gathering data in which the researcher has limited influence on the data source.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, we will discuss strategies and techniques for data generation and collection. Techniques used in gathering data in grounded theory are similar to those used in other forms of research. There are, however, some important factors that must be considered when generating and collecting data with the intent of producing theory. In the following discussion, we will emphasise the grounded theory difference in relation to the gathering of data. We assume that readers of this text will have a beginning level of pre-existing knowledge about research methods. Should you wish to increase your basic knowledge in support of the following discussion, there are a number of generic research texts that can provide you with foundational knowledge.

Data generation

Data collection

Data
source
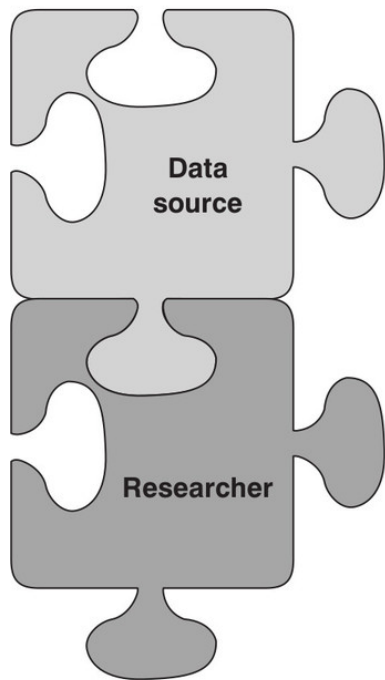
Data
source

Researcher
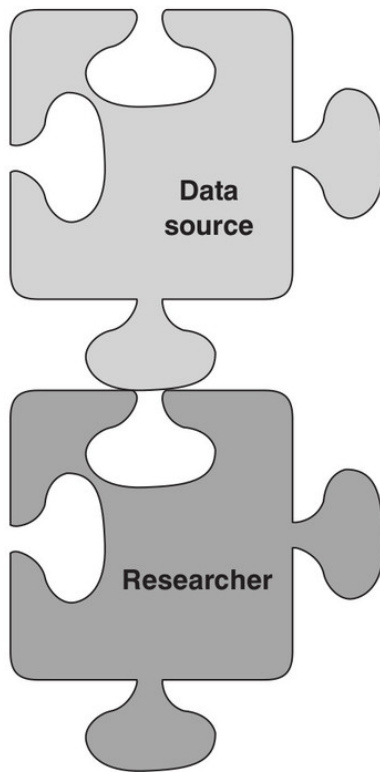
Researcher

Figure 7.2 Data generation versus data collection

GENERATING DATA

When generating data in grounded theory, the researcher is actively involved in the production of material that will be analysed, using the methods described in the following chapter. The researcher may work directly with participants for this purpose by conducting interviews or facilitating focus groups, or may personally generate data in the form of fieldnotes and memos. The dynamic nature of theoretical sampling in grounded theory is supported by the active nature of these strategies. You will therefore see more than one of these methods of data generation used in grounded theory studies.

Interviews

An interview is a conversation that aims to obtain data for a specific purpose. In grounded theory, that reason is to obtain material from which to produce theory. The value of interviewing in grounded theory research is evidenced by the extensive number of studies that rely on it as the principal mechanism for the generation of data. You may have extensive experience in interviewing for other reasons. Health care professionals interview patients for assessment and counselling purposes; market researchers interview consumers; and senior staff in a diverse range of industries interview people for prospective employment and promotion. While the skills you may have developed in interviewing for such purposes will serve you well in establishing rapport and communicating effectively with your participants, do not assume that they will be effective in achieving the aims of interviewing in grounded theory research. Similarly, while techniques of interviewing in grounded theory research are similar to those used in other interpretive research studies, you will need to pay particular attention to your approach to interviewing when your intention is to generate theory.

> Interview
>
> A conversation that aims to obtain data for a specific purpose.

As with many other aspects of grounded theory, the emergent nature of the research process will require you to be flexible in your use of interviews as a data generation strategy. What you ask a participant, and how you ask it, will vary both between and within interviews. Remaining attuned to what each participant is saying, being theoretically sensitive to what this means for your developing theory, and directing or following the interview accordingly can be very demanding. Prepare for your interviews by pilot testing your technique with a trusted colleague or supervisor. Seek constructive feedback and allow your skills in interviewing for the purpose of your research to develop. It is important to note that once you commence interviewing for data generation, things can and will go wrong from time to time. Learn from your mistakes through techniques such as reflecting on the experience and memoing. The recursive nature of grounded theory may see you returning to earlier participants for a second or subsequent interview (Charmaz, 2014), where it will be possible for you to follow up on any issues that may come to the fore in the later stages of your research. For this reason, it is important to secure consent from your participants to follow up with them (for example, via telephone or email) any seemingly innocuous comments made in the interview that may later prove significant.

Grounded theory interviews have traditionally been conducted in person; however, logistical issues may necessitate the use of other approaches. Until recently, synchronous communication such as video conferencing was employed to conduct interviews with participants whose geographic location made them otherwise inaccessible. However, in recent years we have seen such technology more heavily relied on where necessary physical distancing and restricted travel have limited the opportunities to meet with participants in person. This reliance extends beyond the research context, as the need to stay connected with others during such times has increased familiarity with the use of video-conferencing technology. We therefore now find that many of the limitations that previously accompanied technology-facilitated interviews are less problematic. While the telephone is still an option for conducting interviews, the greater level of comfort with video conferencing makes it a viable alternative as it does provide the researcher with the option to observe important non-verbal cues. Given that in grounded theory interviews we often rely on the direction provided by the participant, the absence of these cues can be significant.

Interviews may be highly structured or completely unstructured. The grounded theory interview is dependent on the ability of the researcher to travel a path through the interview with the participant. The greater the level of structure imposed, the less able the interviewer will be to take the optimal route. Less structure is better from the perspective of following where the conversation takes you. This is not to

suggest that the interviewer should be passive in the interview process (Corbin and Strauss, 2015); rather, they coordinate the conversation with the ultimate aim of generating fodder for the developing theory. You can use an interview guide or aide-memoire, but expect that it will evolve as you incorporate theoretical sampling techniques.

Finally, you must give some consideration to how you will make a record of your interview. Commonly, interviews conducted for research are audio recorded and transcribed for the purpose of analysis. Anyone who has engaged in this process will tell you that it is very time intensive. Interview transcriptions do, however, when combined with your fieldnotes, provide a rich data set. Glaser is strongly opposed to the taping of interviews in grounded theory research (having devoted an entire chapter to its limitations in his 1998 text), arguing that taping the interview is inefficient, detracts from the focus of early category delimitation, and generates mounds of superficial data.

Certainly, it is not always necessary to tape interviews. Yehene et al. (2021) chose not to audio record interviews in developing their grounded theory of how parents process loss following acquired brain injury in their child. These authors provide a number of reasons for capturing their data in the form of contemporaneous notes, including a desire to promote candour in their participants. While the rationale provided by these authors engenders confidence in their processes, we recommend the taping of interviews where possible in grounded theory research, particularly for the novice researcher. Whether you choose to transcribe for the purpose of coding, or retain it only as a back-up for later reference, having an audio recording provides additional security for your valuable data. You also have access to verbatim quotations that can be used to defend your coding and illustrate your final theory. You may find that your reliance on the audio recording of interviews will diminish as your study progresses, countering Glaser's (1998) contention that your skill development will be hindered by taping.

An alternative to audio recording is video recording, whether in person or when conducting an interview via a video-conferencing platform. We caution against the indiscriminate use of video recording in grounded theory as it may prove potentially intrusive and impact on both your performance and the responses of your participants. In some instances, however, it may be appropriate to video record your interviews. One such example is evident in the study conducted by Almotiri (2017), who explored the experience of hearing-impaired students transitioning to an international university. As the interviews were conducted using sign language, the use of video recording facilitated the capture of the data. Note that some institutional review boards and ethics committees have specific requirements for video recording, so check that you have the necessary permission before employing this strategy in your research.

Focus groups

Focus groups are an extension of the standard interview in which two or more participants engage in a specified area of discussion led by the researcher. Focus groups have some specific advantages that make them useful in grounded theory research. The assembly of people with like interests is effective in engendering conversation as each participant responds to and feeds off the others. Differing perspectives can be highlighted and explored through the use of focus groups (Tritter and Landstad, 2020), making them valuable for category development in grounded theory, as discussed in the following chapter.

> **Focus group**
>
> Two or more participants engaging in a conversation with an interviewer to obtain data for a specific purpose.

Focus groups may be the only means of data generation in a study, such as was the case in the research conducted by Elliott et al. (2020) referred to earlier. Alternatively, focus groups can be used in conjunction with interviews, as was the approach used by Ray (2017), who developed a grounded theory of the experience and management of grief by street children in India. This author used individual interviews with children to supplement data generated through focus groups. Focus groups may also be used to gather feedback on a grounded theory once it has been developed. Verdecchia et al. (2021) provide an example of this, using focus groups to evaluate their grounded theory of architectural technical debt in software organisations. When using both approaches to generate data, you may choose to include the same participants in focus group and individual interviews, or you may use different participants, or even a mixture of each. However you proceed, it will be directed by your study purpose and your use of theoretical sampling techniques.

The general principles for conducting interviews apply when using focus groups. You should be aware, however, of some specific issues that can impact the effectiveness of focus group processes. While some individuals may feel more comfortable in a group, rather than a one-on-one situation, this is not always the case and participants who are a little more reserved may withhold valuable data that could be significant for theoretical development. In most instances, however, the interaction between participants produces valuable data. The effectiveness of this interaction is somewhat dependent on the relationship between the researcher and the participant group. For this reason, special attention should be paid to establishing rapport when focus group interviewing is undertaken via video conference. While it is possible to use telephone conferencing, its value is limited when conducting focus groups.

Once again, the less structure imposed on the process of focus group interviewing, the better. Regardless of the mode used, your skills in group facilitation will be called upon, and you may find that it is difficult to maintain the focus of the discussion, particularly in larger groups. Your ability to follow theoretical leads that arise may be reduced. The greater level of activity that is natural with the use of focus groups can also make recording the interview problematic, whether through the use of notes, audio, or video means. Novice grounded theorists are therefore advised to use focus groups with caution, and as directed by theoretical sampling in their particular study. Should you choose to include focus groups as a means of data generation, awareness of these potential problems in advance can help you plan accordingly to minimise the impact of these issues. In particular, you should give sufficient thought to the size of the group, the processes used to facilitate and mediate discussion, and the mechanism used to record the data.

Fieldnotes and memos

Undertaking fieldwork is common in grounded theory studies, given the attraction that this approach to research has for those investigating phenomena with a sociological and human element. Grounded theorists will often undertake work in the field, even if it is only to interview participants in their own environment. Fieldwork can encompass a broad range of data generation activities, from passive observation, through accessing documents, to informal conversations and immersed participation. Fieldwork is often used in conjunction with other strategies. T. Turner (2018) provides an example of this in his study of drug use by tourists in Ibiza. This author employed increasingly proximal observational fieldwork, supplemented by individual interviews, focus groups, and tourist materials.

> ### Fieldwork
>
> A broad range of data gathering activities that include passive observation, accessing documents, informal conversations, and immersed participation.

On entering the field, the researcher will not be aware of when, where, or how opportunities for gathering data will occur. It is necessary therefore to undertake concurrent data analysis to facilitate theoretical sampling within the field. What do your observations reveal? Are there subtle differences in the activities undertaken by the same individuals at different times? What can policy manuals or organisational documents reveal about roles and responsibilities? Are these reflected in the day-to-day running of the organisation?

Observations made in the field are recorded in the form of fieldnotes. Notations made in the field are important contemporaneous records of events and activities, and your responses to them. Fieldnotes are important in grounded theory studies, regardless of whether you use a single means of gathering data or employ several. Fieldnotes should be made after you conduct interviews to retain details of the physical environment, to record your immediate responses to the interaction and to capture participant non-verbal behaviour that will not be revealed through transcription. You will write fieldnotes on observations made in the field and informal conversations that you have with those in the research setting. Fieldnotes build on earlier fieldnotes as your exposure in the research setting continues. A word of caution: fieldwork can be unpredictable, and wonderful opportunities for the gathering of data can occur serendipitously; be sure to secure approval from your institutional review board or ethics committee to ensure that all data that you gather can legitimately be used in your developing theory.

> ### Fieldnotes
>
> Contemporaneous records made during fieldwork to record events, activities, and the researcher's response to them.

In Researcher's Voice 7.2, Daniel Ash (2021) discusses the use of fieldnotes as a significant data source in his PhD research, which explored how police officers engage with the public in the UK.

> ### The researcher's voice 7.2

Daniel Ash on the use of fieldnotes

Daniel Ash was a police officer for 20 years and now works as a criminologist and senior lecturer at the University of Gloucestershire. His areas of scholarly expertise are police behaviour, police policy, and preventing youth crime.

I conducted some policing research by collecting data from police incidents, including unstructured interviews with police officers and body-worn video footage of police incidents. I used fieldnotes to capture the content of interviews and video footage rather than using a more traditional approach of creating transcripts. This decision was partly driven by a sense that contemporaneously recording police officers talking about their practice was not conducive to 'instilling the spill' from them about the problematic areas of their work, and also driven by Glaser's advice to not get bogged down with voluminous amounts of transcript-based information when conceptualising data.

In grounded theory work, fieldnote writing is a dynamic process because you are making decisions about what to record based on a growing knowledge of the underlying conceptual framework, filling in the gaps in this framework as the study progresses. Using fieldnotes meant only collecting data that was relevant to the core category, which helped me to remain focused on conceptualisation. Using fieldnotes was an active process of sifting and selecting data rather than being a passive activity like transcribing.

When I viewed video, I recorded fieldnotes while observing footage; capturing what was said and done by police officers and the context in which the encounter took place. In doing so, I was able to capture patterns in social interaction rather than thick description and complete coverage of the area being studied. I created a separate fieldnote for each interview or viewing of body-worn footage. I wrote each fieldnote as an individual Microsoft Word document, and each line of text within a fieldnote was numbered sequentially. Each fieldnote was also allocated an alphanumeric identifier so the data underpinning a code could be traced back to a fieldnote and individual line of text. This approach allowed me to easily find and constantly compare the data underpinning the concepts being developed. I used a second 'coding' document created in Word, which I opened in 'outline' mode. As new codes were identified, I created a first-order title, and the line of text from a fieldnote that related to that code was then copied underneath as second-order text. Whenever subsequent data lines were added to that same code, they were pasted into the coding document as additional second-order text. This method allowed me to view together all data lines associated with a single code, which aided the constant-comparison approach, as indicated in Figure 7.3.

Figure 7.3 Example of coded fieldnote data
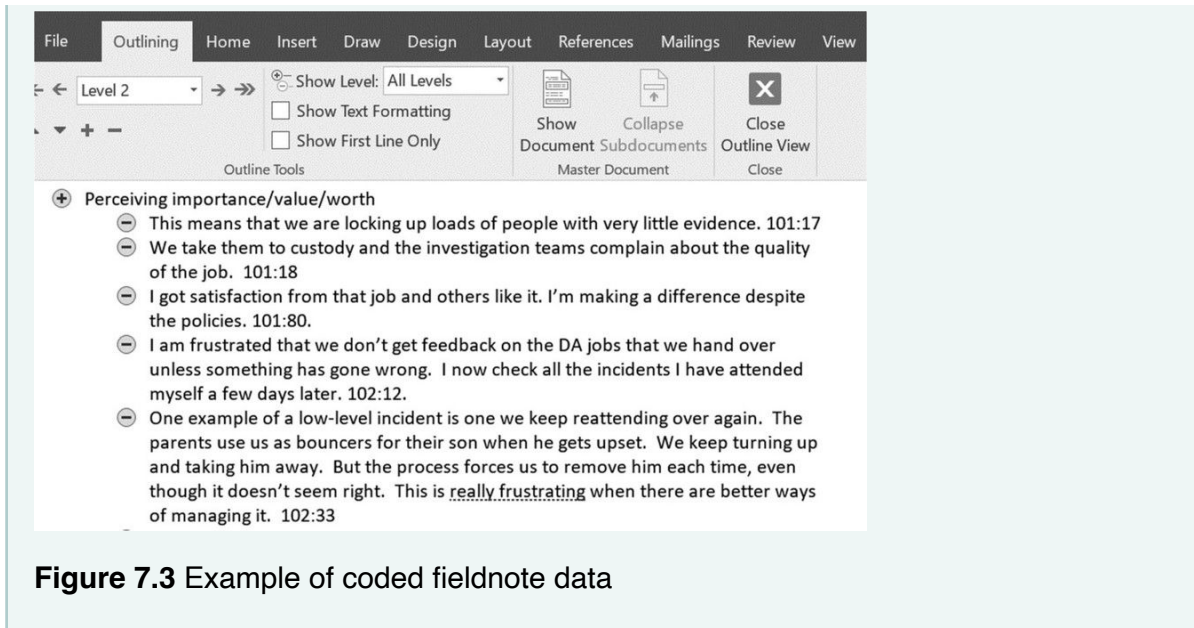
In Chapter 5, we discussed the importance of memos in the grounded theory process. You will recall that memos serve a number of purposes, and will prove particularly significant in advancing your analysis, as discussed in the following chapters. Memos contain insights into your data and your analysis of that data. As the level of your analysis is raised, your memos will build on the content of earlier memos. Your earlier insights, when raised to a higher conceptual level in this way, are essentially data in themselves.

In functioning as data, the role of fieldnotes and memos may appear to overlap. Both may contain data, while also recording what the researcher 'sees' in that data. These documents serve a very different purpose in the development of a grounded theory, however. The intention of fieldnotes is to capture data from the field, in contrast to memos, which draw meaning from those fieldnotes (Montgomery and Bailey, 2007). It is therefore prudent to keep your fieldnotes and memos separate, as confusion may arise between what constitutes the researcher's field-based thinking, versus their more complex abstraction of that data at a later time (Corbin and Strauss, 2015).

COLLECTING DATA

In addition to generating data through interviews, focus groups, fieldnotes, and memoing, the grounded theorist can collect data from other sources. These sources include literature and other materials that are already in existence, or materials drawn from participants. The following discussion focuses on literature, documents, social media, elicited materials, and non-traditional sources. We suggest that the types of data drawn from these sources are particularly valuable when used in combination with data generated through the means discussed above. In using static data, the researcher needs to approach the process of data collection in ways different to how they engage with data generation. For example, theoretical sampling will take alternative forms as there will be less opportunity to follow leads that arise during analysis. Taking account of context, and engaging with the data in more reflexive ways (Charmaz, 2014; Ralph et al., 2014), can reduce the potential limitations associated with the use of data described in this section.

Literature

In Chapter 6, we discussed the use of literature in the initial stages of a grounded theory study. Here we are specifically discussing literature as a form of data. We define literature as published scholarly works, such as research reports and conceptual articles. Often, these have been subjected to peer or editorial review before publication. In many other forms of research, literature is used to justify a study and/or provide a theoretical framework for the ensuing analysis. When used as a source of data in grounded theory research, where the intent is to generate theory, scholarly literature is used in a different way.

> **Literature**
>
> Published scholarly works, such as research reports and conceptual articles.

Online databases have made it possible to access a wealth of literature at the touch of a button, however this does not mean that gratuitous inclusion in your study is justified. You will go to the literature when your theoretical sampling directs you to do so, and your subsequent analysis of that literature will direct you to other sources of data necessary to further your analysis. Your use of the literature may therefore increase as your study progresses (Dick, 2005). Bytheway (2021), for example, accessed the literature for her doctoral research study only after categories had been formed.

The extent to which you rely on the literature as a source of data will vary depending on the nature of your study. It may not feature as data in your research, or may only be used in the process of theoretical coding, as discussed in Chapter 9. Alternatively, literature may be the only data used in a grounded theory study.

Bowers and Creamer (2020) used grounded theory methodology as a framework for conducting a systematic review of the literature. This innovative work resulted in a theory of environmental education in secondary schools in the USA. Similarly, Namboodiri et al. (2019) constructed a model of implementation of market share strategy by subjecting available literature to grounded theory analysis. Your success in constructing a theory grounded in literature as the only data form will be determined by the intent of your research, and your ability to answer questions arising from your analysis using a single data source.

ACTIVITY 7.3

THE LITERATURE AS DATA IN GROUNDED THEORY

Obtain a selection of articles that report research described as grounded theory. How many of these articles discuss use of the literature as a data source? How is this use described? Is there evidence that the literature has been theoretically sampled or used gratuitously? Compare the use of the literature in grounded theory with its use in other approaches to research with which you are familiar. What differences are most evident? How do these reflect the philosophical underpinnings of the varying methodologies?

Documents

Various documents in the form of published and unpublished materials can be used as sources of data in grounded theory research. Examples of these types of documents are contained in Box 7.2.

Box 7.2

Examples of documents

- Government reports

- Organisational policy and procedure manuals

- Personal diaries, journals, log books, and letters

- Newspapers, magazines, and other media publications

- Biographies, non-fiction books, and novels

Documents

Textual material in published or unpublished form that can be subjected to analysis.

Many of the documents contained in Box 7.2 are not produced for commercial purposes and are thus referred to as 'grey literature'. While not usually peer reviewed, and often not published, grey literature can nonetheless be a valuable source of data for developing a grounded theory. This material can be used in conjunction with other data generation or collection strategies, or as the only form of data. For example, grey literature was the sole data source used by Singjai et al. (2021) in their study of a specialised area in software engineering. These authors sought to reduce potential bias had they relied on interviews to generate data in this study.

The means by which you locate documentary data sources will vary depending on the type of document you are seeking. The establishment of online databases and records of library holdings over recent decades has simplified the process of locating documents that may otherwise prove difficult to acquire. In some instances, specialised repositories may need to be accessed to locate the required data. In other cases, documents may be accessible via publicly available websites. de Lucas Ancillo et al. (2020) obtained publications, surveys, and other documents from online sources to explain the process of workplace redesign that resulted from COVID-19. Similarly, Barber and Bettez (2020) accessed transcripts between adult volunteers posing as 13–14-year-olds in chat rooms with sex offenders who were subsequently found guilty at trial. While controversial, this study demonstrates the breadth of data available to researchers for the purpose of producing a grounded theory.

Depending on the aims and focus of your study, documents can prove extremely valuable in your research. As with any other source of data, you will use documents such as those listed above only when directed to do so by your progressive analysis. You may be led to less accessible sources of data, such as historical documents and diaries held in private collections. While these may prove more difficult to acquire, they may have great significance for your research. Be aware of their potential, and plan accordingly to seek them out as guided by your analysis.

Social media

The internet is now an established part of life in most societies. No longer the purview of the young, social media use spans the generations. There are a vast number of social networking sites, web logs (blogs), forums, microblogging tools (e.g. Twitter), and various content and video sharing sites. The diversity and expansive content of these platforms ensure that they contain a wealth of potentially valuable data for use in a grounded theory study. As an example, Mathiasson and Jochumsen (2019) describe the use of Facebook postings about library events, demonstrating the value of this platform as a source of data for generating theory. While the contents of social media sites should be treated in the same way as any other textual data used in your research, you should be conscious of the ethical considerations that may apply, particularly as the contents are often of a sensitive nature and the contributors may choose to be anonymous.

You may rely on social media sites to varying degrees during the course of your research, from an avenue of participant recruitment to the source of your entire data set for analysis. Be aware of the potential that these resources have for your research, but also of the limitations. Information posted to the online environment may not always be trustworthy, nor may it be suitable or appropriate for use in your research. Be prudent in your use of the information available on social media and it will have the potential to serve you well in your study.

Elicited material

Charmaz (2014) discusses elicited documents as those produced by participants, such as questionnaires, personal diaries, histories, logs, and photographs. She distinguishes these from extant texts that already exist, such as documents and literature as discussed above. We would add to these examples journals, testimonials, and artwork (for example, drawings and sculptures). When eliciting data, the researcher poses questions or provides instructions to the participant, yet has minimal interaction with the participant and the resultant data as it is being created (Charmaz, 2014).

> Elicited material
>
> Static data created by participants with minimal interaction from the researcher.

Used in conjunction with data generated through other means, material elicited from participants can add value to a grounded theory study. Often, even an extensive in-depth interview does not allow time for consideration of all the issues of relevance and concern to the participant. The ability to reflect on these matters before, during, and after a formal interview may render up further data. In Researcher's Voice 7.1, Sonya Lowe illustrated this point by showing how elicited materials, in this case symptom logs, can enhance and individualise the interview process.

Increasing accessibility to the internet makes elicitation of data through online questionnaires, surveys, or logs a popular option. This approach is particularly appropriate if you know your participants to be computer literate and/or more comfortable with this medium. Note that collection of data through asynchronous, static mechanisms such as these have the same disadvantages as those that are paper based, in that the ability to follow up on comments made by participants is limited.

Non-traditional media

Less common sources of data suitable for use in grounded theory include visual media (such as film and photographs), artwork, music, and artefacts (including any and all articles to which an individual or a group may assign meaning). These data sources are traditionally associated with methodologies such as ethnography and may be derived directly from the research field or accessed elsewhere. The internet has come to house expansive and diverse data sources over recent decades, from video-sharing platforms to museum databases. These sources offer a wealth of opportunity to access material well beyond that available to researchers in the past.

You may find that your research directs you to sources such as these, depending on the specific aims of your study. While there are data management software programs that will enable you to import non-traditional types of data, you should be aware that, at some point of the analytical process, they will need to be translated into textual form. Both Konecki (2019) and Mey and Dietrich (2017) provide guidelines for analysing visual data forms in grounded theory.

When engaging in theoretical sampling in response to your analysis, be open to non-traditional sources of data such as those described here. You will likely find that your horizons are broadened and your resultant theory is enriched.

ACTIVITY 7.4

NON-TRADITIONAL DATA

Return to your responses to [Activity 7.1](#). Having explored options for diverse data sources, can you expand the list of data options that may be of value in your own professional area?

SECONDARY DATA SOURCES

The amount of data generated and collected for the purpose of research on a global scale is colossal. Often, only a fraction of this data is used for the purpose for which it was collected. Increasingly, researchers are choosing to work with data that have been collected in the past for another purpose, either by themselves or (most often) other researchers. The use of secondary data sources in grounded theory was originally proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in relation to the use of quantitative data, a position that has been maintained by Glaser (2008). The collection of data for secondary analysis need not be limited to quantitative material, however, since data generated for an earlier qualitative study can also be subject to secondary analysis. There are numerous advantages to using data that have been accumulated for prior research. These include savings in respect of time and money, as well as the ability to capitalise on a wealth of existing unused data (Glaser, 2008). There are, however, some potential limitations that should be considered in the use of secondary data in grounded theory research.

Boslaugh (2007) makes the distinction between primary and secondary data on the basis of who collects the data versus who analyses it. She proposes that data is *primary* when it is analysed by the person who collected it, while data is deemed *secondary* when it is analysed by someone else. Grounded theory processes are quite unique and are implemented with the specific aim of generating theory. We therefore define secondary data in grounded theory as *any* data collected in the past for purposes not originally related to the current study. Defining secondary data in this way highlights a significant disadvantage for its use in grounded theory. Consider the discussion in Chapter 2 regarding the position of the researcher in relation to the data. Working with data collected by others removes you from the generation and collection processes. The philosophical perspective and aims of the original researcher will have influenced the nature of data they have gathered and how they approached the processes of data generation and collection. Your own philosophical position and its relationship to your study will no doubt be different, a situation that will impact on how you interpret the available data. Even in cases where you choose to use data that you have personally gathered for an earlier study, your purpose and perspective at that time will likely have been different, and will therefore have implications for your use of that data in your current study.

> Secondary data
>
> Data collected in the past for purposes not originally related to a current study.

The greatest obstacle that you will face when using data from secondary sources is the inherent limitations this has for theoretical sampling. While it is not impossible for you to sample theoretically within data that has already been collected, as you can, to some extent, work with concepts as they become evident in the data (Corbin and Strauss, 2015), the flexibility necessary for true theoretical sampling will be absent. During the analysis process, questions in relation to your current research purpose will be raised, to which you may have difficulty finding answers. Leads will be generated and attempts to pursue these may be stymied by the restrictions of the available secondary data set. Gaps may subsequently exist in the theoretical constructions that defy your attempts to generate cohesive theory.

Our purpose in pointing out these problems is not to put you off using data from secondary sources; rather, we are alerting you to the potential pitfalls in what can otherwise be a valuable exercise. Using data that have already been gathered can be of value in your grounded theory study, for all the reasons we have already presented. Attention paid to the application of grounded theory methods in your treatment of secondary data will minimise the potential disadvantages. Ensure that the data have relevance for your study before commencing. Remember that your primary purpose is to generate theory. Work with and beyond the data, where possible, to achieve this outcome. If necessary, go back

to the field to gather absent data, or be prepared to accept any resultant gaps in your theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2015).

Does secondary data analysis have relevance for your grounded theory study? Perhaps you have stumbled across a data set that you would like to subject to grounded theory analysis, or maybe theoretical sampling of your original data has led you to existing data sets of which you were unaware. Perhaps you are working with limited resources and the cost and time advantages of secondary data analysis are attractive to you. If this is the case, where do you find the data to use in this way? Digitalisation of data has occurred on a mass scale with the advent of the information age (Langtree et al., 2020). The internet provides increasing ease of access to global repositories from which the researcher can source both traditional and non-traditional forms of data (Boté, 2019). Regardless of the means by which you obtain access to secondary data, be sure to secure permission from the original researcher, and any relevant institutional bodies, to use this material in your study.

HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH DATA?

A question that we are often asked by graduate students and others new to grounded theory is 'how much is enough data?'. We have established in earlier chapters that it is not possible at the outset of a grounded theory study to determine how many interviews, documents, observations, and so on, will be needed to construct a quality theory that will stand up to robust evaluation (as discussed in Chapter 3). The need to ensure that theory is grounded in the data precludes the ability to establish in advance the how, what, where, when, who, and why of data generation and collection that will be necessary to facilitate this process. A degree of tolerance of the unknown is therefore required when undertaking grounded theory research.

While the submission of a formal research proposal (see Chapter 5) or grant application may necessitate an estimation of how many data sources will be accessed, in most cases these can only be estimates. Other grounded studies examining similar phenomena may provide an indication of how much data you are likely to seek out. The uniqueness of your work, however, guided by your tools for thinking theoretically, will determine the nature and quantity of data you ultimately generate or collect.

Avoid the temptation to prematurely determine your sample size. You will no doubt encounter studies with a small number of participants that claim to have developed a grounded theory. This may well be the case in some instances. As Charmaz and Belgrave (2019) advise, it's what you do with your data that matters. The opportunity to develop theory that is grounded in the data is dependent on that data being 'rich and sufficient' (Charmaz, 2014, p.33). In the following chapter, we will discuss the concept of theoretical saturation as a precursor to theory development. Until you reach this later stage of analysis, your aim should be to strive for this rich sufficiency, rather than any predetermined measure of adequacy. The result will ultimately be evident in the final product.

CONCLUSION

Undertaking research to produce a theory that is grounded in the data places high priority on that data and the mechanisms by which it is generated or collected. Application of theoretical sampling principles throughout the research process ensures that the data sought out and acquired will serve the construction of a grounded theory that reflects logical analytical processes. This chapter has described various mechanisms for data generation and collection that can be used individually or in combination, as directed by the evolving analysis. In the following chapters, we will explore the analytical techniques that are used in the production of a quality grounded theory.

Critical thinking questions

1. Reflect on your understanding of the use of data in research generally. Has your perception of the role of data changed as a result of what you have learned from reading this chapter?
2. Consider the concept of theoretical sampling. Do you believe that theory could effectively be built without the application of theoretical sampling principles?
3. Think about the distinction between generating and collecting data. Can you effectively reconcile your position as a researcher with this distinction? What implications does an appreciation of your relationship with the data have for your own research efforts?

Working grounded theory

Review the 'Working grounded theory' example presented in the Appendix. Note:

- The sources and types of data used in this study

- The strategies employed by the researcher to promote the generation and collection of quality data

- The application of theoretical sampling principles

8 DATA ANALYSIS IN GROUNDED THEORY

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help you to:

- Compare and contrast concepts, codes, and categories in grounded theory research

- Describe the process of constant comparative data analysis

- Distinguish between initial, intermediate, and advanced phases of coding

- Discuss the concepts of properties and dimensions in relation to category development

- Explore strategies and tools that may aid analytical processes

- Outline the sequence of analytical processes used in grounded theory research

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, we discussed the importance of quality data in the development of a grounded theory. We will now turn our attention to grounded theory methods related to data analysis. In this chapter, the reader will be taken through the process of concept development, which includes the tasks of coding and categorisation. The importance of concurrent data generation or collection and analysis in ensuring the final theory is grounded will be emphasised throughout this chapter. Strategies and tools that can enhance the process of analysis will be examined and discussed. This chapter will provide you with important directions for initial and intermediate data analysis, while preparing you to move into the final phases of theory development discussed in the following chapter.

UNDERSTANDING TERMINOLOGY

Data analysis is the application of techniques in the treatment of data for the purpose of achieving research outcomes. Often, the most confronting and confusing issue for those embarking on a grounded theory study is the need to grapple with terminology relating to analysis. The numerous books and articles written on the topic often do not assist in overcoming this problem; in fact, for the novice researcher, they can add to the confusion. The following discussion will help you to develop a foundational understanding of common terminology related to grounded theory analysis as a precursor to the explanation of analytical methods that follows.

> **Data analysis**
>
> The application of techniques in the treatment of data for the purpose of achieving research outcomes.

Concepts

There are two rules in grounded theory data analysis. The first of these is that everything is a concept. We define a concept as an idea or a notion that encapsulates a descriptive explanation of a phenomenon or characteristic of a phenomenon. Differences between how concepts operate in a grounded theory relate to their function in the analytical process and levels of sophistication, both of which are interconnected.

> ### Concept
>
> An idea or a notion that encapsulates a descriptive explanation of a phenomenon or characteristic of a phenomenon.

The second rule is that data analysis needs to proceed in relation to the research question/s and aim planned for in the research design (see Chapter 5). To maintain focus and develop analytical depth and integration, the substantive area of enquiry should always be kept in mind. In any study with a qualitative component, generating large amounts of data for analysis is inevitable. Because of the inductive nature of the grounded theory process, it is easy to be distracted and sometimes lose sight of your research question. Doing so will slow you down and increase your risk of acquiring what Clarke et al. (2018, p.106) refers to as 'analytical paralysis', a condition where you feel totally overwhelmed by the data and your seeming inability to develop a theory from it.

Overall, grounded theory analysis is categorical in its intent. The grounded theory road begins to split between Glaser (1978, 1992), Strauss (Strauss, 1987), Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998), Charmaz (2014), and Clarke et al. (2018) when it comes to elucidating methods of theoretical abstraction. To aid understanding, Table 8.1 maps out the conceptual language used by seminal grounded theorists to describe the different stages of data analysis. The various concepts have been chosen as umbrella terms under which we have classified seminal texts and the language used to describe methods of grounded theory analysis. As you can see in the table, there are several terms used to describe what is often the same thing under some of the umbrella concepts.

Table 8.1 Map of conceptual terminology

	Concepts				
	Codes	Categories	Properties and dimensions	Core category	Methods of theoretical abstraction
Glaser and Strauss (1967)	Coding incidents	Categories	Properties	Systematic substantive theory	Common sociological perspective

	Concepts				
	Codes	**Categories**	**Properties and dimensions**	**Core category**	**Methods of theoretical abstraction**
Glaser (1978)	Open coding that moves to selective coding of incidents once the core variable is identified	Categories which are interchangeably referred to as concepts	Properties and typologies	Core variable that explains a basic social process	Theoretical codes
Strauss (1987)	Coding paradigm: conditions, interactions, strategies, tactics, and consequences. Open, axial, and selective coding	Categories	Properties and dimensions	Core category	
Strauss and Corbin (1990)	Coding paradigm: cause, context, action/interactions, and consequences. Open, axial, and selective coding	Categories and sub-categories	Properties and dimensions	Core category is a central phenomenon	Storyline and the conditional matrix
Strauss and Corbin (1998)	Coding paradigm: conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences. Open, axial, and selective coding	Categories and sub-categories	Properties, dimensions, and coding for process	Central category	Storyline and the conditional/ consequential matrix
Corbin and Strauss (2014)	Initial coding	Concepts	Properties and dimensions	Core category	Summary memo and reviewing for internal consistency and logic. Paradigm and conditional/consequential matrix

	Concepts				
	Codes	**Categories**	**Properties and dimensions**	**Core category**	**Methods of theoretical abstraction**
Clarke et al. (2018)	Codes	Categories	Seeking variation in the situation of enquiry through situational and relational maps, social worlds/arena maps and positional maps	Multiple possible social processes and sub-processes	Situational and relational maps, social worlds/arena maps and positional discourse maps and associated analyses
Charmaz (2014)	Initial and focused coding	Categories	Properties	Theoretical concepts	Theoretical codes

Regardless of the choices you make between some of these seminal works, the use of grounded theory methods results in the development of concepts that are initially low level and are subsequently developed to a higher level of abstraction as your analysis progresses. Conceptual ordering, or the organisation of data into discrete hierarchical categories, is a common thread throughout all of Strauss and Corbin's writing about grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 2015; Strauss 1987; Strauss and Corbin 2008, 2015) and provides a useful heuristic to think about the grounded theory methods of data analysis illustrated in Figure 8.1. The wheels in this figure, which you will recognise from previous chapters of this text, have been relabelled to indicate the conceptual output that each grounded theory method produces. These outputs range from low-, to medium-, to high-level concepts.
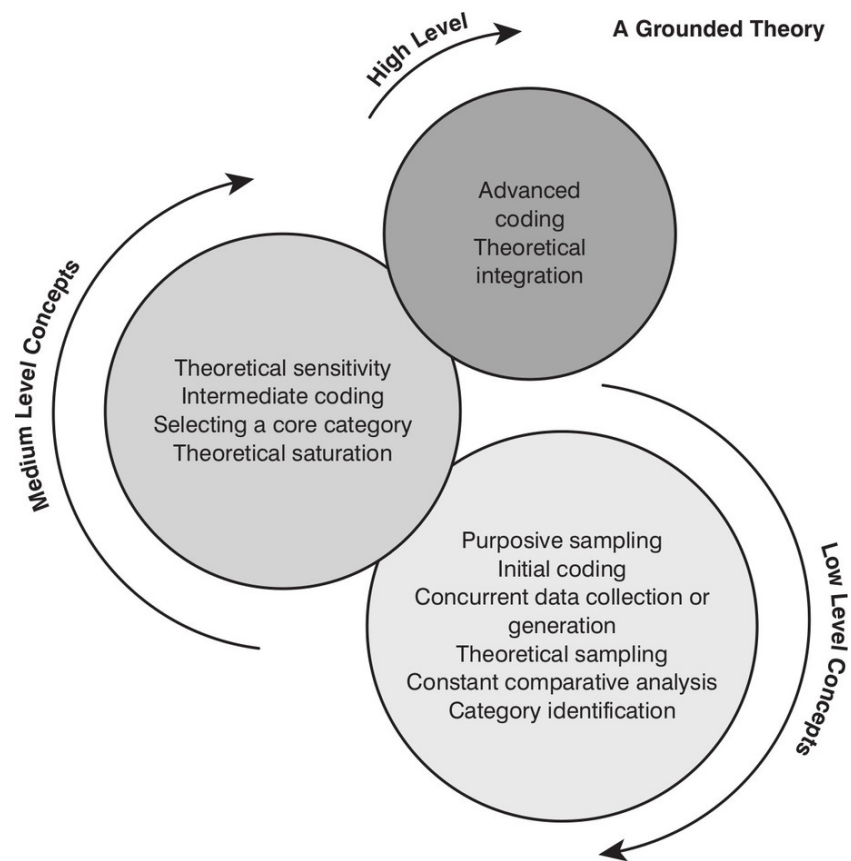
Figure 8.1 Conceptual ordering of grounded theory methods

Codes

In Chapter 7, many potential sources of data in a grounded theory study were discussed. These included textual material and a range of non-traditional sources: for example, photographic images, videos, artwork, artefacts, and music. Regardless of the type of data that has been either generated or collected, the process of analysis remains the same in that the data is initially analysed for incidents, an umbrella term for recurring actions, characteristics, experiences, phrases, explanations, images, and/or sounds. Reading transcripts or fieldnotes, listening to recordings of interviews, or observing visual artefacts, results in the researcher identifying the concepts that underlie incidents in the data and it is these concepts to which a code can be applied. Codes are a form of shorthand that researchers repeatedly use to identify conceptual reoccurrences and similarities in the patterns in the data. Groups of codes representing a higher-level concept form a category. Often, the label assigned to a code is elevated to become the name of a category because it has inherent conceptual grab (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) for the researcher.

> ### Incident
>
> An umbrella term for recurring actions, characteristics, experiences, phrases, explanations, images, and/or sounds.

> ### Code
>
> A form of shorthand that researchers repeatedly use to identify conceptual reoccurrences and similarities in the patterns of participants' experiences.

> ### Category
>
> A higher-level concept that represents a group of codes.

Coding is an active process informed by the substantive area of investigation, the researcher's knowledge and experience, and extant theory. Substantive codes (Glaser, 1978, p.55) are taken from the language of the data and generally assume the form of either gerunds and/or *in vivo* codes. Charmaz (2014) argues for the use of gerunds (verbs used as nouns that always finish with 'ing') when coding to identify process in the data as well as focusing on the participant's experiences as a source of conceptual analysis. Saldaña (2016) classifies gerunds as process codes, coupling them with *in vivo* codes during his initial coding phase. An example of the use of gerunds as a code that eventually morphs into a category is 'wanting a better life' from a study of Indian physiotherapists who travel overseas to work (Grafton and Gordon, 2019). The term '*in vivo*' is Latin for 'within the living' and this type of code captures participants' words as being representative of a broader concept in the data. An example of an *in vivo* code is 'keeping it in the family' from Aburn et al.'s (2021) study of paediatric oncology staff. This in vivo code was eventually elevated to being the core category of this study, 'we are all family'. The researcher's previous thinking about extant theory, professional experience and knowledge, and lay experience and knowledge will influence the identification of codes. Codes specifically derived from extant theory have a specific use in later stages of theory development and will be discussed in Chapter 9.

Substantive codes

Taken from the language of the data and generally assuming the form of either gerunds and/or *in vivo* codes.

In vivo codes

A participant's words used to encapsulate a broader concept in the data.

Gerunds

Verbs used as nouns that always finish with 'ing'.

Constant comparative analysis

Concurrent data generation or collection and analysis is one of the methods that differentiates grounded theory from other qualitative research designs. Constant comparative analysis is an analytical process in which incoming data is compared with existing data in the process of coding and category development. From the time of their initial foray into the field, grounded theorists are analysing data. Constant comparison of incident with incident in the data leads to the initial generation of codes. Future incidents are then compared with existing codes, codes are compared with codes, groups of codes are collapsed into categories with which future codes are then compared, and categories are subsequently compared with categories. It is the constant comparison of the different conceptual levels of data analysis that drives theoretical sampling and the ongoing generation or collection of data. Ultimately, it is this iterative analytical method of constantly comparing and generating or collecting data that results in high-level conceptually abstract categories, rich in meaning, possessive of properties, and providing an explanation of variance through categorical dimensionalisation.

> ### Constant comparative analysis
>
> An analytical process in which incoming data is compared with existing data in the process of coding and category development.

Decision making when constantly comparing data relies on a combination of inductive and abductive thought. Inductive thought is defined as 'a type of reasoning that begins with study of a range of individual cases and extrapolates patterns from them to form a conceptual category' (Bryant and Charmaz, 2019, p.657). In other words, induction is a process of analysis where theory is built from data. Abduction, on the other hand, is 'a type of reasoning that begins by examining data and after scrutiny of these data, entertains all possible explanations for the observed data, and then forms hypotheses to confirm or disconfirm until the researcher arrives at the most plausible interpretation of the observed data' (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007a, p.603). Abduction, therefore, is a process of hypothesising based on the progressive analysis and developing theory. These processes differ from deduction, where analysis begins with an existing theory.

> ### Induction
>
> A process of analysis where theory is built from data.

> ### Abduction
>
> A process of hypothesising based on the developing theory.

> ### Deduction
>
> A process of analysis that begins with an existing theory.

Originally, grounded theory was promoted as an inductive research method that generated theory grounded in the data while challenging 'doctrinaire approaches to verification' (Glaser and Strauss,

1967, p.7). Strauss (1987) later clarifies this as a mistaken impression, arguing that grounded theory analysis requires three activities: induction, deduction, and verification. In a treatise on this topic, Reichertz (2007) examines the logic of grounded theory and concludes that grounded theory researchers use a combination of inductive and abductive thought that accounts for the conceptual leaps of analysis that occur to move a grounded theory away from being a qualitative descriptive account and towards being an abstract conceptual framework.

ANALYTICAL PHASES

As with the terminology relating to concepts, seminal grounded theorists use different language to describe the different phases of analysis. In our work, we have developed three distinct yet overlapping phases of coding: *initial*, *intermediate*, and *advanced* to facilitate a discussion of analytical progression. We have mapped these analytical phases to those processes described by first- and second-generation grounded theorists in Table 8.2. Note that the analytical methods in each phase directly relate to the level of conceptual abstraction the researcher is developing at the time. Initial, intermediate, and advanced coding procedures correlate with and feed into low-, medium- and high-level conceptual development. Initial coding processes power grounded theory analysis by fuelling low-level conceptual analysis. Once you begin the work of integrating your grounded theory by explicating the links between and within categories through intermediate coding, your level of conceptual analysis will increase. A fully integrated grounded theory is a high-level conceptual framework that possesses explanatory power supported by advanced analytical processes. Note that the recursive nature of grounded theory sees the researcher alternate between phases of coding throughout the study as they concurrently generate or collect data and analyse these, the iterative process of which is illustrated by the dotted lines in Table 8.2.

Table 8.2 Initial and intermediate coding

Birks & Mills, 2011, 2015	**Initial coding**	**Intermediate coding**	**Advanced coding**
Glaser & Strauss, 1967	Coding and comparing incidents	Integrating categories and properties	Delimiting the theory
Glaser, 1978	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998	Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
Charmaz, 2006, 2014	Initial coding	Focused coding	Theoretical coding

Initial coding

The process of initial coding of data is the first step in grounded theory analysis. Initial coding is synonymous with that of the same name used by Charmaz (2014) and 'open' coding referred to by Glaser (1978) and Strauss and Corbin (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 2015; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998). Despite the revolutionary nature of *Discovery*, Glaser and Strauss (1967) provide limited practical direction in respect of grounded theory methods. We can, however, distinguish their discussion of coding and comparison of incidents, within the context of constant comparative analysis, as their approach to initial coding. In the first instance, initial coding is used to fracture the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) so as to compare incident with incident, name apparent phenomena or beginning patterns, and begin the process of comparison between the codes applied. With initial coding, the researcher moves swiftly to 'open up' the data by identifying the conceptual possibilities.

> ### Initial coding
>
> The first phase of analysis where data is broken down and labelled.

Initial coding is a particularly reflexive activity (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) whereby the researcher must constantly interrogate themselves about the early analytical decisions that they make. As Saldaña states, initial coding provides an 'opportunity for you as a researcher to reflect deeply on the contents and nuances of your data and to begin taking ownership of them' (2021, p.148). The idea of taking ownership of your analytical decisions requires you to identify and account for the influences on your thinking that have brought you to that point. Early forays into the field as a novice researcher can be very challenging. Often, there is a focus on the quality of skills deployed in generating or collecting data and then the analysis of that data. Not rushing the early stages of concurrent data generation/collection and analysis is important to allow time for the researcher to develop and sustain a reflexive approach that accounts for the multiple selves discussed in Chapter 2. Taking a reflexive approach to data analysis assists the researcher to avoid subconsciously applying pet theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978) during initial coding, while, at the same time, appreciating and developing their theoretical sensitivity (see Chapter 4).

Initial coding is often undertaken by analysing transcriptions, or fieldnotes, line by line or using short segments of data (Saldaña, 2021). Ghaffari et al. (2020) illustrate this method in their use of sentence-by-sentence analysis of interview data generated in a study of the process of developing the Internet of Things. Such a concentrated approach is recommended in the first instance, as it requires the researcher to examine the data in minute detail, while, at the same time, asking questions of the data. Questioning the data is a long-held grounded theory tradition, with both Glaser (1978) and Charmaz (2014) providing suggested lists to use for this task. We differ somewhat from these authors whose questions are directed to the act of coding, rather than accounting for the iterative nature of grounded theory played out through concurrent data generation/collection and analysis. The list of questions to ask the data which are presented in Box 8.1 therefore accounts not only for the task of coding, but also for what comes next – further data generation/collection.

> ### Box 8.1

Questions to ask the data

1. Are elements of process or action apparent in the early analysis?
2. What is left unsaid in the data analysis to date?
3. Are there more questions than answers? If so, what are they?
4. Who are the key stakeholders in the field?
5. Where else do I need to go to get more data? What should that data consist of?
6. Are contextual influences at play?
7. Is the original research question/substantive area of enquiry remaining constant?

Corbin and Strauss (2015) advocate questioning the data using a coding paradigm that clearly reflects Strauss's pragmatic concern with structure and process (Corbin, 1991). In the most recent edition of *Basics of Qualitative Research*, Corbin and Strauss (2015, p.156) have simplified the original coding paradigm and renamed it 'the paradigm', which has three broad components for researchers to think about when they are analysing data:

1. There are conditions – why, where, how, and what happens?
2. There are inter/actions and emotions.
3. There are consequences – of inter/actions and emotions.

This departure from the original coding paradigm aims to prevent novice researchers from becoming too rigid in their thinking about the required outcomes of data analysis, which may in turn have the potential to force the data into a preconceived framework. It is worth noting that any coding paradigm is vehemently rejected by Glaser (1992) as a useful adjunct to analysis, as he perceives it will force data into a theoretical framing of the researcher's making as opposed to allowing theory to 'emerge' inductively from the data.

Initial coding proceeds until categories begin to form. Line-by-line coding is a technique that is most useful in the very early stages of analysis, becoming redundant as the researcher gains a sense of conceptual control over the data. Caution, however, needs to be exercised in moving too quickly towards an 'overview approach' (Glaser, 1978, p.58) to data analysis as there is a risk of missing important concepts that may only be identified after the type of prolonged and intense engagement with the data that initial coding brings. Sbaraini et al. (2011) provide an excellent worked example of how to use different types of codes in their grounded theory study of dental practices. Of note, these researchers describe their movement backwards and forwards between the different types of coding and how they used each grounded theory method to progress the level of conceptual abstraction before finally integrating a grounded theory.

ACTIVITY 8.1

INITIAL CODING

Browse your local or national newspapers over a period of a few days and collect news articles that relate to a specific contemporary issue. Using the techniques described above, code each article. Be sure to work with short segments of the data and use constant comparative processes to generate codes that reflect the major issues evident in the text. How many codes did this process generate? Retain the products of this initial coding session as we will return to it again later in this chapter and the one that follows.

Intermediate coding

Coding processes in grounded theory have a natural progression that reflects the varying levels of conceptual analysis attained (see Figure 8.1), therefore intermediate coding follows on from initial coding. Glaser and Strauss (1967), in discussing the integration of categories and their inherent properties, identify intermediate coding in its earliest form. For Glaser (1978), open coding is followed by selective coding, where attention is turned to generating codes around an identified core variable. Charmaz's (2014) focused coding, in which existing significant codes direct analysis, is a similar process. Axial coding, defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.96) as 'a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between [and within] categories', while elevating the level of conceptual analysis, is the most developed form of intermediate coding. This definition acknowledges the inevitability of identifying patterns and relationships during the process of category development which is at the heart of intermediate coding.

> ### Intermediate coding
>
> The identification of properties, dimensions, patterns, and relationships during the process of category development.

The result of concurrently generating and analysing data is many codes that require continuous organising, and about which memos need to be written (see Chapter 4). It is the grouping of codes that leads to the formation of tentative categories as the researcher begins to identify explanatory, conceptual patterns in their analysis. Grounded theory categories are multi-dimensional and may, but not always, consist of several sub-categories that together explain a broader concept. Ramalho et al. (2021, p.281) developed a context category that had two clearly defined sub-categories – 'smoking and nonsmoking milieus'. The impact of context was very significant in this grounded theory of the process of naturalising non-smoking.

Categories and their sub-categories also have properties (characteristics) that need to be identified in the data and explained fully to develop conceptual depth and breadth. Properties of categories and sub-categories should be considered in terms of their dimensions, or the range of variance that the property demonstrates. Dimensions of properties can also be linked to the conditions that they operate under. As a very simplistic example of this analytic process, consider the category 'walking the dog'. Properties of this category might be 'time', 'enjoyment', and 'exercise'. Each of these properties can be dimensionalised; take, for instance, 'time'. Participants might identify that the time they take walking the dog varies from short to long and that they are influenced by the weather in making this decision. If it is raining, they usually only spend a short amount of time walking the dog, as opposed to a sunny day when they spend a long amount of time walking the dog. Techniques to raise theoretical sensitivity (see Chapter 4) can be very helpful in fully developing the properties and dimensions of categories and their sub-categories.

> ### Properties
>
> Characteristics of a category.

> ### Dimensions
>
> Variations of a property that exist on a continuum.

Figure 8.2 illustrates the difference between initial and intermediate coding. The aim of initial coding is to break up the data by generating as many initial codes as possible. There should be no limits applied during initial coding, with the understanding that these initial codes will be constantly compared to each other to identify the similarities and differences. It is the process of constant comparison of these initial codes that leads to tentative categories. This phase is messy, and the neophyte grounded theorist can feel overwhelmed by the volume of data, the number of codes, and the seemingly impossible task of making some sense of it all. At this point, you need to cultivate your tolerance of ambiguity and keep going. Once several tentative categories have been constructed, plenty of memos written, and often another round of theoretical sampling has been undertaken, the transition to intermediate coding takes place. The aim of intermediate coding is to develop and confirm categories and identify the connections between them that might explain a process. Some of the initial codes identified might be conceptually elevated to become properties of a category. Equally, some initial codes could be re-labelled as dimensions of a property or to explain the relationship between categories. Most initial codes won't be conceptually elevated but instead will be absorbed into the explanation of a category during advanced analysis, as discussed in the following chapter. Often, the initial codes chosen to be conceptually elevated are *in vivo* codes or gerunds because they have the most explanatory power for the developing grounded theory.
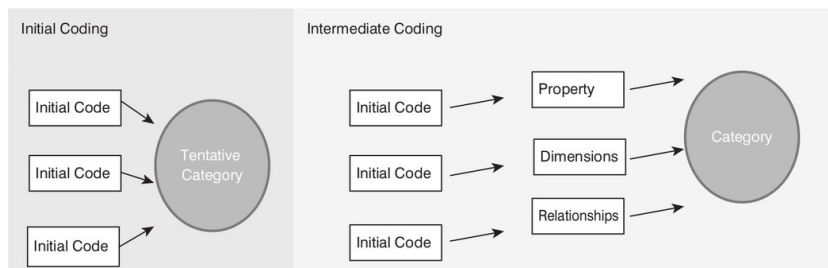
Figure 8.2 Intermediate coding process

One of the key tasks of intermediate coding is the linking together or integration of categories. Using the familiar methods of constant comparison of data, categories and their sub-categories are compared with each other while the researcher questions the relationships between these medium-level concepts. Again, questioning the data will result in the identification of gaps and holes in your analytical schema that require further data generation/collection and analysis to find a satisfactory answer. One outcome from this type of coding may be the development of relational statements that operate at a conceptually high level to link together or integrate categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Corbin and Strauss (2015, p.199) refer to these as 'explanatory statements of relationships' in reference to linking categories to a core category. You will find that you will explore and develop relational statements in your memos as an aid to analysis. The main function of a relational statement is to explain action or process as it becomes apparent in a burgeoning grounded theory. When reporting a grounded theory, relational statements can be either implicit or explicit in the text.

> ### Relational statements
>
> Statements that are used to explain action or process as it becomes apparent in a burgeoning grounded theory.

In Researcher's Voice 8.1, Anita Hallewas describes her use of index cards as an 'old school' way to visualise her developing grounded theory, and in particular the connections between categories that became apparent during intermediate coding.

The researcher's voice 8.1

Anita Hallewas on index cards as a useful grounded theory analysis approach

Anita Hallewas is an experienced and passionate artistic director with a demonstrated history of working in the performing arts industry, specifically in an applied theatre setting. She is currently pursuing a PhD in Applied Theatre at the University of New South Wales, Sydney (Australia) that focuses on theatre in refugee camps.

As recommended by a friend, Will Weigler (2011), and in the interest of continued play as recommended by Saldaña (2016), I decided to play with the idea of putting all my parent categories and their nested codes into a hard copy on index cards. I then also made index cards for each of the memo titles that I had been compiling in NVivo. This resulted in 177 index cards which I lay on the floor to move around to look for new patterns, connections, and ways of seeing. After several days of playing, I was happy with the layout of the cards on the floor and could transfer the cards to the wall for easier visibility. Over days of further observation and further movement of the cards, I began seeing ways to further distill the parent categories as well as make connections and links that I could not see before. This process proved to be highly beneficial and was likely the final and most powerful step in the development of my grounded theory. After the index card process had been initiated, I was able to start seeing an emerging grounded theory. The index cards on the wall of my office allowed me to see all the codes together, how they connected to one another, their overlaps, and recurring themes. From here I was looking at how the research participants solved their shared social problem, and this was clearer to navigate visually. Through a process of continually sorting the cards on the wall and further memoing, I looked for what might be the common theme and the emerging grounded theory. There were several false starts, but those false starts resulted in phrases, metaphors, and words that helped shape further thinking and discussion (Figures 8.3 and 8.4).

Figure 8.3 Index cards
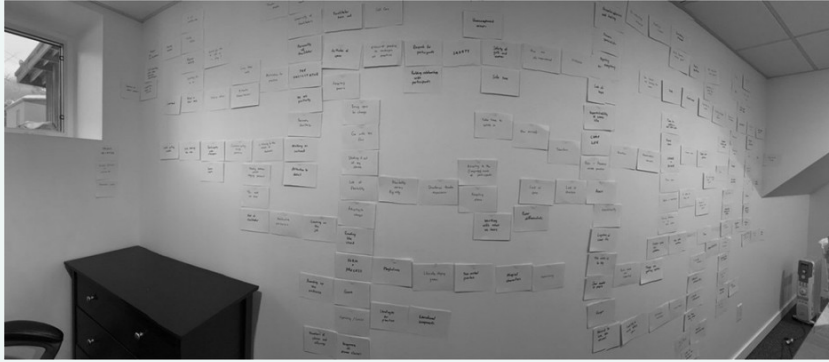
Figure 8.4 Index cards mapped

Returning to Figure 8.1, you can see that intermediate coding results in the development of medium-level concepts. Category development begins with large numbers of low-level conceptual codes that are grouped to create tentative, complex medium-level conceptual categories (see Figure 8.4). Refining and developing tentative categories by defining properties and their dimensions while considering the conditions they operate under, will quickly identify insufficiencies in your data. At this point, the grounded theory method of theoretical sampling (see Chapter 7) really comes into its own, as a means of addressing questions asked of the data during the analytical work of category development and integration. You will continue to sample theoretically throughout your research, including through more advanced stages of analysis, as discussed in the following chapter, until theoretical saturation is achieved.

Theoretical saturation is the term introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to describe the criterion for when to stop theoretically sampling for data pertinent to a category. As will be discussed in the following chapter, theoretical saturation is a necessary factor in the integration of the final theory. Strauss and Corbin (1990) define theoretical saturation as occurring when there are no new codes identified in later rounds of data generation or collection that pertain to a particular category, and the category is conceptually well developed to the point where any sub-categories and their properties/dimensions are clearly articulated and integrated. In other words, it is the point at which categories are sufficiently developed that no new concepts are introduced through the process of concurrent data generation/collection and analysis.

In more recent times, reporting the process of saturating categories or themes in the findings has been identified as a marker of quality in a qualitative study (Constantinou et al., 2017). Bowen (2008) argues that the types of evidence provided can include a high percentage of interviews reflecting the conceptual categories, and member checking participants' level of resonance with the final categories. Neither of these propositions holds up in relation to grounded theory research, with Morse (1995) having laid the groundwork against counting the frequency of a code as an indicator of theoretical saturation early in the piece. Rather, as she states, 'researchers cease data collection when they have enough data to build a comprehensive and convincing theory. That is, saturation occurs' (Morse, 1995, p.148). While Constantinou et al. (2017) have developed the most recent method of ensuring thematic saturation in a qualitative study, we would argue that their focus on reordering the analysis of interviews to ensure thematic saturation is superseded by grounded theory methods which are naturally recursive. The process of theoretically sampling the existing data set based on the developing grounded theory means the researcher will return to earlier data transcripts, and likely recode them during intermediate coding. We agree with the importance of reporting how you have reached the saturation of categories and in turn your grounded theory, and suggest that this becomes a focus of your memoing in this phase of your study.

Theoretical saturation

The point at which categories are sufficiently developed that no new concepts are introduced through the process of concurrent data generation/collection and analysis.

ACTIVITY 8.2

Member checking involves the researcher returning their analysis of qualitative data to participants to check and comment on, with the aim of validating findings. Candela (2019) provides a comprehensive summary of the literature concerning member checking, its pros and cons. This author identified the risk of member checking causing harm, but also the possibility of the member check being a reflective experience for participants. From a grounded theory perspective, we argue that the aim is not to provide an accurate representation of individuals' lived experience generated through a process of phenomenological interviewing; instead, grounded theorists aim for a highly conceptual theorisation of process, apparent in relation to a particular substantive area of enquiry. Because of the high level of analytical abstraction achieved through the analytical process, member checking isn't a useful or necessary process. Charmaz (2006) concurs that grounded theory methods make member checking redundant as a source of verification for conceptual analysis. Pragmatically, though, she does suggest that the term 'member checking' can be included in grounded theory research proposals to institutional committees as a mainstream term that will provide for re-entry to the field, should your theoretical sampling strategy determine that it is required to facilitate theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2014).

Advanced coding

Advanced coding is the final phase of a grounded theory study during which the analysis is taken to the point of theory. Advanced coding employs various techniques for the purpose of integrating a grounded theory. These techniques can be complex and often challenging for the researcher new to grounded theory, but they are critical in that they take the theory beyond the level of simple conceptual description. Given the nature of this final analytical phase, advanced coding is examined in detail in the following chapter.

IDENTIFYING A CORE CATEGORY

A central idea in early seminal grounded theory texts (Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) is identifying a core category or concept that encapsulates the process apparent in the categories and sub-categories constructed. Strauss and Corbin define a core category as 'the central phenomenon around which all the other categories are integrated' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.116). In later seminal works (Charmaz, 2014; Clarke et al., 2018; Corbin and Strauss, 2015), the importance of selecting a core category appears to have lessened, with a broader approach to describing how categories and their sub-categories integrate together to form an abstract grounded theory of a substantive area of enquiry. We agree with Morse and Clark (2019) that identifying a core category provides the researcher with a way to bring together all of the categories under one high-level concept that will provide for a memorable grounded theory. Returning to a previous example, Ramalho et al.'s (2021, p.279) 'naturalization of non-smoking' is a strong core category that encapsulates the overall process identified in this grounded theory.

> Core category
>
> A concept that encapsulates the process apparent in the categories and sub-categories constructed.

Glaser places the development of a strong, conceptually abstract core category at the heart of grounded theory analysis. For Glaser, a core category is generalisable: 'it has grab; it is often a high impact dependent variable of great importance; it is hard to resist; it happens automatically with ease. Researchers tend to see their core category everywhere' (Glaser, 2007, p.14). Glaser had earlier discussed the relationship between the core category and a basic social process, which he defines as theoretical in nature, reflecting and summarising the 'patterned, systematic uniformity flows of social life' (Glaser, 1978, p.100). He further points out that while a core category may be a basic social process, this is not always the case. Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Charmaz (2014) reassert this point, with both taking a more flexible approach to the need to identify a core category as a particular phenomenon.

Selection of a core category occurs when the researcher can trace connections between a frequently occurring variable and all the other categories, sub-categories, and their properties and dimensions. The precise use of grounded theory methods means that during this process the researcher moves between initial and intermediate coding, the specificity of which is directed by theoretical sampling.

Once a core category is selected, theoretical sampling becomes delimited to the generation or collection of data that will theoretically saturate the core and related categories and sub-categories. In this way, the researcher can shape their grounded theory, refine, and fully integrate each theoretical component, while developing the overall level of conceptual abstraction. At this stage, the researcher is naturally progressing to the advanced analysis phase, as discussed in the following chapter.

TOOLS AND STRATEGIES TO AID ANALYSIS

Computer software

The use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) to aid in the coding process is now mainstream for qualitative researchers including grounded theorists (Bringer et al., 2006; Hutchison et al., 2010; Sinkovics and Alfoldi, 2012). While Glaser describes the use of computers as 'burdensome and terribly time taking' (Glaser, 2005, p.38), most researchers today use computers in their everyday lives and are less likely to encounter such difficulties. In a grounded theory study, the main benefit of using analytical software is how it helps you organise and access your data set, particularly during the initial coding phase. Goulding (2017) summarises the advantages and potential disadvantages of CAQDAS, before coming to the conclusion that describing how the analysis, including the use of CAQDAS, was undertaken is important to arguing for the rigour of the final grounded theory product. How CAQDAS is used therefore becomes an important differentiating factor for studies that rely on these programmes for their organisational benefits, versus those who rely on their advanced analytic functions which are not helpful in a grounded theory study.

We encourage you to seek out opportunities to explore the potential of CAQDAS that aid in the management of research data, and, if possible, to find a mentor who is familiar with their use. At this stage, we will, however, reinforce the importance of treating CAQDAS as an adjunct tool rather than an analytical solution. You may find, as many (particularly novice) researchers do, that a combination of computerised and manual coding is most effective. Interestingly, Saldaña (2021) requires his students to use manual coding in the first instance. Conversely, experienced researchers may be more reliant on analytical software during initial coding when they have a large amount of data to work with. Working with data during intermediate and advanced coding will result in the use of different techniques to manage the advancing analysis, many of which rely on tactile, visual approaches, such as that described by Hallewas in Researcher's Voice 8.1. Our intent in providing examples is to encourage you to experiment with different techniques until you find what suits you best. The key is the careful application of each grounded theory method to ensure the production of a theory that is grounded in the data.

Diagramming

A diagram is simply a visual representation that can assist in the process of analysis. Producing diagrams that conceptually map analysis throughout the process of undertaking a grounded theory study is very important. However, because adults have preferred modes of learning (one of the most popular of these learning style models is visual, auditory, read/write, and kinaesthetic) (Wininger et al., 2019), diagramming does not appeal to everyone.

> Diagram
>
> A visual representation that can assist in the process of data analysis.

ACTIVITY 8.3

Diagramming receives varied amounts of attention from seminal grounded theorists. Glaser (1978) limits a discussion of diagramming to constructing typologies during theoretical coding, whereas Strauss and Corbin (1990) advocate for the use of diagrams from the commencement of a study in tandem with the writing of memos. Clarke's (Clarke et al., 2015; Morse et al., 2021) situational analysis is reliant on the development of a range of maps and has extended the use of diagramming to the next level in terms of the purpose and use of diagrams in developing medium-level concepts that result from intermediate coding and analysis (Figure 8.1). One of the important differences with situational analysis as compared to other forms of grounded theory is Clarke's inclusion of non-human actors in the situation under investigation. These authors argue that 'methods that ignore the materialities of existence are today inadequate. Material entities in our situations of concern deserve explicit and intentional analytic inclusion' (Clarke et al., 2018, p.16). A way of identifying such materialities and entities is to map them using a combination of diagrams and text. Clarke et al. use three main forms of maps for this purpose:

1. **Situational maps** which identify 'major human, nonhuman, discursive, historical, symbolic, cultural political and other elements in the research situation of concern'.
2. **Social worlds/arenas maps** which 'lay out all of the collective actors and the area(s) of commitment within which they are engaged in ongoing discourse and negotiations'.
3. **Positional maps** which 'lay out the major positions taken and *not* taken in the discursive data found in the situation'.

You are encouraged to read Clarke et al.'s (2018) text to understand the potential of this form of grounded theory which fully engages in the context of the situation of inquiry. A fascinating example of situational analysis is provided by Dudley et al. (2021, p.2) who researched the 'tourism complex' in New Orleans post-Hurricane Katrina and the 'situatedness of tourism workers within the complex'. The authors examine the situatedness of New Orleans' tourism, including narratives of black culture and neoliberal and ideological policies, alongside the power structures that make up the 'tourism complex'. Providing a detailed explanation of how they used the suite of situational analysis maps, the authors include excellent examples of each map, illustrating the flexibility and utility of this research design.

Pairing diagramming with concurrent data gathering and analysis encourages you to map and connect various codes. Initial coding will result in a long list of codes that can make the novice researcher feel quite overwhelmed. Organising and diagramming these early coding lists is very messy, but it will go some way to restoring calm to the chaos that seems to have exploded in your office. If you choose to keep on diagramming as your analysis progresses, your diagrams will change to reflect the developing levels of conceptual analysis (see Figure 8.1). Generally, initial coding results in messy and intricate diagrams, which will evolve into neat and simple ones as you move into intermediate and advanced coding phases. In the Researcher's Voice 8.2, Carolynne White describes her use of diagramming in a grounded theory study.

The researcher's voice 8.2

Carolynne White on using diagrams to develop understanding

Carolynne White is a lecturer in Occupational Therapy at Monash University. She has over 15 years of experience working as an occupational therapist. Carolynne also works part-time as a project officer at Access Health and Community (formerly Manningham Community Health Services).

Diagramming was a lifeline during my grounded theory study that investigated how adults living with chronic illness influence their health and wellbeing through their activities and occupations. Throughout the study, drawing diagrams enabled me to see what I was wrestling with on paper, which got me out of many sticky situations.

Diagramming helped me untangle the difference between codes, categories, concepts, and theory, when I discovered that proponents of grounded theory use these terms in different ways. After recording each term and its definitions in a table, I experimented with various diagrams to help me make sense of the relationships between them. The result was a pyramid representing each term based on its level of abstraction from the data, with codes at the base, categories, concepts, and theoretical statements in the middle, and finally, theory at the apex.

As my study involved an exploration of human occupation, a concept that I was very familiar with through my undergraduate education and clinical practice in occupational therapy, starting with a blank slate was impossible. Instead, I treated human occupation as a sensitising (or beginning) concept and used constant comparison to further refine the concept based on the experiences of adults living with ongoing health conditions. Soon after commencing data analysis, I saw that existing descriptions and diagrams of human occupation, didn't fit with the participants' experiences.

Drawing diagrams supported the abductive reasoning process as I compared what I already knew with what I was learning from participants. I began with a scrapbook and some coloured markers and occasionally used the diagramming function on NVivo. As the analysis process progressed and new insights arose at inopportune times, I used whatever was at hand: a scribble on the back of a receipt or a sketch on a serviette. In fact, a diagram depicting the relationships between the person and their activities and occupations, in the context of their world (White et al., 2020), was inspired by the pattern on the tiles in my shower!

Like memos, diagrams are for your eyes only, unless you choose to share them. They are a way to represent your analysis-in-progress to gain deeper insights into your data. Drawing diagrams enabled me to form connections between categories and concepts that I may not have seen otherwise, and helped me communicate what I was learning from the data when words were not enough.

Remember our discussion of abduction earlier in this chapter? Diagramming is *the* creative tool to use when operationalising the logic of abduction. You can diagram to identify the properties and dimensions of categories and their sub-categories. By default, therefore, diagramming will also assist you to find the gaps and holes in your developing theory that will further direct theoretical sampling. Identifying points of connection, intersection, and overlap by diagramming categories and their sub-categories is also important. This is particularly so when overlaps exist, as visually recognising these will challenge you to think critically to resolve them through the further refinement of categories and their component parts. A diagram that contains mid- to high-level conceptual analysis can be a useful starting point to use in participant interviews or focus groups. Asking participants to feed back on your verbal explanation of a

diagram in lieu of an open-ended question focuses the generation of data towards theoretical saturation of the developing theory. When diagramming, there is only one rule: keep a record of what you have created and throw nothing away. Do not feel constrained, embarrassed, or frightened to begin diagramming. Not everyone is an artist, but diagramming allows you to express yourself as best you can.

Williams and Keady (2012) use a process they call 'centre stage' diagramming to support the grounded theory method of concurrent data generation and analysis in a constructivist study. Engaging with participants, these researchers use collaborative diagramming to elucidate a storyline of their theory and the stakeholders present in that storyline. Centre-stage diagrams are used in an iterative process of data generation and analysis during repeat participant interviews, based on principles of reciprocity and trust.

Ligita et al. (2022) explain how they used concept mapping in a study of diabetes education in Indonesia. These authors argue that creating more elaborate concept maps, including 'arrows, line titles, shapes and colours', assisted in elevating the level of conceptual development from simple to more complex. They also identify three functions of their concept maps: '[T]o visualize emerging concepts from raw data, to efficiently communicate the developing theory under construction, and to demonstrate progress in the analytical thinking process' (Ligita et al., 2022, p.130).

Experienced grounded theorists have their favourite strategies, such as keeping a large artist's block close at hand to use with students so they can diagram concepts together during supervision sessions. Electronic whiteboards are another effective tool to capture grounded theory diagrams in a retrievable format. Flip charts also work well, but you need to photograph the resultant diagrams to create a manageable visual record. Let loose your creative energy with a rainbow of coloured pens of varying thickness to differentiate between concepts and illustrate various relationships.

Whatever you use to diagram your work, ensure it is labelled and dated and electronically filed securely. Alternatively, convert it to A4 format, print it, and file it chronologically in a plastic sleeve within a ring binder. Adele Clarke (personal communication, May 2009) shared this tip with us when chatting about the effective supervision of students engaged in a grounded theory study. By storing your diagrams in this way, you can flick through pages that trace the development of your grounded theory over time. This has two purposes: firstly, the researcher will get a sense of accomplishment from seeing their analysis develop before their eyes; and secondly, an accurate record is created that provides evidence for the audit trail of decision-making regarding analysis.

ANALYSING CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONS

The idea of analysing grounded theory data for structural or macroscopic conditions is a controversial one. Closely tied to the original coding paradigm, Strauss (1987) introduced the notion of specifically coding for contextual conditions in the first text he wrote about grounded theory after the publication of *Discovery* (1967). In the 20 years that transpired between these two seminal works, Strauss had furthered his thinking about methods of grounded theory analysis in line with his philosophical position of pragmatism and symbolic interactionism, whereby 'while actors act towards their environment they are also both socially and materially a part of their surroundings … subject, cognition, knowledge and theory all need to be conceptualized as a dynamic process resulting from activity relating actors with environment' (Strubing, 2007, p.595).

In the first edition of *Basics of Qualitative Research*, Strauss and Corbin (1990) developed an analytical framework they called the conditional matrix, which, along with its associated conditional paths, was designed 'to protect researchers against the untenable assumption of two contrasting realms of the macroscopic and microscopic, falsely thought by many to be either independent of each other or needing somehow to be related to each other' (Strauss, 1993, p.64). It is this reaction against the predominantly dualistic thinking of the time that provides a foundation for a conditional matrix that centres on action and identifying the salient structural conditions (Clarke, 2005) of this action. The conditional matrix includes the following levels: (8) international; (7) national; (6) community; (5) organisational and institutional; (4) sub-organisational and sub-institutional; (3) group, individual, collection; (2) interaction; (1) action pertaining to a phenomenon. In concert with the coding paradigm, this matrix of conditions guides the researcher in the questions that they ask of the data at various points during the process of analysis. There are various iterations of the conditional matrix; however, we concur with Clarke (2005) that a later version, amended to place the individual at the centre of conditional analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), is not reflective of Strauss's concern with action as the centre of analysis. In the most recent edition of *Basics of Qualitative Research* (Corbin and Strauss, 2015), Corbin returns to the conditional matrix and revises it to be much closer to the original version with 'evolving action and interaction' at the centre of multiple layers of factors that need to be considered as potential conditional and consequential influences on the substantive area of inquiry.

Using the concept of a conditional matrix as a stepping-off point, Clarke's original project of pushing grounded theory around the postmodern turn argues for a reframing of data analysis to consider that 'everything in the situation *both constitutes and affects* most everything else in the situation in some way(s)' (Clarke, 2005, p.72). In the latest edition of this seminal text, Clarke et al. (2018, p.10) have added a stronger emphasis on interpretive perspectives, stating that 'the interpretive turn thus denotes how social researchers have reflexively embraced postmodern and poststructural social theories *toward understanding their own knowledge practices as situated*'.

Actively analysing data for contextual conditions of the substantive area of enquiry is premised on the philosophical and methodological position assumed by the researcher. The inclusion of strategies advocated by Strauss, Strauss and Corbin, and Clarke in a grounded theory research design needs to be carefully considered in relation to questions of human agency and discourse (Mills et al., 2007). If you are clear about how you understand the world ontologically and epistemologically (see Chapter 2), then you will also be clear about the possibilities for either the coding paradigm/conditional matrix or the situational analysis mapping in your work.

CODING SECONDARY DATA SETS

We have made the point above that analytical processes in grounded theory remain the same, regardless of the type or source of data. In the previous chapter, we discussed the availability of a wealth of secondary data on a global scale. As the use of secondary data sets is a growing trend in research (Johnston, 2017), it is worth taking some time to discuss its use in grounded theory. Logan (2020, p.130) reviewed the literature regarding secondary data analysis and argues, in concert with Smith (2008), that it takes two main forms: the analysis of existing data sets to answer new research questions, or the re-analysis of existing data with 'new techniques or theoretical models'.

Secondary data sets can be analysed in the same manner as primary data using grounded theory methods. Glaser (2008, p.39) supports the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative forms of secondary data and posits that because grounded theories are 'conceptually abstract of time, place and people', the traditional limitations of secondary data analysis posed by the nature of archival data (Logan, 2020) are less of a problem.

Michelle Redman-MacLaren used secondary data in her grounded theory study that sought to generate new understandings about HIV risk with women in Papua New Guinea. Collecting this type of data set to address research questions about vulnerable populations is beneficial because it reduces the level of impact the researcher has on participants themselves (Bainbridge et al., 2012). If the original ethics approval includes written consent for the use of participant data in future research, secondary data can provide a rich resource for grounded theory studies. In the Researcher's Voice 8.3, Michelle Redman-MacLaren tells of the challenges associated with the use of secondary data and its role in informing further data generation in a subsequent focus group.

The researcher's voice 8.3

Michelle Redman-MacLaren on using secondary data in a grounded theory study

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Michelle Redman-MacLaren is an Anglo-Celt born on Gubbi Gubbi country, Australia, with most of her childhood spent on a farm on Gamilaroi Country. A Principal Research Fellow in the College of Medicine and Dentistry at James Cook University in Australia, she has a background as a social worker and is committed to inclusive, developmental, and decolonising processes in her research and education work. Michelle is currently the Associate Dean, Research Education and is experienced in the supervision of higher degree by research candidates.

Until recently, researchers have been reticent to use secondary data to generate grounded theory. Secondary data is data collected by other researchers and used in a separate research project to more fully understand the phenomena in question. For my PhD, I used data from a data set generated during a large mixed-methods, multi-site study in Papua New Guinea (PNG) that investigated the acceptability and feasibility of male circumcision for HIV prevention in PNG (generating qualitative and quantitative data). I designed the PhD to build upon findings from the larger study and explore more deeply the implications of male circumcision for women in PNG, including for HIV prevention. This is important as heterosexual transmission of HIV in PNG often results in women being represented as either victims of HIV or responsible for transmitting HIV (Redman-MacLaren et al., 2013).

At the beginning of the PhD study, I theoretically sampled from rich interview and focus group transcripts in the secondary data set and identified codes and categories from this data. I then went to the quantitative data set, consisting of responses from 860 men and 520 women (Redman-MacLaren et al., 2013) to expand my understanding of the emerging categories. In my experience, working with a secondary data set was not always easy. In a memo I wrote during this period, I reflected: 'when I read the interview transcripts and code the participant data I feel like I am only holding half the story, the interplay between the researcher and the participant/s is lost. It is like there is a disconnect between the story being told by the woman and the context in which the story is being elicited' (February 2013).

Despite these challenges, the secondary data set provided codes and categories for me to explore with women in PNG. I identified 'chunks' (segments) of data from the secondary data set that I thought would stimulate discussion in 'interpretive focus groups', and that would generate new and rich knowledge about the implications of male circumcision for the women participating. In the focus groups, women discussed their interpretation of the data 'chunks' and then went on to portray their understandings of the phenomena in drawings, using a storyboarding technique (Redman-MacLaren et al., 2014).

The weaving of shared understandings from secondary and primary data informed a transformational grounded theory (Redman-MacLaren et al., 2017). The analysis of the secondary data set informed the successful co-generation of data for the primary data set, informed the development of a transformational grounded theory, and led to health promotion action in local research sites.

(To watch a discussion about the use of secondary data between Rachael Tommbe, PNG co-researcher and myself, visit: http://youtu.be/Fg3OqF6fK38)

PROGRESSING THROUGH ANALYTICAL PHASES

Before we conclude this chapter, it is worth spending a few moments addressing some issues that you may face in progressing your analysis through initial and intermediate coding to the advanced phase discussed in the following chapter. Figure 8.5 represents the phases of coding in a grounded theory study. The interaction between initial and intermediate coding, concurrent data generation/collection and analysis, and theoretical sampling is iterative as opposed to a linear research design. Your activities during the early phases of coding will generate a large body of data and a proliferation of codes and categories will occur. It is at this point that novice grounded theorists can become 'stuck', finding it difficult to move beyond description to the development of medium- and high-level concepts, which are the hallmark of grounded theory studies.

Reflecting on the range of grounded theory methods available to you, and accounting for these in the implementation of your research design can be helpful in progressing your analysis. Key to maintaining analytical momentum is understanding how intermediate coding assists the researcher to develop categories fully and link these together. Consciously working to raise theoretical sensitivity, critically interrogating categories prior to declaring them theoretically saturated, and selecting a core category that encapsulates the developing grounded theory, will also move you out of the mire of potentially descriptive, thematic analysis, therefore positioning you to move your analysis to the advanced phase discussed in the following chapter.
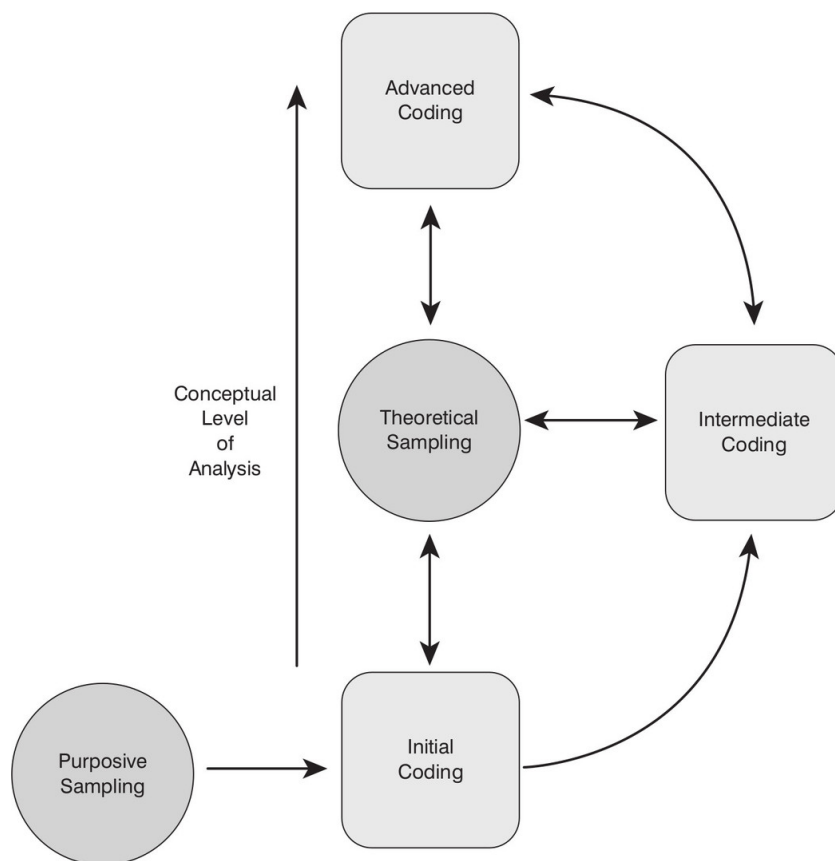
Figure 8.5 Coding in a grounded theory study

CONCLUSION

Analysis is perhaps the most daunting aspect of grounded theory for the beginning researcher. Despite the need to ensure diligence in the application of grounded theory methods, this approach to research is inherently flexible. In this chapter, we have examined data analysis methods in relation to diverse methodological positions and have discussed tools and strategies to enhance their application in your own research. In the following chapter, we move into the advanced phase of analysis and explore techniques for the integration of your final theory.

Critical thinking questions

1. What are the key points of difference between Glaser and Strauss in the publications that followed *Discovery* in relation to data analysis? Reflecting on your own philosophical and methodological position, how might these works influence your grounded theory research design?
2. Describe how you would identify whether your level of conceptual analysis has progressed in line with the initial and intermediate phases of coding described in this chapter.
3. Consider how you might account for context in your own grounded theory research design.

Working grounded theory

Review the 'Working grounded theory' example presented in the Appendix. Note:

- How this researcher struggled with major concepts of analysis in the early stages of her study

- Her use of constant comparative analysis and its contribution to code identification and category development

- The approach used in initial and intermediate phases of coding

- The method used to express properties and dimensions of each category

- Tools employed by the researcher to advance the analysis

9 FROM ANALYSIS TO THEORY

INTRODUCTION

Earlier chapters in this text have aimed to guide you through the use of grounded theory methods in undertaking research that aims to generate theory. Up to this point, you have explored the importance of positioning yourself philosophically and thinking like a grounded theorist. You have learned how to generate, collect, and analyse data as the basis of your developing theory. In this chapter, we will discuss the significance, purpose, and mechanisms of theoretical integration. In this context, we will build on the initial and intermediate coding strategies covered in the last chapter. We will examine the role of advanced coding in the integration of theory that is both grounded in data and demonstrates explanatory capacity, factors that are critical for ensuring credibility in your own research.

DEFINING THEORY

Before we explore the concept and processes of theoretical integration, it is worth pausing to consider what we mean by the word 'theory'. We define theory as an explanatory scheme comprising a set of concepts related to each other through logical patterns of connectivity. A number of other definitions exist that largely reflect the philosophical roots of their proponents; positivists, for example, define theory in terms of explanatory relationships between concepts, while interpretivists view theory in more abstract, indeterminate ways (Charmaz, 2014). Glaser and Strauss (1967) originally defined theory as that which has explanatory or predictive ability. While we question the positivist intent of prediction as reflective of the goal of generalisation, it is clear that the high level of abstraction achieved by grounded theory lends explanatory power. Symbiotically, it is the existence of an overarching explanatory scheme that adds cohesion to the theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Bryant (2009) asserts that original grounded theories need not be conjectural or universally explanatory; rather, they are contextually constrained, awaiting further development (such as to the level of formal theory, as discussed in Chapter 10).

> Theory
>
> An explanatory scheme comprising a set of concepts related to each other through logical patterns of connectivity.

ACTIVITY 9.1

THE CONCEPT OF THEORY

What comes to mind when you hear the term 'theory'? Consider some examples of theories that direct your professional life or that are universally accepted. What purpose do these theories serve? How might theories of this nature differ from your perception of grounded theory?

In evaluating published research, you will find that many studies claiming to be grounded theory do not actually generate theory. As we have discussed previously, this is often the result of studies not rising above the level of description. In other words, such studies do not demonstrate the capacity to *explain* phenomena that are the focus of the research. We believe that this failure is most often a consequence of the researcher struggling with the critical stages of advanced coding and theoretical integration. This later stage of analysis involves processes that are intellectually and emotionally demanding. You will undoubtedly find that integration, or the pulling together of your final theory, is the most difficult part of your research (Strauss, 1987). Take heart in the fact that the associated challenges render the reward of a unique and original theory that contributes to knowledge in your own discipline and beyond.

Certainly, not all studies aim to generate theory, but those that seek a deeper level of analysis have the potential to add further to what we know of the world and improve our understanding of it (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Grounded theory is not just a collection of categories that are assembled into a theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Theoretical integration requires the application of advanced analytical strategies to raise your analysis to the highest conceptual level possible.

FACTORS NECESSARY FOR THEORETICAL INTEGRATION

Theoretical integration is the final stage of analysis during which your theoretical scheme is pulled together into your grounded theory. When does theoretical integration commence? In reality, your construction of theory begins with your first piece of data. Through the application of your theoretical sensitivity (as discussed in Chapter 4), your analytical focus will be directed towards theory development, albeit in an embryonic form, from the earliest stage. Then, as relationships are being formed between categories during intermediate coding, your study 'begins to fulfil its theoretical promise' (LaRossa, 2005, p.849). Eventually, there will come a time when advanced coding techniques, as described below, can be effectively employed to integrate your theoretical scheme into the final grounded theory. This stage represents the final phase of grounded theory production, as indicated in Figure 9.1.

> **Theoretical integration**
>
> The final stage of analysis during which a theoretical scheme is integrated into a grounded theory.
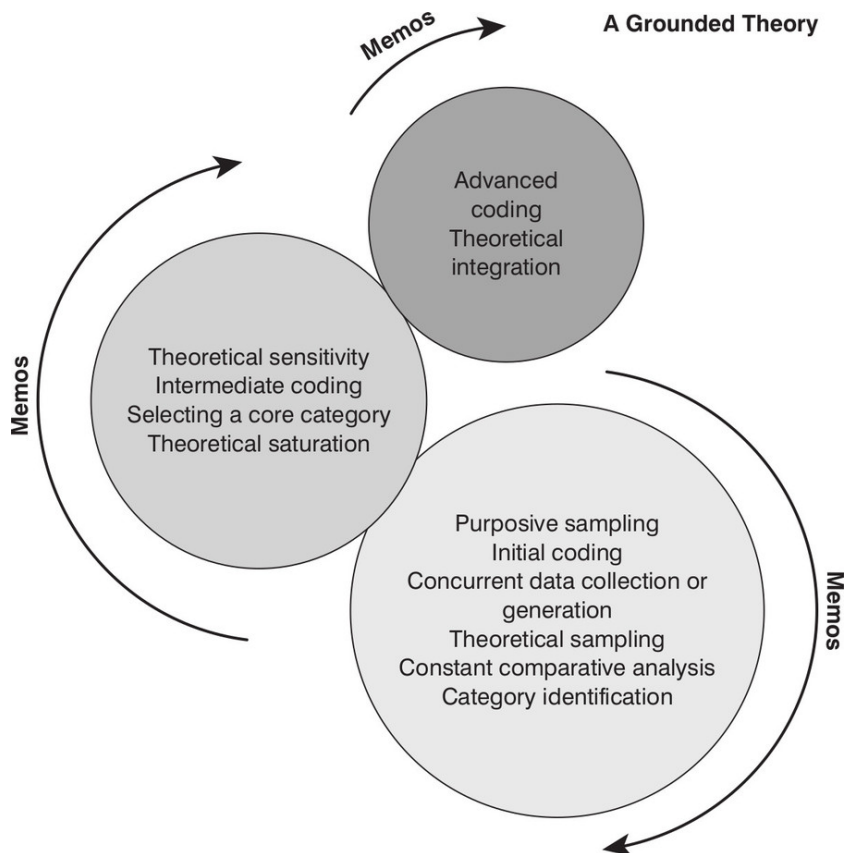
Figure 9.1 Advanced coding and theoretical integration

Glaser and Strauss (1967) speak of theoretical criteria being necessary to guide the final stage of theoretical development, yet do not make clear what constitutes these criteria. We propose that there are three factors necessary for the integration of a grounded theory:

1. An identified core category.
2. Theoretical saturation of major categories.
3. A bank of analytical memos.

In the previous chapter, we discussed the significance of the core category in grounded theory research. Because of its centrality in relation to all concepts, the core category is analytically powerful and therefore has the ability to explain the phenomena under investigation (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). During later stages of analysis, the core category is the hub of the developing theory. Without it, relationships between concepts within the theory are fragile and theoretical elaboration is stunted. You may well enter the stage of advanced analysis having identified a core category during intermediate coding. At times, however, it is necessary to employ techniques of advanced analysis before your core category crystallises.

The second element necessary for integration of theory is the saturation of major categories. As discussed in Chapter 8, theoretical saturation occurs when further data collection fails to add properties or dimensions to an established category. Dey (2007) compares a saturated category with a sponge that has absorbed as much water as it can. In the same way that nothing further is gained by adding more water to the sponge, neither can a category be enhanced once all its dimensions and properties have been explicated. Theoretical saturation is dependent on the correct application of theoretical sampling principles to ensure a diverse range of data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Dey (2007) points out that saturation should not be at the expense of refinement of categories. While it is arguable whether this state can ever be truly achieved, saturation must be viewed in abstract terms, as being represented by a pattern or theme that makes sense to the researcher (Morse, 2007). Saturation can therefore be defined as a 'judgment that there is no need to collect further data' (Wiener, 2007, p.306). As analysis in grounded theory continues until formation of the final theory, theoretical saturation will probably not be truly achieved until your study is complete. Dey (2007) argues for an emphasis of quality over quantity in respect of theoretical saturation. We propose that achieving a balance between category development and refinement is possible with correct application of grounded theory methods throughout the process of advanced coding and theory development. In so doing, you ensure that your final product is linked with, and therefore grounded in, your data.

In Chapter 4, we spoke extensively about the significance of memoing in grounded theory research. Memos are not just produced as a mechanism for recording analytical insights, they are functional tools that will serve as a reference throughout your use of grounded theory methods. Glaser (1978, p.83) aptly describes memoing as 'the bedrock of theory generation'. It is during the later stages of analysis that your investment in memoing provides its greatest return. The analytical insights and discoveries contained in your memos form the basis of the logical scheme that will ultimately become your final grounded theory.

Glaser (2005, p.33) emphasises the importance of 'sorting' memos, considering this a critical element in his advanced (theoretical) coding stage. Corbin and Strauss (2015) also discuss reviewing and sorting memos as a key component of integration, suggesting that your purpose in sorting memos is to aid this process through the identification of relationships and unifying concepts not previously evident. The reason that memos are used for this purpose is that they already contain your abstracted analysis in the form of categories (Charmaz, 2014).

Sorting of memos has traditionally been done by hand, and Glaser (2005, p.39) maintains that this is the only way to remain 'creatively conceptual'. Similarly, Charmaz (2014) suggests that you work with hard copies of your memos and sort them manually as you commence integration of your theory. She advises the researcher to sort memos by category, compare category with category, and ultimately aim to produce a logical scheme that reflects the studied experience.

This traditional approach to sorting memos serves its purpose of integration well, however we suggest that, in reality, you will likely find that you revisit and engage with your memos periodically across the various phases of analysis. We find that drawing on memos in this way is a progressive strategy that you will undertake naturally as you correctly apply grounded theory methods in your research. Producing and storing your memos within a computerised program facilitates this process, particularly as the revisiting and sorting of memos invariably results in the generation of more memos. Possession of such a management strategy is particularly important as the complexity of working with memos increases during the theoretical integration stage (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Ultimately, we concur with Charmaz (2014) who suggests that whatever approach you use, you shouldn't be afraid to experiment.

ADVANCED CODING

The previous chapter examined the use of initial and intermediate coding in a grounded theory study. Correct application of grounded theory methods as you undertake coding through the initial and intermediate stages, will see you eventually progress to the point of advanced coding. Advanced coding refers to the techniques used to facilitate integration of the final grounded theory. It is through these processes that data ultimately become theory. Table 9.1 aligns our coding phases against those espoused in key grounded theory works. This table includes strategies that constitute advanced coding for these theorists.

Table 9.1 Advanced coding

Birks & Mills, 2011, 2015	Initial coding	Intermediate coding	Advanced coding
Glaser & Strauss, 1967	Coding and comparing incidents	Integrating categories and properties	Delimiting the theory
Glaser, 1978	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998	Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
Charmaz, 2006, 2014	Initial coding	Focused coding	Theoretical coding

Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.109) originally discuss 'delimiting the theory', which we consider synonymous with our definition of advanced coding. The coding phases later proposed by Glaser (1978) present theoretical coding as a final analytical stage. Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) originally discuss theoretical integration within their definition of selective coding. Corbin later moved away from referring to selective coding as such, instead describing specific techniques to assist with theoretical integration (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 2015), leaving the phases of coding less discernible. While Charmaz (2006, 2014) suggests that most projects will be adequately completed using only initial and focused coding, she does describe the benefits of theoretical coding when used correctly.

While there are some similarities and evidence of evolution of thinking around the coding phases described in Table 9.1, there is clearly a diversion in approaches to bringing analysis to the point of theory. You are encouraged to seek out the different versions of the works of the authors if you wish to further explore how they define and apply advanced coding techniques.

> Advanced coding
>
> Techniques used to facilitate integration of the final grounded theory.

As has been stressed throughout this text, grounded theory processes are not linear; your progress will be recursive and you will find that analytical phases will continue to overlap (once again represented by

the dotted lines between coding phases in [Table 9.1](#)). Even during the advanced stages of theory development, you will need to return to fundamental theoretical sampling and coding activities at various points to ensure that your theory remains grounded. Charmaz (2014) speaks of the need to be tolerant of ambiguity during coding; as your analysis moves towards theory, we caution you that such ambiguity becomes more pronounced and the need to stay focused and precise in your use of grounded theory methods will be amplified.

In the following sections, we describe the use of storyline and theoretical coding as advanced techniques that can assist in moving from analysis to theory. We have written about these techniques previously (Birks and Mills, 2019; Birks et al., 2009) in an attempt to extend the application and reach of these important aids to the integration of a grounded theory. The following discussion builds on and develops our earlier work.

STORYLINE

Storyline as an aid to analysis in grounded theory reflects the sociological roots of this approach to research. It was not, however, addressed as a specific method in *Discovery* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). An extensive description of the use of storyline as an integrative tool was originally presented in Strauss and Corbin's (1990) text. Storyline as a grounded theory technique drew harsh criticism from Glaser in his subsequent rebuttal. Glaser was critical of the over-reliance by Strauss and Corbin (1990) on storyline, positing it as being inconsistent with grounded theory's emphasis on allowing the data to direct how the story develops (Glaser, 1992). The criticism attracted by these authors may explain in some measure the reduced attention paid to the use of storyline in the second (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) and third (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) versions of their text, with only residual discussion of the concept remaining in their most recent edition (Corbin and Strauss, 2015).

Stories are not a new concept in research, being commonly used in several interpretive methodologies. Narrative analysis, for example, uses stories as a source of data, while ethnography employs storytelling as a mechanism to convey research findings. In grounded theory, stories are used 'in service of our analyses' (Charmaz, 2014, p.317). Stories, whether elicited or extant, can be used as data in grounded theory studies. Scharp (2019), for example, elicited stories from participants in her study of family estrangement. This author also employed storyboarding as an aid to the interview process. Morris and Cravens Pickens (2017) provide an example of stories used as extant data in their study of the impact of disconnecting from technology. These authors accessed publically available online sites to obtain stories that were analysed for the purpose of developing their grounded theory.

While stories and storytelling are useful tools in research, they have quite specific purposes that are different from the use of storyline as an advanced coding technique. In their initial work, Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.116) defined *story* as 'a descriptive narrative about the central phenomenon of the study' and *storyline* as 'the conceptualization of the story … the core category'. The difference between the two terms is important for our discussion as we see the extended term *storyline* as inherently suggesting coherence and continuity. Storyline has a dual function in grounded theory in that it assists in the production of the final theory and provides a means by which the theory can be conveyed to the reader. As a tool for integration, storyline aids in constructing and formulating the final theory. As a mechanism for presenting findings, it enables the researcher to bring to life a theory that may otherwise be dry and unpalatable. For the grounded theorist, therefore, storyline is both a means and an end in itself.

> Storyline
>
> A strategy for facilitating integration, construction, formulation, and presentation of a grounded theory.

Most researchers do not capitalise on the advantages that storyline has for the *process* of theory construction or in presenting the *outcome* in the form of an integrated grounded theory. Our work in developing storyline as a strategy is to enable grounded theorists to realise its potential as a mechanism for constructing and conveying a grounded theory. Through the use of storyline, you are writing your theory; you are explicating the relationships between the concepts that make up your theory. Storyline is the explanation of your theory, which in turn provides an explanation for the phenomenon under study.

Writing a storyline relies on, and is an extension of, the strategies you have employed throughout your analysis. Memos and diagrams, as discussed in previous chapters, assume greater significance as your theory takes shape. Your earliest drafting of a storyline can be done in the security of a memo. Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest that your first attempt at writing your storyline need only be a few sentences that will subsequently be built on until your storyline is formed.

While writing a storyline will be a natural extension of your analysis, we propose a few guiding principles that will ensure that your storyline bridges the gap between analysis and theory. These principles can be remembered through the use of the mnemonic 'TALES', as summarised in Box 9.1.

Box 9.1

Guiding principles of storyline

- **T**heory takes precedence

- **A**llows for variation

- **L**imits gaps

- **E**vidence is grounded

- **S**tyle is appropriate

Theory takes precedence

We have emphasised throughout this text that a defining characteristic of grounded theory research is the generation of a theory as the end product of the process. When writing the final storyline, the theoretical constructs (categories and their relationships) that form the foundational framework are given precedence (Strauss, 1987). The required focus can become problematic when the writer becomes so caught up in producing a readable storyline that all semblance of theory is lost. As has been emphasised throughout this text, a study is not grounded theory if it does not reach a high level of conceptual abstraction that is beyond the level of description. Theoretical integrity must be evident in the presentation of the final product for it to be judged accordingly.

A balancing act is required to ensure that a researcher's theory is translated into a storyline that remains both digestible for the reader and reflective of the analysis. Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) caution that a strong emphasis on analysis can impact negatively on the readability of the final work, with Charmaz consistently arguing that it is possible to write an interesting, imaginative, inspired grounded theory that presents theoretical constructions reflective of the data (Charmaz, 2000, 2006, 2014). Ultimately, as will be discussed in the following chapter, the writer does not necessarily have to sacrifice creativity for the sake of maintaining theoretical precedence.

ACTIVITY 9.2

THEORETICAL PRECEDENCE

Collect a selection of research articles that are described as grounded theory research or draw from those you have collected for activities in previous chapters. Are the grounded theories presented in engaging ways? Can you clearly discern theoretical elements in the way the findings are presented in these articles?

Allows for variation

In writing the storyline, it is not possible, nor indeed necessary, to account for every piece of data. Adequate variation will be evident where data have been generated from broad and diverse sources in accordance with the principles of theoretical sampling. Concepts derived from the data are linked by relational statements that are generally applicable to all those in the specific situation under study (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). As a technique of advanced analysis, the use of storyline raises the conceptual level of the analysis, and the aim of producing theory in the form of a 'conceptually abstract narrative' (Holton, 2007, p.285) can be achieved.

There are times when cases appear that do not seem to fit the overall theoretical scheme. You may, for example, observe a situation that is contrary to what is expected or hear statements from a participant that are inconsistent with what other participants have said, producing what are known as 'negative cases' (Morse, 2007, p.240). Charmaz (2014) asserts that when negative cases come directly from the data, they encourage refinement of the developing theory. Incorporating variation will not work against the storyline; rather, such variants add depth and further dimension to the developing theory as expressed in the storyline, much like an unusual character adds dimension to a fictional story. Furthermore, building variation into the final theory has the potential to increase its reach and explanatory power (Corbin and Strauss, 2015).

Limits gaps

One advantage of the use of storyline is the ability to identify gaps in the developing theory. Stories of any description rely on logical structure, consistency, and flow. Holes, gaps, and inconsistencies in a grounded theory will be highlighted during construction of the storyline. This process will make obvious such limitations, as would pages torn from a novel make that story incomplete.

Careful attention to analytical processes throughout your research will ensure that gaps and limitations in the evolving theory are identified as analysis progresses. You may find, however, that in spite of diligent work, gaps in the theory are made evident through the writing of your storyline. In such cases, it will be necessary for you to return to the data and possibly even the field in order to sample theoretically for data to complete the theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Avoid the temptation to use poetic licence to fill in the gaps that are made apparent by the use of storyline. Charmaz (2014, p.314), for example, argues for creativity in the writing of a grounded theory 'without transforming it into fiction'.

Evidence is grounded

The use of storyline as a grounded theory method has its greatest influence during theoretical integration. Integration both facilitates and is achieved by the development of the storyline. As discussed earlier in this chapter, theory development begins from the earliest stages of a grounded theory study. So, too, you should be conscious of the developing storyline from your first interaction with the data, in order for it to be fully grounded in participants' experiences of the substantive area of enquiry.

Note, however, that the form a storyline takes will vary at different stages of the study. During the early phase of data generation, your storyline will germinate as you compare data with data, and data with developing categories (Glaser, 1978). This process of constantly re-grounding your developing theory in the data is critical. While you need to be sensitive to the developing storyline from the earliest stages of the research, the storyline should not be constructed in isolation from the data. In other words, avoid producing a storyline that is then imposed on the analysis. Any story that exists in the data will become evident through the correct application of analytical processes and procedures (Glaser, 1992). Once again, it is attention to the detailed use of analytical procedures that will reduce the potential for misinterpretation of meaning, or the presumption of unsubstantiated relationships, that may bring the validity of the storyline into question.

In Researcher's Voice 9.1, Jenny van der Harst discusses the use of storyline in producing her grounded theory of the ways in which police officers in New Zealand manage situations involving people with mental distress. In particular, this example demonstrates the value of storyline in addressing conceptual gaps and promoting theoretical integration and grounding.

The researcher's voice 9.1

Jenny van der Harst on the use of storyline

Jenny van der Harst has worked as a district health nurse, correctional and psychiatric specialist nurse, and member of a mental health crisis and assessment team. She has recently retired from 17 years of lecturing in undergraduate health sciences at Auckland University of Technology; however, she continues to be involved in political lobbying for change to how police respond to people in mental distress.

The use of storyline to integrate categories into a grounded theory was more than an academic tool to present my findings. Storyline gave me a narrative framework to abstract and conceptualise the data and convey it in a readable form as a co-construction of the participants' work–life experiences in a specific setting.

After months of coding, memoing, diagramming, abstracting, and conceptualising the data, I began to doubt if my emerging categories and sub-categories could be integrated into a theory. Although at this stage I believed all the categories had emerged from the data and were relevant, I struggled to find connectivity between them.

At a monthly supervision meeting on voicing my concerns, one of my supervisors suggested I articulate the developing theory to him in storyline. While presenting the theory, I found myself hesitating, stopping frequently, and losing track. It became evident before attempting to finish the narrative that something was not working. When I got to one specific category, the flow of the story ceased. I could not connect this category to the other categories without trying to justify why I had 'gone down this rabbit hole' (a colloquialism to indicate I had become stuck). The reason for this, as my supervisor explained, was that by storylining my tentative theory, it had highlighted where the category had been forced into the theory and had not emerged naturally from the data. I returned to the existing raw data, kept memoing, and constantly employing reflexivity. In time, a category did emerge from the data that enabled the integration of all the categories into a substantive integrated grounded theory.

However, the use of storyline had a dual function. Whilst using storyline to integrate and articulate my theory, it also provided a means of determining whether I had reached theoretical saturation of the data. If this were the case, no more data would need to be collected. To determine if saturation had been achieved, I presented the developing theory in storyline to two groups who were part of the target audience. These two groups consisted of individuals who had not been interviewed for the research.

The feedback from the storyline presentation to these two groups affirmed to me that I had achieved theoretical saturation. Feedback indicated that the theory resonated with the two groups and was a correct representation of their work–life experiences. Furthermore, no additional properties emerged or further insights about the generated categories.

Through communicating my grounded theory in storyline, I was able to stay true to the data, preserve the participants' quotes, and present an understandable theoretical explanation of the processes used in the phenomena being researched.

Style is appropriate

What should your completed storyline look like? Presentation of a grounded theory as a series of concepts linked by statements of logic may be technically correct; however, entrenching these within a narrative enhances their cohesion and digestibility (Dey, 2007). Your storyline should ideally be presented in a way that ensures its accessibility to the broadest possible audience (Ligita et al., 2019). While Dey (2007) refers to storyline as an abstract or overview of a study that does little more than allude to the bigger picture, we suggest that storyline can in fact be used to produce a comprehensive rendering of your grounded theory. In the following chapter, we will explore in greater detail options for maximising the impact of your research through presentation of your final grounded theory. As will be discussed in that context, the style and format of your presentation will depend on a number of factors. Whether you choose, or are directed by convention, to present your theory as a fully developed storyline, or simply as a mechanism for summarising your findings, the principles outlined in this chapter remain relevant.

ACTIVITY 9.3

USE OF THE STORYLINE TECHNIQUE

Go back to the coding exercise undertaken in the previous chapter. Take the concepts developed through your intermediate coding stage and write a storyline about what you see. Don't be too worried about writing conventions or technical accuracy. Write a storyline from your analysis so far, while attempting to adhere to the guiding principles summarised in Box 9.1.

THEORETICAL CODING

Theoretical coding is the aspect of a grounded theory study that researchers are most likely to struggle with (Glaser, 2005). Theoretical coding is employed in the later stages of grounded theory analysis for the purpose of moving 'your analytic story in a theoretical direction' (Charmaz, 2014, p.150). Theoretical codes are advanced abstractions that provide a framework for enhancing the explanatory power of your storyline, and therefore its potential as theory. Think of theoretical coding as the final phase of integration during which you 'make sense' of your theory and clearly explain what it is that is going on in *your* data.

> Theoretical codes
>
> Advanced abstractions that can be used to enhance the explanatory power of a grounded theory.

> Theoretical coding
>
> The use of theoretical codes as a framework to add explanatory power during the final phase of the development of a grounded theory.

Confusion around theoretical coding is fed by the lack of consistency with which it is understood and discussed in the literature. You will note from Table 9.1 that theoretical coding is not a feature of all approaches to grounded theory. Charmaz (2014) appears ambivalent about theoretical codes, while acknowledging that their use may promote clarity and precision in the final product. Glaser (2005, p.14) asserts that theoretical coding is not an essential phase of theoretical development but does concede that the end product 'will appear more plausible, more relevant and more enhanced when integrated and modelled by an emergent [theoretical code]'. We support this position and suggest that without theoretical coding, a grounded theory will struggle to demonstrate the explanatory power that distinguishes this unique approach to research.

Theoretical codes have traditionally been associated with Glaser (1978) who originally described 18 sociological constructs known as *coding families*. He would later identify many more, while acknowledging that these lists were far from exhaustive (Glaser, 2005). As discussed in the previous chapter, Corbin and Strauss (2008, 2015) and, earlier, Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998), although not referring to theoretical coding or coding families specifically, use a coding paradigm with similar intent during the equivalent of their intermediate coding phase. Kelle (2007a) suggests that this paradigm reflects many of the key elements of the original coding families. While he proposes that some researchers may find this framework restrictive, he does suggest it may prove an easier option, particularly for novice researchers.

Sources of theoretical codes

The original theoretical coding families are derived from sociological theory, which can be alien concepts to those from other fields of inquiry. Glaser (2005) does suggest, however, that theoretical codes from other disciplines can be used. He further acknowledges that more than one theoretical code may prove relevant to a developing theory, in which case a combined approach may be appropriate. We encourage the use of theoretical frameworks derived from your own discipline where these prove relevant in explaining your grounded theory and discussing the contribution it makes to knowledge in your professional area. These are the theoretical constructs with which you are most familiar; however, we also accept Glaser's (2005) advice that the researcher should strive to learn as many theoretical codes from as many sources as possible. Seek opportunities to expand your repertoire of knowledge and use what is available to you if it serves the theoretical coding intent of integration and explanation. In Researcher's Voice 9.2, Virginia Dickson-Swift illustrates this point with the use of a theoretical coding framework drawn from beyond her own disciplinary field.

The researcher's voice 9.2

Virginia Dickson-Swift on theoretical coding

Virginia Dickson-Swift is a Senior Research Fellow at the La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University, Australia. She is an experienced grounded theorist who is best known for her work on researching sensitive topics. Virginia is currently working on a range of projects focusing on vulnerable populations.

Many years ago, I embarked on a GT study to explore the impact on undertaking sensitive research on the researchers. I knew that I would need to engage with the process of theoretical coding but in the beginning, I was what Jan Morse would describe as 'theoretically timid' (Morse, 1997, p.176). Having done previous qualitative studies, I was more than comfortable with descriptive analysis but had not pushed beyond description into interpretation and theory development. I was always struck by the way that other GT authors described the process of theory development, giving it almost magical qualities (e.g. the theory will emerge from the data). I spent many months immersed in my data, coding and recoding, reading and re-reading, waiting for the magical appearance of the theory.

Sadly, the theory didn't just jump out at me, but I knew I needed to move outside of the safety zone of descriptive analysis and interrogate the data I had in front of me. I needed to immerse myself in the data, code, recode, read, code, read, and be open to new possibilities, new interpretations, new ideas. Many of the participants' stories focused on the difficulties they faced in the process of undertaking qualitative health research. Some of the issues raised included the emotional nature of the research and the difficulties encountered in setting and maintaining boundaries (and the risks that this type of research posed). It appeared that many researchers found undertaking qualitative research on sensitive topics quite an emotional experience. They reported often feeling sad, angry, and frightened throughout the research process. They spoke of emotional displays (like crying) and how difficult it was to manage their emotions while involved in research interviews. Some of them spoke about suppressing emotions while in interview situations and explained how that often led to feeling quite emotionally exhausted afterwards. This is what I called my first 'aha' moment – qualitative research work was emotional, and researchers were being impacted by the emotional nature of the sensitive research.

This revelation led me directly to the sociological emotions literature. I began with the works of Goffman (1959), exploring the presentation of self, but was then drawn to the work of Arlie Hochschild (1979) – a place I had never imagined I would be. After reading her classic text *The Managed Heart* (Hochschild, 1983), which focused on the experiences of flight attendants and how they managed their emotions on a day-to-day basis, I began to realise that this was relevant to what I was seeing in my data. The theory of emotion work and emotional labour provided me with a framework for understanding researchers' experiences throughout the research process. The researchers in my study were really doing emotion work, as described by Hochschild. As the data collection continued, researchers shared stories of how their involvement in research affected them emotionally, especially as they were involved in dealing with other people's emotions while managing their own. While the concept of emotion work had been explored in many occupations, including supermarket clerk, clerical worker, nurse and care assistant, teacher, beauty therapist, and for other professional groups, there was no empirical work that had applied the concept to researchers.

Looking back now, I can see that the process of theoretical coding led me to the development of a grounded theory that would continue to be useful for researchers in the field. Researchers were doing 'emotion work' and this was often hard work, undervalued, and under-researched and, if not managed well, had the potential to be harmful. Since completing my PhD in 2005, I have published widely, drawing on the emotion work and emotional labour theory (see, for

example, Dickson-Swift et al., 2007; Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, and Liamputtong, 2008; Dickson-Swift, James, and Liamputtong, 2008; Dickson-Swift et al., 2009), and many researchers continue to adopt these concepts in their work. My journey illustrates the importance of embracing theory in grounded theory research, and how using theory makes our research more applicable to a broader audience. The PhD journey was a long and arduous one for me, as it is for any student. It took over three years and countless hours of reading, writing, and re-reading for me to finally claim that, as a result, I am now, as Morse (2002, p.295) so succinctly puts it, 'theory smart'.

Extant or emergent?

Wherever they are derived from, theoretical codes must demonstrate 'earned relevance' in that they must not be preconceived or forced into the analysis (Glaser, 2005, p.10). Most theoretical codes are drawn from extant theories, which are those that exist outside of the current study. There is potential for an inductively constructed grounded theory to be forced to conform to such preconceived frameworks, particularly where theoretical coding is poorly understood. Glaser (2005, p.1) refers to theoretical codes as 'emergent', in spite of his identified coding families being existing concepts. Charmaz (2014) considers the issue of whether they emerge or are applied to be an ambiguity that needs to be resolved by the researcher.

> Extant theory
>
> A theory existing outside of the current study.

Grounded theory methodology was originally developed to promote theoretical discovery by moving away from a reliance on existing theories, with Glaser and Strauss (1967) advising the researcher to avoid applying an external theory until after their own theory has been developed. We suggest that it is possible to adhere to this advice and effectively utilise existing theoretical concepts for the purpose of theoretical coding. To this end, theoretical codes must be suggested by the advancing analysis and then positioned *outside* of the storyline. Within the storyline itself, the extent of description and explanation of the researcher's interpretations are limited to the products of analysis. Thus, there is no confusion as to which concepts have arisen from the data and which have been imported. The intent of grounded theory research is to produce a theory with explanatory power. Our belief is that theoretical codes are more effective in achieving this outcome when they suffuse the final theory as rendered through storyline.

Researcher's Voice 9.3 describes a study examining perinatal suicide in which 'shame' is identified as the core category. In this study led by Laura Biggs, Brown's theory of women and shame was used as a theoretical coding framework to enhance the explanatory power of the new theory. Brown's work in its original form did not fully address the core concepts developed by Biggs and her colleagues; it was therefore modified by these researchers, thus further developing the earlier work. Note how this example provides both a written and a visual illustration of how theoretical coding can be applied to a completed storyline.

> The researcher's voice 9.3

Laura Biggs on use of an extant theory

Laura Biggs is a research fellow in the Intergenerational Health Group, Murdoch Children's Research Institute in Melbourne, Australia. She is a midwife, researcher, and educator with a passion for the use of innovative qualitative methodologies and methods to generate deeper understandings of complex social and health phenomena, including maternal suicidality and intergenerational trauma. (Further information about the study that is referred to in this example can be found on the study's website at www.strongerfutures.org.au/making-sense-of-the-unseen).

Suicide is a leading cause of death during pregnancy and the following year – a time known as the perinatal period. Several perinatal studies have examined the incidence of suicidal thoughts and behaviours and the associated social and obstetric risk factors; however, there is a striking lack of research offering insights into women's experiences of suicidality at this time in their lives.

Making Sense of the Unseen, a collaboration between Murdoch Children's Research Institute, James Cook University, and PANDA Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia, sought to address this knowledge gap by generating a theory to explain how suicidality evolves during pregnancy and the following year. Our overall goal was to generate knowledge to support communities, health professionals, and health services and systems to improve maternal suicide prevention initiatives. More broadly, we also aspired to bring attention to maternal suicide prevention as a core responsibility of quality maternity care. We were very lucky to receive substantial interest in the study; 139 women shared their experiences with us in an anonymous testimonial (survey) or in-depth interview.

During initial coding, I quickly saw striking consistencies in the ways the women talked about their experience of suicidality during pregnancy and the following year:

> They'd be better off without me. I felt so alone and desperate. I just needed to escape. I felt so trapped …

Ours was the first study of its kind to explain suicidality at this time in women's lives, and I really hadn't expected to see such consistency so early during analysis. But how did women arrive at this conclusion – that their families would somehow be better off without them? And what was it about this experience that could lead to such desperate feelings of being alone and stuck in this aloneness?

Much of my intermediate coding was focused on answering these questions, on identifying the underlying internal world processes that led women to conclude that their families would be better off without them. I could see that it related to feelings of failure, defectiveness, unworthiness, and isolation, but these feelings in and of themselves did not explain how suicidality evolved. In particular, I wanted to identify where and how these feelings originated and evolved over time.

I remember texting my co-investigator during this stage of the analysis: '*Mel, I'm pretty sure shame is our core category'*. The response was something along the lines of *'Glaser would encourage patience'*. So, of course, I went and wrote more memos.

I felt a really strong sense of responsibility to properly hear the stories that the women had shared with us. I wanted to make sure that I was hearing where and how shame was part of the women's stories without losing nuance and labelling everything as shame and declaring the

whole thing over. I am quite a visual thinker and learner, so I used sketches and diagrams a lot during the analysis process. With an understanding of shame as our core category, I wrote a storyline titled *Pathway through Shame* (as illustrated in Figure 9.2).

I knew that Brown (2006) had undertaken a grounded theory study in the mid-2000s with women on the role of shame in their lives and the generation of shame resilience, so I went back to read it. Not long into the paper, I yelled something like: *'This is exactly what we've been hearing!!'* The fit was beyond belief. The women in Brown's study were discussing the exact same feelings of defectiveness and worthlessness that the women in our study were sharing. We had found our theoretical code.
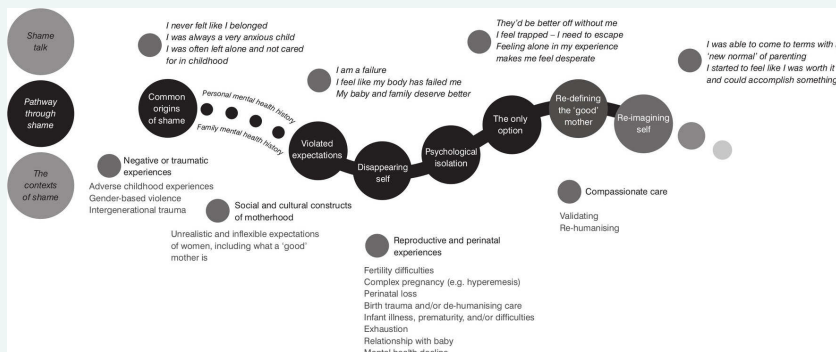
Figure 9.2 Pathways, contexts, and voices of shame
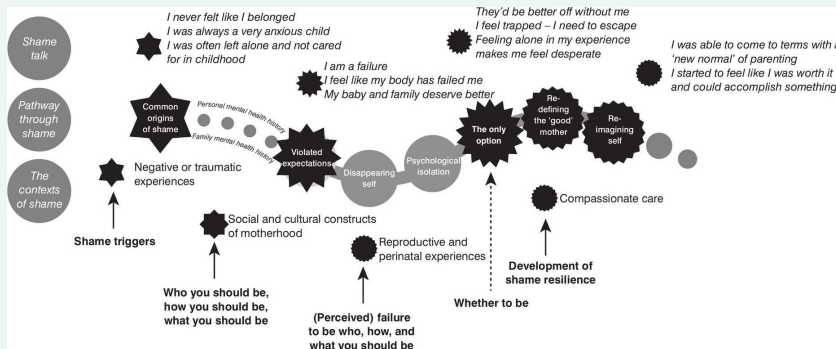
Figure 9.3 Applying a theoretical code

Although Brown's shame resilience theory identified motherhood as a particularly shame-prone time in women's lives, it did not explain the ways shame worked within experiences of suicidality. This isn't a criticism of the theory – Brown simply hadn't aimed to understand shame within this specific context as we had done. The shame resilience theory skilfully explains the role of shame in women's lives as questions of 'what you should be', 'who you should be', and 'how you should be' (Brown, 2006). Building on this understanding of shame, we positioned our theory as addressing an additional question: whether to be (Figures 9.2 and 9.3). Four elements of Brown's theory are overlaid with our theory in Figure 9.2: what Brown identified as common shame 'triggers'; questions of who, what, and how you should be; perceived failures to achieve these expectations; and the development of what Brown has termed shame resilience.

If you review the examples presented in Researcher's Voice 9.2 and 9.3, you will see that employing the work of others as theoretical codes not only explains and consolidates your own grounded theory, it also augments, supports, and validates those existing theories.

Doing theoretical coding

The preceding discussion has introduced you to what theoretical coding is, where theoretical codes come from, and how they can be used. You are still probably concerned about your ability to do theoretical coding as part of your advanced theory development. In this section, we will address some of the common questions raised about theoretical coding and provide some guidance on using theoretical codes.

When does theoretical coding happen?

As we have stated in the previous chapter, conceptual relationships in your developing theory will become evident as you move from initial to intermediate coding. As you progress to the advanced coding phase, it is likely that an appropriate theoretical coding framework will become evident as you construct, or indeed as a result of constructing, your storyline. In the production of a storyline, you are implicitly applying your theoretical sensitivity at its most advanced level to produce an abstract explanation of the findings of your research. When grounded theory methods are applied correctly, an integrating scheme can be uncovered (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), even when theoretical codes are not initially explicit (Glaser, 2005).

What if I can't see theoretical codes in my storyline?

Theoretical codes may not become evident to you, even as you finalise your storyline; if so, you can take your theoretical sensitivity to the literature to seek out an appropriate theoretical coding framework (as was described in Researcher's Voice 9.1). If these efforts do not result in the identification of an appropriate theoretical coding framework, don't be concerned. You have the opportunity to discuss your theory in the form of a storyline in the context of broader literature, which, in a basic sense, is itself a form of theoretical coding.

What if I find a theoretical code but it doesn't completely align with my storyline?

Theoretical coding is an intuitive process informed by your theoretical sensitivity as you develop your storyline. If your intuition draws you to a theoretical code that doesn't fully serve to integrate or add explanatory power to your storyline, modify it in a way that serves both your own purposes and benefits the existing theory (as was described in Researcher's Voice 9.2). However you proceed, it is important that you don't attempt to modify your storyline to fit a theoretical coding framework. Your theory has been developed through an inductive process; don't erode this good work by trying to get it to align with a framework that doesn't serve to enhance the integrative process.

What if I identify more than one theoretical code?

You may find that more than one theoretical code is useful in integrating your theory. Where this is the case, the standard rules of theoretical coding apply: the identified extant frameworks must enhance your own work, or be amendable to modification for this purpose. You can also selectively use elements from extant theories as long as they don't impact the integrity of the original work.

But how do I actually do it?

Every grounded theory is unique and it is not possible for us to provide comprehensive instructions for undertaking theoretical coding. Theoretical coding has become somewhat equivalent to the 'Emperor's

new clothes' fable. We accept that theoretical codes exist and understand their function, but when it comes to actually doing theoretical coding, we can feel inadequate if we struggle with the process. The skills you have acquired in developing your grounded theory to the point of advanced coding are all you need to succeed with theoretical coding. You just need continued faith in the theoretical sensitivity that has brought you this far.

Figure 9.1 provides a simplified flow chart of the theoretical coding process that may assist in giving you confidence as you work through this final phase of your research.
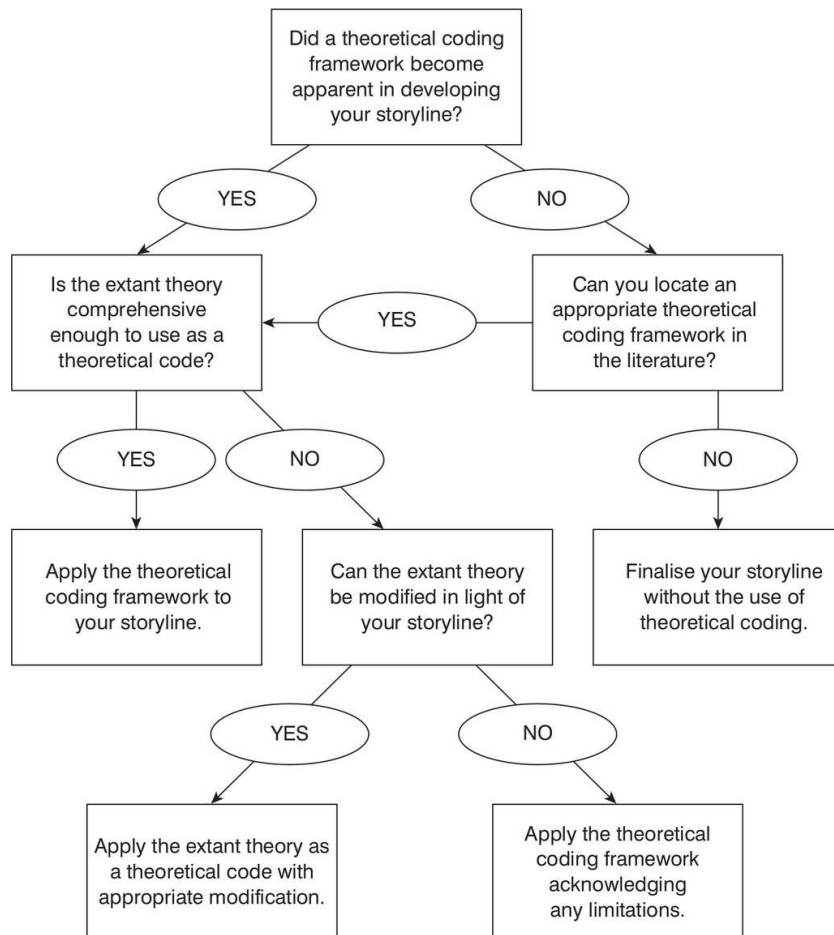
Figure 9.4 Theoretical coding process

ACTIVITY 9.4

THEORETICAL CODING

Refer to the storyline you wrote in <u>Activity 7.3</u>. From your existing knowledge base, consider what theoretical frameworks could be used to enhance the explanatory power of your storyline. For example, news articles about recovery from a natural disaster may suggest theoretical codes that explain grief, loss, and/or adaptation. Stories that discuss the impact of a visiting rock band may invoke theories of mass hysteria and mob mentality. Think broadly and beyond your own discipline to identify potential theoretical codes to explain your analysis.

CONCLUSION

Producing a grounded theory is a result of the interaction between you as the researcher and your data. Through concurrent generation or collection of data and its analysis, as described in the [previous chapter](), the foundations of your theory are constructed. The quality of the final product of your research is reliant on your ability to move your conceptual renderings from these processes to the level of an integrated grounded theory. Techniques of writing a storyline and theoretical coding discussed in this chapter will serve as the bridge between analysis and theory. In the following chapter, we will discuss the various mechanisms for maximising the impact of your final grounded theory.

Critical thinking questions

1. Theoretical integration, as discussed in this chapter, is often the most difficult phase of grounded theory research. Why do you think this is? To what extent do you believe ingrained models of knowledge development influence the ability of the researcher to grasp principles of advanced coding?
2. Think of how you might describe storyline in grounded theory as compared with the use of stories and storytelling in other research methodologies, if asked to explain the distinction to a colleague.
3. How confident do you feel in the use of theoretical coding? Given Glaser's (2005) assertion that theoretical codes are not always necessary, are you likely to seek to avoid or embrace this phase of grounded theory research?

Working grounded theory

Review the 'Working grounded theory' example presented in the Appendix. Note:

- How this researcher approached the process of theoretical integration

- The mechanisms of advanced analysis employed in this study

- The reliance of this researcher on storyline to achieve integration and facilitate presentation of her final theory

- The theoretical codes used to enhance the explanatory power of this grounded theory

10 MAXIMISING GROUNDED THEORY IMPACT

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help you to:

- Discuss research impact and critical grounded theory

- Describe principles of successfully communicating a grounded theory

- Use illustrative modelling as a technique to aid in the presentation of grounded theory findings

- Apply grounded theory findings

- Differentiate between substantive and formal grounded theory

INTRODUCTION

The aim of any research is to make a difference to the lives of others, and to undertake this work in a respectful and ethical manner. Beneficence is demonstrated by researchers:

assessing and taking account of the risks of harm and the potential benefits of research to participants and to the wider community; in being sensitive to the welfare and interests of people involved in their research; and in reflecting on the social and cultural implications of their work. (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2018)

A very important part of any study therefore is the dissemination of findings in a way that they can be easily understood and applied in practice. In this chapter, we discuss the current research landscape and what this means for grounded theorists when designing a study. Critical theory and research impact are explored in relation to framing a grounded theory study. The principles of successfully communicating a grounded theory using a variety of channels are outlined. The importance of grounded theory models in providing a visual aid to communicating your findings is also discussed. How to apply grounded theory findings in practice, and the difference between substantive and formal grounded theory, are then explored with a view to extending the reach of your findings.

RESEARCH IMPACT AND CRITICAL GROUNDED THEORY

In the current era, a new normal confronts us – a new normal brought about by the confluence of the fourth industrial revolution, geopolitics influenced by the authoritarian right, climate change, and a devastating global pandemic. In concert with many, Fielding (2020, p.142) argues that researchers find themselves at 'a troubled juncture' in the current global political climate, which has experienced a shift to the 'hard Right'. For grounded theorists, understanding the landscape in which we now stand is important as we begin to formulate future research questions, while, at the same time, considering how to respond to the question of research impact in this new world.

The impending fourth industrial revolution has arrived with widespread changes to 'technological economic and social systems in industry. Especially, the circumstances of work, the changes of life conditions and [associated] economic wealth' (Dombrowski and Wagner, 2014, p.100). Dombrowski and Wagner's (2014) forecast of changes to employees' job design, as a result of integrating 'industry 4.0 concepts in production systems' (p.102), has come to pass as a result of innovative technologies pervading so many aspects of our lives. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated our reliance on technology as we incorporated it into our lives, both inside and outside of work.

More broadly, Giroux (2021, p.23) argues that:

> We live at a time of multiple plagues that fuel the current coronavirus epidemic that is engulfing the globe inflicting economic misery, suffering and death as they move through societies with the speed of a deadly tornado. These include the plague of ecological destruction, the degradation of civic culture, the possibility of a nuclear war and the normalisation of a brutal culture of cruelty.

As overwhelming as it is to wonder what we as individuals have to offer in such troubled times, we have to remain hopeful that grounded theorists both individually and collectively can contribute to the 'discourse of resistance' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017) against neo-liberalism and the devaluing of societal solidarity. For example, social scientists recognise that there is much to be done to investigate climate politics, as a support to climate science (Pearce et al., 2019). These authors reviewed the literature regarding social media and climate change and concluded that more studies are needed that 'go beyond big data research in order to identify climate imaginaries circulating on social media' (Pearce et al., 2019, p.10) to inform social change. They argue that understanding 'social media users' imagination of climate, utilising qualitative analysis of post content and meaning-making through interactions is required to achieve this aim. Understanding more clearly how human and non-human actors interact can help inform positive changes for the future of humanity and our planet.

The utility of research findings is vital to the translation of knowledge to application in society. 'What works' should be considered from the perspective of end users, government, and policymakers. The rhetoric of the 'knowledge economy' is pervasive in public policy and research funding, with an emphasis on the return on investment. Research impact is now a commonly used measure of this return on investment by governments across the world, but particularly so in Europe, the UK, and Australia. Gunn and Mintrom (2016, p.242) describe research impact as 'university-based research that has a non-academic impact, meaning it delivers some change or benefit outside the research community'. Research impact is an identifiable policy or practice change that is clearly linked to research outcomes. These authors argue that government prioritisation of impact is driven by two factors. The first is general uncertainty about the link between funding research and 'positive social and economic benefits' (2016, p.246). The second is the opportunity cost of funding research in the context of scarce resources.

Research impact

An identifiable change in policy and/or practice clearly linked to previous research outcomes and/or recommendations.

Prosaically, in many countries the main source of research funding is a democratically elected government, which means national priorities shape the assessment panels and processes that they use to determine success. This tension is very challenging for researchers working in spaces driven more by curiosity than social good. Political interference in national research funding schemes is alive and well in countries like Australia, with several examples over recent years of Australian Research Council grants not being awarded by the minister, even though they have been selected by a rigorous peer review process (Lamond, 2022). While these actions have generated well-founded criticism of political intervention in the research process, there are two main factors at play from the perspective of government: the need to increase national competitiveness through research and innovation, and universities delivering on their mission to contribute to the public good (Gunn and Mintrom, 2021).

While each country will have its own set of standards for what constitutes research impact, Box 10.1 includes some overarching statements drawn from an Australian report on assessing research impact (ATNU/Group of 8, 2012) that relate to qualitative research. This same report argues that the central message of research impact is demonstrating 'what was done, why it was done, what difference it made and how the research made it happen' (p.19).

Box 10.1

Evidence of qualitative research impact

- Evidence of qualitative research utilisation through the implementation of findings that have changed knowledge, behaviour and attitude with significant, demonstrated benefit

- Evidence of qualitative research utilisation through the implementation of findings that have changed practice with significant, demonstrated benefit

- Evidence of qualitative research utilisation through the implementation of findings that have resulted in new or improved services with significant, demonstrated benefit

- Evidence of qualitative research utilisation through the implementation of findings that have resulted in new or amended policy with significant, demonstrated benefit

- Evidence of the reach of qualitative findings, global, national, regional, and local, in the implementation of change that has resulted in significant, demonstrated benefit

Machen (2020, p.329) mounts an argument for a different set of impact measures for critical research, or research 'that foregrounds the contingency of knowledge, social structures and relations [and is] often impassioned by desire for social change'. Recall from Chapter 2 that criticalism is a paradigm that views knowledge as being constructed by those who hold power. Critical research therefore seeks to expose and address such power imbalances and engender societal change. Given the intermesh between government, policy, universities, and industry in the impact agenda, research using a critical lens results in the researcher having a harder path toward making a discernible impact based on traditional measures. Machen's reformulation of critical research impact identifies five new modes for assessing impact: 'challenging policy, empowering resistances, platforming voices, nurturing new critical publics, and envisioning alternatives' (2020, p.332).

Critical research

Research that seeks to expose and address a societal power imbalance to engender change.

ACTIVITY 10.1

CRITICAL GROUNDED THEORY: AIMING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Reflect on your disciplinary context. Brainstorm a list of potential grounded theory topics that would require the researcher to take a critical approach to the design.

Hadley (2019, p.565) identifies critical grounded theory as highlighting 'social process and phenomena pertaining to the problems of power inequality and discrimination in all its varied manifestations'. For a researcher, adopting a critical lens will influence the substantive area of enquiry chosen and the use of grounded theory methods. In critical grounded theory, transformational grounded theory (Redman-MacLaren and Mills, 2015) and phonetic grounded theory (Bainbridge et al., 2012), the formulation of questions, the way the researcher chooses to work with participants, the type of data they generate or collect, and eventually the theoretical codes that might be applied, reflect a critical stance. Bainbridge et al. (2012) provide three case studies of how a researcher's methodological position shapes the use of grounded theory methods in ways that promote congruence between ways of 'being, knowing and doing'.

In Australia, unlike other countries, measures of engagement have been added to impact, providing another dimension (Gunn and Mintrom, 2021) that speaks to using a critical lens in a grounded theory design. Engagement refers to partnerships between researchers and industry that result in tangible evidence of the co-design and implementation of research. Ideally, this will be meaningful (Box 10.2).

Engagement

Partnerships between researchers and industry that result in tangible evidence of co-design and implementation of research, with the aim of creating an impact.

Box 10.2

Meaningful engagement

Bainbridge et al. (2019, p.618) provide an example of meaningful engagement with First Nations people when they embed the methods of constructivist grounded theory in a system science framework to account 'for all aspects of a situation with specific focus on interactions between different parts in the situation and their relationship to the functioning whole'. These authors argue for a multiplicity of epistemologies that combine to reformulate grounded theory methods as a tool for decolonisation because of: the shift from individual problems to systems solutions, elevating the presentation of findings from qualitative descriptive analysis to abstract theory, limiting the 'burden of research for Indigenous populations' as an outcome of concurrent data generation, and analysis that serves to focus the process on only what is necessary for the developing theory. Accompanying this is the maxim that 'all is data' (Glaser, 1978), opening the field up in terms of the forms of data and providing an opportunity to engage with participants in ways that are meaningful for them in terms of expressing their Indigenous voice. Finally, they argue that because grounded theory aims to develop theories with explanatory power 'which demonstrate fit and relevance to the research stakeholders' realities and aspirations…[it possesses] hallmarks of deconstructing power relationships, placing importance on context and valuing Indigenous knowledge by centring the voices of participant populations in the research' (Bainbridge et al., 2019, p.622).

COMMUNICATING GROUNDED THEORY

Grounded theorists, like all researchers, have an ethical obligation to maximise the impact of their findings and subsequent recommendations through the translation of theory to practice or knowledge to application. Discovery is just this first step of the research process, for, unless findings are integrated into disciplinary knowledge, they will not be applied in the form of recommendations or taught to future generations as theoretical advancement in the field. Charmaz (2014, 2018) believes that grounded theory methods have the potential to change the world for the better; however, this change can only occur if findings are presented in such a way that they can make an impact.

Attracting attention is a very important aspect of disseminating a grounded theory, with the aim of it being either directly applied to practice or taught for future application. Stern provides clear advice on the importance of developing a 'read-me title' (2007, p.121) that captures the reader's notice. As a reader will often scan very long lists of results from an electronic search of a database, a read-me title is more easily spotted. Consider some of your *in vivo* codes during the process of naming a potential journal article to assist in coming up with something appealing. In addition to the substantive area of enquiry, include the words 'grounded theory' in either the title or the keywords of your writing so that the reader is aware that this is the research design used.

When presenting a grounded theory with the aim of maximising impact, there are five general factors that you need to consider:

1. Identify your audience.
2. Decide what level of analytical detail is required.
3. Present your grounded theory as a whole.
4. Make clear recommendations.
5. Choose an appropriate style of writing.

Identify your audience

A piece of advice often provided to new writers is to determine who their audience is before metaphorically putting pen to paper. Different audiences require different modes of presentation with reference to: their prior understanding of the substantive area of enquiry; their level of understanding of the different aspects of a grounded theory research design; the language that they prefer to use when communicating; and their motivation for reading and understanding the findings and subsequent recommendations. Of these points, the most important one is that which relates to a reader's motivation for engaging with a grounded theory. If you were to compare a policy maker's motivation with that of a professor, it is likely that the former is interested in recommendations for implementation, while the latter is concerned with the methodological congruence and rigour of the study. Both motivating factors are as important as the other; however, for the researcher to meet each reader's needs, the grounded theory must be presented in very different ways for it to be both palatable and sensitive to the target audience (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). As well as working out what each audience considers to be important, the researcher needs to decide on what they would like in return, as this will influence the presentation content and the emphasis placed on various aspects. If the aim of the presentation of findings is to get someone to implement your recommendations, how do you 'sell' your grounded theory in a package that will provoke a 'yes, we can do that' response from the audience? If the aim is to achieve a pass for your thesis/dissertation, how do you signpost your findings so that your grounded theory is transparently rigorous and able to be judged worthy of the accolades that you seek?

Corbin and Strauss provide some clear and pragmatic advice on the task of presenting grounded theory findings to specific audiences. Focus areas for three types of audience, namely colleagues, practitioners, and lay readers (2015, p.315), are identified. Table 10.1 reformulates these ideas to include the type of presentation required for each level of analytical detail, separates colleagues into either peer reviewers or examiners, and expands lay readers to highlight the place of policy makers. The number of ticks indicates the recommended level of focus for each of these areas in a particular piece of writing; the greater the number of ticks, the stronger the emphasis that is required.

Table 10.1 Matching audience to presentation

	Type of presentation for dissemination of findings	Analytical detail	Implications for methodological/methods development	Situating findings in relation to extant theory and the literature	Implications for local action	Im fo re
Lay readers, including policy makers	Oral presentation, newsletter, report	✓		✓	✓✓✓	✓
Social media	Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, podcasts	✓	✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓

Practitioners	Oral presentation, newsletter, report, journal article	✓			✓	✓✓✓	✓⋯
Peer reviewers	Journal article	✓	✓✓✓		✓✓✓	✓	✓⋯
Examiners	Thesis/dissertation	✓✓✓	✓✓✓		✓✓✓	✓✓	✓⋯

Since the first edition of this book was published, social media has grown to become a much more important communication channel for grounded theorists. Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, as well as podcasting, are fertile spaces for scholars to learn from each other about grounded theory, to recruit participants, and to communicate findings. A particular skill set is required to communicate well using these mediums: perfecting a 'lift pitch' that describes the aim and expected outcomes of your grounded theory, creating a professional and informative grounded theory model, polishing a title that communicates your core category parsimoniously and elegantly. All these are the challenges grounded theorists set themselves as they launch into the world of social media. In Researcher's Voice 10.1, Oliver Thomson shares the story of developing his podcast *Words Matter* and how this social media vehicle has been used to communicate impactful research including his own grounded theory.

The researcher's voice 10.1

Oliver Thomson on increasing research reach and impact through podcasting and social media

Oliver Thomson is an osteopath, researcher, and author of more than 40 research papers. He is based in London, where he holds the position of Associate Professor at the University College of Osteopathy. His research expertise is in qualitative methodologies and grounded theory.

In 2012, I completed my constructivist grounded theory PhD, looking to understand the clinical decision-making processes of osteopaths. During that time, conferences, books, and academic journals were the primary means by which research findings were shared and disseminated. This was also the case with the dissemination of methodological advances. As a doctoral student, I remember a few grainy videos on grounded theory but the written word was really the mainstay of a PhD student's diet in regards to mastering their chosen research methodology.

Fast forward 10 years, and now other technologies and media are available to provide further reach, accessibility, and engagement with regards to the sharing of research findings and the advances in the thinking and doing of research. Podcasting is one example of a change in how we are consuming knowledge, and offers an easy and efficient way to engage deeply in an area. I started the Words Matter Podcast (www.wordsmatter-education.com) in 2020 as a way to share knowledge, research, and expertise around clinical communication and qualitative research as well as exploring my own thinking in these areas (and as a pandemic hobby!). In 2021, the podcast hosted a Qualitative Research Series (www.wordsmatter-education.com/the-qualitative-research), with long-form discussions with experts across the qualitative methodologies (including Melanie Birks and Jane Mills discussing grounded theory). The portability and convenience of podcasts mean that you can now learn about grounded theory, ethnography, thematic analysis, phenomenology, or post-qualitative approaches while shopping at the supermarket, working out, or doing the vacuuming, something that is not possible in the traditional written word format.

The theories, epistemologies, methodologies, and methods which underpin all research are complex, multi-faceted, and not always easy to get a handle of in purely written or didactic lecture form. Podcasting is a great way to facilitate the learning of this complex information and the reflexive activities needed to locate this information in the learner's own reality and life.

The freely accessible podcast has had considerable reach (over 110,000 downloads in 86 countries) and listeners come from a range of backgrounds including clinical, research, and humanities.

The Words Matter Podcast is supported by social media, allowing episodes to be shared (including clips of upcoming discussions), and offers a quick method of dissemination and potentially implementation. Feedback and discussion around each episode are in 'real time', and, on many occasions, following the release of an episode, 'meta' or 'sub' discourses take place among listeners on social media where further critique, analysis, and reflection are generated and shared. This is monumentally quicker than the traditional 'letter to the editor' in an academic journal and shows impact and engagement from the end user.

Decide what level of analytical detail is required

An important decision to be made when planning to present a grounded theory is the level of analytical detail to be included. We define analytical detail as the specific labelling of a grounded theory's core category, categories and possible sub-categories, properties, and dimensions, in the presentation of findings. The level of analytical detail required varies depending on the audience and the type of presentation planned. Use caution when deciding the appropriate amount of detail to include in the final product (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). One instance of when there is need for a high degree of analytical detail is in the presentation of a thesis or dissertation, where the examiner needs to be convinced of your competence in using grounded theory methods. Including analytical detail, however, does not include the use of 'funny words' (Stern, 2007, p.122) to rename grounded theory methods. All that results from such poetic licence is confusion – just call it like it is, citing the relevant seminal text in the process to reduce the likelihood of perplexing your examiner.

> Analytical detail
>
> The specific labelling of a grounded theory's core category, categories and possible sub-categories, properties, and dimensions, in the presentation of findings.

Sandelowski (2007) writes about words, the intent of which should be seen in the reporting of findings, without their necessarily being written up. In particular, Sandelowski refers to some authors suffering from an 'acute attack of grounded theory-itis' (2007, p.129) in their inclusion of a multitude of labels for various parts of their presentation. In that author's opinion, the condition 'grounded theory-itis' results in an obscuration of findings and, in turn, their potential usefulness for the reader. Returning to Table 8.1, you will observe a low-level requirement for analytical detail when presenting grounded theory findings in any form of presentation other than a thesis/dissertation. When writing a journal article or report, the inclusion of a grounded theory's 'little logic' (Glaser, 1978, p.129), in the form of an abstract of the storyline (Birks and Mills, 2019), will suffice to introduce one aspect of the theory to be explored and explained in depth. For oral presentations, social media, and newsletter articles, the confines of time and space will usually dictate that you are only able to refer the reader to a fuller explanation of the theory, before expanding on one point. Nonetheless, these forms of dissemination are very important in trying to get a message out that has implications for either local practice or broader policy development. Hopefully, these audiences will later seek out your findings in more detail, with a view to implementing change.

Sandelowski's editorial, referred to previously, is discussed by second-generation grounded theorists in their text reporting on a grounded theory symposium (Morse et al., 2021). In this edition, these researchers appear nonplussed about the idea of labelling versus not labelling concepts as codes or categories in the presentation of a grounded theory. As the group reflects on this, and other critiques of grounded theory, Corbin speaks of Glaser and Strauss's elegant monographs written in a narrative style, while Stern provides a spirited defence of the usefulness of labels to ensure that analytical processes and the organisation of a grounded theory are made clear. As Charmaz states in an earlier work, '[w]hether the theory remains embedded in the narrative or stands out in bold relief depends on your task and your rendering of it' (2014, p.316).

Present your grounded theory as a whole

The inherent beauty of a grounded theory lies in how each component integrates together. Because of this, there is an imperative always to present your grounded theory findings as a whole, even if it means introducing the overall theory before moving on to explain one part of it in depth. The difficulty in this lies in creating brevity without superficiality; however, a well-integrated grounded theory that demonstrates logic, consistency, and its contribution to knowledge can be communicated in an interesting and succinct manner.

When presenting a grounded theory, Glaser (1978) argues for a funnel-down approach where a grounded theory's core category is introduced using an outline approach prior to the researcher focusing on a specific component in depth. When focusing on a specific component, however, the explanation needs to remain at a conceptual level, using select data fragments to provide supporting evidence. Corbin and Strauss (2015, p. 338) suggest asking the question '[d]o I need this detail in order to maximize the clarity of the analytic discussion and/or to achieve maximum substantive understanding?, prior to including data fragments in the presentation of a grounded theory.

We recommend that the findings of your grounded theory study be presented in isolation of both extant theory and the contemporary literature and then discussed in relation to each. This can be achieved using storyline, as discussed in the previous chapter. The subsequent use of theoretical codes will consolidate your grounded theory and enhance its explanatory reach. In any form of reporting, an explanation of the substance of the storyline can then be discussed in the context of the current literature to explain its relevance and contribution to existing knowledge.

Make clear recommendations

Glaser (1978) suggests that it is useful to conclude the report of a grounded theory that has application for a discipline's practice, with a series of recommendations. This can be one of the most challenging tasks for the researcher, not only because of the difficulty in writing such constructs, but because, at this point, they are often keen to finalise their study. We suggest that you avoid facing this task at the end of your study by compiling a list of recommendations as these occur to you during the process of analysis. Often, you will find that this is when these ideas are most likely to present themselves. Yehene et al. (2021, p.1520) provide an excellent example of how researchers can present clear and useful recommendations in their grounded theory study of how parents 'understand and conceptualise their living loss reality' after their child experiences an acquired brain injury. These recommendations provide advice for health professionals supporting parents' emotional loss once the immediate danger to their child has passed and parents begin to plan for their future care requirements. The six recommendations presented by this research team respond clearly to the grounded theory categories that make up the core category of 'concurrent ropes and ladders', while situating these in the context of the contemporary literature.

Choose an appropriate style of writing

Choosing a style of writing for the presentation of grounded theory findings follows on from previous decisions made about both audience and the matching level of analytical detail. In choosing how to write about your grounded theory study, the one thing you do not want to do is unintentionally mask your findings with impenetrable terminology (see Chapter 8). One of Charmaz's (2014) great gifts to novice grounded theorists is her body of work on the importance and possibility of using different writing styles when presenting research findings. Charmaz often uses the term 'rendering' to describe the process of achieving a particular style of writing when presenting a grounded theory. To render is to translate or make understandable to the reader the researcher's analysis of what is happening in a substantive area of enquiry. Therefore, the way in which you choose to render a piece of writing is again a direct reflection of your audience and what you hope to achieve from the dissemination of your findings in a particular way. Charmaz discusses a range of techniques to achieve these different outcomes, through trying to 'balance the logic of exposition with the logic of the theorized experience' (2014, p.317). Many of her suggested strategies relate to creating a sense of participants' experiences while drawing the reader into the written account. Some examples of her strategies for making your writing accessible include providing 'unexpected definitions and assertions' and the use of 'rhetorical questions [to] quicken the pace and focus subsequent points' (Charmaz, 2014, pp.316–317).

> Rendering
>
> The process of translating or making understandable the researcher's analysis of what is happening in a substantive area of enquiry.

Choosing an appropriate style of writing when presenting a grounded theory will result in your findings being read by many more people than might otherwise have been the case. As LaRossa reminds us: 'much the same as a newspaper report or novel will have a slant to it, so also research narratives will have a slant. And that slant may make the difference in whether an article or book is read – and, if read, remembered' (LaRossa, 2005, p.851).

Producing findings that are remembered may also result in those findings being used to implement change in the substantive area of enquiry. Remember, research is about more than just the process, it is also about making an impact on people's lives.

ILLUSTRATIVE MODELLING

In Chapter 8, we discussed the use of diagrams in grounded theory. The difference between a diagram and a model in grounded theory is that the former is a strategy for analysis, while the latter is a strategy for presentation. More generally, a model can be defined as an abstract representation of reality. Think of a model aircraft; it is an abstract representation of something much larger that we fly in from country to country. A model aircraft is not real in that it does not have the same capacity as that which it represents, but we can look at it and understand some of the component parts of larger aircraft. In the same way, illustrative modelling is used visually to represent the component parts of a grounded theory, and because of this, an explanation of the model needs to accompany it in the form of an abstract of the storyline or a previously constructed outline.

> Model
>
> An abstract representation of reality.

The use of illustrative models is a relatively new strategy for the presentation of grounded theory findings, with the first- and second-generation grounded theorists focusing instead on diagramming as a method of analysis. Increasingly, however, grounded theorists are using models as a summative visual representation of their findings. Strauss and Corbin (1998) argue that any visual representation of a grounded theory should contain minimal labels, lines, and arrows, rather focusing on abstraction, logic, and flow. If the core category of your grounded theory is a basic social process, then try to use shapes and positioning that meaningfully encapsulate a sense of flow. Importantly, ensure you refer to the model in the explanatory text that accompanies it. Explain to the reader how the model works, what the different devices you have chosen to use (colours, shapes, dotted lines) represent, and how they work together to illustrate the grounded theory you have constructed from your data.

Good examples of grounded theory models are Ning et al.'s (2019) grounded theory model of dyadic negotiation between Chinese gay and lesbian people and their parents, based on the 'flow of soft power'; Morris and Cravens Pickens' (2017) grounded theory model of 'unplugging' from technology; and de Lucas Ancillo et al.'s (2020) grounded theory model of the changing workplace post-COVID-19. Each of these models adds visual impact and explanatory power to the researchers' explanation of their grounded theory. Figure 10.1 is the grounded theory model developed by Jenny van der Harst (2021), whose storyline is provided as an example in Chapter 9.

Figure 10.1 Grounded theory model: 'Doing your best'

ACTIVITY 10.2

DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN GROUNDED THEORY MODELS AND DIAGRAMS

Refer to the collection of journal articles you have used in previous activities. Do any of them purport to present a grounded theory model? Is the picture presented a model of the author's substantive grounded theory or is it really an analytical diagram? Is it accompanied by a succinct abstract of the storyline that explains how the component parts fit together?

APPLICATION OF GROUNDED THEORY

Rarely is a grounded theory generated to produce knowledge for the sake of knowledge alone. Grounded theories aim to provide understanding of a phenomenon that will ultimately inform practice in a given discipline. When considering application of a grounded theory, either one that you have generated or the work of others, you will need to: ensure that the theory is credible; confirm its relevance to your own situation; tailor it accordingly; and develop and implement a plan for sustainable change (Figure 10.2).
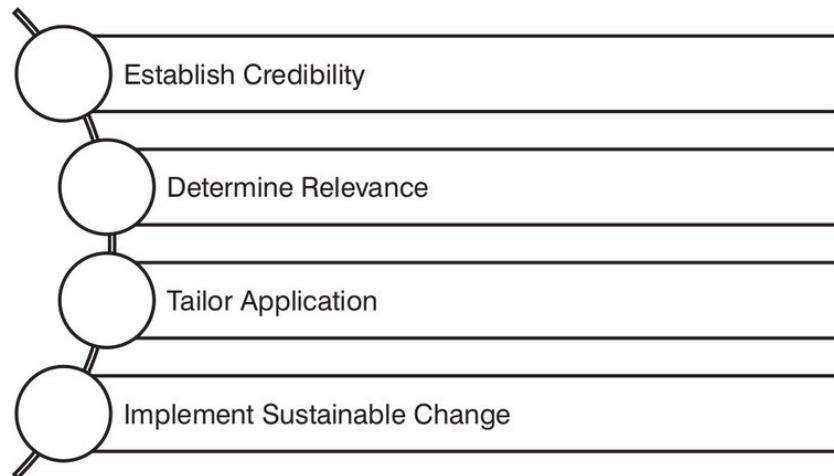
Figure 10.2 Applying grounded theory research

Chapter 3 discusses the evaluation of grounded theory and provides guidance for establishing the quality and worth of published work. The method and focus of your evaluation are likely to be different when appraising a particular grounded theory for a specific purpose, as opposed to when evaluating a study generally. Glaser and Strauss (1967) originally proposed that a good grounded theory will be sensitised to a particular situation, yet would be flexible and open to reformulation in static or changing environments. Glaser (2007) argues that categories in grounded theory are abstract enough to be non-context dependent and are therefore contextualised during application. Do not, however, confuse this flexibility with broad generalisability. General applicability is a characteristic of formal grounded theory that will be discussed later in this chapter.

A grounded theory may not necessarily be applied in its totality; the insights gleaned from the theoretical renderings of this type of research can spark new ideas, initiate changes, and reform thinking. The extent to which you can apply the products of any research will be determined by the identification of elements that have relevance and meaning to your specific situation. Your evaluation of a grounded theory may also raise your awareness of specific aspects that are more credible, and your comfort in applying only these outcomes to your own situation may therefore be greater.

Little has been written on the practicalities of applying a grounded theory (although Glaser (2007) has identified potential applications of formal grounded theory, as discussed below). While a chapter was devoted to applying grounded theory in *Discovery* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), this work, as referred to above, essentially focuses on appraising elements of the theory with a view to application. This emphasis reinforces the relationship between evaluation and application. Note that it is possible to evaluate a grounded theory without intention to apply it (such as during an academic assessment); however, application without evaluation is clearly ill advised.

Once you have established that the grounded theory you propose to use is credible, has relevance to your intended area of application, and can be tailored to your specific purpose, you will need to develop a practical strategy for implementation. When attempting to apply the outcomes of a grounded theory study, you are likely to confront the same issues as are raised in the translation of evidence to practice more generally. Whether your intended application takes the form of policy change, practice change, or knowledge development (Corbin and Strauss, 2015), you will no doubt face challenges. Box 10.3 poses a series of questions that aim to assist you when planning for sustainable change. While each context is different, you may find these questions of use in navigating some of the barriers and challenges that are inevitable in the translation and application of evidence to practice.

Box 10.3

Implementing sustainable change

In preparing to apply grounded theory research outcomes, the following questions should be considered:

1. Is there a need for change that can be addressed by application of the outcomes of this grounded theory study?
2. What challenges are likely to be faced in attempting to apply this evidence?
3. Are the necessary resources available to assist in the successful implementation of the study's recommendations?
4. What specific strategies can be devised to ensure that the application of these research outcomes is effective and sustainable?
5. How will I know if the application of research outcomes achieves the desired outcome?

EXTENDING THE REACH: SUBSTANTIVE VERSUS FORMAL THEORY

As this book is designed for the neophyte grounded theorist, chances are your only experience of this form of research is in the development or implementation of a study that relates to a specific phenomenon in the context of a clearly identified group of individuals. Such research is regarded as substantive as it is produced for the purpose of understanding a tangible phenomenon in a clearly defined situation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Hypothetically, for example, you might develop a theory of 'immersed socialization of medical interns to the professional role', describing a process of disciplinary adaptation for this particular group. Most of the grounded theories you will find through searching the literature will also be substantive grounded theories. Formal grounded theory, on the other hand, is theory developed to a higher conceptual level. These types of theories have applicability across a number of substantive areas due to their higher level of abstraction and generalisation of concepts (Charmaz, 2014).

Substantive grounded theory

Theory that relates to a specific phenomenon in a unique context.

Formal grounded theory

Highly conceptual theory that spans a number of substantive areas.

Kearney (2007) identifies a number of formal grounded theories produced by Glaser and Strauss, and describes some produced by others, although she employs quite a broad definition of what constitutes formal grounded theory in contemporary terms. Glaser (2007) acknowledges only one formal grounded theory originating from his work with Strauss, that being Status Passage, published in 1971. The concept of 'awareness contexts', derived from Glaser and Strauss's (1965) research into dying in hospital, is an often-cited example of a potential formal grounded theory that was never developed and presented as such (Kearney, 2007). In this research, the potential for awareness contexts to be elevated to the level of formal theory is discussed at length, with examples given of awareness contexts beyond dying in hospital that include hustling, impersonation, spying, and selling cars (Glaser and Strauss, 1965). Reference to awareness contexts outside of the original study is testament to the meticulous application of method and insightful identification of the potential broader application of this research. It is perhaps also an example of the ad hoc production of formal theory by less formal means.

ACTIVITY 10.3

FORMAL GROUNDED THEORY

You are probably familiar with Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's (1973) theory of stages of dying. This theory has seen wide application beyond its original intended substantive area. Conduct a search of your library to identify how this theory was raised from substantive to formal level by the later work of Kubler-Ross and others. Investigate the diversity of other applications of this theory evident in the published literature. Note also that this work has drawn criticism from others. What impact has later contradictory work had on the credibility and status of Kubler-Ross's original research as formal grounded theory?

Both substantive and formal theories have greater value if derived from (and therefore grounded in) data relevant to the intended area of application. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that, too often, a researcher will use language in a single study to imply applicability beyond the substantive area. In your theory of medical interns, for example, you may simply choose to present your theory as 'immersed socialisation to the professional role', suggesting a theory that is derived from, and applicable to, professional groups generally. Nothing has been done to extend your theory over and above the substantive area of your study, and its applicability to the broader environment has therefore not been established (Glaser, 1978).

While it is possible for a single study to generate formal grounded theory, most examples you will see are derived from existing substantive theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In such cases, the core category of a substantive grounded theory is expanded through additional data (Glaser, 2007). Concepts from existing developed theories, along with new raw data, are identified through theoretical sampling and are analytically compared with the original substantive grounded theory (Glaser, 1978). If you were to develop your theory of 'immersed socialisation', for example, you might seek out other studies that address professional adaption among other groups and generate or collect new data as theoretical sampling principles dictate. Through this expanded analysis, the reach of the resultant theory is extended and its value, credibility, and applicability are enhanced.

Glaser and Strauss originally identified the need for more attention to be paid to the development of formal grounded theory in their early work in *Awareness of Dying* (Glaser and Strauss, 1965) and again in *Discovery* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), with Glaser (2007) lamenting the continued lack of such attention four decades later. In this most recent work, Glaser identifies a number of potential uses for formal grounded theory, including increasing knowledge and understanding, correcting and extending existing theory, and enhancing academic activities. Despite the solid arguments supporting the value of formal grounded theory presented in these texts, there remain limited examples of grounded theories that have been raised from the substantive to the formal level. Goulding (2002) suggests that the time and costs associated with the generation of formal grounded theory are major barriers to most researchers moving beyond substantive theory generation.

Through the application of substantive and formal grounded theory, your research has the potential to have significant impact in the disciplinary area and beyond. While we have made the point above that formal grounded theories potentially have more reach, this is not to say that your substantive theory cannot make a measurable contribution. Be aware, however, that the utility of your findings is critical to the translation and subsequent application of your theory.

CONCLUSION

Presenting grounded theory findings in a way that increases their accessibility to potential readers is important in making a contribution to knowledge, while developing a personal scholarship that has integrity and value. Adopting the principles of presentation described in this chapter will ensure dissemination of your grounded theory with maximum impact. Using a variety of communication channels that meet the range of learning styles is important to broadening your audience reach. This can include the use of illustrative modelling to capture your grounded theory in a visual form. The potential of formal grounded theory to extend the reach and application of substantive grounded theories is a challenge for the future as we seek to maximise the impact of our work.

Critical thinking questions

1. In what ways would it be possible to measure the impact of a grounded theory? How might you report on the impact of your study to an outside body?
2. Consider your own experience as a reader of research. By what means (for example, conference, journal publication) do you find you are most easily able to access findings? What are the implications for your own grounded theory research?
3. Revise the principles of presenting a grounded theory. How would you incorporate these into a publication/presentation schedule for your grounded theory?
4. In this chapter, we have identified some barriers to the development of formal theory. What other factors can you think of that have limited the amount of formal theory that we have seen developed from substantive grounded theory?

Working grounded theory

Review the 'Working grounded theory' example presented in the Appendix. Note:

- The means by which the research in this example was reported and presented

- The relative reliance of this researcher on narrative presentation and illustrative modelling

- Her reference to the application of the outcomes of her research (both methodologically and substantively) by herself and others

APPENDIX: WORKING GROUNDED THEORY

In the following example, Gemma Aburn (2021) describes her experience of undertaking grounded theory research. This example reflects on her doctoral research using constructivist grounded theory to explore staff experiences of working in children's blood and cancer centres in New Zealand.

PREPARING FOR GROUNDED THEORY RESEARCH

My introduction to grounded theory

I am a clinical nurse specialist in Paediatric Palliative Care, with a background of working in a children's blood and cancer centre from new graduate through to senior staff nurse. At the beginning of my doctoral study, I was still working in a senior staff nurse role in one of the units studied. It was during the course of my time working in the unit that I came to realise there was a cohort of staff that stayed for their entire careers and a much smaller group who were very transient and didn't stay very long. It led me to want to know more about staff experiences of working in a children's blood and cancer centre. I was acutely aware that there was literature out there that explored the negative effects of working in such an emotionally challenging specialty. This literature was overwhelmed by concepts of stress, burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma – all things discussed when you are new in the area. Given my own experience in the unit being a positive one, I was aware that working in children's blood and cancer centres was not simply a negative experience defined by stress and burnout. This led me to want to explore staff experiences from a more positive lens, looking at how staff maintain their resilience.

My first introduction to grounded theory was in the early stages of postgraduate education. I was enrolled in a research methods paper, which explored qualitative and quantitative paradigms of research and delved into the different methods and approaches used. I naturally felt more aligned to qualitative methods, although at this stage had not thought more deeply about why this might be. I spent time exploring different qualitative methods as we were asked to prepare a proposal that would later inform a research project. We covered a range of different methods including phenomenology, ethnography and there was brief mention of grounded theory. Grounded theory was introduced briefly with the caveat that it was a complex method that should probably be avoided in preparing our research proposal due to its complexity and the limited time we had to complete a research project. The pragmatic and logical approach

to grounded theory resonated with me, in the albeit brief summary of the method. Always up for a challenge, I proceeded to explore the grounded theory literature further, and ended up using grounded theory methods and methodology for my honours research project – a study that explored parents' perceptions of education received at the time of their child's diagnosis with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia.

Reflecting back, my understanding of grounded theory at this point was very much in its infancy. Whilst I grappled with an understanding of the tenets of grounded theory, the history and evolution of the methods/methodology package, the key learning I took away from using grounded theory was the ability to construct a theory that was relevant and useful in a clinical setting.

Philosophical perspectives

As part of considering my research study design and reflecting on my own experiences, I was challenged by my supervisors to consider my philosophical position. While this was initially a challenge, in delving into the literature about theoretical frameworks I came to understand that this was really a question of how I viewed reality, or my ontological position. Working as a nurse, I am surrounded by evidence-based practice and a positivist world. However, in working in children's oncology and paediatric palliative care, there is a strong focus on the relationships between nurse, child, whānau (family), colleagues, and the environment in which we work. This is reflective of a more social approach, recognising that reality is constructed through the interactions with others and our environment (Aburn et al., 2020). For me, this understanding of reality is further supported by working with children with uncertain prognoses, and in situations where a scientific explanation of a medical condition is insufficient in explaining a prognosis or life expectancy. I have come to realise that there are multiple understandings of reality, dependent on the social environment and context. These underpinning experiences and beliefs led me to use a social constructionist framework in my research.

The different variants of grounded theory are all influenced by different philosophical positions or methodological approaches. My chosen approach of social constructionism aligned most closely with the constructivist approach of grounded theory described by Kathy Charmaz. Charmaz's approach also resonated with me due to the value she places on the role of the researcher being integral to the research process. As a clinician and colleague researcher, it was really important that I continuously reflected on my own experiences and the influence I had on my work. I acknowledged that I could not separate myself from this research and needed to be reflexive. The paper, *Reflecting on a journey of resilience in children's blood and cancer nursing*, outlines this process and situates me as the researcher within the study (Aburn et al., 2018). Being reflexive, as

documented in memos at the beginning of my research and throughout the study, was integral in supporting theoretical sensitivity and ensuring quality in my grounded theory.

Maintaining quality in my grounded theory

There are a number of ways that quality is maintained in a grounded theory study. Given this research was a doctoral study, I was keen to ensure quality and rigorously applied the tenets of grounded theory, considering the methodological approach of constructivist grounded theory. Given I was relatively new to research, I read widely prior to beginning the study, and spent time during the study discussing each aspect and decision with my supervisors and other expert grounded theorists. I also ensured I had a clear study aim that provided direction but was also intentionally kept broad to enable the application of grounded theory methods. The aim of the study was to develop a theory to explain staff experiences of working in children's blood and cancer centres in Aotearoa, with a particular focus on maintaining resilience in their work.

At the outset of the study, I ensured that I organised a dedicated folder on a password-protected computer, with files for original transcripts, coded transcripts, memos, and study-related information. Once I had started data collection, I quickly realised that I needed a more systematic way of storing and keeping data in one place, and then shifted everything across to the useful computer software program, NVivo. The remainder of my coding, development of categories and memoing was then done and stored collectively in NVivo. Along with making processes for safely storing and recording data, I also honed my skills in using a reference management software tool and developed a bibliography of the reading I was doing. I chose to use EndNote for reference management. This proved really helpful at all stages of the research process, but particularly in writing for publication.

PLANNING A SUCCESSFUL GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

Thinking like a grounded theorist

Memo writing is an essential component to grounded theory and can assist the researcher in thinking like a grounded theorist and acknowledging their role in the study. I started recording memos from the time I was developing my initial research proposal. This helped me gain confidence in writing memos, with topics at this point mainly being about thoughts about how I might carry out the research, and reflections on my own experiences and what I bring to the research process. I continued to record memos through every step of the study, with topics including: thoughts, assumptions, and feelings about the research, reflecting on my philosophical position; notes on what I was seeing happening in clinical practice and team meetings that I was involved in within the units studied, thoughts about presentations I attended, or books or articles I was reading, reflections on field work – interviews and focus groups, detailed notes from supervision meetings, reflections on codes and thoughts about the development of categories. I chose not to demarcate memos into categories as a number of memos overlapped between looking at coding, analysis, and the operational aspects of my study.

Memoing is an important strategy for gaining theoretical sensitivity and constantly questioning, re-evaluating, reflecting on, and interrogating the data. Memos supported me to process the grounded theory literature and make informed and rigorous decisions throughout the research process. For example, at the beginning of the study, I elected to explore resilience as a sensitising concept rather than completing a full review of the literature on the specific topic. This meant that I increased my theoretical sensitivity and understanding of resilience.

At times throughout the study, I found it challenging hearing what my colleagues had to say about their experiences and struggled to comprehend and make sense of what they were sharing. Memo writing provided a forum to navigate these challenges, tease out my own experience from the collective experience, and make sense of

the data. I recall a time as I was coding and had identified the code *being special*. This seemed to be very prominent in all focus groups and in early interviews. I grappled with this as I didn't see myself as special and had never really considered that I might be different to colleagues working in other areas of health care.

Memo – Recorded 16 October 2017

Is it about being special or about a sense of doing something/a job that people don't have a good understanding or knowledge of the reality? Media portrays children with cancer – images, books recently published – Jake Bailey's book – What Cancer Taught Me. This talked about as he was dying, treatment was to save him when he was dying. Fed into people's perceptions that people commonly die of cancer. Young person going through the journey himself talked about dying of cancer, it was chance he survived. Reality is that cancers like Jake's are highly treatable and the majority of children and young people survive their cancers. Survival often not made explicit to the public. How many of the public know greater than 80 to 85% of children survive their cancer. I'm not certain that being special is something this group of staff need to feel to be able to manage working in the area. Sense that they do feel they work in a unique area. But some have said they are no different to others working in different areas of health care. All areas of health are hard work in their own ways. Definitely there is something about identifying as different to others, and being planted within the specialty. Re-reading some of the focus groups – adamant they are not special, they just work in a unique environment and function in a different way as a team. What does this actually mean? Does this contribute to staff wellbeing or resilience, knowing they are different???? Not comfortable or convinced that special is the right word.

Through memos like the one shown above, I was able to consider what this was about, discuss with experienced grounded theorists what I thought was happening in the data, and then follow up this theoretical lead in subsequent individual interviews. This code developed into a sub-category, with the category being *having an identity*. I came to realise that participants were talking about being special as part of their identity as a staff member working in a children's blood and cancer centre in Aotearoa. Memo writing and reflection were essential in my development as a grounded theorist. These strategies supported my awareness of the impact my own pre-conceptions and assumptions had on the research process, ultimately enhancing my theoretical sensitivity.

It is important to acknowledge that no researcher starts out without preconceptions or assumptions. Our own experiences and knowledge have an influence on data generated and the development of a grounded theory. This was critically important to recognise in this study, given I was a colleague researcher, had my own experiences working as a children's cancer nurse in one of the units studied, and still worked alongside staff in a senior nursing role in one of the study hospitals. As highlighted earlier in this example, I wrote a reflective account of my own experiences as both a children's cancer nurse and children's palliative care nurse specialist (Aburn et al., 2018). This was a useful exercise in really considering my personal thoughts and feelings about my own experience in the area before meeting with participants and hearing their voices.

Proposing my grounded theory study

One of the challenges in writing my initial research proposal was remaining true to grounded theory methods, while meeting the requirements and expectations of a research proposal for a doctoral study. The most prominent of these challenges was the place of the literature review in grounded theory research. Use of the literature in the early stages of a grounded theory is of course controversial and needs to be carefully considered. To ensure the theory constructed was grounded in the data generated and not influenced heavily by pre-existing literature, I chose not to complete a full review of literature around the specific topic of my proposal. Rather, I provided rationale, a general summary of the literature I was already aware of in my own practice, and completed an integrative review of the literature defining resilience, which was used as a sensitising concept in the study (Aburn et al., 2016). This was sufficient in meeting the requirements of the university and ensured I remained true to constructivist grounded theory methods.

The proposal also included information about study design and ethical considerations. While detail was provided about the initial phases of data generation, there was also scope included for this to develop and be informed by principles of theoretical sampling and theoretical sensitivity.

Managing myself and others

Working full time while completing my doctoral studies both had benefits for the research and challenges that I had to navigate. Working day to day in the same area I was researching meant that I was immersed in the field and was making observations on a daily basis. These observations I recorded frequently in memos and they aided my analysis of what was happening in the data. On the flipside of this was managing my time as a doctoral student. In the early part of my PhD, I had no protected time in my week to work on my research, which meant long periods without writing or being engaged in the research process. A couple of years into my study, I was fortunate to receive a clinical fellowship, enabling me to have at least one day a week protected time. This made a significant difference to my research, being able to consistently keep working and writing every week. One of the most helpful things was at the end of every session I would write a note of what I had achieved and what I needed to work on in the next session. Documenting my progress and next steps helped me to maintain momentum and see the progress I was making in each session, despite at times feeling like I was going around in circles.

Researching staff experiences and focusing on resilience, at times it seemed like a bit of a personal challenge to consider my own resilience throughout the journey of being a doctoral student. I would not have completed this piece of research if it were not for the activities and hobbies I was determined to maintain throughout. I initially felt guilty taking time out but soon realised that time away from sitting at my desk to go swimming, to bake, or spend time with friends enabled valuable space to think and reflect. There were many occasions where I had 'aha' moments in the middle of the ocean or while standing over a cake mixer. These revelations were quickly documented in a notebook I carried nearly everywhere and later tranferred into NVivo as memos.

In addition to the personal strategies I used to manage my studies, I was fortunate to have amazing supervisors and an effective relationship with them. My supervisory team consisted of two expert researchers with different and complementary skills and knowledge. One was an experienced grounded theorist and a well-respected expert nurse leader in child health, while the other was an internationally recognised health researcher with extensive experience in palliative care research. The combination provided rich discussion and ideas that I had not previously considered, being immersed in the field.

At the beginning of the study, we discussed expectations and ways of communicating which led to an effective relationship being maintained throughout the course of my doctoral study. Having monthly meetings scheduled in advance in the calendar was helpful in ensuring we were all able to meet and have open discussion about progress, and any decisions that I was needing to make. When we were not able to meet in person, regular communication was maintained through email and, at times, video conferencing, particularly during the end of my PhD which coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdowns. Following each meeting, I sent through notes of our discussion, which included things I wanted to achieve before we next met and any expectations I had of my supervisors in that time – for example, providing feedback or reading a paper or chapter of my thesis.

PRODUCING GROUNDED THEORY

Generating and collecting data

I decided to begin data generation with focus groups that included staff from a diverse range of professional backgrounds and experience. Having never conducted focus groups before, I spent time immersed in the literature, learning different techniques that can be used to elicit the best data. Feeling overwhelmed and beginning to appreciate the differences between my familiar world of facilitating group supervision and clinical discussion, I observed a senior research colleague conducting focus groups for another study. It was useful to observe not just how the focus group was carried out and how theoretical leads were followed, but also to learn how to create an environment that was informal and relaxed, where people felt comfortable sharing their personal experiences. Following this, I also asked an experienced research assistant to attend my first focus group and provide feedback around how I conducted the group. This was invaluable, and provided a useful foundation to continue the focus groups.

Each focus group was held in a meeting room on the unit being studied, and included cake for afternoon tea. Participants all knew each other prior to participating and all had a pre-existing relationship with me as the researcher, that ranged from having met once in a professional capacity in my role as a clinical nurse specialist, through to some participants having been close colleagues for many years. While it was a benefit that we started with a sense of rapport, it was important to spend some time identifying my role in the focus group and research process. The focus groups began with several broad questions that got participants chatting and relaxed; prompts were then given throughout the focus groups to elicit further relevant information, but conversation flowed freely among participants, with all having an opportunity to speak and share their experience. Participants bounced ideas off each other, and ultimately some of the early questions intended to get people warmed up, were when the richest data were gathered, including identifying the in vivo code *we keep it*

in the family, which subsequently became a key part of the final theory.

Following the three initial focus groups, I then explored concepts further in individual interviews. This was a challenging step in recruitment – with lots of staff keen to participate, it was important to ensure I interviewed those staff that were most relevant in following theoretical leads to ensure theoretical sampling.

Each focus group and individual interview was transcribed within 24 hours of the group being held. Transcribing focus groups myself provided an opportunity to listen to each focus group and document my thoughts about what was happening in the data as I went through. It was also an invaluable experience in reflecting on my own performance in conducting the focus groups, considering what went well and what I could do differently in the next group or interview. Concurrent to transcribing the interview, I also recorded fieldnotes and observations throughout the focus group or interview. These fieldnotes, along with the transcripts of each group or interview, comprised the raw data of the study. The experiences of participants constructed through our interactions in focus groups and interviews provided data for analysis and construction of the final theory. Existing literature was referred to along the course of the research process to enhance theoretical sensitivity and to give support and structure to the constructed theory.

Grounded theory analysis

Prior to generating data in my study, I had read widely about coding and the different stages to work through, from initial coding through to advanced coding. Initial coding seemed quite straightforward: I went through my first focus group transcript and extracted codes as I reflected on each part of the focus group and recorded memos of my own thoughts, ensuring theoretical sensitivity. I initially coded manually, by hand, using highlighters, and recording notes all over my transcripts. Following this step, I then coded the transcript line by line, and explored gerund codes or action codes. This I did using a Word document, as I was still grappling with using the data management software, NVivo. Gradually, I became more familiar with NVivo, and further advanced coding was done in NVivo. This supported me to further develop and construct codes and categories, constantly comparing them to the new data generated, and helped in refining codes and categories and relabelling codes or categories.

Constant comparative analysis, a key tenet of grounded theory, was essential in constructing my theory and ensuring the theory remained grounded within the data generated among participant and researcher. An example of this is that in following the initial focus group, there were two obvious codes – *having a work family* and *being special*. Initially *being special* was prominent, but on further exploration in focus groups and interviews, it became apparent that these words did not fully reflect the feelings of staff working in the area. The concept of *being special* was more about *having an identity* as a team and identifying their differences from other teams or departments. Identifying this and further exploring identity in subsequent interviews led to *having an identity* being a sub-category and critical part of the processual theory of *being a work family*. The focus on teams, and being different in how they function, led me to further explore the in vivo code *we keep it in the family*. Mapping all the intermediate codes highlighted other early codes – *having a sense of family*, *holding each other together*, and *having a sense of belonging* – which were all then further explored in individual

interviews. This mapping process highlighted that all these codes and categories could relate to *being a family* or thinking of the team as a *work family*. There were multiple different diagrams, with the final diagram explaining a process of becoming part of the work family and how the work family operated.

From analysis to theory

Applying the grounded theory methods during analysis resulted in a conceptual abstraction of data, however the production of the final theory required further time, thought, and a leap in analysis. During the final stage of theoretical integration and constructing my final theory, I spent time diagramming, frequently recording memos, and began writing my first storyline.

I used the storyline technique to attempt to clarify the process of what was happening in my data. When writing my first storyline, I was initially encouraged to step away from my data, enabling me to see the bigger picture rather than focusing on one participant's story. This at first felt scary and overwhelming, and I felt like I was leaving my data behind. After writing the storyline, I went back through and evidenced my storyline with codes, categories, and segments of data. I was most surprised when I had very few codes left that did not fit into the storyline. The first storyline I wrote was only two pages long and lacked the detail and clarity of my final storyline. The storyline technique helped me to identify the gaps in my theory, and highlighted what I needed to explore in my existing data and what data I needed to generate to ensure theoretical integration and saturation. I had five different iterations of my storyline, with the final version being the basis of a publication reporting my final theory and the findings of my study. Storyline aided theoretical integration and provided an opportunity to construct the social process and explain the participants' experiences. The theory explained that staff working in children's blood and cancer centres in Aotearoa maintain resilience through being a collective work family, through three sub-processes: *finding attachment, becoming a work family, and having an identity* (Aburn et al., 2021).

Concurrent to writing my storyline, I also realised the association with the well-known theory of attachment by John Bowlby and discovered Hofstede's theory of individualism and collectivism which resonated with my own findings. Both these theories functioned as

theoretical codes that explained and supported the process and theory of *being a work family*.

Maximising the impact of my grounded theory

I was fortunate to complete my thesis by publication, which provided an invaluable opportunity to publish throughout the research process. This meant that my thesis was made up of five publications which were woven into chapters that further explored and explained the research process and my final grounded theory.

I presented my grounded theory by using a simple model of my theory that explained the process of *being a work family* and the three stages of the process. My final storyline was the main tool I used to communicate my findings, which was illustrated with participant quotes and relevant memos that were recorded throughout the research journey. This storyline was developed into a publication, which was published in the *Journal of Pediatric Oncology Nursing* (Aburn et al., 2021). Throughout the final stages of my doctoral study, I also presented at relevant seminars, education forums, and conferences. These presentations provided opportunity for feedback and discussion, and it was amazing to hear that the theory resonated with many health professionals working in the specialty but also in other specialties and areas around Aotearoa and internationally.

The main purpose of a grounded theory is to construct a substantive theory that is useful and relevant in the area studied, but that is also able to be translated to other areas of practice. Since the findings of this study were reported back to the units studied, there has been a noticeable shift in how staff care for each other and how all members of the team are included in unit celebrations, education sessions, and departmental gatherings. One example is a multidisciplinary meeting I attended as an 'outsider' in my nurse specialist role. Traditionally, this meeting has been a critique of practice that has focused on what could be done better with no acknowledgement of the human impact of caring for seriously ill children. This meeting

has gradually become a forum for discussion where the challenges on both a system and a human level are acknowledged and explored, and where there is positive feedback provided in the face of adversity. There has been discussion within the group of the need to care for each other and consider the impact on the work family.

It has been exciting to also see interest in this research from professionals working in other clinical areas, including primary health care, tertiary education, and secondary schools in Aotearoa. One example of where the findings of this research have been translated is in a primary health care organisation. A manager of a project team has discussed the theory of being a work family and explored with the group how they might be able to strengthen social connectedness, create a sense of belonging, and have an environment that supports being a work family. They have created time at the beginning of the day to connect through karakia (a traditional Māori custom – prayer), have time to check in with each other on a human level for weekly social connection with the sharing of food, and have created an environment of caring for each other. Staff have reported feeling like they belong and are more connected to their colleagues and their work. Concurrently, it has been recognised that as a team, they are achieving more and are exceeding expectations with meeting project outcomes. It is exciting seeing this research having an impact in workplaces, and hearing people reflect on the meaning it has for them as individuals and the resonance it has within their team.

GLOSSARY

Abduction
　　A process of hypothesising based on the developing theory.

Advanced coding
　　Techniques used to facilitate integration of the final grounded theory.

Analytical detail
　　The specific labelling of a grounded theory's core category, categories and possible sub-categories, properties, and dimensions, in the presentation of findings.

Audit trail
　　A record of decisions made in relation to the conduct of research.

Category
　　A higher-level concept that represents a group of codes.

Code
　　A form of shorthand that researchers repeatedly use to identify conceptual reoccurrences and similarities in the patterns of participants' experiences.

Concept
　　An idea or a notion that encapsulates a descriptive explanation of a phenomenon or characteristic of a phenomenon.

Constant comparative analysis
　　An analytical process in which incoming data is compared with existing data in the process of coding and category development.

Constructivism
　　A paradigm that asserts that reality is constructed by those who experience it.

Core category
A concept that encapsulates the process apparent in the categories and sub-categories constructed.

Critical realism
A paradigm that asserts the existence of fixed societal structures within which individuals construct their own reality to effect change.

Critical research
Research that seeks to expose and address a societal power imbalance to engender change.

Criticalism
A paradigm in which knowledge is seen to be constructed by those who hold power.

Data
Raw material generated or collected for use in research.

Data analysis
The application of techniques in the treatment of data for the purpose of achieving research outcomes.

Data collection
The process of gathering data in which the researcher has limited influence on the data source.

Data generation
The process by which a researcher directly engages with a data source to produce materials for analysis.

Data sources
Persons, places, or repositories from which data originate.

Data types
Forms of data obtained from data sources.

Deduction
A process of analysis that begins with an existing theory.

Definitional statement
A succinct statement that defines and delimits a theoretical construct.

Diagram
A visual representation that can assist in the process of data analysis.

Dimensions
Variations of a property that exist on a continuum.

Documents
Textual material in published or unpublished form that can be subjected to analysis.

Elicited material
Static data created by participants with minimal interaction from the researcher.

Engagement
Partnerships between researchers and industry that result in tangible evidence of the co-design and implementation of research, with the aim of creating an impact.

Epistemology
A branch of philosophy concerned with the study of knowledge.

Evaluation
The process of judging research outcomes using criteria established for that purpose.

Extant theory
A theory existing outside of the current study.

Fieldnotes

Contemporaneous records made during fieldwork to record events, activities, and the researcher's response to them.

Fieldwork

A broad range of data gathering activities that include passive observation, accessing documents, informal conversations, and immersed participation.

Focus group

Two or more participants engaging in a conversation with an interviewer to obtain data for a specific purpose.

Formal grounded theory

Highly conceptual theory that spans a number of substantive areas.

Gerunds

Verbs used as nouns that always finish with 'ing'.

Grounded theory

An approach to research that aims to produce a theory, grounded in the data.

***In vivo* codes**

A participant's words used to encapsulate a broader concept in the data.

Incident

An umbrella term for recurring actions, characteristics, experiences, phrases, explanations, images, and/or sounds.

Induction

A process of analysis where theory is built from data.

Initial coding

The first phase of analysis where data is broken down and labelled.

Intermediate coding
    The identification of properties, dimensions, patterns, and relationships during the process of category development.

Interview
    A conversation that aims to obtain data for a specific purpose.

Literature
    Published scholarly works, such as research reports and conceptual articles.

Memoing
    The recording of thoughts, feelings, insights, ideas, and actions in relation to a research project.

Methodological congruence
    Accordance between the researcher's personal philosophical position, the stated aims of the research, and the methodological approach.

Methodology
    The philosophy of method; the lens through which the researcher looks when choosing and employing research methods.

Methods
    The practical procedures, strategies, and processes employed in conducting research.

Model
    An abstract representation of reality.

Ontology
    The study of being, concerned with concepts of existence and reality.

Paradigms

Frameworks that represent collective ways of thinking about and viewing the world.

Philosophical position

The personal beliefs about reality that guide thinking about how legitimate knowledge can be acquired.

Philosophy

A view of the world encompassing the questions and mechanisms for finding answers that inform that view.

Positivism

A paradigm that asserts there is a single objective reality that is there to be discovered.

Postmodernism

A paradigm that posits that reality is subjectively relative to those who experience it.

Postpositivism

A paradigm that recognises the position of the observer as influencing perceptions of reality.

Pragmatism

A philosophy that values practical application and adoption of a solution-focused approach.

Preconceptions

Assumptions, thoughts, and feelings that are informed by the researcher's personal, professional, and experiential history.

Problem statement

Short summary of the root cause, characteristics, and impact of a problem existing in the substantive area of inquiry.

Procedural precision

The deliberate, planned, and consistent application of methodological strategies in the conduct of research.

Process

Dynamic activities occurring in all aspects of life, not necessarily limited to conceptions of time, phases, or stages.

Properties

Characteristics of a category.

Quality

A characteristic of research processes and outcomes that results from the application of rigour throughout all stages of a study.

Reflection

The process of thinking about concepts and incidents to gain insight into meaning and consequences.

Reflexivity

An active, systematic process used by the researcher to develop insight into their work and guide future actions.

Relational statements

Statements that are used to explain action or process as it becomes apparent in a burgeoning grounded theory.

Rendering

The process of translating or making understandable the researcher's analysis of what is happening in a substantive area of enquiry.

Research design

The choice of philosophy, methodology, and methods used in a grounded theory study.

Researcher expertise

The skills, knowledge, and abilities that a researcher brings to the conduct of their study.

Research impact

An identifiable change in policy and/or practice clearly linked to previous research outcomes and/or recommendations.

Research team

A group of individuals who come together with the goal of designing, implementing, and disseminating research.

Rigour

Control of processes employed in a research study in order to account for factors that can impact outcomes.

Secondary data

Data collected in the past for purposes not originally related to a current study.

Self-care

Activities directed towards ensuring psycho-social, physical, intellectual, and professional wellbeing throughout the research process.

Storyline

A strategy for facilitating integration, construction, formulation, and presentation of a grounded theory.

Substantive codes

Taken from the language of the data and generally assuming the form of either gerunds and/or *in vivo* codes.

Substantive grounded theory

Theory that relates to a specific phenomenon in a unique context.

Symbolic interaction

A philosophical perspective that regards reality as a constantly evolving construction in response to symbols and symbolic gestures that are evident in interactions.

Theoretical codes

Advanced abstractions that can be used to enhance the explanatory power of a grounded theory.

Theoretical coding

The use of theoretical codes as a framework to add explanatory power during the final phase of the development of a grounded theory.

Theoretical integration

The final stage of analysis during which a theoretical scheme is integrated into a grounded theory.

Theoretical sampling

The process of identifying and pursuing clues that arise during analysis in a grounded theory study.

Theoretical saturation

The point at which categories are sufficiently developed that no new concepts are introduced through the process of concurrent data generation/collection and analysis.

Theoretical sensitivity

The ability to recognise and extract from the data elements that have relevance for the emerging theory.

Theory

An explanatory scheme comprising a set of concepts related to each other through logical patterns of connectivity.

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