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VA WOMEN'S HEALTH RESEARCH NETWORK

Supporting Practice and Research Collaboration

Spotlight on Women Cyberseminar Series

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What is Grounded Theory, Anyway?

An Overview with Examples from Qualitative Research on Women Veterans

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VA GREATER LOS ANGELES
HEALTHCARE SYSTEM



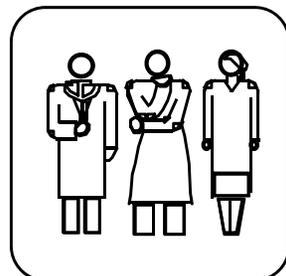
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VA HSR&D Center for
the Study of Healthcare
Provider Behavior



Poll Question:

Do you conduct qualitative research, or plan to conduct qualitative research in the future?

Yes, I conduct qualitative research.

I plan to conduct qualitative research in the future.

No, I do not conduct qualitative research.

Poll Question:

Are you familiar with grounded theory?

Yes, very familiar

Yes, somewhat familiar

I have heard of it

No, not familiar

Thank you

- To the HSR&D Women's Health Research Consortium for sponsoring this CyberSeminar
- To my colleagues Barbara Bokhour and Susan Zickmund for their ongoing collaboration on all matters qualitative
- To my colleagues at the HSR&D Center of Excellence for the Study of Healthcare Provider Behavior, for their valuable feedback (Sangeeta Ahluwalia, Courtney Armstrong, Nikki Armstrong, Jaimi Butler, Ismelda Canelo, Angela Cohen, Jill Darling, Jackie Fickel, Katherine Hoggatt, Debbie Jenkins, Ruth Klap, Casey MacGregor, Fran Nedjat-Haiem, Sabine Oishi, Hector Rodriguez, Rebecca Shoai, Barbara Simon, Diana Tisnado, Donna Washington, Tamar Wyte, & Becky Yano)

Overview of Presentation

1. Brief history of grounded theory (GT)
2. Basic premises and key components of GT
3. Approaching data analysis with GT
4. When GT may and may not be appropriate
5. Other approaches besides GT
6. Qualitative studies that used GT: focus on women Veterans
7. Suggestions for working with qualitative data
8. Importance of qualitative research in health services research on women Veterans
9. Questions/comments?

Grounded theory is not...

- Defined in only one way, by only one or two people
- Only about qualitative data analysis
- The only way to approach qualitative data
- Limited to qualitative research

First, some history

- GT developed by 2 sociologists, Barney Glaser & Anselm Strauss
 - Roots in symbolic interactionism (Herbert Blumer): focus on how meaning is created during social interactions
- Developed the constant comparison method, which became GT, with publication of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967)
 - Developed at a time when qualitative research was seen as unscientific or non-systematic
- Glaser and Strauss came to disagree about GT

History, continued

- GT has become the paradigm of choice in qualitative research
 - Why? It offers a solution to what to do with a pile of non-numerical data; provides a set of procedures, and a means of generating theory
- Many others have taken on GT in different ways
 - Charmaz: Constructing Grounded Theory
 - Corbin & Strauss
 - SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory
 - Adele Clarke: Situational Analysis (postmodern GT)

Basic premises of GT

- Theory comes from data, i.e., theory is “grounded” in data
- Everything related to the subject of study is data
- Approach data to find theory, rather than approach data with theory
- Allow data to move toward a hypothesis, rather than start with a hypothesis
- Trying to answer the question, “What’s really going on, and how?”
- Start data analysis EARLY, after first data collection episode
 - No break between data collection & analysis

Key components of GT

- Fit
 - Do the concepts fit with what's been described (i.e., incidents) by participants?
- Relevance
 - Does the study address something of concern to the people affected by a given phenomenon?
- Workability
 - Does the theory explain how a phenomenon is being addressed/solved/managed?
- Modifiability
 - Can the theory be modified upon introduction of new data?

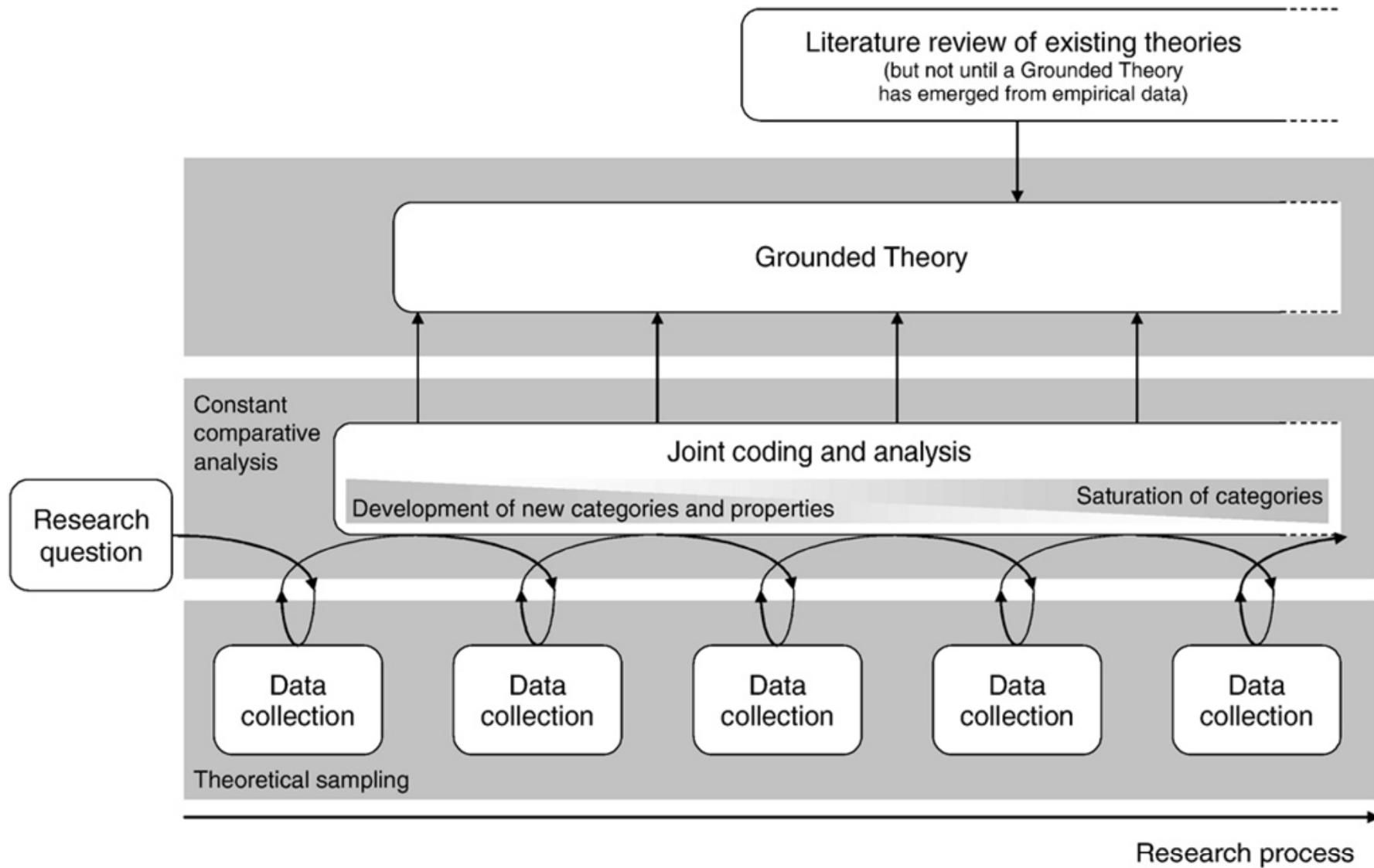
Other components of GT

- “Hard-core” GT (Glaserian GT)
 - No pre-existing knowledge about topic (e.g., through literature review)
 - No taping or transcribing; move from notes to concepts
 - No discussion of emergent theory (limit ideas to data only, not to others’ impressions/ideas)

Approaching analysis with GT

- “Open coding” or “substantive coding”
 - Inductive approach: go with what the data says
 - Identify the “substance”
 - Can be very micro-level (e.g., line-by-line)
- Codes are combined to generate concepts
 - Codes change over time
 - Concepts change over time
 - Constant comparison across data sources is critical

Approaching analysis with GT



Approaching analysis with GT: “Axial coding” & “selective coding”

- Axial coding proposed by Strauss & Corbin in 1990
 - Putting data back together by making connections across codes, categories, concepts
- Selective coding happens after open coding
 - Focus on particular concept and revisit data
 - May revisit subset of data that pertains to concept (theoretical sampling)

Approaching analysis with GT:

Writing memos

- Writing about what's being observed in the data
- Keeping track of ideas, relationships between codes, emergent concepts
- There are no rules about how a memo should look; memos should be free-flowing, stream of consciousness, and constant throughout analysis
- Reflecting on one's role in the research

When might GT be appropriate?

- When the goal is to generate concepts that explain a given phenomenon (“why” or “how,” not “what”)
- When research design and data collected lend themselves to the development of theory

When might GT not be appropriate?

- When straight description of a phenomenon is the goal (not “why” but “what”)
- When theory is not the goal of the project
- When the project was not initially set up to explore a given phenomenon (sometimes)

What else is there besides GT?

- *Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis: Phenomenological Psychology, Grounded Theory, Discourse Analysis, Narrative Research, and Intuitive Inquiry* (March 2011)
- Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 2006 (narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies)

What else is there besides GT?

Choose your Method: A Comparison of Phenomenology, Discourse Analysis, and Grounded Theory (Starks & Trinidad, *QHR*, 2007)

- Phenomenology
 - Study how people make meaning of their lived experience
- Discourse analysis
 - Examine how language is used to accomplish personal, social, and political projects
- Grounded theory
 - Develop explanatory theories of basic social processes studied in context
 - “Grounded theory examines the “six Cs” of social processes (causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances, and conditions) to understand the patterns and relationships among these elements (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).”

What else is there besides GT?

Starks & Trinidad, cont.

Applied all 3 methods to a single data set

- Interview study with 25 primary care physicians (PCPs) that explored their use of informed decision making (IDM) in the context of prostate cancer screening
- One's analytic approach shapes the research questions, attention to data, and conclusions—and, products

Additional considerations in qualitative data analysis: establishing trustworthiness

Lincoln & Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1985)

- Using a constructivist approach to qualitative research [instead of a positivist approach]
 - Credibility [internal validity]
 - Transferability [external validity]
 - Dependability [reliability]
 - Confirmability [objectivity]

Getting in the data: some examples from qualitative research on women Veterans

Hamilton, Poza, Washington

Pathways to homelessness among women Veterans (*WHI*, accepted for publication)

- 3 focus groups conducted to understand how risk factors (identified in survey) “work”
- Semi-structured interview guide
- Used constant comparison approach/GT
 - Why? Interested in developing theory about how women Veterans become homeless, in order to identify critical junctures for intervention/prevention

Getting in the data: some examples from qualitative research on women Veterans

Four iterative stages in constant comparison method (Glaser, 1965):

- 1) comparing “incidents” (i.e., discrete narratives of experiences) → generating categories
 - e.g., experience of pre-military homelessness led to category of pre-military adversity
- 2) integrating categories
 - discovery of relationships among categories
- 3) delimiting a theory for how the categories relate to each other
 - e.g., “roots” of homelessness
- 4) writing the theory
 - “web of vulnerability”

Getting in the data: some examples from qualitative research on women Veterans

Mattocks et al.

Women Veterans' Reproductive Health Preferences and Experiences: A Focus Group Analysis (*WHI*, 2011)

- Focus group data (5 groups, n=25)
- Semi-structured interview guide
- Used concepts from GT
 - Independent open coding → code definitions
 - Coders compared codes, resolved discrepancies, refined, achieved final coding structure (25 codes)
 - Codes were combined (axial coding) into broader categories, which became themes
 - Reported 5 major themes across groups & participants

Suggestions for working with qualitative data

- Consider which approach best suits the goals of your project, and establish research design accordingly
- If you plan to use GT, specify whose version of GT, read the sources, and make sure they are consistent with what you are proposing
 - If you plan to diverge from or modify GT, be explicit about the changes
- During analysis, check original GT sources to make sure you're still using the version you had selected
- Consider using more than one analytic approach to your data
 - Consider using methods consistent with GT principles

Suggestions for working with qualitative data

- Make sure everyone on the analytic team has a shared understanding of the analytic process
- Document your and your team's analytic process
- In your manuscripts, spell out your process in a way that non-qualitative audiences will understand (strive for transparency)

Importance of qualitative research in health services research on women Veterans

- Bean-Mayberry's systematic review (2010) found that most studies of women Veterans have been observational/descriptive
 - Trend toward more implementation research, which will increasingly involve qualitative methods
- With large-scale VA initiatives such as PACT, a more in-depth understanding of women Veterans' healthcare preferences and experiences is needed
 - Qualitative research can contribute to development of services that are attuned to women's preferences

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For additional guidance with qualitative data analysis:

http://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/for_researchers/cyber_seminars/archives/hsrm-061410.pdf

(CyberSeminar by Susan Zickmund on 6/14/2010)