An Introduction to Grounded Theory in Healthcare Research

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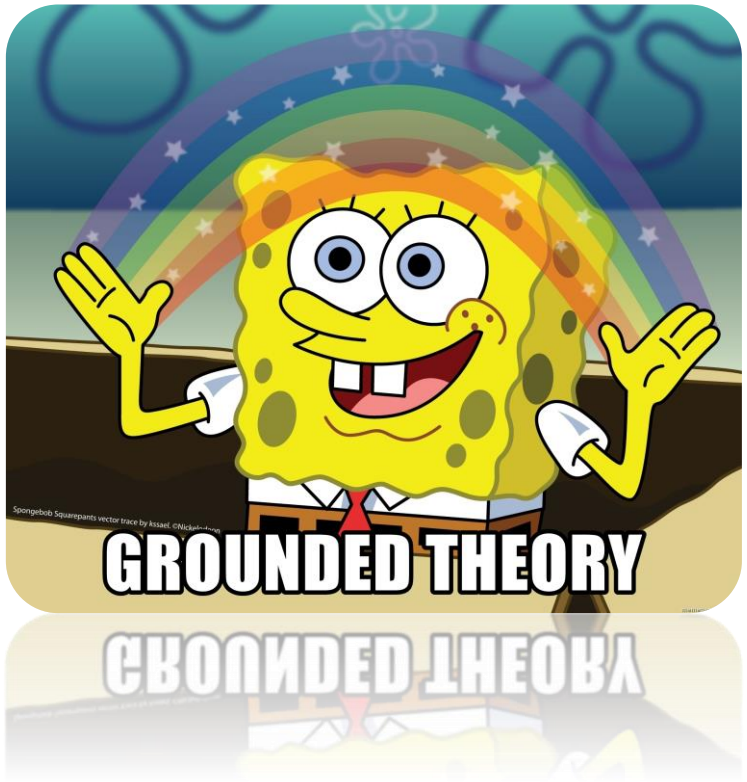

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Overview

1. What is Grounded Theory
2. The Main Features of Grounded Theory
3. Versions of Grounded Theory

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What is Grounded Theory?

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Introduction

- In 1967, Barney Glaser & Anselm Strauss presented Grounded Theory as a new approach to research developed in their study of dying.

- Grounded Theory is a research approach that results in the development of middle range theory – it is a **development of theory directly based and grounded in the data collected by the researcher**.

- This explicit goal of theory development makes grounded theory unique among qualitative methods.

- A grounded theory approach demands that the researcher move beyond description of their study towards identification of key explanatory concepts and the relationships among them.

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Introduction (2)

- Grounded Theory has been embraced by healthcare professionals since Glaser & Strauss introduced the method to graduate students at the University of California in San Francisco in the early 1970's.

- Grounded theory are useful for directing nursing practice because they are explanatory theories of human behaviour within a social context.

- Grounded Theory has evolved since its introduction 50 years ago.

- It is primarily used in qualitative research (but can be used in quantitative approaches).

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Introduction (3)

- Grounded theory is often adopted by researchers when **not much knowledge exists about the phenomenon under study**.

- Data sources can be varied and can include:

  - Interviews
  - Observations
  - Documents
  - Visual/Oral Presentations
  - Fieldnotes/Memos
  - Events
  - ANYTHING that is relevant

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Why is GT Popular?

Very popular method throughout qualitative landscape.

- Influential key concepts were revolutionary which triggered sociological imagination of many researchers.
- The first book on grounded theory presented a highly detailed a methodology enabling practical application.
- In past two decades, it has become popular due to computer assisted qualitative data analysis due to the complex analyses.

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Theoretical Framework

- A theoretical framework is the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study. The theoretical framework introduces and describes the theory that explains why the research problem under study exists.

- In their original work Glaser & Strauss (1967) did not discuss a philosophical base for their approach nor did they create a theoretical framework (one of the reason for the popularity of GT which could be used in any discipline).

- However, when initially used grounded theory had a strong link to **Symbolic Interactionism**.

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Symbolic Interactionism

- Symbolic Interactionism focuses on the processes of interaction between people exploring human behaviour and social roles. See literature from Mead & Blumer for further details.

- Symbolic Interactionism explains how individuals attempt to fit their lines of action to those of others, take account of each others' acts, interpret them and recognise their own behaviour.

- Our self has three elements:
    - How we imagine we appear to others
    - How we think others feel about what they perceive
    - How we feel about this reflected image

- Our self-esteem depends on our looking glass self.

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The ‘Looking-Glass’ Self

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Older People?

If a society reflects negative images to its old people, older people tend to think of themselves negatively

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The Main Features of Grounded Theory

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1. Theoretical Sensitivity

- Researchers must be theoretically sensitive.
- Theoretical sensitivity means that researchers can differentiate between significant and less important data, having insight into their meanings.
- Theoretical sensitivity is built up over time from reading the literature to experiencing the phenomenon. This guides the researcher to examine that data from all sides rather than stay fixed on the obvious.
- Theoretical sensitivity is complex and understanding can be better with use of reflection.

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1. Theoretical Sensitivity

Example 1:

- A specialist nurse, an expert in the care of dementia, explored the process of diagnosis disclosure from the condition of those who experienced it. The nurse's long professional career and many years of involvement made him sensitive to the care context, patient experience and perceptions.

Example 2:

- A researcher lived with a mild form of epilepsy. She decided to carry out research about the experience of epilepsy because she was an insider in this world. Her advisors, while acknowledging she used her own experience as a 'source of knowledge' warned her about the possibility of personal biases and preconceptions which might leave her incapable to be flexible and able to set assumptions aside.

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2. Theoretical Sampling

- In the process of collecting data and analysing them, the researcher decides on the basis of emerging concepts for example; what data to collect next, from whom and in what order so as to advance the theory.

- One of the main differences between this and other types of sampling is time and continuance. Unlike other sampling, which is planned beforehand, theoretical sampling in GT continues throughout the study and is not planned before the study starts.

- At the start of the research, researchers do make initial sampling decisions. They decide on the setting and particular individuals/groups they wish to approach. However once the research has begun (and new concepts arise) people are chosen who can further illuminate the problem.

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2. Theoretical Sampling

- Theoretical sampling continues until **theoretical saturation** is reached. This is NOT when no new information or concepts emerge.
- **Theoretical saturation** occurs when no more data emerges that can be used to find dimensions and develop properties or categories the researcher has established – not when a concept has been mentioned frequently or described in similar ways by lots of people.

Example :

- A grounded theory was developed by McMillan et al. (2012). The researchers examined post-discharge issues of older people after hip fracture. Their sampling was initially purposive and later focused on particular concepts from theoretical sampling (i.e. patients who had been discharged within 4 weeks and then patients discharged beyond 4 weeks).

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3. Data Analysis: Coding & Categorising

- Coding and categorising goes on throughout the research. From the start of the study, analysts code the data.
- **Open coding:** this involves line by line coding where concepts and key phrases are identified and highlighted and moved into subcategories, then categories. This breaks the data down into conceptual components and the researcher can start to theorise or reflect on what they are reading and understanding—making sense of the data. The data from each participant will be 'constantly compared' for similarities.
- **Axial coding:** at this stage relationships are identified between the categories, and connections identified.
- **Selective coding:** this involves identifying the core category and methodically relating it to other categories. The relationships must be authenticated and categories refined. Categories are then integrated together and a GT identified.

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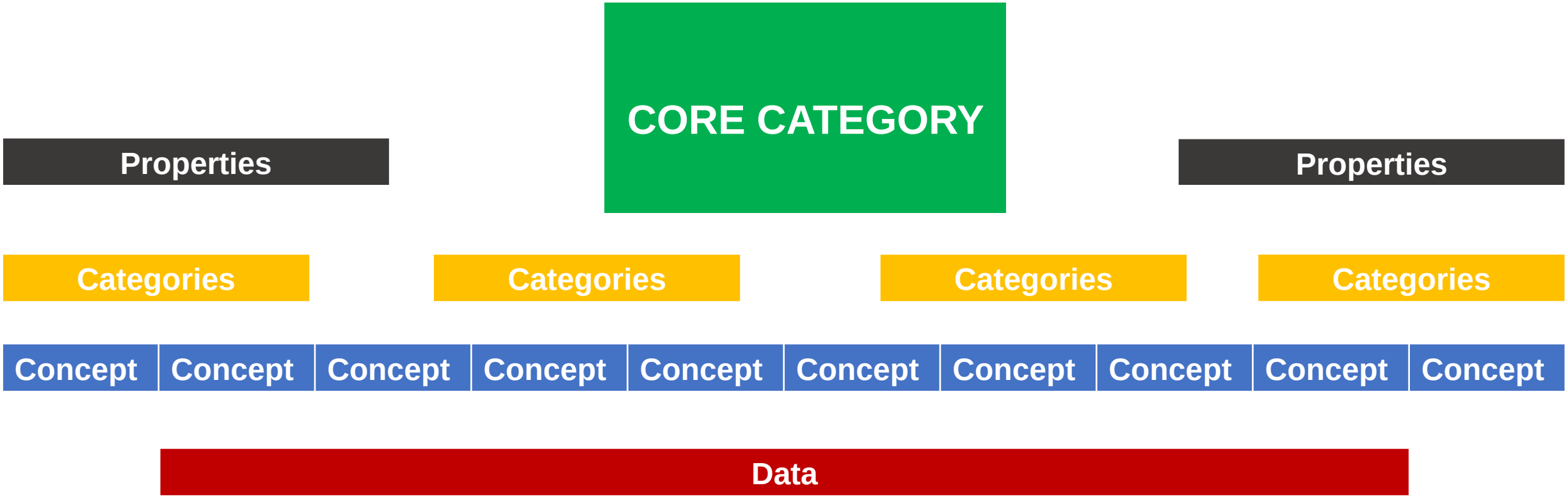
3. Data Analysis: Coding & Categorising



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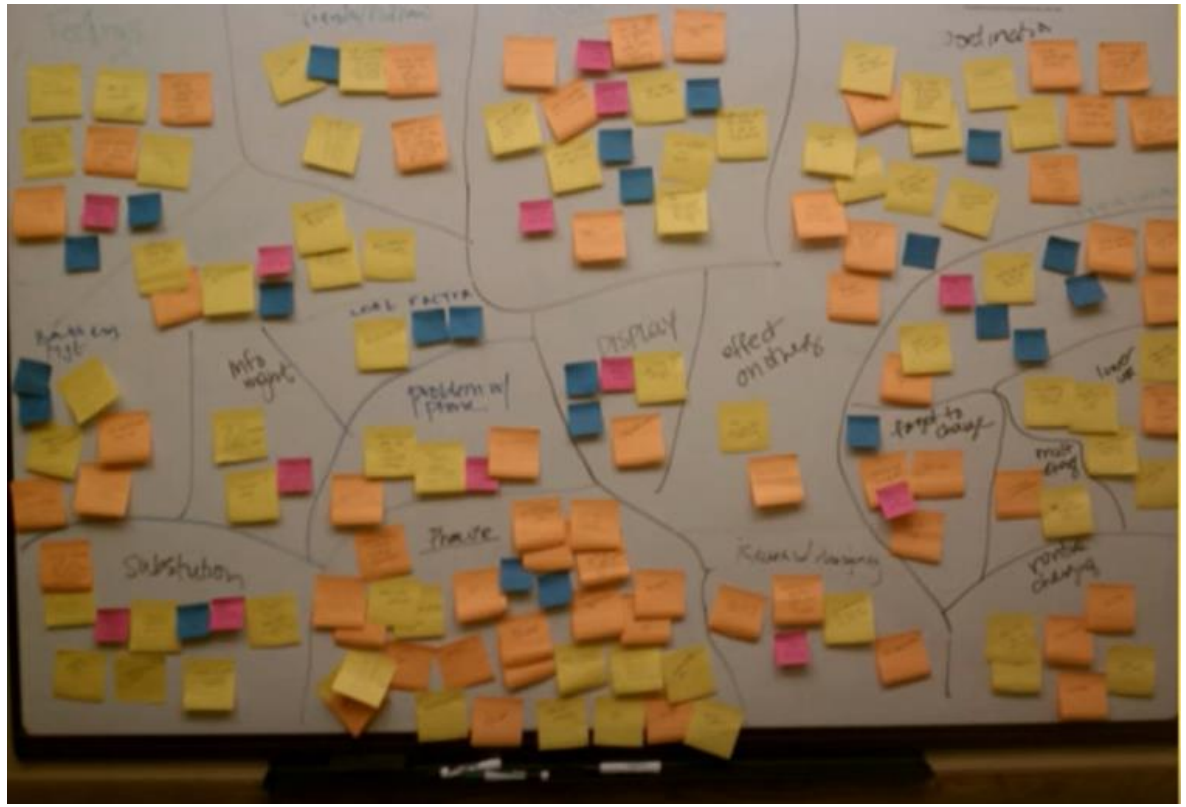
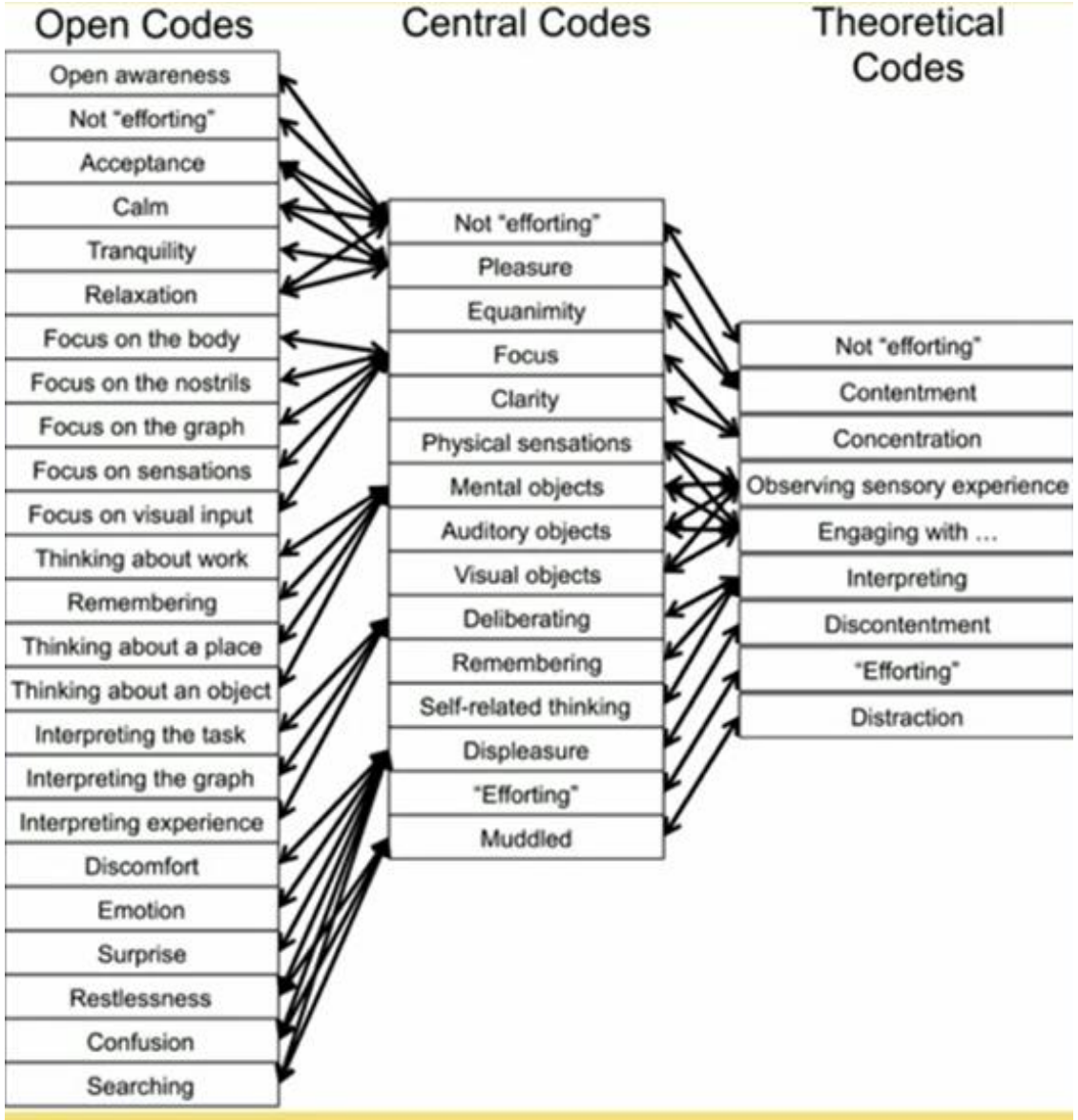
3. Coding & Categorising





4. Core Category

- The researcher must discover the ‘core category’. In grounded theory this is the major category which links all others. This core category should be woven into the whole of the study.

- The major characteristics of a core category are:
  - It must be a central element of the research related to other categories and explain variations.
  - It must recur often in the data and be a part of a pattern
  - It connects with other categories without a major effort by the researcher
  - The core category develops in the process of identifying, describing and conceptualising.
  - The core category is usually fully developed only towards the end of the research.

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5. Constant Comparison

- Coding and categorising involves constant comparison.
- Initial interviews are analysed and codes/concepts are developed.
- By comparing concepts and subcategories, researchers are able to group them into major categories and label them.
- When they code and categorise incoming data, they compare new categories and land those that have already been established.

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5. Constant Comparison

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6. Using the Literature

- The place of literature in a grounded theory us problematic because experts have different perspectives on this.
- Some purists believe that there should not be an initial literature review of the specific topic to be researched but instead an overview of the more general area.
- The reason for this is because researchers would not be directed to particular issues in their field and instead their own data would retain priority.
- Other commentators feel that an initial review sensitises the researcher to issues related to the topic and stimulates questions to be asked.
- GT researchers must give justification of their approach. Irrespective, they must not generate a focus from other people's studies but rather from their own data which must have priority.

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Versions of Grounded Theory

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The Climb for Theory

- 3 Different Versions of Grounded Theory
- All 3 wish to reach ‘Theory’ (at the top of the mountain).
- 1 version of GT wants to give you clear steps and procedures in order to climb the mountain.
- A 2nd version would tell you to just go out there, climb the mountain and have fun!
- The 3rd form of GT would say your climb depends on how you construct this mountain and the certain route and this will effect how you climb.

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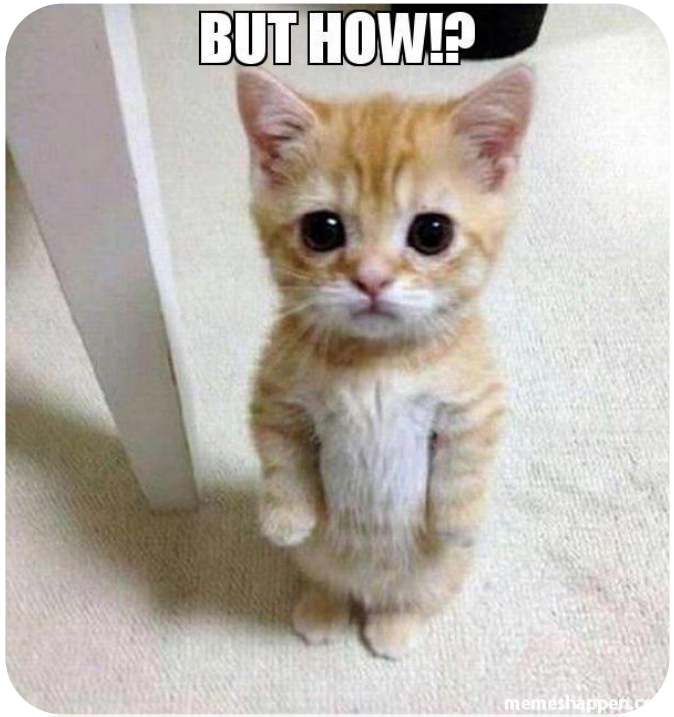
How Did This Happen?!

- Glaser and Strauss (1967) *'The Discovery of Grounded Theory'* during the 'Summer of Love'…

LOVE ENDED



- Glaser (1978) *'Theoretical Sensitivity'* & was a companion to former work about how to go about interpreting and creating a theory with many original ideas.
- Strauss & Corbin (1990) *'The Basics of Grounded Theory Methods'* & this presented a recipe for the methodology.
- Glaser (1992) *'Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis'*.
- Charmaz (2006) *'Constructing Grounded Theory'*.

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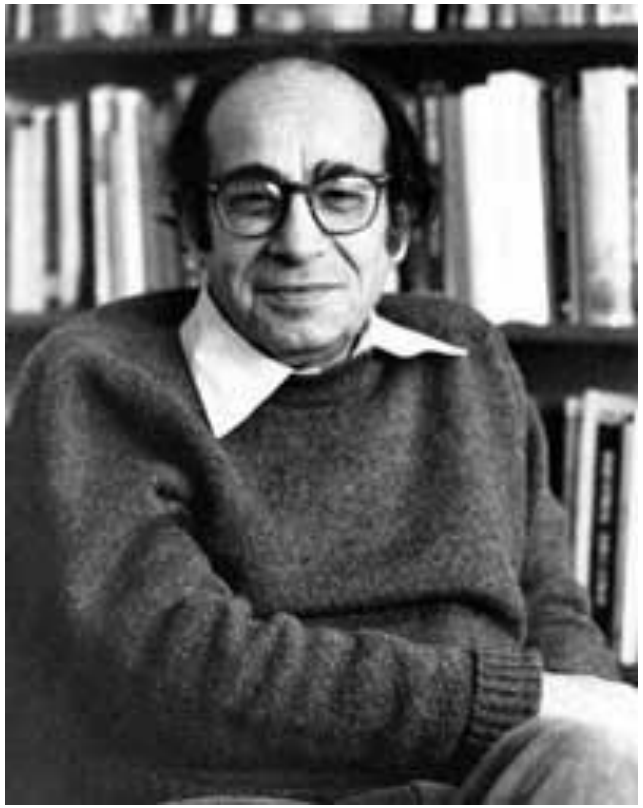
Glaser, Strauss & Charmaz



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Differences in GT Approaches

- **Straussian Grounded Theory** is considered very prescriptive and has a strong focus on procedures. It has been referred to as a recipe group and is the most popular grounded theory approach. For example there is a detailed account of how one should code – open coding, development of concepts, linking of concepts etc.

- **Glaserian Grounded Theory** is considered as the 'classical' approach. Glaserian theory is much less formalized – no need to transcribe all your data; note-taking is often enough. It is much less standardised and there is an acknowledgement that coding can be done in many different ways – not the specific way that Strauss identified. In other words – do away with all the small steps and just do constant comparative analysis!

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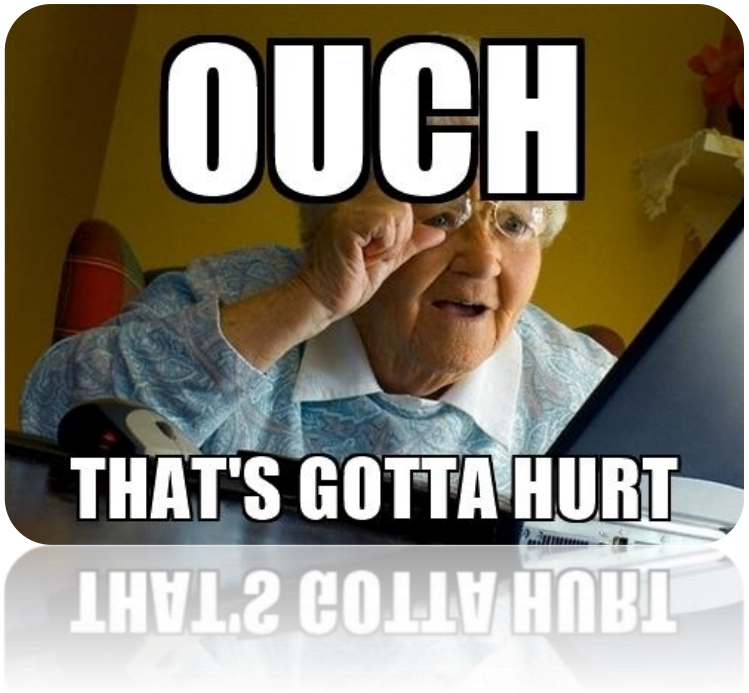
Glaser on Strauss



"Strauss' Method of labelling and then grouping is totally unnecessary, laborious and a waste of time. Using constant comparison method gets the analyst to the desire conceptual power quickly, with ease and joy. Categories emerge upon comparison and properties emerge upon more comparison. And that is all there is to it"

Glaser, Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis, 1992; pg. 43

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Differences in GT Approaches

- **Constructivist Grounded Theory** (Charmaz, 2006) is a newer approach to grounded theory. It recognises the researcher as a co-constructor of meaning. In other words, meaning is not objectively pulled out of people – it is co-constructed within interactions. Charmaz takes elements from both Glaser and Strauss (i.e. emphasis on coding – but also focus on constant comparison and theoretical sampling).

It is recommended that grounded theory researchers state what school they stand (i.e. Strauss, Glaser or Constructivist) – you can't take parts from all 3! This will enable the researcher to write about their methodology in precise terms rather than using a broad GT approach.

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Summary

I. The aim of the GT approach is the generation (or modification) of theory.

II. Data usually are collected through interviews, observations and other data sources.

III. Data collection and data analysis interact.

IV. Researchers code and categorise transcripts from interviews or fieldnotes.

V. The researcher has a dialogue with the literature when discussing categories and findings.

VI. Throughout the analytic process, constant comparison and theoretical sampling takes place.

VII. The theory that is generated has ‘explanatory power’ and is ‘grounded’ in the data.

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