The SAGE Handbook *of* Grounded Theory

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Introduction
Grounded Theory Research: Methods and Practices

Antony Bryant and Kathy Charmaz

PRE-EMINENT QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD

The Grounded Theory Method (GTM) comprises a systematic, inductive, and comparative approach for conducting inquiry for the purpose of constructing theory (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz & Henwood, 2007). The method is designed to encourage researchers' persistent interaction with their data, while remaining constantly involved with their emerging analyses. Data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously and each informs and streamlines the other. The GTM builds empirical checks into the analytic process and leads researchers to examine all possible theoretical explanations for their empirical findings. The iterative process of moving back and forth between empirical data and emerging analysis makes the collected data progressively more focused and the analysis successively more theoretical.

GTM is currently the most widely used and popular qualitative research method across a wide range of disciplines and subject areas. Innumerable doctoral students have successfully completed their degrees using GTM. An extensive and expanding literature on the method has developed in research reports where it has been used, and in discussions concerning its general precepts and how it might best be understood, developed, and taught to others. Its extensive use in specific practice professions has led to significant advances in those practice fields. Using its originators Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss's (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) own terms, GTM has 'grab' and 'fit'; it is clearly 'a good thing'.

GTM is now so much a part of the methodological inventory of so many disciplines and subject domains that scholars may forget that it only came into existence 40 years ago with the publication of Glaser and Strauss's initial publication, *Awareness of Dying* (1965a). Soon after, the key canonical text, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967) followed. Indeed as Stefan Timmermans and Iddo Tavory discuss in Chapter 23, based on a keyword search in databases

of sociological publications, GTM did not become the dominant qualitative methodology until the late 1980s. Furthermore, they associate this rise to pre-eminence with the publication of Anselm Strauss's *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (1987) followed soon after by Strauss and Corbin's 'user-friendly' *Basics of Qualitative Research* (1990).

Whether or not Timmermans and Tavory are correct in their interpretation of their data, by 2000 Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, and Vetter could report in their bibliometric survey of qualitative methods that for the period 1991–1998, GTM received 2622 citations in the Social Science Citation Index out of a total of 4134 citations to all types of methods, quantitative as well as qualitative—almost 64% of the total; with the remaining percentage shared between 11 other methods. Noting their congruent findings with those of others such as Coffey, Holbrook, and Atkinson (1996), and Lee and Fielding (1996), Titscher et al. argue that these findings 'suggest that grounded theory is the most prominent among the so-called *qualitative* approaches to data analysis. *This does not mean that the methodologies developed by Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser are used to any great extent*' (2000: 74, italics added). Lee and Fielding's correct assessment of the discrepancy between claiming use of the method and actual evidence of this continues today. This *Handbook* aims to substantiate the attributes and contributions afforded by GTM, at the same time clarifying the ways in which researchers have developed and adapted it in use. The *Handbook* also demonstrates how GTM has been influential and influenced by other methods in various fields and disciplines.

Titscher et al. explain the predominance of GTM in part by the enormous number of citations of Glaser and Strauss's *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, *Awareness of Dying*, and *Time for Dying* books, whereas other approaches do not have such specific and widely acclaimed core texts. (Kearney, in Chapter 6, describes these three texts as 'the definitive GT tutorial'.) Yet, as Lee and Fielding note: '[W]hen qualitative researchers are challenged to describe their approach, reference to *grounded theory* has the highest recognition value. But the very looseness and variety of researchers' schooling in the approach means that the tag may well mean something different to each researcher' (1996: 3.1).

Certain perceptive readers might, at this stage, take exception to our focus on qualitative research in this introduction. They might point out that Glaser strongly maintains that GTM is a method that can use all forms of data: qualitative and quantitative. Glaser has consistently made this argument over the years, but it is worth noting that the full title of Glaser and Strauss's book was *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*.[1]

In a similar way, ambiguous and contested meanings of the term 'Grounded Theory' itself become readily apparent. As used most commonly in the literature, the term Grounded Theory can lead to confusion. In some cases it refers, correctly, to the result of the research process, i.e. a grounded *theory*; but in many other cases it refers to the *method* used in the research process (Charmaz, 2003).

Strictly speaking a Grounded Theory is exactly that: A theory that has resulted from the use of the GTM. In common parlance, however, the term refers to the method itself, and the title of the *Handbook* adopts and follows this usage. In some individual chapters, as well as in this Introduction, the authors have adopted the term Grounded Theory Method (GTM) to refer to the method. The term Grounded Theory (GT) then refers to the result of using that method. Quotes from specific sources use the original authors' own terms. In most cases, the context in which the authors use the term resolves any actual ambiguity. The methods world will have to accept that the phrase Grounded Theory has now become part of common parlance, resonating with both meanings: the method and the resulting theory.

GROUNDED THEORY METHOD: A CONTESTED CONCEPT

The contested status of grounded theory methods, however, is not so easily resolved. Gallie (1956) first propounded the idea of an 'essentially contested concept' in 1956; specifically with regard to political terms such as 'power' and 'democracy'. Since then, scholars have often applied the label of 'contested concept' to any term that elicits substantial disagreement. Gallie himself offered a set of clear 'minimal criteria' for scholars to view a concept as *essentially contested*. Bryant's (2006) explanation of Gallie's criteria follows:

(1) the concept must be 'appraisive in the sense that it signifies or accredits some kind of valued achievement', i.e. deemed to be significant and valuable;
(2) the achievement 'must be of an internally complex character, for all its worth is attributed to it as a whole';
(3) this complexity of praiseworthy achievement leads to a variety of descriptions of the nature and process of the achievement;
(4) the achievement must be 'open', in the sense that there has been 'considerable modification in the light of changing circumstances' which could not have been predicted;
(5) those who use the term must recognize that their specific use 'is contested by those of other parties … to use an essentially contested concept means to use it against other uses and to recognize that one's own use of it has to be maintained against other uses'. It has to be used 'aggressively and defensively';
(6) there must be some 'original exemplar whose authority is acknowledged by all the contestant users of the concept', failing which there is the risk of 'radical confusion';
(7) the continuous competition for acknowledgement should enable the 'original exemplar's achievement to be sustained and/or developed in optimum fashion'.[2]

When applying Gallie's criteria to GT/GTM, it certainly qualifies as a contested concept, and labeling it as such usefully allows us to identify the following aspects:

(1) 'Appraisive'. GTM clearly fulfils this criterion, as has already been pointed out, the method has 'high recognition value' and claims for its use provide partial validation of a researcher's study.

(2) 'Internally complex character'. This criterion certainly applies in the sense that the achievement of GTM has been to redefine the character of qualitative research, and of social research methods in general. Only the most myopic and outdated overview of even quantitative research methods could fail to acknowledge the impact of GTM.
(3) 'Variety of descriptions'. This criterion is a central feature of GTM; with an embarrassment of riches in terms of 'variety', albeit with many authors contending that some descriptions of the method have moved well beyond its claimed confines.
(4) 'Considerable modification in the light of changing circumstances'. Again another criterion that is all too evident in the paths taken by its proponents since 1967.
(5) 'Used aggressively and defensively'. The GTM literature is replete with examples of precisely such efforts. Diverse researchers often take Glaser's position, and those who work with him, to be that his writings embody 'classic GTM', with all other forms being secondary, partial, or not GTM at all but rather mere 'description' or Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA). In fact, Glaser now seems far more amenable to the possibility of alternative conceptions of GTM than in the past. Other grounded theorists, while recognizing Glaser's unique and continuing contribution and influence, would maintain that their chosen perspective on GTM holds at least equivalent validity. In addition, methodologists who do not claim grounded theory allegiance have raised criticisms of the method and of how various researchers have used it. These criticisms range from its emphases on induction, agency, and presumed emphasis on micro studies to disapproval of some grounded theorists' small samples and trite analyses as well as inattention to epistemological questions and integration with extant literatures.
(6) 'Original exemplar'. No problem here; the original exemplar is *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* or the combined GTM tutorial provided by *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, *Awareness of Dying*, and *Time for Dying*. Having a clear original exemplar does not, however, preclude 'radical confusion' since several candidates for additional exemplars draw either from Glaser's writings or those of Strauss, and some users of GTM, particularly in fields outside traditional social science still seem unaware of the divergences among them (see Smit & Bryant, 2000).
(7) 'Continuous competition for acknowledgement'. Again this criterion is readily apparent in regard to GTM. We would like to think that this *Handbook* exemplifies the diverse ways in which the original exemplar's achievement has been sustained in optimum fashion.

In sum, GTM is a contested concept, yet we argue that its contested nature does not detract from its value and contribution. On the contrary, it accentuates the ways in which the method has redrawn the methods map, brought to the fore some of the central practical and philosophical methods issues, and initiated a flourishing interest in methods enhancement and development. The *Handbook* serves as an indication of this rich profusion and promise.

GLASER AND STRAUSS AND BEYOND: MASTERS AND APPRENTICES

The two founders of GTM have left their indelible marks upon this method, far more so than is the case with founders of other methods. Moreover, the ways in which Glaser and Strauss each went in distinct directions after their initial collaboration have also had significant impact on the method. The considerable growth in interest in GTM dates from the late 1980s, the period following their divergence. Thus many researchers who claimed use of the method in the early

1990s often did so with near exclusive reference to Strauss and Corbin's work, assuming it to be a seamless development from *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. By the late 1990s, however, only those researchers who had not come across Glaser's (Glaser, 1992) arguments would have been unaware of the distinct differences between Glaser's and Strauss's writings about GTM.

Strauss died in 1996, but his ideas continue to have currency, and as many of the chapters in the *Handbook* evidence, to some extent our authors reaffirm his contribution to grounded theory. Indeed Timmermans and Tavory argue that Strauss's work in the late 1980s, particularly *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (1987) and *Basics of Qualitative Research* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) re-established Strauss's role in GTM. Although long recognized by many symbolic interactionists, many other scholars now see and stress the links between Strauss's early work and that of the American pragmatists such as Mead and Dewey, and the writings of Peirce, as crucial influences on his initial contribution to GTM, and to his later methodological writings. Janice Morse and Jörg Strübing in particular discuss these issues in Chapters 11 and 27, respectively, and Adele Clarke and Carrie Friese build on Strauss's pragmatism. Strauss's later writings also come closer to the centre of attention, particularly his *Continual Permutations of Action* (1993), to which no fewer than seven contributors refer. Thus scholars see Strauss's contribution to the GTM canon as having a far wider reach than narrow methodological questions and prescriptions because it goes well beyond the early collaborative work with Glaser, the later book on *Qualitative Research*, and the first edition of *Basics of Qualitative Research*.

Glaser continues to write about and teach GTM. His chapter here summarizes his recent ideas on formal grounded theories, and over the past few years he has produced an extensive range of books and edited collections of examples of GTM research. He continues to offer his Grounded Theory Seminar, attracting students from around the world, and states that he has despatched copies of his books to recipients in more than 40 different countries. Glaser claims continuity between the initial GTM statements, such as *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, and his later writings. He defines his position as being that of 'traditional' or 'classic' GTM, thereby distancing his view of the method from Strauss and Corbin in particular, but also from many other writers claiming the GTM mantle. In some regards, his position has changed from dismissing any other version of the method as invalid, towards a more accommodating view that at least acknowledges the existence of disparities between newer variations of the method and his authentic GTM.

Glaser played an enormous role in shaping GTM. From the outset, however, the method became more than the combined work of Glaser and Strauss. Using the current methodological terminology we might now talk of Glaser and Strauss each, individually, acting as a *lens* that refracted diverse and profound traditions (both theoretical and methodological) towards the focal point of GTM. Yet at a more empirical and immediately personal level, Glaser and Strauss had from the outset worked with Jeanne Quint on research about death and dying at the

University of California, San Francisco. Their various publications are listed in the footnotes in the introduction to *Awareness of Dying*. Quint (later Quint Benoliel) went on to develop her work based on this initial collaboration to the extent that the Washington State Nurses Hall of Fame has honoured her, and included the comment that, 'Her commitment to caring for the dying began with an early study with Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in which she assessed the way in which dying patients were cared for'. This commentary continues:

> To say that Jeanne Quint Benoliel is a 'living legend' is an understatement. She has transformed the field of care for dying people. She was the first to bring the family into care for the dying. Her research, joined with Ruth McCorkel's, continued to focus on system distress, enforced social dependency, and health outcomes for patients and the families. Taken together, Jean's contributions have helped shape the field of palliative care and hospice care. She has made legendary contributions to nursing that bring honor to the discipline. Retrieved March 23, 2007 from (http://www.wsna.org/hof/inductee.asp?id=2).

As many of the contributors to this *Handbook* indicate, Glaser and Strauss came from very different backgrounds, and their specific trajectories certainly exerted profound influences both on their early statements and examples of GTM, and on their later divergence. More critically, and again something some of our contributors comment on and demonstrate, the method spread in its early years through a form of apprenticeship and mentoring of doctoral students in sociology and nursing at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). A number of the contributors to this *Handbook* studied with Glaser or Strauss or both and, as their chapters testify, these experiences were formative and enduring.[3]

Glaser continues active promotion of GTM, and has a large group of adherents who rely upon his guidance and support in their work: both face-to-face and via E-mail. Yet even with the vast reach now possible using electronic forms of communication, this growth via apprenticeship can only account for a minute proportion of those using GTM. Certainly, key GTM figures of the second generation of Glaser and/or Strauss's former doctoral or postdoctoral students such as Kathy Charmaz, Adele Clarke, Juliet Corbin, Susan Leigh Star, Phyllis Stern, Janice Swanson, Carolyn Wiener, and Holly S. Wilson, among others, have sought to continue this tradition with their teaching and mentoring. Nonetheless, the method itself has now taken on a life of its own as evidenced by the wide range of contributions to this *Handbook*.

Given some of the key ideas about GTM, that it should produce mid-range theories grounded in the data, 'fit' the context, and generate applicable and useful analytic explanations, it is important to note that even from the outset a significant strand of practice-oriented research was manifest. Two of the three founding texts (*Awareness of Dying* and *Time for Dying*) had clear practical ramifications that Quint specifically developed. Indeed Quint's development from early collaborative work with Glaser and Strauss led to her 'legendary

contributions' to the professional practices and strategies for palliative and hospital care, and represents an early and notable exemplar of this central characteristic. It also explains to some extent why GTM has sustained the interest of people working in care and associated medical and support areas, often combining professional employment with their research activities. Quint demonstrated the usefulness of conceptualizing issues in professional practice and explicating their consequences.

In sociology in the USA, qualitative research attracted women and the UCSF doctoral program in sociology itself enrolled more women than men. During the early years of the program, most of the men who completed their degrees entered applied areas that seldom included qualitative research. After the decline of American sociology in the late 1970s, the doctoral program at UCSF narrowed its focus to medical sociology and offered specializations in women's health and ageing; all of these areas interested women students in the program.

CAUSES, CONTEXTS, AND CONDITIONS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF GROUNDED THEORY

GTM developed in very specific circumstances. The initial research projects from which the method emerged had been undertaken in the wake of Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser each suffering a close family bereavement. The Appendix to *Awareness of Dying* makes it clear that an important factor in their work on death and dying came initially from Strauss's experience in dealing with the illness and death of his mother in the early 1960s. Glaser joined forces with Strauss some 6 months after the research project had begun (around 1960), having himself just suffered the loss of his father. They worked together, and also with Jeanne Quint, publishing a number of papers mentioned in the footnotes to the opening pages of *Awareness of Dying*, first published in 1965. They also published some methodological papers at this time, including a joint paper 'Discovery of Substantive Theory: A Basic Strategy for Qualitative Analysis' (1965b) and Glaser's paper 'The Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis' (1965). These articles provided much of the groundwork for the more extended and polemical statement of the method to be found in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* when it appeared in 1967.

Chapter 1 provides further details on the respective backgrounds of Glaser and Strauss, as do other contributors, but scholars often ignore the deeply personal motivation that animated Glaser's and Strauss's commitment to GTM from the start. A similar personal commitment remains an important factor to this day amongst many GTM practitioners as many chapters in this handbook very much evidence both in content and style of presentation.[4] Yet had early grounded theory works simply gained their inspiration from the originators' personal

commitment, then it is unlikely that the method would have flourished in the ways it has. Glaser and Strauss, together and individually, brought with them: (1) a shared dissatisfaction with current trends in US social science research; (2) a wide range of ideas drawn from their distinctive backgrounds and experiences; and (3) an innovative and perceptive orientation to the practices and skills required for research in contemporary social settings. The chapters by Eleanor Covan, Susan Leigh Star, and Phyllis Stern each attend, in some manner, to how Glaser's and Strauss's particular individual experiences, training, temperament, and interests influenced the background and development of the method. We do not wish to imply that the emergence of GTM can simply be understood in terms of a biographical concoction of the two; but neither do we disavow that these issues have impact.

None of our contributors has sought to apply either Glaser's 'Six Cs': '*Causes*, *Context*, *Contingencies*, *Consequences*, *Covariances*, and *Conditions*' (see Glaser, 1978) or Strauss and Corbin's 'conditional matrix' (1990, 1998) to the development of GTM itself, but it would be an interesting exercise to apply these two approaches as heuristic devices to shed light upon the originators' trajectories, convergence, and divergence.[5] Seeking to account for the emergence and subsequent development of GTM in terms of the *Causes*, *Context*, *Contingencies*, *Consequences*, *Covariances*, and *Conditions* might well be an illuminating exercise, albeit one open to the criticism of constructing post hoc reifications rather than shedding light on important conjunctures. Similarly Strauss and Corbin's (1990) conditional matrix might be able to provide an alternative conception of the shared framing of GTM and its originators' subsequent differences.

Indeed using these two approaches might provide a way in which the explanatory power and shortcomings of each could be assessed. In addition it would contribute to a key deficiency in much of the GTM-related literature, i.e. a lack of in-depth use of key strategies of the method itself. Far too many references to GTM fail to get much beyond a few slogans or mantras supposedly corroborated by reference to key texts, as if the rich detail and complexities magically flow from the latter. For instance, any attempt to apply the conditional matrix would result in the realization that the 1990 version differs significantly from the 1998 one (Charmaz, 2005, 2006; Clarke, 2005). Strauss was a theorist of action, not of individuals. For him, action formed the core of experience and of sociological analysis. The 1990 version of *Basics of Qualitative Research* better represents Strauss's emphasis on action and interaction and their relation to meso and macro social contexts, although the linked spirals of the 1998 version imply trajectory and connections. Thus tracing a path around the 1990 version of the conditional matrix (see Strauss & Corbin, 1990) would encompass the range and type of structural conditions influencing and being affected by incorporating the co-founders' methodological actions taken together as well as viewed separately. A similar exercise might be attempted for GTM itself as it has developed since the 1960s.

This point exemplifies one of the key strengths of the method: Its ability to give rise to and illustrate the practical use of key research practices and conceptual tools, albeit with the likelihood that such facilities and potentialities will themselves give rise to limited and mechanical applications and to the emergence of new and syncretic forms of the method itself. Several contributors make this point; e.g. Margaret Kearney, notes that students subjected Strauss to constant pressure in the 1980s and 1990s to outline simple step-by-step recipes for generating grounded theories. Strauss responded by offering heuristics, rules-of-thumb, that all-too-often students saw as virtual rules to be followed regardless of the research context.

A CELEBRATION OF DIFFERENCE?

We have deliberately entitled this introduction 'Grounded Theory Research: Method**s** and Practice**s**', since we both firmly see many of the developments from *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*-vintage GTM as strengths and enhancements of GTM, rather than as dissipations and diversions. Our view does not imply that we welcome all such developments. For instance, we have not found axial coding to be a productive research strategy, because it relies far too much on preconceived prescriptions. In addition, we have serious reservations about the conditional matrix in either of its forms. Such techniques cannot be mechanically applied. In an analogous way that extant concepts should earn their way into a grounded theory analysis, so too should using preconceived methodological tools. Such use should only occur after researchers carefully assess whether a given technique has earned its way into their respective methodological repertoires for their specific research problems (Charmaz, 2007). Thus in his chapter, Bruno Hildenbrand provides an example of a good fit between the conditional matrix and his developing analysis.

Ultimately, the maturity of a method will most likely result in the development of a range of related strands, some of which may well appear to be vastly different from the original. The progenitors of GTM have changed, modified, or eliminated major methodological strategies themselves. Carolyn Wiener points out that Strauss dispensed with writing memos directly and instead relied on transcriptions of team meetings. Glaser (2003) recently changed his stance on the grounded theory quest to discover a single basic social process. Certainly, such developments will test the tolerance of the method practitioners and of the key statements of the method itself. In so doing, disputes will arise concerned with issues such as the core features of the method, the possible and viable interpretations of its key characteristics, whether or not some new or hybrid form of the method is actually a valid or legitimate variation rather than an anathema, and the extent to which particular applications or exemplars of the method-in-use demonstrate its flexibility or undermine its integrity. This is not unique to GTM, Bob Dick's chapter charts a similar set of developments in the context of Action Research.

Two important, and related, issues arise in this regard: First, to what extent are statements about methods prescriptive, advisory, or heuristic? Second, at what point do the differences between variations outweigh the similarities? The first issue concerns the ways in which researchers and writers regard the invocations of GTM texts. Some scholars see methods statements as detailed prescriptions for research practices and procedures, while others look upon them as guidelines or heuristics. These ambiguities pertain to GTM but, moreover, apply to all statements about methods. Responsibility for the adopted orientation lies at least as much with the reader (practising researcher) as the writer (methods author). Some methods are offered by their progenitors from the very start as a basis for variation and interpretation, while others are couched far more towards the prescriptive end of the spectrum.

In practice, the initial intentions of the methods progenitors do not really seem to matter. Some researchers will advocate strict adherence, but others will seek to follow or develop variations; with ensuing arguments concerning whose approach has greater validity or authenticity. The resulting tensions have particularly affected the history and development of GTM, especially once Glaser and Strauss themselves took their different paths.

The originators taking different paths leads to the second issue: At what point do such differences lead to a move from 'variations on a theme' to 'a different method in its own right'? This question holds fundamental relevance for GTM, since anyone looking at the range of statements and exemplars on offer will need to take some stand in this regard. Clearly, a fairly specific and widely acknowledged group of initial, canonical texts include statements or exemplars of the method: *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, *Awareness of Dying*, and *Time for Dying* are the obvious ones. Yet the subsequent trajectories of Glaser and Strauss severely undermine taking these texts as a basis for a sustained and seamless understanding of GTM.

Glaser contends that his writings since these early statements do indeed continue to offer a genuine continuation of and adherence to the early GTM sources. The alternative path taken by Strauss, particularly in his collaboration with Corbin, attests to at least one other point of view. Furthermore, at least since Charmaz's chapter in the second edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2000), further diversification of the method has occurred, although the underpinnings of her view were apparent in her 1990 article, 'Discovering Chronic Illness: Using Grounded Theory'. At the simplest level, we have the Glaserian school of GTM, the Strauss and Corbin school, and the Constructivist. The integration of methodological developments of the past 40 years distinguishes Constructivist Grounded Theory. This version emphasizes how data, analysis, *and methodological strategies* become constructed, and takes into account the research contexts and researchers' positions, perspectives, priorities, and interactions.

Many scholars would agree that GTM has three versions; nevertheless, for some scholars, GTM is actually far more diverse. In Chapter 21, Norman Denzin lists seven different versions of GTM; 'positivist, postpositivist, constructivist,

objectivist, postmodern, situational, and computer assisted'. The distinctions between some of these remain unspecified, and some overlap. In any case, the most articulated forms of the method fall fairly readily into the three given above.

GROUNDED THEORY METHOD AS A FAMILY OF METHODS

Anyone contemplating the GTM landscape must grasp the inherent complexity of what might be termed the 'family of methods claiming the GTM mantle'. This point may not seem significant to experienced researchers, but to those new to research, particularly if faced with methods examinations and submissions to research committees, the issues are immediate and vital. Understanding them allows novices to make informed choices and to articulate rationales supporting their choices.

Consideration of GTM as a 'family of methods' deliberately evokes Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblances' which he introduced in his *Philosophical Investigations* to demonstrate how similarities are often based on judgements around ideas that are not amenable to clear and precise definitions. Thus according to Wittgenstein, we all know what a 'game' involves. We can successfully apply this term to many diverse activities that do not all share common attributes, but do share some common characteristics with some other games. Wittgenstein writes:

> Consider for example the proceedings that we call 'games'. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? Don't say: There must be something common, or they would not be called 'games' but look and see whether there is anything common to all. For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but look! (Wittgenstein, 1953, aphorism 66).

Note that Wittgenstein's admonition 'don't think, but look!' is similar to many GTM statements concerning the primacy of grounded observation over preconceptions. More critically for our present discussion, his argument centres on similarities and relationships that can apply to GTM itself. Every contributor to this *Handbook* has studied, applied, taught, and/or written about GTM. Yet each one will have his or her own ideas of what precisely constitutes GTM, and these specific (idiosyncratic) ideas form a family of resemblances in much the same way as Wittgenstein describes them.

Wittgenstein states:

> I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblances'; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. And I shall say: 'games' form a family (Wittgenstein, 1953, aphorism 67).

Now we can readily extend this metaphor of family resemblances so that, just as in real families, membership becomes contested or individuals

become excluded. Given the pre-eminence of GTM, many researchers have good reason to claim the mantle of GTM in some manner, and for others to challenge what they regard as illegitimate claims and claimants. Correspondingly, those who see the method as fostering incomplete data collection or mundane explanations will distance themselves from it, as do those who are antagonistic towards inductive qualitative research.

Unlike Wittgenstein's example of games, however, novices cannot obviously and intuitively grasp GTM. Rather, it takes a good deal of effort and insight to develop sufficient confidence with the method to make these sorts of judgements. Indeed, in putting this *Handbook* together, we intend our readers to view it as a basis for discussion and debate from which students can learn, and upon which experts can apply their insights; certainly not as the only statement about the method, albeit one with some definitive status.

Teaching GTM often requires that instructors treat a set of procedures as if they were rules. Yet learning how to *use* GTM necessitates moving beyond rules to a more profound, more nuanced, and more resilient understanding of the key principles of the method. Thus Strauss worried about students' persistent requests for a clear set of procedures for doing GTM. Ironically, however, Strauss and Corbin's *Basics of Qualitative Research* achieved its popularity to some extent precisely because it seemed to offer just this sort of GTM manual. Some have termed it a cookbook approach, in which the authors discuss the ingredients, procedures, and outcomes in explicit detail, with clear instructions derived from decomposing complex activities into small-scale, simpler tasks. Yet a cookbook can also provide a foundation from which imaginative cooks can develop their own versions of the recipes. (Kearney notes in Chapter 6 that, as GTM grew in popularity, Strauss was constantly asked for a restatement of the method in recipe form.)

We argue for viewing GTM as a family of methods along the lines suggested by Wittgenstein. The *Handbook* then indicates the extent to which scholars invoke differences of approach and of substance, and specify the relationships between their respective approaches and substantive analyses. Many of the contributors themselves offer ideas about the essential properties or features of GTM; Stern's paper specifically focuses on this issue. In some cases the authors define a set of criteria. For instance Wiener states that she considers the following to be 'integral to following GTM':

- data gathering, analysis and theory construction proceed concurrently;
- coding starts with first interview and/or fieldnotes;
- memo writing also begins with first interview and/or fieldnotes;
- theoretical sampling is the disciplined search for patterns and variations;
- theoretical sorting of memos sets up the outline for writing the paper;
- theoretical saturation is the judgement that there is no need to collect further data;
- identify a basic social process that accounts for most of the observed behaviour.

Urquhart outlines a set of guidelines, five in all, which centre on:

- doing a literature review for orientation;
- coding for theory not superficial themes;

- use of theoretical memos;
- building the emerging theory and engaging with other theories;
- clarity of procedures and chain of evidence.

Jane Hood argues that three features of GTM distinguish it from any other research methods: '(1) theoretical sampling, (2) constant comparison of data to theoretical categories, and (3) focus on the development of theory via theoretical saturation of categories rather than substantive verifiable findings'. She terms these the 'troublesome trinity', since as well as being 'essential properties of Grounded Theory' they are 'also the most difficult for researchers to understand and apply'. Hood directs her entire chapter to demonstrating distinctive properties of GTM, differentiating it from what she terms the 'Generic Inductive Qualitative Model'. As many readers already know, Glaser has consistently sought to distinguish between GTM and what he terms 'Qualitative Data Analysis' (QDA).

Other authors make somewhat less expansive statements about the 'core' of GTM. Thus Karen Locke argues that at its heart GTM consists of a set of 'research procedures and practices that help us to initiate, organize and carry forward our thinking relative to our engagements with the field, for example, coding, continuous comparing, iterative sampling in light of developments in thinking, diagramming, memo writing, and so on'. Meanwhile Denise O'Neil Green, John W. Creswell, Ronald J. Shope, and Vicki L. Plano Clark see the method as 'a qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, action, or interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants'.

Other contributors and GTM researchers will perhaps have their own particular ways of summarizing the key features of the method. One of us has recently presented a specific account, which includes the following summary:

> Grounded theory involves taking comparisons from data and reaching up to construct abstractions and then down to tie these abstractions to data. It means learning about the specific and the general—and seeing what is new in them—then exploring their links to larger issues or creating larger unrecognized issues in entirety. An imaginative interpretation sparks new views and leads other scholars to new vistas. Grounded theory methods can provide a route to see beyond the obvious and a path to reach imaginative interpretations (Charmaz, 2006: 181).

GROUNDED THEORY PARADOXES AND PERPLEXITIES, COMPLEXITIES AND CONUNDRUMS

A close reading of the chapters in this *Handbook* brings to the fore a number of major issues concerning GTM, some of which are certainly paradoxical and confusing to novice researchers, and perhaps even to those with more experience. Following Glaser's maxim 'all is data', we subjected the chapters for this *Handbook* to a light-touch coding exercise that resulted in a series of themes or concepts highlighting many key issues regarding GTM and its use in current research practice.

What is grounded in GTM: the categories, the concepts, or the theory?

This query is one of those deceptive questions; at first sight hardly worth asking, but upon reflection it raises a whole series of critical issues. The obvious and immediate answer is 'the theory'; after all it is the Grounded Theory Method. But this response then leads one to ask about the relationship between the theory, the concepts and/or categories, and the data. The categories must surely be 'grounded' in the data, since they give rise to the theory; or in Glaser's terms theories are systematically generated according to the procedures of GTM.

This answer, however, results in a further consideration: What does 'grounding' mean? Glaser correctly admonishes those researchers who fail to rise above what he terms 'description'. Yet he also criticizes those who leap to generate theoretical statements without regard for systematic data collection and analysis, and calls such statements 'immaculate conjectures' or 'immaculate conceptualizations'. Again the traps for the novice and the unwary are legion without further insight and guidance. A researcher embarking upon use of GTM will have to avoid the Scylla of 'mere description' on the one side, and the Charybdis of 'immaculate conceptualization' on the other.

One problem actually lies in the way in which the term data is understood in GTM, and the ambiguities in the early GTM works. Several contributors (e.g. Holton, Kearney, and Locke) point out that data play a double-edged role in GTM. The method certainly encourages, even commands, researchers to gather data in one form or another; and many GTM researchers seem guided by the motto 'everything is data'. But this motto is not meant to imply that 'data is everything', on the contrary, as Kearney remarks in Chapter 6, 'Glaser and Strauss were much more comfortable writing *at a distance from data* than are authors of current qualitative reports in the practice disciplines' (stress added).

GTM products that really have 'grab' and 'fit' probably do so because the researchers have managed to sustain this balancing act between 'grounding' and 'distancing', thereby producing substantive conceptualization. Again Kearney sums this up by noting that Glaser and Strauss favoured 'theoretical density over descriptive amplification'. This observation leads us to consider two other related issues: the nature of data and the sense in which GTM research encompasses and perhaps even requires researchers to make imaginative leaps from the data.

Data

The term 'data' is central to the early writings of GTM, and indeed continues to act as a pivotal identifier for the method. Yet, as we point out in Chapter 1, and as other contributors such as Adele Clarke and Carrie Friese, Katja Mruck and Günter Mey, Virginia Olesen, and Susan Leigh Star would concur, the term itself is fraught with problems that the GTM literature itself ignored. In our earlier works (for example, Bryant, 2002, 2003, 2006; Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001),

each of us has individually sought to incorporate key admonitions with regard to the use of the word, yet still retain the main strengths of GTM.

In the realm of IT or ICT (Information and Communications Technology) the term data has similar centrality and accompanying ambiguities, which can illustrate similar problems arising in GT. People distinguish between data and 'information', explaining the relationship between them in terms along the lines of '[D]ata is therefore raw material that is transformed into information by data processing'.

This sort of imagery appears in most popular textbooks for students of computing and information systems. It implies that human beings and computers 'process' information from data, in much the same manner as petrol is refined from crude oil. Thus, this mechanistic imagery obscures the issue of 'meaning', and mistakes the ways in which humans act in the world. We are not automatons, taking in data and then somehow processing it. As one of us has argued elsewhere (Bryant, 2006), in the context of IS and Informatics, people cannot engage directly with anything to do with data. Scanning a book into a computer is a data process; someone trying to read it (and make sense of it) immediately is in the realm of information, because it inevitably involves meaning.[6] In GTM, the very acts of defining and generating data place the researcher in the realm of meaning.

The contributions by Ian Dey, Bob Dick, Sharlene Hesse-Biber, Jo Reichertz, and many others make similar points. In GTM, the relationship between data, however defined and grasped, and the researcher is one founded on action, interaction, and interpretation. As Mruck and Mey, and Olesen imply, reflexive scrutiny of these processes helps the researcher to locate and position their data (and themselves) without reifying these data or their resulting analyses. The early GMT texts understandably emphasized the importance of 'the data', in contrast to the theoretical flights of fancy that Glaser and Strauss saw as predominant in sociological research at the time. But we are now in the position where GTM has taken its place in the methodological armoury, and the danger is that researchers will over-emphasize the role of data at the expense of other facets of the method. Hence, a number of contributors to the *Handbook* meticulously locate the role for imagination, serendipity, 'abduction', and reflexivity in GTM.

Induction, deduction, abduction

GTM is categorized as an inductive method. Induction can be defined as 'a type of reasoning that begins with study of a range of individual cases and extrapolates from them to form a conceptual category' (Charmaz, 2006: 188). In effect, it means moving from the particular to the more general; in the context of GTM it implies moving up from the detailed descriptive to the more abstract, conceptual level. One of the problems with induction is that this type of reasoning involves a leap from the particular to the general, and may rely on too limited a number of individual cases or an idiosyncratic selection. To an extent GTM

overcomes these problems with the ideas of theoretical sampling (see Chapter 7 by Jane Hood and Chapter 11 by Janice Morse, respectively) and the distinctions between substantive and formal grounded theories (see Chapter 4 by Glaser and Chapter 6 by Kearney, respectively). Indeed a close reading of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* and many other GTM books indicates a far more sophisticated philosophical position than students often glean, much less those who only glance at the texts in order to substantiate their GTM claims. Conversely, as Timmermans and Tavory explain, some of the statements on offer, particularly from 'objectivist' GTM sources, provide ammunition for critics of GTM to label it as an 'epistemological fairy tale'.

In the light of the work of those who have traced Strauss's ideas back to the American Pragmatists and the work of Charles S. Peirce, the inductive nature of GTM is now seen as only part of the story: 'abduction' plays a key role. As a way of reasoning:

> Abductive inference entails considering all possible theoretical explanations for the data, forming hypotheses for each possible explanation, checking them empirically by examining data, and pursuing the most plausible explanation (Charmaz, 2006: 188).

The chapters by Strübing and Locke mention abduction, but Jo Reichertz deals specifically with the topic, remarking on the 'secret charm of abduction' since it combines both the rational and the imaginative aspects of research; the former by defining a logical form of inferencing, and the latter by acknowledging the role played by insight and institution. Although no specific mention of the term abduction appears in any of the writings of Glaser and Strauss, or Strauss himself, a strong case can be made that *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* and some of the other GTM works of Glaser and Strauss, collectively and individually, have abductive strands and implications, particularly when they raise issues such as theoretical sensitivity. Indeed, Reichertz makes the important point that attending to the process of abduction reunites the topics of the logic of discovery and the logic of validation or justification; bringing both into the realm of methodological consideration. Whatever one's view on abduction, and its role in GTM in practice, this new attention to the topic helps underscore how GTM far transcends the 'naïve Baconian inductivism' of which it has been accused (Haig, 1995).

Grounded Theory Method: simple yet skilful

One of the recurrent themes in many chapters is that GTM, far from being some mystical complex approach, is in fact 'simple' and straightforward. Thus Lora Lempert notes that memo making is not mystical but simple; Judith Holton sees the solution to the chaos of coding inundation as 'relatively simple', as also is recognition of the point at which to stop collecting data. Carolyn Wiener points out that, with regard to the method of constant comparison, 'the basic rule is simple'. Conversely many contributors make the point that several key facets of

GTM rely on extensive experience and skill on the part of the researcher. Wiener notes that one of the key characteristics of the team in which she worked with Strauss was that 'All of us were skilled at coding but he was especially gifted at it'. Hesse-Biber argues that one of the most difficult skills in learning qualitative analysis 'is the ability to see what is in the data'.

This paradox or ambiguity is particularly evident in discussions concerning *theoretical sensitivity*. Almost all of those who address theoretical sensitivity, comment to the effect that it is an acquired skill that does not come easily or naturally. Holton rightly asserts that '[T]heoretical sensitivity requires two things of the researcher—analytic temperament and competence'. Udo Kelle deals with this issue at some length, and he concludes that 'the previously presented two basic rules, (1) to abstain from forcing preconceived concepts, and (2) to utilize theoretical sensibility in this process, are obviously difficult to reconcile'. Moreover he notes that in the years following publication of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* the 'apparent antagonism between "emergence" and "theoretical sensitivity" remained a major problem for teaching the methodology of grounded theory'.

Theoretical sensitivity is thus a problematic concept. It is crucial in the application of GTM. But who has theoretical sensitivity? How do you get it? Who judges it? Glaser and Strauss locate it within the researcher. Certainly, some researchers have more developed theoretical proclivities than others. Abduction helps here. Being able to entertain a range of theoretical possibilities to account for a surprising finding gives the researcher material for making systematic *theoretical comparisons* in relation to the particular finding. Making theoretical comparisons not only means knowing something about theory, and at least intuitively understanding how to go about theorizing, but also means being able to play with theoretical ideas before becoming committed to a single theoretical interpretation.

GTM rightly appeals to novice researchers because it encourages them to develop their own theories rather than merely fine-tuning existing ones. They may become conceptual entrepreneurs themselves rather than just work for theoretical capitalists. Nonetheless, this point obscures the fact that use of GTM, at least as much as any other research method, only develops with experience. Hence the failure of all those attempts to provide clear, mechanistic rules for GTM: there is no 'GTM for Dummies'. GTM is based around heuristics and guidelines rather than rules and prescriptions. Moreover researchers need to be familiar with GTM, in all its major forms, in order to be able to understand how they might adapt it in use or revise it into new forms and variations.

Codes, categories, concepts

The terms 'code', 'category', and 'concept' occur as central ones within GTM writings. Some writers use two or more of these terms synonymously. Star poses the specific question 'What is a code?' and gives as a response that it 'sets up a

relationship with your data, and with your respondents'. She does not use the term category, but does use the term concept implying that it operates at a higher level of abstraction than a code. Lempert states that 'codes capture patterns and themes and cluster them under a "title" that evokes a constellation of impressions and analyses for the researcher'; and she uses the term category as a higher level code which has grown in complexity and abstraction, so subsuming other codes. Kelle distinguishes between 'data, codes and the emerging categories', and also notes that Glaser's discussion of *Theoretical Sensitivity* (1978) introduced a distinction between substantive codes and theoretical codes. Kelle sees the latter as 'terms which describe possible relations between substantive codes and thereby help to form theoretical models'. He adds that '[T]he word "codes" or "conceptual codes" is thereby used as synonymous for "categories and their properties"'. Holton equates a code with a category, and quotes from another author who equates a category with a concept; but her main focus is on the ways in which the GTM researcher develops concepts and decides upon a core category. Glaser stresses the importance of a core category in developing SGTs (substantive grounded theories) and then using this core in the conceptual move towards FGTs (formal grounded theories). Kelle invokes set theory and Venn diagrams to achieve some clarification of the terms *category* and *property*, but perhaps researchers need to clarify further distinctions between *code* and *category* and *concept*.[7] It would seem that the best working model places these terms in a hierarchy from bottom to top: respectively code, category, concept. The resulting hierarchy will not, however, appeal to those GTM researchers who see the relationship between category and concept as far more intricate. Whichever approach researchers adopt, Glaser's fundamental question 'what category is this data the study of?' must still be posed.

Theoretical codes, coding paradigms

Glaser and Strauss, individually, noted that the early founding texts of GTM were far from perfect. Glaser's chapter seeks to provide clarity and guidance on the topic of Formal Grounded Theory (FGT), noting that some of the earliest statements about FGT contained ambiguous or incomplete ideas. Both Glaser and Strauss sought in their later, distinct writings to deal with other issues of ambiguity or potential misunderstanding (see Strauss & Corbin, 1994). In some cases these efforts generally produced positive results; but in other cases, they netted fewer obvious benefits. We have already pointed out that the concept of a *coding paradigm* is problematic and to an extent undermines the power of GTM itself. A similar case can be made about Glaser's introduction of his *Theoretical Sensitivity* in 1978. To a novice researcher, Strauss's coding paradigm and Glaser's theoretical codes appear to undermine one of the basic principles of GTM: an open-minded, framework-free orientation to the research domain at the outset. Kelle points out that Glaser: (1) does not clearly explain use of these codes; (2) the codes themselves mix 'logical' with 'substantive' issues; and

finally (3) 'the employment of such an unordered list for the construction of "grounded theories" poses grave difficulties if the researcher does not have a very broad theoretical background knowledge to hand concerning the different theoretical perspectives entailed in the list'. Glaser himself has distanced himself from these codes in recent years, and as Kearney argues, Strauss remained ambivalent in dealing with the demands to offer formulae or rules-of-thumb for the application and use of GTM.

Verification and validation

Glaser and Strauss initially developed GTM as a move away from grand theory verification. They aimed to offer an alternative to young sociological researchers who, in colourful imagery, were almost exclusively tied to acting as 'proletariat testers' to their masters, the 'theoretical capitalists' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967: 10). Hence their concern in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* with 'generation' as opposed to 'verification'. But this concern then begs the question of how grounded theories themselves can be verified or validated.[8] Dey raises this issue in his discussion of how the distinction between the 'context of discovery' and the 'logic of validation' can become sullied if grounded theorists use the same data both for discovery and for validation. He quotes Kelle who argues that 'the prerequisite of independent testing requires that a hypothesis is not tested with the empirical material from which it is developed'.

Accepting the notion of such independent testing is problematic for GTM (unless we aim for *theorizing* rather than verification) because the method itself depends on coterminous data gathering, analysis, and conceptual development. Dey advises GTM researchers to be alert to these distinctions, so that '[I]f we think of validity as the extent to which a theory is well-grounded empirically *and* conceptually, then we can better appreciate the importance of theoretical consistency as well as the accuracy or acuteness of our empirical interpretations. When we develop categories, we need to take account of their theoretical underpinnings and implications as much as their efficacy with regard to the data'. Reichertz, following Peirce, states that the outcome of abductive inference can never be verified, however extensive the testing: 'All that one can achieve, using this procedure, is an intersubjectively constructed and shared *truth*'. Peirce found the idea of absolute certainty 'irresistibly comic', and so saw truth claims as at best provisional. Discussions about verification are not unique to GTM, but still remain part of current discourse on epistemology, science, and general claims to understand the real world.

Using the literature

Ever since the publication of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, concerns have arisen regarding how students and researchers should approach and use the existing literature relevant to their research topic. Holton states her view starkly, the

researcher should enter the domain with 'no preconceived problem statement, interview protocols or extensive review of literature'. Stern notes this precept approvingly, but also remarks that pressures from one's professors, funding committees, and other approval mechanism may work against being able to postpone a literature review to later (post-conceptual) stages of the research. Lempert however clearly states that she deviates from this aspect of classic GTM, not for the reasons given by Stern, but for pragmatic reasons:

> In order to participate in the current theoretical conversation, I need to understand it. I must recognize that what may seem like a totally new idea to me—an innovative breakthrough in my research—may simply be a reflection of my ignorance of the present conversation. A literature review provides me with the current parameters of the conversation that I hope to enter … It does not, however, define my research (see Chapter 12 in this *Handbook*).

Lempert's point suggests a larger problem occurring in some studies that claim grounded theory methods. Researchers may report ideas as new that have been developed in relevant literatures, sometimes by other grounded theorists. Careful *analysis* of relevant extant literatures after developing one's grounded theory can provide cues for raising its theoretical level and indicate which conversations to enter.

Barry Gibson wonders how researchers develop theoretical sensitivity without some familiarity with relevant literature. Similarly, Timmermans and Tavory point to the various statements along the lines of Holton's as the reason that many novice researchers are left in 'confused awe'. The recommendation that the researchers should enter the research domain with an open mind is sound, but many contributors point out two key flaws in taking this at face value. First, in keeping with Dey (1999; Chapter 8), an open mind does not imply an empty head. Anyone starting research will most certainly have some preconceived ideas relevant to the research area. A researcher can account for these ideas in some way, but certainly should not simply ignore them. Second, the advice about postponing exploration of the literature usually emanates from experienced researchers, who themselves have developed an extensive knowledge of a vast mass of literature together with a general familiarity with key topics and an array of concepts at their fingertips. Wiener notes Strauss's skills in analysis and coding that clearly derived from his wide experience and reading. Similarly Glaser can reel off numerous examples of substantive and formal GTs, as well as many others that do not quite make the grade. Here again, the balance arises between reliance on the literature to provide the framework to start with, something that Glaser and Strauss particularly took issue with, and having a level of understanding to provide an orientation as Lempert advises.

Grounded Theory Method and Symbolic Interactionism

The relationship between GTM and Symbolic Interactionism elicits clear disagreements. Clarke and Friese state unambiguously that '[W]ith deep roots in

symbolic interactionist sociology and pragmatist philosophy, the grounded theory method can be viewed as a theory/methods package with an interpretive, constructionist epistemology'. Glaser has been at pains to counter this assertion, devoting a specific article to countering precisely this easy identification (Glaser, 2005).

Symbolic interactionism and grounded theory have strong compatibilities. Both the theoretical perspective and the method assume an agentic actor, the significance of studying processes, the emphasis on building useful theory from empirical observations, and the development of conditional theories that address specific realities. Like symbolic interactionists, grounded theorists assume that people act, as individuals and as collectivities. The symbolic interactionist emphasis on meaning and action complements the question grounded theorists pose in the empirical world: What is happening? (Glaser, 1978).

To find out and interpret what is happening takes the researcher into meanings of action, which may be unstated or assumed. This point speaks to the major divide among grounded theorists implied above: those who treat what they see or hear and record as objective and those who see both what research participants' actions and researchers' recordings and reports as constructed. The latter position treats the research process itself as an object of scrutiny and thus embraces contemporary currents in symbolic interactionism.

The dual emphases on an agentic actor and action in both grounded theory and symbolic interaction lead researchers into attending to process rather than assuming structure. Subsequently, grounded theorists attempt to define fundamental processes and symbolic interactionists view social life as somewhat indeterminate and open-ended because it consists of interactional processes. These points reveal the pragmatist underpinnings of both symbolic interactionism and grounded theory, and have animated Strauss's work. It follows that the resulting theories would be contingent on specific conditions and modifiable as those conditions change. Glaser in particular (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) has stressed the modifiability of grounded theories. Simultaneously, however, he advocates moving towards a general, abstract level, and thus addresses explanatory 'why' questions. Symbolic interactionists have produced many studies of local phenomena that answer 'how' questions. Symbolic interactionists can and do use grounded theory strategies to advance inquiry that answers why questions without severing finished studies from the conditions of their production (see, for example, Casper, 1998; Star, 1989).

The fit between symbolic interactionism and grounded theory is extremely strong. Perhaps we should phrase the question, in pragmatist language, as follows: Do symbolic interactionism and grounded theory work as a theory-method package? Yes, absolutely. Whether they constitute a unitary theory-methods package is another question. Charmaz (1990) has long maintained that researchers from varied theoretical persuasions can adopt grounded theory strategies with sound results. Beginning from another theoretical perspective means that a researcher invokes a different or additional set of sensitizing

concepts to begin the research process (Charmaz, 2005). Yet, in any case, where one starts a grounded theory study is seldom where one ends.

Grounded Theory Method and sociological theory and practice

When Glaser and Strauss published *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, they clearly set their sights on challenging specific people and practices predominating in US social sciences at the time. In the ensuing 40 years, the people and practices have changed. GTM now perhaps joins the orthodoxy of the social sciences, although several authors depict how qualitative researchers in general and GTM practitioners in particular continue to be marginalized in US social science faculties. They also make the point that adhering to some of the central precepts of GTM is difficult in a culture where research aims and objectives have to be submitted for vetting to research boards, funding committees, and ethical approval procedures in advance of the research being undertaken; and where, once approval is granted, any deviation from the proposal requires further formal approval.

In *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Glaser and Strauss singled out various figures, including C. Wright Mills and in particular his book *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), as a target of their criticism of existing sociological methods:

> Much of C. Wright Mills' work, we believe, is exampled with only little theoretical control, though he claimed that data disciplined his theory. In contrast, grounded theory is derived from data and then illustrated by characteristic examples of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967: 5).

We share the position with many contributors to this *Handbook*, that GTM has now matured and in many regards this maturity has resulted in a revised account of the balance of skills and perspectives required for GTM. That three authors make specific mention of Mills, but in affirmative terms rather than disapproving ones, indicates the maturity of GTM. Locke and Hildenbrand each make the connection between the abductive or playful aspects of GTM, with Hildenbrand noting that Strauss in his later work referred to *The Sociological Imagination* as an example of the ways in which the grounded theorist must be *creative*. Covan sees parallels between GTM and *The Sociological Imagination* in which Mills argued for the necessity of understanding social situations by encompassing three dimensions: individual biographies, history, and social structure, and which 'is, of course, grounded in the creative process of generating theory in consideration of the same dimensions'. Lempert argues that Mills's book exemplifies a formal theory with 'analytic power' and extensive application.

Covan makes the interesting point that Glaser and Strauss share some key ideas with Durkheim. Both *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* and Durkheim's *The Rules of the Sociological Method* are based on the claim that social facts exist and that the study of these facts is a true science. Moreover, Durkheim was advocating empirical study, in opposition to the prevailing views of Comte; echoing the criticisms voiced in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Durkheim stated that

'up to the present, sociology has dealt more or less exclusively with concepts and not with things' (1938: 18–19). Covan concludes that '[L]ike Glaser and Strauss, Durkheim seemed to be motivated to explain not only how to "do sociology," but why his way was legitimate'. Moreover they shared a belief that while lay interpretations of reality were a resource for theorizing, the sociologist must transcend these. One main distinction between Durkheim's *The Rules of the Sociological Method* and GTM, however, is that Durkheim advocated classification in advance of the research activities, which GTM specifically rejects.

Serendipity and theoretical development

Several of the contributors allude to 'serendipity'. Covan rightly points to the footnote on page 2 of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* where the authors argue that although Merton referred to the 'theoretic functions of research', he failed to develop this to encompass anything like GTM. The closest he came, according to Glaser and Strauss, was in using the term 'serendipity', which they define as 'an unanticipated, anomalous, and strategic finding that gives rise to a new hypothesis' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 2). Glaser and Strauss distance GTM from serendipity, since they stressed the purposive nature of GTM in developing theoretical insights, as opposed to what might seem to be an accidental and contingent manner. Yet GTM has taken on the mantle of serendipity in different ways. In 1998, Glaser stressed the 'subsequent, sequential, simultaneous, serendipitous and scheduled' (Glaser, 1998: 15) nature of grounded theory. Wiener cautions the GT researcher to be 'ready for the serendipitous opportunity'.

Nevertheless, in the work on GTM and abduction, the concept of serendipity has taken on renewed importance. Reichertz does not specifically use the term 'serendipity' but takes great care in explaining that abductive reasoning involves 'assembling or discovering, on the basis of an interpretation of collected data, such combinations of features for which no appropriate explanation or rule in the store of knowledge already exists. This discovery causes surprise'. Moreover it results in the search for a new theory or hypothesis, precisely the grounded development of concepts and/or theories that lies at the heart of GTM. If it wasn't always apparent that GTM is all about serendipity, then it certainly is now.

Diagrams

A clear split divides those who see diagrams as critical and those who deprecate them. If a researcher proffers a diagram to Glaser, he wants to know what it means, and that implies writing or talking about it; Stern echoes this view in Chapter 5. Lempert sees diagrams as 'central in Grounded Theory work. They create a visual display of what researchers do and do not know. As such, they bring order to the data and further the total analyses'. Clarke (2005; Clarke and Friese, Chapter 17) goes even further in her approach to *Situational Analysis* which centres on the production of diagrams in various forms and at various stages.

Indeed, the division of opinion appears less marked if one notes that Lempert specifically addresses the researcher and what the researcher knows. Thus a researcher can offer a diagram as a possibly helpful way of generating concepts from what might otherwise be a chaos of data. As Lempert says, the diagram furthers the analysis, but may not provide a way of expressing it to others. Glaser bases his criticism squarely on this latter aspect of research, and GTM specifically addresses the issue of writing about one's research.

Writing Grounded Theory

An emerging trend within GTM quite correctly stresses the importance of writing about one's research. Stern specifically addresses the importance of 'skilful writing', and many GTM teachers stress that if one has carefully and consistently written memos in the course of one's research, then, once sorted, these can provide the basis and structure for the eventual research report. A related concern about skilful writing concerns those grounded theorists who present their reports to some extent in literary terms. Dey refers to this literary turn when he discusses the role of narrative in GT research. He particularly notes how a narrative framework can provide 'a vehicle for contextualizing and integrating the various elements'; in effect a form of 'grounding'. Whether or not most grounded theorists can effectively emulate this form, the attention paid in GTM literature to 'skilful writing' and forms of expression can provide a starting point for discussion with relevance to all types of research and their dissemination.

Use of support software

Increasingly, grounded theorists adopt software to expedite their analyses. We contend, however, that ultimately the research process must remain under the control of the researcher(s). Glaser and others are correct to be wary of use of software, particularly when researchers come to rely upon it. Yet, cases abound where use of some form of electronic repository, plus sorting and retrieval facilities has proved useful. Researchers must understand both the benefits and the dangers of use (and reliance upon) software support. Dey and Hesse-Biber each offer arguments in favour of its use. Dey in particular sees software as encouraging 'a more diligent and disciplined approach to the auditing of the creative process'. Glaser remains adamantly opposed to any use of GTM software support largely because he sees it as undermining researcher's creativity, and wasting large amounts of precious time and effort; he devotes a specific chapter to his concerns in *The Grounded Theory Perspective II* (Glaser, 2003: Chapter 3). Hesse-Biber offers an alternative view; 'software supports structure, enriches the learning process; Conversely use of technology may destroy the intimacy between researcher and data'. In any case, whatever one's views might be, the computer is now ubiquitous and so will be incorporated in diverse ways in all and any research settings and projects.

CONCLUSION: GTM IS ABOUT DEVELOPING GROUNDED *THEORIES*

No overview of grounded theory would be complete without a word about theorizing, the professed purpose, and promise of GTM. If the purpose of the method is to create the product (a coherent grounded theory), then how does the researcher go about it? In brief, theorizing in GTM means developing abstract concepts and specifying the relations between them. Thus, how researchers arrive at these concepts becomes a crucial part of theorizing and of grounded theory practice, more generally.

Theoretical concepts in GTM result from iterative processes of going back and forth between progressively more focused data and successively more abstract categorizations of them. Researchers focus on treating their most significant categories to further analysis and raising them to concepts in their emerging theories. Yet their means of making these theoretical moves are by no means transparent. Current discussions of GTM often address tensions between possibilities of emergent categories and the practice of theorizing. The notion of emergence has held a central place in grounded theory logic, and rhetoric. Some grounded theorists argue that categories emerge automatically when researchers study, compare, and successively focus their data. Others avow that emergence does not occur independently from interpretation and, subsequently, they cast doubt on any claims to emergence. For them, however implicit, ideas always inform categories and words alone always impart meaning.

We propose that the two positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive; nor should they be. Grounded theory strategies allow for imaginative engagement with data that simple application of a string of procedures precludes. This engagement with data creates a space where the unexpected can occur; thus, unexpected events and experiences may emerge. In keeping with Mead (1932) and Durkheim (1938), an emergent phenomenon has new and different properties from its antecedents. If so, then a grounded theorist's categories would have new and different properties from the pieces of data that prompted the researcher's idea for the category. Emergent categories arise from the researcher's skill in defining these new properties through the successively more analytic comparative processes of comparing data with data, data with code, code with code, code with category, and category with category. In short, grounded theorists can build on an epistemologically sophisticated view of emergence that allows for possibilities of emergent (but never wholly inductive) categories in the practice of theorizing.

This *Handbook* has been developed to provide a resource for researchers eager to develop their theory-building skills through engagement with a wide range of perspectives on GTM; its features and ramifications; its intricacies in use; its demands on the skills and capabilities of the researcher; and its position in the domain of research methods. As such, the 27 chapters have been divided into six sections: I Origins and History; II Grounded Theory Method and Formal Grounded Theory; III Grounded Theory in Practice; IV Practicalities; V Grounded Theory in the Research Methods Context; and VI Grounded Theory in the Context of the Social Sciences.

NOTES

1 Chapter VII of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* concerns 'Theoretical Elaboration of Quantitative Data', and so does lay the basis for Glaser's valid contention that GTM can use all kinds of data. But we would still hold to the generally accepted view that GTM is a qualitative research method, even if it can incorporate quantitative data: this characteristic is also true for many other qualitative methods.

2 This summary is taken from Bryant, 2006, where it is used with reference to the term 'information' (pp. 39–42).

3 See the chapters in this *Handbook* by Stern, Covan, Clarke, and Star, all of whom studied with both Glaser and Strauss.

4 Barney Glaser is fond of stating that 'Grounded Theory is more than a methodology, it's a way of life', and this is far less far-fetched than might appear at first glance.

5 Kearney, Gibson, Greene et al., and Hildenbrand discuss the conditional matrix; and they and several others discuss the role and nature of Glaser's *theoretical codes*.

6 Bryant, 2006.

7 Readers should refer to the *Discursive Glossary* for some of the different characterizations of these and other GTM terms.

8 Although in some contexts, particularly software development, the two terms have distinct meanings, here 'verification' and 'validation' are treated as synonyms.

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