

# Introduction to Ground Theory

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# Overview



- Background comments
- The development of Grounded Theory
  - Theoretical foundations
- Choosing the best grounded theory approach for your study
- The research process in grounded theory
- Overcoming practical problems in grounded theory



# Background comments

## ➤ Definitions

➤ Research Methods: A set of assumptions and techniques used to achieve a specific aim.

## ➤ Design

➤ Assumptions and techniques used to answer a research question

➤ May be quantitative or qualitative

➤ One part of a group of research methods

## ➤ Methodology

➤ The study of research methods



<b>Elements</b>	<b>Quantitative Paradigm</b>	<b>Qualitative Paradigm</b>
Ontology – what can be known about reality?	Truth is singular and static	Truth is multiple and dynamic
Epistemology – what is the relationship between what can be known and the knower?	Objectivist	Objectivist and Constructivist
Methodology – how should one go about finding out whatever can be known?	Ideal is control of extraneous influences	Ideal is natural environment with all extraneous influences
World View that shapes questions and analysis	Lens	Lens



# Development of Grounded Theory

## Theoretical Foundations

- Objective: to create a **theory** that is grounded in data rather than in deductive logic, and that explains a process or situation
  - Potential for generation of testable hypotheses
  - Gain insight into both process and outcome



- Theoretical foundations

- Hermeneutical philosophy

- Heidegger: *being in the world*

- Social Psychology

- George Herbert Mead: defining of self through social roles, expectations, and the perspectives of society

- Blumer: meaning is defined through interpretive interaction between individuals

- Social life is expressed through symbols

- Language is considered the most symbolic system



# Objectivist and Constructivist Perspectives

- Objectivist Perspective: Glaser
  - Began with a problem identified in daily life
  - Data collected using observations and interviews
  - Focused on building concepts and by identifying relationships between concepts
    - Codes > categories > concepts
  - Held a realist view of ontology – looked for “what is”
    - Natural world is real, apart from social constructions of time and place
  - Methodology focused on “emic” perspective
  - Developed theory using induction

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- Objectivist > Constructivist Strauss and Strauss/Corbin
    - Began with a problem in daily life
    - Coding was word by word, rather than line by line, with a shift from “what is” to “what might be”
    - Realist > relativist ontology
      - Reality exists only as a social construction
    - Originally objectivist epistemology but Corbin moved toward constructivist epistemology more recently
    - Epistemology shifted from an “emic” to an “emic/etic” perspective

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- ▶ Glaser and Strauss/Corbin agreed that during the research process, the investigator must be in a position to discard concepts originally thought important, either within their own findings or within the literature
    - ▶ Thus both fit within the logic of abductive discovery, as discussed by Peirce, but Strauss/Corbin more so.

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- Glaser and Strauss/Corbin differed primarily on the role of theoretical knowledge and its place in research
    - Glaser thought that codes and categories emerged directly from the data and that as the study progressed, the research read the related literature and wrote memo about how their new findings fit with what was already known.
    - Strauss/Corbin thought that prior theoretical knowledge influenced how one coded and interpreted data.



## ➤ Schatzman

- Foundation in symbolic interactionism
- Goal was to define a process for developing theory that was less mired in procedural steps but that would still result in a theory grounded in data.
- Begins with identification of dimensions of a some problem one wished to solve.
- Data collected through observations and interviews
- Process eventually settles on the dimension that provides the most reasonable answer to the problem, in terms of the context, conditions, process, and consequences of the problem
- Result is a detailed description
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# Constructivist Perspective

## ➤ Charmaz

- Begins with Glaserian approach to theory development but with a relativist ontology
- Was first to advocate epistemologic shift from emic perspective to emic/etic perspective.
- Explicated the process by which categories became concepts
  - Through description of properties, conditions under which it arises, consequences, relationships to other concepts.
  - Part of analytic process is also discovering the ideas the researcher has about the concept – hence the constructivist perspective
- Theoretical construction is based on induction



## ➤ Clark

- Similar to Charmaz, she followed the traditional Grounded Theory steps laid out by Glaser, but rooted in relativist ontology and a constructivist epistemology.
- Unique contribution was with respect to systematically exploring the situation of the research question:
- Described “the situation” as being part of the data, not just the context that surround the data
  - developed of a strategy for examining the influence of “situatedness” of data and of theory using 3 kinds of “maps”
  - Situational maps: all human and nonhuman elements
  - Social worlds/arenas maps: linkages between human and nonhuman elements
  - Positional maps: positions taken and not taken in the data regarding issues arising based on the linkages between human and nonhuman elements



# Choosing among the approaches to Grounded Theory

- ▶ Contrary to the view expressed by some, one may argue that the above approaches are simply different and neither right nor wrong.
- ▶ Choose the approach consistent with the ontology and epistemology of your research question.



## The research process

- ▶ Recruiting participants
  - ▶ Purposive sampling followed by theoretical sampling
- ▶ Data collection and analysis occur simultaneously (typically interviews, and possibly observation)
  - ▶ Continues until all data categories are saturated
    - ▶ “no new information was obtained”
    - ▶ Confidence that enough examples of a phenomenon have been collected that all variations have been identified
    - ▶ Able to specify the properties of all concepts (Who, what, when, where, why)
  - ▶ Coding approaches: Open, focused/selective, theoretical/axial
    - ▶ Constant comparison
  - ▶ Identifying core category
  - ▶ Build basic social process that answers the research question

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- Data sources
    - Interviews
    - Observations
  
  - Results
    - Description
    - Theory



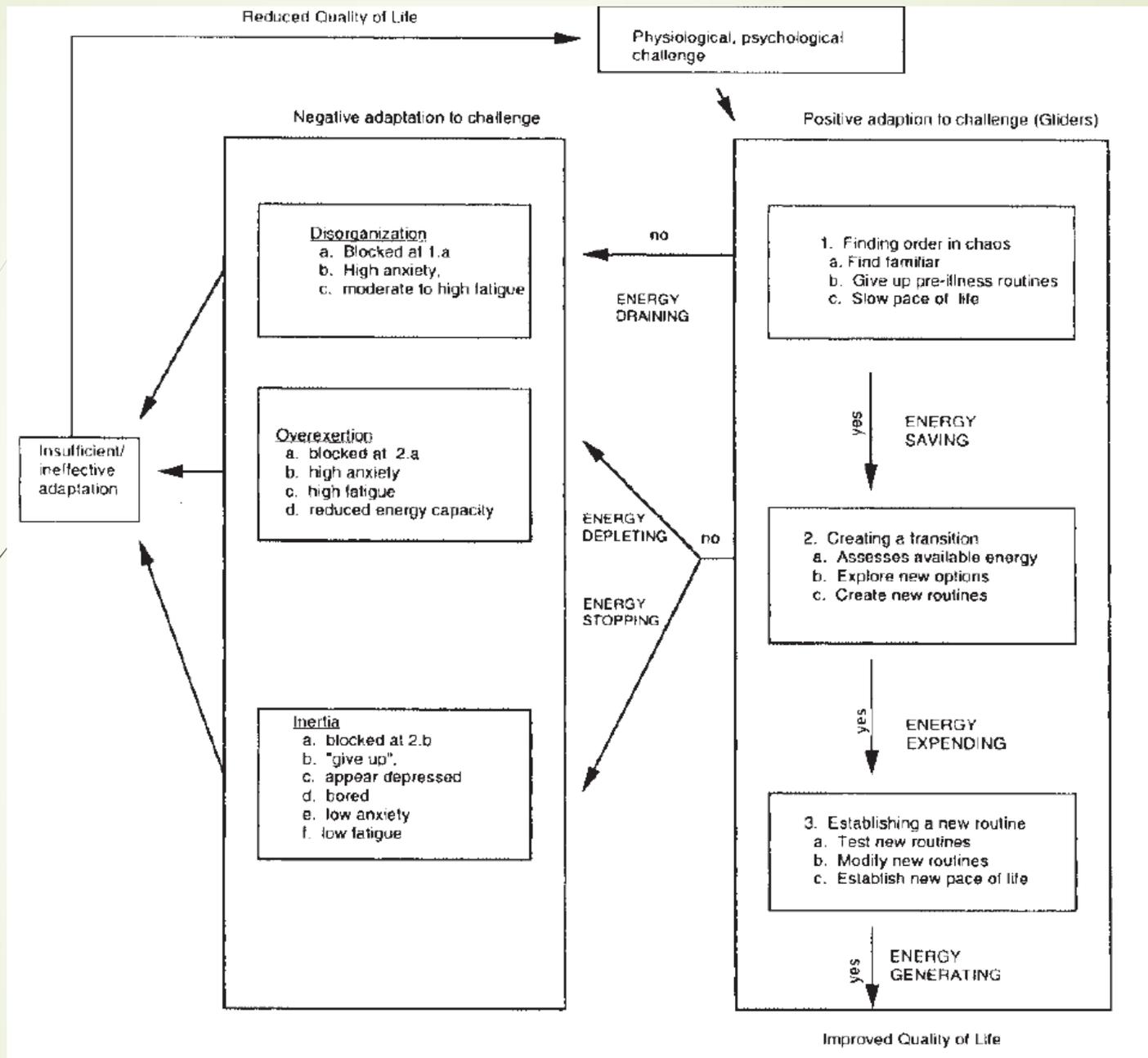
P: Well, I don't have to think too far back because it's pretty much all the time. Before I got sick, I was a busy person. By Friday, I was ready for the weekend but by Monday, I was ready to go again. I only needed 6-7 hours of sleep per night. But now it's really different. I haven't felt like this before. I wake up in the morning and feel good until I try to get out of bed. I have my breakfast but then I need a nap before my shower. I get nothing done – I am just more work for my poor husband and kids who know have to do everything like the shopping, cooking, and cleaning. I read somewhere that exercise helped so I tried to go for a walk to the corner. My mistake was that I went alone. About 5 minutes in, my left leg started to drag. I just couldn't pick it up to make a proper step. Finally, I just sat down on the boulevard, because I was pretty sure that if I didn't, I'd fall over. The other day my husband wanted to take me out for supper for our anniversary so I rested most of the day and then we just went to a nice place near our house.



We drove so that I could save my energy. I had some soup and then we had to wait for our main course but I got so sleepy and light headed. My husband could see I was having trouble keeping my eyes open and said I should just put my head down but I didn't want to. That would just look so weird to other people. I'd rather not go out at all if I have to start taking little naps at restaurants.

I: Look weird?

P: Well you know, when was the last time you saw someone having a nap at a restaurant? It's just not done. I may have cancer but I am a normal person. And I don't necessarily want everyone to know I am sick.





# Practical problems associated with using a grounded theory approach

- ▶ Research question is unclear so rationale for use of grounded theory is not readily apparent
  - ▶ Each approach has its own philosophic underpinnings, answers a different kind of research question, has different analytic strategies, and unique outcome
- ▶ Data collection
  - ▶ Premature closure
    - ▶ Not enough participants and /or data – no saturation
    - ▶ Under-analysis of existing data –in GT failure to move beyond descriptive level to theory



- Data analysis

- Failure to analyze data as they are collected

- Importing concepts/frameworks from existing literature

- Overly Generic

- In a rush to develop formal theory, concepts too general to be of value in relation to substantive theory (results transferable to other settings).



# Additional Grounded Theory references

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# Other information

- ▶ Contact Karin Olson at [Karin.Olson@ualberta.ca](mailto:Karin.Olson@ualberta.ca)
- ▶ Upcoming ATLAS.ti masterclass webinars
  - ▶ March 19, 2020 11 AM MST with Bukola Salami  
*Community Base Participatory Action Research*
  - ▶ April 30, 2020 11 AM MST with Sally Thorne  
*Introduction to Interpretive Description*
  - ▶ May 7, 2020 11 AM MST with Catherine Houghton  
*A walk through thematic synthesis*
  - ▶ May 28, 2020 11 AM MST with Kendra Rieger and Christina West  
*Creating collaborative, shared research initiatives: Strategies and approaches*
- ▶ Upcoming events
  - ▶ Thinking Qualitatively Conference: June 15-19, 2020 in Edmonton Alberta  
<https://www.ualberta.ca/international-institute-for-qualitative-methodology/conferences-workshops-and-events/index.html>
    - ▶ Full day ATLAS.ti training on June 20, 2020
    - ▶ 1 hr consultations on using ATLAS.ti in your research available also with our ATLAS.ti trainer, Dr. Brigitte Smit