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Initiating a Grounded Theory Study: Scoping the Area of Interest, Overcoming Hurdles in the Ethics Review, and Initial Data Collection

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Abstract

A well-executed grounded theory study requires thoughtful planning coupled with an awareness that grounded theory research rests on a foundation of emergence and openness to where the data leads the investigator. Grounded theory allows for multiple sources of data that offer insight into the topic and aid in theory development. Scooping the area of interest offers an opportunity to explore diverse sources where data can be found and lays the foundation for writing a successful ethics application. Writing a grounded theory ethics application entails overcoming hurdles such as, navigating how to formulate the research question so it is sufficiently open to allow for what emerges during the study as important to the participants, estimating sample size when this cannot be known beforehand in grounded theory, and providing a list of and rationale for data sources. This article offers insights into how to scope the area of interest, guidance on how to complete an ethics application, and advice on how to initiate data collection with special attention given to conducting interviews and observations.

Key words: grounded theory, data sources, ethics application, research question, interviews, observations.

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Undertaking a grounded theory study is exciting. At the end you will have discovered a theory that is grounded in the data, meaning that as you conducted the study you were open to what the data were telling you; the data collection and the questions you asked were always guided by the emerging concepts (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). To accomplish this, you have to enter your field of study with an open mind. Entering the field with an open mind, trying to discern patterns that explain what is transpiring and how individuals resolve issues they identify as important, is foundational to grounded theory research. The open stance offers a unique opportunity for discovery versus imposing our own ideas and entrenched perspectives on social contexts and individuals.

It can be intimidating to embark on a grounded theory study. Regardless of whether you are a faculty member or a student who has decided to use the grounded theory method, your colleagues may well ask how you will be able to write a grant application when you are not supposed to conduct a literature review, or how you will obtain ethics approval when you are not sure how many participants will be in your study, or for that matter, exactly which groups they will come from, and maybe the most common question of all, how you will be able to conduct a study without preconceptions if you have worked in, or are quite familiar with the area you are planning to study. Questions like these can be difficult for a researcher who is new to grounded theory to answer. Fear of not being able to fulfill requirements to receive ethics approval, to obtain an academic degree, or secure funding to conduct the study may cause researchers to steer away from using grounded theory, or even more concerning, alter the method to something that resembles grounded theory, but is in fact, not grounded theory.

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In this article we will discuss how to scope the area of interest staying true to grounded theory while at the same time fulfilling academic, grant, and ethics requirements, how to overcome hurdles in the ethics review, and how to begin initial data collection.

Scoping the Area of Interest

In my experience, it is not uncommon for graduate students to say: "I know too much about the area I want to research. I have worked in the area for years and know so much about it. How can I use grounded theory when I am not supposed to have preconceptions?" On the other hand, although this is less common, you may come to your research topic with limited pre-existing knowledge. In either case it is necessary to start thinking about where you can find data and how the study will be conducted. Keeping in mind that emergence is a key concept in grounded theory will help you remain true to grounded theory during this process.

Emergence means staying open to what is going on in the area you are about to study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Holton & Walsh, 2017). It means that you enter your field of research with an open mind suspending what you think you know and, instead, approach the area with "wonder and curiosity" (Nathaniel, 2021, p.4). Emergence is a stance that is maintained throughout the entire research process. In fact, one could argue that grounded theory rests on the concept of emergence. In the first book describing the grounded theory method, Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that existing sociological theories of the day did not reflect what was occurring in the social world. They maintained that entering the field of study with a pre-existing theoretical framework blocks genuine discovery of patterns of social interaction and the ways in which individuals tackle issues that are important to them. The word discovery in the title reflects the notion of exploring, finding out, and seeking to understand

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without imposing the researcher's pre-existing ideas on what might be found. Adopting a humble attitude of wonder and curiosity, keeping in mind that even as you scope the area of interest you might discover the unexpected, will guard against seeing only what you want to see, or expect to find.

A grounded theory researcher ideally starts the research with no preconceptions; however, this does not mean that you cannot study a life-cycle interest or professional interest (Glaser, 1998). The dictum in grounded theory is against trying to make data fit into preconceived frameworks, which is not the same as not being able to study something that you have a keen interest in and some experience with. Glaser (1978) wrote that research should be fun and that studying a life cycle or professional interest injects energy into the project. Research can be tedious, but if you study a topic, you are genuinely interested in, it will help keep the momentum going to completion. The issue with studying an area in which the researcher has pre-exiting knowledge arises when the researcher preconceives the problem instead of approaching the topic from a standpoint of discovery and curiosity with a true desire to put aside what ought to be found for what is actually revealed (Glaser, 2013). When Glaser and Strauss (1965) studied death and dying in American hospitals in the 1960s, they had both had recent experiences with close relatives dying. The outcome of their study was a grounded theory with a core category of awareness contexts that has applicability to settings beyond the hospital environment. Keep in mind that studying an area of interest is not the same as preconceiving the problem, you are studying the area, not a specific preidentified problem (Glaser, 1998). Therefore, if you know a lot about a topic, it does not mean that you cannot study it, what you need to do is remain vigilant in guarding against assuming that you know what the problem is and where you will find data. If you have limited knowledge of the topic,

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you still must be mindful that you do not make the mistake of anticipating what you are going to find.

As you scope the area of interest remember that in grounded theory "all is data" (Glaser, 1998, p. 8). The conventional way of conducting research is to carry out an in-depth review of literature published in academic journals to determine what is already known about the topic, identify gaps in existing knowledge, and then position the research in the context of what is known and what is yet to be known. In grounded theory, as you start thinking about your study, you are not limited to a conventional literature review, in fact Glaser (1978, 1998) advised against a literature review. Knowing that all is considered data, meaning that the world is full of data that can help you understand a topic, provides great freedom when you set out to explore the area you intend to study. Any and all types of data can be used in grounded theory, such as, books, magazines, interviews, informal conversations, institutional documents, quantitative data from surveys, secondary data etc. (Glaser, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Holton & Walsh, 2017). Later, as you immerse yourself in data analysis, different types of data will help you understand the categories that are emerging from different perspectives. These different perspectives, or views, are called slices of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

It is naïve to think that we can start a study with the mind being a "blank slate." We come to our research with a worldview and pre-existing ideas. Glaser (2013) recognized this, what we are being asked to do is to try and put our preconceptions aside as much as possible and, instead, look at the data with a mind that is open to what is transpiring in the context we are studying. As you think about your study consider where you will be able to find information about the topic. Data from diverse sources will provide different views, slices of data,

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of what is occurring, however, at this early stage you have to guard against privileging, or letting certain sources overshadow what is truly occurring. In other words, guard against forming early preconceptions. Instead, as you scope the area, consider a wide variety of sources, read widely, and write some initial memos on what you are finding. Later, during data analysis, these memos can be compared with the emerging categories and incorporated in your theory if they have relevance to the patterns you are starting to discern.

For example, you may be a nurse researcher who wants to study how nurses navigated working in the emergency department during the COVID-19 pandemic. When you start thinking about the topic informal conversations you have had with other healthcare professionals (i.e., nurses, physicians, respiratory therapists) come to mind, write some memos on these conversations, and keep them for later use. Next, as you scope out the area, consider where else you might find data for your study. There are likely Facebook groups you can join where nurses share their experiences. Interviews with healthcare professionals on television and radio can provide you with valuable information. Television footage showing nurses helping patients about to be intubated call their family for maybe the last time can tell you something about the topic. Think about whether there are policy documents that outline ethical responsibilities in a pandemic. Perhaps there are even books or songs written from an "insider" perspective about working in the emergency department during COVID-19. Information can be found in numerous areas and will serve to sensitize you to the topic. Becoming sensitive to the topic means being able to discern what is taking place without imposing your own ideas.

At this point you have formed an idea about where you can find data, however, whether you are a graduate student writing your research proposal or a faculty member writ-

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ing a grant application, you will need to conduct a literature review to fulfill institutional and/or grant agency requirements. The advice for the grounded theory researcher is not to conduct a literature review in order to stay open to what emerges from the data (Glaser, 1998). Reading the existing literature in the field can predispose the researcher to adopt pre-conceived professional problems, as opposed to truly discerning what participants deem to be the concern. For instance, in a study of emergency department triage nurses' decision-making, findings from the literature review showed that a portion of nurses do not assign the correct patient acuity score indicated by existing triage acuity scales (Reay et al., 2016). Based on the results of the literature review, the researchers could easily have formed the idea that triage nurses are poor decision makers and decided to research factors that contribute to incorrect decisions; instead, they approached the topic area with a broad problem statement and explored how triage nurses make decisions. The main concern that emerged from interviews and observations of nurses conducting triage was how to obtain fit between the resources required to treat patients, the resources available, and time to treatment for individual patients in relation to the acuity of other patients waiting, and the overall capacity of the emergency department. This was conceptualized as *momentary fitting in a fluid environment*. As a result, it became a study of the concept, momentary fitting, which can be conceptually generalized to similar contexts, as opposed to a study of incorrect decision making by triage nurses, which would have been limited to one subject area.

The literature review, although necessary in most instances, should be treated with an understanding that grounded theory is explicitly about emergence of what is transpiring in the field, not validating pre-existing problems or theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Holton & Walsh, 2017). Glaser (1998), however, was pragmatic and recognized that there are instances

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when a literature review is required, such as for graduate research proposals and grant applications. In those cases, his advice was to conduct a literature review but guard against forming preconceptions about the topic. Once the review is completed, put it aside until it is time to write the theory.

Overcoming Hurdles in Ethics Review

The ethics review is often viewed by researchers and students alike as a complicated, time-consuming process. It need not be, if you take the time to address potential sticky points carefully as you complete the ethics application, instead of waiting for the reviewers to raise questions, which they will. In this section we will discuss potential obstacles including the literature review, problem statement versus a specific research question, number of participants, and data sources.

Purpose of the Ethics Review

The purpose of an ethics review is to ensure that your study is conducted in an ethical manner. For example, in Canada the mandate for research ethics boards is to balance the importance of research with the need to conduct ethical research that respects human dignity (Goverment of Canada, 2018). The core principle is respect for human dignity which includes respect for persons, concern for their welfare, and justice. The ethics board will consider if the researcher upholds the participants' autonomy and whether the participants can freely choose to be part of the study or not. Secondly, the board will note if participants are provided with enough information about the risks versus the benefits of being in the study to make an informed decision. Finally, the board will look at whether participants will be treated fairly and equitably, and if the inclusion criteria are reasonable given the research question. Alt-

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hough this is a Canadian example, the above principles are foundational for conducting ethical research.

You may be thinking, overarching principles are fine but I need guidance on how to navigate all the nitty gritty details of the ethics review. After all, the ethics review is the point where you need to provide very specific information about how you will conduct your study. As you complete the application, keep in mind that the aim of the ethics board is not to make the process complicated for you, the board's mandate is to balance the need for research with the above principles to ensure that all participants are treated with respect for human dignity. Your responsibility is to answer the questions clearly with as much detail as is needed to show how your research will respect the dignity and autonomy of the participants and their confidentiality.

General Points

In Table 1 you can find some general points for how to complete an ethics review. The points may seem like self-explanatory advice for good writing, however, as a member of a research ethics board who frequently reviews ethics applications, I can assure you that the points I have addressed below are often ignored. Before you puzzle about how to answer questions about, for instance, sample size, you need to ensure that you provide a well written ethics application that reflects favourably on you as a rigorous researcher.

Table 1

General Points for Ethics Review

Point	Rationale
Keep the overall purpose of the ethics review in mind	This will help you to consider your answers from the reviewers' perspective
Answer questions clearly. Do not obfuscate	Reviewers will see through this and ask for

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your answers.	clarification.
Take time to read each question carefully and answer *the question.*	There are sections in the application for different topics. Reviewers will be looking for specific information and will expect to find it in the correct place.
Answer the questions succinctly with pertinent details.	Long answers with excessive detail make it difficult for reviewers to locate the pertinent information and are time consuming to read.
Do not copy and paste large sections from your proposal in lieu of providing a succinct answer to the question asked.	As above.
Provide enough detail about the research method for reviewers to make an informed decision.	Reviewers may not be experts in your research method.
Do not assume that reviewers are as familiar with your topic as you are. Explain key concepts clearly and succinctly.	Reviewers may not be experts in your topic area. Clear explanations will save time and make it easier for reviewers to make informed decisions.
Provide a clear rationale for why your study is needed.	Reviewers will question the purpose of the study if you cannot provide a rationale.
Ensure correct spelling and grammar.	Grammatical mistakes and spelling errors give a poor impression and will make reviewers question whether you pay sufficient attention to detail to conduct rigorous research.
Ensure that all abbreviations are explained the first time they are appear.	Not explaining abbreviations makes it difficult for reviewers to understand your answers.

Literature Review

As a grounded theory researcher, you have some specific hurdles to overcome, the first one being the literature review. Ethics boards typically require submission of a research proposal along with completion of the ethics application form. Include enough evidence-based literature in your proposal to demonstrate that you are knowledgeable in your research area and to show that there is a clear rationale for why your research is needed. You

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may even want to include a statement to the effect that the advice for grounded theorists is to not conduct an in-depth literature review prior to the study as this may interfere with the researcher's ability to truly see what emerges from the data, however, you have conducted the review to fulfill academic/grant application requirements. Qualify this statement by saying that there is allowance for this in GROUNDED THEORY (Glaser, 1998). This will demonstrate that you have a clear understanding of both the research method and ethical requirements.

Research Question versus Problem Area

The next sticky point will be the research question. As you may recall, ideally the grounded theory researcher enters the field with as few preconceived ideas as possible about what the problem is letting the research question emerge (Glaser, 1992; Nathaniel, 2021). This is because grounded theory is inherently emergent and the problem, as described by the participants, might not be the same problem as that which the researcher anticipated finding (Glaser, 1978; Schreiber, 2001). The ethics board, however, will ask for a specific research questions or research objective. Try stating this as a general objective about the area you are exploring. For example, you may be studying coping strategies in people with chronic pain. You could formulate this as "the objective of this study is to explore how individuals with chronic pain manage everyday life." It is a fairly general statement that leaves lots of room for discovery and emergence of what participants consider important, while at the same time providing direction for your study. If the ethics board still requests a specific research question you could word your question something like "what are the processes and strategies individuals with chronic pain use to conduct everyday life?" A question like this will provide you with leeway for discovery. Provide a statement to the effect that grounded theory is about

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emergence and that the specific research problem will emerge from the participants during the research. Include a reference to some of Glaser's work (e.g., Glaser, 1992).

Sample Size

The ethics board will want to know the number of participants in your study. Continuing with the example of individuals with chronic pain, let us say you have decided the best way to collect data is to conduct interviews. It is not possible to know beforehand how many people you will need to interview to reach theoretical saturation. The best way to approach questions about sample size is to provide a range of how many participants you anticipate to interview. Be realistic, if you are a graduate student, it is probably not feasible to include more than 15 – 20 individuals. State that in grounded theory data collection ceases when theoretical saturation is reached, explain what theoretical saturation is, and then state that it is not possible to know beforehand how many participants you will need since this is determined by the point at which theoretical saturation is reached.

You may be asked for a sample size calculation or rationale for your sample size. In this case it might be helpful to say that sample size is not predetermined in grounded theory, however, some authors have suggested that sample sizes in grounded theory can vary from 10 – 40 participants (Wuest, 2012). Again, provide a realistic range for the sample size, say that the number of participants is in keeping with what has been suggested for grounded theory, and that data collection will cease once theoretical saturation is reached.

Conducting interviews is only one of the many data collection methods that are available to grounded theory researchers. Another common method is to carry out field observations. For the purposes of the ethics review, give a rationale for why it is necessary to conduct observations, state how long each observation will last, and estimate how many ob-

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servations you will need to complete. For example, if you are studying how paramedics manage trauma patients in the field you could write: "The best way to understand how paramedics manage trauma patients is to conduct direct observations of paramedics at work. Observations will provide firsthand data that would not be available through interviews alone. Each observation will last for 12 hours (the duration of a shift) for a total of 10 - 15 observations."

Data Sources

In grounded theory multiple data sources can be used and although you may have an idea where to find data, it is not possible to know exactly where all your data will come from as your data collection will be guided by the emerging theory (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This can be a challenging point to overcome in an ethics application. The best approach, as always, is to be transparent and truthful.

You will have an idea of where to start collecting data. For example, say that you are interested in how combat veterans transition to civilian life, you will most likely start by interviewing veterans. In the ethics application you would state that you will conduct interviews but given the nature of grounded theory, it is possible that you will have to use other data sources, and, in that case, you will request a modification to your application. A modification is typically a minor change to an approved study that does not significantly change the aim or design (e.g., broadening inclusion criteria). As you begin to interview the veterans, you notice that they are talking about how their transition to civilian life has affected their families. You realize that to saturate the emerging categories, you will need to theoretically sample by conducting interviews with family members. In this case, you will need to request a modification to your study from the ethics board.

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Of course, there are instances when you can theoretically sample without needing to request a modification, such as publicly available material, however, keep in mind that theoretical sampling is always guided by the emerging theory (Glaser, 1978). In the beginning of this article, we talked about the multiple data sources that are available to grounded theory researchers. Many of these sources can be used without ethics approval. Just state in your application that in addition to interviews and observations, you will use publicly available material as data.

What has been offered in the preceding sections are general suggestions for how to complete an ethics application. We have addressed questions you can typically expect to find in an ethics application form that can prove particularly challenging to address for grounded theory researchers. Requirements and questions will vary depending on country and academic institution. Make sure that you understand the information that your ethics board requires. Finally, remember, the ethics board is not your enemy, the board's mandate is to ensure that your research is conducted with respect for human dignity and that the participants' integrity is protected.

Initial Data Collection

The most common methods of data collection in grounded theory are interviews and observations. This does not exclude other sources such as books, magazines, interviews, informal conversations, institutional documents, quantitative data from surveys, secondary data etc. (Glaser, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Holton & Walsh, 2017). Here we will discuss initial data collection with a focus on interviews and observations. As you start collecting data, remember that one of the most important aspects of grounded theory is to keep an open mind (Glaser, 2013). Be willing to set aside what you expect to find and listen to what participants

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have to say with a keen interest and a willingness to learn. The results will, more often than not, surprise you.

Interviews

The best way to explore the participants' concerns is to follow Glaser and Strauss' (1967) advice and conduct the first few interviews as open-ended conversations. Simply sit down and chat about the area you are studying. Let the participant lead the conversation. Simmons (2010) advised grounded theory researchers to start with a "grand tour" question to open up the conversation. In my experience, it is helpful to start an interview with general small talk for a few minutes to put the participant at ease, for example, "I hope you didn't have any trouble getting here today. I know the traffic can be bad this time of the day." Ice-breaker conversations like this will help both you and the other person relax.

Once you have created a comfortable atmosphere, you a ready to segue into the interview. For instance, if you are studying how emergency triage nurses make decisions, you could start with a grand tour question like "Tell me about your work at triage?" This will allow the participant to talk about what is important to them in their work. The goal when conducting interviews is to elicit what Glaser (1998) called, "instill a spill" (p. 111). You know that you have instilled a spill when the participant starts talking freely without hesitancy, becomes engaged, and elaborates on examples. At this point, listen intently for what they are saying and jot down some notes. You can add prompting questions as needed.

Come prepared to the interview with some general open-ended questions about the topic but be willing to follow the participant's lead if you instill a spill. The open-ended questions will help keep the interview moving forward if a participant is hesitant, however, avoid making the interview into a question-and-answer exercise where you simply read questions

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from your notes, instead, stay sensitive to what is important to the participant and go where they go. There are of course instances when participants do not start talking as freely. There are several reasons for this, the topic may simply not engage them, they may be shy, or it may be a sensitive topic and they may not trust that their identity will be protected. If after several interviews you notice that you are not able to instill a spill, you probably need to re-examine how you are approaching the topic or it may be that it is a sensitive area and you are getting either "properline" data or "vaguing out" data (Glaser, 1998, p. 9). Properline means that the participant is telling you what they think they are supposed to say, and vaguing out means that they think it is simply none of your business or there may be legal ramifications of telling the truth.

During the interview, write down brief notes of key points that are emerging taking care to maintain a conversational atmosphere. After the interview is completed, find somewhere as soon as possible where you can sit down and write your field notes. This may be a nearby coffee shop, hospital cafeteria, or even your car. Our memory is fickle, and you will soon forget many parts of the interview if you do not write down, at the first opportunity, what you remember. Glaser (1998) advised against recording interviews as this can bog the researcher down with substantial amounts of unnecessary data, however, you may be required to record the interviews by your supervisor or a granting agency. This does not preclude taking fieldnotes. Your fieldnotes will offer important insights that you may miss if you depend on transcripts alone.

As we have previously discussed, emergence is a foundational concept in grounded theory (Glaser, 1978, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Holton & Walsh, 2017). Holton and Walsh (2017) wrote "we offer three components of grounded theory as foundational and es-

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sential to its application: emergence, constant comparative analysis, and theoretical sampling" (p. 29/30). As grounded theory researchers collect and analyze data, they seek to discover and make visible latent patterns that explain what is occurring in an area. To accomplish this, researchers need to stay open to what participants are saying and where the data are taking them. Keep this in mind as you are collecting and analyzing data, and grounded theory will come alive and make sense instead of seeming like a set of required steps. Of course, there are steps to follow in grounded theory, but it is first and foremost an iterative process where you are constantly moving between the field and data analysis. In summary, the way interviews are conducted in grounded theory is founded on an understanding of and adherence to the concepts: emergence, constant comparative analysis, and theoretical sampling.

The constant comparative method consists of simultaneous data collection, comparison of data, and analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In contrast to research methods in which data collection, analysis, and writing occur sequentially, the grounded theory researcher simultaneously collects, codes, compares, and analyzes data. The data are coded into various incidents, which are constantly compared and organized into conceptual properties that eventually form categories. Emergence is the notion that the data speaks for itself, and that the researcher needs to let the categories emerge during the research process, rather than trying to force the data into categories pre-determined by an existing hypothesis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Theoretical sampling is a form of sampling in which the ongoing analysis and emerging categories guide further data collection.

In practical terms, adhering to the principles of emergence, constant comparative analysis, and theoretical sampling means that you will be coding each interview before proceeding to the next interview. Of course, this is not always possible but ideally, start with

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open coding after the first interview. Read through your notes and transcript, name each incident as it occurs, and compare incident with incident for conceptual meaning (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Put aside what you expect to find and let what is in the data emerge. Consider what property an incident may belong to and compare it with other incidents that indicate the same property. Let what emerges from your first interview guide the questions you ask in the next interview and so forth. Questions are in service to the emerging theory; that is why an interview guide with a set of the same predetermined questions for all interviews are not used in grounded theory. Adhering to a rigid interview protocol would violate the principle of emergence.

As you continue to interview participants interspersed with coding the interviews, you will find that some tentative conceptual categories start to emerge that indicate patterns of behaviour. In subsequent interviews you can theoretically sample by asking questions about those categories. To recap, constant comparative analysis means that you are constantly moving back and forth from data collection to data analysis guided by what emerges from the data and theoretically sampling for additional data to further elaborate on the conceptual patterns (categories) that are emerging. After a number of interviews, when you start getting a sense of what the core category might be, you start to selectively code for the core and the categories that relate to it (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Observations

Another common form of data collection in grounded theory is observations. Observations can yield valuable data that is not available through other sources of data such as interviews, document analysis, secondary data etc. Conducting observations provides the researcher with an opportunity to gain direct insight into the context in a way that interviews

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and reading documents cannot. The same principles of constant comparison, emergence, and theoretical sampling apply to observations as to all other forms of data collection. Not all topics lend themselves to observations; for instance, studying how combat veterans adjust to civilian life would require many observations over a long period of time, whereas observing how paramedics make decisions in the field could be accomplished by accompanying different ambulance crews for a number of shifts. Be aware of what type of observations you need ethics approval for and always err on the side of caution. If something is publicly available, for instance, via news broadcasts, ethics approval is not necessary, however, as soon you enter into a context that is not publicly available and you will be using the data in your research, you will need ethics approval.

Explain to the participants that you are interested in finding out more about the area they are in, that you want them to go about their work as usual, and that you will be taking notes for the purposes of your research. If you are studying their workplace as in the example with paramedics, it is important to make it clear that you are not evaluating them, you are simply observing what occurs in the area to understand it better. Take fieldnotes as you conduct the observation, noting key processes, describe what is happening, and include reminders to yourself about questions you want to ask in subsequent interviews. However, avoid appearing like you are following individuals around with a notebook or tablet intently writing each and every action and word down. You may find that the opportunity arises for informal conversation as participants go about their duties. Capitalize on these opportunities without interfering with what is happening in the area. Often these impromptu conversations yield great data. As soon as possible after the observation, find a quiet place to write out your fieldnotes in full and then code them before you conduct the next interview or observation.

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Skillfully conducted observations can provide data that would otherwise not be available and can deepen your understanding of the topic. They are also a wonderful opportunity for theoretical sampling as your theory starts taking shape.

Conclusion

What has been offered in this article is advice on how to initiate a grounded theory study, not a recipe or set of rules to follow. As a researcher you will have to adapt to the context you are working in and the area you are studying always keeping the core principles of grounded theory: emergence, constant comparative analysis, and theoretical sampling foremost in your mind. Understanding foundational concepts of grounded theory and adhering to them will help guide your decision-making throughout the study.

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