Using Grounded Theory: A Review

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Abstract

Helen Scott's (2025) *Using Grounded Theory: How to Develop Theory for Managed Change* provides a clear and engaging guide to classic grounded theory, especially valuable for novices, graduate students, and early-career researchers. Drawing on her extensive experience mentoring grounded theory students and participating in Barney Glaser's seminars, Scott offers practical guidance in a collegial, conversational tone. The book covers core processes such as open and selective coding, constant comparison, theoretical sampling, and memoing, with recurring attention to conceptualization throughout the entire research project. To support continued learning, Scott recommends specific chapters from Glaser's foundational texts to help readers expand their understanding. The book includes diagrams, examples of grounded theory projects, and an optional mini-project that encourages active engagement. Overall, Scott's work serves as an accessible and supportive resource for those beginning grounded theory research while pointing them toward deeper study.

Keywords: classic grounded theory, introductory text

Helen Scott's (2025) book, *Using Grounded Theory: How to Develop Theory for Managed Change* (237 pages), offers an accessible and comprehensive introduction to classic grounded theory, especially valuable for novices, graduate students, and early-career researchers. Early responses from readers have indicated its particular usefulness for students new to the method. While the book is written with beginners in mind, its usefulness is not limited to them. I am reviewing the book as a novice, supported by insights and guidance from others.

The author Helen Scott draws on her personal experience mentoring more than 300 students in grounded theory and her participation in Barney Glaser's seminars from 2003 to 2017—first as a participant and later in helping to arrange them. Scott's approachable style and practical guidance foster a collegial and conversational tone, evident in phrases such as "Whichever way you choose to manage your constant comparison" (p. 105, page numbers from Kindle desktop app), and "The way that I think about properties is that they specify a concept" (p. 107), and "So for me, dimensions shape a concept and degrees size it." (p. 111)

Scott shares that when she was struggling with the notion that tolerating confusion can be necessary:

> during a down time in a seminar, Glaser told me to 'rest in the confusion as it's a really good indicator that something is happening.' That is, that one's preconscious is working away on the problem. You just need the tenacity to stick with the process and see it through. (p. 28)

She provides practical insights, advising readers during open coding to "read each line carefully but understand that you are not required to code each line" (p. 97). She says that grounded theorists are often "motivated to make things better for people" (p. 14). Furthermore,

she says, "I think I am fairly typical as a grounded theorist in that I care deeply about the research areas and/or research populations that I work with" (p. 14).

The book describes the key processes and procedures of classic grounded theory. Chapter content includes: 1. an overview of classic grounded theory; 2. why one might choose to use the grounded theory method; 3. data selection for a grounded theory study; 4. open coding, constant comparison, and the identification of core concept(s) or dependent variable(s); 5. theoretical sampling, selective coding, and memoing to conceptualize; 6. theoretical codes; 7. use of existing literature and guidance for writing; and 8. considerations for using grounded theory for master's or doctoral degree research. There is additional discussion of conceptualization in the Appendix, and the author often mentions conceptualization throughout the book.

The author invites readers to do a mini-project and to communicate their answers to her through email. Her responses to me have been insightful and helpful.

Scott's book serves admirably as a foundational text for readers approaching the more complex core writings of grounded theory. Scott includes many recommendations of specific chapters from Barney Glaser's books *Theoretical Sensitivity* (1978) and *Doing Grounded Theory: Issues and Discussions* (1998) for "studying the method" (Scott, 2025, p. 30) and deepening the reader's "knowledge of grounded theory" (Scott, 2025, p. 121). She recognizes these early works as "the starting point or stem of the grounded theory methodology" (p. 17), considering *Theoretical Sensitivity* to be the central text in classic grounded theory. These reading recommendations, situated within thematically related material, help strengthen and deepen the reader's grasp of grounded theory. Scott thoughtfully highlights specific chapters from Glaser's foundational texts to further enhance readers' understanding.

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Clear successes of the book include the comprehensive survey of the grounded theory method and a guide for doing grounded theory research. The book has diagrams that show the phases of the grounded theory process, with highlighting showing the current phase being described. Scott includes illustrative grounded theory project examples beneficial for many researchers. She provides many insights into conceptualization, a summation being, "eventually I have realized the benefit of using the conceptual dance approach. It is the method of allowing our emergent concepts to dance freely around until forming a theory" (p. 159). Helen Scott's *Using Grounded Theory: How to Develop Theory for Managed Change* is a well-written and clearly organized introduction, highly suitable for novices and beneficial as a foundational resource for anyone embarking on grounded theory research.

References

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