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A Simpler Understanding of Classic GT: How it is a fundamentally different methodology

Ólavur Christiansen

Abstract

The author reduces the research rationale of classic grounded theory (GT) methodology and the consequential classic GT research procedures and stages down to their essential elements. This reduction makes it possible to compare classic GT to other research methodologies in a manner that is simpler and yet concise. This methodological analysis and synthesis has been conducted while applying and after having applied the classic GT methodology in practice in a major project. The fundamental differences between classic GT versus other adaptations of GT, as well as other qualitative-inductive research approaches, are mainly explained by the very different approaches in solving the problem of many equally justifiable interpretations of the same data, and by the consequential differences in research procedures, and how they are applied. Comprehension of methodological differences in details will always be relevant. However, an uncomplicated and still concise explanation of the differences between these methodologies is necessary. "Grounded theory" (GT) is used as a common label in the literature for very different research approaches. This simpler approach of comparing the methodologies will be helpful for researchers, who might want to consider several options when deciding which research methodology to use, and who need quickly to understand some of the most essential methodological elements.

Introduction

For prospective researchers, who wish to consider several options when deciding which research methodology to use, it can be bewildering when "grounded theory" is used as a common label in the literature for very different research methodologies. During the research process that led to the theory of "opportunizing" in business (Christiansen, 2005; 2006) the author made some observations and lived through

some experiences that could be helpful to others who might want to utilize Glaser's prescribed set of classic grounded theory (GT) research procedures, or other adapted GT procedures, or other mainly inductive-qualitative research procedures in e.g. economics, business and management research. This article is based on a systematic treatment of these observations and experiences.

Glaser's prescribed set of GT research procedures are definite with regard to their usage and research rationale (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; 1992; 1998; 2001; 2003; 2005). In this article, these procedures will be referred to as classic grounded theory methodology or classic GT. Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998) have prescribed a set of research procedures that also are specific, and this set of procedures is also called "grounded theory". However, the research rationales that are attached to these two different sets of "grounded theory" procedures are clearly different, and consequently, and despite some apparent similarity, these two sets of research procedures are also very different. It is also obvious that there is a much wider diversity regarding applied research procedures in studies labelled as "grounded theory" studies in the literature. It has even been claimed that almost any qualitative research can be labelled as a "grounded theory" (Simmons, 1995).

Research methodologies almost by definition are different. They each have a different raison d'être, set of procedures and standards. Methodological diversity has its raison d'être and there is nothing wrong in it. To make judgments regarding general superiority or inferiority of methodologies may be pointless. However, to mix procedures of different researcher methodologies, which have different research rationales, may give a set of research procedures that do not represent a consistent method. A best choice of methodology depends on fit to the individual researcher's purpose or skills, or the contextual purpose, and any research outcome has to be judged according to the raison d'être, procedures and standards of the methodology applied.

The purpose of the article is to suggest a simplified and yet concise approach by which to compare research procedures that are labelled as GT, as well as other mainly inductive-

qualitative research methodologies. The basis for this comparing will be a reduction of the classic GT research rationale and the consequential classic GT research procedures and stages down to their essential elements. Thus, instead of only focusing on the many differences within the many details, focus can be delimited to the differences in the fundamental research rationales of the methodologies, and the consequential fundamental differences in the research procedures and stages of research.

This simplified basis for comparing will, of course, sum up and highlight the fundamentals of classic GT. It will not necessarily sum up and highlight all the essential features of the other methodologies. However, it will be enough to give an explanation for the methodological differences that are most fundamental, and which may be most the problematic for prospective researchers to understand.

The Classic GT Research Rationale

The rationale for using classic GT methodology, or its raison d'être, can be summed up and explained in different ways. One example is the following: "A methodology was needed that could get through and beyond conjecture and preconception to exactly the underlying processes of what is going on so that professionals and laymen alike could intervene with confidence to help resolve the participants' main concern surrounding learning, pain and profit." (Glaser, 1998, p. 5).

To "get through and beyond conjecture and preconception to exactly the underlying processes of what is going on in the resolving of the participant's main concern", the research area or the general research topic must, of course, be known. However, the researcher has to minimize his/her preconceptions and this requires that not even the research problem should be preconceived. It has to be allowed to emerge from the systematic collection and treatment of data during the research process. Due to its rationale, classic GT methodology is predominantly empirical and inductive – what counts is only what the data relate. The methodology is for the generation of a theory directly from data that explains as much as possible with as few concepts as possible, and what are explained are the behaviour patterns of those being studied. The research

outcome is a conceptual theory. Substantive concepts are stable latent patterns that image the area being researched. These concepts are generated from the systematic treatment of the data and should not be preconceived. These concepts should represent a considerable abstraction of time, place and people, and should have name labels that fit vis-à-vis what actually goes on in the resolving of the main concern, and be firmly grounded in the data by interchangeable data indicators. The purpose is certainly not conceptual descriptions with many concepts; such conceptual descriptions just convey stories that are bound to the specificity of time, place and people. The methodology can be used not only on qualitative data, but also quantitative data, but in practice it is mostly used on qualitative data.

Another way of expressing this rationale could, for example, be as follows: (1) to delimit the study to the main concern and its recurrent solution of those being studied (their substantive interests), and (2) to prevent preconceived professional concerns to mask what actually goes on in the field of study, and instead to stay open and let patterns emerge from the data. I will refer to these two points as the two hallmarks of the methodology. The following text will further explain the meaning of these two hallmarks and their significance in classic GT.

When researchers are confronted by an overwhelming set of collected data, some of them may find relief by concluding that the cultural, social or economic organization of life is complex enough to allow a number of equally justifiable interpretations. The rationale of classic GT is to meet this unique challenge by a unique solution. This is to find the core variable as the first stage of the research. This is the first hallmark of the methodology. As a concept, the main concern and its recurrent resolution of those being studied is summed up by the core variable of the emergent theory. After finding the core variable, the subsequent research and the generated theory is delimited to the core variable and to what is related to the core variable – the theory thus becomes a theory around the core variable. In other words, as the first stage of research, the main concern and its recurrent resolution of those being studied has to be conceptualized or summed up and explained

by one concept, which becomes the core variable. The core variable has to be allowed to emerge from the systematic treatment of the data during the research process, and should in no way be preconceived, and this is accomplished by adhering to the second hallmark. A fitting name has to be given to the concept that emerges as the core variable. By its naming, the core variable represents that particular behaviour pattern that is highly important for the participants, but also problematic. It is what drives and directs these people's behaviour. The core variable is that particular concept that is most related to the other concepts of the emerging theory. The core variable is also that concept of the theory that explains most of the variation in the data or in the studied behaviour. The problem of "numerous equally justifiable interpretations of the data" is minimized by finding the core variable. Consequently, the research is deliberately set out to follow the agenda of those being studied, the substantive interest relevancy of those being studied, and not any preconceived agenda of some professional research community or individual researchers, or their deemed professional interest relevancy. This is also the second hallmark of the methodology.

The second hallmark of classic GT has been referred to as "staying open and letting patterns emerge from data" and its opposite is "logically deducing, logically conjecturing, preconceiving (and possibly testing or quantitatively verifying some auxiliary hypotheses)". The orthodox GT analyst does not know a priori what he/she is looking for. Thus, much of the induction in orthodox GT is not tantamount to the ordinary induction, or the inductive principles used by different hermeneutic research procedures. Instead, classic GT induction is "assumption free" as well as "assumption based", but this latter only applies when these assumptions correspond to what already has emerged as more or less stable patterns in the data (Hartman, 2001, p. 37). This means that there is a "classic GT form of induction", which is different. Coupled with the first hallmark of classic GT, this helps keep the substantive interests of the participants in the field of study in focus, to avoid the compulsory, preconceived interests of the established research community, and to focus on what actually goes on in the field of study. In other words, the research is delimited to what is empirically discovered to be the most relevant and

problematic for the people being studied, not what a priori is deemed most relevant by the researcher (or by those being studied). For the researcher this means a minimizing of preconceptions and a suspension of prior knowledge and understanding regarding the area of research. Sometimes it may even be an advantage to be completely without any prior knowledge about the area of research prior to conducting the research. Such a statement, of course, flies in the face of positivist, rationalist and many other research positions. Yet, in the fairy tale, "The Emperor's New Clothes", it was only an innocent and ignorant little child that could do justice to reality by shouting out: "He is naked!".

Due to its rationale, the classic GT methodology has no attachment to any particular theoretical-disciplinal paradigm (Kuhn, 1996), theoretical perspective or theoretical-disciplinal research program (Lakatos, 1970). Ontological and epistemological positions may also contain pre-framings or preconceptions. Due to its rationale, the classic GT methodology is almost free of logically derived assumptions regarding ontology and epistemology. Its basic assumptions are limited to this: "Because man is a meaning-making creature, social life is patterned and empirically integrated. It is only a question of applying a rigorous and systematic method for discovering and explaining these patterns. Thus, just do it." (Glaser, 2004). The classic GT methodology is for the study of behaviour or behaviour patterns, not for the study of people or units as such. To generalize on units or people is difficult by any means. To generalize on behaviour is easier. Behaviour patterns transcend the borders of units.

Classic GT methodology can be conceived as a methodological paradigm or methodological research program, but it is not a usual one. The methodological procedures are the outcome of doing classic GT research on classic GT research since the early 1960s, i.e. the methodology is itself a classic grounded theory and thus essentially empirically generated. That the methodology is very different does not mean that it is better. For certain research tasks, and for certain very relevant and necessary research tasks, it would be a very wrong choice. For other research tasks, it could very well be an option. This is true especially when new perspectives may emerge regarding

what actually goes on in a field of study. However, even though new concepts and models may emerge, it does not necessarily mean that other concepts and models are wrong. The classic GT rationale is to increase and not to decrease methodological diversity and options, including ontological and epistemological options. When the classic GT rationales are stated as (1) "to keep the main concern and its recurrent solution of those being studied in focus" and (2) "to prevent preconceived professional concerns to mask what actually goes on in the field of study", this does not mean that use of other methodologies by default will lead to the opposite result. It may even be a strength if many different methodologies can be applied within a given research task. Methodological choice is not a question of enabling a researcher to reach the "absolute truth line", but to come closer to it. Social life has many facets, many realities may emerge in approaching "the truth line", and there cannot be any ultimate finality in any classic GT theory generation.

Of course, those being studied in a classic GT research know much more about what they do than any researcher. No classic GT researcher can or should compete with these people in their contextual knowing and describing. However, these people have not conceptualized nor conceptually explained what they do and how they accomplish it. The researcher, on the other hand, uses his/her license to conceptualize. Thus, the researcher can empower these people by providing them with an empirically grounded theory that conceptually explains what actually goes on and how they recurrently resolve their main concern. If some changes are needed, then these people would be empowered to accomplish them.

The Consequential Classic GT: The research procedures and distinct terminology

The research rationale of classic GT is made operative by the classic GT research procedures and by a distinct classic GT terminology. With reference to the research rationale, many of the procedures explain themselves. Firstly, it is difficult to "get through and beyond conjecture and preconception to exactly the underlying processes of what is going on in the resolving of the participant's main concern" without taking a predominantly empirical and inductive approach in the systematic collection and treatment of data. However, this inductive approach is not

the same as the "ordinary" inductive approach. This inductive approach is basically "assumption-free" and only "assumption-based" when these assumptions represent emerging stable patterns in the data. Anything else may be preconceptions, and preconceptions have to be minimized. Thus, a distinction may be made between (1) deductive logic based on a priori knowledge (which is minimized), (2) inductive logic where non-grounded assumptions also may direct the research process, (and which also is minimized), and (3) "the classic GT form of induction", where data takes the lead of the research process and where only grounded assumptions count. Suspension of prior knowledge and minimization of logical-deductive elements does not mean the elimination of them; neither does it give "objectivity". However, it makes a big difference. The data have also to be collected without any tainting of the researcher's possible preconceived notions, and this means that the researcher starts without any predetermined or preconceived research problem. Actually, one cannot know what one is studying before one has had a chance to look at the data - it has to "emerge" first. Literature reading has to wait to the end of the research. Only the data provides the control, and the task of the researcher is to be able to follow where the data lead him/her (Lowe, 2005).

Secondly, it is difficult to "get through and beyond conjecture and preconception to exactly the underlying processes of what is going on in the resolving of the participant's main concern" without the specific procedure of conceptualization by the method of constantly comparing. This procedure of conceptualizing thus becomes the main inductive procedure for the systematic treatment of data. The research rationale also requires delimiting, and the procedure of conceptualization is inherently delimiting, and the summit of this delimiting is achieved by finding the authentic core variable.

Possibly the most important and the most problematic issue for any researcher who uses the methodology is conceptualization or concept generation. To conceptualize means to discover and to name latent patterns and relationships between latent patterns as they emerge in the data and are verified by interchangeable data indicators.

Further, to conceptualize means: "to discover and generate new categories and their properties, instead of being forced to use received concepts." (Glaser, 1998, p. 133)

By coding (or conceptualizing or categorizing), the data are analyzed by being cut into slices that are constantly compared, and subsequently they may become synthesized and put together again differently according to the "pattern fit" and the various relationships. By coding, fitting names are given to each stable pattern, which convey explanations regarding the main concern and its recurrent resolution of those being studied. This takes place in a process of data collection and data coding that usually becomes iterative and involves much reworking.

There are two main types of building blocks of theory. These are substantive concepts or codes and theoretical concepts or codes. Substantive concepts are stable latent patterns that summarize the empirical substance of the data and signify the underlying meaning, uniformity and/or pattern. Theoretical codes, on the other hand, signify the relationships between substantive codes. For substantive concepts there is a hierarchy of levels. Any substantive concept has a level of abstractness vis-à-vis time, place and people. The more a particular underlying meaning, uniformity and/or pattern represents an abstract of time, place and people, the higher is the concept's conceptual level. The core variable is the substantive concept of the theory that has the highest conceptual level, and it is most closely related to all the other lesser-level concepts. Sub-core variables are below the core variable in conceptual level and very closely related to the core variable. Categories are below sub-core variables in conceptual level, but are related to some sub-core variables. A property is another type of concept; it is a conceptual characteristic of a category, sub-core variable or core variable, or a concept of a concept. Consequently, a property has a lesser conceptual level than the concept to which it refers. Data (qualitative or quantitative) are contextual descriptions that are bounded to the specificity of time, place and people and are at the lowest conceptual level. Theoretical codes are usually on a higher conceptual level than substantive concepts, as they signify more general phenomena (different kinds of causes, correlation,

processes with at least two stages that account for variation over time, loops, inseparable part-wholeness structures, etc.). (Glaser, 1978, pp. 93-115; 1992, pp. 38-39, 75-76).

A distinction is made between substantive coding and theoretical coding. There are two types of substantive coding. They are open coding and selective coding. Open coding is for finding the core variable. Selective coding is applied when the core variable has emerged and selective coding is delimited to concepts or data fragments that are related to the core variable. Theoretical coding is for recognizing or discovering the type of relationships between substantive concepts.

Classic GT is a form of latent pattern analysis of qualitative or quantitative data, but in other respects it is quite unlike, e.g. factor analysis. It originates from multivariate quantitative methodology (Glaser, 1998, p. 27). Yet, the methodology does not rely on any form of measuring or any counting. It does not rely on index construction of any kind, but on interchangeable indicators found in the data (Glaser, 1978, pp. 55-65). Glaser recommends that emergent categories (different latent patterns) should not be listed during the data work, and that data indicators should not be counted (Glaser, 1998, p.137).

The methodology is rarely used on only quantitative data, despite the fact that it is far easier. It has to be high calibre quantitative data, and such data on behaviour may be costly to obtain. When the methodology is used on qualitative data, the use of it has to be entirely technology-free (Glaser, 2003:17-44). Apart from mere writing purposes, the use of special computer software for coding or for sorting of categories or coded data is not recommended. Use of computer software may lead to a built-in pre-framing, incompatibility regarding forced choices, as well as incompatibility regarding flexibility, pacing and attention to what goes on in the data.

In the next section, more will be explained about classic GT procedures and terminology.

The Consequential Classic GT Stages of Research

Because focus is on behaviour patterns that transcend the limits of individual units, the data are collected by theoretical

sampling and not by statistical or representative sampling. In the beginning phase of theoretical sampling, the differences among the sampled units are maximized. Analysis and synthesis of the data then determines what unit to sample next. The data should be collected without any tainting of the researcher's possible preconceived notions from pre-existing theory, and the significance of the data should never be pre-judged, for example, by assuming that variables such as age, sex, income, size, type of business, etc. are important. When the interview is used in data collection, ungrounded or predetermined questions should be avoided. Instead, the interviewee should just be encouraged to talk freely about his/her main concern and its recurrent solving. This may be done in different ways, depending on what the interviewer finds appropriate in the given context. When the core variable has been revealed, more grounded questions may be asked. Audio or video is not recommended during interviews, and it may not be a good idea to take notes as well during interviews. This may inhibit the interviewee in giving genuine and original data. Instead, the data may be recorded afterwards, and the coding of it should begin immediately. (Glaser, 2001, pp. 165-184).

The procedural stages of the research are generally sequential, but once the research process begins, they are often conducted simultaneously or serendipitously according to the requirements of the particular research. Following the preparatory stage of not preconceiving the problem, and the data collection stage, an overview of the subsequent stages is as follows (Simmons, 2002):

As mentioned, there are two procedural stages of substantive coding, open coding and selective coding. Common to them is the procedure of constant comparative analysis. This means constantly comparing or relating data or data incidences (line by line) to emerging concepts (ideas), then relating concept (ideas) to other concepts (ideas) or their properties.

Open coding, which has the purpose of finding the core variable, allows coding of anything and everything in the data. The analyst asks three general questions of the data: "What is this data a study of". This ultimately leads to the discovery of the core variable that subsequently becomes the focus of the

research. The next question is: "What category or property of a category does this incident indicate?" (This encourages thinking conceptually and to avoiding contextualizing or "story-telling"). The third question is: "What is actually happening in the data?" (This alerts to possible theoretical codes).

The next procedure of selective coding is carried out when the core variable and its major dimensions and properties have been discovered. Selective coding means delimiting the coding to concepts or data fragments related to the core variable, but in other respects the procedures are the same while in the process of constantly comparing. Theoretical coding is to recognize or discover how the substantive concepts may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into a theory. Theoretical coding is facilitated by the procedure of sorting (see below).

The procedure of memo-writing is a must in a classic grounded theory study. Memos are the "theorizing write-up" of ideas about substantive codes and their relationships. The writing of memos triggers insight and new ideas, and provides a record of grounding. While coding gives conceptual familiarity with the data, emergence happens while memo-writing. Data are always available, and can be analyzed at any time, while ideas are fragile. They should be written down at the earliest possible moment. Memos are always modifiable as more is discovered about the topic. Data collection, analysis (coding), sorting, and memo-writing are ongoing and overlap. (Glaser, 1978, pp. 82-92; Glaser, 1998, pp. 177-186). Conceptual familiarity with what conceptually occurs in the data has to reach a certain threshold before insight can strike gradually or suddenly or in abundance - or in other words: before emergence of concepts can occur. It requires theoretical sensitivity and creativity, but hardly more logic than what can be summoned by a small child in solving a jigsaw. Activation of more complex logic than that can easily trigger logical elaboration, and when an analyst relies on logical elaborations and deductions instead of what the data conceptually tell, he/she has actually abandoned the methodology. However, in theoretical sampling, a bit of *logic* is used in deciding where take the next sample. In theoretical coding, *prior knowledge* and *logical understanding* of as many theoretical codes as possible will be helpful. This

means that while classic GT is predominately inductive regarding the research area and the research problem, it is also a specified inductive-deductive mix.

The procedure of sorting refers not to data sorting, but to conceptual sorting of memos and accompanying data. By default, it also involves constant comparing. As explained, this has to be done manually, and a pair of scissors and a number of paper boxes may be useful. Sorting may become appropriate at any time during the course of the research. The final sort frames or constitutes the first draft of the write-up.

Once the researcher feels confident in his/her theory, he/she can begin to analyze and integrate relevant existing literature into it. A classic GT comparative literature review examines and compares the concepts rather than the contexts from whence the data came. Contextual literature without conceptual relatedness is not integrated, but non-contextual literature (i.e. from other disciplines) should be integrated if relatedness is found. Such a comparison may modify the theory, and it may of course also add to or correct the pre-existing literature. Usually, it is difficult to find relatedness in contextual literature. Consequently, the literature review is usually short.

The key issue comes down to the methodology's as well as the researcher's capability to reveal a credible theory from the data that explains with parsimony and scope. This means the capability to make allowance for and to trigger the emergence of concepts that (1) fit to the data, (2) work to explain, and are (3) relevant for those being studied. Yet, there is also a 4th criterion for assessment. This criterion probably applies to all research, which literally means "search again". A generated orthodox GT is "asymptotic" in the meaning that it approaches what goes on, but most likely, it will never reach any ultimate or final "truth line". Further research, involving new data, may bring it closer to the ultimate "truth line" or the asymptote. Therefore, a generated classic GT is modifiable. It should be open to modification, and consequently fit as a tool for learning. (Glaser, 1992, p. 116).

The Challenges for a Novice Classic GT Researcher

There is no reason to expect that it is easier for a beginner

to use these procedures than it is for a beginner to use advanced quantitative-statistical procedures in research. Yet, the innate and required abilities to learn these different sets of procedures may be very different. While attempting to achieve autonomy in the use of the classic GT methodology, the novice classic GT researcher has to relinquish all theoretical-disciplinal autonomy over the research process, and to surrendered this autonomy and control to the data. This cannot be done without humility and without extended tolerance for extended periods of confusion, while not controlling "as usual". The task of the researcher is to follow where the data might lead him/her while conceptualizing by constantly comparing, memo-writing, sorting, etc. From this relinquishing of autonomy, another kind of autonomy has to emerge. This is researcher autonomy as the researcher gradually learns to use the research procedures as prescribed. Such autonomy is not obtained without accomplishing a major research project. However, this is a description of a good outcome. A different outcome is quite possible if no qualified methodological coaching is available, and the need for such coaching may be underestimated. The need to emphasize the classic GT research procedures and stages of research as necessary requirements for fulfilling the classic GT research rationale may also have been underestimated. These relationships are fundamental for fully understanding whether or not classic GT is the right methodology to choose for a given research task and research purpose, and also for understanding the methodology.

The suspension of prior knowledge and the keeping of preconceptions in check will usually lead to long periods of seeming deadlock, confusion, even depression, while no stable patterns are seen in the data. In such a situation it becomes tempting to find another solution than "to discover the core variable first" for solving the problem of "many equally justifiable interpretations of the data". A pre-framed professional concern or preconceived theoretical perspective may replace the role of the core variable.

In such a situation it may also become an option to apply the different GT procedures that are prescribed by, e.g., Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998) as an alternative. The Strauss-Corbin version of GT also applies a core variable, but

this core variable is found at a later stage of research to sum up or integrate the findings. (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, pp. 143-161). This core variable has not the role to delimit the study from its start in order to solve the problem of "many equally justifiable interpretations of the data". Furthermore, the Strauss-Corbin version of GT applies the procedures of "axial coding" and the "consequential/conditional matrix" (ibid., pp. 123-142, 181-199). These represent a different coding paradigm that replaces the role of theoretical coding, sorting and partly substantive coding in classic GT, and the role of the "classic GT form of induction". This coding paradigm more restricted. It favours the generation of concepts that fit within a narrow range of theoretical codes. These are mostly the theoretical codes of symbolic interactionism or the stimulus-organism-response model (ibid., p. 128). As opposed to this, the classic GT researcher has to be open for the emergence of any type of theoretical code, and their number may range between 40 and several hundred (Glaser, 2005, pp. 17-30).

If the researcher needs to pre-frame his/her study, to predefine the core variable, or to define the core variable at the end of the study, or to use a given theoretical perspective as a substitute for finding the core variable as the first stage of research, or does not want to use "the classic GT form of induction", then classic GT definitely will be a wrong choice of methodology.

An Approach to Compare Methodologies that is Simpler

Detailed explanations of the many methodological differences are of course necessary, and are especially valuable when provided by the methodological pioneers. Barney Glaser (1992) has given his own detailed account of the differences between classic GT and the version of GT that has been prescribed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Glaser's critique can easily be misunderstood. Glaser does not claim that classic GT is a better methodology. Glaser just concludes that the Strauss-Corbin version of GT is fundamentally different from classic GT methodology, and that this very different methodology should be referred to a different name:

> It is a "new" conceptual method, uniquely suited to qualitative research, that simply uses the grounded theory name, with the author having no realization of what grounded theory was in the first place – what it was in goals, methodology, freedom, level of abstraction, constant comparison, naturalism, emergence, trust and care about what the participants perceive and what their problems are. (Glaser, 1992, pp. 123-124).

Jan Hartman (2001) has also provided a detailed account for the differences between these two different "grounded theory" approaches. In Hartman's view, the most important idea perhaps behind grounded theory, as it was conceived by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is that the theory that is generated has to emerge without being influenced by a priori theoretical assumptions, and that all elements in the theory have to be grounded in data. Hartman concludes that the Corbin-Strauss GT procedures will not always be able to fulfil this original intention behind grounded theory. (Hartman, 2001, pp. 41-42). This also means that the de facto rationale of the Corbin-Strauss GT methodology is different from classic GT rationale.

In this article, the two "*hallmarks*" of classic GT have been used to explain the classic GT research rationale. Jointly these two "hallmarks" justify the pivotal role of the *core variable* in solving the problem of "multiple equally justified interpretations", the role of the very different "*classic GT form of induction*" to prevent preconceptions and to facilitate grounding, and the role of the procedure of "*conceptualizing while constantly comparing*" while applying the "*classic GT form of induction*" for the detection of stable latent patterns in the data. When this frame is used for comparing methodologies, the fundamental difference between classic GT and logical deductive or hypothetical-deductive approaches is obvious. The fundamental differences between classic GT and other mainly inductive-qualitative or hermeneutic research approaches, as well, do not need further elaboration.

The *first and second hallmark* of classic GT, i.e., the role of the *core variable*, and the very different "*classic GT form of induction*", are enough to highlight a fundamental difference. That many of these other methodologies also use procedures for

coding and *comparing* of qualitative data, as well as *memo-writing* does not eradicate this difference. Because the "*classic GT form of induction*" and the role of the *core variable* differ from other inductive-qualitative approaches, the classic GT procedures for *coding*, *constantly comparing* and *memo-writing* and *sorting* are applied very differently. To assume that procedures with the same name mean equivalent procedures only leads to confusion. Because of the differences between the classic GT and the Strauss-Corbin set of research procedures, these two sets research procedures could lead to the emergence of dissimilar *core variables* and dissimilar sets of *substantive concepts* within the same area of research.

The Role of Symbolic Interactionism

Many authors have linked *symbolic interactionism* with Glaser's classic GT. There are many examples, and it is beyond the scope of this article to comment on them (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Creswell, 1998; Morse, 1994). It has even been stated that *symbolic interactionism* is the foundational philosophy of the original or classic GT. If this were true, this would mean that any prospective classic GT research had to start with a preconceived or predefined theoretical perspective, namely the perspective of *symbolic interactionism*. If this were true, classic GT would be inconsistent and hence meaningless. Dr. Glaser has carefully explained that *symbolic interactionism* is *not* the foundational theoretical perspective of classic GT. Classic GT is a general inductive methodology that presumes no discipline or theoretical perspective or data type (Glaser, 2005, pp. 141-160). In his book from 1998, Dr. Glaser gives an account of how his acquaintance with the Chicago school of *symbolic interaction* through Anselm Strauss gave him "*a chance to analyze qualitative data by applying my quantitative ideas to qualitative data*". It also gave him a chance of fully absorbing the notion that man is a meaning-making animal (Glaser, 1998:32). This may have been an important step for a researcher, who previously had been accustomed to quantitative research procedures, but this does not mean adherence to the methodological and theoretical perspective of *symbolic interactionism*. However, the *axial coding paradigm* of the Strauss-Corbin version of GT is directed towards some pre-

selected theoretical codes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 128), and these are quite compatible with symbolic interactionism.

Some Examples that Highlight the Difference

The difference between classic GT and other versions of GT can be illustrated by some examples. Frederic Lee has made some attempts to apply GT methodology within the context of macroeconomics (Lee, 2002a:4; Lee, 2002b; Lee, 2005). However, Lee's research problem is entirely set within the paradigm of post-Keynesian economics and heterodox economics without any focus on what is the most important and problematic for those being studied. This means that classic GT will be unsuited for Lee's research task and research purpose, and consequently, Lee applies another version of GT.

One example of a GT study in business that deliberately avoids classic GT is Tomas Brytting's study of "Organizing in the small growing firm" (Brytting, 1991). About the core variable Brytting writes: *"The study's "aspect" or "core variable" was set at the outset: "organizing processes in small firms". An analysis <u>à la Glaser</u> would not have defined that core variable until later on in the research process. With this study's data, Glaser might have ended up with a theory about sensemaking in the small firm…/…My view in this study has been that generation of theory might benefit from the same systematic and cumulative ambition that guides the testing of theory."* (Ibid., pp. 209-210). Due to Brytting's research purposes, another version of GT was a more fit choice for him. However, Brytting's understanding of a *core variable* has nothing to do with the *core variable* in classic GT, and it does not correspond entirely to the meaning of the core variable in the Strauss-Corbin version of GT. Brytting preconceives the notion of "sensemaking", and "organizing processes in small firms" is just his general research topic.

In her book, "*Grounded Theory in Management Research*", Karen Locke (2001) explains the use of the Corbin-Strauss version of GT. However, it is remarkable that she does not take Dr. Glaser's clear position seriously. Dr. Glaser states that the Corbin & Strauss version of GT is an entirely different methodology. (Ibid., p. 71). Locke labels both as grounded theory. Consequently, her readers do not obtain any clarity

regarding the difference between these two research methodologies. Neither do her readers obtain any clarity regarding the classic GT research rationale and the consequential classic GT research procedures and stages of research. For example, Locke misses the pivotal role of the *core variable* in classic GT and she does not mention the procedure of *sorting*. She also states: "*Certainly, the school of thought, namely symbolic interactionism, that informed the understanding of social reality expressed in grounded theory's research practices, appears to have been left behind.*" (Ibid., p. viii). Thus, for Locke, correct use of GT means to view and treat the data through the "glasses" of one particular theoretical perspective, namely the perspective of *symbolic interactionism*. Avoidance of any such pre-framing is part of the classic GT research rationale. This may be the clearest difference between classic GT and other versions of GT.

Conclusion

When the essential elements of classic GT are used as a frame of reference, a simpler and yet concise comparison of classic GT and seemingly similar methodologies can be achieved. The essential elements are: The first hallmark of classic GT, ["to keep the main concern and its recurrent solution of those being studied in focus"], the finding of the consequential *core variable* as the first stage of research, and the subsequent and consequential delimiting of the research to the *core variable*. These elements minimize the problem of "many equally justifiable interpretations of the data".

The Corbin-Strauss version of GT finds a substitute solution to this problem. This solution is not necessarily an inferior one. It solves the problem of "many equally justifiable interpretations of the data" by viewing and treating the data through the "lens" of a restricted range of possible theoretical codes and hence pre-selected theoretical perspectives and possibly also predetermined professional concern. Consequently, there is no need to find the *core variable* as the first stage of research, or any need or urgency to find it at all.

The second hallmark of classic GT ["*to prevent any preconceived professional concerns to mask what actually goes on in the field of study*"] cannot apply in the same way, or apply

at all, in the Corbin-Strauss version of GT. This second hallmark is tantamount to the "*classic GT form of induction*", and it is inconsistent with the axial coding paradigm of the Strauss-Corbin version of GT. As a consequence, the procedures of conceptualizing (coding) have to be applied differently in the Corbin-Strauss version of GT.

Because the Corbin-Strauss version of GT finds a substitute solution to the problem of "many equally justifiable interpretations of the data", a user of this methodology needs not to endure long periods of seeming deadlock, confusion, even depression, while no stable patterns are seen in the data. It will always be easier to interpret the data through the "glasses" of a pre-determined theoretical perspective, and this will ultimately yield the findings of a standard solution. To deem this solution inferior however, is pointless.

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