

ePortfolio Journal Assignment 1

Thinking About My Grounded Theory Project

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There is both beauty and terror in being a novice researcher in any discipline, at the beginning of a new graduate program. The beauty lies in the possibilities, the potential for discovery, and the journey ahead. The terror is also found in the vastness of the possibilities, the amount of work and decisions that need to be completed, and in the steep learning curve that is unlike any other. Once you have settled on your research question, there are more that will follow. Fortunately, there are many research methodologies available for nurse researchers to answer the many research questions that are being asked. Selection of the research methodology will depend on the philosophical views of the researcher, the knowledge and skill of the researcher and the research team, but the decision is ultimately driven by the research question. Which methodology, qualitative or quantitative, grounded theory or narrative inquiry, is best suited to answer the question and the objectives of the research? Grounded theory is an approach to qualitative inquiry that sets out to discover or construct substantive theory from the data. Grounded theory as a methodology is flexible, yet structured, and is appropriate when there is little known about the phenomenon of interest (Chun Tie et al., 2019).

History and Philosophical Underpinnings of Grounded Theory

Origins of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory (GT) was founded in the mid-1960's by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. While they were studying the experiences of terminally ill patients who had varying degrees of knowledge about their health status, they questioned if using the scientific method was appropriate for their study (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Through the course of their study, they found that they could inductively generate theory from data, a process that challenged the more traditional method of theory testing and refinement through deductive testing (Charmaz,

2014; Chun Tie et al., 2019). The result of Glaser and Strauss's work was not only a theory of dying, but also the development of constant comparative analysis, and other systematic methodological strategies. These strategies were first described in 1967 in their seminal work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory; Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Glaser & Strauss). Together, they advocated for developing theories through research generated from qualitative inquiry as opposed to deducing hypothesis from existing theories (Charmaz, 2014; Chun Tie et al., 2019; Rieger, 2018; Wuest, 2012).

Grounded theory is an approach to qualitative research where the goal lies in the development of a substantive middle-range theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Wuest, 2012). Glaser and Strauss felt that theory generated from data would be more suitable to practical use than theory that was deduced from *a priori* assumptions, and attempted to shift qualitative inquiry from descriptive studies towards explanatory frameworks that could provide abstract and conceptual understandings of the area of inquiry (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As far as Glaser and Strauss are concerned, theory has five interrelated functions, to predict and explain behaviour, to be useful in theoretical advancement, to be useful in practical applications, to provide perspectives on behaviours, and to guide research (1967). Additionally, they felt that theory should not only make sense to members of the discipline, but also to students and laypeople (Boychuk Duchscher & Morgan, 2004; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014).

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Kathy Charmaz is a sociologist, who was a student of Glaser and Strauss (Charmaz, 2014). She, like many other grounded theorists, took the basis of GT research strategies and developed constructivist grounded theory (CGT) based on her own ontological and epistemological stances. CGT takes with it the iterative logic of Strauss and the inductive and

comparative approach of Glaser but eliminates the notion that the researcher is a value-free, neutral observer (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivist grounded theory assumes that there are multiple perspectives to reality, and that reality is constructed. Research itself is constructed rather than discovered, a position which highlights the reflexivity of the researcher (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz is clear that GT in its various iterations serve to learn about the worlds we study and to develop theories about them, stating that “...we are part of the world we study... We *construct* our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 17).

Grounded Theory in Nursing Research

Nursing as a discipline has long struggled with something of a professional identity crisis, seeking its place as an academic discipline with its own professional body of knowledge versus a practice discipline versus a vocation or a “calling” (Thorne et al, 1998). Sally Thorne, a well-known nurse scholar, describes nursing as a “...complex and ‘messy’ discipline...exquisite in its complexity and its purity of purpose” (Thorne, 2016, p. 28). As nurse scholars have attempted to work through this identity crisis, they have relied on the development of nursing theory and nursing knowledge, looking towards a wide variety of methodologies to develop this knowledge (Thorne, 2016).

Since its development in 1967, nurse scholars and nurse researchers have found GT to be of great utility. As GT results in the development of an explanatory theory of human behaviour in a social context, nurse researchers can use GT approaches to develop deeper understandings of patient and family beliefs and actions in a clinical setting (Charmaz, 1990; Wuest, 2012). Nurse researchers have used grounded theory approaches to examine clinical phenomena such as time management in nursing students, stress-levels of nurse educators, and nurses’ clinical decision

making (Batson & de Chesnay, 2015). Grounded theory approaches have been used by nurse researchers to explore a phenomenon in detail, to develop concepts or constructs for future research and theory development, or in descriptive studies when theory development is not the goal (arguably not a correct use of the methodology) (Batson & de Chesnay, 2015). As a practical approach to research, GT can allow nurse researchers to see patterns of health in groups and communities, and to attempt to predict health and practice issues (Singh & Estefan, 2018). As GT results in a substantive middle-range theory, it can help address the ever present, often debated “theory-practice” gap by developing theories that are truly grounded in the experiences of the participants (and the researchers in the case of CGT) (Batson & de Chesnay, 2015).

My Grounded Theory Project

As I have progressed through my doctoral program, I have become very interested in the image of nursing and nurses, and nursing stereotypes and how these stereotypes have been portrayed and perpetuated in the media. I ultimately have decided to focus this project on social media and nurses, specifically on the phenomenon of nurse influencers and how nurses experience and engage with nurse influencers on various social media platform. Social media is widely used by nurses and nursing students and there are many nurse influencers who are present across a variety of platforms. This work will fit well within my interest of the image of nursing in the media, and within my broader research interests of moral distress, resilience, and hope that I plan to pursue as the focus of my doctoral work.

This work will attempt to develop a constructivist grounded theory analysis of nurses’ engagement with nurse influencers on social media. I will be analyzing data collected primarily from Reddit, as this site is largely anonymous, and does not provide any personal or geographical data about its users. I will gather comments and posts from sub-Reddits such as

r/nursing, *r/nurse*, and *r/nurses*. Nurse influencers will be identified from other social media sites such as Instagram and TikTok and will be determined based on criteria such as number of followers and verifiability of credentials as a Registered Nurse. There is risk to collecting data from an anonymized source such as Reddit is that anyone can post in these groups, there is limited ability to truly vet members who say they are nurses or nursing students. However, with anonymity comes a certain element of freedom, and the ability for posters to say what they feel without fear of ramification. This is both a benefit and a drawback, as posters can say what they think – good and bad.

Development of Self as a Researcher

As a novice researcher, CGT appeals to me because of the approach that it takes toward the position of the researcher as an active participant and co-constructor of the research. For me, this is congruent with Stebbins (2001) view of exploratory research, where personal experience should not be ignored and where the researcher is committed to research that is of their own “central life interest” (p. 55). Of central interest to me is in looking at issues and concerns that are affecting my colleagues and the populations I work with and seeking to find ways to address these challenges. Grounded theory is reflective of real-world settings, and the explanations behind the theory are grounded, making it practical and applicable and ideal for helping to find solutions. I also appreciate that CGT is flexible and adaptable, yet has a structure, which is appealing as a novice researcher as well.

I am looking forward to the next stages of this project to see how it will unfold. I am trying to not anticipate anything, to see where the data takes me. I am already getting ahead of myself in thinking about the projects and studies that could come after this one to further explore the issue of nurses and nurse influencers.

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