

# Grounded Theory in Global Perspective: Reviews by International Researchers

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## Abstract

This article locates grounded theory in its national, historical, and disciplinary origins and explores how and to what extent these origins affect research practice across the globe. The article begins a conversation with international researchers who review using grounded theory in their countries and cultures. Their reviews reveal the significance of (a) shared meanings, (b) contradictions between data collection techniques and cultural practices, (c) tensions between coding in English and native languages, (d) points of cultural convergence and grounded theory strategies, and (e) local constraints. In conclusion, the article calls for attending to how the national and cultural underpinnings of methodological approaches affect inquiry.

## Keywords

grounded theory, global perspective, Chicago School sociology, language, culture

## Introduction

Grounded theory reaches across the globe. Researchers in diverse disciplines and professions throughout the world have adopted this method to conduct qualitative inquiry. Yet, in their original statement, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (1967) assume a North American logic and approach to inquiry with their emphases on empirical fit with data, efficient strategies, successful theoretical outcomes, usefulness for policy and practice, and skepticism toward earlier theories as well as on personal career advancement.<sup>1</sup>

This article speaks to the growing recognition of how methods are embedded in the locations and conditions of their development. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) showed how research methods reproduced colonialist forms of knowledge and relationships with indigenous people. Pertti Alasuutari (2004) pointed out that the United States and the United Kingdom dominated the logic and form of qualitative research methods. Anna Amelina and Thomas Faist (2012) challenge conceptions of the national origins of research methodologies as the natural way of conducting research.

Place and time matter in the development of research methods. The grounded theory method emerged at a particular historical moment. Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1965, 1967) developed grounded theory shortly before the unrest of the late 1960s in the United States. By 1968, the Viet Nam war divided the country and punctured notions of political consensus. Moreover, as diplomatic historian Mary Sheila McMahon (1994) observes, the state

failed to embody the justifications on which it had based its legitimacy. But before then, the legitimacy of the state and of the nation's economic institutions largely remained unquestioned. The grounded theory method first emerged during a time of unquestioned capitalism in which many U.S. citizens subscribed to taken-for-granted hierarchies of race, class, and gender in the United States and of political and economic dominance beyond its borders. In the early 1960s, many Americans viewed capitalism and democracy as two sides of the same coin.

I have long argued that methods develop within specific contexts rather than being context-free. As Edward Tolhurst (2012) also implies, grounded theory developed in a particular methodological culture and reflects this culture. International researchers may have national and cultural pasts that differ considerably from those in which grounded theory originated. How do these researchers find using grounded theory?

My questions about using grounded theory in global perspective began to take form almost a decade ago. During a conversation about qualitative methods, sociologist César Cisneros-Puebla<sup>2</sup> suggested that using grounded theory could pose problems for researchers from other cultures than the United States (personal communication, June 26,

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2004). He asked what I thought the methodologist's responsibility should be to adapt the method to fit the situations of these researchers. I had realized that grounded theory strategies could collide with cultural practices on the international scene but I had no answer for César.

This article opens a conversation about grounded theory in global perspective and begins to address international researchers' experiences in using grounded theory. Certainly numerous concerns and experiences that grounded theorists express here also pervade other forms of qualitative research. As Karen Henwood states (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008; Henwood & Pigeon, 2003), grounded theory provides a useful nodal point for looking at larger issues in qualitative research.

I begin the conversation about grounded theory in global perspective with the following questions: (a) How do the historical, national, disciplinary origins of this method affect grounded theory research practice across the globe? (b) What problems and possibilities might arise for grounded theorists from different cultures? (c) What concerns do international grounded theorists raise about using grounded theory? (d) How might their respective national and disciplinary trends influence international grounded theorists' work?

## Materials and Resources

To consider these questions, I draw upon the few written methodological and autobiographical statements that I could find about using grounded theory in international contexts beyond the United States and the United Kingdom but highlight written comments from international colleagues who have used grounded theory. My involvement in writing and teaching grounded theory precludes conducting research on this topic. I did, however, invite grounded theorists from various countries to review their experiences in using the method. To my knowledge, few if any of these grounded theorists knew their counterparts from other countries except perhaps through published works. I had had earlier email correspondence with most of these grounded theorists but only had a sustained prior acquaintance with several of them. Most of the invitations to participate were extended by email. I sent each grounded theorist a list of open-ended questions about the method to consider when formulating their comments.

I sought international researchers at various career stages from doctoral students to senior scholars to review their experiences with grounded theory. I asked researchers to consider questions such as the following: (a) "In your view, to what extent do grounded theory methods fit your culture?" (b) "How, if at all, have you adapted grounded theory methods to fit cultural traditions in your country?" (c) "What do you see as the strengths of grounded theory for researchers and teachers in your country and culture?" and (d) "Could you describe any problems or obstacles that

using the method poses for you?" I realize that "culture" is neither a static concept nor do national borders necessarily identify a culture. However, my questions let the reviewers respond to the term *culture* as they saw fit. I also intended that the questions serve as tools for the researchers to review their experiences, not to limit what they might cover.

The responses were thoughtful and detailed.<sup>3</sup> I present excerpts from international scholars' short reviews about their experiences in teaching and using grounded theory. Rather than summarizing their comments, I aim to preserve their voices in the following pages.

## The Emergence of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory arose at a particular time, under particular social, historical, situational, and disciplinary conditions, from specific people: Barney Glaser, Anselm Strauss, and Jeanne Quint (Benoliel), who played an integral role in the research team for Strauss and Glaser's studies of the social organization of dying in hospitals. Benoliel (1967) published two classic works herself (Quint, 1965).

The publication of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* came at a propitious moment in disciplinary history. Most explicitly, grounded theory arose in opposition to trends in sociology and reflects the arguments and assumptions of this discipline during the mid-1960s. Although some sociologists such as Lyn H. Lofland<sup>4</sup> see grounded theory as a natural and unsurprising outgrowth of Chicago School sociology, others see it as an innovative breakthrough in qualitative methodology, but in the 1960s, grounded theory stirred mixed responses as is evident in Strauss's (1969) response to Jan J. Loubser's (1968) negative review of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Strauss wrote,

The book, as we know from having sent draft copies to many readers, arouses strong feelings pro or con and acts a little like a projective, forcing readers to stake strong methodological stands themselves on some of the issues raised in the book. (p. 419)

Glaser and Strauss did not anticipate how their method would spread across disciplines and professions and reach across the globe. They intended that their book would speak to their contemporaries among North American sociologists. Yet, the *Discovery* book reflects cultural assumptions located in time, place, and situation as well as mid-century North American disciplinary culture in sociology. Among these cultural assumptions are North American notions of work, progress, pacing, and achievement.

The 1950s and early 1960s culture of North American social sciences and specifically the disciplinary culture of sociology spawned the ascendance of quantitative methods that soon dominated departments, journals, and funding agencies.<sup>5</sup> Earlier Chicago School traditions supporting qualitative inquiry in U.S. sociology had rapidly eroded.

Qualitative research narrowed to the purview of a few star sociologists, a small number of departments where qualitative researchers clustered, and their students who carried the qualitative mantle into the 1970s and 1980s.

Positivistic quantitative research framed methodological debates and set the criteria for sociological studies in the 1950s and early 1960s. Qualitative research did not fit this methodological frame with its logic of quantified measures of reliability and validity as well as research designs that made replication possible (although few studies were replicated). Hence, many sociologists viewed qualitative research as impressionistic, idiosyncratic, anecdotal, and biased. In this view, qualitative research could not meet standards for validity, reliability, and replication. Simultaneously, theorizing had become abstract, general, macroscopic, and largely devoid of empirical roots. The distance between research and theory grew. These methodological and theoretical developments distinguished U.S. sociology from European sociology, which had long traditions in critical debate and addressed praxis in theorizing.

Social scientists had developed public opinion research and statistical techniques during World War II and institutionalized quantitative research after the war. Jennifer Platt (1996) notes that these developments established the hegemony of the survey as well as the dominance of departments that used this approach. The growing strength of public opinion research and statistical analysis during the mid-20th century overshadowed and marginalized qualitative inquiry in sociology in the United States. This trend occurred despite long and vibrant qualitative traditions at the University of Chicago that began with life histories, included urban ecologies, and increasingly moved into participant observation. The methodology of conducting observational fieldwork and, moreover, analyzing the data it generated had neither been explicated nor codified for ready transmission to novices and newcomers. Early discussions dwelled on field research roles and the validity of the observations. Paul Rock (1979) observes that Chicago School ethnographers learned their craft through mentoring and immersion in their field sites but what happened in them largely remained invisible.

The methodological frame of quantitative research set criteria that qualitative research could not fulfill. Some mid-century quantitative researchers saw qualitative inquiry as a precursor to constructing quantitative instruments but most dismissed it. Qualitative research could not meet mid-century canons for reliability and validity, much less objectivity. The inability of qualitative researchers to replicate their studies further marginalized qualitative research.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) challenged these developments by offering a systematic method of qualitative analysis for theory construction and guidelines for conducting the requisite research to do it. Hence, they not only integrated research and theory but also they democratized

theory construction and made it within the realm of the working researcher. Glaser and Strauss refuted the prevailing assumption that theorizing belonged to “great man” theorists (p. 7) who pondered the structure of society without conducting empirical research. Instead, Glaser and Strauss brought theorizing into everyday empirical problems and the study of action. By explicating their methodological strategies for studying dying in hospitals (Glaser & Strauss, 1965, 1968), they changed the debates. They argued that qualitative research proceeds by a different canon than quantitative inquiry and cannot be judged by the criteria for quantitative research.

Did Glaser and Strauss influence quantitative researchers of their day? Probably very little. Nonetheless, they gained numerous followers among aspiring qualitative researchers—and gave them a rationale that legitimized conducting inductive qualitative research. The symbolic significance of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* perhaps exceeded its usefulness as a guide to qualitative research.

Grounded theory has been treated as a neutral, scientific frame of inquiry that researchers can apply anywhere with varied epistemologies (Holton, 2007). I have long argued that researchers who subscribe to varied theoretical perspectives can use specific strategies of grounded theory such as coding, memo-writing, and theoretical sampling. Yet in my view, no method is neutral. A method may be useful. It may be general. But it is not wholly neutral. It arises from specific values, assumptions, and epistemologies. It directs the researcher toward certain types of research problems and questions and thus frames inquiry.

Like other approaches to research, grounded theory exports culture, a worldview, a way of viewing, relating to, and depicting studied life along with exporting its specific strategies. The very frame of a method constitutes a standpoint from which the research process flows. The specific content this frame generates can become separated from the frame and reified as truth. In the case of grounded theory, the method also arose from particular people, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. Their worldviews and ways of doing research echoed earlier forms of conducting research (see also Loubser, 1968; Tolhurst, 2012) with an emphasis on dispassionate distance and generalization. As Clarke (2007, 2008) observes, the generalizing impulse of grounded theory erases differences of gender, race and ethnicity, and culture in the empirical world and in the subsequent analyses. Perhaps ironically, researchers use grounded theory to discern cultural differences between and within societies (Shakespeare-Finch & Copping, 2006), but its own cultural foundations have remained implicit.

## Framing Grounded Theory Inquiry

The social conditions in a society can form a silent frame on inquiry within it. Like other qualitative methods, the

development of grounded theory has largely occurred in the United States and the United Kingdom. Strauss's approach to grounded theory has also had notable influence in Germany (see, for example, Hildenbrand, 2007; Reichertz, 2007; Schütze, 2008; Strübing, 2007). But what happens in developing countries? The shadows of post-colonialism remain strong in societies for which the domination of more powerful nations still shapes everyday life. The extent to which a colonial past shapes a grounded theory present and future is unclear. For César Cisneros-Puebla, the subordination continues. He writes,

Mexico has lived always as subordinate country in different sense of life: economically, politically, culturally, scientifically and technologically. Mexico has been forever a colonized country. Even from a postcolonial and critical perspective [it] is possible to say such subordinate roles have played a crucial influence in how social science is conducted and practiced in my country. (personal communication, May 13, 2012)

The extent of marginalization that grounded theorists experience in post-colonial nations may affect the extent to which they define it as affecting their research practice. Educational researcher Elaine Keane, who is Irish, defines Ireland as a post-colonial nation but does not view its post-colonial status as framing grounded theory methods.

I'm finding it difficult to see how in any particular way Irish culture impacts on the understanding or use of grounded theory methods. In terms of a "fit" with Irish culture, one could argue that as a post-colonial nation, Irish culture might be anathema to the objectivist ontology of the classical approach and much more aligned to the context-situated theorizations of the constructivist approach. However, a rejection of this ontology and an embracing of the constructivist approach is certainly not unique to Irish culture! (personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Perhaps sharing the same language buffers the impact of post-colonialism on research and provides a taken-for-granted frame. Keane offers other important clues about framing grounded theory inquiry at the level of research practice. She adapts the method for her priorities and projects. Thus, her purposes frame how she uses grounded theory and constructs the research situation.

I would not say that I have adapted grounded theory methods to fit the cultural traditions in Ireland. I have, however, found it necessary to adapt them to better fit a) my beliefs in terms of the philosophical underpinnings of research methodology, and b) the social justice orientation in terms of my research topic. Both my philosophical beliefs about research and the social justice orientation of my research within education required a rejection of the clearly objectivist ontology of the classical approach and a deep engagement with, and appreciation of, the constructivist adaptation. In addition, because of the social

justice orientation of my research, I adapted the theoretical sampling stage to include a participatory stage for my participants, as I wished to include them as much as possible in my research. Whilst engaging in theoretical sampling, I simultaneously shared my emerging analysis and interpretations with my participants and requested their feedback. (personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Keane's comments suggest that adapting the method flows from her clear purposes but also might emerge as she engages with the empirical world.

## Considering Data Collection

Complex research relationships affect grounded theorists' strategies of data collection particularly as immigration increasingly takes global forms and societies become multicultural. Subsequently, multiple and conflicting cultural rules, beliefs, and values can enter the foreground. Cisneros-Puebla states that in Mexico, people only talk in vague terms with strangers. In addition, collecting data has its own rules and values, which may conflict with those of the research participants. The research role can distance an indigenous scholar from his or her research participants (Roulston, 2010). As in the United States, international grounded theorists who study minority populations may discover that they need to alter their approaches.

Western researchers who enter worlds elsewhere may only glimpse but not grasp how a long view of history can shape meanings and actions within their studied communities (see also Glesne, 2007). Data collection strategies must fit the particular culture and specific research participants. In some situations, using an interpreter can be a poor idea. Meanings may be muted or lost in translation and, as Vera Sheridan and Katharina Storch (2009) note, the interpreter gains private knowledge that could cause the research participant to lose face. Interviews may not be acceptable in a particular cultural community or if acceptable, recording or note-taking during the interview may not be. Cisneros-Puebla (personal communication, December 14, 2012) views interviewing as incongruent with Mexican culture, "Interviewer-interviewee is regularly a very vertical and unequal situation." Cisneros-Puebla also states,

If the data to be analyzed by GT methodologies has been constructed from interviews a great discussion must be faced. Here the issue is about what is the validity interview data can create. Interview is not a basic component of our culture. Interview is not a regular relationship in our culture. In some ways interview and some of its components (as consent signed by the interviewee) is shaped by multiple distrusts. (personal communication, December 14, 2012)

Using grounded theory across cultures and societies can change research relationships. Access may be predicated on

becoming an accepted and acceptable member of the studied community. Sheridan and Storch (2009) state,

In-depth research with Vietnamese in Ireland implies the investment of a long-term approach: a long record as a known and, eventually, trusted person which then provides the basis for a renewal of such bonds and the opportunity to contact individuals in a semipublic sphere. (para. 8)

These authors also suggest the danger of assuming that a term such as “Vietnamese community” means class, cultural, religious, and political homogeneity (para. 12).

## The Centrality of Language

Language is central. Language shapes meanings, fosters forming different types of meanings, and clarifies or conceals connections between meanings and actions. The characteristics of specific languages matter as do the characteristics of cultural traditions and norms. Massimiliano Tarozzi, the qualitative methods expert who translated *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* into Italian, agrees with me, as did several other reviewers:

I think that language, more than “culture,” affects social science methods and that it cannot be taken for granted in carrying out research. The translation question should be more carefully studied in order to highlight what we exactly mean when we presume to say the same thing, esp. “grounded theory,” while we only reduce this complex notion to its propositional content . . . It is interesting to see in which countries and why “grounded theory” is translated in the local language. In Italy we decided not to translate it both because the original term was already settled among scholars and researchers and because a perfect translation of the rich term “grounded” is impossible, with all its nuances and semantic variations. (personal communication, May 14, 2012)

However silently, language enters both data collection and analysis. Like most other qualitative researchers, grounded theorists have given scant attention to how the structure and content of specific languages can affect inquiry. In a striking exception, Tarozzi (2011) describes the influence of language when using grounded theory strategies. He compares Italian with English in his reflection of translating the *Discovery* book. Tarozzi states,

Italian is particularly suitable for applying careful, rich and refined descriptions. For that reason, I think Italian is more suitable than English for the first phases of research and memos that may be why English is been called an “isolating (or analytic) language,” while Italian is more “inflectional.” (Comrie, 1983/1989)

. . . English is a more conceptualizing language than Italian, and has greater propositional power. Therefore, it seems more

suitable for making propositional statements, binding concepts, expressing complex and tricky categories with synthetic nomenclature. Because of this I prefer English for more advanced coding, where it is necessary to label concepts. In the early stages of analysis (open and initial coding) Italian is particularly suitable because it corresponds more closely to the original data. The more the analysis proceeds into selective and theoretical coding, the more English becomes appropriate for sorting and conceptualization. (p. 171)

Tensions arise between coding in one’s first language and in English. When I taught at the University of Vienna in 2006, the students avowed that coding in English prohibited them from capturing the subtleties that coding in German preserved. Recently, I asked doctoral students at the University of Gothenburg to participate in a coding exercise in which they compared having first coded some data in English, followed by coding other data in their native language. Afterward, Annicka Hedman made the following observation:

Languages do make a difference—I felt a little restricted when coding in English compared to coding in Swedish, not having access to all the nuances of the language.

My English codes tended to become longer than my Swedish [codes because of] not finding the right summarizing words. I sometimes had to describe the actions with more words. (personal communication, November 11, 2012)

The degree of familiarity with a language matters, as does the researcher’s purposes. Certainly coding in English could go more slowly when it is a second or third language. Cisneros-Puebla (personal communication, December 20, 2012) observes, “Line by line coding is quite challenging because of the Spanish wording when talking about anything.” Searching for succinct words and groping with language also needles many researchers for whom English is their first language. However, they may experience less uneasiness with their codes. Second-language coders may lose spontaneity but gain a critical stance toward their codes.

In the coding exercise, Linda Åhlström tells how she moves between English and Swedish in her doctoral research:

The interviews, the data, are in Swedish, although I prefer to start thinking in English immediately. For me it feels like I stick with the facts better, I am more precise and accurate, my imagination is not as obvious in the English language as it is in my native language. As well I know I want to publish the findings and there are no journals that accept articles in Swedish. For me it feels easier to start to think in English straight away for a theory to emerge in the English language. This might have to do with me having lived in an English-speaking country for many years. (personal communication, November 14, 2012)

Note that Åhlström raises an intriguing point: For her, thinking in English fosters emergent theorizing. The relative compatibility between the language of thought and the conduct of theorizing may have a significant impact on the extent to which international scholars adopt grounded theory.

Faculty who work with international students are likely to encounter problematic features of language. Joanna Crossman, who teaches doctoral students in international business in Australia, states,

Language is problematic too in sharing trans-cultural research contexts. The challenges in this direction are not exclusive to GT by any means but the notion of research as a co-created activity allows us to engage deeply with decision making and interpretations, asking questions all the time about meaning and understandings. I noticed this particularly in working with Hiroko Noma on the concept of *sunao* [“denotes weakness or tractability in a person, an openhearted innocence and a willingness to be sincere” (Kotter, 2010)] in Japanese multinationals operating in Australia [see Crossman & Noma, 2013]. Our long conversations on meaning and the implications of how her participants constructed their accounts and understood the actions of others through this lens could not have happened if *sunao* had simply been left to languish as something the Japanese understand but westerners don’t. My ignorance of *sunao* as her supervisor forced her to interrogate her own cultural understandings; that might not have happened if I had also been Japanese. Engaging with the concept was not simply concerned with the translation of a word; it involved peeling away layers of personal cultural assumptions so that the intercultural implications could become accessible to others unfamiliar with the context under study. (personal communication, May 7, 2012)

As Crossman’s comments suggest, this type of exploration and excavation of taken-for-granted cultural terms holds important implications for shaping the research process and product. It encourages grounded theorists (and other qualitative researchers) to link meaning and action and to analyze action in its collective context. In this way, grounded theorists may identify processes that otherwise remain invisible—and providing a method for the explicit analysis of processes is one of grounded theory’s strongest attributes.

## Points of Cultural Convergence

In varied ways, reviewers often found points of convergence between their situations and grounded theory. A convergent complementarity between national and disciplinary cultures and grounded theory was discernible. Kiyoko Sueda and Hisako Kakai, who specialize in international communication, state,

We do not remember exactly where we got this information, but there tends to be more inductive learners than deductive learners

in Japan. That being the case, grounded theory has some advantage in Japan. Other than that, we do not think of any cultural specific aspect that makes Japanese people use grounded theory easily. “Culture” may take some role in how the data are interpreted. (personal communication, May 15, 2012)

Sueda and Kakai’s point suggests that *how* people learn frames *what* they learn, as well as whether or not a particular way of knowing coincides with their past experience. Although grounded theory is not exclusively an inductive method, it begins with making sense of inductive observations that the researcher successively shapes to seek answers to emergent questions.

Krzysztof Konecki’s comments imply that this inductive approach fits inquiry in Poland. Konecki situates his remarks in Polish society and culture, his discipline, and the culture of social scientific study in Poland. Specifically, Konecki sees his approach to grounded theory as embedded in humanistic sociology and symbolic interactionism. In turn, this foundation derives from an appreciation of his predecessors and deeply held shared cultural values.

The humanistic vision of sociology was always present in Poland. For that reason the interpretive/constructive grounded theory is well accepted in Poland. We still live in the aura of Florian Znaniecki and his works and we believe that he has had a big influence on Chicago School of sociology and later on the development of symbolic interactionism: Mainly innovative strength of the methods and serendipity (see Konecki, 2008). It fits the culture, because stereotypically we like more to work in unpredictable environments and discover new things than to verify existing hypothesis created by others (individualism and adventurous spirit). (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

The “individualism and adventurous spirit” that Konecki identifies as part of Polish culture resonates with John C. Scott’s (1971) remarks about grounded theory in his review of the *Discovery* book. Scott wrote, “The authors successfully transmit the sense of adventure, the air of excitement [sic] and of positive apprehension over what is discovered as one tracks down clues and sorts among attractive alternatives” (p. 336). Not only does Konecki’s depiction of Polish culture fit Scott’s view of the method, but also the links between Polish culture and symbolic interactionism foster taking an open-ended approach to research.

Stephanie Bethmann and Debora Niermann note the strong influence of Anselm Strauss on the development of grounded theory in Germany. They also see grounded theory coding as consistent with earlier research practice. They state,

Grounded Theory is valued in Germany because it offers a complete methodological program on the one hand, and yet is flexible and encourages unorthodox research practices on the other . . . Another characteristic of the most common German

methods is a strong emphasis on microscopic analysis of textual, transcribed data. In this context, Grounded Theory codes are usually grounded in a thorough line-by-line analysis. Furthermore, due to the importance of methodology in German qualitative research, the foundations of GT, especially American Pragmatism have been intensely described and discussed in Germany (Strübing, 2005). This has been inevitable since, in Germany, a study's quality is often measured upon its coherence of following one logic. Consequently, every decision in the research process is guided and has to be reasoned from epistemological premises. Ultimately, one could say we turned a quite flexible and rather anti-foundationalist program into a more foundationalist one. (personal communication, July 24, 2012)

Bethmann and Niermann's comments imply that a quest for consistency can perhaps lead to unintended consequences, such as a quest for certainty. Grounded theory methods do generate results even when researchers aim for certainty of their findings and analyses. But grappling with ambiguities in the empirical world fosters gaining unanticipated knowledge and insights.

### Issues in Using Grounded Theory

Cultures are multiple, mobile, and dynamic, and increasingly hybrid (see also Aneas & Sandin, 2009; Bhabha, 1985). Using grounded theory means taking into account these cultures, whether or not the researcher is explicitly aware of them. For some, qualitative research in general remains contested and the logic of grounded theory is subsumed by larger disciplinary battles within and beyond a researcher's own country. Perhaps potential issues of using grounded theory become blurred by multiple challenges to the method.

Grounded theorists across the globe report similar problems with their colleagues' outdated or limited views of grounded theory that have arisen in the United States and the United Kingdom (Charmaz, 2005, 2008). Several reviewers commented on the lack of awareness of some of their colleagues of recent developments in grounded theory. Tarozzi states,

Sometimes GTM is conceived in my country as rigid or too structured method, in particular when used through qualitative data analysis software (NVivo or ATLAS.ti). This problem is related to the objectivist origin of the method. Italian researchers are not always aware of the evolution of the method and in particular they didn't absorb the second generation's shift in GTM, particularly the "constructivist turn." (personal communication, May 14, 2012)

Robert Thornberg reports having faced similar issues. He has used grounded theory with notable success in educational research in Sweden (see, for example, 2007, 2008a, 2008b,

2009, 2010). Thornberg responds to the culture of his country, the academic culture pertaining to qualitative research, and to the professional culture of his discipline. In this way, he reveals how national and disciplinary priorities and trends shape views of a method and influence its adoption.

Even though GT [grounded theory] is one of the most cited approaches in qualitative social science, in Sweden GT is still rather underused in the field of educational research (as for example in contrast to the field of health care or nursing research). Among some of those educational researchers who conduct qualitative research in Sweden, there is a skeptical or critical stance toward GT (based on their view of GT as a naïve realistic project, and based on their lack of awareness of its pragmatist roots and later developments such as constructivist GT and situational analysis). In addition, there are educational researchers in Sweden who position themselves within the fields of philosophy of education and theoretical political sciences, and who take a more or less skeptical stance toward empirical research in general. Finally, within the field of quantitative research of education, there are those who undervalue or dismiss qualitative research in general. Hence, there are some challenges considering legitimacy of GT in relation to certain groups of educational researchers. Furthermore, a recent strong emphasis on evidence-based research within the Swedish "governmentality" of delivering research grants (within the fields of education, psychology, social work, and nursing) is indeed a challenge for GT and other qualitative research approaches. (personal communication, April 17, 2012)

Thornberg's statement illustrates how local situations can constrain the development and transmission of a method. Yet individuals may be left on their own to deal with the consequences. Thornberg explains how he handles the challenges above:

One way of approaching and resolving the widespread reputation of GT among Swedish researchers that if you do GT, you have to accept a naïve realistic position, become "a-theoretical" (and uncritical) and delay the literature review, is my own efforts to present arguments for using literature in GT from the constructivist position and pragmatist epistemology, and how to do this in a data-sensitive manner. (personal communication, April 17, 2012)

Grounded theory has been a contested method both from within and without. Tarozzi's observations and Thornberg's assessment of educational research in Sweden capture other researchers' major criticisms. Thornberg not only proposes one solution to resolve external criticisms but also addresses debates within the method. Despite continued injunctions to forego consulting the literature until after completing the analysis, not all grounded theorists find delaying the literature review to be possible, practical, and conceptually useful (Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Lempert, 2007).

When thinking about the implications of culture in global perspective, Joanna Crossman connects debates within grounded theory with training the next generation of international scholars. She writes,

The main weakness of GT in my view, is not about culture at all unless it is about *the* GT cultures [her emphasis]. It is about what I perceive as a “preciousness” about what constitutes “good” GT. I loved the text, “The Second Generation” because finally it seemed that GT researchers were listening and talking to one another. GT squabbles intensify the confusion of new researchers (perhaps even more so amongst international scholars) who become incredibly anxious about whether they are “doing the right thing” and feel they should stick labels on their heads, reflected in their work, that declares them to be “Glaserian,” or “Straussian” or a constructivist grounded theorist as though these were the names of beings from strange planets. The terminology of “classical” GT too, bothers me. It suggests that it is something like classical ballet or classical music as though early ideas about GT are more pure, rigorous or authentic than later evolutions or further developed conceptualizations. (personal communication, May 7, 2012)

Crossman recognizes that names divide as well as explain differences. Grounded theory has been a contested method from within as well from without. Yet grounded theorists share points of convergence such as beginning with open-ended, inductive inquiry, engaging in simultaneous data collection and analysis, focusing on actions and processes rather than themes and structure, using comparative methods, developing inductive categories, conducting theoretical sampling (sampling for developing the grounded theorist’s emerging categories, not for population representation), and aiming for theory construction, not description (Charmaz, 2010, 2014).

Recognizing points of convergence as well as divergence may help novices develop informed perspectives that help them attend to their research rather than to seek the “correct” conception of the grounded theory method and subsequently use it like a recipe. As Crossman notes, this point may hold special significance for international students. Mentors who help international students make the shift to an informed perspective likely need to have considerable cultural sensitivity, as Crossman’s statement about her mentoring indicates:

I do encourage international scholars to read and familiarize themselves with their options that arise from varied perspectives but seem to spend a lot of time de-briefing them afterwards so that they can have the confidence and courage to really engage with their own cultural contexts and allow those contexts to drive their rationales for decision making. Labels of the kind I described suggest we need to be purist. I think this is a threat to the wonderful flexibility of GT. Preciousness suggests there are rules and absolutes and there really aren’t when you are in the

middle of the mud. You have to think it through (muddle through sometimes) and the “rules” don’t always work in a particular (cultural) context so we have to make sure new international researchers on completion of their PhDs can think for themselves and stay sensitive to the cultural contexts in which they will work in the future, whether “back home” or as seems to be occurring increasingly, when they take up positions as expatriate researchers. Essays and articles about “what GT isn’t” or affirmations from the gurus about what GT is, might feel comforting to the confused in the short term but in the end they douse the fire of our passions about the process and leave practitioners afraid to take some reasoned risks. (personal communication, May 7, 2012)

Taking reasoned risks needs to be acknowledged and encouraged in grounded theory practice. Yet Crossman finds that researchers approach and “resolve” problems in using the method, “By sticking labels on their heads.” The labels may give researchers a sense of identification and belonging while sidestepping knotty problems. Crossman’s comments also raise questions about when a study is a grounded theory study. Does it matter? Yes, where grounded theorists draw the lines matters, but the lines need not be rigid and inflexible (see Suddaby, 2006, for one viewpoint).

Turning from problems to possibilities, what new direction might grounded theory take? Konecki (2011) envisions a new future for grounded theory through visual sociology:

Visual data open new possibilities to develop grounded theories. Developing of theories of substantive visual processes could facilitate constructing formal theories of the visualization of social problems, visualization of organizational politics, visualization of identity, etc. The most ambitious goal looms large on a theoretical horizon: the construction of a formal theory of the visualisation of action. The future of grounded theories will inevitably be associated with constructing theory on the social, cultural and psychological dimensions of visual reality, not only because of our societies’ recent “visual turn,” but also because of the growing research focus on the visibility of our social worlds. (p. 152)

Konecki proposes an innovative direction that fits contemporary life across the globe. Yet, to move in innovative directions means integrating global perspectives with local practices. By honoring local epistemologies, ways of knowing, new knowledge can emerge, as Cisneros-Puebla states,

Adopting GT methodologies in our own practices as researchers in our countries means adapting it to what are the specific conditions of our ways of knowing. Epistemologically speaking when creating inductively knowledge a new way of perceiving emerges and that is the real value of adapting any way of theory construction. I see GT methodologies as a pragmatic way of theory building. (personal communication, May 13, 2012)

## Conclusion

It is humbling to read the statements of international colleagues. I am reminded of the wise methodological advice that Glaser and Strauss gave to those of us in their first cohort of doctoral students at the University of California, San Francisco. They foresaw then that our versions of grounded theory would not be exactly the same as theirs. Rather, Glaser and Strauss invited us to adopt and adapt the method to suit the problems that we studied. Both the developments in qualitative inquiry and the statements of international grounded theorists here remind us to adopt and adapt grounded theory methods under our specific conditions of inquiry, including the situations shaping the research process. International researchers can adopt grounded theory strategies and adapt them to fit their cultural and research practices.

I had no answer for César Cisneros-Puebla when he first posed the question about the methodologist's responsibility to adapt his or her method to fit the needs of scholars from different cultures. I still have no answer to *this* question but it also raises the knotty issue of the methodologist's responsibility to explicate the national and cultural underpinnings of his or her method, which I have begun to do here. I call for giving much greater attention to how these underpinnings affect research practice. Insights into grounded theory's relative suitability and usefulness in varied cultural contexts will come from the international scholars who use it with scrutiny. They will have the confidence and competence to take risks and to shed labels. By attending to what happens while conducting grounded theory studies, they can illuminate their methodological problems and solutions in ways that reach across the globe.

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## Notes

1. Glaser and Strauss also imparted notions of the promise of making discoveries as though exploring new frontiers and of individual success. In his review of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, John C. Scott (1971) explicates Glaser and Strauss's claims that generating grounded theory will advance students' careers and that mentors who impose verification research on their students are leading them astray. Scott also states, "One of the rewards of reading this book is the restatement of the persistent theme that research of the kind Glaser and Strauss advocate is a thrilling, creative thing. It is not the least bit ignoble or tedious" (p. 336).
2. At the time of our conversation, Cisneros-Puebla served as a consultant in computer-assisted qualitative analysis software programs. Since then, he has become a major voice of qualitative methods and of grounded theory in Central and South America.
3. The ensuing discussion shares concerns that Norman Denzin (2007, 2010) has raised about the political underpinnings of knowledge and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) has detailed in her ground-breaking work on developing anti-colonialist methods.
4. Lofland expressed this view in the 2007 Author Meets Critics session on the first edition of *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis* at the annual meetings of the Pacific Sociological Association, Oakland, California, March 30.
5. The following historical summary partly uses and adapts material from Charmaz (2008, pp. 463-465).

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