

Choosing Between Glaser and Strauss – An Example

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At the beginning it was all a blur!



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A fixed point - your question!

- The study used as an example here aimed to understand residents' perceptions of 'being at home' and the factors which influence these perceptions.

Accelerating – the stage of why!

- Which methodology?
- Is grounded theory the right one?
- Why grounded theory? Why not phenomenology? Or ethnography?
- Which version of grounded theory?
- Why that version?



Which methodology?

- There is general agreement that the “right” methodology is the one that will answer the research question (Holloway and Todres, 2003; McPherson and Leydon, 2002; Holloway and Wheeler, 2002). Not always obvious.
- **Take a step backwards... !!**
- A clear understanding the research paradigm is essential (Cresswell, 2003; Holloway and Wheeler, 2002; Lincoln and Guba, 2000)
- Munhall (2001a p.4) suggests qualitative researchers should initially explore the fundamental assumptions and beliefs of the main paradigms because “... *using the concreteness of placing paradigms in stark relief to one another should be of assistance to our beginning understanding of various worldviews.*”
- The first decision – a qualitative methodology!

Why not phenomenology?

- The primary intent of phenomenology is to *describe* phenomena (Koch, 1995; Spiegelberg, 1970) or, in the case of Heidegger, to describe how phenomena are *interpreted* (Rapport, 2005; Cohen, 2000).
- Cohen (2000 p.3) suggests that phenomenology is most useful when the “... *task at hand is to understand an experience as it is understood by those who are having it*”.
- Phenomenology has been frequently used to describe residents lived experiences.
- The study aimed to move beyond describe experience but to ***understand*** the factors that influenced residents' experience of 'home' in long-stay care and quality of life.

Why not ethnography?

- Ethnography is useful when social conditions, attitudes, roles and interpersonal relationships are explored “*in conjunction with fundamental cultural prescriptions.*” (Sarantakos, 1993 p.268)
- Omery (1988 p.29) states that most ethnographers believe their main contribution is the development of “*descriptive theory*” reflecting cultural knowledge, behaviours or meanings.
- In context of the example study ethnography would help describe the culture of the long-stay care facility, the relationships between older people living there, with staff and with the wider community.
- Noted ethnography has already been used to explore older peoples experience of living in long-stay care settings.
- It is claimed that ethnography is capable of theory development. However, there is sufficient debate as to its capability to do so (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994; Omery, 1988) to warrant caution.
- Why use ethnography to develop a theory when this is the *raison d'être* of grounded theory?

Why grounded theory?

- Grounded theory is recommended when investigating social problems or situations to which people must adapt (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Schreiber, 2001; Benoliel, 1996).
- Its goal is to explain “... *how social circumstances could account for the interactions, behaviours and experiences of the people being studied*” (Benoliel, 1996 p.413).
- Grounded theory facilitates the move from a description of what is happening to an understanding of the process by which it is happening (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Stauss and Corbin, 1998a).
- Using grounded theory permitted the development of a substantive theory, which increased understanding of residents’ experience of life in long-stay care, their QoL, the extent to which they felt at home and what helped them to feel home.

Some clarity – an illusion!



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Which version of grounded theory?

The choices:

- Original version (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).
- Glaserian grounded theory.
- Straussian grounded theory.
- Hybrid version.
- Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006).

Glaser and Strauss

- What is the difference between Glaser and Strauss?

Take a step backwards ...

The 'heart' of their difference centres around beliefs about and approaches to analysis

Tracing the differences

- Glaser is viewed as remaining more faithful to the original version of grounded theory in his approach to data analysis, while Strauss (with Corbin) is considered to have reformulated the original version (Walker and Myrick, 2006; Heath and Crowley, 2004; Glaser, 1992).
- Data analysis is described very loosely in the original book (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This prompted Strauss (with Corbin) to publish two books in an attempt to make clear the data analysis process (Strauss and Corbin, 1998a; 1990).
- Strauss's explication of the data analysis process however was severely criticised, for example, Melia (1996 p.370) refers to it as "...*programmatic and overformulaic*". Glaser (1992) accused Strauss of promoting a new method, which he termed "*forced, full, conceptual description*" (Glaser, 1992 p.5). He maintained that Strauss's version was no longer grounded theory but a completely different method.

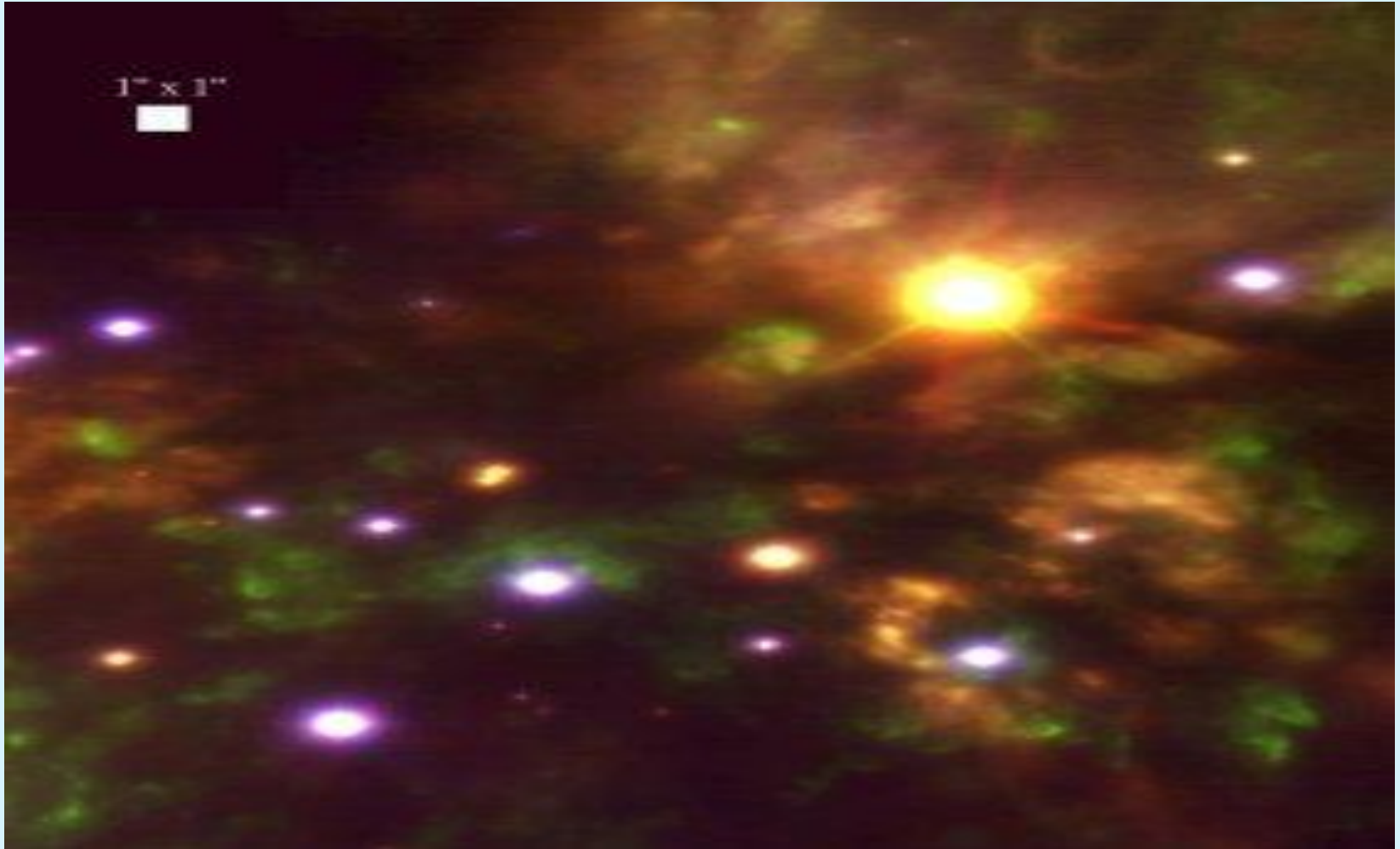
- In the second edition of their book Strauss and Corbin (1998a) modified their initial approach to data analysis. They point out it had not been their intention to promote rigidity and insist the procedures they outline are “... *guidelines, suggested techniques but not commandments*” (p.4).
- The third edition is even more flexible. In this text Corbin (with Strauss) enjoins researchers to “... *use the procedures in their own way*” (2008 p.x)
- The core of the conflict between Glaser and Strauss is whether verification should be an outcome of grounded theory analysis or not (Heath and Cowley, 2004; Boychuk Duchscher and Morgan, 2004; Holloway and Wheeler, 2002; MacDonald, 2001; Charmaz, 2000).

- In 1987, Strauss indicated that induction, deduction and verification are “*absolutely essential*” (p.12). In contrast, Glaser (1992) maintains that grounded theory is inductive only.
- Going back to the original work the crux of the difference appears to be a matter of interpretation. In 1967, Glaser and Strauss wrote “... *generation of theory through comparative analysis both subsumes and assumes verification and accurate description, but **only** to the extent that the latter are in the services of generation.*” (p.28). Heath and Cowley (2004) argue that Glaser remained true to this commitment, placing emphasis on induction and theory emergence.
- In contrast, Strauss stresses the importance of deduction and verification, and suggests that the role of induction has been overstated (Byrant and Charmaz, 2007; Heath and Cowley, 2004).

- In their second and third books, Strauss and Corbin (1998a) and Corbin and Strauss (2008) refer to deduction followed by validation and elaboration but do not refer to verification.
- Strauss and Corbin (1998a p.24) define validation as “... a process of comparing concepts and their relationships against data during the research act to determine how well they stand up to such scrutiny”. This means that the researcher’s interpretations are checked out with participants and against the data as the study progresses (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). This approach suggests a shift in Strauss’ thinking.
- Bryant and Charmaz (2007) and Reichertz (2007) agree and suggest that in his later writings Strauss employs *abductive* reasoning.
- Abduction is defined as “... a type of reasoning that begins by examining data and after scrutiny of these data, entertains all possible explanation for the observed data, and then forms a hypothesis to confirm or disconfirm until the researcher arrives at the most plausible interpretation of the observed data” (Bryant and Charmaz 2007 p.603).

- So what? Strauss acknowledges that there may be different explanations for what is emerging from the data. He also recognises the importance of paying attention to the broader contextual factors that may be impacting on a situation. Strauss and Corbin (1998a p.183) argue that “... *events that occur ‘out there’ are not just interesting background material.*” This focus suggests that Strauss’s version of grounded theory has evolved and is more in line with contemporary constructivist thinking.
- It is clear across the three versions of ‘Basics of Qualitative Research’ that Straussian grounded theory has evolved. Corbin (with Strauss, 2008 p.ix) acknowledges that their version of grounded theory has changed and been shaped by current methodological debates.
- In contrast, Glaser is adamant that grounded theory should not be changed. He maintains that theory simply “emerges” from the actual data (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007; Boychuk Duchscher and Morgan, 2004; Charmaz, 2000; Babchuk, 1996).

Blurring again!



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My criteria

- Three key issues were considered when determining whether to adopt a Glaserian or Straussian approach for the study:
 1. General user friendliness for data analysis
 2. Potential to generate theory
 3. Compatibility with contemporary thinking.

User friendliness

- Those who adopt a Straussian approach are generally attracted by the clearer guidelines for data analysis (Heath and Cowley, 2004; McCallin, 2003; Kendall, 1999; Melia, 1996; Glaser, 1992).
- Conversely, those who adopt the Glaserian approach find the more open approach to data analysis liberating (Boychuk Duchescher and Morgan, 2004; Heath and Cowley, 2004; McCallin, 2003).
- There is some concern that Strauss's more explicit approach to data analysis, rather than making data analysis easier, makes it more difficult, for example, Heath (Heath and Cowley, 2004 p.148) found that using the Straussian approach moved the analysis down "*...irrelevant paths which effectively closed off the research*".
- These experiences mirrors the theoretical debate. Melia (1996 p.376) expresses concern that Strauss and Corbin's procedures may cloud the analysis with the result that "*... the technical tail is wagging the theoretical dog.*" Robrecht (1995 p.171) worries that researchers are encouraged "*... to look for data rather than look at data ...*" For example, Kendall's (1999) reports stopping thinking about the data, instead becoming caught up in applying axial coding.

But is it about the coding?

- Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Strauss and Corbin (1998a) are clear that researchers should trust their instincts and not focus too closely on the analytical procedures.

“Sometimes, one has to use common sense and not get caught up in worrying about what is the right or wrong way. The important thing is to trust oneself and the process. Students should stay within the general guidelines ... and use the procedures and techniques flexibly according to their abilities and the realities of their studies.”

(Strauss and Corbin, 1998a p.295)

Quality of the theory!

- The quality of the end product of Straussian studies has been raised as an issue, for example, Artinian (1998) notes the failure of Straussian studies to produce theory.
- Glaser (1992) points out that failing to produce a theory is contrary to the original goals of grounded theory and suggests that Strauss's version of grounded theory yields "...*low-level abstract description*" only (Glaser, 1992 p.81).
- Essentially, Strauss (with Corbin, 1998a) and Corbin (with Strauss, 2008) have a broader vision of the purpose of grounded theory. They recognise that not every study aims to build theory and acknowledge that some researchers will use the techniques of grounded theory to produce useful descriptions. Corbin and Strauss accept therefore that grounded theory techniques have uses beyond building theory.

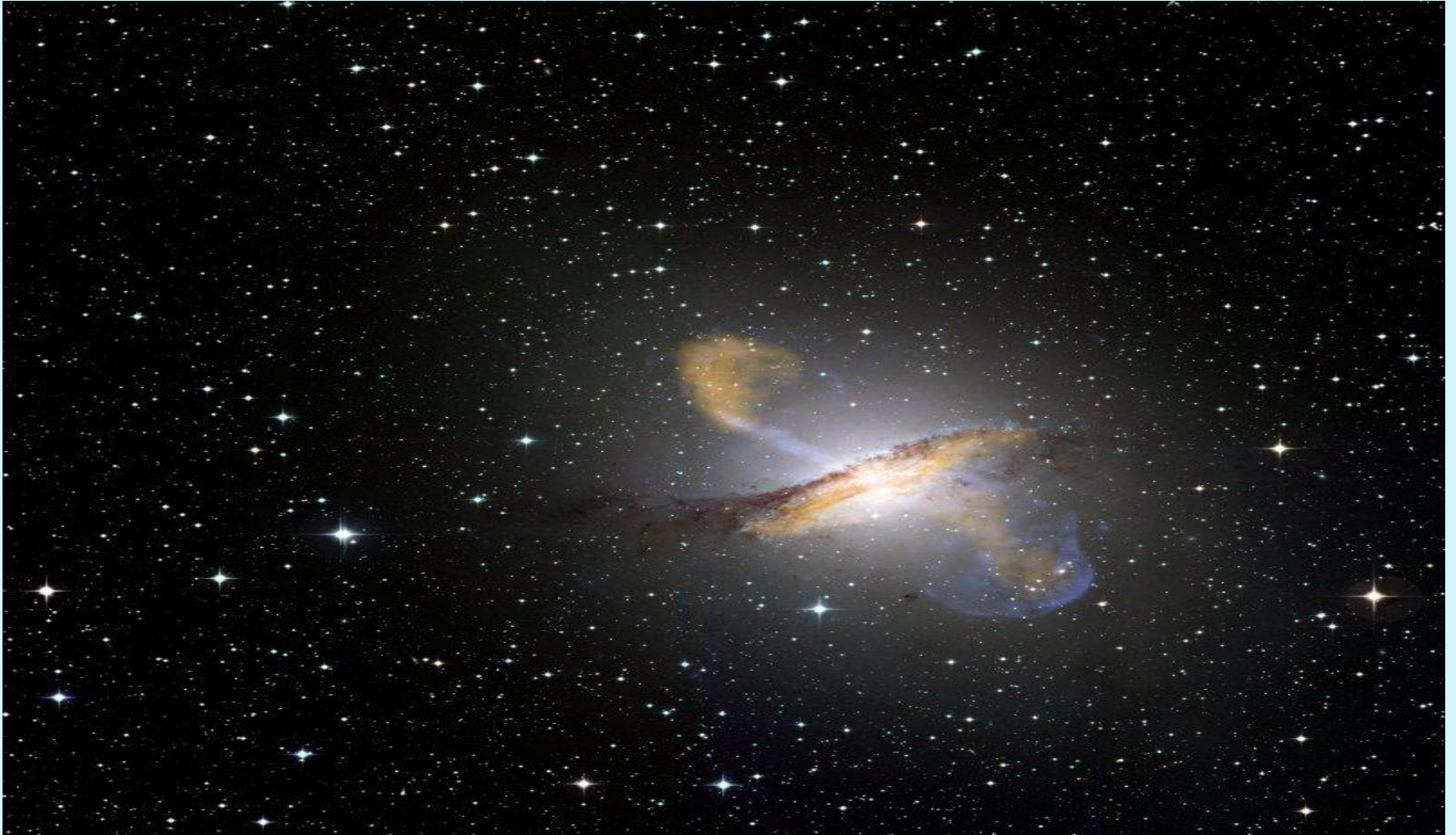
In tune with current thinking?

- The incompatibility of the positivistic premise of a neutral observer, accepted by Glaser and Strauss and supported by Glaser in recent publications, with current thinking has been debated (Byrant and Charmaz, 2007; Byrant, 2003; MacDonald and Schreiber, 2001; Charmaz, 2000).
- It is generally accepted that grounded theory, as originally described, fits within the positivist paradigm (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007; Hallberg, 2006; Charmaz, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Charmaz (2000 p.510) maintains Glaser's version of grounded theory continues to fit within this paradigm as he assumes "*... an objective, external reality, a neutral observer who discovers data, reductionist inquiry of manageable research problems, and objectivist rendering of data*".

- However, Annells (1997a) argues that classical grounded theory aligns with the post positivist paradigm. He points out that classical grounded theory adopts a critical realist (linked with postpositivism) stance and argues that classical grounded theory reflects this view too. Glaser's later work is considered to continue to reflect a realist ontology (MacDonald and Schreiber, 2001; Annells, 1997).
- To confuse matters further, some authors maintain that Strauss' (with Corbin) position is also aligned with the postpositivist paradigm (Hallberg, 2006; Charmaz, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Others disagree and suggest that Strauss (with Corbin) has moved further, adopting a relativist (associated with constructivism) perspective (Kearney, 2007; Bryant and Charmaz, 2007; MacDonald and Schreiber, 2001; Annells, 1997a)

- Annells (1997a) bases his opinion on the fact that Strauss and Corbin (1998a; 1998b; 1994) acknowledge that the researcher and the researched cocreate the theory, recognise the influence of macro-social factors on action, accept that reality cannot be fully known but is interpreted and is linked to time and place. This is consistent with a relativist ontology.
- Most telling however of this shift is Corbin's (with Strauss, 2008 p.10) recent explicit acceptance of constructivism. She acknowledges "*... concepts and theories are constructed by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants ...*"

The choice!



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Rationale for choice

- It was decided to adopt Straussian grounded theory. The rationale for this decision was:
- It is compatible with contemporary thinking. The literature reviewed suggests that Straussian grounded theory reflects a shift toward social constructivist ontology and postmodernism which is more compatible with current thinking (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; McCann, and Clark, 2003c; Annells, 1997b).
- It pays attention to the broader environmental and contextual factors (macro conditions) that influence the phenomenon under study which was an important consideration in this study.
- It aims to produce a theory that is both relevant and able to guide action and practice. Straussian grounded theory aims to produce a theory that fits (i.e. has relevance) the situation, aids understanding and guides action and practice (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Strauss and Corbin, 1998a; 1998b). It is acknowledged that this is the broad goal of all grounded theory approaches.
- Explicit guides for data analysis are provided. The more explicit guidelines on analysis were considered helpful rather than restrictive.

Good luck with your decision making



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