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## Glaserian Grounded Theory and Straussian Grounded Theory: Two Standard Qualitative Research Approaches in Social Science

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**Abstract:** Grounded theory (GT) has appeared as a popular research approach in many branches of social science that acts for the well-being of society. It is an inductive methodology and focuses on the discovery of theory from data. Overtimes the original grounded theory of Barney Galland Glaser (1930-2022) and Anselm Leonard Strauss (1916-1996) has evolved, and two grounded theory variants: Glaserian grounded theory and Straussian grounded theory have emerged as qualitative approaches. When a novice qualitative researcher starts data collection on grounded theory; s/he cannot identify the differences between the two approaches. In this paper, some of the key differences and similarities between the two methods are illustrated. So, a confused researcher can easily select the desired grounded theory for his/her research version. In this study, an attempt has been taken to continue the grounded theory research smoothly when novice researchers face uncertainty during the research procedure.

**Keywords:** Qualitative approach, Glaserian grounded theory, Straussian grounded theory, novice researcher

**JEL Codes:** A14, B54, I31, P43

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### 1. Introduction

In the grounded theory (GT) research zone, the leading authors are Barney Glaser, Anselm Strauss, Juliet Corbin, and Kathy Charmaz; who have addressed critiques, advancements and clarifications towards the utility of the different types of grounded theory [Sebastian, 2019]. Both qualitative and quantitative data are used in a GT study [Tie et al., 2019]. GT is the generation of the theory that stresses human social behavior, which is grounded in data, and systemically collected through social research [Glaser, 1978]. Two US sociologists; Barney Galland Glaser (1930-2022) and Anselm Leonard Strauss (1916-1996) for the first time have developed the grounded theory in 1967 in qualitative social research through the publication of their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* [Glaser & Strauss, 1967]. Glaser has defined GT as “a general methodology of analysis linked with data collection that uses a systematically applied set of methods to



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*generate an inductive theory about a substantive area*" [Glaser, 1992]. GT is a systematic flexible method that emphasizes simultaneous data collection and analysis and finally provides tools for constructing theories [Charmaz, 2011]. It can be used by any theoretical perspective, and should therefore not be appropriated by any perspective [Glaser, 2005]. At present, it is a recognized methodology in many research studies [Mohajan, 2018b; Mohajan & Mohajan, 2023a].

The roots of GT lie in symbolic interactionism and researchers seek a form of meaning on the basis of data collection. A GT researcher spends enough time collecting data for the formulation of the research [Strauss & Corbin, 1990]. Symbolic interactionism is a sociological perspective that relies on the symbolic meaning that people ascribe to the processes of social interaction. It talks about the subjective meaning of people and places on objects, behaviors, or events based on what they believe is true [Clarke, 2005]. In GT research analysis, Glaserian and Straussian approaches are different in terms of paradigmatic dimensions, methodological dimensions, choice, and use of literature, research question formation, research analysis procedures, sampling analysis, the procedures for validating the resultant theory, etc. [Devadas et al., 2011].

In the 1990s, two authors Glaser and Strauss have shown methodological disagreements in some matters. Later, their ways of research are parted. Each route of its own "versions" of the original methodology is labeled "Glaserian" and "Straussian" respectively [Thulesius, 2019]. Both of them expose latent forms of human behavior [Tossy, 2015]. Glaser moves lonely to develop Classic Grounded Theory (cGT) [Glaser, 1992]; which is consistent, rigorous, and effective [Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022a]. It is a popular methodology in social sciences, which has explanatory power and is grounded in the reality. It uses theoretical sensitivity, coding, and constant comparative analysis of the data [Glaser, 1978; Charmaz, 2006]. Many authors have considered it a classical approach [Cooney, 2010].

On the other hand, Strauss proceeded with Juliet Corbin, a nurse researcher, to publish a landmark book *Basic of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Strauss and Corbin are known as the second-generation grounded theorists and finally have developed Straussian grounded theory (SGT) [Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012]. Glaserian version indicates the "epistemological assumptions, logic, and systematic approach." Straussian variant shows the "notions of human agency, emergent processes, social and subjective meanings, problem-solving practices, and the open-ended study of action to the grounded theory" [Charmaz, 2014, 2017].

In this study, we want to discuss Glaserian grounded theory (GGT) or classic grounded theory (cGT) and Straussian grounded theory (SGT) in some detail [Charmaz, 2006; Mohajan, 2018b]. Both tacit and explicit knowledge sharing and transferring about SGT can improve the quality among novice researchers. On the other hand, knowledge sharing is essential to improve organizational performance [Mohajan, 2016a, b, c, 2017a, b,c].

## 2. Literature Review

In any research, the literature review section is an introductory unit of research, where the works of previous researchers are highlighted [Polit & Hungler, 2013]. The literature review helps novice researchers to understand the subject, and it serves as an indicator of the subject that has been carried out before [Creswell, 2007]. Kailah Sebastian has shown that the GT methodology has developed into many perspectives, each underpinned by different ontological and epistemological assumptions. She has assured that GT researchers will easily identify and distinguish a chosen approach and its implications within research [Sebastian, 2019]. Nor Syafini Mohd Muhaiyuddin and her coauthors have wanted to show that



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GT researchers do not build their research on prearranged hypotheses. They have also indicated some groundbreaking and chronological grounded theory researchers, such as Glaser, Strauss, Corbin, Charmaz, and Judith Wuest, have adopted multiple philosophical and methodological settings to develop and evolve GT [Muhaiyuddin et al., 2016].

Kendra L. Rieger has briefly discussed the history and origins, philosophical perspective, role of the researcher, data and data analysis, and strengths and critique of GGT [Rieger, 2019]. Johanna C. van Niekerk and J. Dewald Roode have investigated the differences between the two methods: Glaserian GT and Straussian GT. They have realized that the two methods look very similar and a substantial number of researchers ignore the difference between these two approaches [van Niekerk & Roode, 2009]. Udaya Mohan Devadas and his coauthors have analyzed the similarities and differences between Glaserian GT and Straussian GT approaches in human resource development (HRD) research [Devadas et al., 2011]. Helen Heath and Sarah Cowley have compared the two approaches Glaserian GT and Straussian GT in relation to the roots and divergences, role of induction, deduction and verification, ways in which data are coded and the format of generated theory. They have noticed that novice qualitative researchers sometimes become uncertain regarding the differences that exist in Glaserian GT and Straussian GT. They have not given priority to any of the two, instead, they have advised that novice researchers need to select the research method that best suits their cognitive style and proceed accordingly [Heath & Cowley, 2004].

Windy Rakhmawati has taken attempted to highlight three approaches in the GT methodology for novice researchers that consist of classic grounded theory, Straussian grounded theory, and constructivist grounded theory. She has tried to introduce different points of view regarding the philosophical position, role of literature review, and coding process in data analysis in nursing research [Rakhmawati, 2019]. Haradhan Kumar Mohajan analyzes the qualitative research methodology that is written for novice researchers. He has tried to describe in brief the core principles of GT. Later, he analyzed the origin and progress of global feminism which is a mass movement commenced by women of all groups to eradicate all forms of feminist oppression by men that are prevailing in a patriarchal society. He has also explored the development of four waves of feminism elaborately that act against women's abuse and oppression [Mohajan, 2018a, 2022a,b].

Devajit Mohajan and Haradhan Kumar Mohajan have observed that grounded theory is one of the most revolutionary and widespread methodologies in qualitative research methodology. They have discussed the classic GT and Strssian GT approaches that aim to generate a theory rather than using a pre-existing one [Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022a, 2023a,b]. They have analyzed the coding techniques that the grounded theory researchers follow when they develop qualitative research. Later, they developed memo-writing techniques within the framework of GT methodology of qualitative research in social sciences [Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022a,b,c]. They have also explored the constructivist grounded theory (CGT) that is developed by American sociologist Kathy Charmaz. They have observed that feminist theory can easily be augmented the GT research and can serve society more than any researcher of other variants of GT [Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022d,e].

### **3. Research Methodology of the Study**

The research design is the plan of the researchers to develop a research area that is underpinned by philosophy, methodology, and method [Tie et al., 2019]. The methodology is the guideline of research work. In any research, it is an organized procedure that follows scientific methods efficiently [Kothari, 2008]. It is the research design that shapes the selection and use of particular data generation and analysis



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methods [Crotty, 1998]. Research methodology is a strategy for planning, arranging, designing and conducting fruitful research confidently [Legesse, 2014]. It tries to develop logic to generate a theory that is a procedural framework within which the research is conducted [Remenyi et al., 1998]. It helps to identify research areas and projects to perform the research efficiently and successfully [Blessing et al., 1998]. A genuine researcher describes his/her ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions properly [Hofweber, 2020]. S/he also tries to reflect his/her philosophical beliefs and interpretations of the world before the starting research [Crotty, 1998]. Reliability and validity are the two most important and fundamental features for the evaluation of research [Mohajan, 2017d].

In this study, we have confined ourselves to two versions of grounded theory, such as Glaserian version and Straussian version of GT. Straussian version is developed based on a symbolic interactionist perspective to the methodology, where the reality is constructed through language, symbols, and social interactions [Blumer, 1969]. To prepare this article we have used secondary data sources that are collected from published and unpublished data sources. We have used books by famous authors, handbooks, and theses. We have also collected valuable information from websites and the internet [Islam et al., 2012; Mohajan, 2012, 2014a,b, 2017c, 2020].

#### 4. Objective of the Study

The objective of every research is to advance, refine and expand existing knowledge to reach a new conclusion. The chief objective of this paper is to discuss aspects of Glaserian grounded theory and Straussian grounded theory. Some other specific objectives are;

- to highlight on the foundation of GT,
- to focus on both Glaserian GT and Straussian GT, and
- to compare both versions.

#### 5. Basis of Grounded Theory

Kathy Charmaz defines GT as “*a method of conducting qualitative research that focuses on creating conceptual frameworks or theories through building inductive analysis from the data*” [Charmaz, 2006]. Glaser and Judith Holton have defined GT as “*a set of integrated conceptual hypotheses systematically generated to produce an inductive theory about a substantive area*” [Glaser & Holton, 2004]. Strauss and Corbin define GT as a “*theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process*” [Strauss & Corbin, 1998].

Two US sociologists; Barney Galland Glaser (1930-2022) and Anselm Leonard Strauss (1916-1996) are considered the fathers of the GT. In 1967, they have published the book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* [Glaser & Strauss, 1967]. Since the inception of GT, both of the authors have constantly tried to improve it till the passing of Strauss in 1996. Glaser was educated by the positivist paradigm, whereas Strauss was with an interpretivism background [Glaser, 1992; Charmaz, 2006]. GT is a multivariate process that happens sequentially, subsequently, simultaneously, serendipitously, and in a scheduled manner [Tossy, 2015]. It is well-known for the detection and explanation of social phenomena about what is happening [Haig, 1995]. It tries to present a simplified procedure to collect rich and unbiased data for developing a theory that is grounded in the research. It takes attempts to bridge the gap between research and theory [Glaser & Strauss, 1967]. It constructs theory from data, which are systematically obtained and analyzed using comparative analysis and grounded in the research [Tie et al., 2019].



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In GT, the researcher is considered a neutral observer and can objectively discover data with an open and impartial mind [Glaser, 2005]. GT has two distinctive aspects, namely constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling [Glaser & Strauss, 1967]. The roots of the grounded theory lied in symbolic interactionism [Heath & Cowley, 2004]. The term “*symbolic interactionism*” was invented by American sociologist *Herbert Blumer* (1900-1987) in 1937 [Blumer, 1937]. It guarantees the researcher greater freedom to explore the research area [Bryant, 2002]. It is particularly popular in nursing research, but it soon spreads to other fields, such as in healthcare, education, sociology, physiotherapy, anthropology, psychology, management, information systems, business, management, computer science, and many other such branches [Smith, 2011].

Overtimes distinct assumptions and many complexities arose in GT research area. As a result, for improvement and evolvement, the classification of GT becomes an essential part of this field [Sebastian, 2019]. In the 1990s, Strauss began to work together with his new collaborator Juliet Corbin [Strauss & Corbin, 1998]. However, Glaser remains determined in the original GT [Glaser, 1992]. Glaser believes in a “*true reality*”, on the other hand, Strauss believes in “*constructive reality*” [Glaser, 1992; Corbin & Strauss, 2008].

## 6. Glaserian Version

The Glaserian grounded theory (GGT) or classic grounded theory (cGT) is a unique inductive straightforward research method, which has remained largely consistent over the years [Bryant, 2009; Thulesius, 2019]. When a GGT researcher discovers a theory, it will be relevant, workable, modifiable, and essential criteria for further grounded theory research [Cooney, 2010]. It tries to create hypotheses and theories about the experiences of people, rather than testing and validating the existing theories [van Veggel, 2022]. It uses theoretical sensitivity, coding, and constant comparative analysis of the data [Glaser, 1978]. It has a unique language, criteria for rigor, and procedures that are inviolate and cannot be mixed with other iterations of GT [Birks & Mills, 2014]. In GGT, the categories and theory emerge through the analysis and constant comparison of the data [Glaser, 2009].

For validating in GGT, Glaser has focused on four criteria: fit, relevance, work, and modifiability [Glaser, 1992, 1998]. GGT is closer to the postpositivism paradigm that relates to critical realism ontologically, modified objectivist epistemology, and methodologically discovers theory [Annells, 1997; Devadas et al., 2011]. Glaser is obstinate that GT should not be changed and theory simply emerges from the actual data [Bryant & Charmaz, 2007]. Glaser has remained true to this commitment, emphasizing induction and theory emergence [Heath & Cowley, 2004]. The researchers who approve of the Glaserian version find the more open method of data analysis for liberating [Boychuk-Duchescher & Morgan, 2004].

## 7. Straussian Version

In 1987, Strauss has realized that induction, deduction, and verification are “*absolutely essential*” [Strauss & Corbin, 1990]. In the 1990s, Strauss began to work together with Juliet Corbin, where they applied a more interpretivist approach to the methodology. In 1990, they have published a book entitled *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* that split the pathways of future research works between Strauss and Glaser [Corbin & Strauss, 2008]. Both of the authors worked collaboratively until the death of Strauss in 1996. In 1998, Strauss (posthumous) and Corbin have modified their initial approach to data analysis [Strauss & Corbin, 1998]. They have used a variety of techniques, such



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as validity, reliability, credibility, plausibility and value of the theory, adequacy of the research process, and the empirical grounding of the research process [Corbin & Strauss, 2008].

Strauss stresses the importance of deduction and verification and suggests that the role of induction has been overstated [Byrant & Charmaz, 2007; Heath & Cowley, 2004]. The researchers who follow the Straussian version are generally attracted by the clearer guidelines for data analysis [Heath & Cowley, 2004].

For validating in SGT, Corbin and Strauss have focused on validity, reliability, credibility, plausibility and value of the theory, adequacy of the research process, and the empirical grounding of the research process. They strongly support constructivism. SGT has taken a form of relativist ontologically, and subjectivist epistemologically [Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Devadas et al., 2011].

Straussian GT reflects a shift toward social constructivist ontology and postmodernism that is more compatible with current thinking. It aims to produce a theory that fits the situation, aids understanding and guides action and practice [Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Annells, 1997]. Glaser accuses and claims that the Straussian version is no longer a GT, but “*forced, full conceptual description*”. He stresses that Strauss’s version is no longer remains a GT, but a completely different method [Glaser, 1992].

## 8. Comparison between Glaserian and Straussian GT

Both GGT and SGT are different in terms of the paradigmatic dimensions, formulation of research questions, analysis procedures used, usage of literature, and sampling procedures [Devadas et al., 2011]. Glaserian grounded theory (GGT) identifies ontologically and modifies objectivist epistemology, and then methodologically discovers theory by verifying it using sequential research. But SGT prefers it to be called “*constructivists*” and shaped it as relativist ontologically, subjectivist epistemologically, has recognized the interactive nature of the inquirer and the participants, and has placed it in a constructivist paradigm of inquiry [Annells, 1997].

In SGT, the researchers should adopt a literature review in the revision of data. But the GGT strongly opposed the use of literature review [Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Devadas, 2011]. In GGT, the theory is grounded in the data, and the researcher is passive, and exhibits disciplined restraint. On the other hand, in SGT, the theory is interpreted by an observer and the researcher is active. GGT is the basis on emerging theory, with neutral questions and SGT is founded on forcing the theory, with structured questions [Jones & Alony, 2011]. In 1998, Glaser observed that research on GGT is complicated for novice researchers [Glaser, 1998].

The GGT stresses the interpretive, contextual and emergent nature of theory development [Glaser, 1992]. Glaser believes that any specific philosophical setting can lessen the wider potential of GT research procedures [Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 1995]. On the other hand, SGT stresses very complex and systematic coding procedures and certifies a preliminary literature study to recognize research problems [Strauss & Corbin, 1998].

Novice researchers often face the dilemma of two approaches; Glaserian GT and Straussian GT, and cannot find differences between them. Sometimes they are unsure of how to analyze their data when they run through GT research [Glaser, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Heath & Cowley, 2004]. They must find out “*about the process of researching through learning in the process of carrying out the research*” [Freshwater, 2000]. On the other hand, experienced researchers do not mix the research data, and easily can choose their research area and proceed accordingly [Heath & Cowley, 2004]. SGT can be particularly difficult for novice researchers. But, most of the GT researchers feel that the Straussian variant is more



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suitable than the Glaserian one [Douglas, 2004]. Novice researchers should not start research with a preconceived theory, rather begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data [Strauss & Corbin, 1998]. To some experts, SGT is research bias. Moreover, it seems time-consuming, and laborious process to the SGT researchers [Timonen et al., 2018]. Both of the methods support theoretical sampling, coding, and constant comparison methods [Devadas et al., 2011].

## 9. Conclusion

In this study, we have observed that Glaserian GT and Straussian GT methods have a few similarities but there are many differences. The similar properties are; both generate theory grounded in the data and both require the researcher to conceptualize. On the other hand, different properties are realized in initial considerations, coding techniques, memo writing, analysis principles, etc. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century popularity of the Glaserian grounded theory and Straussian grounded theory is increasing day by day and more new researchers with previous researchers are joining worldwide in both of the research fields. Both Glaserian grounded theory and Straussian grounded theory have moved the researchers to be enthusiastic and driven toward finding the right answers to the right questions. They are often uncertain about the analysis of collected data. We have highlighted the Glaser version and Strauss version with the similarities and differences in the versions. We hope the new researchers will be benefited from this article and can develop themselves through the research in any one of the two versions that are interesting to them.

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