

# Back to the Basics: The Tenets and Procedures of Classic Theory

Alvita K Nathaniel, PhD  
Professor Emerita, West Virginia University  
Editor, Grounded Theory Review

1

2

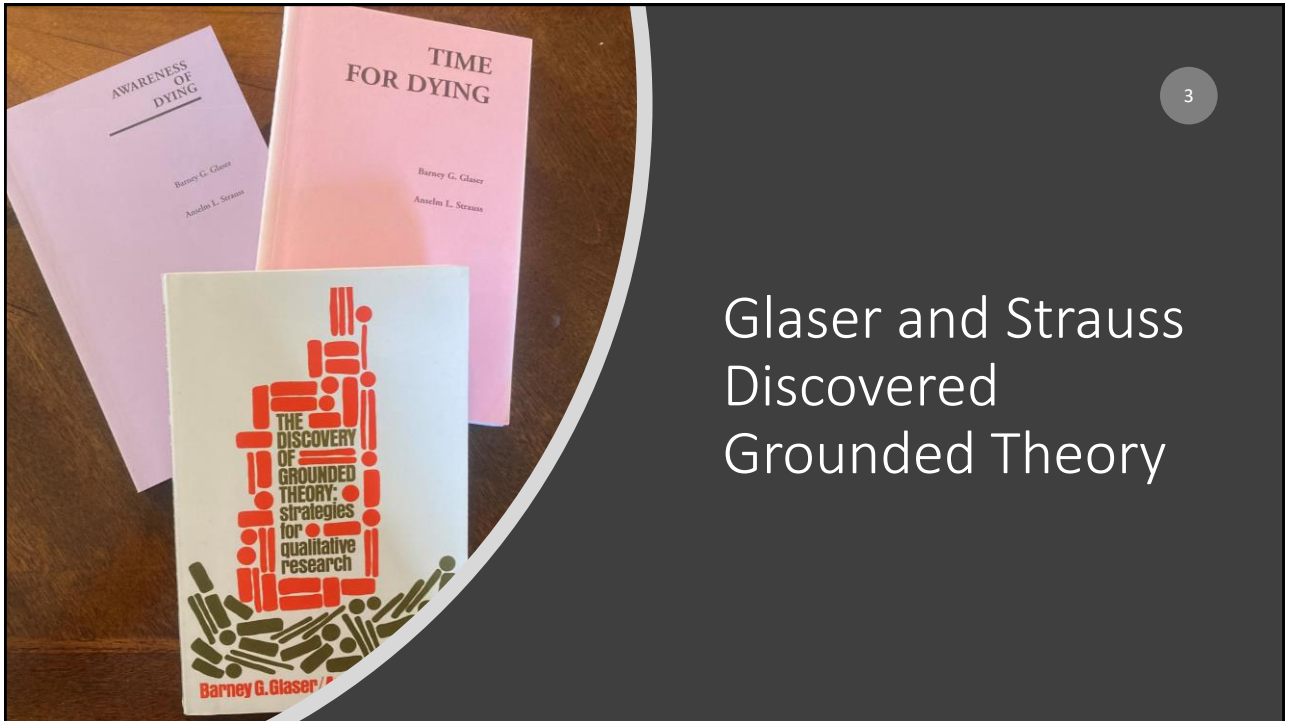
## Objectives

At the conclusion of the workshop the participant will be able to:

1. Describe the basic tenets of classic grounded theory
2. Explain how each procedure of classic grounded theory flows from the tenets of the method



2



3

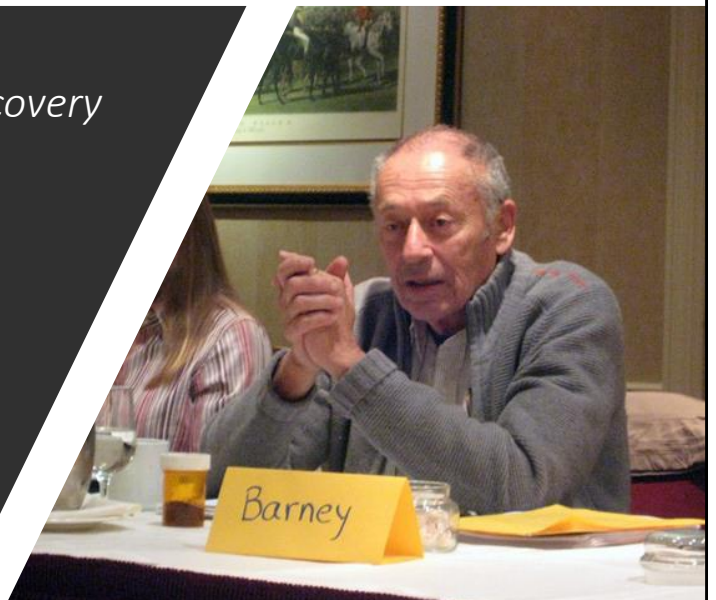
## Glaser and Strauss Discovered Grounded Theory

3

### Classic is GT Based on *Discovery*

Glaser's approach adhered to  
*Discovery*

- Emergence
- Conceptualization
- Limited description
  - No "thick description"



4

4

## The Major Remodeled Versions of Grounded Theory

(These are **not** classic grounded theory)

---

Strauss and Corbin (*Basics of Qualitative Research*, 1990)

---

Kathy Charmaz (*Constructing Grounded Theory*, 2006)

---

Adele Clark (*Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory After the Postmodern Turn*, 2005)

---

5

5

## Classic Grounded Theory

- Is the systematic collection of data from which emerges a multivariate conceptual theory.
- Is a set of probability statements that form an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses
- Generates a theory that accounts for a pattern of behavior which is relevant and problematic for those involved
- Should be able to explain, predict, and sometimes interpret what is happening

6

6

## Goal of Classic Grounded Theory

To generate a theory that accounts for a pattern of behavior which is relevant and problematic for those involved (Glaser, 1978, p 93)

Asks:

“What is the main concern of the participants and how do they continually resolve it?”

7

7

## Basic Tenets

Objective observations

Human perspective

Discovery of latent patterns

8

8

# Foundations

## Ontology

- There are patterns of human behavior.

## Epistemology

- Patterns can be observed, interpreted, and thus predicted
- Deduction, induction, and abduction comprise the scientific method.

## Methodology

- Openness to discovery
- Recognition of patterns
- Conceptualization
- Modification as new data emerges

9

## Preparatory Research Elements

### Research purpose

- To understand what is going on.
- To discover an explanatory theory.

### Research question must be broad

- “What is going on in the lives of ... when...”  
or
- “What is the main concern of... when... and how do they continually resolve it.”

10

10

# Iterative and Non-Linear Steps of Classic Grounded Theory

Data collection

Open coding of transcripts or field notes

Constant comparison

Selective coding

Conceptual memoing

Theoretical coding

Theoretical sampling

Memo sorting

Writing

11

11

## Common Classic Grounded Theory Terms

Constant comparison

Emergence/discovery

Core category

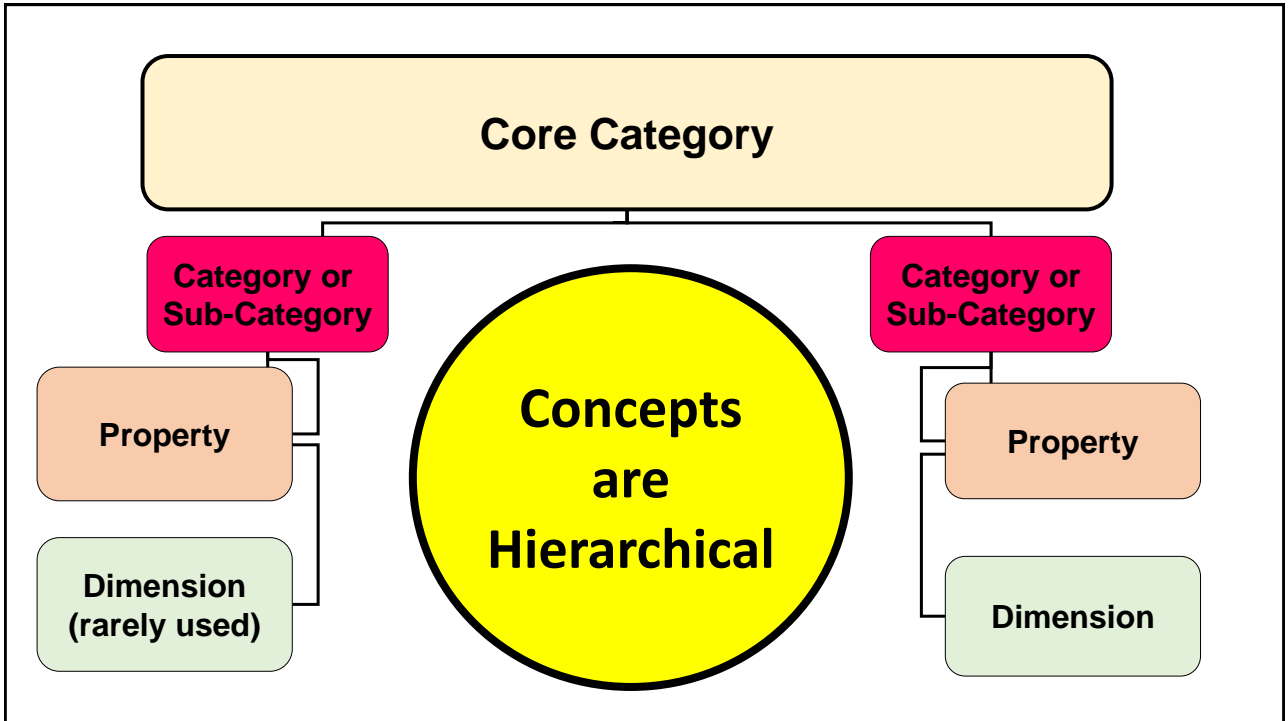
Theoretical sampling

Theoretical coding

Basic social process

12

12



13

How to identify the core category:

- What is the main concern of participants?
- How do participants continually resolve their main concern?

# The Core Category

14

What is the main concern?	How is the concern resolved? (Core Category)
Entrepreneurs are concerned about selling their products in order to survive in business (Simmons, 1993).	Entrepreneurs find ways to entice customers (Cultivating)
Emphysema patients have trouble getting around because of their exertional dyspnea (Fagerhaugh, 1993).	Emphysema patients identify routes that require less effort. (Routing)

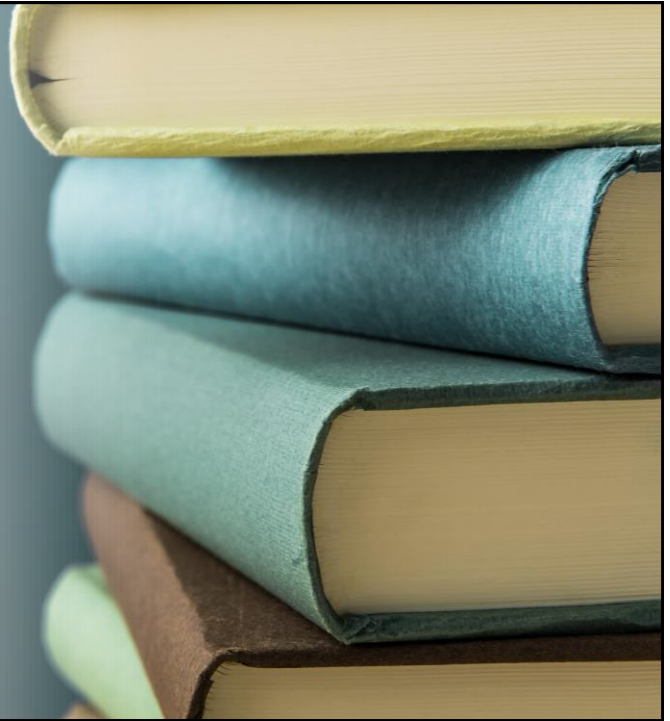
## Examples of Core Categories

## Classic Grounded Theory

- Is discovered
- Is abstract
- Is conceptual
- Requires constant comparison
- Produces hypotheses via theoretical coding
- Fills in the blanks through theoretical sampling
- Integrates tentative hypotheses to create a theory

## Literature Review

- Begin with knowledge of a substantive area
- Avoid preconceived notions, a preexisting theory, received knowledge
- Do the bulk of literature review after data analysis
- The literature review sets the new theory in the context of academic research.



17

## Participant Selection

- Limited to those whose experience is the focus of interest



18

18

## The Classic Grounded Theory Interview

- Choose the right setting
- Blend
- Ask the right question



19

## The Written Theory: What to Expect

- Interesting and parsimonious
- Laid out early
- Interwoven
- Sections with explanation of concepts
- Illustrated with short bits of data



20

20



## A Theory in a Nutshell

The theory of **protecting personhood** explains the process that hospitalized individuals go through to find balance in their sense of self, oscillating between **personhood** and **patienthood**. The process consists of four stages: 1) the **stage of introspection**, 2) the **stage of preservation**, 3) the **stage of rupture**, and 4) the **stage of reconciliation** (Didier, 2022, unpublished).

21

21

## Conclusion

A good classic grounded theory offers a bias-free, clear-eyed, logical, and conceptual explanation of what is going on in a substantive area.



22

22