

# Chapter 9

## Grounded Theory for a Doctoral Thesis: Retrospective and Prospective Insights

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The chapter transverses Grounded theory (GT) from its inception to the development of numerous strands which include Glasier and Strauss, Glaserian and Straussian versions, and Charmaz social constructivist among many others. The ontology and epistemology underpinning the diverse strands are scrutinized and insights are provided. The application of GT in doctoral study is discussed with a special focus on human social interactions and the attendant complex and nuanced nature of interactions. The chapter also highlights the challenges and prospects of using GT in doctoral research. The chapter is underpinned paradigmatically by knowledge situatedness and social constructionism.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter offers a background to the evolution of Grounded Theory (GT). Diverse GT strands are synthesized, including the classical version of Glasier and Corbin and Strauss, as well as Charmaz's constructionism. The roots of GT in symbolic interactionism, positivism, and post-positivism are analyzed. In addition, the chapter submitted issues in the following order: GT in mixed research, theoretical sampling, controversy in GT, and shortcomings of GT, among many other headings.

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The theoretical basis for this chapter is rooted in the Haraway theory on the situated nature of knowledge and social constructionism. The chapter further explored the quality issues in GT, challenges that doctoral students face when using GT, prospects for using GT in doctoral studies, discussion, recommendations, and conclusion.

## **BACKGROUND**

McCall and Edwards (2021) averred that grounded theory had become one of the most prominent research methods used in qualitative work overtime. In this chapter, the background of the evolution of grounded theory is examined, and philosophical assumptions are explored. Grounded theory has a definitive history and has led to the development of numerous approaches (Rieger, 2019). This chapter explores three distinct strands of GT and other emerging grounded theory strands, including the Glasorian, Straussian, and constructivist grounded theories.

Kenny and Fourie (2014) indicated that grounded theory was an innovation of American sociologists Glaser and Strauss, who worked together at the University of California on a project titled, “Awareness of Dying.” Grounded theory evolved as a consequence of frustration at the forefront of theory verification at the expense of generating theory (Glaser & Straus, 1967). They postulated that the dual process of initially generating data followed by verification of theory must be given equal primacy in social science research. In addition to critiquing a misplaced focus on verifying research using theory, the two researchers were also disenchanted by a dearth of social theory in social science. They foregrounded the priority of developing a social science theory grounded in research data, which is not based on theoretical a priori assumptions, and in 1967, Glaser and Strauss (1967) published the foundational book, *Grounded Theory*. The authors asserted that combining theory building with social science research would generate a sturdy research and crafty research hypothesis grounded in research (Glaser and Straus (1967).

Later, Mohajan and Mohajan (2022) expounded that GT is an inductive methodology that methodically gathers and analyses data to generate theory in social sciences. GT has its genesis in the field of sociology but has, however, diffused to other disciplines such as engineering nursing, education, management, anthropology, management, and psychology, among many other domains of learning. This methodology can be utilised by either novice students at doctoral level or an accomplished researcher. GT is rooted in a modernist ontology.

Mohajan and Mohajan’s (2022) work indicated that GT has grown to generate novel epistemological and ontological positions, including symbolic interactionism, a pragmatic approach of Strauss and Corbin, the constructivism of Charmaz, and the feminist GT of Judith Wuest. Likewise, Cullen and Brennan (2021) indicated

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