

Families of Grounded Theory: A Theoretical Structure for Novel Researchers

Devajit Mohajan¹ & Haradhan Kumar Mohajan²

¹ Department of Civil Engineering, Chittagong University of Engineering & Technology, Chittagong, Bangladesh

² Assistant Professor, Department of Mathematics, Premier University, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Correspondence: Haradhan Kumar Mohajan, Assistant Professor, Department of Mathematics, Premier University, Chittagong, Bangladesh.

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Abstract

This paper tries to discuss families of grounded theory. Grounded theory is a systematic research analysis that deals with qualitative research area. It is based on the effort to collect field data; follow the development and refinement through the systematic data analysis, and the final result can test existing theories or develop a new theory. Therefore, it constructs hypotheses and theories by the continuous collection and analysis of data. It is established for the first time in 1967 by two American sociologists Barney Galland Glaser and Anselm Leonard Strauss. Since the starting, it has taken on different iterations, and evolved a number of variants, such as classic grounded theory, Straussian grounded theory, constructivist grounded theory, and feminist grounded theory. New grounded theory researchers face difficulties to understand how to operate and apply families of grounded theory concepts and methods properly. This study has planned to provide an overview of families of grounded theory with the proper explanation for them. In this study an attempt has been taken to provide an up-to-date research framework of a grounded theory and its variants.

Keywords: Grounded theory, qualitative research, Glaser, Strauss, variants of grounded theory

1. Introduction

Grounded theory (GT) is one of the most popular qualitative methodologies in social science researches (Case & Light, 2011, Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022f). In the mid-1960s, quantitative approach was dominated in the social science researches. In 1967, two American professors of sociology, Barney Galland Glaser (1930-2022) and Anselm Leonard Strauss (1916-1996) have developed GT to take strong position in social science researches. They have worked together to acquire experience of terminally ill patients who are dying (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). GT is a systematic, inductive, and comparative research process that tries to develop theories, which are grounded in data (Groen et al., 2017).

In GT, the researcher is a neutral observer who develops theory from the collected data, with an open and independent atmosphere (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). GT is inherently flexible and a complex research methodology. It involves the meticulous application of specific methods and processes (Tie et al., 2019). It uses strict procedures for data analysis that enables to search for and conceptualize the hidden social and collective patterns (Noble & Mitchell, 2016).

Social scientists use GT in qualitative research, which is considered as “*methodologically dynamic*” (Ralph et al., 2015). GT is a systematic, so it involves a different level of complexity (Birks & Mills, 2015). No doubt, qualitative research has a rich history in natural and social sciences, but GT of Glaser and Strauss has a landscape contribution than all other qualitative researches before 1967 (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Their aim is

to make qualitative research more methodical, rigorous, and structured (Charmaz, 2006). Kathy Charmaz considers her seminal works as “*qualitative revolution*” (Charmaz, 2000). GT is a widely cited and frequently used approach in a wide range of disciplines and subject areas. At present it becomes a popular research area in variety of fields of social sciences, such as in sociology, education, medicine, nursing, social work, physiotherapy, healthcare, medical research, education, anthropology, psychology, law, management, computer science, information systems, software engineering, etc. (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012; Díaz et al., 2021).

GT has several distinct methodological families; each variant is an extension and development of the original GT of Glaser and Strauss (Birks & Mills, 2015). Classical GT is associated with Glaser, whose goal is to generate a conceptual theory (Glaser, 1998). The evolved second generation GT is associated with Strauss, Juliet Corbin (a nurse researcher), and Adele Clarke (a professor of Health Science); which is founded on symbolic interactionism (inner experiences of human which is rather difficult to obtain) (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). It is moved to an interpretive approach for developing theories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The third generation constructivist GT is associated with Charmaz, which focuses on how participants construct meaning in relation to the area of inquiry (Charmaz, 2006). Feminist GT is associated with Judith Wuest, which has started its journey for the welfare of the women. It aims to establish gender asymmetry environment in all steps of the society (Wuest, 1995; Kaur & Nagaich, 2019). Although research on GT is interesting to the experience researchers; but it seems difficult for new researchers (McCall & Edwards, 2021).

2. Literature Review

The literature review section is an important portion in social science researches, but Glaser and Strauss were against the literature review. They advised the GT researchers to maintain a position as neutral, objective observers and actively advised against conducting a literature review in early stages of the research process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory (GT) is known as classic Glaserian grounded theory (CGGT) or classic grounded theory (CGT), which is an inductive research methodology and it generates theory from data evaluation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Heath & Cowley, 2004). Oliver P. Thomson and his coauthors have highlighted how GT research may be helpful for developing robust and rounded evidence based in relation to osteopathic practice (Thomson et al., 2013).

Kathy Charmaz proclaims that *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* stands at the front of the “*qualitative revolution*” (Charmaz, 2000). Philip Bulawa shows that while there are common elements across most approaches of GT, theorists and users of the approach have applied it differently. Hence, the researchers can adopt and adapt the GT approach for their own researches (Bulawa, 2014). Glaser considers the literature review as another source of data within classic grounded theory, and can be used it for further develop of the theory (Walls et al., 2010). On the other hand, Corbin and Strauss believe that the literature review could enhance conceptualization (Giles et al., 2013). Actually, none would claim that s/he can enter the field completely free from the influence of past experience and reading (Morse, 1994). Niek van Veggel shows that CGT has been successfully used to investigate phenomena on two different areas of practice: in education and in evidence-based practice (van Veggel, 2022). Lars Selden criticizes the GT of Strauss and Corbin that provides recipes on methodology for inexperienced researchers (Selden, 2005).

Kathy Charmaz and Robert Thornberg have stressed on three major portions as: i) introducing the logic of GT, with emphasis on how researchers can use it to construct theory, ii) detailing criteria for quality in the major forms of GT advocated by Glaser and Strauss, and augmented by Glaser, Strauss and Corbin, and refined by Corbin and Charmaz, and iii) providing an analysis of how constructivist grounded theorists Thornberg, Halldin, Bolmsjö and Petersson attended to the interviewing process, coding, and developing their theoretical concept of double victimizing (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Méabh Kenny and Robert Fourie have realized that GT is an innovative research methodology, consisting of three prevailing traditions: Classic GT, Straussian GT, and constructivist GT that are arising from the same root, and sharing a number of the original methodological techniques (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). Kendra L. Rieger has compared and contrasted three widely used GT approaches with key distinguishing characteristics. She has widely discussed three approaches of GT: classic Glaserian GT, Straussian GT, and constructivist GT in a systematic manner (Rieger, 2019).

Lars Selden criticizes the GT of Strauss and Corbin that provides recipes on methodology for inexperienced researchers (Selden, 2005). Kul Prasad Khanal argues that theory construction in constructivist grounded theory (CGT) design is accomplished through the interaction of both data-indicated and extant theoretical concepts by integrating inductive, abductive and deductive reasoning during various stages of the inquiry (Khanal, 2018). Drawing on constructivist GT and critical feminist methodologies, Elizabeth Hordge-Freeman has used specific examples from his ethnographic research in Brazil to highlight the complex and contradictory ways that researchers’ bodies and emotions are perceived by potential research participants, and can be managed in order to enhance ethnographic research (Hordge-Freeman, 2018).

Judith Wuest has applied the method of GT in the feminist research perspective. She has focused on respecting

subjective interpretations of social experience, where she rejects subject-object dualisms and tries to value the relationship between the researcher and the research participants (Wuest, 1995). Marilyn Plummer and Lynne E. Young have wanted to describe the epistemological affinity between feminist inquiry and grounded theory. They have tried to identify six key areas where the underpinnings of GT are enriched by a feminist perspective when working with women (Plummer & Young, 2010). Sandra Harding has stressed on feminist epistemology (i.e., understand and explain how and what know), where she considers the development of method and methodology as the basis of research (Harding, 1987). In a review article, Haradhan Kumar Mohajan has simply highlighted on the GT research (Mohajan, 2018). He has also tried to discuss aspects of waves of feminism that act for women rights, and act against women's abuse and oppression (Mohajan, 2022a, b, d). Devajit Mohajan and Haradhan Kumar Mohajan have studied the aspects of Straussian GT and Constructivist GT (Mohajan, 2022c, 2023a, b). They have also tried to explore coding in qualitative data analysis and memo writing procedures in GT (Mohajan, 2022a, b).

3. Methodology of the Study

Before starting any research, a researcher must need a perfect understanding of the research process. A well-developed outline of the study and an efficient understanding are essential to reach the goal of a research (Tie et al., 2019). GT is a method of simultaneous data collection and stable relative analysis, theoretical sampling and memoing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this study, variants of GT, such as classic GT, Straussian GT, constructivist GT, and feminist GT are discussed in briefly. Then we have tried to show the differences and similarities with the original grounded theory methodology.

Research with the use of secondary data is *"a form of research in which the data collected and processed in one study are reanalyzed in a subsequent study"*. These provide efficiencies in time, money, and other resources; also reduces research obtrusiveness and decreases the burden placed on respondents (Szabo & Strang, 1997; Rubin & Babbie, 2008). To prepare this article we have consulted secondary data sources. The materials are gathered from the related papers of reputed journals and e-journals, books and handbooks of established writers, internet and websites, etc. In the study we have tried to maintain the reliability and validity as far as possible, and also efforts to properly cite the references in the text (Mohajan, 2017, 2018, 2020).

4. Objective of the Study

The objective of every researcher is to flourish, advance, improve, and expand his/her present research area with the maximum use of his/her existing knowledge. The key objective of this article is to analyze the aspects of variants of GT. Some other subsidiary but related objectives are;

- to provide basic ideas of GT, and
- to show the popularity of GT in social science.

5. Basic Ideas of GT

Grounded theory (GT) is a research method, and it seeks to develop theory that is grounded in data. It is considered as a family of methods whose main objective is to produce middle-range theory starting from varied arrays of data (Evans, 2013). It is an encompassing qualitative research strategy, which can be used to develop concepts from the empirical data through a comparative coding process (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010). It is located in a number of differing paradigms of thought, such as constructivism, postmodernism, and symbolic interactionism (Liamputtong, 2009). Glaser states that GT is *"a general methodology of analysis linked with data collection that uses a systematically applied set of methods to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area"* (Glaser, 1992). Charmaz defines GT as *"a set of methods that consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves"* (Charmaz, 2006).

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss have jointly developed GT; when they were in the field of health and nursing studies in the USA. They have conducted a qualitative investigation on the meaning and awareness of dying for patients affected by terminal illness (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 2005). Glaser came from the Chicago School, was familiar with pragmatist philosophy and symbolic interactionism. On the other hand, Strauss studied with Paul Lazarsfeld at Columbia University, was familiar with systematic quantitative methods (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). Glaser and Strauss have published their revolutionary work when qualitative postpositivism research is dominated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Their goal was to establish qualitative research strongly with reliable data analysis that had a positivist direction (Charmaz, 2006).

Most of the researches in social sciences are based on verification of theories and testing hypotheses. But predetermined theories and hypotheses cannot provide hidden structures grounded in the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). GT does not follow the usual research steps of the other qualitative research, such as formation of hypothesis, evidence of methodology data collection and analysis at the end testing of hypothesis (Duchscher

& Morgan, 2004). Rather, it creates specific, comprehensible, reasonable and logical theory, and explains and predicts the phenomena, which is grounded in data that are scientifically collected and analyzed (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

In GT, data are gathered, assessed, and coded through the constant comparison method (i.e., data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously) and subsequently used in developing theory, based on what has been observed (Rosenbaum et al., 2016). GT is a systematic, rigorous means of gathering and analyzing data. With the previous collected and coded data, new data is collected and coded, and these codes are compared to the previous codes to find patterns, and compared them with categories (i.e., groups of codes). Finally, the emerging theory is compared to the literature (Holton, 2010; van Veggel, 2022).

6. Families of GT

Grounded theory (GT) studies human behavior and makes knowledge about how individuals interpret reality (Suddaby, 2006). It does not test theory but build theory that is a main difference from other researches (Thornberg & Dunne, 2019). It simplifies recording and elucidates subjective experiences of human (Fendt & Sachs, 2008). It has established guidelines for leading research and interprets data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The original GT of Glaser and Strauss that has been developed for the first time in 1967, has been diverged both professionally and methodologically, after twenty-three years of establishing the method, by Strauss and Corbin in the 1990s (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Suggestions of Strauss and Corbin did not go down well with Glaser. He heavily criticized of these modifications and considers himself as the defender of the original and correct GT research. He demanded that his work is original and correct GT methodology (Glaser, 1992). He accused them of encouraging researchers to limit the free generation of theory by introducing preconceived ideas (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). On the other hand, Charmaz has encouraged them by constructing GT and advocates for the use of a preliminary theory (Charmaz, 2006).

Grounded theorists adopt multiple philosophical and methodological settings that determine the application of a set of fundamental GT methods (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). The original GT has split into two parts for the first time, and later has split into three parts. Glaser's original method is known as "*classic or Glaserian grounded theory*", whereas Strauss and Corbin's method is known as "*Straussian grounded theory*" (Engward, 2013). The third version is social constructivist theory of Charmaz that relies on constructivism (Charmaz, 2000). Various other forms of GT have been developed by some students of Glaser and Strauss, such as Juliet Corbin, Adele E. Clarke, and Kathy Charmaz (Morse et al. 2009).

There are main four different GT approaches (Fernandez, 2012; Levers, 2013): i) classic Glaserian grounded theory (CGGT) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 2005), ii) Straussian grounded theory (SGT) (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), iii) constructivist grounded theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2006), and iv) feminist grounded theory (FGT) (Wuest, 1997). Each variant is an extension and development of the original GT. These entire have a common core of methods, vocabulary, and guidelines, such as coding, theoretical sampling, and constant comparative methods (Mills et al., 2006). Although these approaches have basic similarities, they have some differing philosophical assumptions and methods, which are implemented in every approach (Charmaz, 2017). Another approach, for example, situational analysis is considered as an extension of CGGT (Clarke, 2009). Now we compare and contrast these four approaches in brief.

6.1 Classic Glaserian GT

The original grounded theory (GT) of Glaser and Strauss is also known as classic Glaserian grounded theory (CGGT) or simply classic grounded theory (CGT) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is an inductive approach to research that reflects the objectivist worldview of Glaser and the pragmatist worldview of Strauss (McCall & Edwards, 2021). It has its ontological roots in critical realism and the researcher is considered to be independent of the research. Glaser is heavily influenced by the objective and systematic processes embedded in GT (Blumer, 1969). The classical version of GT is united in qualitative research with the positivist epistemology (Khanal, 2018). It is a systematic, rigorous means of gathering and analyzing data and tries to explore social situations through people's experiences (Engward, 2013).

The classic grounded theory (CGT) is called "classical" because of its supreme loyalty to the primary ideas published in 1967. In CGT, Glaser focused on four criteria: fit, relevance, work, and modifiability (Glaser, 1998). He states that CGT research starts without research questions to avoid "*forcing the data*" with the notions of the researcher; instead the researcher investigates an area where the subjects have a main concern. He also criticizes the Straussian coding approach (Glaser, 1992; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). From ontological, epistemological and methodological discussion of GT, the classic post-positivist mode has established by Glaser and Strauss (Annells, 1996; Khanal, 2018). Overtimes, two authors Glaser and Strauss show methodological disagreements in some matters and parted in the research procedures. Each route of their own '*versions*' of the original methodology are

labeled by “Glaserian” and “Straussian” respectively (Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin 1998). Barney Glaser is always faithful to the methodology in its original one, and is referred as “*Classic Grounded Theory*” (Glaser, 1978).

The CGT researchers assert that the data reveal a true theory (Mills et al., 2006). The purpose of CGT analysis is to expose the main problem in a substantive area, as well as the resolution to this problem (Hernandez, 2009). The CGT observes the participants’ viewpoints and revolves their main concerns. So, it is a perspective-based methodology (Glaser, 1998). Glaser has argued that CGT is the pure form of GT that reflects a modernist ontology (i.e., knowledge about the nature of reality and the nature of the human being). He has continued to develop CGT by explaining abstract concepts, such as theoretical sensitivity, developing numerous theoretical coding families, and describing in detail how to conceptualize data (Artinian, 2009; Glaser, 1978, 2005). He has also launched the Grounded Theory Institute and the associated journal, *Grounded Theory Review: An International Journal*, to continue promoting, developing, and refining CGT (Kenny & Fourie, 2014).

In CGT, analysis is an iterative process that begins with preconscious processing. A researcher starts to write field notes, codes the raw data word-by-word and sentence-by-sentence, fractures the data through constant comparison, and identifies incidents that indicate a concept. The researcher identifies the relationships between concepts, theoretical sampling, and sorting memos to complete a theory (Nathaniel, 2020).

CGT is a systematic, rigorous means of gathering and analyzing data that explains a social procedure (Engward, 2013). It takes attempts to create hypotheses and theories about experiences of people, rather than testing and validating the existing theories (van Veggel, 2022). Whether the data are qualitative or quantitative, CGT tries to discover a robust empirically derived hypothesis or core variable that are generated through constant coding and analyzing of data (Tossy, 2015, Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022a). It suffers from internal misalignment, as it spreads from a positivist and objectivist method while using interpretivist (i.e., the beliefs and feelings about the world how it should be understood and studied) and constructionist (i.e., meaning is created through the interaction of the interpreter and the interpreted) tools (Kenny & Fourie, 2014).

6.2 Straussian GT

In the 1990s, the GT has evolved and lead to the formation of two variants: the Glaserian variant and the Straussian variant; each is distinguished by its own ideographic procedures (Goulding, 2002). Strauss has 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, are influenced by symbolic interactions, and finally have developed Straussian Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

Straussian version has a particular system and procedures that guide researchers to organize and analyze data collections (Muhaayuddin et al., 2016). It starts with some research questions and the researcher can use his experience, prior knowledge, interaction with participants, and interpretation of findings, and even the literature if it is needed (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this method, data are collected recurrence order, and then data are coded. Comparative analysis and theoretical sampling are preceded until theoretical saturation arises (Locke, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Straussian variant stresses very complex and systematic coding procedures and certifies a preliminary literature study to recognize research problems (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Corbin and Strauss have used variety of techniques, such 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). Although both Glaserian and Straussian versions in GT are different procedures, both perspectives allow the role of literature in developing a new theory and both agree on the use of theoretical sampling. Glaser believes in a “*true reality*” while Strauss believes in “*constructive reality*” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

6.3 Constructivist GT

GT is firmly rooted in the constructivist paradigm and the researchers follow epistemological structure to the study of research methods (Wuest, 2012). Constructivism indicates that knowledge and meaning is constructed through human interaction and the acknowledgement of the influence of social context (Crotty, 1998). It allows knowledgeable researchers to engage in deep and highly interactive discussions when data are gathered (Charmaz, 2009). It empowers the researchers to follow deeper and more interactive dialogue with their contacts, and to explore issues in greater depth through a more active discourse (Strauss & Corbin 1998).

Kathy Charmaz, a US sociologist, has been known as the third-generation grounded theorist, based on the ideas from two of her mentors: Glaser and Strauss, has developed a new approach called constructivist grounded theory (CGT) in 1995 (Charmaz, 2014; Bryant, 2017). She has named her research approach as “*Constructivist Grounded Theory*” because; it is situated between positivism and postmodernism, and has its ontological roots in relativism (Charmaz, 1995, 2017; Mills et al., 2006). She has assumed that in GT approach neither theories nor

data are discovered; theories are generated by the mutual construction of knowledge by the researcher and the participants (Charmaz, 2006). CGT reshapes the interaction between the researcher and the participants in the research process and highlights the role of the researcher as the author (Mills et al., 2006). In CGT, neither data nor theories are discovered; researchers are a part of the world they study and the data that they collect (Tan, 2010).

Both of the authors, Strauss and Corbin, move from positivist paradigm towards a more constructivist paradigm, which distinguishes between the real and the true. The CGT does not seek truth but addresses human realities as objective knowledge and truth. The grounded theorist constructs an image of reality, not the reality, i.e., objective, true, and external (Strauss & Corbin 1998; Charmaz, 2003). Charmaz has realized that CGT “*assumes a relativist epistemology, sees knowledge as socially produced, acknowledges multiple standpoints of both the research participants and the grounded theorist, and takes a reflexive stance toward our actions, situations, and participants in the field setting and our analytic constructions of them*” (Charmaz, 2009). CGT has explored the chronic illness of people, their strategies of managing their lives and effects of CGT on self and identity (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014).

CGT captures the interplay between the form and content of data where the individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work (Charmaz, 2017). It allows us to address while preserving the complexity of social life (Gubrium, & Holstein, 1997). It has been applied by nurse researchers in numerous healthcare settings (McCreaddie & Payne, 2014). It is a most popular research approach in the disciplines of psychology, education, and nursing (Mills et al., 2006).

6.4 Feminist GT

Feminism has motivated into the academy in the early 1970s (Messer-Davidow, 2002). Feminist grounded theory (FGT) has started its research since the mid-1990s. Nursing and social science scholars have examined in scientific knowledge generation, for the first time; well-matched relation between feminist and grounded theory (GT) behaviors (Kushner & Morrow, 2003; Wuest, 1995). FGT has developed initially for nurses in recognition of the androcentric bias and ensures that women’s voices are heard in the research community. Judith Wuest, a Canadian professor of nursing, is considered as the founder of feminist grounded theory (Wuest, 1995; Plummer & Young, 2010). She has applied the method of GT in the feminist perspective. Her thought covers the knowledge discovery for nursing that incorporates diversity and change (Wuest, 1997). She has focused on subjective interpretations of social experience. She has also addressed the contextual and relational nature of knowledge that rejects subject-object dualisms (Wuest, 1995).

Grounded theory and feminist theory have been considered as compatible methodologies to use together in qualitative research. The combination of both is based on epistemological, ontological, and methodological congruence (Keddy et al., 1996; Wuest, 1995). In the society women are ignored in many factors, such as in racism, systems of production, nationalism, heterosexism, ablebodiedism, and the complex relations between them (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). To change women’s lives the inequalities need to be understood as extending beyond gender to include those based on class, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, disability, age, and place of residence (Ruzek et al., 1997). Globally the women are victim of gender inequality. Consequently, FGT researchers have huge scope to flourish their knowledge in this research area (Plummer & Young, 2010).

7. Conclusions

Grounded theory is a systematic method of gathering, analyzing, and conceptualizing data so that a theory can be built to explain social interactions. It has experienced enormous popularity within the qualitative social science researches, such as in health, medical science, and nursing practice. In the study we have tried to explore four variants of grounded theory. The grounded theory researchers can choose the best one for their desire studies. Grounded theory is an extensively accepted method that provides the comprehensive generousness of the method. This study will help the novice grounded theory researchers to find basic ideas and can design their researches accordingly. In this paper we have realized that grounded theory is a research method that deals with theory generation and not theory testing. All the variants of GT use the method of concurrent data collection, constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling, and memoing. Classic grounded theory and Straussian grounded theory become popular from their inception. Constructivist grounded theory of Kathy Charmaz and feminist theory grounded theory of Judith Wuest have increased in popularity over the last two decades.

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