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Αικατερίνη Χάλαρη
MSc, BSc (Hons) RN.

Ekaterini Halarie
MSc, BSc (Hons) RN.

Περίληψη **Η θεμελιωμένη θεωρία αποτελεί μια ιδιαίτερα ενδιαφέρουσα ερευνητική μεθοδολογία για τη σύγχρονη νοσηλευτική επιστήμη. Το παρόν άρθρο παρουσιάζει τα κεντρικά σημεία αυτής της ποιοτικής προσέγγισης, η οποία στοχεύει, μέσω της συστηματικής συλλογής και ανάλυσης δεδομένων, στην ανακάλυψη θεωριών, που βρίσκονται μέσα στα ίδια τα δεδομένα και στις κοινωνικές δομές από όπου αυτά προέρχονται. Η ανάδειξη τέτοιων θεωριών από το χώρο της νοσηλευτικής θα συμβάλει στην πληρέστερη κατανόηση των κοινωνικών διαδικασιών και της Ελληνικής νοσηλευτικής πραγματικότητας. Στο παρόν άρθρο επίσης συζητείται η έννοια του ατόμου σε ερευνητική συνέντευξη υπό το πρίσμα της ποιοτικής προσέγγισης.**

Λέξεις-Κλειδιά: *Θεμελιωμένη θεωρία, νοσηλευτική έρευνα, ποιοτική μεθοδολογία, συνεντεύξεις.*

GROUNDED THEORY AS A RESEARCH APPROACH

Abstract **Grounded theory consists a distinctive research approach which aims to discover theories grounded in social processes. It is based on symbolic interactionism and has been utilized in many disciplines such as psychology, education, philosophy and nursing. This paper discusses the main features of the grounded theory methodology by analyzing the overall sampling design, data collection methods, the use of constant comparative analysis and issues relating to the review of literature in conducting grounded theory research. Additionally the notion of 'self' in qualitative interviews is debated. The use of the approach is proposed of having immense value in revealing unknown theories grounded in Greek nursing practice and education.**

Key - words: *Grounded theory, nursing research, qualitative methodology interviews.*

Υπεύθυνος Αλληλογραφίας
Διαδόχου Παύλου 20
Φιλοθέη 152 37
Αθήνα - Ελλάδα
Τηλ.: 210-6910115

Corresponding author
Diadohou Pavlou 20
152 37 Philothei
Athens - Greece
Tel: 210 – 6910115

Introduction

Grounded theory was developed in the 1960's by the sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss[1] as a distinctive research approach aiming in discovering theories that are grounded in real world observations[2]. As a methodology is rooted in the symbolic interactionist school of sociology, although it has been used by several disciplines and has epistemological roots in the areas of psychology, education and philosophy[3]. For Bowling this approach aims through systematic collection and analysis, to discover theory from the data[4]. For Blumer, who explicitly developed symbolic interactionism as a social theory, this school is based on three basic premises: 1) 'human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them'[5 (p. 2)], 2) that meaning arises from the process of interaction between people, and 3) 'meanings are handled in, and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters'[5(ibid)].

Utilizing grounded theory methodology and employing a symbolic interactionist perspective, the researcher is able to discover what is taking place in a specific social situation, and to inductively drawn explanations of the existing social processes[6]. Becker comments that the use of this theoretical perspective requires to view social phenomena within their social context and in the light of the social interactions of the people involved[7]. Grounded theory methodology enables us to explain a specific social reality and to inductively drawn explanations[6] by discovering socio - psychosocial processes which allow the development of a conceptual framework from the data[8], or as Glaser simply puts it 'to discover what is going on'[9]. Grounded theory therefore is used to explore the social processes within human interactions[10]. This methodology is regarded as a unique approach in conducting field research and not just another method of data analysis[2].

Methodology

A distinctive feature of the methodology is its sampling design called theoretical sampling. Glaser defines it, as a process of data collection were the researcher at the

same time collects, codes and analyses his data while also decides whether to recruit more participants, in order to further develop the emerging theory[9]. Therefore in grounded theory design, the researcher will be only retrospectively able to exactly define the total sample, once the theory has been as much as fully generated[11]. Becker views this sampling strategy particularly essential to the inductive - deductive process characteristic of grounded theory, as at first the theory will inductively emerge from the data, while thereafter by purposeful selection of participants, it can be deductively tested and evaluated[7]. This selective sampling continues until theoretical saturation, were each developed concept or category is as much as possible explored, indicating that the concept has been 'fully' researched, and no categories or concepts emerge during the analysis.

Another uniqueness of grounded theory research approach lies around the debate whether to conduct or not a literature review. There are disagreements whether a literature review is needed at all, as according to Glaser and Strauss, to allow the concepts to emerge the researcher has to be impartial through the whole research and particularly the analysis without forcing the data to fit into preconceived categories[1,12]. Glaser recommended reviewing the literature after the theory has developed[9]. In contrast to Glaser, Strauss and Corbin advocating to review the literature while the research progresses, for stimulation as a secondary source of data with the aim to direct theoretical sampling, to stimulate theoretical sensitivity and as a mean for additional validation to the accuracy of the findings[13]. Theoretical sensitivity is another important notion within grounded theory research. It is described as the ability to gain a real insight, to give meaning to the data[13]. Having sensitivity means having insight into and being able to give meaning to the events and happenings in the data. It means 'being able to see the obvious' [13 (p.48)], and discover the new. The literature, personal and professional experiences are sought of being sources influencing theoretical sensitivity and there are specific techniques which enhance it, such as comparisons, constant questions and detailed analysis of words phrases and sentences.

Constant Comparative Analysis

A fundamental characteristic of this approach is the notion of constant comparative analysis, in which data collection and data analysis occur concurrently. The analysis combines an analytic procedure of comparison with an explicit coding procedure[10]. The data are organised in discrete categories according to their 'properties' and 'dimensions.' Main themes within the data are presented as concepts, which constitute the building blocks for the emerge theory[10]. Properties are the characteristics of a category along a continuum of a dimension range. This type of coding is known as open coding and can be further developed by axial and selective coding. During axial coding, associations are made between already existing categories and subcategories, linking them at the level of properties and dimensions. At the third stage, selective coding, a central category is identified, which appears to be the heart of the phenomenon under study and it is the process of integrating and refining the theory 'grounded' in the data[10]. In terms of validity the emerged theory must be indicated by the data[10], should be directly relevant to the particular group from which it emerged, and it should also be able to explain and interpret the phenomenon under study[9,14].

Discussion

Grounded theory as a research methodology has been widely used within the field of sociology, since it aims to discover explanations of social and psychosocial processes[6]. According to Quint Benolien knowledge generation through grounded theory approach has undergone stages of discovery mainly during the 1960's, a decade of development 1970's - 1980's, a next decade of diffusion and in the 1990's a stage of diversification[15]. Although grounded theory has contributed to the accumulation of scientific knowledge for nursing, it has been argued that not all research studies followed a pure grounded theory methodology, although some might claim that this was the case, neither that all are based on the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. Additionally there have been criticisms against symbolic interactionism, for not adequately considering wider factors which influence the role of individuals within society, as it is mainly interested in the individual and the interactions with others[16]. Another criticism comes from Thompson, who argued that grounded theory and its underlying philosophical basis are both influenced by hermeneutic philosophy[17], what Denzin describes as 'interpretive interactionism'[18]. However knowing the roots of a specific research approach, influences and directs the researchers view of the world and the methodology and methods chosen to unveil the reality under research[19]. George Mead, a teacher of Blumer, sees the individual as an 'object... by means of his experiential transactions'[20 (p. 225)], with others entering an organised social environment. Through this perspective, there is a crucial need for the person to define himself. In addition, while people interact with one another they are engaged into an interpretive interaction and they often express experiences of social life through the use of symbols[5]. For Wilson and Hutchinson this symbolic ability of people to define the situations and action is the characteristic which makes them unique individuals[21]. The use of symbolic interactionism approach has been although critisised as being a micro - sociological theory, which does not

confront broad questions about the society under research neither adequately appreciating external restrains on social actions[16].

The notion of the 'Self' in qualitative interviews

An important area for philosophical and practical consideration prior the conduction of any research project relates to the concept of 'the self'. According to Quinton the concept of a phenomenon is defined as an object of perception through the use of senses[22]. Beside the external sensory perceptions are also the internal perceptions or self - consciousness. The self is regarded as a construction of consciousness which translates a person into his own object[23]. The use of one's self as an 'object' and within the framework of a research study has to be carefully considered. Rock sees the self as a facet of consciousness, appearing out of itself, reproducing and transforming itself[23]. As an interview is a dialectical interaction between two people, as well as an inner dialectical interaction with ones self, both activities have to be accommodated. The dialectical interaction between the researcher and the interviewee could be also directly or indirectly influenced by certain attributes as a result of each participant cultural 'baggage' and the language used to share lived experiences[24]. Blumer asserts that culture and social structure are the two dominant conceptions of contemporary sociology about society[5]. As interpretative interactionism is committed to understand how individuals see themselves in terms of personal experiences and within a specific historical moment[18], the conception of culture and the notion of historicity have to be necessarily considered. However Rock asserts that there is considerably difference between the experience of producing symbolic expressions and the experience of observing them[23]. This affects the reporting of experiences and feelings during interviews and also influences the ability to recall information from memory. In addition every interview necessarily correlates with the above difficulty and it is extending the difficulty of the 'objective' analysis of the data and the validity of the study[25]. Despite this difficulty, what has to be emphasized is that nor the researcher or the interviewee can divorce themselves from their social, cultural or political context[4]. On the contrary, the self of each individual would be revealed, as according to Heidegger every person's socio - cultural background is always present, giving the opportunity to enter and understand, a much as possible, the world and the experiences of the other person[26]. The underlying philosophy of grounded theory what we could describe as an interpretative sociological viewpoint, implies that the researcher accepts his role for interpretation[27]. Warkley believes that such understanding is the result of the fusion of horizons of interpretation and the object, as the person experiences reality and expresses it[28]. Even if this interpretation by either sides, the participants and the researcher, is unavoidably subject to the unconscious sometimes thoughts, assumptions and prejudices, going back to the same or new sources of information, exploring in more depth the emerge concepts and refining the emerged theory, there is the opportunity to gain a richer and more informed understanding of the research[27].

Conclusion

In this article the main features of grounded theory research methodology has been presented and critically discussed. The value of philosophical analysis has been seen as an absolutely necessary activity prior and during any structured attempt of scientific inquiry[4], and as an essential component for the enhancement and enrichment of any educational process[29]. Methodology provides the power to move forward while epistemology provides the 'rudder' to guide research, which without it 'we may circle aimlessly without direction'[30 (p. 1262)]. The use of such an approach can be of great value in revealing hidden or implied theories grounded in contemporary Greek nursing practice and education.

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