Draft Paper

Orla Lehane
PhD Candidate
School of Law and Government
Dublin City University
orla.lehane2@mail.dcu.ie

GROUNDED THEORY: A JOURNEY THROUGH DISCOVERY AND EMERGENCE

Introduction

Qualitative research has been described as 'an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem [and] the research builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting' (Creswell, 1998: 15). Such a qualitative research framework is of relevance to the study of the role of animation as a form of counter-narrative in countering violent extremism. The exploration of this issue involves analysing animations that have been created with a specific purpose in mind – to counter the extremist narratives disseminated by jihadists[1] – and interviewing those involved in their creation, production and dissemination. As such, the study aims to create a greater understanding of the role of these animations, the context and objectives behind them and the influence they potentially have. This paper outlines the qualitative method of choice in this research study, namely the adoption of a classic grounded theory approach.

This first part of this paper details the origins of classic grounded theory, elucidating the main characteristics and processes involved in applying this method. This includes a detailed outline of these procedures and considers the place of the literature review in a grounded theory study, which is often contested. The paper moves from this general discussion of classic grounded theory to focus specifically on why this method has been chosen for this particular study. The need for a compelling rationale when choosing a qualitative research framework (Creswell, 1998) is considered when justifying the use of classic grounded theory here. The final section of

---

[1] Extremist narratives are employed by a variety of groups, including extreme right, Irish Republicans etc. This paper refers to jihadi narrative given the extent of policy preoccupation with this type of narrative.

1

this paper details the starting point of this study and how this fits in with and has been informed by the decision to use this method.

Classic Grounded Theory: Origins and Overview

Grounded theory is a specific, qualitative, methodology developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) for the purpose of building theory from data. While the term grounded theory has evolved,[2] classic Glaserian grounded theory remains rooted in the discovery of theory from data. Originally developed for their study of the interaction of hospital staff with dying patients (Glaser & Strauss, 1965), the approach was more fully enunciated in the 1967 work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory,* which offers a full description or explanation of the method and remains a key reference to this day (Amsteus, 2014: 72). The backgrounds of both scholars had a role to play in the development of the methodology which falls somewhere between interpretivism and positivism. Indeed, grounded theory has been described as 'interpretivism for positivists' and 'positivism for interpretists' (Seery, 2014), indicating the quantitative background of Glaser and Strauss' experience and the influence of symbolic interactionism.[3] The development of grounded theory marked a challenge to the traditional acceptance and verification of grand theories at the expense of theory generation and the emphasis on theory development by logical deduction from a priori assumptions. One of the main aims with the development of grounded theory was to bring more rigour to qualitative studies by remaining close to the data. Originally the text was seen as a polemic work directed against deductive forms of theorizing (Dey, 1999; referenced in Amsteus, 2014: 13) which led to assumptions that grounded theory marks a rejection of hypothesis testing and the use of quantitative data. However, Glaser and Strauss are not necessarily arguing for qualitative versus quantitative

---

[2] For example, Corbin and Strauss (2008: 1) use the term in a generic sense to denote 'theoretical constructs derived from qualitative analysis of data.' Different types of grounded theory are discussed later in this paper.

[3] Charmaz (2013/2006: 189) offers a succinct description of symbolic interactionism: 'a theoretical perspective derived from pragmatism which assumes that people construct selves, society and reality through interaction. Because this perspective focuses on dynamic relationships between meaning and actions, it addresses the active processes through which people create and mediate meanings. Meanings arise out of actions, and in turn influence actions. This perspective assumes that individuals are active, creative, and reflective and that social life consists of processes.' Symbolic interactionism, informed by interpretivism and pragmatism, 'assumes human beings construct and reconstruct the meaning of reality in a constant interaction with the self and others' (Lomborg and Kirkevold 2003: 196). Influenced by the ideas of Mead (1934), it draws on the notion that individuals are self-aware and, able to see themselves from the perspective of others and therefore adapt their behaviour according to the situation (Heath & Cowley, 2004: 142).

methods, but rather elucidating and emphasising the fact that qualitative studies can have as much rigour as quantitative studies. Although clearly a qualitative method, grounded theory endeavoured to integrate the strengths inherent in quantitative methods with qualitative approaches, combining the depth and richness of qualitative interpretive traditions with the logic, rigour and systematic analysis inherent in quantitative survey research (Walker & Myrick, 2011: 548; referencing: Charmaz, 2000; Dey, 1999; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Keddy, Sims & Stren, 1996; Robrecht, 1995).

The evolution of grounded theory has led to the growth of different versions, discussed further below, and debates regarding the place and validity of these different versions. Key to many of these debates is the epistemology and ontology of the method. From a classic grounded theory perspective, these debates are moot, the method being epistemologically and ontologically neutral (Glaser, 2005), summarised as follows:

> 'this is not to say that classic grounded theory is free of any theoretical lens but rather that it should not be confined to any one lens; that as a general methodology, classic grounded theory can adopt any epistemological perspective appropriate to the data and the ontological stance of the researcher' (Breckenbridge et. al, 2012, referencing Holton, 2007: 269).

It is the application of the method to the type of data within a specific research method that indicates 'where grounded theory takes on the mantle for the moment of pre-positivist, positivist, post-positivist, postmodernism, naturalism, realism etc.' (Glaser, 2005: 145). Debates and preoccupation with ontological and epistemological issues of grounded theory may, as Breckenbridge *et. al* (2012) note, 'distract from the simplicity of its purpose: to generate a theory from the data that fits, works and is relevant within the area from which it was derived.' Generating a theory in this manner ensures that the theory is suited to its supposed uses and enables the prediction and explanation of behaviour, useful in theoretical advances in sociology, usable in practical applications (Glaser & Strauss, 2008/1967: 30). Theory describes, explains and predicts phenomena and can be considered as a set of logically related statements that is a 'creative and rigorous structuring of ideas that project a tentative, purposeful and systematic view of phenomena' (Chinn & Kramer, 1995: 72).

Grounded theory initially advanced in the field of nursing and remains very popular within different areas of healthcare research (Dey 1999; May, 1996). It has subsequently been used in many fields, including management studies (Jones & Noble, 2007); software development (Coleman & O'Connor, 2007); studies on beer consumption (Pettigrew, 2002); and recently Bartlett and Miller (2012) have taken a grounded theory approach in a study on violent and non-violent radicalisation, using a mixture of in depth and semi structured interviews, along with archival research. The study was not approached with a specific hypothesis in mind, but 'with the intent of understanding the relationship between violent and non-violent extremists more generally' (Bartlett & Miller, 2012: 5). In the area of media studies, Vivian B Martin has used grounded theory methods to develop theories regarding daily news viewing (2008).

Grounded theory does not start with a deductively produced hypothesis but with experience (Della Porta & Keating, 2008: 35) and the assumption that human existence is characterised by a latent pattern of behaviour that people may not be conscious of. The goal of this research is therefore to develop, systematically, a theory that accounts for this latent pattern of behaviour. The focus is on following the data and letting the participants lead the way. With no pre-existing research question, the researcher starts off with an idea about something, with the initial decisions for theoretical collection of data based on a general subject or problem area, not based on a preconceived theoretical framework (Glaser & Strauss, 2008/1967: 45). Inductive analysis is the principal technique used in the grounded theory method (Bowen, 2006: 2). Fritz (1960: 132) describes induction as 'going from the particular to the general' and in the case of grounded theory this means that 'the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis' (Patton, 1980: 306). While the emphasis is on this inductive approach, it is important to note that there is, in fact, an iterative procedure between deduction and induction taking place (Héritier, 2008: 65). Deductive reasoning has an important role to play in theoretical sampling[4] and the development of ideas regarding where to go next, the next step, for data collection. As such, data analysis is a critical, reflective and iterative process that moves between data and the overarching framework. The analysis may be at the micro level, but there is a constant referral

---

[4] Theoretical sampling is a key process for data collection in grounded theory studies. It is discussed in detail in the following section of this paper.

to the macro – what is this study about? The key question throughout remains: what is the participants' main concern and how are they resolving it? Grounded theory is rooted in the behaviour, words and actions of those under study, with theory emerging from the data through the application of a model that usefully and pragmatically links diverse facts, and explains relationships.

There are a number of core characteristics associated with grounded theory, all of which have an important role to play in any grounded theory study and are outlined in the following section. These are key to any grounded theory study and if they are not all used it is simply not a grounded theory study. The aim is for theoretical completeness, not descriptive coverage and ultimately, grounded theory is about developing the germane connections between themes and developing an integrated theory. To achieve this goal the following features are key.

Characteristics of Grounded Theory

All variants of grounded theory involve the following elements: simultaneous data collection and analysis, pursuing emergent themes through early data analysis, discovering basic social processes within data, inductive construction of abstract categories to explain and synthesize these processes, sampling to refine categories through comparative processes, and integrating categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions and consequences of the studied processes (Conlon et. al, 2013: 2; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012: 348). Before detailing these characteristics, it is important to note that a grounded theory methodology is not a linear process. Data collection and data analysis are continuous and concurrent processes, with analysis beginning as soon as the first pieces of data are collected. Data collection is not a one off event. There is a constant comparative analysis taking place as data is being collected. Data can be collected in a variety of ways, as with any other qualitative study, including: interviews (formal, informal, structured, or unstructured); observations; questionnaires and documentation. Textual or visual analysis/interpretation can also be used in a grounded theory study. One of the maxims of grounded theory is: 'all is data,' indicating that everything is open for interpretation and analysis within a grounded theory study.

Coding, Concepts and Categories

Upon initial data collection, analysis begins immediately. Coding, which can be viewed as a twin process to constant comparison (Amsteus, 2014: 75; Piantanida, Tananis & Grubs, 2004), has two main levels: substantive and theoretical. Coding is about asking analytical questions of the data and thinking about the data in new ways. With grounded theory coding begins as soon as the first pieces of data are collected. The initial open coding is carried out quickly, staying close to the data. Glaser (1978: 56) describes it as 'coding the data in every way possible…running the data open.' At this stage the data is broken up into parts, divided by meaning, and given labels, or 'codes' – naming, or defining what is happening. Open coding marks the initial stage of comparative analysis (discussed below), and is also the first part of 'substantive' coding. The focus of substantive coding then is on looking for connections and properties between codes, or labels. It is more selective and focused than at the initial stage. Here categories become more abstract and frameworks begin to emerge. The titles of the categories are 'concepts' and the aim is to find links between these, all the time seeking to arrive at one connected 'core' category. The next step in achieving this is 'theoretical' coding, which involves weaving the fractured story back together to specify the relationships between the substantive codes and categories. As such, coding can be seen as the interpretive rendering of the data and the building blocks upon which the theory will be developed. Through the coding process concepts are continually analysed and gradually organised into higher order categories, finally arriving at an underlying core category, which suggests an emerging theory (Amsteus, 2014: 13). The core category is one that constantly recurs throughout the data and integrates all the other categories. It should relate the participants' main concern and explain all of the coding – it is the category with the most explanatory power (Glaser, 1998). It is an overarching category that makes sense of all of the data and coding thus far and should also make sense to someone who is not familiar with the study.

Constant Comparison & Memo Writing

The use of constant comparison and memo writing are key here. It is through the use of these methods, categories and their properties become integrated, leading to a unified whole and ultimately the development of theory. With constant comparison and memo writing the focus very much remains on the data, and it is important to reiterate the non-linear process that takes

place. As noted by Coffey & Atkinson (1996: 10-11): '[a]nalysis is a pervasive activity throughout the life of a research project. Analysis is not simply one of the later stages of research to be followed by an equally separate phase of writing up results.' The constant comparative method of joint coding and analysis is to generate theory systematically by using explicit coding and analytic procedures (Glaser & Strauss, 2008/1967). Here codes are examined for complementarity and contradictions and incidents are compared to identify similarities, differences or variations. The constant comparative analysis technique means contrasting data against itself, against evolving original data, and against existing theoretical and conceptual claims (Boychuk & Morgan, 2004) and requires the examination of the data many times from different perspectives (Douglas, 2003).

The journey through coding and constant comparison is documented through memo writing. There can be no grounded theory study without memo writing: 'the writing of theoretical memos is the core stage in the process of generating grounded theory. If the researcher skips this stage by going directly to sorting or writing up, after coding, s/he is not doing grounded theory' (Glaser, 1978: 83). Memos serve a number of different functions. They help to take apart the story within the data, and can be useful in capturing a moment and exploring thoughts and ideas. They are 'the theorizing write up of ideas and meanings about the theory at the moment they occur' (Glaser, 1998: 177). The regular writing of memos ensures that there is an audit trail illustrating the path to theory formation. Not only do memos provide this record of the research and analysis that has taken place, they also help to advance thinking, build theoretical links, make analysis stronger and point to gaps that may need to be filled. They can be seen as 'a moment capture' or a space for the exploration of thoughts and the development of ideas. As with coding and comparison, memo writing occurs throughout a grounded theory study, beginning at the very outset of the study. The emphasis on researcher memoing ensures that interpretation is continuously integrated into the constant comparative analysis (Boychuk & Morgan, 2004; Douglas, 2003). Not only are memos critical in analysis and in keeping track of the route to theory development, they, along with the constant comparison that takes place, have a crucial role to play in theoretical sampling and in arriving at theoretical saturation.

Theoretical Sampling and Theoretical Saturation

Theoretical sampling is an important part of any classic grounded theory study, and goes hand in hand with constant comparison and memo writing. It indicates where to go for the next set of data. When the research is underway, theoretical sampling is decided by the analysis of previous data, making it possible to answer questions that have arisen from the analysis of and reflection on previous data (Amsteus, 2014: 75). Based on initial or tentative findings, the researcher becomes aware of where to look next for the information they require. Theoretical sampling can happen in a number of ways: a) participant one – two – three, the interview from one leads to theoretical sampling in interview two, three, etc.; b) the data from participants guide further theoretical sampling of new participants; c) the questions about analysis and emergent theory lead to theoretical sampling of literature for extant theory unknown at the outset.

Theoretical sampling is directed by the emerging theory and involves following leads and being selective about the data collected. Given the emergent nature of grounded theory, there is no set sample size, and a nonprobability sampling is employed. The researcher cannot cite the number and types of groups from which the data is collected *until* the research is completed (Glaser & Strauss, 2008/1967: 50 – emphasis in original). Theoretical sampling can included people, events, sites, ideas, context, literature, observations and documents selected based on theoretical purpose and relevance rather than structural circumstances. In addition, previous interviews and field notes can be sampled. According to Glaser and Strauss (2008/1967: 47 – emphasis in original), '[t]he basic question in theoretical sampling is: *what* groups or subgroups does one turn to *next* in data collection? And for *what* theoretical purpose?'[5] Glaser and Strauss (2008/1967: 45) define theoretical sampling as: '[T]he process of data collection for generating theory, whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyzes his data and then decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges.'

The cessation of theoretical sampling is determined by theoretical saturation. This marks the point where nothing new is happening with the research – there are no new insights, no new patterns emerging. It is important to note that this is not the same as repetition, rather, no

---

[5] Aggregates or single people can be considered the equivalent of groups with respect to the strategies of comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 2008/1967: 47).

additional data is found to develop the properties of a given category. As the researcher sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated (Glaser & Strauss, 2008/1967: 61). Saturation, in the context of grounded theory, implies the point when categories are completely explained and accounted for, and when relationships between them have been assessed (Amsteus, 2014: 76, referencing O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). With a grounded theory study, the adequate theoretical sample is judged based on how widely and diversely the groups for saturating categories were chosen, according to the type of theory under development (Glaser & Strauss, 2008/1967: 63).[6] Saturation and 'knowing' is always provisional, and the potential that next participant will add some new property always remains (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2002).[7]

The Place of the Literature Review in a Grounded Theory Study: Theoretical Sensitivity

Within the field of grounded theory research, the use of existing literature represents a polemic and divisive issue, which continues to spark debate (Dunne, 2010: 3). The issue is not whether a literature review should be undertaken or not, the question lies more with when this should take place - when it should be conducted and how extensive is should be (Cutcliffe 2000). In a grounded theory study, writes Glaser (1998: 69), literature is 'discovered as the theory is.' This is an element of theoretical sampling, as outlined above, where literature is sampled as theories and ideas begin to emerge. In traditional research, the literature review, conducted at the beginning of a research project, provides a theoretical perspective or framework in which the research question, or problem, is preconceptualised. However, Glaser advises against this: 'An effective strategy is, at first, literally to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study, in order to assure that the emergence of categories will not be contaminated by concepts more suited to different areas. Similarities and convergences with the literature can be

---

[6] It is important, as Glaser and Strauss (2008/1967: 62) explain, to 'contrast theoretical sampling based on the saturation of categories with statistical (random) sampling. Their differences should be kept clearly in mind for both designing research and judging its credibility. Theoretical sampling is done in order to discover categories and their properties, and to suggest the interrelationships into a theory. Statistical sampling is done to obtain accurate evidence on distributions of people among categories to be used in descriptions or verifications. Thus, in each type of research the "adequate sample" that we should look for (as researchers and readers of research) is very different.'
[7] Dey (1999: 117) uses the term 'theoretical sufficiency' rather than 'theoretical saturation,' noting '[w]hile both indicate that the data have been properly analysed, the latter turns out to be an inflexible expression because it has connotations of completion [and] seems to imply that the process of generating categories (and their properties and relations) has been exhaustive.'

established after the analytic core of categories has emerged' (Glaser & Strauss, 2008/1967: 37). The traditional literature review, with the researcher reading in the substantive area and developing a theoretical framework in advance of data collection carries the potential for the loss of *theoretical sensitivity*. The risk is committing to one specific preconceived theory and thus becoming doctrinaire and insensitive or defensive toward the questions that cast doubt on the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2008/1967: 46). Theoretical sensitivity, another key notion within classic grounded theory, refers to the researcher's ability to have theoretical insight into the area of research combined with the ability to make something of his/her insights (Glaser & Strauss, 2008/1967: 46). It is under constant, continual development and enables the researcher to conceptualize and formulate a theory as it emerges from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 2008/1967: 46). Glaser's views on contamination and preframing, or forcing the data, therefore, should not be understood as a suggestion that the researcher approach a study with a blank mind. One of the ways of developing theoretical sensitivity is by reading widely – reading beyond the substantive area. This way the researcher approaches the study with a wealth of ideas, but they remain just that – ideas. There is no preconceived framework or theory into which to fit the study being undertaken. Reading widely can help sensitise the researcher to think in certain ways about the world – approaching a study with an open mind is something different to approaching it with an empty head. That the literature review is not carried out at the beginning of the research process is not to suggest that it is neglected. It is completed alongside the data analysis and plays an important role in enhancing the development of the theory. It has a both a place and a purpose within the study: 'to situate the research outcome within the body of previous knowledge, and thus to assess its position and place within the main body of relevant literature' (Christiansen, 2011).

Why Classic Grounded Theory?
The rationale for adopting a qualitative approach to this study, namely a grounded theory approach, has been influenced by the research topic and the aims of this study. As Glaser and Strauss (2008/1967: 233-234) note, the approach should be taken based on methods 'best suited to the socially structured necessities of the research situation.' An investigation into the use of animation as a form of counter-narrative within CVE policy and the effect it has is particularly amenable to a grounded theory study for a number of reasons. The exploratory nature of the

research, and the open ended, flexible research questions lend themselves not only to a qualitative approach, but specifically to a classic grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 2008/1967). Qualitative research is driven by questions focussing on the need to 'provide an understanding of social behaviour by exploring people's accounts of social life' (Avis, 2005: 4). Data analysis within qualitative research manages words, language and the meanings these imply (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and grounded theory is particularly suited to studies that are concerned with interaction (McCann & Clark, 2003). Further tying in with the aims of this study, to understand more about the influence of counter-narrative on their target groups, Coyne & Cowley (2006: 501) note that the goal of grounded theory research is 'to develop theory that will explain the dominant process in the social area being investigated.'

There has been very little research undertaken thus far into the role and influence of counter-narratives in CVE policy, and even less regarding specific initiatives, such as the animations that have been created with explicit CVE aims. Qualitative methods of research have been noted as being particularly useful when exploring topics about which little research has been conducted: 'qualitative research has begun to gain the reputation of being an excellent method for examining phenomena about which little is known' (Phillips, Morrow et. al., 2000: 590). As little research has been carried out in the area under study, and there is no clear theory to apply, creating a theory is an appropriate step. As Glaser and Strauss point out this can help agencies working in a particular area to make their research relevant, by offering a theory that accounts for much of the relevant behaviour (Glaser & Strauss, 2008/1967: 31). The use of counter-narratives, such as the animations being studied, is a major policy preoccupation within CVE, with billions of Euro earmarked for projects in the EU alone, coming as a direct response to the spread of jihadi narratives in different formats, including graphic imagery-based content. A grounded theory study allows for the development of a theory, grounded in the available data that can help guide future work in this area, and, as such, matches the aims of this particular study.

As noted in the opening sections of this paper, the term grounded theory has evolved from the original 1967 understanding. Amsteus (2014: 13) explains, 'the method has been elaborated and advanced by its originators and their students; it has diversified…' In fact, Glaser and Strauss themselves split during the 1990s due to their disagreement over the methodology. Debate

regarding different versions of grounded theory remains, with Dey (2004: 80) suggesting that 'there is no such thing as 'grounded theory' if we mean by that a single, unified methodology, tightly defined and clearly specified.' The debates surrounding the different types of grounded theory are not problematic, *per se*, and reflecting upon these debates is time well spent:

> 'it is not the differences that matter so much as the understanding of these differences and the making of informed and knowledgeable choices about what one will do in their research. Perhaps it is more about the researcher and less about the method. The value of this discussion might not reside in picking sides but exist in the discourse itself' (Walker & Myrick, 2006:558).

The problem lies not in the differences between different version of grounded theory, but rather its indiscriminate adoption by a variety of researchers to denote qualitative studies that are at best tenuously based on the methodology (Geiger & Turley, 2003: 581). Thus, it is important in any grounded theory study to be clear from the outset about which version is being used. In this study a classic Glaserian grounded theory will be used. Compared to the version espoused by Strauss and Corbin (2008; 1990) and Charmaz's (2013/2006) constructivist grounded theory, a classic approach offers distinctly more potential for the topic under study.

Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory draws heavily on classic grounded theory,[8] the point of departure relating to the place of the participant and researcher in the process of generating knowledge (Conlon et. al, 2013: 2). The fact that the researcher is implicated in every stage of generating data and theory, and the situation of participants as active in the construction of knowledge (Conlon et. al, 2013: 2) draws on more recent debates and discussions regarding the nature of knowledge. As such, the main difference is epistemological and theoretical (Greckhamer & Koro-Ljungberg, 2006: 734), as opposed to methodological, however, others have argued that it is a different method entirely (Breckerbridge et. al, 2012). I would argue that Charmaz's situating of participants as active in the research process is overstated. Of course they have a role to play, but to claim that the knowledge is co-created between researcher and participant is exaggerated. Ultimately, in a study of this nature, it is the researcher carrying out the coding and interpreting the data. While they play a key role and it should not be understated,

---

[8] Charmaz (2000) considers classic grounded theory to be more adequate than the version put forward by Strauss and Corbin.

participants do not play an active part in this process of interpreting the data collected. In addition, in criticising classic grounded theory for focussing on 'analysis rather than the portrayal of subjects experience in its fullness,' Charmaz (2003: 269) appears to be dismissing classic grounded theory for failing to do something that it does not purport to do. Breckerbridge *et. al* (2012), explain that 'the purpose of grounded theory is not to tell participants' stories, but rather to identify and explain conceptually an ongoing behaviour which seeks to resolve an important concern.' As such, the unit of analysis is not the person themselves, but incidents in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 2008/1967). In this way, I feel that Charmaz's version, while certainly interesting, does not offer any valuable contribution to classic grounded theory. Furthermore constructivist grounded theory contradicts the openness of the original methodology by predetermining one particular lens through which to analyse data (Glaser, 2002).

In discussions regarding variations of grounded theory, the key differences focused upon, and the most significant, are those between Glaser and Strauss themselves. While these debates are too extensive to cover in depth in this paper, and are complicated by the similar use of language and terminology, the key differences stem mainly from the data analysis process – 'the interventions and activities in which the researcher engages with the data' (Walker & Myrick, 2011: 549) – as opposed to the fundamental principles underlying the method. In reformulations of the original version of grounded theory, Strauss (along with Juliet Corbin), have listed more concrete steps for those undertaking the process of data analysis (Cooney, 2010: 19). The book was published as a way to help grounded theorists, especially beginners, learn to construct in-depth and dense grounded theories in a consistent manner (Kendall, 1999: 745). However, it has been criticised for its rigidity. Glaser (1992) emphasises that it is essential to be more creative and less procedural in methodology, whereas Strauss (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) communicates a more strict one dimensional method (Amsteus, 2014: 78). Strauss and Corbin include a paradigm in their approach that can be seen as imposing a conceptual framework in advance of data analysis, which does not sit easily with the inductive emphasis in grounded theory (Amsteus, 2014: 80).

Ultimately, although it has been argued that Corbin and Strauss are not given credit for the flexibility of their methods (Cooney, 2010: 20), I agree with those who feel that the approach is 'programmatic and over formulaic' (Melia, 1996). Although Strauss and Corbin (1998) claim

that the procedures they outline are 'guidelines, suggested techniques but not commandments,' it is easy to get weighed down by the list of processes that are presented in a prescriptive way (whether that was the intention or not).   Again, it has been argued that this version is more compatible with contemporary thinking, taking more recent debates about knowledge into account and reflecting a shift towards social constructivist ontology and postmodernism (Cooney, 2010: 26). However, as previously noted, these arguments are not necessarily relevant given the flexibility and openness of the ontological approach within classic grounded theory. Ultimately, being aware of the differences and the positions of the divergent grounded theories helps the researcher to be more explicit in their methods of analysis and in the making of informed and knowledgeable decisions regarding the research undertaken (Walker & Myrick, 2006: 558).

Getting Started: *Abdullah – X*

Having decided to adopt a grounded theory approach, the starting point for this study is *Abdullah-X,* a series of animated shorts developed specifically as a counter-narrative to online violent extremism and supported by the EU Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). There is no fixed research question, and no a priori hypothesis, as is the case when undertaking a grounded theory study. The initial ideas, or tentative research questions, revolve around the role of counter-narrative in CVE policy, with a particular focus on the use of animation. *Abdullah- X* is the logical starting point as it has been created specifically with these aims in mind. In exploring the case of *Abdullah – X,* the following steps will be undertaken: a) interviews[9] – these will be carried out with those involved in the project, including the creator, funders, disseminators (*YouTube* and *Google*) and those involved in making CVE policy; b) analysis of the *Abdullah-X* clips themselves along with the accompanying social media accounts (*Abdullah-X* is available on *YouTube* and has both *Twitter* and *Facebook* accounts); c)Analysis of the media coverage *Abdullah –X* has been receiving.

Through the initial analysis and coding of these materials theoretical sampling will take place, guided by the emerging theory, and will dictate where the study will progress to next. It is

---

[9] Ethical approval has already been obtained for these interviews from Dublin City University's Research Ethics Committee and initial interviews have been undertaken.

impossible to know from the outset where this might be, and, as a researcher, it is important to remain open and follow leads as they emerge. '…beyond the decisions concerning initial collection of data, further collection cannot be planned in advance of the emerging theory' (Glaser & Strauss, 2008/1967: 47). Throughout these steps it is important to maintain a balance between allowing the participants' concern to emerge and forcing it to emerge, or forcing a particular concern to emerge. Interviews are directed conversations and in a grounded theory study these are comprised of broad, open-ended questions aimed at instilling a spill of information (Higgins, 2014).[10] The focus of interviews becomes narrower as the theory develops, and it is possible to return to interviewees to follow up regarding specific topics that have emerged as the study progresses.

Conclusion

A classic grounded theory has been chosen as the research method for the study in question based on the nature of the research and the aims of the research. The rationale has been outlined in detail in this paper. In choosing a grounded theory approach this study, along with making a contribution in the substantive area also makes a methodological contribution. According to King, Keohane and Verba (1994: 15), 'a research project should make a specific contribution to an identifiable scholarly literature by increasing our collective ability to construct verified scientific explanations of some aspect of the world.' One way to do this is to '[s]how that theories or evidence designed for some purpose in one literature could be applied in another literature to solve an existing but apparently unrelated problem' (King, Keohane & Verba: 17). By applying grounded theory to a little researched phenomenon in an area that is not typically associated with grounded theory methods, this research does exactly that. In choosing a grounded theory approach there are significant implications in the planning and execution of the study, not least engaging with the debates regarding divergent grounded theories and making an informed decision about which one to use, ensuring a clear and consistent approach throughout

---

[10] While Glaser (1998) argues against the taping of interviews, believing that it prevents the researcher from paying attention during the interview and can result in too much data 'clutter,' the interviews in this study will be recorded. This allows for a more in depth analysis which wouldn't be possible for a novice grounded theory researcher without the recordings. It is also possible then to return to the interviews to ensure nothing has been missed and to see which questions worked well (Charmaz 2013/2006).

the study. Ultimately, classic grounded theory offers the possibility to produce rich, innovative results in a way that the imposition of preconceived framework, in this case, simply would not.

References

Amsteus, M. (2014) 'The Validity of Divergent Grounded Theory Methods.' *International Journal of Qualitative Methods.* **13**: 71-87.

Avis, M. (2005) 'Is There an Epistemology for Qualitative Research?' In: Holloway, I. (Ed.) *Qualitative Research in Health Care*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill International: 1-16.

Backman, K. & Kyngäs, H.A. (1999) 'Challenges of the Grounded Theory Approach to a Novice Researcher.' *Nursing and Health Science*. **1**: 147-153.

Bartlett, J. & Miller, C. (2012) 'The Edge of Violence: Towards Telling the Difference Between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalisation.' *Terrorism and Political Violence.* **24**: 1-21.

Breckenbridge, J., Jones. D., Elliott, I., & Nicol, N. (2012) 'Choosing a Methodological Path: Reflections on the Constructivist Turn.' *Grounded Theory Review. An International Journal.* **1**(11). Available online at: http://groundedtheoryreview.com/2012/06/01/choosing-a-methodological-path-reflections-on-the-constructivist-turn/ [accessed 30th July 2013]

Boeije, H. (2002) 'A Purposeful Appraoch to the Constant Comparative Method in the Analysis of Qualitative Interviews. *Quality & Quantity.* **36**(4): 391 – 410.

Bowen, G. (2006) 'Grounded Theory and Sensitizing Concepts.' *International Journal of Qualitative Methods.* **5**(3): 1-9.

Boychuk, D. J. E. & Morgan, D. (2004) 'Grounded Theory: Reflections on the Emergence vs. Forcing Debate.' *Journal of Advanced Nursing.* **48**(6): 605 – 612.

Bryant, A. (2009) 'Grounded Theory and Pragmatism: The Curious Case of Anselm Struass.' *Forum: Qualitative Social Research.* **10**.

Bryant, A., & Charmaz, K. (2007) 'Grounded Theory in Historical Perspective: An Epistemological Account.' In: Bryant, A. & Charmaz, K. (Eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage: 31-57.

Charmaz, K. (2013/2006) *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis.* London: Sage.

Charmaz, K., & Belgrave, L. (2012) 'Qualitative Interviewing and Grounded Theory Analysis.' In: Gubrium, J. F., Holstein, J. A., Marvasti, A. B. & McKinney, K.D. (Eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft.* 2nd Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications: 347-367.

Charmaz, K. (2003) 'Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Methods.' In: Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.) *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (2nd Edition). London: Sage Publications Limited: 249-291.

Charmaz, K. (2000) 'Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist methods.' In: N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* (Second Edition: 509-536). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chinn, P. & Kramer, M.K. (1995) *Theory and Nursing: A Systematic Approach*. 4th Edition. St Louis: C.V. Mosby.

Christiansen, Ó. (2011) 'The Literature Review in Classic Grounded Theory Studies: A Methodological Note.' *Grounded Theory Research. An International Journal.* 3(10). Available online at: http://groundedtheoryreview.com/2011/12/20/the-literature-review-in-classic-grounded-theory-studies-a-methodological-note-2/ [accessed 5th August 2014]

Coffey, A. & Aktinson, P. (1996) *Making Sense of Qualitative Data. Complementary Research Strategies.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Coleman, G. & O'Connor, R. (2007) 'Using Grounded Theory to Understand Software Process Improvement: A Study of Irish Software Product Companies. *Information and Software Technology.* **49** (6): 654-667.

Conan Doyle, A. (2013/1891) *A Scandal in Bohemia.* Boston: Addison Wesley Publishing Company.

Conlon, C., Carney, G., Timonen, V., & Scharf, T. (2013). '"Emergent Reconstruction" in Grounded Theory: Learning form Team-Based Interview Research.' *Qualitative Research.* **0**(0): 1-18.

Cooney, A. (2011) 'Rigour and Grounded Theory.' *Nurse Researcher*. **18**(4):17-22.

Cooney, A. (2010) 'Choosing Between Glaser and Strauss: An Example.' *Nurse Researcher.* **17**(4): 18-28.

Corbin, J. & Strauss, A. (2008) *Basics of Qualitative Research. Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory.* Third Ed. USA: Sage.

Coyne, I. & Cowley, S. (2006) 'Using Grounded Theory to Research Parent Participation.' *Journal of Research in Nursing*. **11**(6): 501-515.

Creswell, J. (1998) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cutcliffe, J. R. (2000) 'Methodological Issues in Grounded Theory.' *Journal of Advanced Nursing.* **31**: 1476–1484.

Cutcliffe J., & McKenna H. (2002) 'When do we Know What we Know? Considering the Truth of Research Findings and the Craft of Qualitative Research.' *International Journal of Nursing Studies.* **39:** 611-618.

Della Porta, D & Keating, M. (2012/2008) 'How Many Approaches in the Social Sciences? An Epistemological Introduction.' In: Della Porta, D & Keating, M. (Eds.) *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences. A Pluralist Perspective.* Cambridge: University Press.

Dey, I. (2004) 'Grounded Theory.' In: Seale, C., Gobo, G., Gubrium J.F. & Silverman, D. *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: Sage: 80-93.

Dey, I. (1999) *Grounding Grounded Theory: Guidelines for Qualitative Inquiry.* San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Douglas, D. (2003) 'Inductive Theory Generation: A Grounded Approach to Business Enquiry.' *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods.* **2**(1): 47-54.

Dunne, C. (2010) 'The Place of the Literature Review in Grounded Theory Research.' *International Journal of Social Research Methodology.* (iFirst: 1-14).

Elliott, N. & Higgins, A. (2012) 'Surviving Grounded Theory Research Method in an Academic World: Proposal Writing and Theoretical Frameworks. *Grounded Theory Review. An International Journal.* **11**(2). Available online at: http://groundedtheoryreview.com/2012/12/07/surviving-grounded-theory-research-method-in-an-academic-world-proposal-writing-and-theoretical-frameworks/ [accessed 5th August 2014]

Elliot, N. & Lazenbatt, A. (2005) 'How to Recognise a 'Quality' Grounded Theory Research Study.' *The Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing.* **22**(3): 48-52.

Fritz, C. A. J. (1960) 'What is Induction?' *The Journal of Philosophy.* **57**(4): 126 – 138.

Geiger, S & Turley, D. (2003) 'Grounded Theory in Sales Research: An Investigation of Salespeople's Client Relationships.' *The Journal Of Business And Industrial Marketing*. **18**: 580-594.

Greckhamer, T. & Koro-Ljungberg, M. (2005) 'The Erosion of a Method: Examples from Grounded Theory.' *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education.* **18**(6): 729-750.

Glaser, B. (2001) 'Doing Grounded Theory.' *Grounded Theory Review.* **2**: 1-18.

Glaser, B. G. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity: Advances in the Methodology of Grounded Theory.* Mill Valley, California: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G. (1992). *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G. (1998). *Doing Grounded Theory: Issues and Discussions.* Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G. (2001*). The Grounded Theory Perspective: Conceptualisation Contrasted with Description.* Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G. (2002). 'Constructivist Grounded Theory?' *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 3.

Glaser, B. G. (2003). *The Grounded Theory Perspective II: Description's Remodelling of Grounded Theory Methodology.* Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G. (2004). 'Naturalist Inquiry and Grounded Theory.' *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 5.*

Glaser, B. G. (2005). *The Grounded Theory Perspective III: Theoretical Coding.* Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G. (2011) *Getting Out of the Data: Grounded Theory Conceptualisation.* Mill Vallye, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A. L. (2008/1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research.* New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

Heath, H. & Cow;ey, S. (2004) 'Developing a Grounded Theory Approach: A Comparison of Glaser and Strauss.' *International Journal of Nursing Studies.* **41**: 141-150.

Héritier, A. (2007) *Explaining Institutional Change in Europe.* Oxford: University Press.

Higgins, A. (2014) 'An Introduction to Grounded Theory.' *7th Qualitative Research Summer School, Dublin City University.* 9th May 2014.

Holton, J. A. (2007) 'The Coding Process and Its Challenges.' *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory.* Bryant & Charmaz (Eds.) London: Sage Publications: 265-289.

Jones, R. & Nobel, G. (2007) 'Grounded Theory and Management Research: A Lack of Integrity?' *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal.* **2**(2): 84 – 103.

Keddy, B., Sims, S., & Stern, P. (1996) 'Grounded Theory as a Feminist Research Methodology. *Journal of Advanced Nursing.* **23**: 448-453.

Kendall, J. (1999) 'Axial Coding and the Grounded Theory Controversy.' *Western Journal of Nursing Research.* **21**(6): 743-757.

King, G., Keohane, R., & Verba, S. (1994) *Designing Social Inquiry.* Princeton: University Press.

Lomburg, K. & Kirkevold, M. (2003) 'Truth and Validity in Grounded Theory – A Reconsidered Realist Interpretation of the Criteria: Fit, Work, Relevance and Modifiability.' *Nursing Philosophy.* **4** (3):189-200.

Martin, V. (2008) 'Attending the News: A Grounded Theory About a Daily Regimen.' *Journalism.* **9**: 76-94.

May, K. A. (1996) 'Diffusion, Dilution, or Distillation?: The Case of Grounded Theory Method.' *Qualitative Health Research.* **6** (3): 309-311.

McCallin, A.M. (2003) 'Designing a Grounded Theory Study; Some Practicalities.' *Nursing in Critical Care.* **8**(5): 203-208.

McCann, T. & Clark, E. (2003) 'Grounded Theory in nursing research: Part 1 – Methodology.' *Nurse Researcher.* **11**(2):7-18.

Melia, K.M. (1996) 'Rediscovering Glaser.' *Qualitative Health Research*. **6**(3):368-378.

Miles, M.B. & Huberman, A.M. (1994) *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook.* 2nd Edition. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

O'Reilly, M. & Parker, N. (2013) '"Unsatisfactory Saturation": A Critical Exploration of the Notion of Saturated Sample Sizes in Qualitative Research.' *Qualitative Research.* **13**(2): 190-197.

Patton, M. Q. (2002) *Qualitative Evaluation Methods.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Phillips M. G., Burris-Kitchen, D. & Der-Karabetian, A. (2000). 'Assessing Campus Climate Of Cultural Diversity: A Focus on Focus Groups.' *College Student Journal*. **34**(4): 589-603.

Piantanida, M., Tananis, C. & Grubs, R. (2004) 'Generating Grounded Theory of/for Educational Practice: The Journey of Three Epistemorphs. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education.* **17**(3): 325 – 346.

Robrecht, L. (1995) 'Grounded Theory: Evolving Methods.' *Qualitative Health Research.* **5**(2): 169-177.

Seale, C. (2004) 'Quality in Qualitative Research.' In: Seale, C., Gobo, G., Gubrium J.F. & Silverman, D. *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: Sage: 409-419.

Seery, A. (2014) 'The Epistemology and Ontology of Grounded Theory.' *Grounded Theory: Using it to your Advantage as a Research Student.* Workshop at Trinity College Dublin, 19th May 2014.

Stanley, L. & Wise, S. (1983) *Breaking Out: Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Research*. London: Routledge.

Walker, D. & Myrick, F. (2006) 'Grounded Theory: An Exploration of Process and Procedure.' *Qualitative Health Research.* **16**: 547-559.

Wells, K. (1995) 'The Strategy of Grounded Theory: Possibilities and Problems. *Social Work Research.* **19**(1): 122 – 124.