

The Grounded Theory Perspective II

**Description's Remodeling of
Grounded Theory Methodology**

Barney G. Glaser, PhD, Hon PhD

Sociology Press





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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to maintaining the depth of Grounded Theory thought that Anselm and I started in 1967. I am deeply appreciative for Anselm's part in this original contribution, however much it may have changed in later years.

This book is also dedicated to all the MA and PhD degree seeking students, who must manage and convince their committees of the direction, goal and worthiness of Grounded Theory. I trust they will find some of the help and answers they need herewith.

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by: Barney G. Glaser, PhD, Hon PhD

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Chapter 1

Remodeling GT Analysis

The difference between the particularistic, routine, normative data we all garner in our everyday lives and scientific data is that the latter is produced by a methodology. This is what makes it scientific. This may sound trite, but it is just the beginning of many complex issues. Whatever methodology may be chosen to make an ensuing research scientific has many implicit and explicit problems. It implies a certain type of data collection, a type of analysis, the pacing and timing for data collection, analysis and a specific type of research product.

In the case of qualitative data, the explicit goal is description. The clear QDA problem is the accuracy, truth, trustworthiness or objectivity of the data, its subjectivity, its interpretative nature, its plausibility, the data voice and its constructivism. Achieving accuracy is always worrisome. These are a few of the problems of description. Other QDA problems are the problems of pacing of data collection, the volume of data, and the procedure and rigor of data analysis and generalizability of the unit findings, the framing of the ensuing analysis and the product. These issues and others are debated at length in the qualitative research literature. Worrisome accuracy of qualitative data description worries me. I dealt with these problems at length in *The GT Perspective: Conceptualization Contrasted with Description* 2001.

In this book I will take up the perspective of GT, which assumes the reader has read my recent book, "The GT Perspective". GT methodology does not carry with it most of the heavily debated QDA problems, because it is conceptual thus abstract of time, place and people. Conceptual hypotheses, however grounded, do not carry the problem of accuracy. Its data, data collection procedures, analysis procedures, and product are explicit and the pacing of these steps are simultaneous, sequential, subsequent, scheduled and serendipitous. I have detailed these matters in *Theoretical Sensitivity, Doing Grounded Theory, Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis* and *The Grounded Theory Perspective*.

Mixing QDA and GT downgrades or erodes the GT goal of conceptual theory through the process of default remodeling — GT

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becomes remodeled as another QDA method with all its descriptive baggage. QDA is ascendant by dint of numbers of researchers so the apparent merger between the two methodologies results in the ascendent default remodeling to QDA canons and techniques of its rendition of "science." Conceptual requirements of GT methodology easily get lost. GT gets lost in QDA problems of accuracy, type data, constructivism, participant voice, data collection rigor according to positivistic representative requirements, however couched in flexibility. (See Andy Lowe, PhD, "Default Remodeling" European Union Post Doctoral Research Fellow, Swedish School of Economics, Helsinki, Finland — this article analyzes dealing with mergers.)

In this book I will attend many, not all, of the myriad of remodeling blocks to classic GT analysis brought on by lacing it with QDA descriptive methodological requirements. It is my goal in this book to try to alleviate the bane on good GT analysis brought on by QDA's pervasive ascendancy and the structurally wrapped professional identities of those QDA senior researchers open to no other method, especially the GT method. I hope to relieve GT of the excessive scientism brought on it by those worried about accuracy and what is real data when creating a science product. I hope to give explanatory strength to those PhD dissertation level students to stand their GT grounds when struggling in the face of the misapplied QDA critique by their seniors and supervisors.

I hope to remind people yet again that GT is only a set of integrated conceptual hypotheses systematically generated from systematic research methodology. It is not what the adopt, adapt, coopt, corrupt usages would call GT. It would appear to be very popular currently in QDA research for substantive and methodological papers to label QDA as GT for the rhetorical legitimating effect and then to critique its various strategies as somewhat less than possible or effective. Then further to sanctify the mix of methods as one method. These researchers do not realize that the GT and QDA methods are sufficiently at odds with each other even though often using the same type of qualitative data. Each stands alone as quite legitimate. As I said above the choice of methodology to render research representations about data as scientific is the researcher's choice. This choice should not be confused, lumped or multi-methoded, if GT is involved and eroded. I refer to my books on the difference between conceptualization and description and between preconceived concepts, problems and frameworks imposed on data and the emergence of concepts, problems and theoretical codes.

Vision and View of This Book

The simple view of this book is that the researcher, who has to achieve a GT product to move on with respect to career and skill development, is often blocked by QDA requirements. Over the 34 years since *Discovery of Grounded Theory* was first published the adapt, adopt, coopt, corrupt assault of QDA on GT has remodeled it, hence blocked in a myriad of ways the procedural generation and analysis of GT. I will discuss many of these blocks and the reader will thereby see and think of, by these examples, many other blocks, however subtle. The blocking idea will become clear.

The great proliferation of QDA's diverse methods, students, researchers and popularity has massively mauled and eroded GT methodology. Undoing the blocks to GT by this default remodeling will not be an easy task. The reader is to keep in mind that this book is about GT to extract it from this remodeling. It does not indite QDA, in any way, whose methods are quite worthy, respectable and acceptable. The focus is only on GT in order to rescue GT from the QDA blocking, erosion and thus default remodeling.

As I consider the inundation, overwhelming and overload of QDA dictums, "words" and assumed requirements on GT methodology, the reader will see that it is hard to both assimilate and withstand this avalanche on GT methodology. The assault is so strong and well meaning that many, and most young researchers, do not know, nor realize that GT is being remodeled by default. GT procedures and ideas are used to legitimate and buttress routine QDA methodology. The backlash is to block classic GT as it was conceived.

I will deal with as many of the blocks I see as most relevant, certainly not all. If I repeat, it will be from different vantage points to undo QDA remodelings in the service of advancing the GT perspective. I will hit hard that GT deals with the data as it is, not what it is wished to be or, more formally, is preconceived to be accurate and to be forcefully conceptualized. This requires an honesty about taking all data as it comes and then requires figuring it out and then its conceptualization. I have written at length on "all is data" and on forcing in *Doing Grounded Theory*.

As I deal with the increased severity of QDA's remodeling of GT over the many years since 1967 by being laced with QDA requirements, my hope is to free GT up to be as originally envisioned. In 1978 in *Theoretical Sensitivity* I wrote: "The goal of grounded theory is to generate a conceptual theory that accounts for a pattern of behavior which is relevant and problematic

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for those involved. The goal is not voluminous description, nor clever verification.” (page 93)

QDA Lacing of GT

This book has a simple message. GT is a straight forward direct methodology which takes a researcher from the first day in the field to a finished written theory. Following GT procedures, based on the constant comparative method, results in a smooth uninterrupted emergent analysis and the generation of a substantive or formal theory. When GT procedures are laced with the exhaustive, abundant requirements of QDA methodology, GT becomes distorted, wastes large amounts of precious research time and derails the knowledge, hence grounding of GT, of what is really going on. The lacing of GT with preconceived conjecture, preconceptions, forced concepts and organization, logical connections and before the fact professional interests defaults GT to another QDA method mix which remodels its methodology.

GT being laced with QDA procedures and descriptive capture leads to multiple blocks on conceptual GT. This virtual subversion of GT results in a complex confusion of a simple methodology for new researchers. The researcher is blocked and no longer freed by the power and autonomy offered by GT to arrive at new emergent, generated theory. Being honest about what exactly is the data is distorted by the unattainable quest for accuracy. GT may or may not be mentioned in a QDA methodological discussion, but its procedures are, such as constant comparative analysis, problem emergence, theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, conceptual emergence, memoing, sorting, etc, as they are laced with QDA requirements which default their rigorous use to a QDA burden.

For example, listen to Kathryn May’s unwittingly eroding the GT methodology in QDA fashion when describing the cognitive processes inherent in data analysis. “Doing qualitative research is not a passive endeavor. Despite current perceptions and student’s prayers, theory does not magically emerge from data. Nor is it true that, if only one is patient enough, insight wondrously enlightens the researcher. Rather, data analysis is a process that requires astute questioning, a relentless search for answers, active observation, and accurate recall. It is a process of piecing together data, of making the invisible obvious, of recognizing the significant from the insignificant, of linking seemingly unrelated facts logically, of fitting categories one with another, and of attributing consequences to

antecedents. It is a process of conjecture and verification, of correction and modification, of suggestion and defense. It is a creative process of organizing data so that the analytic scheme will appear obvious." (Kathryn May: "Abstract Knowing: The Case For Magic In Method", in *Critical Issues In Qualitative Research Methods*, J Morse ed. 1994 (10–22))

Dr May engages in descriptive capture, as I discussed at length in *Grounded Theory Perspective*, in QDA fashion and attacks the main tenant of GT, that theory can emerge. She is lost in accurate fact research, which is moot for GT. She prefers to force the data — make it obey her framework. She does not acknowledge the constant comparative method by which theory emerges from all data. Again GT is defaulted to routine QDA.

Listen to this PhD student, now PhD — email Jan 2002 from Brene Brown — who wants to do a GT dissertation but is caught up in QDA and descriptive capture. "I need some guidance. I'm on wrong track — I don't care about the main concerns of clinical social workers in private practice. I care about the main concerns of anyone attempting to contextualize practice. Maybe the issue is that I'm interested in an activity regardless of the actor. If I ask these questions I have no doubt that main concerns will emerge as well as attempts to continually resolve them. This I care about."

She is caught by the QDA approach to force the data for a professional concern. She wants to use GT procedures in service of a QDA forcing approach which defaults GT. GT does not work that way, but the prevalence of QDA would have her think that way. The GT problem must emerge and it will. I have seen it hundreds of times. Then later, when the GT is generated, it will have relevance for professional concerns. I have also seen that starting with the professional problem ends up with little or no relevance in GT, just a routine QDA description with "as if" importance.

The word "analysis" is a catch all word for what to do with data. It is scientized up, down and sideways in QDA methodologies and catches up GT analysis in its wake. GT becomes laced with so many QDA requirements that it is hard to follow to the point of confusion. Theory development is confused for QDA and this blocks GT generation of theory. GT methodology is a clear straight forward approach to theory generation. Worrying about its place in QDA methods and science is just fancy talk, legitimating talk, but the result is defaulting it to the confusion of QDA analysis. GT has clear, extensive procedures. When brought into QDA, GT abstraction is neglected in

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favor of accuracy of description. GT picks up QDA problems based on accuracy WHICH worry it does not have.

In this book, my effort will be to bring out the GT perspective on how GT analysis is done — to lay this method bare — and in the bargain to show how QDA blocks, as I have said, GT generation and product proof. I hope to show how QDA leads to particularistic analysis based on discrete experiences while blocking the abstract idea that GT is based on naming by conceptualization latent patterns. Again I must refer the reader to my previous books.

Here is a good example of extensive lacing of GT by QDA needs. The confusion of QDA requirements and GT procedures makes it hard to follow and clearly erodes GT by default remodeling.

“Grounded Theory: Comprehension is achieved in grounded theory by using tape-recorded, unstructured interviews and by observing participants in their daily lives. However, the assumption of symbolic interactionism that underlie grounded theory set the stage for examining process, for identifying stages and phases in the participants experience. Symbolic interaction purports that meaning is socially constructed, negotiated and changes over time. Therefore the interview process seeks to elicit a participant’s story, and this story is told sequentially as the events being reported unfold. Comprehension is reached when the researcher has interviewed enough to gain in-depth understanding,” (Janice Morse, *ibid* to reader above, page 39)

GT does not require tape recorded data. It uses all types of interviews as the study proceeds and the best interview style emerges. It is not underlined by symbolic interaction, nor constructed data. GT uses “all as data”, of which these are just one kind. GT does not preconceive the theoretical code of process. There are over 18 coding families of which process is only one and that must emerge. Interviews lead to many theoretical codes. Participant stories are moot. Patterns are sought and conceptualized. GT does not search for description of particularistic accounts. All data are constantly compared to generate concepts. Clearly GT’s identity is lost in this default remodeling by May.

Morse continues her description of GT: “Synthesis is facilitated by adequacy of the data and the processes of analysis (Morse 1986). During this phase the researcher is able to create a generalized story and to determine points of departure, of variation in this story. The process of analysis begins with line-by-line analysis to identify first level codes. Second-level codes are used to identify significant portions of the text and compile these excerpts into categories.

Writing memos is key to recording insight and facilitates, at an early stage, the development of theory."

It is hard to recognize GT procedures in this quote by Morse. Adequacy of data and a generalized story smack of accuracy and descriptive capture: pure QDA. They do not relate to GT procedures. Neither does her approach to line by line analysis. It is a bare reference to the constant comparative process, but that is all. Her references to first level, second level codes, portions of text and compiling excerpts into categories are far from the constant comparative method designed to generate categories and their properties right off the bat in data collection and analysis. Writing memos has to do with immediate recording of generating theoretical conceptual ideas grounded in data, not mystical, perhaps conjectural insights.

Morse continues her description of GT: "As synthesis is gained and the variation in the data becomes evident, grounded theorists sample according to the theoretical needs of the study. If a negative case is identified, the researcher, theoretically, must sample for more negative cases until saturation is reached when synthesis is attained."

Again finding GT in this description is hard. There is always variation in the data. GT is concerned with generating a multivariate conceptual theory — not data variation for QDA. In GT seeking negative cases is not a procedure and likely to be beforehand forcing. GT seeks comparative incidents by theoretical sampling, however same or different, positive or negative, for generating categories and their properties. The GT researcher does not know in advance what will be found. Her reference to saturation does not imply conceptual saturation, it anticipates simple redundancy without conceptual analysis.

Morse continues on GT: "Theorizing follows from the processes of theoretical sampling. Typologies are constructed by determining two significant characteristics and sorting participants against each characteristic on a 2x2 matrix. Diagraming is used to enhance understanding and identifying the basic social process (BSP) that accounts for most of the variation in the data."

Again the default remodeling of GT to a QDA is great here. In GT theorizing, as a generated emergent, occurs in the cycling of collecting, coding and conceptual analysis at any time and written up constantly in memos. Theoretical sampling is just one source of grounding during the constant comparative method. Preconceiving theoretical codes such as typologies or BSP's is not GT. They emerge in sorting and could be "whatever." Also the fourfold property space is a good tool, when emergent, for conceptualizing types (see *Awareness of Dying* Alpine Publishing, 1967). It is NOT for placing

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or sorting participants, or maybe to even count them. This is strictly routine QDA descriptive capture, NOT GT.

Lastly, Morse finishes with a completely eroding view of GT generality. "As with the methods previously discussed, recontextualization is determined by the level of abstraction attained in the model development. Whereas substantive theory is context bound, formal theory is more abstract and may be applicable to many settings or other experiences."

This statement is totally wrong for GT, but it addresses the usual QDA quandary of trying to generalize a description of a unit. Substantive theory always has general implications and can easily be applied to other substantive areas by the constant comparative method which modifies the theory. For example cultivating — milkmen cultivating housewives for profit and recreation — can apply easily to doctors cultivating clients to build a practice by comparing incidents and modifying the theory: cultivating down instead of cultivating up the social scale. Formal theory is attained by many such diverse area comparisons done in a concerted way to generate a formal theory of cultivating for recreation, profit, client building, help, donations etc.

Context must emerge as a relevant category or as a theoretical code like all other categories in a GT. It cannot be assumed as relevant in advance. As one applies substantive theory elsewhere or generates formal theory, when relevant, context may emerge.

These quotes clearly lump GT into the multimethod QDA camp with the result being default remodeling by erosion. Nowhere does Morse refer to the GT procedures of delimiting at each phase of generating, theoretical completeness, conceptual saturation, core variable analysis, open to selective coding, memo banks, analytic rules, theoretical sorting, memo piles writing up, reworking and resorting, emergent problem, interchangeability of indices and theoretical (not substantive) coding. The effect of default remodeling is a great loss of GT procedures while being blocked by QDA requirements.

GT stands alone as a conceptual theory generating methodology. It can use any data, but obviously the favorite data, to date, is qualitative. Ergo it is drawn into the QDA multimethod world and eroded by consequence, however unwittingly. Creswell in his book *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, Sage 1998, lumps GT into comparisons with phenomenology, ethnography, case study and biographical life history. The result of the lumping is a cursory default remodeling of GT to a "kind" of QDA. GT is continued thus not allowed to stand alone. The criteria of the continuum is

when is theory used in research varying from before the study begins to after the study. By study he means data collection and structuring questions. This is a very weak gradation for discerning the difference in QDA methods and GT methodology. The result is a lumping and confusion of GT with QDA, since he does not discern the generating of theory from data collection and finding a theory to apply to the data once collected. Both come during and after data collection, but are very differently sourced.

Creswell says: "A grounded theory study: At the most extreme end of the continuum, toward the 'after' end, I place grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin (1990) are clear that one collects and analyzes data before using theory in a grounded theory study. This explains, for example, the women's sexual abuse study by Morrow and Smith (1995) in which they generate the theory through data collection, pose it at the end, and eschew prescribing a theory at the beginning of the study. In my own studies, I have refrained from advancing a theory at the beginning of my grounded theory research, generated the theory through data collection and analysis, posed the theory as a logic diagram and introduced contending and contrasting theory with the model I generate at the end of my study." (Creswell & Brown 1992, Creswell and Urbom 1997)

Creswell may be stating a fundamental tenet of GT: begin with no preconceived theory and then generate one during the analysis (unless he meant applying an extant theory). As a distinguishing item of GT, however, it is barely a beginning, leaving the reader with no knowledge of how generating is done, BECAUSE the assumption is it is done by routine QDA. Contrasting the generated theory with extant other theories to prove, improve or disprove one or the other neglects or ignores constantly comparing the theories for category and property generation and thereby modifying the generated theory using the other theory as a kind of data: two other vital tenants of GT.

These two authors are typical of many trying to place GT somewhere in the QDA camp. First they lace it with some QDA requirements and ideas, which they then use to lump GT into QDA multi-method thought. I will try in this book to show that lumping GT as a QDA does not apply and, indeed, blocks good GT as the default remodeling occurs. Lumping erodes GT. I will try to show that GT stands alone, and on its own as a conceptualizing methodology.

Accuracy

I discussed accuracy at length in *The Grounded Theory Perspective: Conceptualization Contrasted with Description*. At the core of lacing and erosion of GT by QDA methodology and its consequent default remodeling is the wish and quest of QDA methods for accuracy — accuracy of description. This QDA quest, which is always worrisome, has many synonyms, such as credibility, trustworthiness, auditability, validity, objective, verificational, reliable, reproducibility, evidential, factual, etc.

It is a fine, respectable quest, but different from the GT quest of conceptualization abstraction of data. The QDA quest for accurate facts (baseline data) ignores much of the data of everyday social life. Properline data, vague data, interpreted data (not to be confused with constructivist data) are virtually ignored. GT uses all data to generate conceptual theory, since it is going on, and especially the last three types of data. (I discussed “all is data” in the *GT Perspective*.)

When accuracy starts to fail in a QDA research the researcher calls it constructed data by mutual interpretation yielded in the interviewer-interviewee relationship. This yields a new form of QDA accuracy, which is still the quest for description.

The accuracy quest results in a preponderance view of QDA research which is assumed to apply “obviously” to GT research. Full conceptualization is either not in view or out of view, and not understood as a constantly modifiable abstraction that explains. The result is the default remodeling of GT which blocks good GT research.

The accuracy quest produces worrisome data (See GT Perspective) for the QDA researcher. The QDA researcher sinks deeper and deeper into the quicksand of professional pressure to get the data “straight” to avoid professional sanctions and achieved professional rewards. There is a proliferation of books on QDA methodologies that effort to reduce worrisome data to a minimum. Bias is highlighted, which is just another variable to a GT researcher. Constructed data is seen as a better, curing view to worrisome bias and interpretation. QDA research wants what ought to be: an accurate view. (See chapter 10 in this book.)

The overbearing accuracy view of QDA makes its harder and harder for the QDA researcher to see conceptual generality and patterns in the data by using GT methodology. There is little or no conceptual view of what is being socially produced: what is going on. The QDA researcher's focus is careful, detailed accurate description. This overbearing view clearly erodes, by professional pressure, the

GT conceptual view of abstraction from time, place and people. Good GT is blocked by default remodeling.

The quest for accuracy begins to deny that it is human beings researching human beings in the usual critique of bias worrisome accuracy. Thus the QDA quest for accuracy actually puts research products in jeopardy as an almost inhuman quest. Careers can become doubtful. These accuracy critiques default remodel GT and block its abstracting and conceptual generality.

In a strange way QDA's effort to be legitimate is highly scientized. Although QDA sees itself as an answer to the blocking of meaning and interpretation by quantitative methods, it tries to be seen as a legitimate science by using the canons of quantitative research to appraise its interpretist view of objective accuracy. This lacing of QDA by quantitative requirements for data collection and data analysis results in the accuracy quest. This scientized lacing of QDA draws GT into the scientizing realm and laces it with descriptive canons of accuracy. The method mix of quantitative, QDA and GT certainly remodels GT by default and blocks the GT quest for multivariate conceptual hypotheses. GT is eroded to producing accurate findings not conceptual probability statements. There is no support for the GT conceptual methodology in this method mix, unless it is eroded to a QDA methodology.

The constant reangling of quantitative methodology to the freedom of QDA provides solutions, as such, that drag GT into QDA and blocks its analysis with default remodeling. This reangling never facilitates the freedom and power of the abstraction of GT conceptual analysis. Scientizing of reangling erodes GT. Again, GT stands on its own canons of scientific endeavor.

The very first paragraph in Miles and Huberman's popular book (*Qualitative Data Analysis*, Sage 1994) on QDA sets the remodeling stage for GT. "We wrote this book to address a critical need faced by researchers in all fields of human sciences. Put simply: how can we draw valid meaning from qualitative data? What methods of analysis can we use that are practical, communicable, and non-self-deluding — in short, will get us knowledge that we and others can rely on?"

The main issue for M&H is accuracy and the believability of meaning. Perhaps this is OK for QDA, but it sets the stage for a total remodeling block of genuine, conceptual GT analysis by the voluminous references to GT in the remaining 309 double column pages. It laces GT with the following QDA problems they list on page 2 in reference to the expansion of QDA over the last 15 years or so.

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M&H say: "Yet, in the flurry of this activity, we should be mindful of some pervasive issues that have not gone away. These issues include the labor-intensiveness (and extensiveness over months or years) of data collection, frequent data overload, the distinct possibility of researcher bias, the time demands of processing and coding data, the adequacy of sampling when only a few cases can be managed, the generalizability of findings, the credibility and quality of conclusions and their utility in the world of policy and action."

M&H continue: "Still the problem of confidence in findings has not gone away. Clearly we still lack a bank of explicit methods to draw on. We need to keep working as sensible canons for qualitative data analysis, in the sense of shared ground rules for drawing conclusions and verifying their sturdiness."

"Some qualitative researchers still consider analysis to be an art form and insist on intuitive approaches to it. We are left with the researcher's telling us of classification and patterns drawn from the welter of field data, in ways that are irreducible or even incommunicable. We do not really see how the researcher got from 3,600 pages of field notes to the final conclusions, as sprinkled with vivid illustration as the may be."

Drawn into this barrage, GT has little chance to not be laced with QDA problems. Yet GT handles quite nicely the problems of data overload, time extensiveness, labor intensiveness, adequate sampling, generalizability of conception — not findings — the precise way coding (latent pattern naming) is accomplished by the constant comparative method to become grounded, the constant verification of conceptualizations, and lastly the quality and credibility of the categories, their properties and their hypothetical relations. GT handles these QDA problems, yes, but GT itself cannot easily merge out this barrage without being remodeled by default to an ascendant method.

Listen to this M&H's lacing of GT with QDA properties. "GT is a subjectivist method. This criticism comes from the positivist paradigm and is the same as for all qualitative methods. Particularly the deductive strategy is criticized. GT is neglecting formal theory, and arriving at common sense knowledge. Theories are discovered and rediscovered. GT is a time consuming method, with detail prescriptive rules." It is true that GT implicitly criticizes deductive when it leads to preconceived problems and concepts and logically deduced theory. But GT uses deduction in the service of theoretical sampling and where to sample next based on inductive coding and analyzing.

All research seems common sense when it comes up with what people think normally, yet the research becomes striking when it