Philosophical positioning in grounded theory

Striking the balance
Aims

In this presentation we will consider:

• The significance of positioning the researcher in a grounded theory study
• The role of theoretical sensitivity in grounded theory research
• Strategies and techniques that can be used to raise a researcher’s theoretical sensitivity
Shameless self-promotion
Preliminary concepts

- Grounded theory
- Philosophy
- Ontology
- Epistemology

Source: http://offthemark.com/search-results/key/ground/
# Philosophy and research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigm</th>
<th>Philosophical position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positivism</td>
<td>There is a single reality that is to be discovered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postpositivism</td>
<td>No measurable reality exists in isolation of the observer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmodernism</td>
<td>Reality is subjectively relative to those who experience it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivism</td>
<td>Reality is constructed by those who experience it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A philosophical position?

“…what counts as ‘real’ and ‘true’ and what is to be valued as ‘good.’” (Schostak, 2008).

“…truths and principles of our existence and that these truths are accepted by us…” (Mackie, 2007).
What’s the big deal?

Philosophical position

Research paradigm

Research question

Methodology

Method
Philosophical congruence

Research as continuum

Ontology – what can we know?

Realism

Relativism

Epistemology – how can we know?

Positivism

Interpretivism/Constructionism

Methodology – how can we find out?

Quantitative

Qualitative

Method – what tool to use?

e.g. experiments, surveys
e.g. interviews, diaries

Philosophical congruence

http://www.slideshare.net/jennacondie/researching-people-using-questionnaires-and-interviews
Let’s get into position!

Take a moment to consider:

- How do you define reality?
- How do you gain knowledge of the world?
Positioning in GT

- Little attention in seminal works
- Strauss (1987) identified the role of researchers’ biographies
- Strauss and Corbin (2008) acknowledged the position of the researcher in co-construction
- Clarke (2005: 13) ‘we need to become more visible and accountable for, in, and through our research’
- Charmaz (2014) - need to recognise the influence of taken for granted assumption
Impact of positioning

- Philosophical position influences the researcher’s:
  - Relationship with the data
  - Theoretical sensitivity

“I’m okay. This is just how I get creative.”
Relationship with the data

Researcher as subjective, active participant

Researcher as objective instrument
Theoretical sensitivity

- What is it?
- How do you get it?
- What do you do with it?
- Won’t it result in ‘forcing’ the data?
Characteristics of TS

1. It reflects the sum of your personal, professional and experiential history.
2. It can be enhanced by various techniques, tools and strategies.
3. It increases as your research progresses.
Raising your TS

• Identify your baseline before you begin
• ‘Dance’ with the data (Hoare et al., 2012)
• Examine your underlying assumptions about the world on an ongoing basis
• Memo, memo, memo, memo
References


Questions?

"Excuse me, is this the Society for Asking Stupid Questions?"