

Qualitative Psychological Research: The Potential of Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology

Grounded theory (GT), developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the 1960s, aims to construct 'middle-range' theory *from data*. It is exploratory, iterative, inductive-abductive, comparative, and systematic. GT's exploratory nature is seen in its ground-up, open-ended approach through which the researcher is led by data. It is fundamentally iterative through the back-and-forth nature of data collection and analysis, both of which commence early in a study and are conducted in tandem. Both inductive and abductive logic are inherent in the GT process, with the researcher making tentative hypothetical statements through an inductive approach and investigating which hypothesis best explains an aspect of data through abduction. GT is founded upon Glaser's constant comparative method, with researchers continually engaged in a process of comparison of data with data, data with codes, codes with codes, and so on, throughout the research process. Finally, GT is systematic in that a set of flexible guidelines is offered to the researcher to guide their work.

This keynote address commences by briefly exploring the history and development of GT and its variant 'schools', including Kathy Charmaz's *Constructivist* GT (CGT) school, before examining its core features (including coding, theoretical sampling, analytic memoing, and conceptualising), some of which differ depending on the GT 'school' under consideration. I emphasise constructivist adaptations to the GT process, particularly those relating to the timing and nature of the literature review, researcher positionalities and related reflexivity, as well as meaningful participant involvement, which are underpinned by CGT's co-constructive principles. I then explore how CGT has been used in *psychological* research, including that with a social justice-orientation. Finally, I end by emphasising that the methodology holds significant potential for qualitative psychological research, and by highlighting key challenges and important opportunities as we look towards the future use of GT and CGT in qualitative research internationally.

Bio

Professor Elaine Keane, PhD, is Professor and Head of the Discipline of Education in the School of Education at the University of Galway, Ireland. Her research focuses on social class and education, teacher diversity, and constructivist grounded theory (CGT), and she has published widely and has led national and international projects in these areas, including as lead editor of *Diversifying the Teaching Profession: Dimensions, Dilemmas and Directions for the Future* (Routledge, 2023). She is Co-Editor of *Irish Educational Studies*, serves on the Editorial Board of *Teaching in Higher Education*, is Inaugural Chair of the *National Initial Teacher Education Diversity Network* and Convenor of the *Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) Special Interest Group on Teacher Diversity Research*.

On CGT, Elaine has collaborated and published with Kathy Charmaz and Robert Thornberg and taught workshops in Ireland, the UK, Poland, Sweden, South Africa, and the USA, including with the *Odum Institute for Research in Social Science* at the University of North Carolina and *ResearchTalk Inc*. She has taught CGT at the *International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI)* at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA, since 2015 and was keynote speaker at the World Conference on Qualitative Research (WCQR) at Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland, in February 2025, and at the MCAST 4th Annual Conference in Qualitative Research Methods in Malta in November 2025.

A member of the *International Association of Grounded Theorists*, Elaine is lead editor of the *Routledge International Handbook of Constructivist Grounded Theory in Educational Research* (2025). She has authored/co-authored chapters in many methodology texts, including *The Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Psychology* (2026), the Routledge

Encyclopaedia of Qualitative Methods (2026), the *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology* (2023), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research Design* (2022), and *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (5th ed., 2018). Since 2025, she is (EU) Editor of the *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* (SAGE).

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