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What are grounded theories made of?

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Abstract

Grounded theory (GT) is a popular methodology in qualitative research, and is founded on an iterative inductive and deductive cycle where theory is allowed to emerge directly from data and is ultimately tested (grounded) against 'the real world'. However, two problems are immediately apparent. Firstly, the actual nature of grounded theory as a methodology is contentious due to a split between the two originating theorists, Secondly, it is unclear what kinds of data are acceptable in GT apart from traditional and explicitly recognised forms of contemporaneous observation and interview. This article explores implicit links in the original GT literature between 'traditional' and 'nontraditional' forms of real-world data. It is proposed that other kinds of data, including that available from survey questionnaires, may be legitimate sources of data in grounded theory studies. Some suggestions are offered for selecting appropriate forms and sources of data in GT

studies.



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