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Five different approaches for doing qualitative research - from data-driven to theory-driven qualitative research designs

Michael Hviid Jacobsen[1*]
[1]Aalborg University, Denmark; mhj@society.aau.dk (M.H.J.).

Abstract: There is not one single or unified way of doing qualitative research. This article presents and discusses a number of different qualitative approaches to social research that can meaningfully be placed on a 'qualitative continuum' (an idea developed by Søren Kristiansen) – ranging from data-driven approached in one end towards more theory-driven approaches in the other – and which highlights some internal differences between the ambitions, procedures, and outcomes of these approaches regarding the relative importance of the research components of 'data' and 'theory'. In the article, the following five methodological approaches are described in some detail: grounded theory, analytic induction, adaptive theory, the extended case theory, and metaphorical redescription. While some of these approaches are already well-known and widely used within qualitative research, others remain relatively unknown and are largely unused. Based on the presentation of these five approaches, a discussion and qualification of the respective positioning of the different approaches follows, illustrating some of the problems and potentials of the idea of a qualitative continuum.

Keywords: *Adaptive theory, Analytic induction, Extended case method, Grounded theory, Metaphor-ical redescription, Qualitative continuum.*

1. Introduction

There are many roads leading to knowledge. No single road can, in and of itself, prove to be the only right one. Although the roads leading to knowledge may point in the same direction, their individual steps, procedures, trajectories, and justifications differ quite considerably. The ongoing discussion of inductive, deductive, abductive, or retroductive ways of conducting social research bears witness to the fact that researchers select and choose between different ways of approaching and studying their subject matter. Whereas some regard themselves as hardcore inductivists who gather large amounts of data and generalize from these, others are equally defiant deductivists who engage in testing existing theories to verify or falsify them, and yet others find themselves somewhere in between, mixing insights and procedures from both methodological camps. It is evident that basic ideas and insights from the philosophy of science inform the methodological choices involved whenever actual social research is carried out. This is also the case in qualitative research, in which a number of different approaches or perspectives argue for different ways of working with the components of 'theory' and 'data' in concrete research projects.

This article delineates and discusses five different approaches to qualitative social research, each representing a specific road to knowledge. Some of these approaches are already well-established and frequently used in empirical research, whereas others are less so. The purpose of the article is to illustrate the useful idea proposed by Danish sociologist Kristiansen (2002) of a 'qualitative continuum' as a pedagogical and graphical way of illustrating how different methodological approaches, research designs, or analytical strategies, grounded theory, analytic induction, the extended case method, and metaphorical redescription, can be meaningfully placed at different positions or locations on a continuum stretching from the very data-driven (or inductive) to the much more theory-driven (or deductive) approaches. To

* Correspondence: mhj@society.aau.dk

my knowledge, this idea of a 'qualitative continuum' has so far not gained any international recognition, but it is indeed useful for teaching and research purposes alike.

The purpose of the article is threefold. First, to introduce and disseminate knowledge of the qualitative continuum as suggested by Kristiansen (2002) to an international social science audience. Second, to develop this qualitative continuum further from his original ideas by adding a fifth position, that of 'adaptive theory', to the continuum. Third, to briefly discuss the 'right' positioning of the five qualitative approaches on this continuum, as well as the pros and cons of the idea of a qualitative continuum. The article aims to highlight different ways of conducting qualitative social research and to inspire and qualify reflections about the choices made regarding the most appropriate and adequate qualitative approach when embarking on an actual research project.

2. The Data-Theory Blend

Within the philosophy of science, a classic and broad distinction is sometimes drawn between a 'context of discovery' and a 'context of justification' (Reichenbach, 1938). These contexts are regarded as different yet mutually important ways of doing scientific work. Whereas the context of discovery is often described as the early part of a research endeavor guided by openness and curiosity, the context of justification is regarded as a much more rigorous procedure in which the findings from the context of discovery are tested and elaborated, and ultimately either verified or refuted. Although it is not necessarily always as clear-cut, the context of discovery is conventionally regarded as the early inductive phase of research, and the context of justification as a subsequent deductive or confirmatory phase. However, both contexts are necessary for the production and validation of knowledge, and in both contexts, the two basic components of most scientific work, 'data' and 'theory', are involved, albeit in different ways, at different times, and for different purposes.

In most methodology books, a number of notions are used, often almost synonymously, to designate and describe how researchers approach and work with the different components (methods, theories, and data) involved in scientific investigation: 'research designs', 'research strategies', 'methodological perspectives', 'methodological approaches', 'logics', 'analytical strategies', etc. Several words are used to describe how knowledge is produced within a specific research context, focusing on broader and more specific aspects of the research process. Almost all research designs, perspectives, approaches, strategies, or logics outline the purpose of the research endeavor, describe how research is to be conducted, and specify the relative importance or 'weight' of 'theory' and 'data' in the research process, thereby locating it within either a context of discovery or justification. Most of these also contain specific information on what type of methods and data material will be used, qualitative, quantitative, or a combination.

The type of methods and data, qualitative or quantitative, used in a specific scientific study does not necessarily determine the purpose of the research project (and vice versa), but it may be indicative. Discovery and justification can work with both types of data as well as with mixed data types. There is, however, a tendency to mainly associate qualitative studies with more discovery-oriented ambitions than quantitative studies, the reason apparently being that testing theory often requires relatively large amounts of data for confirmatory purposes. What is generally considered 'qualitative approaches' is defined (often in direct opposition to 'quantitative approaches') by primarily prioritizing qualitative types of methods and data material, but not necessarily excluding quantitative data. At the same time, qualitative approaches are often not particularly interested in features such as measurement, averages, means, medians, sample sizes, random sampling, statistical probabilities, predictions, and other more quantitative characteristics. Instead, qualitative approaches, despite their many internal differences, to which we return later, often value and pursue flexible designs, in-depth studies, purposive or strategic sampling procedures, exploratory insights, interpretative meaning-making, non-numerical data, and similar features. Sometimes, the differences drawn between qualitative and quantitative approaches seem exaggerated, trivial, and even erroneous (deliberately overlooking similarities). Moreover, it is important to stress that qualitative studies, as we shall see in this article, may follow either inductive, deductive, or some intermediary paths to knowledge construction (Perry & Øystein, 2001) in the same way that

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qualitative research projects may differ considerably depending on the relative level of structure and rigidity of the research process (e.g., highly structured, relatively structured, and highly unstructured research processes).

Most textbooks on social research methodology outline a number of broader or more specific research designs, perspectives, approaches, strategies, or logics that illustrate the different paths to follow from start to finish in a concrete research project. For example, De Vaus (2001) specified four main research designs: experimental, longitudinal, cross-sectional, and case designs. De Vaus thus lumped together what could conventionally be regarded as rather different types of qualitative research under the inclusive heading of 'case study design,' thereby seemingly ignoring or downplaying some of the important differences between different types of qualitative work. First of all, not all qualitative research is necessarily case-based (if by this we mean representative of some broader social patterns or contexts). Second, within qualitative research, there exists a significant difference between the relative importance and weight of 'data' and 'theory' that makes the actual research process very diversified. In another key volume, and looking specifically at various qualitative approaches, Cresswell (2012) introduced 'narrative research,' 'phenomenological research,' 'grounded theory research,' 'ethnographic research,' and 'case study research,' recognizing that these different approaches are not exhaustive of all possible ways of working qualitatively. Yet others have quite similarly distinguished between five ways of doing qualitative research: 'phenomenological psychology,' 'grounded theory,' 'discourse analysis,' 'narrative research,' and 'intuitive inquiry' (Wertz, Kathy, Linda, Rosemarie, & Emalinda, 2011). There are thus many ways to make sense of the highly diversified and hilly landscape of qualitative research.

One way to distinguish between different methodological designs, approaches, perspectives, logics, or strategies is to look at what type of data is used and what design is proposed for working with (selecting, sampling, organizing, and analyzing) this data material. Another way is to look at how the starting point of the research process relates to the desired end result, which is where the discussion of induction, deduction, and other forms of inference becomes relevant. As mentioned above, one such promising way of trying to make sense of and compare the many different qualitative approaches was proposed by Kristiansen (2002), who suggested the idea of a 'qualitative continuum,' which informatively captures the relative 'blend' between the components of respectively 'data' and 'theory' in a given qualitative research process. As Kristiansen (2002) remarked, 'the function and meaning of data in relation to theory or generalized knowledge can take on different forms.' The qualitative continuum thus captures the what, when, why, where, and how of incorporating data and theory in the actual research process, thus providing a useful way of illustrating and discussing *some* of the main methodological differences between qualitative approaches. Whereas some approaches favor as limited an import of pre-existing theory as possible and prioritize data in the process of theorizing (e.g., in generating new theory), other positions instead privilege the importance of previous theoretical knowledge to inform the research process (and sometimes even aspire to 'test' theory through data collection). Four approaches, 'grounded theory,' 'analytic induction,' 'extended case method,' and 'metaphorical redescription, were mentioned by Kristiansen (2002) on his 'qualitative continuum.' However, the approach of 'adaptive theory' has been added to the continuum in this article, since it constitutes an important and more recent 'middle strategy' (Layder, 1998) for carrying out a qualitative research project in which there is a close interplay between the components of 'data' and 'theory' (induction and deduction). Figure 1 below illustrates the qualitative continuum.

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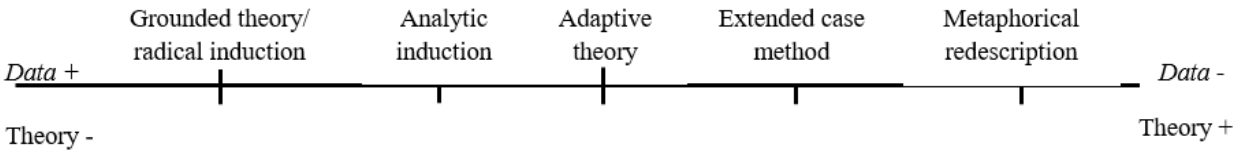

Figure 1.
The Qualitative Continuum.
Source: Appropriated and adapted from Kristiansen (2002).

In his original version of the qualitative continuum, Kristiansen (2002) indicated a division between the two left-sided approaches (grounded theory and analytic induction) and the two right-sided approaches (the extended case method and metaphorical redescription). He claimed that the former two rely on a research process with 'data first, then theory,' whereas the latter two characterize a process working with 'theory first, then data.' This can also be summarized with the former two being more inductive and the latter two more deductive, with adaptive theory somewhere in between. Kristiansen (2002) stated that he structured his presentation of the qualitative continuum by starting with approaches that begin with data and end with theory, then approaches that start with theory and incorporate data, and the movement from predominantly inductive to predominantly deductive approaches. This structure forms the basis of the subsequent presentation. The following will briefly outline the five approaches on the qualitative continuum, followed by a discussion.

3. Grounded Theory – A Radical Inductive Approach

What by Kristiansen (2002) was defined as 'radical induction' is a position placed at the far left end of the qualitative continuum in which 'data' has priority and constitutes the foundation for the generation of 'theory'. Grounded theory, in Kristiansen's view, is such a radical inductive position because the approach, first of all, is concerned with generating new theoretical knowledge based on data and, second of all, relies as little as possible on already existing theoretical knowledge. For this reason, grounded theory is conventionally regarded as an inductive and perhaps even radical inductive approach to qualitative research. Obviously, what is regarded as 'radical' is necessarily relative to something that is less radical, and this also means that describing grounded theory as 'radical inductive' makes sense only if compared to approaches that are not equally radical, which we will return to below.

It was in the groundbreaking book Glaser and Anselm (1967) that the grounded theory approach was first formulated. The title of the book says it all: first, that theory is discovered through research, and secondly, that the book itself presents the discovery of the methodology of grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss originally defined grounded theory as an approach that shows '*how the discovery of theory – systematically obtained and analyzed in social research can be furthered*' (Glaser & Anselm, 1967). In his later book on grounded theory methodology, Glaser (1978) specified the approach as follows:

> Grounded theory is a general methodology for generating theory. It is not wedded to sociology or social science, let alone to a school or position in sociology. It is useful in any field that wishes to generate an inductive theory from systematically collected data, whether qualitative or quantitative (Glaser, 1978).

Grounded theory is thus a general approach to sociology that does not pledge allegiance to either any discipline or paradigm within it and which aspires to inductively generate theory directly from data, clearly stressing the inductive character of the research process, whether the data used is qualitative or quantitative. Although grounded theory did continuously state that qualitative as well as quantitative data could be used for theory generation, in reality, the vast majority of grounded theory studies have relied on qualitative data, such as observations or interviews. Whereas one of the inventors, Glaser, was trained in quantitative research methodology, Strauss came from a qualitative background. Today,

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grounded theory is mainly regarded as a qualitative research strategy, although it can indeed also draw on quantitative data or a mixture of data sources.

When first introduced back in the 1960s, grounded theory – with its early inspiration particularly from interactionist and pragmatist ideas- was specifically presented in opposition to the logico-deductive approach aimed at the testing and verification of theory that was regarded as the dominant social science paradigm at that time (Zetterberg, 1966). Glaser and Strauss believed that there was an artificial separation between the context of discovery's interest in generating new theory and the context of justification's concern with testing theory. Instead, they wanted to generate theory based on intensive research and directly from data, not least in order to make theory construction relevant and possible for many of those research novices and practitioners with whom they worked within nursing research and medical sociology. For example, based on in-depth qualitative studies of the management of death and dying in American hospital settings, a much-neglected area of social research at that time, Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s developed new theories about 'awareness contexts' and 'dying trajectories' that were deeply grounded in data (obtained mainly from participant observations and interviews). A key element of the early formulations of grounded theory was the insistence that the prior reading of theory, particularly theory from within one's own specific area of research, should be avoided since it risked 'contaminating' the emerging theory. Grounded theory is thus an archetypal kind of exploratory research characterized by curiosity, openness, flexibility, and a desire for discovery (Stebbins, 2001) with the ambition of generating new knowledge about areas of social life in which theoretical knowledge is limited or lacking.

The research process in grounded theory can be sketched as a relatively linear process, which does, however, also contain certain iterative and repetitive elements. Like all other research designs, grounded theory starts out with a problem formulation, which will often have an exploratory and relatively loose or broad character (e.g., the management of death and dying in hospital settings). It is, therefore, mostly a thematic interest rather than an extensive or rigid set of research questions that guides the grounded theory researcher. This initial attempt at specifying an area of interest is followed by the collection of a substantial amount of data (mainly qualitative but, as mentioned, potentially also quantitative) that can provide relevant information about the topic in question. In all this, there is unpredictability because the researcher never knows specifically what to look for or to find, because the research process is open-ended, and because an emerging theory is already in the making during data collection. As Glaser and Strauss insisted:

> Beyond the decisions concerning initial collection of data, further collection cannot be planned in advance of the emerging theory (as is done so carefully in research designed for verification and description). The emerging theory points to the next steps; the sociologist does not know them until he is guided by emerging gaps in his theory and by research questions suggested by previous answers (Glaser & Anselm, 1967).

Following (or rather during) the initial collection of data is the organizing and coding of the material in successive steps of 'open', 'axial', and 'selective' coding procedures (Strauss & Juliet, 1998). During this process, certain codes may be eliminated (for lack of substantial empirical grounding), they may be combined, and eventually, it should be possible to propose a 'core category' at the center of the emerging theory. Developing 'categories' (conceptual constructs) with their respective 'properties' and 'dimensions' and systematically clarifying their interrelationships with other categories is what ultimately constitutes the new theory. The ambition of grounded theory research can be the development of either 'substantial' or 'general' theories (the former relating only to a specific research context, whereas the latter are more generic and can cover different contexts).

Key elements in the grounded theory approach are thus the determined ambition to inductively generate theory 'from scratch,' as it were, meaning without importing theoretical ideas from 'the outside' during the research process. The new grounded theory emerges through a process in which there is a 'constant comparison' of empirical findings and is based on a 'theoretical sampling' of one's data material, meaning that the inclusion of new data units aims at filling out holes in the emerging theory rather than

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relying on other sampling strategies (e.g., randomized sampling). By this, Glaser and Strauss meant that the way to 'saturate' the emerging theory is through the ongoing collection of new material that will make the emerging theory as strong and coherent as possible. It is this aspect of grounded theory that, by Glaser (1978), was called 'theoretical sensitivity,' in which *all* steps in the research process are concerned with being directed towards creating or generating new theory.

As mentioned above, in its original formulation, grounded theory argued for as little import of previous theory as possible and, preferably, also as little prior knowledge of one's field of research, in order not to interfere with the inductive generation of theory. Throughout his own writings, Glaser (2013) maintained this demand for as few preconceptions as possible when engaging in a grounded theory research process. In his view, theoretical preconceptions or too much prior knowledge about a research area risk limiting one's curiosity and forcing one's emerging theory. Grounded theory is thus, at least to some extent, a radical inductive approach to qualitative research. However, what Kristiansen (2002) failed to recognize (simply because it was not relevant at the time of his writing the text on the qualitative continuum) is that grounded theory would develop into new directions. Already during the 1980s and 1990s, there were attempts at rethinking the approach, and during the first decades of the 21st century, new developments within grounded theory, sometimes referred to as 'second-generation grounded theory', began to emerge that, in many respects, challenged the idea of the approach as one of 'radical induction'. These versions of grounded theory proposed by Kathy Charmaz and Adele E. Clarke are, first and foremost, not against prior theoretical inspiration when doing grounded theory research. They are, to certain degrees, inspired by a more abductive type of research process in which creativity, reflexivity, and the co-creation of knowledge between researcher and researched are recognized. Moreover, by relying on inspiration from, e.g., Marxism, poststructuralism, feminism, discourse analysis, and critical social theory, these 'second-generation' versions of grounded theory also pursue more political agendas than was the case with the much less politically concerned 'classic version'. We will return to this issue again in the discussion part of the article.[i]

4. Analytic Induction – Hypothesis Development Through Negative Cases

Moving from the radical inductive end of the qualitative continuum and grounded theory towards the right-hand side, we encounter the approach called 'analytic induction'. It is not a notion necessarily known to many; the approach is not often presented in introductory methodology books, and it is not among the most frequently used qualitative research designs. Notions of 'peculiar', 'niche', or 'marginal' are sometimes used when outlining the procedures involved in analytic induction or when describing its status in the social sciences. Like grounded theory, analytic induction was developed within a broad interactionist perspective in the mid-20th century, and it also contains clear inductive aspirations and research elements. In Kristiansen's (2002) view, analytic induction should therefore be placed right next to grounded theory on the qualitative continuum because the inductive aspect is a prominent feature of the research process, and like grounded theory, it also primarily involves the use of qualitative methods and data sources.

The origins of analytic induction actually date back to the work of Polish-American sociologist Florian Znaniecki, who was one of the early representatives of the Chicago School of Sociology, and particularly to his critique of quantitative research (Tacq, 2007).[ii] Znaniecki was perhaps most famous for writing, together with Thomas, the pioneering book *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, which presented an in-depth study based on the diaries of Polish immigrants to America and their adaptation to their new life circumstances in the United States (Thomas & Florian, 1918-1920). The idea of analytic induction was first formulated by Znaniecki (1934/1968). In his rendition of the approach, Znaniecki opposed analytic induction to 'enumerative induction,' which consists mainly of quantitatively counting a number of cases or incidents as is known from probabilistic statistical analysis and then making inferences from samples to larger populations (sometimes based on correlational analysis). Here, the strength of the conclusion derives directly from the number of confirmatory cases from the sample (leading, in David Hume's words, to the 'problem of induction'). This is not the case with analytic induction. As the name

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clearly indicates, analytic induction argues for an inductive but *analytic* type of reasoning, and it is not the same way of working as described above with grounded theory or as in classic enumerative induction. The 'analytical' aspect in analytic induction refers to the way the inductive research process proceeds, relying on a rigorous and logical procedure leading to the gradual discovery of universal causal explanations (or theories). Instead of simply counting the number of empirical instances in a given sample and then concluding from this, there is thus ongoing organization, interpretation, adjustment, and reformulation involved.

Analytic induction comes in different degrees and guises, some more strictly defined and rigorously pursued than others, and sometimes described with a distinction between 'classical' and more 'generalized' versions of the approach (Becker, 1998; Ragin, 2023). Whether rigorously or non-rigorously pursued, analytic induction aims at developing knowledge through a relatively clearly defined, iterative research process in which certain interconnected steps follow each other. Throughout this process, the researcher is in a constant dialogue with the data. The process starts with roughly defining a problem or a phenomenon to be studied. Whereas grounded theory, as we saw above, starts out with as few preconceptions as possible in order to generate new theory based on empirical generalizations that are produced through a rather linear process of coding and gradual saturation of the data material, analytic induction instead proceeds by initially proposing a tentative hypothesis that may explain the problem or phenomenon in question, which is then tested through a less linear process in which there is an ongoing interplay between collected data and the refining of the hypothesis. This is done through a case-by-case process. American sociologist Howard S. Becker outlined the analytic inductive research process as follows:

> When you do analytic induction, you develop and test your theory case by case. You formulate an explanation for the first case as soon as you have gathered data on it. You apply that theory to the second case when you get data on it. If the theory explains the case adequately, thus confirming the theory, no problem; you go on to the third case. When you hit a 'negative case', one that your explanatory hypothesis doesn't explain, you change the explanation of what you're trying to explain by incorporating into it whatever new elements of this troublesome case suggest to you (Becker, 1998).

Contrary to grounded theory, in which no testing of hypotheses is involved (although it can be argued that the gradual saturation of categories resembles a sort of ongoing testing strategy), analytic induction is systematically test-oriented, involving often a limited number of cases. In this ongoing testing process, the researcher is concerned with identifying bits of 'negative cases' or 'deviant data' that contradict or challenge the original hypothesis (tentative explanation), leading to modifications. Instead of discarding the hypothesis if it encounters a negative case, the analytic inductive researcher will refine it, or the negative case may also be excluded, or the initial problem formulation may be changed. The main purpose is thus to achieve theoretical certainty (contrary to grounded theory's 'theoretical saturation') – a situation in which the explanation can account for *all* cases included in the study. As is evident, there is an incremental and iterative view of hypothesis refinement and knowledge development in analytic induction. Conclusions in analytic induction are generated from empirical observations that lead to refined and reformulated hypotheses about and explanations of the cases in question. The aim (at least in classic analytic induction) is to discover so-called 'causal universals,' meaning explanations that can account rather precisely for relatively identical or similar cases.

Early exponents and practitioners of analytic induction, primarily developed within a North American symbolic interactionist tradition, were Lindesmith (1947), Cressey (1953), and Becker (1953), who used the approach in studies of drug addiction, embezzlement, and marihuana use, seeking explanations for these phenomena. It has been suggested that analytic induction is particularly useful when studying deviant people or groups about whom knowledge is limited (Manning, 1982). There is a clear explanatory interest in analytic induction, aiming to explain specific cases that can be extended to other related cases. The end result of the analytic inductive process is a tested and approved hypothesis or explanation, involving an undeniable deductive (or confirmatory) element in parts of the process. This approach is

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otherwise focused on discovering ways to explain and understand empirical contexts. In this way, analytic induction aims at developing causal explanations at a deep and universal level.

This explanatory aspect of analytic induction is also one of the elements that moves the approach closer towards the more deductive side of the qualitative continuum compared to grounded theory. Contrary to grounded theory, which relies on an open-ended, exploratory, and empirically inductive research process, analytic induction seems to work in a more structured manner through the targeted testing of cases against the hypothesis. According to Becker, analytic induction is particularly suitable for answering 'How' questions (such as why and how a phenomenon is happening) because it is interested in looking for data on how opiate users, embezzlers, or other types of people undergo certain changes or transformations in their lives, making the approach sensitive to documenting and 'describing the steps of a process that produces a result' (Becker, 1998). Here, there may be an interest in finding out what exactly triggered this development and how it then proceeded. Besides being suitable for answering such 'How' questions, analytic induction is also useful when seeking to answer 'Why' questions (e.g., searching for causal explanations). In his study of opiate addiction, Lindesmith explicitly stated that it was one of his main concerns to provide a 'rational theoretical account' explaining *why* some people developed an addiction to opiates compared to others who did not, and trying to discover the main causes, origins, and conditions involved (Lindesmith, 1947). Despite its ambition to rely on a rigorous procedure that can discover causal universals, analytic induction has been criticized for being able only to account for the necessary rather than the sufficient conditions for a given problem or phenomenon (Robinson, 1951). Others have suggested that analytic induction is perhaps best suited mainly for pilot studies or scouting purposes early in a research process (Tacq, 2007).

5. Adaptive Theory – A Methodological Middle Strategy

The third approach to be presented here is titled 'adaptive theory' (sometimes referred to as the 'adaptive approach') and is surprisingly still not very well known among many qualitative researchers despite the fact that it was developed more than a quarter of a century ago. Moreover, it was not an integrated part of Kristiansen's (2002) qualitative continuum, although it was briefly mentioned. The inventor of the approach is British sociologist Derek Layder, who, since the 1990s, has written several important methodology books arguing for an adaptive approach to social research. Adaptive theory is a sort of 'middle-strategy' located somewhere between and among a number of different and sometimes seemingly opposite dimensions of social research (including data and theory or induction and deduction), which is the reason for placing it at the very center of the qualitative continuum. We will, however, discuss the appropriateness of this positioning later in the article. Layder originally defined adaptive theory in the following way in connection with inductive and deductive approaches.

> In a nutshell, adaptive theory, as I conceive it, is an original amalgam of different influences and approaches that falls somewhere between what are variously referred to as deductive or theory-testing approaches on one side and inductive or theory-generating approaches on the other (Layder, 1998).

It is evident that Layder regards adaptive theory as a bridge-building approach concerned with filling the gap or combining what, in his view, has been artificially and counterproductively separated within many other approaches, such as theory *versus* data, agency *versus* structure, induction *versus* deduction, micro *versus* macro, exploratory *versus* explanatory, realism *versus* constructivism, the subjective *versus* the objective, and so on. Later, Layder (2018) defined adaptive theory (now renamed as 'investigative research') as a 'multi-strategy' and 'multi-method' approach that brings together different perspectives, methods, and data sources to provide a robust research foundation and to maximize the coverage and density of relevant data material. Although adaptive theory is not specifically defined as a synthesizing approach, it nevertheless aims at combining and uniting these otherwise oppositional positions, dissolving their dualism, and showing their interconnectedness in actual research contexts (Layder, 1993). This is also made apparent in the research procedures and steps involved in the adaptive approach, in which the close interplay between extant theory and different sources of data (primary and secondary) constitutes

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the core of what Layder defines as 'theorizing', refining and developing theory through the interplay with data and explaining data through theoretical ideas. In Layder's view, adaptive theory finds itself somewhere between grounded theory on the one hand and Robert K. Merton's middle-range theory on the other. From the former, the inspiration lies in the ambition to theorize throughout the research process, theorizing is thus a constant as well as an end goal in the adaptive approach. From the latter, the inspiration comes from the focus on the systematic theorizing of empirical observations through explanatory theory, as well as in the attempt at finding a middle ground between grand or abstract theory and more empirically informed findings (Layder, 1998).

Although adaptive theory, like grounded theory, is not limited to the use of qualitative methods, in practice, the vast majority of studies conducted with the adaptive approach have drawn on qualitative data. Layder (1998) does insist that qualitative data are necessary if one wants to get as close as possible to people's subjective experiences in their everyday lives, whereas quantitative data in this respect will necessarily be secondary. A problem, however, with relying exclusively on qualitative data (which was also Merton's perspective) is that there is a tendency to become excessively entangled in empirical concerns, being too descriptive and atheoretical rather than having ambitions of systematic theory construction.

Layder's approach is inspired by his early interest in realism (and perhaps to some extent critical realism) that is also reflected in his ontological considerations, which play an important role in his work. According to Layder, social reality exists independently of the human mind, but it can be made amenable to analysis through scientific effort (theories and data). Layder's adaptive theory relies, to some extent, on an ontological model called 'domain theory'. This model specifies the ontological features of social reality into four different but closely interrelated domains: psychobiography, situated activity, social settings, and contextual resources (Layder, 1997, 2018). It is Layder's contention that by specifying the ontological foundation of reality, it is easier to construct an appropriate research design or strategy with which to study it, but he does admit that it is possible to work adaptively also without resorting to either realist philosophy of science or the domain theory (Jacobsen, 2025). Although Layder borrowed insights from realism and, to some extent, critical realism, he remains critical of the political agenda of many who identify as 'critical realists', and he is also highly critical of postmodern or 'constructivist' positions, not least because they tend to use pompous scientific language as a smokescreen for often quite banal observations without any empirical backing (Jacobsen, 2025).

In its actual research procedures and processes, adaptive theory is concerned with the close, flexible, and creative interplay between some pre-selected theoretical ideas and data material that may consist of either primary or secondary data sources. It is important to Layder that adaptive theory is not seen as an abstract methodology but as a practical guide to social research (Layder, 2013, 2018). One of the most important and identifiable features of the adaptive research process is that of 'orienting concepts,' which Layder (1998) suggests can serve as an initial theoretical entry point into one's research. By carefully selecting a number of concepts from the start of the research project, these concepts provide some connection to already existing theoretical knowledge whilst simultaneously serving as conceptual stepping stones into new empirical territory. It is important that these orienting concepts guide and orient one's work within a given area (rather than forcing it into specific directions), and together, the concepts serve as an 'orienting scaffold' (Layder, 2018) also for one's analysis. It is advisable that the orienting concepts provide a certain explanatory potential; description and understanding are not sufficient. For Layder, perhaps as part of his inspiration from realism/critical realism, there is an ongoing concern with finding explanations for empirically observed phenomena. An example of an orienting concept used several times by Layder himself is the idea of 'emotion work,' as developed by Arlie R. Hochschild. This concept is illustrative because it provides a simultaneously focused and flexible filter with which to interpret data and also connects the individual and the more structural level of analysis. Layder suggests that the orienting concepts selected for a research project may be located on different analytical levels. Whereas some concepts may be concerned with explaining the actor/action level, others may be more oriented towards the systemic/structural level, and yet others may be 'bridging.' Layder also insists that

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orienting concepts may be chosen from non-academic contexts (such as popular culture). It is important to stress that adaptive theory is not in the business of testing theories or concepts. Rather, the concern is with how already existing concepts may assist in 'theorizing,' aimed, in close interplay with data, at developing new, refined, or more precise theoretical knowledge through measures such as 'innovative concept development,' 'concept splitting/fragmentation,' 'concept replacement,' or the construction of 'typologies' (Layder, 2018). In all cases, it is the intimate interplay between concepts and data that forms the foundation for analysis and theorizing.

Following Merton, Layder argues for a 'disciplined eclecticism' when choosing useful orienting concepts that are intended to serve an analytical purpose in one's research project. It is therefore always a good idea if the adaptive researcher has a relatively broad knowledge of already existing conceptual and theoretical ideas, although it is not a requirement. Even though novices can conduct adaptive studies (which is a point frequently stressed by Layder), it is advisable that at least some attempt is made to argue convincingly for the choice of orienting concepts, if this is not the case, the danger lurks that one's study, due to lack of adequate theoretical consideration and qualification, becomes wobbly or simply repeats what others have already shown. As part of this 'middle strategy' of the adaptive approach, it is important to emphasize again that the orienting concepts are not supposed to be tested (that is, verified or falsified) during the research process (as in a hypothetical-deductive design). Their primary purpose is to provide an initial inroad into a given empirical context and to serve as a constructive conceptual/theoretical sparring partner for the gathered or included data material.

In summary, adaptive theory offers an attempt at arguing for an intermediary position or 'middle-strategy' between induction and deduction; however, according to Layder, not necessarily reducible to the notion of 'abduction' (Jacobsen, 2025). It concerns the development of existing theoretical knowledge through a creative interplay with data, which is why it is initially placed at the center of the qualitative continuum. In adaptive theory, data adapts to theory as theory adapts to data.

6. The Extended Case Method – Reconstructing Theory Through Data

Moving from the middle-position of adaptive theory on the qualitative continuum towards the pole in which theoretical concerns compared to data occupy a much more prominent position, we find 'the extended case method'. The extended case method is a specific type of case study research that seeks to bridge theory with data and the micro (everyday life) with the macro (social structures) – not unlike the ambitions of the aforementioned adaptive theory. However, the two positions are far from similar. The extended case method has its roots in research conducted back in the 1940s-1960s by social anthropologists Max Gluckman and Jaap van Velsen, associated with The Manchester School of Social Anthropology, who argued that studies of everyday practices in localized contexts could be used to shed light on larger social processes and structures (Van Velsen, 1967). In a sociological context, this approach was pursued and developed further through studies by British sociologist Michael Burawoy, a student of Van Velsen. Throughout his career, Burawoy's position was strongly influenced by and contributed to a Marxist perspective, with a continuous focus on stratification, inequality, power, and social change. In his Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association, Burawoy passionately argued for a 'public sociology,' outlining different ways of working sociologically and emphasizing the importance of providing studies of and solutions to social problems (Burawoy, 2005).

Early in his career, Burawoy immersed himself in studies of strikes among workers in copper mines and the clothing industry in Zambia, as well as work practices in an engine factory in Chicago during the 1970s. For example, in his seminal book, Burawoy (1979) spent almost a full year conducting ethnographic research in a factory, working as a machine operator. He combined the rich data obtained from this study with an overall Marxist account of the labor process in monopoly capitalism, an account that challenged an earlier theory formulated by Donald Roy in the 1950s, based on studies of the same factory. The detailed insights from Burawoy's in-depth empirical studies were then used to develop more generalized theoretical explanations, understandings, and conclusions, which have remained a hallmark of the extended case method (Burawoy, 2009).

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As mentioned, throughout his work Burawoy was devoted to a Marxist perspective, and he defined the extended case method as 'the most appropriate way of using participant observation to (re)construct theories of advanced capitalism' (Burawoy, 1991b). In Burawoy's conception, the extended case method is a critical and reflexive approach to science aimed at extracting general knowledge from specific case contexts and thus creating extra-local and historical knowledge about social reality from case-based studies. Burawoy stated that for the extended case researcher, 'methodology provides a link between technique and theory. It explores ways of utilizing technique to advance theory' (Burawoy, 1991b). Research technique and theory are thus closely interrelated in the extended case method.

The reason for placing the extended case method to the right side of the qualitative continuum is that the research process starts out with a problem formulation that is either already embedded in or expressed through theoretical ideas that may, in principle, come from any background, but, in Burawoy's rendition of the method, was mainly Marxist-oriented. There is thus a foregoing theoretical foundation for the subsequent research. From this follows an in-depth empirical study of a given specific context (e.g., a factory setting), often by the use of ethnography (e.g., participant observation, which was Burawoy's own preferred research method), in which one looks specifically for anomalies, contradictions, or unexpected findings – what in analytic induction would be called 'negative cases'. During the observational period, it is important to create an ongoing reflexive dialogue with the research field to avoid, on the one hand, the positivist fallacy, in which interaction with participants is regarded as a source of 'bias', and, on the other hand, the humanist/postmodernist reduction of social science to a search for 'mutual self-understanding' between insider and outsider, in order to instead contribute to scientific explanation and progress (Burawoy, 1991a). In principle, this 'dialogue' or 'dialectical' part of the research process can be repeated iteratively until no more anomalies appear in the relationship between the data and the theory. This then leads to an attempt at challenging, revising, or confirming existing social theories and, in the process, to refine existing knowledge based on research findings. This process ends, at least temporarily, with the suggestion of a reformulated or reconstructed theory that has incorporated the empirical knowledge obtained from the case study and thereby specified and deepened the existing theoretical knowledge within the research context. The case part is concerned with the detailed study of a specific context, but this is then extended outward, as it were, to encompass broader social issues and larger-scale social processes, the main methodological purpose being to reformulate the original theory based on the findings from the empirical study (e.g., advancing a critique of monopoly capitalism based on insights from a study of an industrial factory setting). Whereas grounded theory is primarily (though not exclusively) concerned with studying micro-social and interactional contexts (and developing new theories about this particular level of social reality), and adaptive theory aims to bridge the micro and macro by using 'orienting concepts,' the extended case method attempts to move from studies of the micro to the macro to discover and locate explanations at a more structural or societal level. While some types of case study approaches are content with providing deep, rich, and contextualized knowledge about a specific but limited area of social reality, the extended case method instead aims at producing knowledge that transcends localized contexts and has a wider reach, with broader theoretical implications.

In his argument for the extended case theory, Burawoy (1998) actually defined it in opposition to grounded theory. As indicated here, contrary to grounded theory, and in fact also to other much more inductive qualitative approaches (including the understanding of most qualitative research as mainly case-oriented, see (De Vaus, 2001), the extended case method relies much more extensively on a prior theoretical understanding of the social world (in Burawoy's case a Marxist perspective, but in principle it could be any other) that provides the early foundation for the research perspective and process. Whereas there may have been a certain impetus for generating grounded theories at a time when the theoretical landscape of sociology was less densely populated by perspectives and theories, today the sheer amount of existing theories means that it is useful to take these as a starting point. As Burawoy thus contended:

The generation of theory from the ground up was perhaps an imperative at the beginning of the sociological enterprise, but with the proliferation of theories, reconstruction becomes ever more urgent.

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Rather than always starting from scratch and developing new theories, we should try to consolidate and develop what we have already produced (Burawoy, 1991a).

Later, Burawoy (1998) would argue that the researcher should start out with one's 'favourite theory' and from this foundation then elaborate and develop it through empirical studies (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 1999). This is very much at odds with grounded theory, which argues, at least in its earlier formulations, against pre-existing theoretical ideas (such as 'pet theories') interfering with the 'empirical purity' of the emerging grounded theory. Actually, in many respects, grounded theory and the extended case method offer widely different ways of understanding and using the empirical 'cases' with which they work. In grounded theory, data is used to create theoretical saturation from the constant comparison of empirically recorded incidences, whereas the purpose of the empirical case or cases in the extended case method, which starts out with theory, is 'to add yet another "protective belt" or another layer of theory to the [initial] theoretical narrative, thereby reshaping it to fit the new set of observations' (Tavory & Timmermans, 2009). In other words, grounded theory is *creating* theory from 'scratch,' ideally based exclusively on data, whereas the extended case method is rather *elaborating*, *revising*, and *reformulating* existing theory based on data.

To summarize, the extended case method seeks to reconstruct sociological knowledge based on existing theory, which is then gradually refined or reformulated through findings from in-depth empirical studies, leading to revised theoretical knowledge about a phenomenon often related to larger-scale or structural explanations. Located next to adaptive theory and more to the deductive side in my expanded version of Kristiansen's (2002) qualitative continuum, the theoretical foundation in the extended case method is regarded as more 'guiding' than the 'orienting concepts' proposed by the adaptive approach but also as somewhat less 'dictating' than the 'theoretical/metaphorical' frameworks from the final approach to be outlined next.

7. Metaphorical Redescription – A Recontextualizing Approach

Moving further along the right side of the qualitative continuum, the last approach we will deal with here is that of 'metaphorical redescription' or the 'recontextualizing method'. Metaphors and analogies are an integral part of language, and perhaps particularly poetic language, that aim at transferring meaning from one context to another. It is something that has interested scholars for a long time (Lakoff & Mark, 1980). Metaphor, however, is also an integral part of social science research, and many researchers and scholars have used metaphorical imagery to describe the different contexts they are studying (Hesse, 1966; Rigney, 2001). The purpose of metaphors here is to reconfigure, recontextualize, or redescribe actually existing or empirical reality in a novel, creative, and sometimes even counterfactually and surprisingly way that sheds new light on a given phenomenon or situation. Metaphors are part of what Kenneth Burke once described as 'perspectives by incongruity' that refer to ways of transforming our ingrained understanding of certain phenomena. Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman's dramaturgy, to which we return, is a very good example of a metaphorical redescription and also the preferred illustration provided by Kristiansen (2002) when outlining how this type of qualitative approach has informed sociological research.[iii]

Throughout his career, Goffman – who was trained in the sociology program at the University of Chicago – was concerned with generating knowledge about the micro-world of face-to-face interaction taking place mostly in everyday settings. Goffman's main area of research was what he called 'the interaction order' (Goffman, 1983). In his work, Goffman either invented or extensively drew on (this is not entirely clear in all cases) four metaphors, which each in their way, served as interpretative frameworks for analyzing situations of face-to-face interaction and helped to organize the presentation of his findings. Most well-known is doubtlessly his dramaturgical metaphor, suggesting that social life can be temporarily understood *as if* it is a theatrical performance. Goffman's three other metaphors were those of the ritual, the game, and the frame (Jacobsen & Søren, 2015). These four metaphors – theatre, ritual, game, and frame- were used in order to redescribe and recontextualize findings from the flow of interaction in everyday life.

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Although there were some substantive overlaps between Goffman's metaphors (perhaps mostly between the dramaturgical and the strategic ones), each of them provided an interpretative universe in its own right that would read and contextualize the same empirical material in a number of different ways. Goffman's metaphors thus constituted 'idiosyncratic maps' (Manning, 1992) with which to read and interpret social interaction. The metaphors, to use an expression from Goffman (who took it from Gilbert Ryle and Gregory Batson), can thus be seen as different ways of 'framing' the data material, which in Goffman's case was always exclusively qualitative, stemming primarily from systematic or unsystematic participant observation in different natural settings, informal conversations, and a diversified range of literary examples. Goffman, however, was not only an adept ethnographer reporting about empirical facts, but he was also deeply engaged in theoretical and conceptual work (Manning, 2016). In many respects, Goffman regarded himself more as a scholar than as a researcher, meaning that the many empirical details he gathered throughout his career were not all that important *in themselves* but rather served as fragments or 'strips' (as he called those arbitrarily cut slices from the ongoing stream of life) that made it possible for him to create a comprehensive and systematic theory about the interaction order (Goffman, 1983). The preferred method for studying this 'interaction order' was, according to him, 'microanalysis,' which basically consisted of studying and interpreting multifaceted information about events taking place in a multitude of different everyday settings such as restaurants, elevators, lecture halls, pavements, private dinner parties, insane asylums, fun fairs, etc. Goffman's preferred method was naturalistic inquiry, in which data were obtained directly from the flow of everyday life without resorting to surveys or formalized interviews, and he remarked that we always need to triangulate what people say they do with what we observe them actually doing, thus never fully trusting their verbal self-presentations (Goffman, 1989). However, his sampling procedure qualifies as highly selective, and any clarification about his selection and inclusion of data material in his published work remained conspicuous mainly by its absence.

In fact, looking through Goffman's books, it is difficult to see exactly *how* he worked, not least because he was rather reluctant to give much information about his research process, data material, and general way of working, which he himself described as 'a sort of freewheeling, literary kind of thing' (Verhoeven, 1993). Although Goffman himself never specified or defined his own research process by way of the conventionally used categories (such as induction, deduction, or abduction), there is an unmistakable element of abductive reasoning involved in his work, not least in his metaphors that, in a typical abductive manner, propose creative and sometimes indeed surprising answers to how we may analyze and understand face-to-face interaction. Perhaps Goffman's way of working can best be captured by what Umberto Eco termed 'creative abduction,' in which 'the rule acting as an explanation has to be invented *ex novo*' (Eco, 1984). The metaphors thus make us see the real world in a new and different light, a light invented or applied by the researcher. Obviously, there exists a sort of interpretative membrane between the metaphor and actual empirical reality (the metaphor *is* not reality), but a membrane that is movable, penetrable, and elastic, and although the membrane may mirror parts of reality, for Goffman it was not important to specify or comment on. But as Goffman intriguingly observed about his own dramaturgical metaphor: 'All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify' (Goffman, 1959).

In his practice of a 'freewheeling' kind of abductive research process, Goffman remained highly critical of positivist and deductive research designs based on hypothesis testing through artificial experimental setups, which he disavowed in the following way.

[This type of work] begins with the sentence 'we hypothesize that …', goes on from there to a full discussion of the biases and limits of the proposed design, reasons why these aren't nullifying, and culminates in an appreciable number of satisfyingly significant correlations tending to confirm some of the hypotheses. As though the uncovering of social life were that simple (Goffman, 1971).

Contrary to this type of hypothetico-deductive research, Goffman admitted that his own way of working perhaps represented a rather 'speculative approach' but stated that this was preferable to a 'rigorous blindness' to the study of the topic in question (Goffman, 1963).

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During his career, in the different types of ethnographic fieldwork he conducted, and throughout his eleven published monographs, Goffman was a generous (almost obsessive) conceptual generator. It has been estimated that he coined and developed more than 900 concepts and neologisms (often expressed in some sort of typological manner) with which to capture even the most microscopic dimensions of human behavior and social interaction (Williams, 1988). These concepts, however, were not simply inductively generated based on observational findings; they seemed to grow almost organically from within his aforementioned metaphorical frameworks that, as it were, constituted the incubator for a multitude of conceptual innovations, interpretations, and typologies. It is important to note that a few of Goffman's concepts, if any, contradicted his overall metaphorical frameworks; his concepts instead validated his metaphors and vice versa. It is a key aspect of abductive research to approximate a sort of theoretical explanation of the studied situation or phenomenon based on a 'qualified guesswork' (Charles Saunders Peirce's notion). The type of sociological 'explanation' provided by Goffman's many different concepts is that the overall metaphor (e.g., the dramaturgical one) gives meaning to the many underlying specific concepts (e.g., impression management, performance, personal front, etc.) and illustrative empirical examples, which in turn simultaneously support the overall metaphorical framework (Corradi, 1990). In this way, a peculiar, almost tautological, sort of (self)-explanation is generated in which the content of the metaphor corroborates the framework and vice versa. However, in Goffman's work, it is never entirely clear whether the metaphor was proposed first and then afterwards filled with data as illustrative examples of the validity of the metaphor, or whether the metaphor was itself, in fact, the result of the many different bits and pieces of data (which Goffman described as being of a 'mixed status') when being put together. The respective weight of the inductive, deductive, and abductive elements in Goffman's way of working was never really specified by him. But, contrary to analytic induction or the extended case method, there are no 'negative cases' or 'anomalies' leading to a need for revision or reformulation of the metaphor, and no testing procedure is involved. The metaphor, as it were, thus speaks for itself through its persuasive rhetorical and imaginative power. Goffman's metaphors sensitize or persuade the reader to see and understand situations in a new, different, and surprising light than what is commonly the case (Edmondson, 1984). The metaphors are, in Goffman's (1959) words, to be regarded as temporary 'scaffolds' that need to be taken down again when they have completed their job, meaning when they have assisted the researcher in gaining a better and firmer grasp of what he or she is studying. The work scaffold is to the completed building what the metaphor is to sociological understanding.

We do need to remember that although Goffman's metaphors were indeed discovered and refined by him, all of them had already been invented by someone else, predating his use. For example, the dramaturgical metaphor, with its suggestion of a similarity (perhaps even isomorphism) between theatre and social life, goes back at least as far as William Shakespeare, perhaps even to Euripides, Aristophanes, and Aeschylus of the ancient Greek tradition of tragedy and comedy. The ritual metaphor, as Goffman himself reminded his readers, was inspired by his admiration for Émile Durkheim's work. The strategic metaphor was developed following Goffman's reading of Thomas C. Schelling's work, but the whole idea of strategic behavior goes back at least to Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*, and possibly even further. Finally, the frame metaphor was suggested by Gilbert Ryle and Gregory Bateson prior to Goffman's original use. What Goffman did, and did so convincingly, was to put these metaphors imaginatively to use in the service of a sociological understanding and explanation of face-to-face interaction.

8. Discussion

The above presentation of five different approaches for doing qualitative research, grounded theory, analytic induction, adaptive theory, the extended case method, and metaphorical redescription, and positioning these alongside each other on a 'qualitative continuum' is open to interpretation. It is indeed possible to disagree with Kristiansen (2002)'s reasons for positioning these approaches in their respective order, but recent developments within some of the approaches may legitimately lead to reconsiderations. Here, we will briefly mention some points of contention and cases for discussion that *could* perhaps

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warrant an alternative placement of the respective five approaches on the continuum, which is obviously a purely scholastic maneuver.

Regarding grounded theory, it should be mentioned that already back in the early 1990s, a student and later colleague of Strauss, Leonard Schatzman, proposed a revised version of grounded theory titled 'dimensional analysis,' which, however, did not leave a lasting impact on the approach but did testify to an interest in moving beyond the original inductive formulation of the founders of grounded theory. Some of the more recent so-called 'interpretative' and 'constructivist' approaches within grounded theory have gained much more attention. Due to their prioritizing of a more abductive rather than radical inductive research process, they seem to move more to the right (deductive) side of the qualitative continuum than the classic variants such as Glaser and Anselm (1967); Glaser (1978), and Glaser (1992), which also means that the idea that grounded is one and the same thing no longer holds. Although certain basic elements still persist (such as an emphasis on generating new theory, constant comparison, and theoretical sampling), classic and contemporary versions of grounded theory show a number of rather significant differences from the original, making it relevant to consider whether grounded theory nowadays still qualifies as 'radical inductive'.

Like grounded theory, analytic induction has undergone some developments and modifications since its earliest formulation. For example, Ragin (2023) recently differentiated between 'classic' and 'generalized' analytic induction, where the former relies on a rather strict research procedure and ambitious outcome (e.g., Lindesmith), with the latter (e.g., Jack Katz) being much more loosely devoted to the overall perspective and less concerned with the quest for causal universals (Becker, 1998). However, the fact that analytic induction, in its classic as well as its generalized versions, works almost in the same inductive and iterative way means that its positioning on the immediate right side of classic grounded theory on the qualitative continuum seems appropriate, although the development of the aforementioned more abductive variants within grounded theory actually makes it relevant to consider if these 'second generation' perspectives of grounded theory are still more inductive or perhaps more abductive/deductive than analytic induction, justifying perhaps a change of positions on the continuum.

Another question to consider is whether it is warranted, as suggested in Figure 1 above and as implied by Layder's (1998) description of adaptive theory as a sort of 'middle strategy' between induction and deduction, to locate adaptive theory exactly at the centre of the qualitative continuum. Would it perhaps be more appropriate to place it much more to the right (and thus deductive) side, perhaps even after metaphorical redescription, because the presence of already existing theory (in the shape of 'orienting concepts') looms large in the research process and perhaps even larger than, for example, in Goffman's work? Is the adaptive approach, compared to all the other approaches on the qualitative continuum, perhaps more deductively oriented than what Layder (obviously with no knowledge of this continuum) would suggest? This remains an open question, searching for answers.

Regarding the extended case method, in Burawoy's rendition, from the outset of the research process, it rests on a pre-existing theoretical (and in his case, Marxist) setup that provides the very foundation for the selection of the case and the subsequent development and reformulation of theory. This begets the question if the extended case method, with its strong emphasis on pre-existing theory, should actually be placed further towards the right (deductive) end of the continuum than metaphorical redescription. Metaphorical redescription, at least as exemplified by Goffman's work, also relies on some sort of pre-defined metaphorical framework, but instead of prioritizing a specific and extensive type of already-existing theory or explanatory worldview (such as Marxism), it is, as we saw above, rather defined as a temporary scaffold that only serves initial analytical purposes.

This finally leads to some comments on metaphorical redescription. Jacobsen and Søren (2015) have suggested that Goffman worked with a 'data-model' kind of research process in which the data and model parts mutually fertilize each other, but the interesting question remains if these two components ('data' and 'model') were equivalent in this process and whether it was actually not a 'model-data' rather than a 'data-model' way of working. If the former is the case, then the data may have to be 'massaged,' as it were, in order to fit neatly into the preconceived metaphorical model, but if the latter is the case, then the data

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may not only fill out the model but potentially also expand, alter, challenge, and perhaps even falsify it. Since Goffman remained enigmatically silent about his own way of working, this is only qualified guesswork, but a good guess would be that the metaphor, in a temporal sense, was invented prior to the selection and application of different specific pieces of data used to illustrate it. This warrants the location of metaphorical redescription at the more deductive pole of the qualitative continuum.

Before concluding this discussion section, a few more general remarks, reservations, and qualifications of the qualitative continuum must be mentioned. Firstly, obviously not *all* qualitative approaches have been captured here, IPA (interpretative phenomenological analysis), QDA (qualitative data analysis), QCA (qualitative comparative analysis), SPA (social pattern analysis), discourse analysis, and several others have not been included on Kristiansen's or on my expanded version of the continuum, but they could meaningfully have been added to illustrate similarities and differences in the 'theory' and 'data' blends. Although it is perhaps the case that there are only few (if any) more radical inductive positions than grounded theory, maybe apart from a position that has *no* prior theoretical ideas and *no* theory-building ambition *at all* (perhaps some forms of purely descriptive phenomenology might qualify here), it is indeed possible that there are many more deductive positions to qualitative research than metaphorical redescription, which at the qualitative continuum is placed on the farthest right side.

Another general observation relates to the increasing potential for 'overcrowding' of approaches located around the middle of the qualitative continuum (a sort of 'regression toward the mean' in a theoretical sense). The growing interest in and awareness within the social sciences of the possibility of working in a more abductive manner rather than relying on the conventional strict inductive or deductive research strategies illustrates the appeal of more hybrid ways of doing qualitative work that perhaps mirror the growing complexity of many research problems and social phenomena (Sætre & Van de Ven, 2021; Tavory & Stefan, 2014; Timmermans & Iddo, 2022)

A third general comment is that the qualitative continuum is admittedly rather one-dimensional, operating only on one comparative 'plane', that of 'data' and 'theory', when it comes to distinguishing between different approaches. Obviously, other criteria (ontological, epistemological, and methodological) could have been contemplated. Additionally, the relative 'distance' on the continuum between the five different approaches can also be discussed, for example, whether the 'gap' between analytic induction and adaptive theory is larger or smaller than the one between adaptive theory and the extended case method. The qualitative continuum does not measure or specify this.

Finally, looking at some similarities despite their differences, in all five approaches described and discussed here, there is a theoretical ambition as well as, to varying degrees, an explanatory purpose exceeding basic data description and understanding known from more exploratory and phenomenological perspectives (sometimes unduly reduced to the idea of *Verstehen*). All five approaches are thus engaged in some sort of 'theorizing,' whether they explicate it or not, but the purposes, processes, and end-products of this theorizing are far from the same; some are much more data-driven, others much more theory-driven in their theorizing efforts (Swedberg, 2014). Furthermore, despite their differences, some minor, others more significant, all five approaches presented here would support the classic grounded theory dictum that (at least in principle) 'everything is data,' meaning that all types of material (but primarily qualitative) may be used for research and theorizing purposes (such as testing or reformulating existing theories or for generating new empirical and theoretical knowledge) in the study of a given area of social life.

9. Conclusion

This article has, in an admittedly compact manner, attempted to cover a lot of ground by outlining and discussing five different approaches, grounded theory, analytic induction, adaptive theory, the extended case method, and metaphorical redescription, for doing qualitative research. These different approaches were placed at different points along what Kristiansen (2002) memorably called 'the qualitative continuum', a continuum specifying the priority of or 'blend' between respectively 'data' and 'theory' in the research process. For several reasons, this placement is not, as the discussion showed,

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completely fixed or unambiguous. First of all, new developments within each of the approaches presented may shift or push it into one or the other direction (as is the case with recent developments within grounded theory). Secondly, there is also a lot of interpretation involved in exactly where to position these different approaches on a linear scale that, in the end, depends on how we conceive of the 'blend' between data and theory. Is the positioning determined by what initiates the research process (data or theory) or by what the ambition or end result of the research is (to create theory from 'scratch,' to inscribe data in pre-fabricated theoretical frameworks, or something in between)? It is my contention, however, that Kristiansen's (2002) original positioning of the different qualitative approaches (with the above addition of adaptive theory and the qualifying remarks in mind) is largely warranted.

After this presentation and discussion of a number of qualitative approaches, it should be stressed that *all* methodological approaches obviously have their individual advantages and limitations, and they should always be carefully chosen primarily based on the type of knowledge they are intended to produce and the process through which one arrives at this knowledge. As the Polish sociologist Bauman (1966) once rightly noted, a razor blade and an axe are both sharp instruments, but whereas the axe is better suited for deforestation purposes, the razor blade is certainly preferred when shaving. The same goes for research strategies and methodological approaches: they should always be chosen and applied depending on the specific research context in which they are used and how they fit the research purpose. One should thus always choose the methodological approach that is most suitable for one's specific research endeavor. Obviously, many researchers develop some sort of personal path-dependency when it comes to choosing and pursuing the same research strategy time after time, even in research projects dealing with different topics. It is not easy to break free from the routinized and habitualized ways of working that characterize many researchers' preferences when discovering, approaching, and investigating different research topics. But it is always good to have knowledge of alternative paths – not least because it can serve to qualify one's own choices.

The purpose of the article has been to illustrate and discuss the rather broad and diversified way that qualitative research processes can, in fact, proceed. It is my hope that this compact overview and discussion of five different qualitative approaches may prove useful for those standing in front of making an informed decision about which research strategy to pursue in order to find good arguments for and against one's decision. All research strategies can generate interesting empirical and theoretical knowledge, but the success of each of them ultimately lies in choosing and pursuing the right one.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

Copyright:

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Notes:

[i] Now there exist, to which we return in some more detail later in the discussion, classic as well as a number of different contemporary versions of grounded theory (Sebastian, 2019) and particularly the latter ones are increasingly difficult to fit neatly into a notion of 'radical induction'.
[ii] Others have suggested that the first sociological use of analytic induction was found in Robert Cooley Angell's study of family life during the Depression from 1936 (Becker, 1998). However, Znaniecki's work did precede Angell's.
[iii] Obviously, Goffman was far from the first one or the only one showing veneration for metaphor within sociology – prolific scholars such as C. Wright Mills, Robert Nisbet or Zygmunt Bauman were also keen inventors and users of metaphorical imagery. However, they would not be regarded as representatives of 'qualitative research', which was the case with Goffman's work.

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