Lessons Learned From the Glaserian Grounded Theory Approach: Professionalizing as a Basic Social Process in Elite Athletes’ Lifestyle

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Abstract
This paper presents a qualitative study conducted using the Glaserian grounded theory (GT) method. Glaser’s approach to GT differs from Strauss and Corbin’s method, which is more widespread. There are some differences in the focus on participants’ concerns, staying in the research environment for an extended period to discover participants’ main concerns and the emergence of a basic social process around the core category. The Glaserian GT method was used to understand elite athletes’ lifestyles. Two groups of athletes and non-athletes were recruited for the interview as the sample. The core category was determined through iterative coding, memoing, theoretical sampling, and theoretical sorting. There were overlaps in these phases; they fluctuated back and forth and were not as clear-cut as they could be. Results showed the lifestyle components of elite athletes. Besides identifying participants’ main concerns, the results also demonstrated how to address them over time. It is a category of a basic social process named “professionalizing.” Lastly, the steps of creating a concept map are explained practically, which in addition to sports science scholars, can be considered by researchers in other fields.

Keywords
classic grounded theory, basic social process, main concern, elite athletes

Introduction
Maguire (2014) believes that given the problems, challenges, and dilemmas of sports in the contemporary world, there is a need to pay attention to the social sciences of sports more than ever. Social sciences of sports have two main goals: first, full coverage of the current knowledge in a range of disciplines; and second, establishing relationships between these disciplines to clarify critical issues and concerns regarding sport and thus, providing the possibility of change (Maguire, 2014). The social science of sports includes a wide range of different disciplines such as the history of the sport, philosophy of sport, psychology of sport, anthropology of sport, sociology of sport, and many others. Furthermore, each discipline mentioned above includes many main and sub-axes, such as identity, national identity, ethics, gender, sport and socialization, globalization (Maguire, 2014). As a result of this remarkable diversity, there are also various research methods for social sciences of sports studies. In this regard, the present study has been conducted to address the processes, steps, Challenges, and Lessons Learned from Conducting the Glaserian grounded theory (GT) method in the study of Professionalizing as a Basic Social Process in Elite Athletes’ Lifestyle.

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Background of the Study

Due to today's globalization of sport and its further consolidation within the social, cultural, and economic context of societies, there are complex research issues in this area that cannot be answered only by quantitative methods, and this is why qualitative research methods are becoming increasingly popular in sport sciences research (Pitney & Parker, 2009; Skinner et al., 2020). It seems social science of sports is one of the areas in which qualitative research methods are mostly used (Smith & Caddick, 2012). On the other hand, it is not easy to propose a uniform definition from qualitative research in the social science of sports. Therefore, selecting an appropriate qualitative research method in the social sciences of sports studies is crucial.

Lifestyle as an Ambiguous Concept in Different Sciences

The term “lifestyle” is currently in vogue. While the term has a more restricted sociological meaning regarding the distinctive style of life of specific groups within contemporary consumers' culture, it connotes individuality, self-expression, and stylistic self-consciousness. One's body, clothes, speech, leisure pastimes, eating and drinking preferences, home, car, and choice of holidays are indicators of the individuality of taste and sense of style of owner/consumer (Featherstone, 1987). The theoretical significance of lifestyle as a sociological and cultural concept is more related to economic, social, and cultural changes during the 1960s and 1970s. Commonly, the transition from modernity to postmodernism is referred to these changes. Although sociologists such as Weber and Simmel have explored some aspects of the lifestyle concept, this concept belongs to the middle-class growth and development age. Lifestyle changes in the 1960s and 1970s have made this term an essential concept in social science (Veal, 2001). In this regard, William C. Cockerham noted that all indicators show that research in the lifestyle field goes to the center of sociological focus with evolving sociology in the 21st century (Hinote, 2015). Furthermore, Chaney (1996) believed that the “social phenomenon of lifestyles is an integral feature of the development of modernity, at least in the way that lifestyle is a significant representation of the quest for individual identity, which is also a defining characteristic of modernity” (Chaney, 1996). A review of lifestyle history shows that leisure is one of the focal concepts in this field. Bourdieu’s studies are notable in this regard. Bourdieu (1984), in his book entitled “Distinction,” argues that social distinctions can be observed in a variety of social practices, including traditional leisure activities, such as holidays, sports, study, music, and cinema. From Bourdieu’s view, these areas can be investigated in terms of the economic and cultural capital of those in that society. A social and cultural map of their social position and social trajectory can be plotted (Bourdieu, 1984). Ken Roberts’s book entitled “Leisure in Contemporary Society” (1999) and Steven Miles’ book entitled “Youth Lifestyles in a Changing World” (2000) have been published about lifestyle.

Roberts rejects the proposition that lifestyle can replace social class, gender, and age as basic structuring concepts in leisure analysis. Generally, Robert rejects the traditional view of lifestyle by arguing about “being new,” “intra-class or cross-class,” “instability,” “style,” “identity,” “the role of leisure,” “youth,” and “social class, age, and gender.” Robert believed the consumer has the power of choice and is not captive to structures constructed and addressed by sociologists. He argued that economic and sociological theories were too simplistic based on assumptions about the consumer, motivations, and concepts, such as economic rationality and economic, human beings. Finally, lifestyle is a very challenging concept in postmodernism. There are more heterogeneous lifestyles in postmodern society than in modern and traditional society, and there are different ways and means to do so for postmodernists. The way a person operates in one area has nothing to do with how he/she operates in another area. People are moving between different areas of daily life and constantly making new choices in connection with choices that change one’s lifestyle (Veal, 2001). Briefly, lifestyle with every view and approach has become one of the most important social sciences and sociology concepts today.

Despite the complexity of lifestyle in sociology, it is a practical concept for marketers. Nowadays, lifestyle is usually defined as patterns in which people live and spend their time and money (Kaynak & Kara, 2001). For the time being, the lifestyle concept has become so central, and the personality concept is so marginal concerning psychographic research that the latter is currently equivalent to lifestyle research (Hawkins et al., 2007; L.R. Kahle & Chiagouris, 1997). Marketing scholars use different quantitative investigations to segment consumers into distinguished lifestyles. The activities, interests, and opinions (AIO) approach, value systems approach, and list of values (LOV) are examples of quantitative questionnaires of lifestyle in marketing (Lynn R Kahle & Kennedy, 1989). In another study, Vyncke (2002) prepared the value questionnaire and presented new tools for lifestyle segmentation. Vyncke (2002) believed that his new approach was better because more general and stable concepts of values, aesthetic styles, and life visions have been used. Values, aesthetic styles, and life visions - either alone or in combination - can lead to balanced and meaningful lifestyle typologies. Finally, the media preferences were an essential part of a lifestyle questionnaire in the study (Vyncke, 2002).

Lifestyle of Elite Athletes

The term lifestyle is a complex and broad one in sociological studies and is closely related to consumption and leisure. Lifestyle must be considered in the social sciences of sports for many reasons:

1. Sports are considered as one of the new symbols of people’s leisure (a focal concept in lifestyle). Furthermore, there have been many changes in sports as a
business. The result of these changes was the creation of an industry called the sports industry.

2. The sports industry and its sub-divisions have various kinds of key actors, such as athletes, coaches, sport managers, sport sponsors, and other influential individuals.

3. Elite athletes or sports stars are at the core of the sports industry because they shape competitions and matches. Athletes may be the most important actors in the sports industry, especially professional sports.

4. Sports stars are one of the important groups in societies. Generally, the national and international media concentrate on the lives of sports stars. It means that the non-sport aspects of an athlete’s life are as important as their sports performance.

5. Although the number of sports stars in societies is often low compared to the general population, their effect on the behavior and habits of different groups of people, especially children and adolescents, is very evident.

Therefore, the lifestyle of sports stars can be an essential issue for at least two aspects: (1) The intrinsic nature of athletes’ lifestyles (development of knowledge about athletes’ lifestyles can lead to management and improvement of their lifestyles). (2) The external effect of athletes’ lifestyle (knowing different aspects of athletes’ lifestyle can help to understand their effects on citizens’ lifestyle). A review of the literature on lifestyle showed that scholars had introduced various indicators for lifestyle, in which there are some significant points. (1) Lifestyle indicators depend on the scientific field of researchers. There are differences between lifestyle indicators in sociology, psychology, and marketing. (2) There is insufficient knowledge about athletes’ lifestyle indicators. Likewise, Law et al. (2020) acknowledged that limited research had been done on the lifestyles of professional footballers (Law et al., 2020). It seems that the primary question about athletes’ lifestyles is related to the nature of athletes’ lifestyles. Although variables, such as leisure and consumption, can be considered in the study of athletes’ lifestyles, there are certainly more significant variables that have not been considered so far. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a qualitative study to understand elite athletes’ lifestyles better.

**Methodology**

The grounded theory (GT) is an inductive method founded on a concept-indicator model to raise a theory to realize multiple social manners (Glaser, 1978, 1998). Glaser and Strauss developed the GT method throughout the 1960s. The purpose of the GT is to generate a theory through continuous data comparison instead of using data to test a theory, which is very abstract (Glaser, 1992). Glaser (1978) believed that the GT is a process to produce a theory via an organized, iterative, and complex data collection (Qureshi & Ünlü, 2020). GT is an advanced and robust qualitative approach in many disciplines (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Makri & Neely, 2021). GT as a branch of qualitative research could provide a deeper understanding of real-life events and human interactions (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Lifestyle studies seem to be one area that meets these conditions, and qualitative research is needed to understand it in-depth. Lifestyle is a topic in social science, which according to Makri and Neely (2021), almost 23% of the GT studies are relevant to this area in the Scopus database.

The GT includes the two main approaches of Glaserian and Straussian, as the two principal founders of this theory (see Table 1). Glaser follows the primary (classic) GT approach, meaning that the researcher tries an open and flexible process. He believes that the theory comes directly from data about participants’ main concerns (Glaser, 1998).

Moreover, Charmaz developed a constructivist GT approach in recent years. The constructivist grounded theory is an extension of the original grounded theory that is younger than the two primary schools. Contrary to Glaser and Strauss, Charmaz maintained that the researcher is not a neutral observer but a co-participant in the study. In addition, she believes that data, research processes, and theories are not discovered but instead constructed by the researcher and the research participants (Charmz, 2000; Mills et al., 2006). Due to the constructivist paradigm of Chams GT, she considers her approach to be suitable for critical studies (Charmaz, 2017). The constructivist GT approach is similar to the Glaserian GT; both are emerging methods (Charmaz, 2017). However, we chose Glaserian GT because we believe athletes’ lifestyles have their nature, and researchers cannot construct them and must only discover that.

The classic GT believes the forced relationship between theory and data is the opposite of the fit between theory and data. If the researcher has a presumption about the relationship between data, he/she puts pressure on the data and does not discover what the data really show (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). The most important feature of the Glaserian method is that the researcher remains faithful to the data, meaning that when entering a field study, there is no pre-defined program for analyzing and coding the data and no prior idea of what data must be obtained. Some of the essential avoiding directives in the Glaserian qualitative research method are as follows:

- Lack of a pre-determined theoretical framework
- It is better not to review the literature
- Ignoring demographic information
- If possible, do not use a consent form
- The use of computer programs or software is not suitable for GT studies.
- One should not analyze an incident without comparing it to the others.
- Do not answer research questions, not addressing participants’ main concerns.

The Glaserian GT method was chosen for several significant reasons studying elite athletes’ lifestyles. Since
there was no comprehensive theory about the lifestyle of elite athletes, there was the need to theorize it. Therefore, the GT was used to accomplish that. Glaserian and Straussian methods are the two main schools of the GT (Jones & Alony, 2011). Because of the brevity of this paper, herein, it is not possible to describe each of GT schools in detail. However, the essential issues are raised. According to Glaser (1992), Strauss and Corbin’s method is not about GT, but rather it is a method based on the concept of “forced conceptual description.” Therefore, Glaser (1992) used the term “emergence versus forcing” in his book title. Glaser (1992) believes novice researchers may use axial coding methods in GT, which is easy to implement. It means that when following Strauss and Corbin’s description, there is no doubt that something will be found (Glaser, 1992). Since it was not attempted to introduce a theory with pre-determined specifications thus, the Glaserian GT approach was preferred for studying elite athletes’ lifestyles.

The Glaserian GT method also has other characteristics that can help study the lifestyle of elite athletes, according to Glaser (1998). The emergence of the main concern and core category with consistent use of this method; availability of social organization of a group that should be discovered; and higher importance of participants’ concerns than researchers’ concerns are these primary characteristics. Glaser (2001) explained that participants’ main concerns would likely be issues or dilemmas or how they plan to resolve their main concerns (Glaser, 2001). This study tried to provide a theory about the lifestyle of elite athletes based on the participants’ experience and identifies their main concerns.

Furthermore, this theory has the potential to resolve participants’ concerns over time. Another characteristic of the Glaserian GT approach supporting its use in studying elite athletes’ lifestyles is a basic social process (BSP). About BSP, Glaser and Holton (2005) said that: “Similar to all the concepts of GT, generation of a BSP theory occurs around a core category. While a core category is always present in a grounded research study, a BSP may not be so” (Glaser & Holton, 2005). The BSP is a category with two or more emergent phases resolving the group’s main concern under study. It refers to the process of moving through a situation (Artinian et al., 2009). BSPs are labeled by a “gerund” form (“ing”). The concepts like cultivating, defaulting, centering, highlighting, and becoming are BSPs showing the feeling about process, change, and movement over time (Glaser & Holton, 2005). In the following sections, we will discuss why and how the BSP appears in the study of elite athletes’ lifestyles. However, regarding the discovery of the major concerns of the participants (elite athletes’ lifestyle), it is clear that a process is required to address the concerns and improve the situation.

**Recruitment of participants, sample, and Characteristics**

A fundamental principle of Glaser’s approach to GT is that the emerging theory itself should determine the next person to whom we talk or where to obtain the information. Theoretical sampling is considered in GT, which involves collecting and analyzing data to discover the theory. Glaser (1978) defined theoretical sampling as follows: Theoretical sampling is the

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**Table 1. Comparisons of the Two Schools of Grounded Theory.**

| ‘Glaserian’ | ‘Straussian’ |
|-------------|-------------|
| Beginning with general wonderment (an empty mind) | Having a general idea of where to begin |
| Emerging theory, with neutral questions | Forcing the theory with structured questions |
| Development of a conceptual theory | Conceptual description (description of situations) |
| Theoretical sensitivity (the ability to perceive variables and relationships) comes from immersion in the data | Theoretical sensitivity comes from methods and tools |
| The theory is grounded in the data | The theory is interpreted by an observer |
| The credibility of the theory, or verification, is derived from its grounding in the data | The credibility of the theory comes from the rigor of the method |
| A basic social process should be identified | Basic social processes need not be identified |
| The researcher is passive, exhibiting disciplined restraint | The researcher is active |
| Data reveals the theory | Data is structured to reveal the theory |
| Coding is less rigorous, a constant comparison of the incident to incident, with neutral questions and categories and properties evolving. Take care not to ‘over conceptualise’, identify key points | Coding is more rigorous and defined by technique. The nature of making comparisons varies with the coding technique. Labels are carefully crafted at the time. Codes are derived from micro-analysis, which consists of analysis data word-by-word. |
| Two coding phases or types, simple (fracture the data then conceptually group it) and substantive (open or selective, to produce categories and properties) | Three types of coding, open (identifying, naming, categorizing and describing phenomena), axial (the process of relating codes to each other) and selective (choosing a core category and relating other categories to that) |
| Regarded by some as the only ‘true’ GTM | Regarded by some as a form of qualitative data analysis (QDA) |

(Jones & Alony, 2011).
process of collecting data to produce a theory by which the researcher simultaneously collects, encodes, and analyzes the data. Also, he/she decides what data to collect in the following and where to find them to improve the theory until it emerges (Glaser, 1978). Sampling should be started purposely, and then, the emergence of the theory itself determines who should be interviewed next and where to obtain the information. In theoretical sampling, data analysis nurtures more questions, presents relationships, identifies gaps, and finds what researchers do not know yet, all of which lead to developing the theory (Sbaraini et al., 2011).

To achieve theoretical saturation in the study, we recruited 23 people for interviews (see Table 2). These participants belonged to two main groups: athletes and non-athletes. We had some reasons for recruiting a vast range of participants. Based on the introduction of this paper, lifestyle is a common concept in different disciplines (Chaney, 1996; Hinote, 2015; Kaynak & Kara, 2001; Veal, 2001; Vyncke, 2002); therefore, when we discuss it in athletes’ lives, we must take a multidisciplinary approach because athletes do not live only based on sociology theories, psychology, or marketing. They live in the real world, and a comprehensive understanding of their lifestyles requires using the concepts of all possible sciences. Therefore, recruiting non-athletes, such as coaches, sports managers, sports psychologists, and sociologists, is justified. On the other hand, using multiple recruitment strategies is common in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers could even place ads in newspaper contact sites, send out letters, post flyers about the project, and ask for recruits (Creswell & Baez, 2020).

In order to establish participation opportunities for all athletes, we contacted sports federations, sports clubs, and athlete college departments and created an initial database of available athletes’ contact information. Then in the email with our contact information, we declared our study title, goals, and other conditions, such as the data collection method. We asked athletes to contact us by phone or email for more details about the study. More than 20 athletes contacted us, and we prepared a preliminary list. We called them back and asked for more information about age, sports field, education, and place of residence. We also gave them more explanations about the subject under study (lifestyle) and that they should honestly explain the various dimensions of their life and its details. We also assured them about the confidentiality of their personal information, the use of interview data solely for this study, and the benefits that conducting research and dissemination of knowledge about the lifestyle of Iranian athletes can have for all athletes. Finally, 16 athletes voluntarily announced their readiness to participate in the main interview, all interviewed. However, after reaching the theoretical saturation point in 12 interviews (about lifestyle components), non-athletes were also recruited to maintain the data collection process (about lifestyle modification). According to the “Reciprocity for Participants” principle, in which researchers need to give back

Table 2. Participants of the Study.

| No | Group     | Field/expertise       | Age | Experience of High-level sport |
|----|-----------|-----------------------|-----|-------------------------------|
| 1  | Athletes  | Footballer            | 26  | Yes                           |
| 2  | Athletes  | Footballer            | 27  | Yes                           |
| 3  | Athletes  | Footballer            | 25  | Yes                           |
| 4  | Athletes  | Footballer            | 30  | Yes                           |
| 5  | Athletes  | Footballer            | 24  | Yes                           |
| 6  | Athletes  | Volleyball player     | 31  | Yes                           |
| 7  | Athletes  | Volleyball player     | 30  | Yes                           |
| 8  | Athletes  | Volleyball player     | 26  | Yes                           |
| 9  | Athletes  | Volleyball player     | 27  | Yes                           |
| 10 | Athletes  | Basketball player     | 28  | Yes                           |
| 11 | Athletes  | Basketball player     | 25  | Yes                           |
| 12 | Athletes  | Basketball player     | 29  | Yes                           |
| 13 | Non-athletes | Coach            | 48  | Yes                           |
| 14 | Non-athletes | Coach            | 51  | Yes                           |
| 15 | Non-athletes | Coach            | 50  | Yes                           |
| 16 | Non-athletes | Coach            | 55  | Yes                           |
| 17 | Non-athletes | Sport management   | 54  | No                            |
| 18 | Non-athletes | Sport management  | 57  | Yes                           |
| 19 | Non-athletes | Sports psychologist | 54  | Yes                           |
| 20 | Non-athletes | Sports psychologist | 48  | Yes                           |
| 21 | Non-athletes | Sports psychologist | 45  | No                            |
| 22 | Non-athletes | Sociologist of sports | 49  | Yes                           |
| 23 | Non-athletes | Sociologist of sports | 48  | No                            |
participants’ time (Creswell & Báez, 2020), we presented some gifts (like books and art paintings), and we suggested free use of academic services such as counseling sessions and scientific resources to athletes. We recruited non-athletes such as coaches, sports managers, sports psychologists, and sociologists who have expertise in athletes’ lifestyles with the purposeful sampling method. Purposeful sampling is selecting participants for a qualitative project by recruiting individuals who can help inform the central phenomenon in the study (Creswell & Báez, 2020). We confirmed their expertise by criteria like authoring papers or books about athletes’ lives and having solid relationships with athletes.

Generally, according to Table 2, 12 of 23 participants are athletes. Eight of the 11 non-athlete participants had high-level sports experience. Thus, they are suitable candidates for interviewing about elite athletes’ lifestyles. Participant 17 had high experience managing different professional sports clubs, and many athletes described him as a good manager. He cares not only about athletes’ sports performance but also about other facets of their lives. Based on athletes’ comments, participant 21 possessed an excellent relationship with athletes in addition to academic expertise. Lastly, participant 23 had many studies about elite athletes’ different issues.

**Interviews**

Due to Glaser’s emphasis on unstructured qualitative interviews, this type of interview was used as the primary tool for data collection. Also, there was no set of fixed questions in interviews regarding not to use interview instructions in this approach or beginning with an empty mind (Jones & Alony, 2011). However, considering two main groups of participants (athletes and non-athletes), the questions of these groups were different. We asked the athletes how they lived. In contrast, we asked non-athletes (experts) about how to improve the lifestyle of athletes. Of course, with the start of the interviews, the questions about each participant became more widespread based on his/her unique experiences. In this study, it was decided to use a tape recorder in addition to writing. Although Glaser does not believe in recording interviews, tape recording can reflect many of the interviewees’ feelings, such as sadness, joy, sighs, etc., which can contribute to the richness of qualitative data (Artinian et al., 2009). Indeed, recording the interviews is common in studies on elite athletes (Bastos et al., 2020; Hayes et al., 2020; Kacperski et al., 2019; Tingaz, 2021). Also, we created favorable conditions for interviews by doing the following:

1. We tried to talk about sensitive and personal topics, such as the family thing, when the interviewee’s trust is gained at the end of the interview. In addition, if the concept and sentence seemed ambiguous or misunderstood, the researcher would repeat the concept to the interviewee to make sure they approved it.
2. Because lifestyle is essentially a slang topic, we tried to keep the interview open and not ask too many questions because (as) the participants themselves had a lot to say about it. In some cases, the interview process was more like a friendly conversation. Only the interviewer tried to open his mind about all aspects of life whenever he felt that the audience was too stuck in a subject or far from the research goal. For example, when the interviewee talked too much about financial issues and contracts, or, for example, when the club manager was absent, the interviewer would ask him what he thought about the cultural problems of the athletes.

3. Considering that athletes have two sports seasons, including in and out season of competition, an attempt was made to draw the athletes’ attention to both seasons because the pressure of competitions and training in the competition season in many sports is high compared to the out-of-competition season which could affect many parts of an athlete’s life.

4. Creating a sense of comfort, privacy, no distraction, and easy access were the most important criteria for choosing the interview location. Regarding the way of sitting and in line with the study on elite athletes (Palmer & Leberman, 2009), an attempt was made to choose a face-to-face position to create an intimate atmosphere.

5. We avoided planning multiple interviews in 1 day, leading to data loss due to boredom. We also allowed athletes to make the desired plans about the time, location, and place of interviews. Several studies have also considered these conditions in elite athletes (Hayes et al., 2020; Motta et al., 2022; Palmer & Leberman, 2009).

6. To reassure athletes about the confidentiality of their personal information to comment freely on various aspects of life, a sample analysis of qualitative research in the form of an article report on a similar topic (e.g., social behaviors) was presented to them. Because some athletes were not familiar with scientific research, observing the sample of the final report of the qualitative research made sure that their information was confidential.

**Data Analysis: The Emergent Theory**

According to Glaser (1978), “generation of theory occurs around a core category” and indicates the main theme of the substantive area of inquiry. Thus, the core category captures the main concerns of study participants and accounts for most variation in a pattern of behavior (Glaser, 1978). Generally, the core category is determined through an iterative process of coding, memoing, theoretical sampling, and theoretical sorting. There are overlaps in these phases; they fluctuate back and forth and are not as clear-cut as they could be.

**Open Coding**

According to Glaser (1978, 1992) and Corbin and Strauss (1990), open coding is the first step towards discovering categories and their properties. Open coding aims to find as
many codes as possible without considering relevance (Glaser, 1978). Coding is the link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain them (Charmaz, 2014). Researchers highlight the data in open coding that they think may be of importance beyond a simple description of the context of the data (see Table 3). Despite being descriptive, the generated open codes set the stage for moving conceptualization to a higher level (Smith & Caddick, 2012).

Finding the Main Concern of Participants and Core Category

Since in the GT method, interviews and analysis (open coding) are performed simultaneously after open coding of the first interview, it was tried to determine the main concern of participants and the core category of the study. Glaser (1978) believes that asking the following question: “What do these data study?” is a way of finding the participants’ main concern. After holding 12 interviews, it was tried to figure out what is wrong with elite athletes’ lifestyles. “Lack of professionalism in life” was labeled as participants’ main concern. Then, the core category of the study was determined. The core category has some criteria, including being central (related to many other categories), frequent data recurrence, time-consuming data, and saturation (Glaser & Holton, 2005). The core category was named “professional mindset” in light of the above criteria and the participants’ main concern; the core category was named “professional mindset.”

| Table 3. Examples of Coding Process. |
|--------------------------------------|

| Examples of interviews quotes | Open coding | Selective coding | Final concepts |
|------------------------------|-------------|------------------|----------------|
| Q: What is the lifestyle of elite athletes like? | Spend leisure time with families | Family-oriented | Leisure |
| Some athletes spend their leisure time with their families, that is, they do any activity with the family, if they want to watch a movie, they do it with the family, if they want to go shopping, and they go with family members. | Virtual Online games internet dating | Virtual leisure | |
| Many people today spend a lot of leisure time in the virtual world, and elite athletes are no exception. Although dependence on the virtual world is inevitable today, these athletes prefer to choose virtual activities such as online games, internet dating, shopping, etc., perhaps because of the ease of these kinds of activities. | Luxurious Sumptuous activities | Sumptuous | |
| Showing luxurious and sumptuous activities has become an important habit in athletes. | Covertly Indoors | Closed leisure | |
| Private parties | |
| Small friendly gatherings | |

| Q: Is there a way to make the lifestyle of elite athletes more professional? | Professional sports clubs | Macro level | Professionalizing |
| We can say that elite athletes do not live professional lives, but part of that depends on them personally. The solution to this problem lies at various levels … Sports organizations must be professional and manage by professional principle … It is necessary sports colleges and universities established to support form athletes’ education. Supporting athletes’ academic education should be a priority in these universities … developing and presenting a role model athlete is crucial for young athletes. | Establishment of sports schools | |
| Suitable national role model | Academic support programs | |

Memo-Writing

Case-based and conceptual memos are two types of memos written during interviews and analysis of this study. After each interview, the interviewer writes a case-based memo reflecting what he/she has learned from the interview. These memos reflect the interviewer’s impressions and reactions to the participants’ experiences (Sbaraini et al., 2011). Conceptual or theoretical memos are other types of memos that help develop the theory. The memo is crucial as it maps out the emergent theory and identifies categories. Ground theorists view Memo-writing as a stage between data collection and formulating a draft of theory (Charmaz, 2008). According to Glaser (1978), memos are a key part of the process, and without using them to write up an idea, the researcher is not conducting the GT method. Memos are building blocks of theory development in the GT method (Haslam, 2002).

Selective Coding

In parallel with validating participants’ main concern and core category, selective coding was conducted, which involved coding only those variables that were related to the core category (Glaser, 1978). Selective coding means coding with respect to a core category. In selective coding, theoretical memos focus on aspects of the core category, and those aspects guide theoretical sampling. In this way, the theory can be enriched by focusing on the main category, and even the participants’ main concern and how they resolve it can be revealed through the data.
Theoretical Saturation: Ending the Collected Data and Analysis Process

Data collection and analysis often continue until saturation is reached. Theoretical saturation in qualitative research often means that what is said in interviews is repetitive, and no new information is received from the participants. However, determining the theoretical saturation point can be challenging.

According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), theoretical saturation can occur at three points in the research. When no new data reveal new categories; or when each category is richly and densely described and all of its properties have been revealed; and when the relationships between categories are well established and validated by data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In other words, theoretical saturation means all the concepts in developing theory are well understood and can be proved by data. Theoretical sorting is a key for formulating theory (Glaser, 1992). Theoretical sorting means arranging and sorting theoretical memos by similarity, association, and conceptual ordering (Glaser, 1978). Therefore, it contributes to theoretical saturation.

If the research area is multifaceted and participants are diverse, theoretical saturation may take longer to reach. Also, if a conceptual gap is identified during analysis, the researcher should expand the sample to collect more data to clarify and refine emerging concepts and codes. Suppose observation or interview elicits information about a concept that has not been heard or contradicts previous understandings. In that case, the researchers should expand the sample to include participants and experiences to understand this new concept more fully (Bradley et al., 2007). Since similar conditions were met in our study, when reaching the saturation point of the lifestyle components, we found that the lack of professionalism is a significant gap in the athletes’ lifestyles. Therefore, we added more variety to the samples (the recruitment of non-athletes), which increased the time of reaching the theoretical saturation.

This led to a more comprehensive theory covering athletes’ lifestyle components and the condition of their modifications. Therefore, no theoretical saturation was obtained for each participating group alone in the present study. In simpler terms, the sum of the interviews of different groups on the lifestyle of elite athletes was considered because all participants described different aspects of the phenomenon, and there was no need for theoretical saturation of each group separately. On the other hand, the unit of analysis in grounded theory can be the concept, not the person, the group, or the case (Corbin & Strauss, 1990); therefore, the sampling should have conditions that enrich the concepts. Hence, maximum variation sampling is often used to select participants with valuable information (Brown et al., 2002).

Many studies have recruited highly diverse groups as samples in the GT studies, such as heterogeneous stakeholders in the study of perceptions of sustainable tourism (Hardy & Beeton, 1999), different groups in high-quality leadership programs (Eich, 2008), and two diverse groups in establishing a participatory library model (Nguyen, 2015). As a result, the recruitment of different groups as the sample in the present study was not inconsistent with the basics of the GT studies. It even was essential due to the nature of the concept under study.

Basic Social Process: Professionalizing

As stated earlier, one of the features of the Glaserian GT approach is the emergence of the BSP, which of course, is not compulsive. Glaser (1996) claims that GT is ideally suited to a study that continues over time; therefore, stages of a BSP can emerge and demonstrate changes occurring over time (Glaser, 1996). Glaser identified two types of BSPs in his paper published in 1978, including “basic social psychological process [BSSP] and basic social structural process [BSPP].” However, in his paper written in 1996, Glaser appeared to be less pedantic about the types mentioned above; instead, he preferred to refer to a singular concept of BSPs (Glaser, 1978, 1996). According to Glaser (1978, 1996), any emergent theory should account for patterns and processes of behavior that are grounded in the data. These processes occur over time as stages, and as they change, they will make a sequence. In this study, the BSP was named “professionalizing” primarily because the main concern of the participants and the core category were “lack of professionalism in life” and “professional mindset.” Professionalizing as a process describes stages of resolving the athletes’ lifestyle problems and becoming professional athletes. The fact is that the process of becoming a professional athlete is not well understood. Professionalism in sports does not only mean applying sports skills but also applying them to the other aspects of an athlete’s life.

Theoretical Coding and Mapping Concepts

As codes and memos are generated, the researchers begin to understand their relationships. Theoretical coding refers to this process. Theoretical codes “conceptualize how substantive codes may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into a theory. They are emergent like substantive codes; they weave the fractured story back together again. Theoretical codes give integrative scope, broad pictures, and a new perspective” (Glaser, 1978). In other words, we can link concepts to each other clearly and distinctly through theoretical coding. The concepts can be generated by open coding, selective coding, or even memo-writing. The situations of each emerged code were investigated along with the relationships between them through theoretical coding. At this time, theoretical saturation was obtained. As a final step in our model development, concept mapping was done. The concept map represents key concepts of the theory and how they are related to one another. Theoretical coding continued to understand the relationships between concepts fully. Glaser (2005) states that novice researchers often miss theoretical
codes because they are difficult to understand. They are unnecessary, but a GT becomes more integrated and relevant when theoretical coding is used to raise the theory to a higher level (Glaser, 2005).

Indeed, the concept map is a valuable tool for developing grounded theory. The concept map illustrates how a theory is conceived at a specific time, which helps to build the theory. This is a graphic representation of how the theory evolves and reduces the integrative memos to a diagrammatic representation. Concept maps provide a structure for presenting and organizing data and visually help the reader see the theory (Artinian et al., 2009). There is no single instruction to construct a concept map in grounded theory. Conceptual mapping seems to be directly related to theoretical coding. Giske and Artinian (2007) write about this “As we worked on theoretical coding, we discussed different ways of relating the concepts to each other and how it would be possible to put the participants’ main concern in the model.” Then these scholars present the phases of developing the concept map and refining it during the time so that it consists of the main concern and covers all categories simultaneously. Therefore, theoretical coding must be continued until the final model is developed (Giske & Artinian, 2007). Glaser (1978) introduced a typology of theoretical codes as guidelines for researchers about doing theoretical coding (see Table 4). Despite the usefulness of the Glaser list, it seems this list is incomplete, and the coding families overlap. Therefore, the researchers must not limit their analysis to the Glaser list (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical coding reflects the logic embedded in previous theories, and this underlying logic could be supplied by “Abduction” (Thornberg et al., 2013). According to Glaser (1998), previous theories could be in many different disciplines (Glaser, 1998). Abduction means “a way of capturing the dialectical shuttling between the domain of observations and the domains of ideas.” (Atkinson et al., 2003). The researchers who use abduction reasoning are like Sherlock Holmes; they constantly move back and forth between data and pre-existing and develop knowledge or theories to find patterns and the best descriptions (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012).

The steps taken in this study for theoretical coding and concept mapping included the following:

1- The coding process continued, including open coding, selective coding, and letting final concepts emerge from all interviews (like the codes in Table 3).
2- When the final concepts were created, we wrote them on sticky note paper and pasted them on the board.
3- Using Glaser’s theoretical codes in Table 4, we shifted each sticky note paper on the board. We considered all Glaser’s coding families. For example, we categorized many of the concepts by type family. Concepts like responsibility, financial literacy, consumption, leisure, life vision, competencies, religious behaviors, and personal issues were similar because they refer to lifestyle indicators. It means we see different modes of them in athletes’ lives. We see differences in consuming various goods, such as luxury goods, or choosing different leisure activities among athletes. They have different religious orientations and not the same views on financial management, responsibility, or other life aspects. These concepts got closer to each other in the center of the concept map because of their similarity.
4- Professional mindset and professionalizing should be at the model’s center. Because professional mindset was a core category and Iranian athletes were weak in it. Professionalizing is a basic social process that can improve the professional mindset.
5- Athletes’ choices and preferences in items like responsibility, consumption, leisure, religious behaviors do not depend only on themselves. These choices are influenced by childhood deficiencies, familial situation, individual ideals, global styles, traditional elite styles,

Table 4. Examples of Glaser’s Coding Families.

| Coding families               | Theoretical codes                                                                 |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The 'six C's'                 | Causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances and conditions         |
| Process                       | Phases, progressions, passages, transitions, careers, trajectories, cycling, etc. |
| Basic family                  | Basic social process, basic social psychological process, basic social structural condition, etc. |
| Cultural family               | Social norms, social values, social beliefs, etc.                                  |
| Strategy family               | Strategies, tactics, manipulation, dealing with, positioning, dominating, etc.     |
| Degree family                 | Limit, range, grades, continuum, level, etc.                                     |
| Type family                   | Type, kinds, styles, classes, genre, etc.                                        |
| Dimension family              | Dimensions, sector, segment, part, aspect, section, etc.                          |
| Identity-self family          | Self-image, self-concept, self-worth, self-evaluation, identity, transformations of self, self-realization, etc. |
| Consensus family              | Agreements, contracts, conformity, homogeneity-heterogeneity, conflict, dissensus, etc. |
| Paired opposite family        | Ingroup–outgroup, in–out, manifest-latent, explicit-implicit, overt–covert, informal–formal, etc. |
| Cutting point family          | Boundary, cutting point, turning point, breaking point, deviance, etc.            |

(Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).
economic structure, socio-cultural structure, political-legal structure, and religion that have emerged in the coding process. We considered Bourdieu’s (1984) theory for understanding the nature of these concepts, which emphasized the importance of exterior social structures and conditions in individual decision-making. Although Bourdieu only uses the “social structures and conditions” term and does not specify precisely these structures (Bourdieu, 1984). Nevertheless, in our study, the structure and conditions are perfectly customized for the lives of athletes. We considered the theoretical codes of causes and conditions as outlined in Table 4. The causes and conditions do not possess the same power in our study. It means some of them are closer toathletes than others, like the familial situation compared to the political-legal structure. So, we divided causes and conditions based on closeness to athletes into three levels. Glaser does not have a specific theoretical code for linking concepts as levels. However, he says studying many theories across different disciplines can enable researchers to identify theoretical codes embedded in them and thus expand their knowledge base about theoretical codes. Glaser (2005) states that the more theoretical codes the researchers learn, the more they have the variability of seeing them emerge and fitting them to the theory (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Therefore, we considered the multi-level culture model (Erez & Gati, 2004) to understand the relationship between our theory levels. We could review this theory and use its logic because it had nothing to do with our study topic. Glaser (1992) claims that studying the literature of other fields increases the researcher’s theoretical sensitivity in conceptualization and theoretical coding (Glaser, 1992).

6- Professionalizing as the basic social process of the study also had the above condition. It can resolve the problems of Iranian elite athletes’ lifestyles. However, it depends on many concepts with different powers (which emerged in the coding process). Goal setting and imitation of a role model were at the micro-level. Professional sports clubs and sports schools were at the meso-level. Finally, the professional sports governing body, sports colleges, academic support programs, and national role models were macro-level.

7- The final concept map was created by moving sticky notes frequently on the board.

The final model includes concepts and relationships among them, a core category, and a BSP. Thus, all the collected data were adequately explained, and a theory was developed with a coherent set of concepts related to each other. The developed theory was presented to sports experts and athletes, and it was accepted and resonated with these audiences (see Figure 1).

The Challenges Stated in This Study and How to Handle Them

In this study, the silence of the interviewees on some personal issues of lifestyle was one of the most critical challenges faced by the researcher, which can be informative for researchers in this field. Lifestyle as a personal issue that includes health–disease-related behaviors, money (financial status), and social conditions can be one of the sensitive points of athletes that do not act easily in its emergence. The athletes are less inclined to emerge the personal issues of life because; they are more visible to the public and are relatively famous in the media. This state creates a sense of introversion that challenges interviewing and exploring data. In this regard, Waddington (2013) states that initiating conversation with elite athletes is difficult because they are trained to safely interview by their media interview experiences (Waddington, 2013). For solving this problem, the interviewees had to gain the trust of the interviewer and the interview process. In our case, several essential approaches were taken, each of which is described below:

1. According to Law (2019), one of the researchers’ solutions to eliminate the silence challenge is taking the role of “insiders.” This means that athletes were more likely to provide information if they felt the interviewer had a similar experience with the aim that they could be understood (Law, 2019). For this purpose, although researchers were in the sports science area and had sports experiences, they tried to use athletes or trusted coaches who were justified about the research subject as intermediaries for interviews.

2. The second consideration was about the place and time of interviews, which were tried to be adapted with respect to the participant’s preference; therefore, wherever and whenever they felt comfortable, the interview was scheduled. Despite that, the researchers’ priority for interviews was in person (to understand the athlete’s moods while interviewing), in cases where athletes did not want to visit in person; interviews were conducted by video call (In setting the type of interview based on preferences of the subjects, there is a tiny point that qualitative researchers can pay attention to it. In simple terms, in this study, the lifestyles of athletes were investigated, and lifestyle is related to interest and preferences; therefore, the preferred type of interviewing individuals can suggest their orientations, e.g., when the athlete conducts a virtual interview. There could be a preference for virtual relationships over face-to-face relationships in this situation. As a result, this had a positive effect on our memo-writing. Therefore, if the study subject is concerned about social behaviors, researchers will be able to derive valuable points by reflecting on how an individual prefers to utilize his or her preferred tools, which are then tested during an interview).
3. Taking changes in players’ training schedules into account due to match conditions and athletes’ lives sometimes made the interviews unplannable. The researcher’s solution was convenience sampling to facilitate flexibility that did not challenge the overall interview process. The best option was using convenience and snowball sampling methods simultaneously.

4. The fourth point was related to the interview process. Given the breadth of the concept of lifestyle, the interview was held in an open form for athletes to speak about anything they liked. Therefore, the interviewer started with general questions and then moved on to questions about lifestyle. They became more eager to continue the interview with a smile and a nod from the interviewer during the interview because the researcher seemed to understand them well. In some cases, the interviews turned into conversations, and of course, the researcher did not avoid them because these chats contained many points. In some cases, the interviewer even sympathized with them to give them a greater sense of security. Others have also noted this policy to gain open interviews (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Law, 2019; McConnell-Henry et al., 2010).

5. The last case, which can be challenging to a qualitative researcher if not handled properly, but it can lead to a stronger theory if appropriately handled, was that the subjects were changed during the study. In other words, although the interview and coding process on lifestyle was started from athletes, in the following, it led the researchers to interview some coaches, sports managers, sports psychologists, and sports sociologists to complete the final theory on lifestyle in the form of a BSP. There was no general idea about the athletes’ lifestyle; the Glaserian GT method was preferred rather than Strauss-Corbins. In this way, the researchers relied on the BSP to develop the theory by identifying the main concerns of athletes in lifestyle and collecting data regarding solving these concerns. This process proved that if the subject is multifaceted, such as lifestyle, it can be analyzed through the Glaserian GT method, and all its dimensions would be completed via a BSP.

Conclusion

Elite athletes have received a great deal of attention in society in recent decades due to the rapid development of the sports
industry, and their lifestyles have become more interesting for citizens.

Lifestyle is a popular concept that is easy to understand, but it is scientifically challenging. What is an athlete’s life like? Or, to put it more scientifically, what is their lifestyle? However, there was no comprehensive theory about the lifestyle of elite athletes. In analyzing the lifestyle of elite athletes, restricting it to concepts such as consumption and fashion might lead to a superficial interpretation. The Glaserian GT method enabled the researchers to develop a theory about elite athletes’ lifestyles. Compared to Strauss and Corbin or the systematic approach of GT, this method has some critical differences. Attention and focus on participants’ concerns, staying in the research environment for a long time to discover participants’ main concerns, coding flexibility, and the emergence of a BSP around the main category are some differences. The Glaserian GT approach provided a helpful tool for understanding elite athletes’ lifestyles. The researchers were able to analyze elite athletes’ lifestyles from different perspectives using this approach. In addition to identifying lifestyle components of elite athletes, they presented the main concerns of participants and even how to address them over time.

We recruited two groups of samples, athletes, and non-athletes, for interviews. The Glaserian GT enabled us to gather different ideas and experiences into one theory. We uncovered a large portion of lifestyle components by analyzing athletes’ interviews. However, what prompted the study to include non-athletes was discovering the main concern of “lack of professionalism in life.” Indeed, we could present a theory about athletes’ lifestyles by interviewing them, but even the athletes themselves believed their life was not professional. Thus, it was necessary to resolve the elite athletes’ lifestyle problems by interviewing non-athletes (experts). As a result, it can be said that interviewing a wide range of participants most likely did not adversely affect our data and findings. Hence, the proposed theory is a rich theory that describes elite athletes’ lifestyles and shows the conditions for their improvement. Of course, this theory is still very young, and more qualitative studies on elite athletes’ lifestyles are needed to refine it.

Conducting a study based on the GT method requires characteristics such as chaos tolerance, hard work, and creativity, as stated by researchers previously. Researchers should possess more powerful qualitative research skills since the Glaserian GT method appears more chaotic than Strauss and Corbins GT approach. The steps taken in this research may be used to study various concepts in the field of sports science that have the following conditions:

1. There is no comprehensive, universal theory for the selected phenomenon, highly influenced by the local context, such as sportsmanship and fair play.
2. Various perspectives and ideas are required to understand a phenomenon such as sports corruption, which involves many stakeholders and actors.
3. The phenomenon in question requires a process to improve over time, in which case the Basic Social Process would be helpful. It means sports science researchers, especially inexperienced ones, may benefit from recognizing and naming the Basic Social Process in this study.
4. According to Glaser’s (1998; 2005) idea regarding studying many theories in different disciplines for increasing the theoretical sensitivity in conceptualization and theoretical coding, it seems the report of our study and its various stages can also be helpful for researchers in all fields.

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Ethics Approval
Given that ethical considerations are one of the most important conditions for conducting research, in this study, the following instructions were done to observe these considerations:

Proposal for this study was approved by the Ethics Board of the University of Tehran.

A list of possible actions and strategies was provided in selecting interviewees and conducting interviews in accordance with Charmaz’s titles.

Participants took part in the interviews voluntarily and they had the right to withdraw at any stage, and their information was strictly confidential. Confidentiality was maintained by assigning an individual code number for each participant, and the number was used only to distinguish between participants’ interviews.

All statements were anonymous prior to analysis, and the researchers were very careful not to disclose potential details, such as location, team, or names of participants.

According to ethical guidelines, all oral and written information was provided to the interviewees prior to the interview.

The interview environment was chosen with respect to the participant’s consent so they could freely share their experiences.

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