The Utility of Constructivist Grounded Theory in Critical Policy Analysis

Tebogo B. Sebeelo

Abstract

Constructivist grounded theory (CGT) has gained traction as a popular method across various fields in both the social and natural sciences. Its acclaim lies in its constructivist and pragmatist heritages that emphasize flexibility, co-construction and subjectivity. Despite its general appeal, CGT remain largely unexplored in the area of critical policy analysis. Using data from an alcohol policy dissertation in Botswana, this paper applies CGT to What’s the Problem Represented to Be (WPR), a Foucauldian-inspired poststructural policy analysis framework. WPR served as a framework while CGT provided strategies to do it. The paper demonstrates the utility of CGT as a useful strategy in critical policy analysis. The practice of CGT aligns with critical policy studies that consider subjectivity, temporality and reject value-free enquiry. Furthermore, CGT aligns with policy analysis studies that explicate human experience and meanings. The implications of deploying CGT to critical policy analysis are outlined in the paper.

Keywords

Constructivist grounded theory, WPR, alcohol policy, critical policy analysis, Botswana

Introduction

Grounded theory (GT) approach has become a popular qualitative method across a wide range of disciplines. GT attempts to generate theory through inductive research. Developed in the 1960s by Glaser and Strauss (1967), this approach “brings together elements of multiple qualitative research methods to create a systematic roadmap whereby data can be simultaneously, rather than sequentially, processed through during both collection and analysis phases” (Hussein et al., 2020: 4). The value of the approach lies in generating theory through the stories of participants that are “grounded” in the data. A key method of GT is the “constant comparative method” where “the researcher analyzes data by constant comparison, initially of data with data, progressing to comparisons between their interpretations translated into codes and categories and more data” (Mills et al., 2006: 27). The advantage of using this comparative method in grounded theory is to allow for deeper understanding of the data, gather/refine ideas and elevate them into theoretical categories that form the basis of theory generation.

The approach has become a cornerstone of studies from various fields like nursing (Miles, 2018; Singh & Estefan, 2018), education research (Fetherston & Kelly, 2007) health and illness (Charmaz, 1990; Swoboda, 2006; Woods et al., 2016), technology (Joo, 2011; Webster & Son, 2015) and policy studies (Weed, 2005; Richards & Farrokhnia, 2016; Sebeelo & Belgrave, 2021) amongst others. These studies tap into the pragmatic and flexible nature of GT that gives the researcher more control of the data collection and analysis process. Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) contend that “the defining purpose of this method is to construct a theory that offers an abstract understanding of one or more concerns in the studied world” (p. 305).

GT has undergone significant shifts since the traditional method offered by Glaser and Strauss. Several genres of GT have evolved from the traditional method such as the “Straussian GT” and “Constructivist grounded theory” (CGT) by Kathy Charmaz. While these different GT iterations share similar techniques from...
the traditional GT, they diverge on philosophical and ideological frameworks especially how they approach theory generation (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). The constructivist turn of grounded theory (CGT) has particularly appealed to many scholars due to its roots in pragmatist philosophy and constructivism that advocates for social reforms (Charmaz, 2017a). While CGT maintains the iterative and emergent nature of traditional grounded theory, it adopts a different epistemological approach. It views data as co-constructed not discovered. CGT draws its intellectual heritage from the constructivist school that refines “social contexts, interaction, sharing viewpoints, and interpretive understandings” (Charmaz, 2014:1). Furthermore, this approach values reflexivity and goes against the positivist and objectivist assumptions of the traditional grounded theory. While CGT has gained prominence, its application to critical policy studies remains neglected and less understood. Grounded theorists have not systematically deployed CGT to critical policy analysis.

In this paper, I reflect on an alcohol dissertation that combined both CGT and WPR. I explore the utility of CGT to a critical policy analysis framework called, What’s the Problem Represented to Be (WPR), a Foucauldian-inspired poststructural policy analysis framework. WPR provided a framework for thinking about the alcohol policy issue whilst CGT offered a strategy of doing the project. I argue that CGT is well positioned as a methodological tool in critical policy frameworks that explicate human experience and meanings. I begin the article with a brief discussion of the development of grounded theory as an approach, followed by the basic tenets of CGT after which I introduce WPR as a policy analysis framework. I then demonstrate the utility of CGT as a good fit for policy analysis using WPR as an example. Throughout this paper, I maintain that CGT’s emphasis on induction, reflectivity and explanation aligns with policy studies with a critical inquiry. Both approaches give prominence to “methodological self-consciousness” (Charmaz, 2020). Furthermore, I highlight that CGT is well suited for data collection during COVID-19 due to its flexible research tools. I conclude the article by discussing the implications for future work that deploys CGT in critical policy studies.

The Development of Grounded Theory

The development of grounded theory can be traced to Glaser and Strauss (1967) seminal work, Discovery of Grounded Theory. When GT emerged in the 1960s in the United States, qualitative research was not thought to be rigorous enough compared to quantitative studies which had more refined analytic approaches. Tie et al. (2019) contend that at the time when quantitative research was reigning supreme, Glaser and Strauss “challenged the belief that qualitative research lacked rigour and detailed the method of constant comparative analysis that enables the generation of theory” (p. 2). The debate between quantitative and qualitative research has not subsided and continues to cause controversy amongst researchers today (see Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019; Belgrave et al., 2002). Glaser and Strauss offered GT to bring to light the strength of qualitative research by offering a systematic approach that could be used to collect and analyze data. Moreover, they challenged existing theories and approaches that believed that theory could only be tested deductively (Tie et al., 2019). The original GT by Glaser and Strauss offered an approach that generates inductive theories from data where “concepts are summarized into codes which-with the benefit of further data-are placed into higher level “categories” that may provide the basis for hypothesis” (Hussein et al., 2020: 4). In GT, the collection of data is “grounded” on the narratives and experiences of participants. Mills et al. (2006) emphasize that a typical grounded theory work must attend to common traits such as theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling, treatment of the literature, coding, memoing, constant comparative method and identification of core category. These steps are usually applied by grounded theorists through a constant comparison method to generate an integrated theory.

The original version of grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss provided groundbreaking ideas about qualitative work in the social sciences. This version of GT assumed that methods of enquiry in qualitative research were neutral. Glaser and Strauss believed that reality can be ‘discovered’ and exist outside the researcher and the research process. Under the traditional GT, the researcher was assumed to be a passive listener who had limited interactions with participant’s stories and narratives. In this offering, theory generation was assumed to be systematic and had to follow a set of logical steps. In other words, grounded theory was understood to be a non-reflexive and systematic approach that could be used to ‘discover’ a theory. Charmaz and Belgrave (2015) maintain that an objectivist grounded theory that is similar to the Glaser and Strauss model has several facets. It “(1) seeks discoveries in an external knowable world; (2) assumes a neutral, passive observer but an active analyst; (3) studies phenomenon from the outside as an objective external authority; (4) treats representation of research participants as unproblematic; (5) distinguishes facts and values; (6) regards completed analysis as objective reports” (p. 4).

While many iterations of grounded theory have developed over time, it is widely acknowledged that the original version by Glasser and Strauss laid the ground for subsequent works in qualitative studies versed with developing theory from data (Mills et al., 2006). Glasser and Strauss later went their separate ways and extended the original version. For example, Strauss in conjunction with Juliet Corbin offered the “Straussian GT” that was inspired by symbolic interactionism. Another GT genre inspired by the constructivist school emerged that built from both the original version and Straussian GT. In the next section I discuss the constructivist turn of grounded theory, its critique of previous versions and its value in studying social phenomena.
Beyond Positivism: Basic Tenets of Constructivist Grounded Theory

One of the more recent genres of GT is the constructivist grounded theory that is associated with Kathy Charmaz (1939–2020). CGT draws its intellectual heritage from the constructivist school which holds that our life experiences influence how we view the world and consequently how we construct objects and meanings of truth (Mills et al., 2006). Constructivist grounded theorists are concerned with events in their social, historical and material conditions (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019). In the CGT tradition, action and meanings are highly subjective and cannot be separated from our value system. In essence, the assumptions we have about the world shape how we do research (Charmaz, 2017b). This proposition of CGT is contra earlier versions of GT especially the Glaser and Strauss model that suggested that reality is out there to be discovered.

CGT also assumes that “action and meaning are dialectical; meaning shapes action and action affects meaning” (Hallberg, 2006: 146). Researchers aligned to this tradition argue that actions should be “situated in their social, historical, local and interactional contexts” (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021: 315). The practice of CGT therefore acknowledges the active participation of the researcher and the participant in the research process. As Tie et al. (2019) states, “a constructivist co-constructs experience and meanings with participants” (p. 2). While traditional grounded theory viewed the researcher as external to the research process, CGT acknowledges the role of both the researcher and participant in constructing reality. It “shreds the notion of a neutral observer and value-free expert” (Charmaz, 2014: 13). Kenny and Fourie (2015) suggests some methodological differences that distinguishes CGT from other version of grounded theory. They highlight differences in coding procedures, philosophical traditions and their treatment of literature. For example, while other models advocated for strict and rule-bound coding style, CGT emphasized flexibility that reified the researcher’s imagination and creativity (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). Within CGT, the researcher is intimately involved in the coding process every step of the way and constantly maintains reflexivity and “methodological consciousness” which means “detecting and dissecting our worldviews, language, and meanings and revealing how they enter our research in ways we had previously not realized” (Charmaz, 2017a: 36). CGT has not been without its critics. Glaser (2002) for instance has challenged CGT’s methodological approach as it relates to researcher’s involvement. He believes that interviewing in GT is predominantly about passive listening where participants usually narrate their stories in their own way. Interpreting these narratives and stories “would be an unwarranted intrusion by the researcher” (Glaser 2002: 3). Additionally, Glaser charges that Charmaz’s push for an interview guide to frame the interview process is largely determined by the interviewer and cannot be said to be constructive. That is, “if the data is garnered through an interview guide that forces and feeds interviewee responses then it is constructed to a degree by the interviewer imposed bias” (Glaser 2002:3). According to Glaser, constructivism within GT is untenable.

Despite its criticisms, CGT has gained widespread popularity amongst scholars across a range of disciplines with a critical enquiry. As stated earlier, its strength lies in its pragmatic approach that values co-construction and resist the passive researcher and logical order of data collection and analysis offered by earlier versions of grounded theory. CGT essentially “shifts the foundation of the method from positivism to a relativist epistemology” (Charmaz, 2017b: 5), a strength that separates it from earlier iterations of GT. Its open-ended and emergent nature positions it well to be methodologically deployed to projects with a critical enquiry (Charmaz, 2020). While CGT has been a revelation, it has largely been neglected in critical policy analysis studies. There is a dearth of studies that have utilized CGT as a strategy in policy studies. In the next section, I introduce WPR, a poststructural policy analysis framework that is acquiescent to CGT.

“What’s the Problem Represented to be (WPR) Approach”?

What’s the Problem Represented to be (WPR) is a Foucauldian-inspired policy analysis framework that considers how policies are made. The framework draws attention to the making of policies, their representation, silences and the effects on political subjects. Proffered by Carol Bacchi, the approach goes beyond constructivism and focus on interrogating how policy proposals come to be. Bacchi (2015) maintains that WPR challenges mainstream conceptions that policy “problems” sit outside the policy process waiting to be “addressed” and “solved”. Rather, she argues that policy proposals are constituted in policy and practice. For Bacchi, an examination of the politics of policy emergence “challenges a theory/practice divide. Theory is itself practice” (Bacchi, 2012: 3). In other words, policy problems are not discovered, rather, they are implied in policy practices. WPR therefore considers problematisations of policies; how policies are made (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). In the critical policy tradition, problematisations neither refers to understanding how a condition is put forward as a problem nor the processes of how stakeholders understand policy problems. Problematisations are rather understood in the Foucauldian sense, how issues are “constituted as “problems”-within policies” (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016: 39). As a framework, WPR also considers the question of governance; the politics of making policy proposals. It asks the questions, who is speaking? Where are they speaking from? Why are they being listened to compared to other speakers?

Critical policy scholars and poststructuralists have embraced WPR across various subfields. Studies employing this approach
range from addiction studies (Secar & Fraser, 2014), alcohol and other drugs (Lancaster & Ritter, 2014; Manton & Moore, 2016; Sebeelo, 2021), homelessness (Zufferey, 2014), immigration policy (Chan, 2018), education policy (Bills & Howard, 2017) and other policy arenas. Its appeal lies mainly in challenging the taken-for-granted ways of policy making and how policies can be thought about differently. As Goodwin (2011) suggests, WPR policy (Chan, 2018), education policy (Bills & Howard, 2017) and other policy arenas. Its appeal lies mainly in challenging the taken-for-granted ways of policy making and how policies can be thought about differently. As Goodwin (2011) suggests, WPR researchers have the “additional task of contesting dominant ideas about what constitutes evidence” (p. 168).

The WPR framework is suitable and well-positioned to be integrated with CGT. Since both approaches are complimentary and share similar epistemological orientations, it was easier to integrate them in the alcohol policy project. In the next section, I demonstrate the applicability of CGT in an alcohol policy dissertation conducted in Botswana between 2020 and 2021. I show how CGT was productively used as a strategy with WPR to illuminate alcohol policy development processes in Botswana.

The Alcohol Policy Dissertation Project

The alcohol policy project examined how alcohol was represented as a policy problem in Botswana. The background to the project emerged from recent developments that suggest that alcohol is seen as a “problem” in Botswana. While the country has implemented several regulations on the consumption of alcohol since pre-colonial times, these efforts were heightened in 2008 with the implementation of drastic alcohol reforms. These include a 30% tax levy, reduction in trading hours for bars and other licensed premises, increased penalties for alcohol-related traffic offenses and outlawing residential sales of alcohol (Sebeelo, 2020). The government of Botswana subsequently development a National Alcohol Policy in 2010 to guide alcohol interventions in the country. These events motivated the current study where I examined how alcohol was represented as a policy problem in Botswana. More importantly, blending WPR and CGT as a framework/strategy approach proved to be relevant for this critical policy work.

Integrating Constructivist Grounded Theory and What’s the Problem Represented to Be (WPR): The Alcohol Policy Analysis Project

I integrated CGT and WPR to examine the alcohol policy development processes in Botswana on a dissertation that was undertaken as a partial fulfillment of the requirements of a PhD (Sociology) at the University of Miami, Florida in May 2021. WPR served as framework while CGT was a strategy to do the project. I used three (3) data sources: policy documents, open-ended semi structured interviews with both alcohol stakeholders and drinkers. Integrating these approaches was undertaken for several reasons. First, the dissertation was undertaken during the onset of COVID-19 meaning I could not collect data the traditional way. I had to do all my data collection from the United States with participants in Botswana due to international travel restrictions. The challenges brought by COVID-19 meant I had to use flexible methodological approaches hence I settled for CGT and WPR.

Second, I used CGT as a strategy to undertake the WPR project. This approach was relevant to navigate my data collection and analysis strategy. For instance, I was able to study the language of documents/texts on alcohol policy development process in Botswana. Both approaches attend to the use of language especially how it “shapes our views and how we know the world” (Charmaz, 2017b: 5, emphasis added). Third, conducting cross-national interviews in a pandemic could only be possible through a flexible method like CGT. Interviews were undertaken to complement documents and official texts. Interviews with alcohol stakeholders and drinkers were framed using CGT and investigated how policies were constructed and their impact on the drinker’s choices. Interviews specifically dealt with how policy proposals impacted the lived experience of drinkers. The methodological approach on how I integrated these approaches is illustrated in detail in Figure 1 below.

Methodological Approach

The Process

In the project, data collection and analysis were informed by grounded theory methods and proceeded through various steps. These steps included open and focused coding, constant comparison, memo writing and thematic generation. The development of the study problematization aligns with the WPR framework. Since the study was mainly informed by grounded theory methods, data analysis was done simultaneously with data collection. In the next section, I discuss each step and show how I purposively integrated CGT and WPR to develop the problematization of alcohol policy in Botswana. I also demonstrate how conducting research during COVID-19 affected my data collection and analysis strategy.

Step 1: Document/textual analysis and interviews with alcohol stakeholders. The first step in my data collection process was to study documents and policy texts on alcohol policy processes in Botswana as illustrated in Figure 1 above. In studying documents, I was mainly concerned with how they represented alcohol policy practices in Botswana. In line with CGT, this was a highly subjective and value-laden process where I used my previous knowledge of working in Botswana. I considered documents as instruments of power (Bourdieu, 1991) that assert authority through policy language. I also analyzed documents and texts as discourses embedded with meanings. To stay true to CGT and WPR, my strategy was to delve deep into processes of alcohol policy development and hidden meanings of texts to understand how they are constituted, organized and transformed.
I selected and analyzed eight (8) policy documents that included the 2008 Presidential Addresses, National AIDS Frameworks, the Botswana Multi-sectoral Strategy for Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (2018–2023), Parliamentary Hansard (2018) and the National Alcohol Levy and Beverages Fund Order (2008). These documents were chosen due to the different roles they played in alcohol policy discourses in Botswana. For instance, the Presidential Addresses were chosen because they reveal the governmental strategies that had an influence on policy issues in Botswana. The Parliamentary Hansard explicated policy debates on alcohol at the legislative level whilst the Levy Fund Order detailed the funding priorities set by government on alcohol-related activities. The key theme from policy documents was that young people in Botswana were responsible for most alcohol problems. Some documents especially Presidential Addresses spoke about “discipline” amongst youth as a cause of concern. Young people in Botswana were singled out as disorderly, out of control and most likely to cause alcohol-related problems.

I also conducted semi-structured interviews with officials and alcohol stakeholders in the first step. Since policy texts were obtained from officials, complementing them with interviews yielded richer data. This process was worthwhile as officials constantly referred to policy texts during interviews. It is important to emphasize that I used open-ended questionnaires to access most alcohol officials and stakeholders. This was primarily because the study was conducted during COVID-19 which coincided with national lockdowns and the implementation of COVID-related safety protocols. Most officials worked from home meaning that they could only be accessed through emailing questionnaires followed by semi-structured interviews. This adjustment strategy aligns with CGT that allows for the re-organization of research tools to suit your situation during data collection. It demonstrates reflexivity and the active participation of the researcher in the research process. An interview guide was used to conduct interviews with alcohol stakeholders. Overall, the first step mainly involved collecting data from alcohol officials and stakeholders that illuminated the alcohol policy practices that the government of Botswana took in developing the entire policy arena.

**Step 2: Interviews with alcohol drinkers.** The second step entailed interviews with alcohol drinkers. Since I had established alcohol policy development processes from policy texts with officials, the second step was to understand how policy discourses impacted drinker’s choices. I was interested in how the construction of policy proposals shaped the lived experiences of drinkers. Since I was collecting data from the United States, I conducted telephone interviews with participants in Botswana. I purposively selected participants from Botswana and asked them to refer their close contacts to participate in the study. All participants had to consent to the study and were given an opportunity to review and verify transcriptions after interviews. This was a symbiotic process that promotes co-construction between the researcher and participants. It also aligns with CGT and critical approaches where participants are afforded the space to speak back and freely about their experiences. The views of alcohol drinkers on alcohol policy processes were mixed and variegated. Some suggested that
alcohol policies were needed during the COVID-19 pandemic to protect people from the virus while others felt government’s efforts were intrusive and people should be allowed to drink. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly shaped drinker’s viewed about alcohol policy experiences in Botswana. Overall, I selected twenty (20) participants that included nine (9) women and eleven (11) men. Most participants were middle-aged Christians who identified as middle-class. The interviews lasted between 30 and one hour 30 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

**Step 3: Initial and open coding.** The third step involved coding all interviews and texts from officials and drinkers. This was an iterative process of moving between transcripts and codes to ensure that they are “grounded” in participant’s narratives. As illustrated in Figure 1, data was first coded openly to identify implicit meanings about alcohol policy experiences. I undertook coding as analysis, as a “process of attaching conceptual labels to data, labels that capture what the relevant data are about” (Belgrave & Seide, 2019: 7). I read through all texts to identify information that was relevant to my research questions and openly coded it. At this stage, I undertook line-by-line coding and looked for information that logically fit together. For grounded theorists, line-by-line coding helps explicate participants experiences and perspectives (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). I did the same with open-ended interviews for both officials and alcohol drinkers. For example, in policy texts, my initial coding suggested that most policy documents constructed alcohol as a “problem” that caused various social problems like road accidents, health issues and moral debauchery. This message was consistent across most documents and official texts. For officials and alcohol drinkers, most initial codes pointed towards the impact of COVID-19 on drinking experiences. For example, officials spoke about the management of COVID-19 and how alcohol was to blame for spreading the virus.

At this stage, I also wrote my memos as I coded fragments of my data. Memo writing was reflexive at this stage. Over and above memo writing, I theoretically sampled my data at this stage. In grounded theory, theoretical sampling is used to explore tentative categories of data to gauge and feel the progress of enquiry (Charmaz, 2014). It usually leads to systematic checks into data analysis and might result thematic categories until saturation or when no new properties of categories can no longer emerge. Charmaz and Belgrave (2015) argue that this process “may lead to returning to earlier research participants and settings. It may mean seeking new participants and settings or returning to earlier ones with new questions” (p. 3). In this study, I built theoretical sampling in my data collection. For instance, since most alcohol stakeholders and drinkers narrated about the impact of COVID-19, I refined my interview guide to include questions that aligned with drinking during COVID-19. For alcohol stakeholders, this process mainly occurred between questionnaires and interviews. Sampling my work theoretically positioned me to increase definitiveness and generality (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2015) at the same time building precision to my research enquiry. After initial coding, I moved to focused coding which was the fourth step.

**Step 4: Focused coding.** The fourth step focused the codes that were developed in step 3. During the stage, the objective was to gain analytic control of my data (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2015). The aim was to elevate initial codes into analytic categories that gave impetus to my analytic strategy. Focused coding was also an iterative process of moving back and forth between the initial codes, reflexive memos and data categories to ensure that they are aligned. At this stage, I employed a grounded theory technique called the Constant Comparative Method (CHC). Constant comparative method is a technique used to make sequential comparisons (Charmaz, 2014) where data is compared with data to look for similarities and differences. Constantly comparing my data kept checks on how my analysis was progressing and focused subsequent data collection. It also ensured that I achieve methodological rigor and guard against researcher bias as I challenged fresh concepts with data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

At this stage, I complemented my codes with analytic memos which aligned with focused codes. Moving my memos to an analytic phase, was an important and pivotal strategy that bridged coding and report writing (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2015). It moved my data to an analytic phase where I could begin to see the emergent theoretical categories. Charmaz (2012) points out that analytic memo writing allows researchers to explicate codes and raise them to categories. Writing analytic memos therefore became a springboard for theoretical categories in the next stage.

**Step 5: Theoretical categories.** After focusing codes and constantly comparing my data properties, I moved to generating theoretical categories of my study. To generate my theoretical categories, I separated my categories into two parts as seen in Figure 1. I grouped data (both textual and interviews) from alcohol stakeholders together since they were collected from the same source. I then triangulated these data with the data obtained from drinkers to check for similarities. For instance, one theme that was constant amongst some drinkers and stakeholders was that young people caused most alcohol problems. Although some drinkers differed with this assertion, most of them believed that young people drink more and caused more problems related to alcohol use. This theme was “grounded” on the data and aligned with participants narratives. This process led to thematic generation which was the subsequent step.

**Step 6: Thematic generation.** The sixth step was to generate themes from my theoretical categories. To develop study themes, I clustered and diagrammed my theoretical categories. As Charmaz (2014) suggests, in grounded theory diagramming
is important to show the relationships between emergent categories. It illuminates the key relationship and how the entire grounded theory fits together. As seen in Figure 1, I undertook clustering and diagramming to demonstrate the “direction of categories and the connections amongst them” (Charmaz, 2014: 218). After generating thematic categories, I moved to the last stage which was to problematize these categories.

**Step 7: Study problematization.** The last stage of the GT process was to subject study themes to further analysis to determine what they assumed to be the problem of alcohol consumption in Botswana. This stage paid fidelity to the WPR aspect of the study and sought to answer the question, “what is the problem of alcohol consumption in Botswana”? The study problematization was found to be “Undisciplined youth drinking”. This was the problematization that was constituted to be the “problem” of alcohol consumption in Botswana. The analysis demonstrate that policy texts and study participants characterized drinking as a youth problem caused by lack of discipline. In the next section, I detail the lessons learnt from this study. I then make a case for CGT as a relevant methodological approach that is positioned for critical policy analysis.

**Implications of Integrating Constructivist Grounded Theory and WPR**

There are some implications for integrating CGT and WPR especially in studies with a critical enquiry. The main lesson from this project was the usefulness of CGT as a pragmatic, adaptable and interactive methodological tool. The alcohol study demonstrated that CGT is well positioned for policy studies with a critical enquiry. Furthermore, CGT was best suited for WPR as they share a similar ontological heritage that emphasize co-construction, reflexivity, subjectivity and an anti-essentialist orientation. As I stated earlier, both these approaches demur a value-free and objectivist inquiry.

One of the key similarities between CGT and WPR was their treatment of document and textual analysis. Both approaches emphasize the need to treat policy texts as discourses with embedded meanings. In this way, policy texts are understood to be performative in nature (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000) and attention is given to their linguistic features. Documents are not treated as objective. Rather, they are seen as tentative and subject to study and interpretation. An integration of CGT and WPR therefore made it easier for the analysis of policy texts as both approaches have a textually oriented discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992). The key lesson as demonstrated in my study, is the importance of documents and textual analysis in constructivist grounded theory work. Future CGT studies might consider documents as critical data sources in critical enquiry. More specifically, the interplay between the language of policy documents and open-ended interviews provides a good potential for grounded theory work.

The adaptability of CGT was also evident in dealing with the challenges of collecting data during COVID-19. Reflexivity was central to undertaking this study. As stated earlier, the project was conducted from the United States with participants in Botswana and one of the major challenges was how to access alcohol stakeholders. While I had planned to only undertake semi-structured interviews, I was forced to send questionnaires through email to access stakeholders. These questionnaires then became a springboard for theoretical sampling that informed not only subsequent interviewing but also the direction of my data collection and analysis. The key lesson is that the process of actively taking part in and interacting with data is a mainstay of CGT that allows researchers to make contingency re-adjustments to suit their contexts. CGT with its emergent, reflexive and fluid methodological approach is well suited for research in unpredictable situations. The current study demonstrated that integrating CGT and WPR was appropriate for the challenges associated with conducting cross national research during COVID-19.

The deployment of CGT as a strategy to examine alcohol policy development processes in Botswana brought issues of power and inequality in the policy discourse. Examining policy texts and documents as instruments of power was important and demonstrates the usefulness of CGT to critical enquiry. The use of WPR as a framework and CGT as a methodological tool attend to how alcohol policy development processes represent what is assumed to be the problem of alcohol and foster critical enquiry. Framing alcohol as a “discipline” issue amongst youth centers power in the alcohol policy discourse. In essence, it deconstructs the taken-for-granted assumptions about policy proposals in Botswana and commits to a social justice agenda. Future studies might consider CGT as a pertinent method to examine power dynamics in policies. This approach allows grounded theorists to challenge the taken-for-granted ways in which policies are made and what they represent.

The key lesson from the study is that CGT is a pragmatic tool that can be leveraged to offset different challenges in qualitative research. This is especially relevant in the era of COVID-19 that brought a lot of uncertainties and changed how qualitative researchers thought about doing their work. The onset of COVID-19 resulted in the adoption of innovative and flexible approaches like CGT to deal with the incertitude of the pandemic. Moreover, CGT confronts issues of power and inequality and commits to a social justice agenda.

**Study Limitations**

This study has some limitations. First, there was a challenge with accessing potential participants since most of them were working from home or under a hard lockdown. Second, since data collection was done from the United States with participants in Botswana, there was a challenge with data collection practices. Telephone interviews were difficult and proved to be impersonal.
This was a serious limitation and deprived the study of the rich data that usually comes from being in the “field”. Some participants were even skeptical of the interviews despite being sent official approval documentation. Third, some participants did not review interview transcripts and confirm if they reflected their experiences. Only about seven (7) participants out of twenty (20) reviewed their transcripts. This was a limitation since the study advocated for co-construction between the researcher and participants. Lastly, the purposive sampling used for this study resulted in participants with similar demographics who were mainly College-educated urban drinkers who identified as middle-class. This was a limitation since younger participants living in rural areas were not included in the study. These cohort of drinkers are usually excluded from mainstream alcohol policy development practices. Future studies might use alternative methods of recruitment to capture other drinkers.

Conclusion
Constructivist grounded theory is an important approach that appeals to various research contexts due to its flexibility and adaptability. It is well positioned to deal with interdisciplinary work that uses multiple approaches. This paper combined CGT and WPR to demonstrate its power and relevance in critical policy analysis. Moreover, the paper showed the relevance of CGT as a methodological tool suited for contingent challenges such as conducting cross-national research during COVID-19. The ability for researchers to re-align research instruments to fit research circumstances (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) and be active co-constructors, typifies the power and utility of CGT.

In sum, CGT is well positioned as a methodological approach in critical policy analysis. More studies that use CGT in critical policy analysis are warranted. The first step would be to assess the ontological similarities between CGT and the policy approach. As this paper has demonstrated with the alcohol policy and WPR, it is important to critically examine the methodological fit to ensure a seamless integration. A systematic deployment of CGT to policy studies could expand critical qualitative enquiry to an area that has not received enough attention amongst grounded theorists.

Acknowledgments
I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their positive feedback and editors of LQQM.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD
Tebogo B. Sebeelo https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2428-9091

References
Bacchi, C. (2012). Why study problematizations? Making the politics visible. Open Journal of Political Science, 2(1), 1–18. http://doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2012.21001
Bacchi, C. (2015). Problematizations in alcohol policy: WHO’s “alcohol problems”. Contemporary Drug Problems, 42(2), 130–147. http://doi.org/10.1080/0091450915576116
Bacchi, C., & Goodwin, S. (2016). Poststructural policy analysis: A guide to practice. Palgrave.
Belgrave, L. L., & Seide, K. (2019). Grounded theory methodology: Principles and practice. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), Handbook of research methods in health social sciences. Springer.
Belgrave, L. L., Zablotsky, D., & Guadagno, M. (2002). How do we talk to each other? Writing qualitative research for quantitative readers. Qualitative Health Research, 12(10), 1427–1439. http://doi.org/10.1177/1049732302238753
Bills, A., & Howard, N. (2017). Social inclusion education policy in South Australia: What can we learn? Australian Journal of Education, 61(1), 54–74. http://doi.org/10.1177/0091450916689165
Blommaert, J., & Bulcaen, C. (2000). Critical discourse analysis. Annual Review of Anthropology, 29, 447–466. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.29.1.447
Bourdieu, P. (1991). Language and symbolic power. Harvard University Press.
Chan, T. H. (2018). What is the problem represented to be? A research methodology for analyzing Australia’s skilled migration policy. International Journal of Business and Economic Affairs, 3(1), 21–32. http://doi.org/10.24088/qbea-2018-31003
Charmaz, K. (1990). ‘Discovering’ chronic illness: Using grounded theory. Social Science & Medicine, 30(1), 1161–1172. http://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(90)90026-r
Charmaz, K. (2012). The power of grounded theory. Medical Sociology Online, 6(3).
Charmaz, K. (2014). Constructing grounded theory (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
Charmaz, K. (2017a). The power of constructivist grounded theory for critical inquiry. Qualitative Inquiry, 23(1), 34–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/1078046916657105
Charmaz, K. (2017b). Special invited paper: Continuities, contradictions, and critical inquiry in grounded theory. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16(1), 1–8. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1609406917719350
Charmaz, K. (2020). “With constructivist grounded theory you can’t hide it”: Social justice research and critical enquiry in the public sphere. Qualitative Inquiry, 26(2), 165–176. http://doi.org/10.1177/107804191879081
Charmaz, K., & Belgrave, L. L. (2015). Grounded theory. In G. Ritzer (Ed.), The blackwell encyclopedia of sociology (pp. 1–6). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
Charmaz, K., & Belgrave, L. L. (2019). Thinking about data with grounded theory. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 25(8), 743–753. http://doi.org/10.1177/1077800418809455

Charmaz, K., & Thornberg, R. (2021). The pursuit of quality in grounded theory. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 18(3), 305–327. http://doi.org/10.1080/14787934.2020.1780357

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13(1), 3–21. http://doi.org/10.1007/bf00988593

Fetherston, B., & Kelly, R. (2007). Conflict resolution and transformative pedagogy: A grounded theory research project on learning in higher education. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 5(3), 262–285. http://doi.org/10.17757/1541344607308899

Glaser, G. B. (2002). Constructivist grounded theory? *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 3(3), 1–13.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, L. A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Aldine.

Goodwin, S. (2011). Analysing policy as discourse: Methodological advances in policy analysis, 167-180. In L. Markauskaite (Ed.), *Methodological choice & design, methodos*. Series 9, Springer.

Hallberg, L. (2006). The “core category” of grounded theory: Making constant comparisons. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being*, 1(3), 141–148. http://doi.org/10.1080/1748260060085399

Hussein, F., Stephens, J., & Tiwari, R. (2020). Grounded theory as an approach exploring the effect of cultural memory on psychosocial well-being in historic urban landscapes. *Social Science*, 9(12), 219. http://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9120219

Joo, J. (2011). Adoption of semantic web from the perspective of technology innovation: A grounded theory approach. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 69(3), 139–154. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2011.10.002

Kenny, M., & Fourie, R. (2015). Contrasting classic, straussian, and constructivist grounded theory: Methodological and philosophical conflicts. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(8), 1270–1289. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2251

Lancaster, K., & Ritter, A. (2014). Examining the construction and representations of drugs as a policy problem in Australia’s national drug strategy documents 1985-2010. *International Drug Policy*, 25(1), 81–87. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2013.07.002

Manton, E., & Moore, D. (2016). Gender, intoxications and the developing brain: Problematizations of drinking among young adults in Australian alcohol policy. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 31, 153–162. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2015.10.009

Miles, A. D. (2018). Simulation learning and transfer in undergraduate nursing education: A grounded theory study. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 57(6), 347–353. https://doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20180522-05

Mills, J., Bonner, A., & Francis, K. (2006). The development of constructivist grounded theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(1), 25–35. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500103

Richards, C., & Farrokhnia, F. (2016). Optimizing grounded theory for policy research: A knowledge-building approach to analyzing WTO E-commerce policies. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 15(1), 1–14. http://doi.org/10.1177/1609406915621380

Sebeelo, B. T. (2020). Beer drinking, resistance and the politics of alcohol tax levy in Botswana. *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 37(6), 544–556. http://doi.org/10.1177/1455072520936811

Sebeelo, B. T. (2021). Undisciplined drinking, multi-sectoralism and political power: Examining problematisations in the Botswana alcohol policy. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 94(2021), 103228. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2021.103228

Sebeelo, B. T., & Belgrave, L. (2021). Navigating the drinking self: A qualitative study of beer consumption among the working poor in Botswana. *Qualitative Report*, 26(1), 186–203. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.4136

Seear, K., & Fraser, S. (2014). “The addict as victim: Producing the ‘problem’ of addiction in Australian victims of crime compensation laws”. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 25(5), 826–835. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2014.02.016

Singh, S., & Estefan, A. (2018). Selecting a grounded theory approach for nursing research. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, 5, 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1177/2333393618799571

Swoboda, A. D. (2006). The social construction of contested illness legitimacy: a grounded theory analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(3), 233–251. http://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qrp06oa

Tie, C. J., Birks, M., & Francis, K. (2019). Grounded theory research: A design framework for novice researchers. *SAGE Open Medicine*, 7, 1–8. http://doi.org/10.1177/2053012118822927

Webster, E. T., & Son, J. (2015). Doing what works: A grounded theory case study of technology use by teachers of English at a Korean University. *Computers & Education*, 80, 84–94. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2014.08.012

Weed, M. (2005). A grounded theory of the policy process for sport and tourism. *Sport in Society*, 8(2), 356–377. http://doi.org/10.1080/1474034050087815

Woods, P., Gapp, R., & King, A. M. (2016). Generating or developing grounded theory: Methods to understand health and illness. *International Journal of Clinical Pharmacy*, 38, 663-670. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11096-016-0260-2

Zufferey, C. (2014). Questioning representations of homelessness in the Australian print media. *Australian Social Work*, 67(4), 523–536. http://doi.org/10.1080/0312407x.2013.842604