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## A Critique of Four Grounded Theory Texts

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## A Critique of Four Grounded Theory Texts

### **Abstract**

This article is a review of *Discovery of Grounded Theory* by Glaser and Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research* by Strauss and Corbin, *Constructing Grounded Theory* by Charmaz, and *Situational Analysis* by Clarke across six categories, including the authors' purposes, structure of the books, practical applications of the books' methods, how the authors approach theory and data emergence, how the authors judge grounded theory research and finally, if the authors have achieved their purposes. For the most part, I found that all books accomplished their purposes. *Discovery* was weak in practical applications but strong on logical arguments for the usage of grounded theory. *Basics* contained many practical tools but some of the techniques discussed forced data into certain categories. *Constructing* was written in a very clear, easy-to-follow format that novices might find useful. *Situational* contained many tools, but with a focus on situations rather than actors.

### **Keywords**

Grounded Theory, Book Review, Glaser, Strauss, Corbin, Charmaz, Clarke

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## A Critique of Four Grounded Theory Texts

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*This article is a review of *Discovery of Grounded Theory* by Glaser and Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research* by Strauss and Corbin, *Constructing Grounded Theory* by Charmaz, and *Situational Analysis* by Clarke across six categories, including the authors' purposes, structure of the books, practical applications of the books' methods, how the authors approach theory and data emergence, how the authors judge grounded theory research and finally, if the authors have achieved their purposes. For the most part, I found that all books accomplished their purposes. *Discovery* was weak in practical applications but strong on logical arguments for the usage of grounded theory. *Basics* contained many practical tools but some of the techniques discussed forced data into certain categories. *Constructing* was written in a very clear, easy-to-follow format that novices might find useful. *Situational* contained many tools, but with a focus on situations rather than actors. Key Words: *Grounded Theory, Book Review, Glaser, Strauss, Corbin, Charmaz, and Clarke**

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In 1967, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss published their seminal work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, one of the first books to systematically produce a set of procedures for the generation of theory from qualitative data. As Thomas and James (2006) aptly put it, "There can be little doubt that it has been a major—perhaps the major—contributor to the acceptance of the legitimacy of qualitative methods in applied social research" (p. 767) and since then, grounded theory has become the "paradigm of choice" (Miller & Fredericks, 1999, p. 538) for qualitative researchers in social work and other disciplines.

In the first chapter of *Discovery*, Glaser and Strauss (1967) invite researchers to use grounded theory strategies to suit their own pursuits. Many accepted the invitation. Strauss answered it himself when he published with Juliet Corbin *Basics of Qualitative Research* (1998). Charmaz (2006) accepted the invitation by presenting grounded theory within a social constructivist approach in *Constructing Grounded Theory*. Clarke (2005) took up the challenge by giving grounded theory a postmodern twist in *Situational Analysis*. Since all of these works have made considerable contributions to the field of grounded theory research, and since they all use original and innovative approaches, in this article I will attempt to review them briefly for two reasons. First, I hope readers might get an overview of the different viewpoints and methods that each author presents and thereby be able to make a choice as to which book better suits their research needs; and second, I hope to inspire readers not only to read the books, but to try out some of the methods presented in the texts in their next grounded theory research project.

In this article, I will review these four books across six categories. I will begin with an explanation of each author's purposes in writing his/her book, followed by an analysis of the structure and practical applications of the book, a description of how the

authors approach the issue of data or theory emergence and if and how the authors present a method of assessing grounded theory research, and finally, a discussion of whether or not the authors have achieved their purposes. Since grounded theory begins with Glaser and Strauss's (1967) *Discovery of Grounded Theory*, it is logical for us to begin with these notable authors.

### ***The Discovery of Grounded Theory by Glaser and Strauss***

In the age of grand theory and the verification of such theories, authors Glaser and Strauss (1967) maintain that the sociological mandate should not be one of just verifying existing theory, but it should also be one of generating new theory. They suggest that in the past, too much emphasis has been put on verification of the existing theories of "great men" (p. 10). The authors' book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* is meant to rectify that by inspiring readers to pursue their own theory generation using a specific method. They urge sociologists to discover theory systematically from data using what they refer to as the constant comparative method or grounded theory. Using this methodology, researchers generate theory by analyzing data. The discovery of theory systematically from data is one of the major themes of the book, and they use that theme for several purposes.

#### **Purposes of the Book**

"[W]e are...trying to strengthen the mandate for generating theory" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 7) write the authors in explaining their reasons for publishing *Discovery*. The authors also explain that the book's function is to provide a defense against doctrinaire approaches to verification. Additionally, the authors hope to provide the reader with a way of evaluating the worth of any theory. The book is also meant to be a methodological handbook for those who already use grounded theory in hopes of systemizing their methods of doing so. It is important to note however that the authors' principal aim is to "stimulate other theorists to codify and publish their *own* [emphasis original] methods for generating theory" (p. 8). Many researchers (Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005), including both of the authors (Glaser, 1992; Strauss, 1990), have in fact taken up that challenge as will be discussed later in this article. The authors Glaser and Strauss undertook all of the above listed ambitious purposes within a coherently written structure.

#### **Structure**

*Discovery* is divided into three parts and 11 chapters. In the first part, "Comparative Analysis," the authors present a strategy by which sociologists can discover both substantive and formal theory through the use of the comparative analysis technique. It is in this section that the authors hope to convey to the readers both the theoretical and practical ways of approaching theory generation. In part two of *Discovery*, "The Flexible Use of Data," the authors explore how one can generate theory from both qualitative and quantitative data. Although the methods that they detail in the quantitative chapter are now outdated, it is significant that they have made a solid effort

to convey to readers that their methods are not just for use in the qualitative world. In the final part of their book, *Implications of Grounded Theory* (1967), the authors expound on how to judge the credibility of grounded theory work. The book itself has a very clear structure. It provides an unambiguous argument as to the benefits of using grounded theory and builds a rational line of reasoning in defense of that argument. Although *Discovery* is well organized and logically written, it is somewhat lacking in specific practical applications.

### **Practical Applications**

Although Glaser and Strauss (1967) devote chapter 5, “The Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis,” to a general system on how to apply grounded theory methods practically in the discovery of theory, they fail to be detailed in their explanations. For example, on page 105, they begin by saying that analysts should code each incident and put it into emergent categories. They then give a couple of quotes from their own work as an example. Although they have explained their procedure here sufficiently enough for an experienced researcher, it may not be enough for a novice. Their book, in fact, does not reveal a lot of practical tools since in the 11 chapters presented, only two are devoted to methods, one of which is now outdated. However, as noted earlier, the authors indicate that their principal aim is to stimulate other theorists to devise their own methods and it is perhaps with that in mind that the authors did not wish to direct researchers in too specific a manner.

Although weak on detailed explanation of methods, there is some practical advice given to the researcher. In chapter 3, “Theoretical Sampling,” the authors explain that researchers need only code for incidents that occur within the chosen categories of that theory. When these core categories become saturated, the researcher can stop filling those particular categories. This helpful counsel allows the researcher to use his/her time management skills in research. Let us now take a closer look at how the authors approach the concept of emergence.

### **Emergence of Data, Categories, and/or Theory**

A common word that Glaser and Strauss (1967) use is “emerge.” According to the authors, data should not be forced into categories from a preexisting theory but should emerge naturally. They state that “generating theory does put a premium on emergent conceptualizations” (p. 37) and that theory will be “destined to last” (p. 4) since it is intimately linked to data. They warn also that those who are verifying the validity of a theory should “focus directly on how [the] theory emerged” (p. 27). Theory emergence is a reoccurring theme throughout the book. In chapter 6, “Clarifying and Assessing Comparative Studies,” they give many examples of other researchers who have not done so and instead used preconceived models. Concerning preconceived models, the authors state that “these may be useful models for verification, but they hinder an emergent theoretical analysis” (p. 134). Checking for true theory emergence is one way of critiquing work, but the authors provide many more ways of judging research through their “Accounting Scheme” found in the same chapter.

## Criteria for Judging Grounded Theory Research

In the Accounting Scheme, or criteria for assessing research, the authors present eight questions that analysts and reviewers can ask when they are judging the quality of any theory. The authors then proceed to give no less than 12 examples of how to apply their criteria to various other published works, giving the reader plenty of illustrations. However, in the provided examples, many of the critiqued researchers, if not all, had no intention of using grounded theory and therefore it may not be fair to judge these works through the lens of grounded theory. Author Cohen (1969) also notes that Glaser and Strauss (1967) commonly use words such as “dense,” “grounded,” and “saturated” as the “new language of abuse” (p. 277) by which one can make “indiscriminate sideswipes at other sociologists” (p. 277). Regardless of what language Glaser and Strauss are using, the Accounting Scheme does provide a useful tool in judging the works of researchers that are using grounded theory methods.

## Conclusion: Do the Authors Achieve their Purposes?

The general purpose of *Discovery* is to show that researchers can and should generate theory and that they should do so systematically from data. Some of the other purposes are to provide a defense against verification, provide a system for evaluating the work of any theory and to present a methodological handbook. Their principal aim however, as stated by the authors, is to stimulate other theorists to publish their own methods for generating theory. Do Glaser and Strauss (1967) accomplish these purposes in *Discovery*?

The authors endeavor to convince the reader throughout *Discovery* that theory generation is just as important as theory verification. They also convince the reader that a researcher, whether “young or old” (1967, p. 7) can conceivably discover theory themselves. The authors state “we contend also that it does not take a ‘genius’ to generate a useful grounded theory” (p. 11). They are certainly unbeaten in this respect for the simple reason that the reader does come away from the book with a certain eagerness to take a crack at theory generation. As well, the reader has a solid belief that the theory that is generated using Glaser and Strauss’s methods will be one with dynamic explanatory power since it is grounded in data. The authors are also successful in providing criteria for assessing the quality of both theory and of the methods used to generate that theory in their Accounting Scheme. As for a methodological handbook, the book might be useful for those who are already familiar with grounded theory, but novice researchers may not be able to grasp exactly how to go about doing grounded theory, because, although there is much in the way of theoretical advice, the book is somewhat deficient in practical advice. Since the authors do an excellent job in convincing readers that grounded theory is useful in generating valuable theory, they might have done well to devote more space in their book on how to do so, rather than the importance of doing so.

The author’s final and principal aim is to stimulate other theorists to codify and publish their own methods of generating theory. At the time that *Discovery* was published, the authors could not have guessed that they would be wildly successful in both popularizing grounded theory and in stimulating others to publish their own method

books. As reviewer Philipsen (1992) notes, “Since the publication of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss’s (1967) *Discovery*, grounded theory has been a catchword and one of the staples of qualitative methods” (p. 243). And since *Discovery*, there have been many authors (Bernard, 2010; Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Lofland, 1984; Miles, 1994) who have fulfilled Glaser and Strauss’s principal aim of writing their own methods books. So it is clear that Glaser and Strauss, without a doubt, have both inspired and stimulated other researchers not only to use grounded theory as they have presented it, but to explore their own ways of doing so. Some years later, Strauss himself fulfilled that purpose when he wrote, in conjunction with Juliet Corbin, the *Basics of Qualitative Research*. I now describe how these two authors have undertaken that challenge and produced their own methodological text.

### ***Basics of Qualitative Research* by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin**

#### **Purposes of the Book**

*Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, (1998, originally published in 1990), is a collaborative work that provides an informative guide in the application of grounded theory. In writing this book, the authors had one main purpose in mind: To present a set of procedures for doing grounded theory. These procedures are not meant, however, to be used rigidly. Instead, readers and researchers are instructed by the authors to adapt them to their own work and use them flexibly, since “these procedures were designed not to be followed dogmatically but rather to be used creatively and flexibly by researchers as they deem appropriate” (p. 13).

#### **Structure**

In pursuing these goals, the authors have divided the book into three sections. The first section gives background information and the philosophy behind grounded theory. Part 2, the practical portion of the book, gives readers specific procedures for coding and analysis. Part 3 discusses various topics such as doing write ups, evaluation, and answers to commonly asked questions.

The clear structure that I found in *Discovery* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), however, is wanting in *Basics of Qualitative Research*. To begin with, the authors present many lists in the book that add little value, such as their description of the characteristics of qualitative researchers, characteristics that are basic enough to apply to any good researcher, including quantitative ones. Details on the applications of their methods are also unclear. An example of this lack of clarity can be found in chapter 12, in their Conditional Consequence diagram. Here, the authors present an overly-simplified diagram that lacks information on connections between micro and macro conditions and thus is deficient in the amount of detail needed to understand how the diagram is meant to be used. Their definitions are also somewhat vague. For example, they define selective coding as the “process of integrating and refining a theory” (1998, p. 143). This is too broad of a definition to be understandable to someone who is not familiar with selective coding. In addition, their summaries at the end of each chapter are useful, but often they

do not provide a synopsis of the chapter; rather, they frequently add new information instead of recapitulating what has already been said. In essence, *Basics* presents numerous tools that researchers can use; however, the structure of the book, with heavy detail in some areas and a scarcity of detail in other areas, makes it tricky to understand how one should employ some of their techniques. On the other hand, many would disagree and point out that *Basics* does have several excellent practical applications.

### **Practical Applications**

Many reviewers (Gosby, 2000; Hoffart, 2000; Plank, Iacobucci, Langer, Wallace, & Rosen, 1994) contend that the most useful aspect of the book is its functionality. Indeed, Strauss and Corbin (1998) have given numerous useful examples from their own work that allow for grounded theory to be applied to context. They also include numbered sections that help the researcher follow the steps of the research process. For example, in chapter 6 the authors list some of the questions that researchers might ask respondents in the case of interviews. However, these types of handy sections are not frequently found in the book. The debates of practicality aside, let us examine how Strauss and Corbin approach the emergence of data.

### **Emergence of Data, Categories, and/or Theory**

Barney Glaser, in his book *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis* (1992), puts forth an interesting argument when he states that Strauss and Corbin have used a kind of logic that forces data instead of allowing it to emerge. He asserts that in *Basics* the authors ask “many preconceived, substantive questions, which takes the analyst elsewhere from what is really going on” (Glaser, p. 4). Glaser uses Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) Conditional Consequence matrix found in Chapter 12 as an example. He points out that although dimensions and conditions are always present, they are not always significant to the issue being investigated. A dangerous play does seem to be occurring between the forcing and emergence of categories. We can see an example of this in chapter 4, when the authors indicate that researchers can use past experience as well as literature to generate concepts. However, in responding to critiques who accused Strauss and Corbin of using past experience as a preconceived category, Juliet Corbin (1998) stated, “We certainly had no intention of conveying the idea that we use ‘experience’ as data. Rather, experience is an analytic device used to stimulate reflection about the data at hand” (p. 122). Whether or not the authors allow true emergence to occur, Strauss and Corbin are not lacking in giving readers a standard by which to judge the pros and cons of grounded theory work.

### **Criteria for Judging Grounded Theory Research**

The authors devote chapter 16 to judging the merit of grounded theory research and give some useful criteria on how to do so. The chapter is divided into two sections: the research process and the empirical grounding of a study. Under each of these sections they present points that readers should look for in judging research. For example, they state that readers should ask how the original sample was selected and on what grounds it was selected. In the empirical section, the authors ask that we look at how concepts are



generated within a theory. This section of the book is very clearly written and provides excellent standards to judge any grounded theory work.

### **Conclusion: Do the Authors Achieve their Purposes?**

There are two main goals that authors Strauss and Corbin (1998) set out to achieve in *Basics*: To present a set of methods for doing grounded theory research and to encourage readers to use their methods flexibly. Indeed, flexibility is a reoccurring theme throughout the book as Strauss and Corbin write that although they offer useful procedures, they are not “commandments” (p. 4). Certainly the authors themselves are very flexible in their ideas when they promote the usage of their methods for qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research. In chapter 3 the authors state that their aim for the chapter is for researchers to think of quantitative procedures as a “potential ally” (p. 32). Taking the authors’ tools and applying them innovatively and resourcefully to one’s own work is sound advice for both the novice and experienced researcher. But do they achieve their overall purpose of providing a set of procedures?

They accomplish this in part 2 of their book where they present to the reader a method for doing grounded theory. Keeping their goal in mind of offering “very useful procedures” (1998, p. 4), one might be disappointed in that the book does not present as a detailed procedural instruction manual. However, reviewer Philipsen (1992) rightly points out that *Basics* is not meant to be a “complete handbook for grounded research” (p. 244). More accurately it is a book that offers a way for researchers to generate theory that links conditions, consequences, and process in a systematic way. Strauss and Corbin confirm this idea when they state, “We are offering *a* [emphasis mine] way of thinking about and viewing the world” (p. 4). Taken in this context, the authors have skillfully accomplished just that.

I now examine grounded theory from a different perspective, a perspective that says that we construct our theories from data rather than discover them. Strauss and Corbin allude to this idea when they state that “theorizing is the act of constructing” (1998, p. 25), but to take the idea of theory as a construction to a higher level, I examine *Constructing Grounded Theory* by Charmaz.

### ***Constructing Grounded Theory* by Kathy Charmaz**

#### **Purposes of the Book**

In *Constructing Grounded Theory*, researcher and writer Kathy Charmaz (2006) invites readers on a journey that traverses basic grounded theory steps within an interpretive approach. She introduces a portrayal of grounded theory methods using what she refers to as “twenty first century methodological assumptions and approaches” (p. 9). In this approach, she explicitly assumes that any theoretical renderings offer an “*interpretive* [emphasis original] portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it” (p. 10). Researchers, the author maintains, are not separate from their theories but construct them through their interactions with people, places, and research perspectives. She goes about her theme with the following objectives in mind: The book is meant to expand the readers’ viewpoints with regard to grounded theory, to provide guidelines for

constructing grounded theory, to correct common misunderstandings, to point out different versions of grounded theory, to provide sufficient explanation of guidelines that a novice can understand, and finally, to inspire. Her theme and objectives are elaborated and exemplified in eight lengthy but clearly written chapters.

## **Structure**

The first chapter reviews for readers the developments of grounded theory over the past few decades. Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 are devoted to the practical applications such as coding, memo-writing and theoretical sampling. Chapter 6 reiterates her theme that theories are constructed. Chapter 7 gives some suggestions on how to write drafts, and chapter 8 presents criteria for judging grounded theory studies. Although the book is highly structured, Charmaz (2006) encourages readers to use her methods according to their needs.

*Constructing* is written in a succinct and concise style that focuses on basic instruction in developing grounded theory. For this reason, reviewer Smit (2007) fittingly points out that it is especially accessible to newcomers. The chapters are replete with diagrams and bullet points that summarize the steps and questions presented during various stages of the research. These frequent summaries are particularly useful for those who require structure and direction in their research (Stebbins, 2006). Charmaz (2006) also states that in practice, doing grounded theory is “not so linear” (p. 10). Happily, however, she has written the book in a linear format, thus making it easy to follow. That clear structure is a vehicle by which Charmaz can convey her practical recommendations.

## **Practical Applications**

Indeed, there is much in the way of practical advice in *Constructing*. For example, Charmaz (2006) frequently presents various lists of questions analysts can ask themselves in their research. In chapter 2: “Gathering Rich Data,” the author includes questions such as “Do I have a range of views?” or “Have I recorded changes over time?” Later in this chapter, the author includes a box of interview questions to help stimulate ideas. Here, the author also warns researchers to be careful when they hear statements that indicate taken-for-granted signals, such as “you know” (p. 33). In these cases, she suggests that researchers need to explore the issue further in order to grasp the respondent’s exact meaning. Later in the book, she also adds to her practical advice by examining questions such as how to approach an Institutional Review Board in describing theoretical sampling. In short, the book is not lacking in practical advice and applications. Next I will examine how Charmaz portrays theory as emerging from data.

## **Emergence of Data, Categories, and/or Theory**

Unlike traditional grounded theorists, Charmaz (2006) assumes that neither data nor theories are discovered, but are constructed by the researcher and research participant. For example, she indicates that when respondents answer interview questions, their responses are “a construction-reconstruction-of reality” (p. 27). Similarly, in chapter six she notes that the act of theorizing means constructing abstract

understandings about the world. Charmaz's concern is not with the emergence of theory, but rather with whether or not the researcher has been explicit in stating that the data and theory are a construct of both the researcher and the respondent. According to Charmaz, theory neither emerges nor is discovered, instead it is constructed. Moving from the idea of emergence to the more practical treatment of judging the quality of others' works, in the next part of this article I will examine whether Charmaz presents any criteria for judging grounded theory research.

### **Criteria for Judging Grounded Theory Research**

In chapter 8 the author provides a list of questions that can help researchers judge both their work and the work of others. This includes sections on credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. Unlike the previous books reviewed in this article, Charmaz (2006) does not provide examples of studies that either include or exclude the criteria she sets forth. In addition, there is no in-depth explanation for each category. However, the questions themselves are straightforward enough that most readers should be able to understand and apply them. Charmaz provides a useful standard for judging grounded theory work, but by what criteria can I judge Charmaz's book? Examining whether or not she achieves her purposes is one way to do so.

### **Conclusion: Does the Author Achieve Her Purposes?**

Charmaz (2006) has several purposes in *Constructing*. The first of these is to provide flexible guidelines that are clear enough for a novice researcher to follow. Secondly, the author wishes to correct common misunderstandings. Thirdly, she endeavors to point out different versions of grounded theory; and, finally, she wishes to inspire readers and expand their viewpoints. Let me begin by investigating whether Charmaz has succeeded in expanding readers' viewpoints.

In my opinion, she does so by providing readers with a powerful argument that if grounded theory was developed to work with social worlds, and these worlds are ever changing, methods and outlooks have to change with them. Her theme is "unabashedly interpretive" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 128), and this influence is seen throughout the book. Charmaz writes that researchers construct their theories through interaction with people and that data are not facts but constructs. Because this theme is repeated throughout her book, readers can at least become aware of her viewpoint and how it differs from others, even if they do not choose to accept it. Her work is also practical in nature, as seen in her methods section.

An examination of her methods section, chapters 2 to 6, provides ample evidence that the author has realized her goal in providing guidelines that novices can follow. Although she indicates that her guidelines are "flexible" (2006, p. 9), they are detailed enough that there is a danger that neophyte researchers might be tempted to use them as recipes to follow rather than suggestions. However, regardless of how the researcher chooses to use them, the author has accomplished her goal of providing guidelines that novices can easily understand. Although the author attains this particular goal, does she achieve one of her other set goals, that of correcting common misunderstandings? That question is more difficult to answer.

It is not clear in the book how Charmaz (2006) corrects common misunderstandings or even what those misunderstandings are. This part of the book is either indistinct or missing altogether. What is not missing from the book, however, is a summary of the differing versions of grounded theory. Both in her introduction and in chapter 6, the author explains to the reader the differences in the grounded theory approaches and the worldviews from which they are drawn. She presents the ideological clashes in a way that fairly presents both positivist and interpretive stances. Thus she does fulfill her aims of defining grounded theory from different perspectives.

The author's overall goal for *Constructing* is loftier in nature. Charmaz's main purpose is to be relevant and inspirational to researchers. Does she achieve that goal? The wealth of information in this book appeals to those who already have skill in this area and would like some fresh ideas. Newcomers will also appreciate that it is written in a clear and to-the-point fashion, in a way that inspires readers to apply grounded theory to the field (Bumard, 2006). Thus Charmaz realizes her main purpose by a creating a book that is both an inspiration and a notable companion to anyone partaking in grounded theory research.

Much of Charmaz's book can be considered postmodern since she includes elements of subjectivity, multiple voices, and positionality. However, to take grounded theory past the postmodern turn, I must examine author Clarke's influential work *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory after the Postmodern Turn* (2005) and how that work changes both the methods and the way we look at grounded theory.

### ***Situational Analysis by Adele Clarke***

#### **Purposes of the Book**

In *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory After the Postmodern Turn* (2005), Adele Clarke combines grounded theory with a postmodern worldview. She does this not just through postmodern theory, but also through an innovative method that uses situational maps to analyze a wide range of narrative, discourse, and visual data. She has clear aims in writing her book. Her main goal in writing this book is to "regenerate the grounded theory method toward new approaches" (p. 37). First, she seeks to supplement basic grounded theory methods with a situation-centered approach influenced by postmodernism; this approach emphasizes partialities, positionalities, and contradictions that portray the complex nature of the social world. To achieve this objective, she points out that grounded theory already has postmodern capacities. She then focuses on the importance of using situations as the locus of inquiry rather than actions or processes. Finally, she seeks to achieve those goals by offering a systematic but flexible means of research design within a logical four-part structure.

#### **Structure**

The book is written in four major sections, beginning with a theoretical framework that gives readers a line of reasoning as to why we should move grounded theory further into postmodernism. The second section deals with practical aspects of her methodology. The third expounds on the importance of discourse, and the final section

explains how one can analyze discourse. Each section of the book has merit, but some are more easily read than others.

The first part of the book, theoretical framework, is challenging to those unfamiliar with postmodernism. As Clarke (2005) acknowledges in the Frequently Asked Questions section of her book, some critics suggest that *Situational* contains too much theory. She responds by arguing that since she is changing an established method, she needs to be clear on her theoretical rationale for doing so. The author balances that with several creative and inventive practical applications in the second section of her book.

### **Practical Applications**

Persons looking for the practical application of Clarke's (2005) approach will find it in chapters 3 to 7. Of these, the one that she emphasizes the most consistently throughout her book is her technique of using situational maps. Situational maps are not new to qualitative research; however, Clarke's introduction of them with her postmodern approach to grounded theory is unique. These maps allow the researcher to generate ideas and see their juxtaposition clearly on paper, thereby demonstrating relationships in data that the researcher might not have otherwise noticed. An added handy technique that she suggests is that researchers use a tape recorder while they are making their maps so that they can simultaneously do memoing while they are drawing and contemplating relationships in data. Without doubt, Clarke's maps compliment her approach, but does that approach allow for data to emerge?

### **Emergence of Data, Categories, and/or Theory**

It does not appear that data totally emerges using this technique. This is related to the fact that the author is quite clear in some of her assumptions regarding social justice and her assertions that researchers must pursue certain topics in relation to that. For example, Clarke (2005) indicates that collective actors are in all kinds of "negotiations and conflicts" (p. 37). Here we see that she has already made the supposition that actors are in some kind of conflict even before investigating a situation. In addition, she states that situational analysis must take into account nonhuman elements that pervade social life, such as institutional systems, when doing research. This ties in with the author's frequent referrals to Foucault's idea of power and how these institutional systems hold power over the players such that the respondents are "forced to deal with them" (p. 87). Thus she concludes that these non-human elements will have an effect on the human actors. These are assumptions that clearly align with her postmodern viewpoint, and indeed she may be correct in making those assumptions and others. However, she does insist that researchers investigate those non-human elements and the power differentials therein, regardless of whether or not they emerge. In the following section, I will examine whether or not Clarke provides a structured method for judging other people's work.

## Criteria for Judging Grounded Theory Research

In fact, although the author provides much in the way of theory and methods, she does not provide the reader with a way of judging other people's work. One should keep in mind, however, that finding ways of judging other's work is not one of the stated aims of her book.

## Conclusion: Does the Author Achieve her Purposes?

Clarke's goal in her book is to present a new way of looking at and doing grounded theory. She hopes to achieve that goal by showing the reader how postmodernism has already permeated grounded theory and how we can further expand grounded theory in that direction. Her aim is also to show the situation as the locus of inquiry and finally, she hopes to present a flexible yet systematic set of guidelines. Does she achieve those aims?

In the case of pointing out the "already present" (Clarke, 2005, p. xxxiii) existence of postmodernism within grounded theory, the author achieves that in chapter 1, where she explains how writers such as Charmaz (1995; 2000) and Strauss (1987) have already expanded grounded theory into postmodernism. Clarke then presents strategies to help push grounded theory further around the postmodern turn, such as focusing on the situation and shifting away from representing the social world in a simplified way to one of complexity.

Although the author achieves the goal of presenting ways grounded theory can be brought around the postmodern turn, she has a tendency to be overly simple in her summation of the deficits contained within the traditional approach. To illustrate, let us examine a chart replicated twice in the book (Clarke, 2005, pp. 32-294). This chart contains features of both traditional and postmodern grounded theory. It is, in my opinion, overly naive in its summation of both types of grounded theory. For example, she states that traditional grounded theory is linear in nature. Yet both Glaser and Strauss explain frequently in *Discovery* (1967) that the process of grounded theory is circular and that analysts need to return back and forth between coding, memoing, and hypothesizing. Clarke also makes claims about traditional grounded theory that are not supported with examples. A case in point is when she asserts that traditionalists often intentionally delete distinctiveness in favor of creating a "monolithic other" (Clarke, p. 15), meaning that they regularly over-simplify the social world in order to come up with far-reaching theories. Regardless of whether or not she is correct in this claim, she does not substantiate it with references to other theoreticians' work. Thus it reads more as an accusation rather than a genuine attempt to compare her methods with that of traditionalists. The author does, however, provide a logical and coherent argument for how and why researchers should focus on the situation as the locus of inquiry.

Clarke (2005) describes the "situation of inquiry" (p. xxviii) as the most innovative part of her book. She argues that our analytic focus needs to go beyond "knowing the subject" to that of investigating the situation. This is a major theme in her book, and Clarke is successful in transmitting the importance of that theme to the reader. Some authors (e.g., Smit, 2006), however, feel that by having her present situational analysis as her "key unit of analysis" (Clarke, p. xxxv) she may be shifting subtly away

from grounded theory methods since she suggests that researchers can use her approach with “uncoded, but carefully read and somewhat ‘digested’ data” (Clarke, p. 84). With that statement, one might construe that she is suggesting that her methodology can be used without grounded theory at all. That said, she does state within that same paragraph that it is preferable to have coded data since it does force a familiarity with the data. Her situational maps form the basis of her research design, but are they both systematic and flexible?

Clarke (2005) does achieve a systematic and flexible means of research design innovatively with her situational maps. It is not that her maps in themselves are groundbreaking, but what is unique is that she has pioneered a technique for using them with grounded theory. Clarke hopes that with her perspective and methodology, the researcher can not only be an analyst, but a “cartographer of sorts” (p. xxxvi). Through the extensive explanation that she gives in her methods section, along with flexibility of her map design, she accomplishes her goal of presenting the reader with both a systematic and adaptable research design.

Clarke’s book is a remarkable attempt to portray the world depicted in its detailed form that makes no attempt to reduce that complexity to better suit the human propensity for simplicity. By capturing that complexity within a framework of a practical, logical method, the author is exceedingly successful at presenting to the reader a regeneration of grounded theory methods that pushes well past the postmodern turn.

### **Conclusion**

Each book reviewed here is unique and will appeal differently to readers depending on that particular reader’s interest and method of learning. Thus I encourage researchers and those interested in grounded theory to read all of the books reviewed here as well as others to find out which one is a closer fit to their own ideology. Of course, a researcher cannot go wrong in working with any or all of the books reviewed here, because each of them will not only make a considerable contribution to a researcher’s knowledge of grounded theory but also to his or her passion for pursuing it. Glaser and Strauss (1967) were the first to plant the seed of enthusiasm in researchers to learn more about grounded theory research. In the text by Strauss and Corbin (1988), researchers can learn the importance of being flexible in all aspects of the research pursuit. Charmaz (2006) provides excellent guidelines to follow for novice grounded theorists; and, finally, Clarke (2005) has provided many practical tools along with a profoundly different, innovative perspective on grounded theory research. Thus, all of the books are an inspiration, and readers and researchers alike should look forward to the transforming journey that will take place not only within the reader, but within their research as well. Indeed, I have little doubt that these books will be extraordinarily successful at enthusing researchers to put into practice the cornucopia of wisdom and learning that they have gained from exploring the expertise of each of these distinguished authors.

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