

1-2-2009

The Next Generation of Grounded Theorists Tells All

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Recommended APA Citation

Chenail, R. J. (2009). The Next Generation of Grounded Theorists Tells All. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 28-30. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol13/iss4/16>

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Abstract

Grounded theory in all of its forms, variations, and extensions is one of the most widely practiced qualitative research methodologies. In a personal rendering, the contributors to *Developing Grounded Theory: The Second Generation* give an insider's perspective that allows us not only to learn the commonalities and differences of this diverse family of methodologies, but also to meet the men and women who have contributed to its development and evolution.

Keywords

Grounded Theory, Dimensional Analysis, Situational Analysis, Qualitative Research

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The Next Generation of Grounded Theorists Tells All

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*Grounded theory in all of its forms, variations, and extensions is one of the most widely practiced qualitative research methodologies. In a personal rendering, the contributors to *Developing Grounded Theory: The Second Generation* give an insider's perspective that allows us not only to learn the commonalities and differences of this diverse family of methodologies, but also to meet the men and women who have contributed to its development and evolution. Key Words: Grounded Theory, Dimensional Analysis, Situational Analysis, and Qualitative Research*

Grounded theory in all of its forms and extensions is one of the most widely practiced qualitative research methodologies. When generic qualitative research studies that utilize grounded theory procedures such as open and axial coding and constant comparison to conduct their analyses (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003; Sandelowski, 2000) are factored into the tally, the case could be made that grounded theory is the dominant approach in contemporary qualitative inquiry.

Grounded theory also has a fascinating development history give its fairly recent creation in the 1960's, the interesting relationship between its co-founders—Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, and the creative productivity of their students such Leonard Schatzman, Juliet Corbin, Kathy Charmaz, and Adele Clarke. It was this talented group of next generation of grounded theorists who gathered in Banff, Canada in September, 2007 at Jan Morse's invitation to celebrate grounded theory, but also to bring those of us who have not had the opportunity to study with Glaser and Strauss back stage and give us an insider's perspective on the main points of the methodology as well as the nuanced differences between all of the variations and to give us a glimpse of where grounded theory may be going in the future as it continues to evolve.

The September gathering of "next gen" grounded theorists was billed as the "Grounded Theory Bash" and its naming gave some participants pause because they worried that the bash could turn into a bashing of one or both of the originators of grounded theory, but as can be seen from the chapters of the new book, *Developing Grounded Theory: The Second Generation* (Morse, Stern, Corbin, Bowers, Charmaz, & Clarke, 2009), the bash turned out to be more like a party or festival where attendees were treated to a series of fascinating accounts from Phyllis Noerager Stern, Juliet Corbin, Barbara Bowers, Kathy Charmaz, and Adele Clarke that bring grounded theory to life as we are able not only to encounter the ideas, but also to meet the people who have contributed to this family of methodologies and to situate these ideas within a historical time and place. The willingness of the second generation to tell all including the formal and informal history of grounded theory brought the methodology and methodologists to life for me and gave me a better understanding of the commonalities and differences between and among these variations that I had not been able to glean

from reading the articles and books separately. Such a contribution makes the work a valuable tool for teachers and learners alike.

The layout of the book is another factor that makes the work reader-friendly. The main chapters cover original grounded theory and its divergent development into the classic, Glasarian, and Strauss and Corbin forms; Charmaz' constructivist form; and the two main diversions or extensions: Schatzman's Dimensional Analysis and Clarke's Situational Analysis. Interspersed among these chapters are questions and answers from the live Bash and exemplary papers showing the results produced from these different grounded theory approaches. These research studies give the book even greater depth and help us as readers to connect what the chapter writers had described with the results of the work itself.

The work also contains a number of pictures of the main players and literally puts a face on these methods. The personal feel of the book also highlights the sometimes conflictual relationships that had been a part of the Glaser-Strauss collaboration. I appreciated the authors' honesty with sharing some of the family secrets and I also liked how their willingness to bare brought a degree of humanness to the account without letting the narrative turn into a melodramatic rendering.

A theme that seemed to run throughout the work was how the second generation of grounded theorists have helped to evolve the methodology while still remaining informed and connected to the original's tenets and intents. By sharing the political, sociological, and personal contexts that helped to shape Strauss and Glaser's original formulation and the subsequent environments that nurtured the second generation's divergent re-formulations, I could see how these newer forms emerged while also gaining insight into the next generation's sensitivities to their teachers' and mentors' initial grounded theory work.

I found the final chapter of the book to be the most fascinating part of all. As described in the introduction of Chapter Eight, the Bash panellists were reflecting on the day's proceedings and were lamenting that there did not seem to be enough time to discuss the intricacies of the variations' similarities and differences. In a spontaneous move they agreed to keep the recording running and entered into a spirited conversation that helps to illuminate the contrasts between the various forms, but to also help us grasp the essences of what makes grounded theory a unique form of qualitative inquiry. This widely ranging dialogue also helped me to see that we have only just begun to catch a glimpse of what grounded theory can bring to social inquiry including grounded theory assessment, intervention, and evaluation. From reading Adele Clarke's abstract mapping maybe we will one day even see an artistic form of grounded theory.

Developing Grounded Theory also presents an impressive collection of grounded theory citations and resources. Besides the references provided at the end of each chapter, the book concludes with list of other sources not previously cited in the main text of the book. Even in the "About the Authors" section at the end of the book we can find additional references arranged by the chapter contributors.

I agree with the book's claims that it makes an ideal selection for a research method course. There is ample description and explanation of the approaches and the exemplary papers also help to make this introduction quite accessible. The text also works as an advanced work that would aid researchers to select a grounded theory approach for a particular research project in a more informed manner and hopefully

conduct the study in a manner consistent with grounded theory “best practices” regardless which grounded theory was ultimately selected and employed.

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Author Note

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Article Citation

Chenail, R. J. (2009). The next generation of grounded theorists tells all. *The Weekly Qualitative Report*, 2(5), 28-30. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/WQR/morse.pdf>
