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Book Review: *Essentials of Accessible Grounded Theory* (Stern & Porr, 2011)¹

Reviewed by Tom Andrews, RN, B.Sc.(Hons), M.Sc., Ph.D.

Grounded Theory (GT) has been subjected to continual modification to fit various ontological and epistemological positions. Although not an explicitly stated purpose, it is nonetheless encouraging that a book has been published to counter its continual misinterpretation and adaptation. This book by Stern and Porr (2011) is a very welcome addition to the GT literature. It is aimed clearly at under-graduate and post-graduate students as well as novice researchers. It is explicitly aimed at explaining classical GT rather than “other versions” and so draws on the numerous writings of Dr. Glaser for its source material.

GT can be difficult to understand because it is an advanced methodology but made more complex by the fact that its study requires students to read several different textbooks. Also, GT is written about in ways that make it hard to understand. While there will always be a need to read original sources, at last here is a book outlining the principals and practices in just one volume. The book is very well written in a style that is easily understood and comprehended by its target audience. The concepts and procedures are clearly discussed while being faithful in the main to GT as originated by Glaser and Strauss. The premise of the book is that GT is a way of thinking and not just a way of doing (p.27). This emphasises from the start that GT is not simply a series of procedures to be applied. Post-graduate students, particularly those doing advanced degrees through research are expected to engage in philosophical issues surrounding research. The section on philosophical and theoretical underpinnings is therefore to be welcomed and is discussed in a way that is easily understandable. This will form a good basis for further reading on ontological and epistemological issues. However the conclusion that GT is based on symbolic interactionism (SI) is not supported in recent assertions by

¹ Stern, P.N. & Porr, C.J. (2011). *Essentials of Accessible Grounded Theory*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Dr. Glaser that this is simply another theoretical code that is used if relevant.

The tables provide a very useful summary of terms, which can be accessed quickly. There are numerous examples provided of coding and theoretical coding. These work well and provide effective illustrations of how these are operationalized. Initially I wondered if Appendix A was necessary, but it is effective at providing examples of theoretical coding. In books discussing GT the constant comparison method is either not discussed or only very briefly, but not so here. It is emphasised and explained well.

Following discussion of interpretative frameworks, students may well wonder if they should be using one in order to “direct the researcher’s gaze to where to look and think about data”. Although to be used as a sensitizing tool rather than an interpretative one, nonetheless it has the potential to lead to preconception, something that Dr. Glaser cautions against, particularly since it is prefaced by the word “interpretative”. Students may well form the impression that an interpretative framework is needed prior to data collection based on the discussion on pp.31-32. Also in this section the suggestion is that SI may be used as a framework together with “... any number of interpretative frameworks”. Readers may be left wondering when SI should be used as a framework and when as a theoretical code. Dr. Glaser insists that this should emerge from the data just as the theory does. Emphasising the integrative functions of theoretical coding and that they provide a theoretical framework would have reduced any potential confusion. Also it would have been worth mentioning that not all GT studies are basic social processes.

While the examples used in the section on selective coding are useful, it would benefit from a more comprehensive discussion of the issues around this step in the coding process such as when to change from open to selective coding. Students new to GT get confused between the different terms and explaining the differences for example between properties, codes and concepts would have been very useful.

This book will provide an invaluable first reader in classical GT, a book that researchers can return to act as a quick reference and for clarification purposes. It will not, nor

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does it claim to, replace reading the original writings of Glaser and Strauss and latterly Glaser. It does what it says on the cover: it is accessible and covers the essentials of GT.

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