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Book Review: Demystifying Grounded Theory Selection

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Glaser, B. (2014). *Choosing Classic Grounded Theory: A Grounded Theory Reader of Expert Advice*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

How to select a research methodology? What is the difference between CGT and QDA? Does grounded theory work with case studies? Is grounded theory the right selection for a PhD dissertation? These questions and many more are the focus of Dr. Glaser's new book, which addresses the key issues faced by the novice researcher in selecting classic grounded theory as their research methodology. In this 439 page fifteen-chapter book, Dr. Glaser takes the research reader on a journey reviewing the history, issues, and factors to consider in selecting classic grounded theory and challenges and myths around what is and is not grounded theory.

Rightfully, Dr. Glaser identifies other methodologies put forward as grounded theory as variations of QDA and while they may prove beneficial as research tools, they break the rules that govern the original hallmarks of grounded theory. The temptation to blur or slur different methodologies is discussed in detail providing the researcher sound advice on some of the pitfalls of mixing methodologies in the name of grounded theory. The book provides rationale for the selection of CGT and addresses bias that may exist with those whose primary research was based on QDA methodologies. Dr. Glaser provides detail differences between methodologies and five chapters of the book are contributed by four outstanding experts in the field of grounded theory (Dr. Christiansen, Dr. Holton, Dr. Lowe, and Dr. Simmons). Finally the book provides the reader with numerous examples of good CGT research and some of the basic rules to be applied in the application of CGT.

With the large volume of research books and articles focused on the novice researcher (novice being Masters or PhD students) claiming to highlight what is and how to implement grounded theory, this book provides clarity in what has become a confusing maze of literature.

Chapters one to four provide the researcher some of the basic rules and considerations in selection, and implementation of grounded theory and resolves outstanding myths associated with grounded theory. Grounded theory is often associated with qualitative research but as Dr. Glaser (2014) points out "GT is a general method that can be used with any type of quantitative data or qualitative data or combination thereof" (p. 45). Another myth is that GT is time consuming and should only be attempted with a strong mentor. During my own PhD, I had no mentor and while this book would have saved me substantial time in more effectively understanding different types of methodologies put

forward as GT, the actual time necessary for the research was most certainly not greater than any other methodology. Glaser (2014) addresses this myth head-on in this book: "GT takes far less time than QDA and many a GT novice does just fine without a mentor..." (p. 63).

In chapter three, Dr. Christiansen highlights the hallmarks of GT and provides sound advice on some of the do's and don'ts in the application of GT. In chapter four, Dr. Glaser identifies the issue of conceptualization and how this is a core difference of CGT to other methodologies whose focus is on descriptive analysis. Dr. Glaser explains the struggles and dimensions of generalization and how the descriptive value of case studies can be utilized as data within GT.

Chapters five to ten are a must read for the novice GT researcher. For those who teach research methodology these chapters provide an excellent background on the concerns of novice researchers and dangers of creating preconceived bias based on supervisors' pasted experience with methodologies. Dr. Glaser encourages those who supervise graduate students at either the masters or PhD level to keep an open mind in their role as supervisors and not to discourage the novice researcher from using methodologies with which they themselves may not be familiar. In the social science quest to emulate the scientific world of research, supervisors are often drawn to encouraging students to follow QDA focused methodologies. The argument is often that you need to have experience prior to using grounded theory methodologies and they are more effective with experienced researchers.

In chapter five, Dr. Glaser put forward "Make no mistake about it, the best GT is done in the hands of beginners" (Glaser, 2014, p. 157). Dr. Glaser highlights the concerns of new CGT researchers and provides encouragement and examples of success that other novice researchers have had in the use of CGT. In chapter six, Dr. Christiansen addresses the issue of ontology and epistemology highlighting the ongoing debate on theory building and the concerns of just building on extant theories versus breaking through to new conceptualizations and hence new theories. Chapters seven and eight provide the researcher a review of some of the differences of classic grounded theory, constructivist grounded theory and other forms of QDA. Chapters five to eight provide the much-needed clarity between the methodologies that has been missing in the bulk of the grounded theory literature. Constructivist and Straussian are QDA forms of methodologies and should not be mixed and matched to CGT. It is critical for effective research that the researcher clearly understands the differences and makes every effort not to blend or combine these methodologies.

In chapter nine, Dr. Simmons provides a historical view on the development of the CGT and other grounded theory methodologies (Constructivist and Straussian) that have gone down the QDA path. A candid view is offered by Dr. Lowe in chapter ten of the potential issues that exist within some academic institutions that have either an established bias or where supervisors may be unaware of the requirements that CGT puts on the researcher to stay true to the methodology. For those who teach research methodology, this book provides an excellent source of information on CGT. The book offers instructors and students the starting point to better insights to the CGT methodology and its application within research.

In chapter eleven, Dr. Glaser discusses the ongoing issue of qualitative research "its desire for credibility in the world of research." As Dr. Glaser (2014) puts forward,

credibility is not the question. The question for GT is being applicable to explaining how a main concern is continually resolved in a substantive area and its general, conceptual applicability. . . . The theory has fit, relevance and works and is modifiable when compared, conceptually, with new data. (p. 317)

Dr. Glaser puts forward that the conceptual credibility of CGT is based on the due diligence of the methodology itself. I agree the strengths of CGT are in the theory generated and the process by which CGT develops the theory. In chapter twelve, Dr. Holton provides an overview of the research method and with Dr. Glaser (2014) reaffirms "The four criteria are fit, work, relevance and modifiability" (p. 356).

The reader is reminded in chapter thirteen of the dangers of mixing methodologies and a general guideline on the CGT procedures from an earlier work by Dr. Glaser and Dr. Holton.

The book closes with chapter fourteen providing some useful success stories of PhD research accomplishments and in chapter fifteen Dr. Glaser provides a copy of historical letters he wrote defending the basics of grounded theory analysis.

As with many of the books and articles that Dr. Glaser has produced over the years, this is one that I will keep close at hand as reference material for both my students and myself. There are too many insights within the 439 pages to hope to cover them effectively in a short book review.

The book is structured to provide the novice researcher a clear understanding of CGT and how it fits as a research methodology. Dr. Glaser and four well know grounded theory scholars have presented in an easy-to-read book the necessary facts that the researcher needs to consider in selecting classic grounded theory. It removes the confusion that has been created by too many authors mixing QDA and other non-classic grounded theory methodologies. Those who advocate QDA, and other non-classic forms of grounded theory may take exception to some statements, but the author has been careful to stick to the facts; for those who believe in evidence based decision making it puts the facts out for consideration. A great read I would highly recommend to both PhD students and supervisors.