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Book Review: Replacing The Discovery of Grounded Theory

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## **Book Review: Replacing The Discovery of Grounded Theory**

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Glaser, B. G. (2016). *The Grounded theory perspective: Its origin and growth*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

This book is Glaser's fourth in Sociology Press' perspective series. The first book in this series was about "conceptualization contrasted with description". The second book was about "description's remodeling of grounded theory methodology"; the third book was about "theoretical coding".

The overriding purpose of all books written by Glaser is to help novice CGT researchers in their dissertation work, often without any mentor involved. In this Glaser's fourth book in the perspective series, the overriding purpose is the same as in the other three books, but special emphasis is on doing good CGT by learning to do CGT by example. People learn better by example. The book facilitates learning by example by providing a listing of earlier CGT works.

Another emphasis in this fourth book is to draw attention to the historical origin and growth of the classic grounded theory perspective. Consequently, the book sums up and links to all the coherent "constituent parts" of the CGT perspective and it gives an overview of and a linking to Glaser's work since the 1960s (the preceding 50 years).

For example, many grounded theories within medical sociology have been published in many different journals. To obtain a copy of all these works is almost impossible and too time consuming for an individual researcher. However, Glaser has done the work. He can provide his readers with access to 59 published articles within medical sociology. This access will facilitate learning CGT by example. A balanced learning by example takes place as (1) reading and comparing of earlier CGT works, (2) supervised (if possible) practical use of the CGT procedures, and (3) a reading of a prioritized selection of CGT methodology books.

The contrast between this fourth book and the first GT book (*Discovery of Grounded Theory* [Glaser & Strauss, 1967]) is enormous. So much has happened in the advancement of CGT during these last 50 years that the "discovery book" in my view is becoming increasingly antiquated as a pedagogical tool. A replacement by *The Grounded Theory Perspective: Its Origin and Growth* (Glaser, 2016) can safely take place. We need a book that goes straight to the most important and problematic element.

On the website of Sociology Press, the publisher suggests the following prioritized reading list for researchers new to classic grounded theory:

**1. Start by reading the foundational works (in this order):**

- a. The Discovery of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)
- b. Theoretical Sensitivity (Glaser, 1978)
- c. Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis (Glaser, 1992)
- d. Doing Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1998)

**2. Read examples of grounded theories:**

- a. Try one of the Readers listed in our Index of publications
- b. Subscribe to The Grounded Theory Review

**3. Next, study the Perspectives Series**

- a. The Grounded Theory Perspective: Conceptualization contrasted with Description (Glaser, 2001)
- b. The Grounded Theory Perspective II: Description's Remodeling of Grounded Theory Methodology (Glaser, 2003)
- c. The Grounded Theory Perspective III: Theoretical Coding (Glaser, 2005)

It is remarkable that the "discovery book" is number one on this current list. As mentioned earlier, it could be replaced as number one by *The Grounded Theory Perspective: Its Origin and Growth*. It follows ordinary logic to replace the oldest by the newest.

The understanding of the classic grounded theory (CGT) perspective is, of course, the prerequisite for the use of the CGT methodology. It is also the prerequisite for supervising PhD students in their CGT research, for peer-reviewing CGT research, and for teaching the methodology. Lack of understanding of the CGT perspective will by default lead to a remodeling of CGT.

On the other hand, the understanding of the CGT perspective is not the same as an understanding of the methodology and its practical procedures. The CGT procedures are best learned by practical research efforts (supervised whenever possible), balanced by a systematic reading of the methodology books and of literature that demonstrates CGT by example.

Then, what is the GCT perspective? I can only give my own summary:

The CGT perspective is about a methodology for discovering and generating theory directly from data instead of logically deriving theory from presupposed premises and subsequent testing/verifying of hypotheses. It is about avoiding all preconceived professional interest concern of the researcher (including preconceived ontological and epistemological assumptions that are best replaced by a pragmatic attitude), in favor of the discovery of the substantive interest concerns of those being studied. It is about the discovery of the "main concern" of those being studied and their recurrent solving of their main concern by their actual behavior. It is about what drives and directs the behavior of those being studied; consequently, it will also be the discovery of the most relevant, important and problematic for those being studied and of its recurrent solving. It is about explaining most of the variation in the data (behavior) while accounting for the recurrent solving of the main concern.

CGT is philosophically (almost) neutral. This means that it has nothing or almost nothing to say about ontology and epistemology. Its philosophical stance is limited to the assumption that social life is patterned, and that these patterns can be discovered and explained by the methodological approach of CGT. This methodological approach is also a modifiable classic grounded theory that has "conceptualizing" as its core variable. The (almost) philosophical neutrality of CGT also means that CGT is a perspective and a paradigm as well as a modifiable classic grounded theory of research design and research procedures.

People who know nothing about CGT are usually surprised, when they hear or read about the CGT perspective. Many preconceive it to be something else. For many, the *raison d'être* of CGT becomes obvious. The CGT perspective is not better, it is just different, but it cannot be mixed with other approaches without losing its potential and *raison d'être*.