

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory

By Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss

(3rd ed.; Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 2008, 358 pages)

An updated and revised edition of Corbin and Strauss' popular handbook on grounded theory, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (3rd edition), remains a classic in qualitative research. This third edition, one of the most readable and practical explorations of grounded theory available, is a must-read for any graduate student or researcher interested in using grounded theory for qualitative research. Corbin and Strauss have laid out their volume in a manner that easily walks any beginning (or experienced) researcher through the grounded theory approach to data collection, analysis, and reflection. The combination of both writing about the process and demonstrating it with actual research study examples works very well for reinforcing how to "make sense out of masses of qualitative data" using grounded theory (pp. ix-x). A classic, it should remain on the shelves of researchers for years to come.

What Corbin and Strauss' revised edition is not, however, is a guide to the basics of *all* qualitative research. It is important to realize when reading this book that there are both subtle and explicit differences between various qualitative research methods. The strength of this book is that it stays focused on exploring a grounded theory approach to qualitative research and does not try to incorporate other qualitative methodologies into the text. Contrary to its title, however, the *Basics of Qualitative Research* does not delve deeply into other commonly used qualitative methodologies. The author(s) acknowledge this issue when they state:

I am not an expert in other methods . . . each method has its own theoretical foundation, purpose and procedures for collecting and analyzing data. Quality quantitative research can be done using all of the different methods as long as the user is true to the method. (p. 326)

Even with that qualification, however, throughout the book, the author(s) repeatedly imply that this research process applies to all qualitative research and philosophical underpinnings to methodological approaches of collecting, analyzing, and using data. For example, the statement "research is a continuous process of data collection, followed by analysis and memo writing, leading to questions, that lead to more data collection, and so on" (p. 197), describes

one research process, that of grounded theory, rather than all research. Those new to qualitative research might easily mistake this particular grounded theory approach for a generalized qualitative research methodology.

The book's weakness in this regard, led me to a personal reflection about my own training in qualitative methodologies, and my subsequent work with other researchers exploring qualitative research for the first time. I could easily see using *Basics of Qualitative Research* as a teaching text, in conjunction with other qualitative research texts, such as van Manen's (1997) *Researching Lived Experiences* on phenomenology, and Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) *Narrative Inquiry*, to compare and contrast different qualitative research methodologies. It would make for a great graduate research methods seminar, but the complexity of these different qualitative research methodologies is missing from this book.

Two other issues worth mentioning in Corbin and Strauss' *Basics of Qualitative Research* could be easily addressed in future editions. First, the volume lists two authors (one of whom, the late Anselm Strauss, has been called the father of grounded theory), yet the text is often written in the first person singular; and it switches back and forth between first and third person in other places, making it slightly difficult to understand. If I were a new researcher who had no idea of Strauss' contribution to grounded theory, this inconsistency in narrative style might be frustrating. Although confusing, there are a few specific instances when Corbin clarifies that it is her voice driving the narrative. As someone who had not read the first two editions, but knew Strauss' work, I am led to assume that the "I" is Corbin throughout, but I could be mistaken. This inconsistency also manifests itself in the book's target audience, explicitly mentioned in the text. In several places, the author(s) specify graduate students, but in others they purposefully broaden their language to "researchers."

Confusion about the target audience leads me to a second general issue with the book, which is specifically about Chapter 13, "Writing Theses, Monographs, and Giving Talks." This chapter was too general to be of much use specifically to grounded theory. Even though the author(s) state that "writing and presenting help clarify thoughts and elucidate breaks in logic" (p. 275), the chapter does not explore in depth how writing might aid in data analysis for grounded theory. That said, the writing process the author(s) describe is quite prescriptive and may be of limited use beyond grounded theory. While perhaps not intentional, it also presented a slightly dated view of the value of different types of publications, calling writing papers for research-based publications a "fourth class" that were clearly inferior to monographs, even though in many disciplines using grounded theory peer-reviewed journal articles are the currency of trade for faculty evaluation. The author(s) might be better off revising this chapter to specifically address the role of writing and oral communication as a part of the data analysis process for grounded theory. In its current format, the chapter reiterates in general terms what is found in more depth and detail in other sources that focus on supporting academic writing and communication, including, for example, Rudestam and Newton's (2007) well-known *Surviving Your Dissertation*.

Despite the reservations I have expressed above, this is still *the* book for introducing researchers to a grounded theory approach to qualitative research. I recommend it wholeheartedly.

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