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A Review of Corbin and Strauss' Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory

Abstract

In the third edition of the classic text, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, Juliet Corbin continues to present the basics of grounded theory in the context of an evolving world of qualitative research. In doing so she is able to share the traditional essences of the method as put forth in the first two editions while weaving in contemporary changes resulting from her reflections on emergent method, methodology, theory, and who she has become as a researcher

Keywords

Grounded Theory, Qualitative Research, MAXQDA

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**A Review of Corbin and Strauss’
*Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for
Developing Grounded Theory***

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*In the third edition of the classic text, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, Juliet Corbin continues to present the basics of grounded theory in the context of an evolving world of qualitative research. In doing so she is able to share the traditional essences of the method as put forth in the first two editions while weaving in contemporary changes resulting from her reflections on emergent method, methodology, theory, and who she has become as a researcher. Key Words: Grounded Theory, Qualitative Research, and MAXQDA.*

Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss’ (2007) new version of *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* is an excellent reference for students, particularly those in the early stages of learning about qualitative research in general and grounded theory in particular and wanting to apply a qualitative method to address their research questions in a variety of disciplines. It is a book that the qualitative researcher may have encountered in its first (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and its second (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) edition. Discussions continue in the third edition to include the myriad of changes that have occurred in qualitative research including grounded theory itself since the earlier editions (see also Morse, Stern, Corbin, Bowers, Charmaz, & Clarke, 2009). This text will also serve teachers of qualitative research well, as it draws upon the updates in the field serving to introduce students to the most recent thinking in qualitative research.

It is important to note that the 3rd edition is written such that the first section of the text includes materials that were worked on by both authors, Anselm Strauss and Judith Corbin. The early chapters contain information about methodology and procedures, and these reflect the collaboration of the two authors. However, the second portion of the book is written wholly by Judith Corbin, following the death of Strauss. She uses the procedural and methodological materials developed by both authors and turns toward building theory by analyzing her own collected data related to the Vietnam War. As such, her examples provide the reader with applications to consider as they collect and consider their own data points. Corbin also introduces new aspects of grounded theory based upon conversations that have emerged in qualitative research regarding theory and methodology since the last version was written. In addition Corbin builds upon her own development as a researcher which leads her to explore in the text means other than theory construction to create new knowledge.

The book is organized into 15 chapters, each one heralded by a quotation meant to capture the essence of the information that follows. The authors provide definitions of

terms at the outset of each chapter; each chapter concludes with a summary of important points, followed by author-suggested activities for thinking, writing and group discussion. Thus, the reader is easily able to capture the logical and sequential framework of the topics represented by each chapter based on the framework in which the author captures the information. Readers wanting to get a first-hand feel for this format can read the full-text of Chapters Three, Six, and Eight that can be found on the book's web page at Sage (<http://www.sagepub.com/booksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book226809>).

The text is 379 pages and is not presented in handbook style. As such, the reader should not choose to reach chapters selectively. This reviewer felt it important to read the text from beginning to end in order to best understand the philosophical beliefs that underlie the Corbin and Strauss approach to analysis. Chapters 1 through 4 include the introduction, practical considerations, preludes to analysis and strategies for qualitative data analysis. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on context and process as well as memos and diagrams. Chapter 7 provides information about theoretical sampling. Beginning in Chapter 8, the author provides demonstrations of "doing analysis" using case studies and data from the Vietnam War research project. For those readers wanting to go more in-depth with this data set, they can go to the MAXQDA "Corbin: Basics of Qualitative Research - Study Site" (<http://www.maxqda.com/service/books/corbin>) and follow the analytical steps outlined in the book and they can also conduct analyses of their own with the data set. The next five chapters are all written with examples, as in case study. The final chapters are devoted to helping the reader to be a better writer of theses, monographs, and a better consumer of qualitative research. The final chapter, entitled "Student Questions and Answers," is this reviewer's favorite as it mimics a classroom dialogue and provides the type of feedback crucial to a deeper understanding of the author's perspectives.

As an institutional effectiveness researcher whose primary focus over the last two years had been in evaluating engagement of university constituents, this reviewer found most useful the chapters on analyzing data for concepts, elaborating the analysis, and analyzing data for context. While all of the examples provided were from the author's research on the Vietnam War, this reviewer was easily able to make connections to the types of data collected within an institution of higher education. Corbin provides the framework by which data can be broken down into manageable pieces, and then begin to conceptualize the direction to which the data points. From there, the researcher can brainstorm and further question the data, make comparisons, and reflectively consider the next steps in the process. By so doing, the researcher can begin to develop themes and categories. This is useful, for example, in examining the types of activities that are generated from engagement data that point to institutional trends to improve quality.

The following quotation serves well to explain how one must proceed when elaborating upon the analysis:

On the part of the researcher, creative and solid data analysis requires astute questioning, a relentless search for answers, active observation, and accurate recall. It is a process of fitting data together, of making the invisible obvious, of linking and attributing consequences to antecedents. It is a process of conjecture and verification, of correction and modification, or suggestion and defense. (Morse & Field, 1995, pp. 125-126, as cited in Corbin & Strauss, 2007, p. 195)

Corbin makes the point that analysis becomes complex, particularly when the researcher does not maintain adequate memos and documentation methods for future concept development. Although the use of computers is described within the text to analyze data and screen shots are provided to further elucidate the use of a computer software system, it is clear that the author(s) discourage approaching analysis in a mechanical way. Corbin is quite emphatic that the researcher's ability to be flexible, to change his/her mind and to consider new ideas, that allows findings that are obtained through qualitative research to be both compelling and relevant. The idea that the journey or the process by which the researcher arrives at his/her understanding is crucial to enhancing the practice of qualitative research.

This text is based on the belief that multiple interpretations can be derived from one set of data. Concepts that are developed can be used as the basis for additional dialogue. The dialogue can then be utilized to build the professional body of knowledge and then can be used to enhance practice. An example for this reviewer is a recent study undertaken at the institution in which she works. The initiative was one that provided a 360 degree reflection about a variety of institutional constituents' views of the institution. The use of surveys formed the basis of perceptions. It became clear, however, that without follow up dialogue, exchange, and discussion about what the survey items meant, much of the information would remain cloudy. The use of focus groups, town hall meetings, and feedback along with a review of the action plans developed to improve the quality of the institution's self-perceptions provided a richer understanding of the initial set of data.

In summary, while this text is primarily a methodology book, there are many sets of materials provided within to give context and demonstrations to novice researchers as they move forward in their work with qualitative data. With the third edition, Corbin and Strauss provide a step-by-step guide to qualitative research – from formulating the research question, through several approaches to coding and analyzing, to providing suggestions for reporting the research to a variety of audiences. The text is an excellent addition to introductory qualitative courses and students in the social, behavioral and health sciences fields should find applications for their work settings.

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