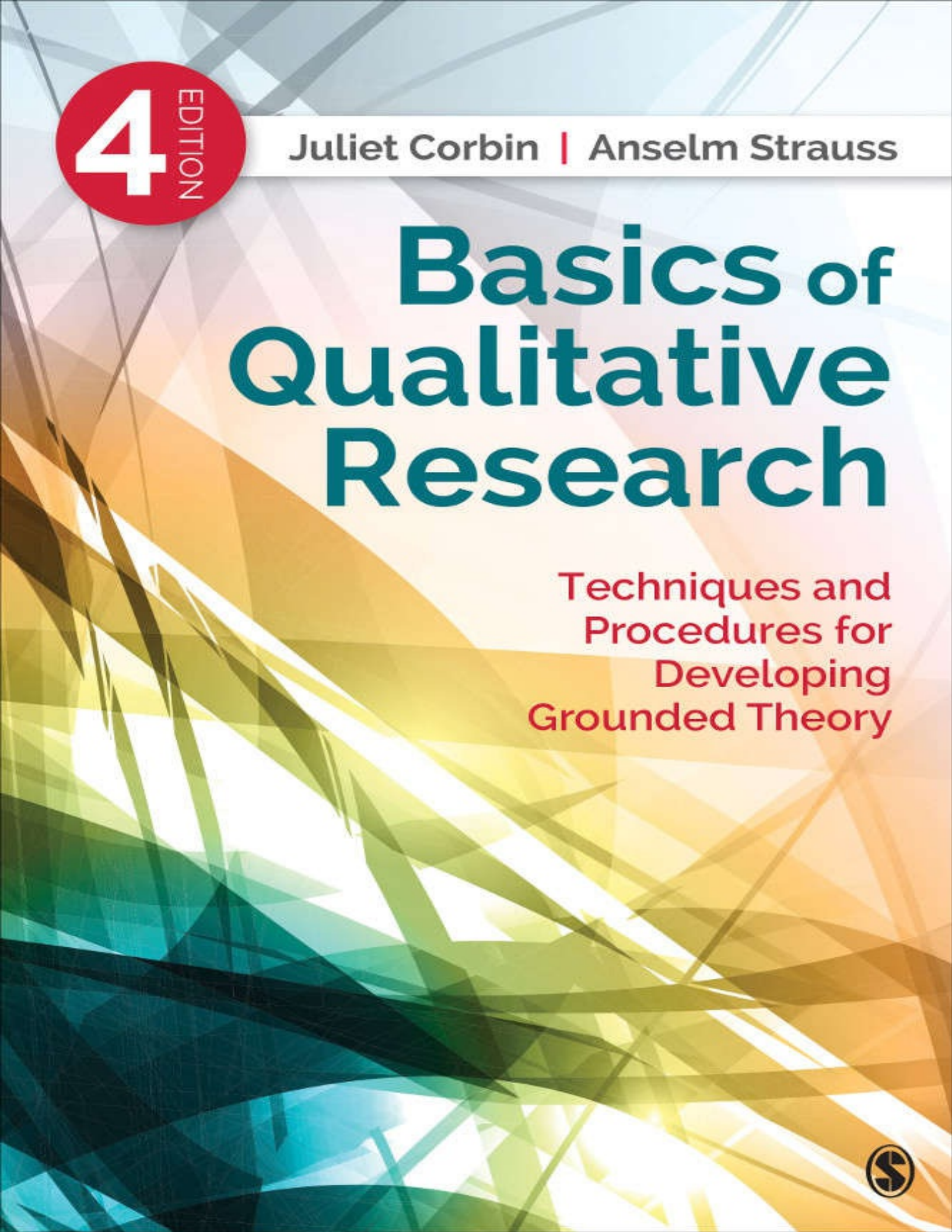
4 EDITION
Juliet Corbin | Anselm Strauss
Basics of Qualitative Research
Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory

Basics of Qualitative Research

Fourth Edition

To Anselm

December 16, 1916–September 1996

Scholar and Humanist

Who touched the minds and lives of all who came into contact with him

Basics of Qualitative Research

Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory

Fourth Edition

Juliet Corbin
International Institute for Qualitative Methodology
Anselm Strauss

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Preface

> Also at my intellectual core perhaps is the sense that—however naÏve you thinks this is—the world of social phenomena is bafflingly complex. Complexity has fascinated and puzzled me much of my life. How to unravel some of that complexity, to order it, not to be dismayed or defeated by it? How not to avoid the complexity nor distort interpretation of it by oversimplifying it out of existence? This is of course, an old problem: Abstraction (theory) inevitably simplifies, yet to comprehend deeply, to order, some degree of abstraction is necessary. How to keep a balance between distortion and conceptualization? (Strauss, 1993, p. 12)

Since *Basics of Grounded Theory* was first published in 1990, this book has come a long way. When Anselm Strauss and I wrote the first edition of this book it was meant primarily for our own students. We never thought it would attract much of an audience beyond that group. In preparing to write this fourth edition, I went back and looked at some of those earlier editions and was surprised to see how much the book has grown in depth and breadth.

Never fear, the basics of *Basics* have remained the same for each edition. Over the years chapters have been expanded and contracted, been combined and broken apart, all in an effort to make the book easier to read. This edition also is an attempt to make the book more readily understandable to beginning grounded theorists. All of the chapters have been closely examined by me and re-organized with new headings added to each chapter. Parts of each chapter have been rewritten to increase clarify of major concepts. There are additional examples provided in each chapter to illustrate major analytic points especially in regards to analyzing data for context and integration. Some of the denser chapters from the third edition have been broken apart to make it easier for readers to grasp the material they contained. In Chapters 2, 3, and 4, there are new sections on ethics applying that notion to the major points made in those chapters. A new feature, “Insider Insights” short writings from former students and colleagues have been added to chapters 4,

5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 to provide readers with optional viewpoints. The emphasis of the book is on analysis. It is not meant to be all-inclusive and for that reason there are suggested readings at the end of each chapter in Part One and in the chapter on writing and doing presentations to fill in areas where the book might be lacking such as with interviewing.

This book has been divided into three parts with a short introduction to each, Parts 1, 2, and 3. The material provided in Part 1 of this book contains the background, the essential procedures, and outlines the steps necessary to construct a grounded theory. Part 2 demonstrates how to apply that material to actual data so that readers can follow the progress of a study from initial data collection to integration. Part 3 is practical in nature. It offers suggestions for writing papers, monographs, dissertations, and doing presentations along with demonstrations of how to write an outline for each. There is a chapter that discusses how to evaluate the quality of one's own and other's grounded theory and a short new section on application of theory to research, teaching, and practice. The final chapter is one devoted to student questions and answers. I want to make it clear to readers that the three parts of the book are not meant to be read separately. The material in the first part of the book is meant to be used in conjunction with the second part with readers going back and forth between a discussion of procedures and demonstration of application of those procedures. Readers can go to Part 3 to find answers to questions posed by other students, questions that they too might have.

Part 1 of this book includes Chapters 1 through 11. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to Strauss's approach to grounded theory. Chapter 2, formerly a part of Chapter 1, now stands alone. It presents the philosophical background for this methodology. In Chapter 3, there are practical considerations for getting started on a grounded theory research project with an additional section on the requirements for the IRB committee. Chapter 4 introduces the notion of analysis and discusses some of its properties. Chapter 5 gets to the heart of analysis by presenting some procedures and techniques for doing analysis. The order of the next 2 chapters Chapters 6 and 7 have been arranged differently from those in the third edition on the advice from reviewers of this book. Chapter 6 on memos and diagrams now follows Chapter 5. Chapter 7 on theoretical sampling follows. It discusses theoretical

sampling, a specialized form of data gathering particular to grounded theory. Chapters 8 and 9 formerly one chapter are separated now with Chapter 8 explaining the importance of locating major concepts in context and Chapter 9 emphasizing the relevance of bringing process into the analysis when constructing theory. Chapter 10 discusses integration—the final step in theory construction. Part 1 concludes with a new chapter, Chapter 11, a brief chapter on the use of computer data analysis programs in qualitative research.

Throughout Part 2, I'll will be working with different types of data, including interviews, memoirs, and historical materials. Each chapter has been cut back somewhat for this edition. Each chaper focuses on a different aspect of analysis. In Chapter 12, the emphasis is on concept identification or open coding. In Chapter 13, the emphasis is on concept elaboration. In Chapter 14, the focus is on analyzing data for context a form of axial coding. Chapter 15 explains how to bring process into the analysis and Chapter 16 demonstrates integration. Readers of this text will notice that for teaching purposes I break analysis down to its major elements. I acknowledge that analysis is more complex than these breakdowns imply because persons' thought processes are more complex. As analysts are breaking data down, they are also noting relationships. As they are delineating concepts, they are also identifying properties and dimensions. Throughout the analytic process, they are working toward integration. The breakdowns are made so that novices can put a name on what they do and be somewhat systematic and at the same time flexible about their analyses.

A research study is not complete until it is critiqued and made available to others. This final part of the book, Part 3, deals with practical matters related to evaluation and publication. Chapter 17 offers suggestions for preparing dissertations and monographs, writing papers, and doing presentations. Chapter 18 presents criteria that can be used by grounded theorists to evaluate the quality of the their own work, theses and dissertation committees and granting agencies and readers of grounded theory studies to evaluate the quality of the studies. It also includes a new section on applying one's theory to research, teaching, and practice. Chapter 19 responds to questions often posed by students and other researchers regarding grounded theory. We hope that these sections provide a fit conclusion to the book.

Most of all, this book remains a tribute to Anselm Strauss and the legacy he has left behind. It has been an honor and joy to write and his memory remains buried deep in these pages.

Juliet Corbin

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Finally, I want to express my gratitude to the colleagues and former students who have contributed to the book through their "Insider Insights." They are a welcome addition to the book.

SAGE was founded in 1965 by Sara Miller McCune to support the dissemination of usable knowledge by publishing innovative and high-quality research and teaching content. Today, we publish more than 750 journals, including those of more than 300 learned societies, more than 800 new books per year, and a growing range of library products including archives, data, case studies, reports, conference highlights, and video. SAGE remains majority-owned by our founder, and after Sara's lifetime will become owned by a charitable trust that secures our continued independence.

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Part 1: Introduction to the Grounded Theory of Anselm Strauss

These first eleven chapters in Part 1 are purposefully abstract. They are not meant to demonstrate the method but to set the tone and provide the background for doing analysis. I feel it is important that readers of this text know something about the method before they begin doing it. The reason is that so often novice researchers take a very dogmatic, rigid approach to doing analysis. They want structure because they don't understand what they are doing or why. They want a formula that lays it all out for them step-by-step. But qualitative research is not meant to have a lot of structure or rigid approach to analysis. It is an interpretive, very dynamic, free-flowing process, and unless researchers understand the basics of what they are trying to do, they lose these aspects of analysis. Their research becomes superficial and fails to provide the novel insights into human behavior that give qualitative research its dynamic edge.

This text was not meant to be read beginning with the first chapter and moving forward until the end. It is meant to be used flexibly, with movement back and forth between chapters. Users can arrange the chapters in the manner that best works for them. For example, after studying the more abstract chapters on analysis and analytic strategies—Chapters 4 and 5—readers can move to Chapters 12 and 13 for illustrations on open coding (Chapter 12) and coding to develop and link concepts (Chapter 13). After studying the abstract chapter context in Chapter 8, readers can move to Chapter 14 to see how analysis for context is carried out during a research project and so on. I arranged the chapters using a logic that made sense to me. Readers may approach the text using another form of logic, and that is okay.

Chapter 1 Inspiration and Background

> If what is designated by such terms as doubt, belief, idea, conception, is to have any objective meaning, to say nothing of public verifiability, it must be located and described as behavior in which organism and environment act together, or interact. (Dewey, 1938, p. 32)

Table 1.1 Key Terms

Table 1.1 Key Terms

Grounded theory: Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed this qualitative methodology—the purpose of which is to construct theory grounded in data. The method presented in this book reflects Strauss's approach to grounded theory analysis.
Methodology: A way of thinking about and studying social phenomena
Methods: Techniques and procedures for gathering and analyzing data
Qualitative research: A form of research in which a researcher(s) or designated coresearcher(s) collects and interprets data, making the researcher as much a part of the research process as participants and the data they provide

Overview

> Like Coleridge and Kublai Khan, I woke up dreaming, but since it isn't a complete dream but only the germ, I thought out the words and here they are.
>
> —Anselm Strauss

In the third edition, the preceding quote and the paragraphs that followed were located toward the end of the chapter. However, after consideration, I couldn't help but feel that in this fourth edition they belonged at the beginning of the chapter as they were placed in the second edition. I couldn't think of a better way to begin this book than with the words of Anselm Strauss! Although he has been dead now for over a decade, he is very much alive in the method that follows.

Persons choose to do research because they have a dream that somehow they will make a difference through the insights and understandings they arrive at through their research. But it is not enough to dream about doing research. Dreams must be brought to fruition by actually following through. This chapter will introduce readers to a **methodology** that provides a means of achieving research dreams. The methodology is not perfect, and we acknowledge this. However, it is a proven method that has been used successfully for over 40 years by countless students throughout the world—some taught by us, others who were not. Though we wish we could reach across the world and train everyone who is interested in learning how to do **grounded theory**, we know that this is not possible. Therefore, we have written this book with the hope that we can become "teachers–mentors in absentia." Like all good teachers, our purpose is to stimulate a love for doing research that will remain with our readers throughout their careers and provide readers with a solid foundation in data analysis.

Points to Keep in Mind

When reading this chapter, students are advised to keep the following points in mind:

- Describe qualitative research.
- Introduce grounded theory as a form of qualitative research.
- Present testimonials by our students about grounded theory.
- Explain why theory construction is important.
- Differentiate theory from description.
- Introduce ethics as it relates to grounded theory research.

Qualitative Research

We begin our text by locating grounded theory within the broader context of **qualitative research**. This section will provide the following:

- Description of qualitative research
- Explanation of why researchers choose qualitative over quantitative methods
- Summary of characteristics of qualitative researchers

Description of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a form of research in which the researcher or a designated coresearcher collects and interprets data, making the researcher as much a part of the research process as the participants and the data they provide. Qualitative research utilizes an open and flexible design and in doing so stands at odds with the notion of rigor so important when doing quantitative research. There are many different types of qualitative research each with its own purpose and structure (Creswell, 2013). (For just some of the possibilities, see the list under “Suggested Readings” at the end of this chapter.) The focus of this book is upon one type of qualitative research called *grounded theory*.

Explanation of Why Researchers Choose Qualitative Over Quantitative Methods

Why do some researchers choose to use qualitative rather than quantitative **methods**? Here are some of the most frequently given reasons:

- To explore the inner experiences of participants
- To explore how meanings are formed and transformed
- To explore areas not yet thoroughly researched
- To discover relevant variables that later can be tested through quantitative forms of research
- To take a holistic and comprehensive approach to the study of phenomena

However, we think there are additional reasons why some persons choose to do qualitative research. Committed qualitative researchers tend to frame their research questions in such a way that the only manner in which they can be answered is by doing qualitative research. In addition, qualitative researchers are drawn to the fluid, evolving, and dynamic nature of this approach as opposed to the more structured designs of quantitative methods. In addition, they enjoy serendipity and making discoveries. Statistics might be interesting, but it is the endless possibilities to learn more about the human response that attract them. Qualitative researchers want the opportunity to connect with their research participants and to see the world from their viewpoints. Furthermore, they enjoy playing with words, making order out of seeming disorder, and thinking in terms of complex relationships. For qualitative researchers, doing research is a challenge—one that brings the whole self into the process. This is not to denigrate quantitative researchers. In fact, all researchers share curiosity about the word and a determination to find answers to questions that will improve the social condition or lead to social justice. But there is no doubt that qualitative researchers are of a certain type, and once bitten by the “qualitative bug,” they seek out opportunities to continue doing this form of research.