FORUM: QUALITATIVE SOCIAL RESEARCH SOZIALFORSCHUNG

Review:

Craig Whisker

Adele E. Clarke, Carrie Friese & Rachel S. Washburn (2018). Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory After the Interpretive Turn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage (2nd ed.); ISBN-13: 978-1452260907; Price: $65.00 USD

Abstract: "Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory *After* the Interpretive Turn" is the second edition [2E] of Adele CLARKE's inspirational 2005 book [1E], where this new approach to qualitative research first appeared in the tradition of grounded theory methodology [GT]. Thirteen years, two additional authors, and a title change—from postmodern to interpretive turn—herald major revisions in 2E that update, clarify, and further distinguish situational analysis [SA], providing a more user-friendly read than its predecessor. In this review, I attempt to illuminate the relationships between SA and constructivist GT, and between SA mapping and GT coding. I experience the 2E authors' increasing confidence in their distinctive conceptualization of GT as infectious, and this is celebrated.

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> "[T]he most productive route for change [...] is to work at defining self in the family of origin" (BOWEN, 1978, p.545).

1. Distinguishing Situational Analysis Within the Grounded Theory Tradition

In the early days following situational analysis's [SA] appearance in the tradition of grounded theory methodology [GT],[1] one critic grumbles that Adele CLARKE (2003, 2005) "constantly [emphasizes ...] that situational analysis is a method which can expand grounded theory" (MATHER, 2008, §36). As the years roll on, linkages identifying SA as "relying on," "extending," and being "supplemental" (CLARKE, 2009; CLARKE, FRIESE & WASHBURN, 2015) to GT are sustained even as SA celebrates its coming of age (CHARMAZ, 2015, p.7). So, it is with considerable relief and some necessary illumination that in 2018 the second edition [2E] of CLARKE's inspirational textbook, now entitled "Situational

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1 I follow CLARKE, FRIESE, and WASHBURN in using "GT" to denote grounded theory methodology—what *FQS* usually refers to as GTM.

Analysis: Grounded Theory *After* the Interpretive Turn,"[2] updates, clarifies, and further distinguishes SA as a distinctive 21st-century qualitative methodology in its own right—yes, sharing some epistemological assumptions and ontological roots with Straussian GT and fully capable of working jointly with its methodological sister, constructivist grounded theory [CGT] (CHARMAZ, 2014), yet also "an analytic approach distinct from GT" (CLARKE, FRIESE & WASHBURN, 2018, p.xxvi)[3] and compatible with select non-GT partners—which may have been CLARKE's interpretivist vision for SA all along. [1]

In this review, I briefly recap what SA is, summarize the revisions contained in 2E, attempt to illuminate the relationships between SA and CGT and between SA mapping and GT coding, and celebrate the achievements of the 2E authors. [2]

2. SA in Brief

SA is a new approach to qualitative analysis that grows out of CLARKE's feminist-inspired project to push GT (GLASER & STRAUSS, 1967; STRAUSS & CORBIN, 1990) "more fully around the interpretive turn" so as to rid it of generic oversimplifications, its lack of reflexivity, and other "problematic positivist recalcitrancies" (CLARKE et al., p.xxiv, also see pp.33-41) lingering in the name of theoretical purity. Instead of focusing on action-centered basic social processes, as CLARKE asserts GT primarily does—see MARTIN (2006) for rebuttal by a Glaserian theorist—SA makes "the situation of inquiry broadly conceived [...] the ultimate unit of analysis, and understanding its elements and their relations its primary goal" (CLARKE et al., p.xxv). [3]

To achieve this goal, SA researchers construct "the situation" empirically by making three unique ecological-relational maps: situational maps, social worlds/arenas maps, and positional maps. Rather than joining GT in seeking commonalities through codes, categories, and substantive or ultimately formal theory, SA's analytical mapping exercises aim to generate new forms of theorizing that capture the complexities and multiplicities of social life and produce thick analyses that "take into account the full array of elements in the situation—human, nonhuman and discursive" (ibid.). [4]

Consistent with its pragmatist roots, SA is an especially relational and ecological approach (e.g., CEFAÏ, 2016). It has been highly taken up transdisciplinarily and transnationally, with a German translation of 1E introduced by Reiner KELLER (CLARKE, 2012 [2005]), a forthcoming Italian translation of parts of the SA reader introduced by Giuseppina CERSOSIMO (CLARKE, FRIESE & WASHBURN, forthcoming), and a broad range of exemplars from around the world (see appendices in 2E). [5]

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2   The emphasis placed on "after" is made by the 2E authors. Situating SA with respect to the interpretive rather than the postmodern turn, as it was in the first edition [1E], is thoroughly discussed by CLARKE, FRIESE and WASHBURN (2015, pp.22-50).

3   Hereafter, citations for CLARKE, FRIESE and WASHBURN (2018) are shown as CLARKE et al., with page numbers only.

3. 2E Revisions

Major revisions to structural layout, density of content, theoretical grounds, and exemplars in 2E make for a sharper, cleaner, more user-friendly edition than its 1E predecessor. This may owe something to the generativity of collaborative authorship when discerning how best to communicate what SA currently is, what it is growing into, who it is attracting, and who it is attracted to—insights reflecting knowledge accumulated by several working partnerships (CLARKE & CHARMAZ, 2014; CLARKE & FRIESE, 2007; CLARKE et al, 2015; CLARKE & KELLER, 2014; CLARKE & MONTINI, 1993; CLARKE & STAR 2003, 2008) who have invested in developing SA over the past 20 years. [6]

Instead of presenting SA in uninterrupted sequential chapters as before, 2E is structured into three parts: theoretical grounds, map making, and discourse analysis, respectively. In Part One the authors braid SA's older theoretical grounds from Straussian GT, rooted in pragmatism, Chicago School ecologies, and symbolic interactionism (CLARKE et al., pp.63-77), with newer theorizing that goes beyond the known subject through Foucauldian discourse analysis (pp.77-85), that takes the non-human explicitly into account (pp.85-91), and most recently, that recognizes the "intrinsic co-constitution and relationality of rhizomes and assemblages" (pp.91-96) from DELEUZE and GUATTARI (1987). [7]

Part Two is called "Doing Situational Analysis" and features new chapters on getting started and writing up, with the mapping processes in between illustrated by following one exemplar throughout. Part Three focuses on "Mapping Extant Discourse Materials," with separate chapters for narrative, visual, and historical discourses, as in 1E but with new text and fresh exemplars. 2E wraps up with an epilogue of tidbits and answers to frequently asked questions; appendices listing SA websites, and exemplars sorted into both discipline and mapping focus; a who's who of SA-related references; and an index. With so much changing in qualitative inquiry since 2005, these revisions have involved a lot of rewriting. [8]

4. Illuminating the Relationship Between SA and CGT

Earlier I dubbed SA and CGT "methodological sisters" through their shared genealogy in pragmatist/interactionist/constructivist-leaning Straussian GT (STRAUSS, 1987). In 2E that relationship is defined more explicitly than in previous publications:

> "As an analytic approach distinct from GT, SA can be used on its own in studies centered on analysing and interpreting situations. Alternatively, SA can be used along with constructivist GT in the same project to *also* analyse and portray action—basic social processes—in that situation" (CLARKE et al., p.xxvi).[4] [9]

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4 I interpret this joint usage to be separate SA and CGT analyses of a situation pursued one after the other to thoroughly open the data, both relationally through SA and processually through CGT (CLARKE et al., pp.108-109).

The 2E authors further differentiate SA by adding: "It can also be appropriate to use another approach in conjunction with SA" (p.xxxii, n.22), "[...] including theories of assemblages, rhizomes, actor-networks, and scapes. Each foregrounds particular facets of situations, and SA draws on them all" (p.xxvii). The emerging picture is of SA standing on its own feet, free to go it alone or jointly with select others; confirming MARTIN's (2006, n.p.) early critique—that "Clarke proposes changes [to GT] that pretty much create a new method." [10]

So, what signature research methods do SA and CGT still have in common as members of the GT tradition? Or put another way, what would a GT methodologist recognize in SA that might be dear to their heart? Well, SA asks questions about social phenomena and begins analysis as soon as data is available. Analysis involves systematic and constant comparison of data, with theoretical sampling responding to emerging theorizing ground in that data. Memoing accompanies data analysis and increasingly deepens theoretically with the goal of generating new sensitizing concepts. These processes are all immortalized in GT, and if it looks like a duck, it's expected to swim and quack, right? For some analysts who have dipped their toe into the SA pond, if SA is really "situational GT," as the 2E authors sometimes refer to it (e.g., p.8), they expect GT coding to be among its adopted traits. [11]

5. Illuminating the Relationship Between SA Mapping and GT Coding

Several contradictory messages about whether GT coding is a necessary preliminary step to SA mapping appeared in 1E. In its prologue CLARKE wrote: "The basic coding procedures of grounded theory [...] remain invaluable, and are used in developing situational analysis as well as in analysing basic social processes" (2005, p.xxxiv). CLARKE clearly values GT coding as a means of increasing researcher familiarity with data: "[When doing SA mapping,] coded data—at least preliminary and partially—are thus better" (p.84). The impression that CLARKE may be saying GT coding is a necessity for SA is created when on the same page she states: "[T]he [SA mapping] approaches can be used with coded data [...] or even, *at least partially*, with uncoded but carefully read and somewhat 'digested' data" (p.84, my emphasis). [12]

This is already too much for some. SMIT (2006, p.561) protests that with this statement, CLARKE "leaves the door ajar (albeit it [sic] very slightly) for doing situational analysis without any grounded theory in sight." Yet, for me and perhaps for others, it has the opposite effect because I perceive CLARKE to be asserting that mapping without GT coding will result in partial situational analyses, and furthermore, perhaps it is GT codes that are mapped? I write "perhaps" because I am trying to solve the mystery of why several researchers, some seasoned in GT and others neophytes like myself, produce GT codes from their data and assiduously create SA maps with them to supplement their analyses (e.g., McCALMAN, 2012; MILLS, CHAPMAN, BONNER & FRANCIS, 2007) when clearly SA and CGT are undergirded by "different conceptual infrastructures or guiding metaphors" (CLARKE et al., p.xxiv). [13]

On the other hand, when some SA research reports refer to "coding," perhaps this is not GT coding for basic social processes but rather a type of codification that extracts situational elements from data, which one analyst appears to refer to as his "'situation analysis' qualitative coding scheme" (HART, 2018, p.81). Perhaps—yes, there have been a lot of "perhaps" in seeking to clarify the role of GT coding in SA—extracting situational elements from data for the purpose of SA mapping *is* a form of descriptive or topic coding (SALDANA, 2016) with the guiding metaphor being "everything you think *might* matter" (CLARKE et al., p.128) in the situation of inquiry. In any event, CLARKE is having none of this and refers to the whole business as "analysis" (personal communication, January 9, 2018). [14]

Some of the necessary illumination on the relationship between SA mapping and GT coding contained within 2E is provided in the following excerpts:

- "[C]GT and SA [...] work beautifully together, allowing the researcher to feature processual [GT] and/or relational [SA] analytics—but only one at a time" (CLARKE et al., p.108);
- "Our main point [...] is that [CGT & SA ...] *are two different kinds of analysis pursued separately.* They are to be done one at a time, not blended together" (p.109);
- "[L]et us say a few things about *what situational maps are not* [...] They are *not* intended to be [...] based on GT codes. In fact, analytic codes should not even be on these data maps unless they are 'in vivo' codes used by participants in your situation!" (p.132). [15]

The last bullet point nails it. SA utilizes mapping and GT utilizes coding, with both independent of the other, and that's that! [16]

6. Increasing Confidence in SA

For years, CLARKE and her colleagues have given fair warning to their audiences that SA is a "radically different" conceptualization of qualitative methods (CLARKE, 2003, p.554; CLARKE et al., 2015, p.12). In 2E that description is simply "different" (CLARKE et al., p.xxiv). This change suggests to me that the authors feel more comfortably situated in SA's skin and more confident and able as communicators, and some of their confidence seems to have rubbed off on me while reading 2E. Any book that instills confidence has done its half of the job—and now I'm off to do mine by completing my SA thesis/dissertation! Many thanks to the 2E authors for progressively refining SA methods, making them easier to comprehend. [17]

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Author

Craig WHISKER is completing his PhD at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia. He is researching the situation of family therapy in Aotearoa, New Zealand from 1990-1995.

Contact:

Craig Whisker

PO Box 19, Kihikihi,
Te Awamutu, New Zealand 3840

E-mail: c.whisker@latrobe.edu.au

Citation