



Situational Analysis in Practice: Mapping Research with Grounded Theory

Clarke, Adele E.; Friese, Carrie; and Washburn, Rachel, eds.
Left Coast Press, 2015

Book Review

Tags: grounded theory | qualitative methods | research methods

Reviewed by: Mary Hale, *Saint Mary's University (Nova Scotia)*

Date Reviewed: August 15, 2017

Aimed at students and researchers newer to qualitative analysis in general or to Situational Analysis (SA) in particular, *Situational Analysis in Practice: Mapping Research with Grounded Theory* is a history, theory, and how-to book gathered into one neat, accessible package. Comprised mainly (save the introduction) of attributed essays and reflections, the volume provides both theoretical depth and methodological breadth.

SA is an inductive qualitative methodology that grew out of Grounded Theory (GT). Although the details are complex, the essential critique of GT that SA counters is an accounting of the messiness of human lives. Where GT can be described as exclusive by virtue of its analytical focus on main social processes, SA is described as inclusive: it widens the analytical lens to include power dynamics, discourse, context, non-human environment, and so forth – all the elements that under/overlie social process. The consequents “messiness” that SA encounters is made manageable by a mapping process.

The book is divided into three discrete parts that allow the book to be used in a field methods course in whole or in part. The introduction (Part I) is a concise history of GT, the schools of thought that developed and competed for dominance, and the emergence of SA as a way to counter some of the perceived weaknesses in GT. A lack of emphasis on marginalized voices is the weakness in GT that is most alluded to, and this emphasis comes to the fore, especially when the introduction turns to the technique of and rationale for mapping SA.

Part II, on interpretive qualitative method, contributes to the theoretical depth by expanding on the foundations of SA. Modelling the strengths of qualitative analysis, Adele E. Clarke

humanizes the historical development of SA by offering her personal recollections and rationales. The two other essays in the section demonstrate how mapping with SA supports and is supported by feminist theories of knowledge acquisition and an inductive methodology. The fluid, process-oriented nature of SA is examined, providing foundation and foreshadowing for Part III and the methodology of mapping SA.

The introductory section of Part III briefly explains three types of maps used in SA: situational, social worlds/arenas, and positional. The editors go on to note, however, that the flexibility of SA mapping assures that no two research projects will use it in exactly the same way. This is illustrated by the bulk of Part III, which consists of research essays by scholars from a diversity of disciplinary backgrounds and interests who have utilized SA mapping in their research. I liked the author reflections included after each essay. This adds to the pedagogical value of the work.

The Appendices provide ample reference materials, websites, and further discipline-specific research that has been conducted using SA mapping. While no religious studies or theological research is specifically referenced, this work is accessible and substantive and could be a valuable tool for a field work or theory and methods course.

https://wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/book_reviews/situational-analysis-in-practice-mapping-research-with-grounded-theory/