

Book Review: Heeding The Cry for Help

Kara Vander Linden, Saybrook University, USA

Glaser, B. G. (2016). *The Cry for Help: Preserving the Autonomy doing GT Research*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press

In *The Cry for Help*, Glaser (2016) articulated four main points. First, the use of classic grounded theory (CGT) is growing worldwide. Second, there are increasing numbers of novice researchers seeking support. Third, help needs to be provided to strengthen the position CGT is gaining worldwide. However, this help should preserve the autonomy of the novice researcher and come from mentors experienced in using and mentoring CGT. The final point is a call for help from Glaser to "senior mentors" to answer the cries from help from novice researchers for their sake and to continue to strengthen the growth of CGT worldwide.

As a mentor to numerous novice researchers in classic grounded theory (CGT), I was honored at the request to review Glaser's new book *The Cry for Help*. As it was explained to me, *The Cry for Help* is about GT novice researchers, what they are "crying for," and how they can best be helped. What I expected was a book about common areas where novice researchers "cry for help" and the answers to those problem areas. However, what I discovered was a book more suited for mentors of those novice researchers than for the novice researchers themselves. Thus, the book was written for me, and those like me, who answer *The Cry for Help*.

In *The Cry for Help*, Glaser (2016) made four main points. First, the use of CGT is growing worldwide. Second, with this growth, there are increasing numbers of novice researchers who are seeking support and mentoring in CGT. Third, help for novice researchers needs to be provided to strengthen the position CGT is gaining worldwide. On this third point Glaser touched on two important aspects of the help needed. First, the help must preserve the autonomy of the novice researcher and second, the help needs to come from the right mentor, specifically a mentor who is experienced in using and mentoring CGT. Glaser referred to these as "senior mentors." It is these "senior mentors" to whom this book is directed. This can be seen in the final point which Glaser articulated by saying "So, I ask my colleagues at the senior mentor level to answer these cries for help as best they can for the valuable bigger picture as well as for the novice's research" (2016, p. 89). Each of these points will be discussed in greater detail.

The use of CGT is spreading worldwide. Glaser (2016) explained that CGT is now being used in China, Japan, Portugal, Philippines, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Australia, North and South America, and all of Europe. Glaser's books are being translated into more languages and Glaser and others are being invited to speak and give workshops around the

world. I have seen this myself as I have friends and colleagues doing, teaching, and presenting on CGT from Japan, to Europe, to the Philippines and throughout the US. Another colleague of mine has worked on the translation of Glaser's books. CGT is also spreading across many fields and disciplines from healthcare to education to management and the social sciences. Increasing numbers of doctoral students are selecting CGT as the methodology for their dissertation research; however, in so doing, many of these doctoral students are setting themselves up for conflict within more QDA dominated departments. Unless doctoral students can find one of the few departments, such as the one I oversee, which openly support the use of CGT and allow students the flexibility to utilize the methodology as designed, conflict and a lack of support in CGT may hamper student progress. However, even in this case novice researchers often require much support and guidance. This idea leads to Glaser's second point.

The increased exposure and adoption of CGT as the methodology for dissertation research worldwide has led to an increase in the "cries for help" from novice researchers. Glaser (2016) made abundantly clear the volume of requests he receives for help and the strategies used by these novice researchers to elicit his help, including what he described as "flattery" and "sweet talk." A bulk of the book addresses the voluminous requests and the individual nature of help needed. At times, all that is required to assist the struggling novice researcher is a one-time straight forward answer, but often much more support is needed. In this case, novice researchers may need support provided through Glaser's seminars and other seminars offered worldwide. However, even these seminars may not always address the voluminous need. Many novice researchers need more ongoing support than Glaser and other mentors can provide.

The "cries for help" are hard to ignore, not only because of the desperate pleas from the novice researcher who is trying to earn the coveted doctorate, but also because of the importance in answering these calls for help in strengthening the spread of CGT worldwide. However, the quality of the support is critical to the success of both of these points. Throughout *The Cry for Help*, Glaser (2016) strongly advocated for mentoring and support that preserves the autonomy that the methodology provides the researcher. "The novice must be careful not to yield or give away his power of autonomy given by the GT methodology" (Glaser, 2016, p. 7). Later, Glaser continued by saying "But no matter how desperate he may feel the need, he should not give up his power of autonomy to a mentor who takes control of the research" (p. 8). Preserving the researcher's autonomy is a major theme running throughout the book.

As a mentor, this idea made me stop and evaluate my mentoring. Am I taking away the novice researcher's autonomy by taking control of the research or am I empowering the novice researcher by providing the level of support needed to facilitate autonomy? Why is this so important? Because if, as a mentor, I take away autonomy, I create a needy researcher who does not have the skills or confidence needed to embrace and use the methodology independently both in the dissertation research and post-PhD. Such a person is unlikely to engage in further independent CGT research and thus hampers the strengthening position CGT is gaining worldwide. My goal, as a mentor, is to recognize the learning that takes place in the struggle to learn the methodology and to help my mentees embrace that struggle and work through it. However, I must also provide just enough

specific guidance and support focused on exactly where the student is struggling so that he/she does not give up on the research and/or the CGT methodology. This is in alignment with what Glaser (2016) stated when he wrote "Timing of a specific help is very important. It should be for a specific issue for exactly here the novice is in the GT research process" (p. 47).

Selection of the right mentor, or "senior mentor," is key to preserving the autonomy of the novice researcher. While *The Cry for Help* is most appropriate for mentors, one key takeaway that other readers may gain from reading this book is the advice and warning provided in regards to the selection of a mentor. There are other risks, besides losing autonomy, to not selecting the right mentor. These risks include the taking over of the novice's research by a mentor, getting no help and turning to another methodology, or getting inaccurate advice (often based on another QDA methodology) from a committee member or another authority figure who does not know CGT. Glaser (2016) explained, "If a novice asks a supervisor who is not GT aware, he is liable to be derailed by another descriptive version of a QDA and lose his autonomy" (p. 19). Other risks may also be present. However, selection of the right mentor may propel the novice researcher forward enabling the researcher to finish his/her dissertation and earn the coveted doctorate.

Glaser identified several different types of cries for help. "GT methodology is not simple thus GT questions are not simple nor are the answers simple" (Glaser, 2016, p 41). One type of cry for help is the "Am I doing it right?" cry. In response, Glaser explained "Novices should ask this question as often as needed as it speeds up their research to get a quick response" (p. 59). Glaser also discussed cries for help which center around the need for certifying and legitimating the method, procedures or researcher's work. For example, cries of help emerge when a novice researcher finds himself/herself in conflict with other methods, perspectives, or procedures. Glaser noted that this is beyond the skill of most novice researchers and advised the use of his books in defense of the methodology. "The novice need not argue for what is already certified and legitimated" (p. 86) in Glaser's books. Rather "the novice need only show the books to his supervisor" (p. 86). Glaser also mentioned the legitimating effect of attendance at trouble-shooting seminars. Throughout the book Glaser identified and provided some general guidelines of ways mentors can respond to various types of cries for help.

While "senior mentors" are not always readily available, other options are available. The first and foremost are the books written by Glaser which detail many different aspects of the methodology. Gynnild and Martin expounded "In reality, the books serve as asynchronous, written mentoring of grounded theory. These are key issues in Glaser's strategy for mentoring the method" (as cited in Glaser, 2016, p. 96). However, novice researchers may find that reading the books alone do not fully address all their questions. Learning CGT is experiential and the books may become more understandable as the novice researcher begins to use CGT. Guidance is also available through the articles published in the Grounded Theory Review. However, one word of warning: there are many articles and books written about CGT that are methodologically inaccurate requiring critical review and comparison with Glaser's articulation of CGT. Grounded theory seminars, online discussion forums and other networks of support on the internet, and peer-to-peer mentoring may be other potential sources of support. Hopefully, as the use of CGT continues to gain ground

throughout the world, support will also grow and this is what Glaser calls for in his final point in *The Cry for Help*.

The Cry for Help makes it clear that Glaser alone cannot answer all the cries for help and the book ends with Glaser's "cry for help." The final point made by Glaser is a request that "senior mentors" answer the cries for help for the benefit of the novice researcher and his/her research and for the benefit of the continued spread of CGT worldwide. *The Cry for Help* is a call to action to "senior mentors" to support the spread of CGT by mentoring novice researchers. So, with the question asked, how will it be answered? As for me, I will continue on with my weekly meetings with novice researchers, answering their "cries for help" and hope that in so doing a new generation of CGT researchers will rise up who can mentor future generations of CGT researchers.