

D.L. Streiner & S. Sidani (Eds.). (2010). *When Research Goes Off the Rails: Why It Happens and What You Can Do About It*. New York, NY: Guilford. 398 pages.

*Reviewed by Diane Rogers*

*When Research Goes Off the Rails* is an eye-opening text that pushes the reader to think about solutions to real world problems that occur in the field as one performs research. Many texts used in graduate courses and recommended for practitioners only discuss ideal settings. The uniqueness of this book is that the editors, David L. Streiner and Souraya Sidani, capture the true trials and tribulations of research as their collection of vignettes tells the story of how to deal with the unexpected in each stage of the research process. This easy-to-read paperback is an essential read for new researchers and will be thought-provoking for those in the field.

The book is organized into eight sections based on the stages or issues involved in the research process: Ethics Approval, Accessing the Participants, Recruitment and Retention, Study Implementation, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Collaboration, and Final Thoughts. Each of these sections includes vignettes written by over 50 authors at either the PhD or doctoral student level. The text is 387 pages including an introduction, 44 short chapters, and the index. A table at the beginning of the book assists readers in finding vignettes focused on specific settings, methods, ethics issues, treatments, and other issues. This allows readers to locate and read stories with specific strategies that may prove helpful in overcoming a roadblock in their own research projects. The introduction quotes Murphy's Law, stating that in research, "If anything can go wrong, it will" (p. 2). The remainder of the introduction explains how things will go wrong in research projects and that the researchers' job is to employ preventative strategies as well as solve problems along the way in order to keep the study going.

Each section comprises multiple chapters or vignettes that illustrate the myriad of things that can go wrong even when a well-planned study is implemented in the field. The chapters are structured in five main sections: Background of the Study, The Challenges, Overcoming the Difficulties, Lessons Learned, and To Read Further. The editors chose to include a variety of studies that are likely to interest social

researchers as well as push readers to think critically about ways to solve unexpected problems that arise when working in the real world. The ending of each chapter contains suggestions for further reading as well as references for that particular chapter. This addition is helpful for readers who want to dig deeper into the strategies used to solve their research problems.

As a graduate student new to the field, I found this book useful for exploring the realities of research. Many of the textbooks included in my course of study discuss examples as though all aspects of the research process go according to plan every time. The editors discuss that even researchers who submit their findings to scholarly journals tend to gloss over imperfections in a study for fear of rejection from peer reviewers, since the scientific community promotes the notion that quality research has no flaws or barriers in the process. *When Research Goes Off the Rails* provides new researchers with clear examples and solutions to typical problems that arise in everyday research. For example, many of the vignettes in the section titled “Ethics Approval” discuss the difficulties of working with both the university’s Institutional Review Board policies and the policies of the institution to be studied (e.g., school, hospital, departments, etc.). These complications include pushing back start dates of the study by over one year, rewriting protocols to meet both institutions’ needs, and/or using different types of data that could be obtained more easily. The frank discussion of how each challenge is overcome sheds light on the reality of the research process by explaining what had to happen to maintain or at least finish the study without completely starting over. The idea that researchers have limited resources was another theme that was common across stories, especially in the “Recruitment and Retention” section. There are numerous ethical questions brought out in the text about compensation for subjects’ time, form of payment, and protocols for handling money.

As I read through the text, I found myself at times lost in the story of the research, forgetting to focus on the strategies that could be useful to my work. The text reads more like a novel than a traditional scholarly text, which is a welcome addition to the reading list of most doctoral students. This text would be excellent material to pair with a traditional textbook for a research design course. This pairing would allow students to analyze more formally the design of the studies contained in the book as well as systematically discuss problems and solutions for obstacles encountered at each stage of the research process. Moreover, I would suggest that the editors include questions and

a summary of strategies used at the end of each section as a way to help the reader process and synthesize the problems and strategies used in each stage of the research process.

For researchers in the field, I would recommend that this book be used as a springboard for discussion amongst colleagues, departments, and learning communities. It is vital that researchers keep up with innovations in the field as well as explore solutions to the difficulties of operating in the world. *When Research Goes Off the Rails* could provide working groups with topics for rich discussion and could lead to common understanding and unified approaches to policies. I would also recommend this book for new researchers and graduate students specifically. The easy-to-read flow of the stories contained in its pages would be a welcome break from the sometimes cryptic and dense writing of college textbooks. Regardless of your position, social researchers will find the honest discussion of research problems and solutions to be an enlightening and interesting read.