

**EMERGENCE vs FORCING**

**BASICS  
OF  
GROUNDED THEORY  
ANALYSIS**

**Barney G. Glaser PhD**

**Sociology Press**





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## **BASICS OF GROUNDED THEORY ANALYSIS**

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**Sociology Press  
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I wish to express my appreciation to Anselm L. Strauss for his continued discussions about the matters to be discussed in this book and his support for the academic enterprise.

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# **BASICS OF GROUNDED THEORY ANALYSIS**

For Carolyn,  
whose trust in emergence is  
fundamental to our life together

## CONTENTS

Chapter 1	Introduction	1
Chapter 2	Preface	8
Chapter 3	Basic Considerations	11
Chapter 4	Getting Started	21
Chapter 5	Theoretical Sensitivity	27
Chapter 6	Reading and Using The Literature	31
Chapter 7	Open Coding	38
Chapter 8	Techniques for Enhancing Theoretical Sensitivity	49
Chapter 9	Axial Coding	61
Chapter 10	Selective Coding	75
Chapter 11	Process	89
Chapter 12	The Conditional Matrix	96
Chapter 13	Theoretical Sampling	101
Chapter 14	Memos	108
Chapter 15	Writing	111
Chapter 16	Criteria For Judging Grounded Theory	116
Chapter 17	Intellectual Property	120
	Suggested Reading	128
	Notes	129

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

On September 23, 1991 I wrote Anselm Strauss, my co-originator of Grounded Theory, the following letter.

"I am writing you in response to your phone call last Friday night (9/20) during which you said that you will do nothing to either recall or change the Basics of Qualitative Research book, nor will you listen to any further critique from me.

Your response is totally unacceptable to me. As co-originator of grounded theory, my response to yours is:

In 1967 we developed together the conceptions of grounded theory set forth in our book, the Discovery of Grounded Theory. In 1988 you published Basic Qualitative Research, which is a book which misconceives our conceptions on grounded theory to an extreme degree, even destructive degree. Furthermore you implied throughout the book my complete endorsement of these misconceptions, which further is very destructive to me and my creativity and my cherished contribution to the field of research methodology.

Therefore I demand that you withdraw the book pending a rewriting of it. And then you and I sit down and go through each page of the book to iron out what I consider to be the misconceptions and then rewrite the book by mutual consent. Or, you rewrite the book deleting all the tie-in references to me and to grounded theory, subject to my approval that you have done so.

The problem will not go away until solved. And I will persist until it is.

Sincerely,

Barney

In Jan. of 1991, 9 months before the above letter, I had written the following:

“Dear Ans:

I have read most of your letter to me. My response is that your experiential history may explain, partially as I see it, but it does not excuse a “wrong doing.” As co-originator of grounded theory, I request that you pull the book (Basics of Qualitative Research). It distorts and misconceives grounded theory, while engaging in a gross neglect of 90% of its important ideas. With you as its legitimator, the misconceptions cannot be withstood or explained away. Your and Julie’s book clearly indicates that you have seen yourselves exempt from doing the necessary study, scholarship and research to check out your work with what has gone on before, and thereby doing the necessary footnoting and analyzing and integrating of your ideas with what has gone on previously in Discovery of Grounded Theory and Theoretical Sensitivity. You write as if there were no grounded theory methodology and methods in the past, thus nothing to carefully contribute to.

To repeat it another way: You wrote a whole different method, so why call it “grounded theory”? It indicates that you truly have never grasped what we did, nor studied it to try to carefully extend it. Yet you borrow its name to trade on its success, which success is theoretically fundamental, while your work is fractured and scattered.

Pull the book. It leaves out quantitative researchers and will wreck the work of qualitative researchers too, piling up tons of fractured rules instead of cutting directly through to basic and underlying fundamental relevance.

Your Pal,

Barney



After this letter of Jan 1991 the exchange of letters ensued with myself pleading and Anselm saying "no" to a pulling and correction of *Basics of Qualitative Research*. This exchange ended with the letter of 9/23 given above.

Thus it is up to me to write a cogent, clear correction to set researchers using grounded theory on a correct path to discovery and theory generation. During our exchange Anselm did challenge me to write a grounded theory methods book for beginning students. I attend to this task within this volume.

Many of the wrong ideas in *Basics of Qualitative Research* are too subtle for the average reader to follow and compare and critique. A critique would also be too cumbersome because due to the underlying logic of the misconceptions in *Basics of Qualitative Research* there would be corrections on each page. The reader would surely lose interest, soon feeling "enough already." So I therefore decided to give a corrected view following the correct logic underlying grounded theory to enable researchers to get on with their research tasks and keep up their productivity. A simple critique would be too destructive and nonproductive to Strauss and researchers alike. It would throw monkey wrenches into the work of the many researchers in the field.

To publish an article on the misconceptions would also be ineffective as it would be too laborious and cumbersome to present in one paper all the errors and misconceptions found in *Basics of Qualitative Research*, and again, it would be too distracting to the job of ongoing research. Thus it is better for the reader to just follow a corrected version of Strauss' book and get on with their research with the confidence it will produce a grounded theory. *Basics of Qualitative research* cannot produce a grounded theory. It produces a forced, preconceived, full conceptual description, which is fine, but it is not grounded theory.

Let us look at Strauss' logic to see what I mean. It is a logic that thwarts and frustrates the discovery of what is truly going on in the substantive area under study, and undermines grounded theory at every turn by preconceived forcing of the data.

The logic of grounded theory as stated most clearly in Theoretical Sensitivity is to ask two formal — not preconceived — questions. They are: What is the chief concern or problem of the people in the substantive area, and what accounts for most of the variation in processing the problem? And secondly, what category or what property of what category does this incident indicate? One asks these two questions while constantly comparing incident to incident, and coding and analyzing. Soon categories and their properties emerge which fit and work and are of relevance to the processing of the problem. The researcher must have patience and not force the data out of anxiety and impatience while waiting for the emergent. He must trust that emergence will occur and it does.

The logic in Basics of Qualitative Research, and Qualitative Analysis also, is not to ask the two questions above. Rather, it is to constantly compare for awhile, but then interrupt true emergence by asking many preconceived, substantive questions, which takes the analyst elsewhere from what is really going on, what is really at issue for the respondents and/or observees, what is relevant, and what would have emerged. The true nature of the data is lost forever.

This forced questioning preconceives the substantive and the theoretical codes, losing discovered relevance and putting the result — a preconceived conceptual description — into a face-sheet data format. This format is that certain variables ought to be relevant like sex, age or conditions, and begs off the question as to whether or not they are truly relevant; or, put another way, do the variables work to produce variation in the action observed and in the issues which emerge in the perspective of the people involved?

Of course all research uses data or is grounded in some way. And of course, one can always apply a standard, preconceived concept to data and get a premodeled conceptual description. Asking substantive questions is a good way to do it. Discovery may even break through this preconceived, forced framework to a small degree. But the work is not based on emergent relevance with categories that fit and work, and the product is not grounded theory. Again, it is preconceived, forced, conceptual description, which can be very significant in its own right, but again it is not emergent grounded theory.

This logic in Strauss' book permeates it at every turn and produces its own confirmation, because it produces a research product which proves the logic works, as it does. Conditions always exist, dimensions always exist, age always exists and so forth, but are they truly relevant to the emerging theory? One does not know, but the product is not grounded theory, it is forced conceptual description, and as is all research it is grounded in data in some fashion. In the bargain students are derailed from generating grounded theory, especially since the Basics of Qualitative Research logic is much easier to use, and less threatening to fears of failure and of not finding something. And with Strauss' method it is especially easy to fool oneself into thinking one is doing grounded theory. No patience and trust in the fundamental social organization of everyday social life is required. Social organization is known beforehand —especially by pontificating sociologists.

Grounded theory allows the relevant social organization and socialpsychological organization of the people studied to be discovered, to emerge —in their perspective! Grounded theory does justice to the data. The methods in Basics of Qualitative Research will always produce research products, but not the aforementioned ones of emergence in the perspective of the substantive area participants.

Strauss' book is without conscience, bordering on immorality. (These harsh words can be further and better understood by also reading the last chapter of this writing on intellectual property.) Three books had been written beforehand using a multitude of ideas, concepts, and research directives. Basics of Qualitative Research sets forth methods with no scholarship reference to what has already been written, and it sets forth no description of the developments and changes that account for the new concepts, terms criteria, etc that are written for grounded theory in Basics of Qualitative research. Rather, what is written in Strauss' book is out of the blue, a present piece with no historical reference on the idea level, and an almost new method borrowing an older name — Grounded Theory —and funny thing, it produces simply what qualitative researchers had been doing for sixty years or more: forced, full, conceptual description.

It borders on immorality also because it misleads researchers attached to grounded theory, and abuses devoted, committed users of grounded theory, and because it does not account for the development of changes from previous writings. It leaves them confused on many issues of grounded theory, such as the difference between concept, category and property, label, condition and context; all of which had been clearly explicated in *Discovery of Grounded Theory and Theoretical Sensitivity*.

*Basics of Qualitative Research* just puts out an old method in new terminology, ignoring the true contribution of *Discovery of Grounded Theory and Theoretical Sensitivity*. Without this scholarship, which accounts for changes in past to present, the authors can say and claim anything. It asks others to figure out the changes if they can even formulate them. Strauss' stature as a Sociologist carries the bill, with no one able to put a call on him.

But enough critique which can become too destructive. I am interested only in the productive, only in getting on with the main goal of grounded theory which is the systematic generating of theory from systematic research. To wit, I will shorten the book by leaving out much of what is not needed when writing only the multitude of corrective ideas to wipe out the pervasive perversion of grounded theory logic found in *Basics of Qualitative Research*.

Only the reader's personal need makes it necessary to compare with study the *Basics of Qualitative Research* with this corrected version to analyze the differences. This version is the correct one; it sets the average researcher back on the correct track to generating a grounded theory. It sets grounded theory back on course, based on the fundamental analytic ideas which spawned its beginning, which are totally ignored in *Basics of Qualitative Research*, such as emergence, relevance, processing of problems, correct logic of induction, cutting down on a plethora of rules which hamper creativity, the true nature of the generality produced by the grounded theory method and of its hypotheses, the underlying logic of matrix analysis and core variable, proper criteria, elaboration analysis, reason analysis, density, the underlying logic of saturation, little logics, how to relate grounded

theory to reading other theories, the underlying logic of sorting, integrating categories and concepts, the difference between substantive codes and theoretical codes, the relationship between memos, writing and rewriting, the interchangeability of indices and index or concept construction, the difference between constant comparison, standard comparison and summation index construction, the proper use of dimensions for the subtraction and reduction of types through property space analysis, different types of theory through conceptual levels of generality for the generation of theory, and many more underlying ideas that went into the previous work on grounded theory.

It is vital to note that the fundamentals of Grounded Theory, the underlying analytic methodology, are in very large measure drawn from the analytic methodology and procedures of inductive quantitative analysis laboriously discovered by researchers and students in the Department of Sociology and the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University in the 50's and 60's.

The average researcher wanting to get on with the show should just use this book, but while also reading *Discovery of Grounded Theory*, *Theoretical Sensitivity*, and many of the footnoted monographs, in order to be capturing fundamentals of the grounded theory methodology so that the methods are better understood and do not just appear to arise out of the blue. Methodology is the theory of methods, and in this case, the grounded theory methodology is itself a theory which is generated alongside the substantive theory it is generating.

## CHAPTER 2

### PREFACE

This book is primarily addressed to yeoman researchers in various disciplines who are interested in inductively generating theory through qualitative analysis of qualitative and/or quantitative data. Often researchers are stumped by this necessary task. They can be overwhelmed not only by the sheer number of fieldnotes, documents or interviews confronting them, but are often troubled by the inevitable problem: pulling the analysis together to create a concise theoretical formulation based on the data of the area under study.

The purpose of this book is to address this problem and to show how it is processed by the modicum researcher. It is intended to provide the basic knowledge and procedures needed by persons who are about to embark upon a qualitative analysis with the desire to generate a substantive grounded theory.

The methodology guiding my discussion is known as grounded theory. This is the fifth in a series of books explicating grounded theory methodology. The first, *Discovery of Grounded Theory*, by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, 1967, presented both the argument and the underlying logic for the procedures discussed in this book and the preceding ones. *Theoretical Sensitivity*, by Glaser, 1978, continues this focus on underlying patterns and added methodology. *Qualitative Analysis*, by Strauss, 1987 and *Basics of Qualitative Research*, by Strauss and Corbin, 1990, add more methods, no methodology, and lose the abstract logic required to generate grounded theory as I discussed above.

If the reader reads and studies each of these books, he will find that much of the terminology and specific, recommended procedures are changed in the last two books by Strauss, with no developmental or other notion as to why and why they are better, as we discussed above. Thus the first two books express a stance toward grounded

theory at odds with the last two books. This book I am writing spells out procedures and techniques consistent with Discovery of Grounded Theory and Theoretical Sensitivity. It continues with the logic of discovery and emergence of integrated theory, while the last two Strauss books focus on preconceived, forced conceptual description.

All of these books are based on the vivid research experiences of the authors, who have done and taught qualitative analysis in classes, seminars and consultation for many years. These methodology books collectively offer two diverse approaches to qualitative analysis for the purpose of generating theory. The philosophic beliefs and the scientific tradition that underlie these books give rise to their mission of discovering theory through systematic analysis and research.

In addition to reading and studying the methods books, the reader's understanding of grounded theory would be greatly enhanced through the study of some of the monographs written by Glaser and Strauss. These are amply footnoted in the methods books and listed in the front of Glaser's *Experts and Laymen*, *A Study of the Patsy and the Contractor* and *Theoretical Sensitivity*. Furthermore the books cited above also amply list other author's monographs, which can be classified as grounded theory.

The analytic mode of emergence and discovery at the heart of this book on grounded theory analysis is learnable by anyone who will take the trouble to study its procedures and then experience them in research. While this learning involves hard work and persistence in studying applied to research, it is also immensely exciting and enjoyable. Furthermore, these hard work and joyous experiences are requisite to discovering how to use and adapt grounded theory in a myriad of ways to either qualitative or quantitative data and in whatever combination they may be used.

This book has value beyond the goal of doing grounded theory. It can be used for theme analysis of qualitative and/or quantitative data. Those interested in concept generation will find methods for this pursuit. People looking for new ways of considering data will also find this book useful. It will help evaluators of papers and research proposals evaluate grounded theory approaches. Scholarly interest in inductive theory generation will benefit from grounded

theory methods. Through discovery, grounded theory also opens up new fields in sociology. These new fields arise out of the discovery of core variables, which is an amazing happening, such as the study of partnering — partnerships being a major force in integrating social organization of everyday family, economic and work life.

I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation to Anselm Strauss with whom I began the grounded theory enterprise in 1965 with intense nightly phone conversations around the evolving research methodology and methods that emerged from our initial work: *Awareness of Dying*, 1967. *Awareness* is now published in four languages and still sells today. It was Anselm's genius that obtained the dying study grant which resourced our enterprise.

This book follows the exact chapter sequence and nomenclature in *Basics of Qualitative Research*. This enables the reader to follow the correction and divergence in perspective of *Basics of Qualitative Research* and grounded theory in each discussion. Thus I discuss in the following order: getting started, theoretical sensitivity, the uses of the literature, open coding, techniques for enhancing theoretical sensitivity, axial coding, selective coding, process, the conditional matrix, theoretical sampling, memos and diagrams, writing theses and monographs, and criteria for judging a grounded theory study. The last chapter considers the problem and prospects of ownership of intellectual property.



## CHAPTER 3

### BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

The next four chapters will provide some of the basic operative methodology which underlies grounded theory analysis so that the researcher will more clearly understand what he is doing and why he is doing it when engaging in qualitative analysis.

Qualitative analysis means any kind of analysis that produces findings or concepts and hypotheses, as in grounded theory, that are not arrived at by statistical methods. To repeat, qualitative analysis may be done with data arrived at quantitatively or qualitatively or in some combination. As we grounded theorists say when doing a book or paper and theoretically sampling for more data, "It's all data for the analysis. Whether soft or hard it is just grist for the mill of constant comparison and analyzing."

It is important to keep the distinction clear between qualitative analysis and qualitative research to forestall confusion. Some researchers gather exclusively qualitative data through interviews, observation and publications of journals etc. They can of course do a statistical content analysis using the methodology of Bernard Berelson, and in effect do a quantitative analysis of qualitative data. In this book our focus will be on qualitative methods of analysis of qualitative data, buttressed at times with quantitative data, and yielding concepts integrated into hypotheses, resulting in theory. As I said in Chapter 1, this methodology of analysis will not be for the production of forced, preconceived full conceptual description - a worthy task in its own right, but not the task of this monograph!

The requisite conceptual skills for doing grounded theory are to absorb the data as data, to be able to step back or distance oneself from it, and then to abstractly conceptualize the data. To do this requires