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## Basic Social Process

Barney G. Glaser  
with the assistance of Judith Holton

### Abstract

The goal of grounded theory is to generate a theory that accounts for a pattern of behavior that is relevant and problematic for those involved. The goal is not voluminous description, nor clever verification. As with all grounded theory, the generation of a basic social process (BSP) theory occurs around a core category. While a core category is always present in a grounded research study, a BSP may not be.

BSPs are ideally suited to generation by grounded theory from qualitative research because qualitative research can pick up process through fieldwork that continues over a period of time. BSPs are a delight to discover and formulate since they give so much movement and scope to the analyst's perception of the data. BSPs such as cultivating, defaulting, centering, highlighting or becoming, give the feeling of process, change and movement over time. They also have clear, amazing general implications; so much so, that it is hard to contain them within the confines of a single substantive study. The tendency is to refer to them as a formal theory without the necessary comparative development of formal theory. They are labeled by a "gerund" ("ing") which both stimulates their generation and the tendency to over-generalize them.

In this paper, we shall first discuss the search for, and criteria of, core variables (categories) and how they relate to BSPs. Then we go on to a section on several central charac-

teristics of basic social processes. Lastly, we discuss the relative merits of unit vs. process sociology.

### **Core Category and Basic Social Process (BSP)**

While grounded theory can use any theoretical codes, the basic social process (BSP) is a popular one. As with all grounded theory, the generation of a BSP theory occurs around a core category. While a core category is always present in a grounded research study, a BSP may not be. BSPs are just one type of core category—thus all BSPs are core variables (categories), but not all core variables are BSPs. The primary distinction between the two is that *BSPs are processural* or, as we say, they “process out.” *They have two or more clear emergent stages.* Other core categories may not have stages, but can use other theoretical codes.

Without a core category, an effort at grounded theory will drift in relevancy and workability. Since a core category accounts for most of the variation in a pattern of behavior, it has several important functions for generating theory. It is relevant and works. Most other categories and their properties are related to it, rendering the core category subject to much qualification and modification because it is so dependent on what is going on in the action. In addition, through these relations between categories and their properties, the core has the prime function of *integrating* the theory and rendering the theory *dense* and *saturated* as the relationships increase.

These functions then lead to theoretical *completeness*—accounting for as much variation in a pattern of behavior with as few concepts as possible, thereby maximizing parsimony and scope. Clearly integrating a theory around a core variable *delimits* the theory and thereby the research project.

Upon choosing a core category, the first delimiting analytic rule of grounded theory comes into play. Only variables that are related to the core will be included in the theory. Another delimiting function of the core category occurs in its necessary relation to *resolving the problematic* nature of the pattern of behavior to be accounted for. Without a focus on how the core category resolves, solves or processes the problem, the analysis can drift to accounting for irrelevancies in the pattern, instead of being forced to conceptually integrate the relevant categories around the main concern.

Yet another delimiting function of a core category is its requirement that the analyst focus on one core at a time. Thus, if two core categories are discovered—or one worked on before another emerges—the analyst can choose one, being sure of its relevance. S/he then demotes the other by filtering it into the theory as a relevant “near core”—but not core—variable. Thus, in *Time for Dying* (Glaser & Strauss, 1968), we included ideas about awareness, but only *insofar* as they affected time. And in *Awareness of Dying* (Glaser & Strauss), 1967, we did the reverse. By this method, the analyst can be sure that the other core does not disappear. It can still take a central focus in another writing. Many studies yield two or (sometimes) three core variables. To try to write about them all at once with no relative emphasis is to denude each of its powerful theoretical functions.

Discovering the core category is our grounded answer to the perennial research problem of “which focus.” This focus cannot fail, since it is systematically generated, by a sentence-by-sentence grounding in its capacity to be relevant and to work. In contrast, to core a study and its theory around a “pet” sociological interest or a logically elaborated interest from scholarly writings can easily miss on the many functions mentioned above. Since it is not grounded, there is no assurance that it will integrate any other categories or properties or ac-

count for any or sufficient variation in a behavioral pattern. Nothing—or not much—may emerge as related. Plus, it derails the analyst from discovering the true core. Thus the analyst cannot start a grounded theory study with preconceived notions, from whatever source—even grounded—about what will work in a specific project. The focus must emerge on its own to do justice to the data, while accounting for significant variation in problematic behavior.

### **Discovering Core Categories**

*Looking:* First, the analyst should consciously look for a core variable when coding his data. As s/he constantly compares incidents and concepts s/he will generate many codes, while being alert to the one or two that are core. S/he is constantly looking for the “main theme,” for what—in his or her view—is the main concern or problem for the people in the setting; for that which sums up, in a pattern of behavior, the substance of what is going on in the data, for what is the essence of relevance reflected in the data, for categories (gerunds) which bring out process and change (two properties of BSPs).

As the analyst asks these questions while coding, analyzing and theoretically sampling, s/he becomes sensitized to the potential answers. Possible core categories should be given a “best fit” conceptual label as soon as possible so the analyst has a handle for thinking of them. The analyst may have a feel for what the core variable is, but be unable to formulate a concept that fits well. It is OK to use a label, which is a poor fit until a better fit eventually comes. As the analyst develops several workable coded categories, s/he should begin early to saturate as much as possible those that seem to have explanatory power. This way s/he will see which category is related to as many other categories and their properties as possible. S/he theoretically samples to maximize differences in the data to help saturate the categories. This is relatively easy with quantitative data. The analyst need only run possible core categories against all

other variables to see how much each relates to others. With qualitative data, it is more difficult since these relations must be kept track of in memos, which get spread out until sorted. The core category must be proven over and over again by its prevalent relationship to other categories thereby integrating them into a whole.

When the analyst starts coding, categories tend to emerge quickly, giving the appearance of finding core categories. But the analyst should be suspect of these as core. It takes time and much coding and analysis to verify a core category through saturation, relevance and workability. It always happens that a category will emerge from among many and “core out”—but it happens “eventually”! And, even then the analyst may still feel s/he is taking a chance on selecting what the core variable is, until it is finally proven by sorting data into a theory that works. The more data, the more sure the analyst can become of saturation, relevance, workability and integratability of the chosen core. Time and data can be expensive; in smaller studies an analyst often has to take chances. Certainly, deciding on a core category tests the analyst’s skill and abilities. If s/he acts too quickly on a thin amount of data, the analyst risks ending up with a large array of loosely integrated categories, and a thin, undeveloped theory with little explanatory power.

*Criteria:* It is helpful to sum up the criteria by which an analyst can make judgments as to the core category.

1. It must be *central*; that is, related to as many other categories and their properties as possible and more than other candidates for the core category. This criterion of centrality is a necessary condition to making it core. It indicates that it accounts for a large portion of the variation in a pattern of behavior.

2. It must *reoccur frequently* in the data. By its frequent reoccurrence, it comes to be seen as a stable pattern and becomes increasingly related to other variables. If it does not reoccur a lot, it does not mean the category is uninteresting. It may be quite interesting in its own right, but it just means it is not core.
3. By being related to many other categories and reoccurring frequently, it takes more *time to saturate* the core category than other categories.
4. It relates meaningfully and easily with other categories. These *connections* need not be forced; rather, their realization comes quickly and richly.
5. A core category in a substantive study has clear and grabbing implication for formal theory. The analyst can talk of hospital shifts and immediately realize the implications of shifts as a basic social condition in any twenty-four-hour-a-day work operation and start to conceive of generating a formal theory of work shifts.
6. Based on the above criteria, the core category has considerable carry-through. By this, we mean it does not lead to dead ends in the theory nor leave the analyst high and dry; rather, it gets him/her through the analyses of the processes s/he is working on by its relevance and explanatory power. S/he literally carries through his analysis based on the core's use.
7. It is completely variable. Its frequent relations to other categories make it highly dependently variable in degree, dimension and type. Conditions vary it easily. It is readily modifiable through these dependent variations.
8. While accounting for variation in the problematic behavior, a core category is also a dimension of the problem. Thus, in part, it explains itself and its own variation. While “becoming” a nurse explains the process that student nurses go through in relation to

their training and their interaction with nursing faculty, it also in part explains why a nurse becomes a nurse. They engage in becoming to become, while becoming also explains how they handle those largely responsible for formalizing their entrance to the profession (Olesen & Whittaker, 1968).

9. The criteria above generate such a rich core category that, in turn, they tend to prevent two other sources of establishing a core which are not grounded but, without grounding, could easily occur: (1) sociological interest and (2) deductive, logical elaboration. These two sources can easily lead to core categories that do not fit the data and are not sufficiently relevant or workable.
10. The above criteria also generate a false criterion. Because it has so much grab and explanatory power, the analyst begins to see the core category in all relations, whether grounded or not in the data. While serving as a positive indicator of the core, this logical switch must be guarded against so that relationships among categories are earned through emergence and not forced upon the data through deductive logic.
11. The core category can be any kind of theoretical code: a process, a condition, two dimensions, a consequence and so forth. When it is a process, additional criteria also apply.

### **The “Process Out” Requirement of BSPs**

Once the analyst becomes theoretically sensitized to the search for core categories and those that process out, discovering core categories—and BSPs in particular—becomes natural. Indeed, we have found that analysts must be careful about tacking a gerund on to any core variable and treating it like a process when, in fact, it does not process out. For example, in one study, “shifting” was seen as a BSP. After review, we found no stages and reconceptualized it

as “shifts”—a basic social structural condition confronting people and organizations that have a twenty-four-hour-a-day operation.

The “process out” requirement of—at minimum—two clear, emergent stages requires that the *stages should differentiate and account for variations in the problematic pattern of behavior. If not, the stages collapse conceptually and there is no BSP.* For example, in information-gaining processes, the stages of playing completely naive, playing mildly informed but needing correction, and finally, playing knowledgeable, each results in a different interaction pattern in bidding subcontractors. In this sense, a BSP processes a social or social psychological problem from the point of view of continuing social organization. Irrespective of whether it solves the problem, to some degree, it processes it.

A process is something that occurs over time and involves change over time. These changes over time ordinarily have discernable breaking points—discernable to the extent that stages can be perceived, so they can be treated as theoretical units in themselves, with conditions, consequences (which may be another stage), other properties, and so forth which are unique in form to each particular stage. Stages are perceivable, because they sequence with one another within certain temporal limits. Sets of codes related to these stages may “carry forward” into one or more stages further on in the process.

Stages may be in vivo (generally perceivable by those persons involved), or purely heuristic (generally not perceivable by the persons involved, but demarcated by the sociologist for theoretical reasons), or some shade in between. If the stages are built into the social structure, they and their transition points will likely be clearly perceived by social actors (e.g. receiving a diploma, passing a course of study, getting a promotion from “worker” to “supervisor”, and so forth). Conversely, stages that are perceivable before one goes through them



would likely be built into a social structure (Glaser & Strauss, 1971). However, stages not determined by social structure can also be perceived by social actors (“When they started joking with me I knew I was in”). In some instances, stages may be perceivable by social actors only after they have been through them. This would likely be the case with stages that are marked by common sense indicators and such.

Some stages may be learned as persons go through them. For example, milkmen, when learning to “cultivate,” learn from their coworkers that a particular stage in cultivating a relationship is reached when the customer routinely offers the milkman a cup of coffee (Bigus, 1972). This is, the novice learns, a “coffee stop” and is considered the last and most successful stage of a relationship, if the customer is worth it in monetary return. The novice is informed in one way or another that when this occurs, he no longer need worry about the relationship to the extent that he does others, and that “coffee stops” will perform certain functions for him—a place to go to the bathroom, a place to get a payment when one is needed, and so forth.

Stages, if perceivable by social actors, may be brought about by their conscious intentions. Again, the milkman: once he learns about the “coffee stop” stage, he consciously sets about cultivating to get particular customers (the large ones) to that stage. Other stages, particularly those demarcated by institutionalization, begin and end without conscious effort on the part of participants.

A person may perceive the events that make up stages of a process he is going through without perceiving the overall process or any particular stages. These events may be perceived as idiosyncratic—events that are unique to his own experience—rather than as stages of a social process which many persons go through. A sociologist, however, can perceive the stages

because he studies large numbers of individual histories and sees as social what individuals may see as personal.

The development into stages prevents a BSP theory from being static—a condition ordinarily found in most types of theory. It allows one to follow changes over time, yet remain in grasp of a theoretically “whole” process—which has a beginning and an end. When the stages and their properties, conditions, consequences, and so forth are integrated into the “whole” process, when each stage’s relationship to the process and to the other stages—how they affect it, shape it, and so forth—are integrated, then the process can be conceptually followed from stage to stage, the change over time being theoretically accounted for, without the imagery of the overall process being lost. This allows a reader to momentarily focus on the dense codes without losing grasp of the larger scope of the BSP theory.

Stages, then, function as an integrating scheme with which to tie together various sets of conditions, properties, etc. in a manner that allows for a high amount of densification and integration. At the same time, stages allow for conceptual grab and tractability as well as the theoretical tracing of and accounting for change over time.

Stages have a *time* dimension; that is, they have a perceivable beginning and end. The length of time between these points may or may not be fixed. In one instance, a stage may always be of fixed duration. In another, it may last several days or weeks. This will depend upon what brings about the transition from one stage to another. If the length of a stage is determined by institutional timing, for instance, it could always be of the same duration. The length of time a stage lasts could also be determined by events that do not occur according to a time schedule. A stage in a “residential career,” for instance, could be determined by the move

from renting to buying a home. Thus, the renting stage (if such a stage were developed) could last several months or many years.

The transition from one stage to another is ordinarily contingent upon one or more things happening (e.g. the decision to purchase a house—as above). This contingency may be in the form of a *critical juncture* (Strauss, 1969) – a period of time between stages when the occurrence or non-occurrence of a particular critical event (or whatever) will determine whether a new stage is entered (a stage is skipped, one of several possible stages is entered, etc.) or the previous stage is maintained. For example, exploratory surgery in search of cancer could be such a critical juncture. If cancer is found, the beginning stage of a dying trajectory or a recovery trajectory (depending upon the severity of the cancer) may be entered. If cancer is not found, a diagnosing stage may be returned to.

The transition from one stage to another may not be as clear as it is when a contingency or a critical juncture marks it. It may, instead, be marked by a general set of indicators in such a way that the transition point is somewhat blurry. For example, an “acceptance” stage may be entered around the general time that insiders begin to allow a newcomer to joke about the group, let him attend insider affairs, disclose “secrets” to him, and so forth. An exact time of transition may be impossible (or arbitrary) to pin down, but the transition may be obvious later after a short period of time, through the gradual occurrence and clarity of a set of indicators.

We now turn to a discussion of further characteristics of BSPs. Much of what we shall say in the next section applies in general to all core categories, except when the property specifically refers to process.

### **More about the Basic Social Process**

Stages, as we have just seen, are the prime property of BSPs, however there are several other defining properties: pervasiveness, full variability and change over-time. BSPs are pervasive since they are fundamental, patterned processes in the organization of social behaviors which occur over time and go on irrespective of the conditional variation of place.

The pervasiveness of such core processes gives rise to the word basic in BSP. BSPs, then, are more than just heuristic devices that allow sociologists to conceptually order the social world. BSPs are theoretical reflections and summarizations of the patterned, systematic uniformity flows of social life that people go through, and which can be conceptually “captured” and further understood through the construction of BSP theories.

No matter what the sociologist does, s/he cannot alter the basic substantive patterns of the process. S/he can only apply whichever theoretical codes best illuminate variations in what is going on. Not all persons go through a process in the same manner; that is to say, there is much variation. But, a BSP theory can uncover what condition or variables give rise to particular variation and can therefore theoretically account for them. For example, “becoming” is basic, occurs over time, and is still becoming no matter where it occurs, and irrespective of how it is varied by current conditions. So, for instance, there’s a basic pattern or process to becoming a nurse, regardless of variation in individual experiences.

The pervasiveness of BSPs, due to their fundamentality to social organization makes them necessary, unavoidable processes, irrespective of variations. However, social organization itself being sets of infinitely variable conditions makes BSPs fully variable. By this, we mean that although BSPs are activated through the units of social organization, they are abstract of any specific unit’s structure and can vary sufficiently to go on in other, very different

units. Thus, recruitment processes go on no matter what the social unit; people are continually brought into units or eventually the units disappear. As such, their full variability makes BSPs independent of structural units: that is, free of their time and place and the perspective of their participants and fully generalizable as abstract processes to be found anywhere they may emerge.

As an analytic unit, BSPs receive relative emphasis over the structural unit in which they are analyzed. The essential point is that, for example, we focus on becoming processes when talking of nursing education, not on the structured unit—the school—in which the study took place. The school is merely a set of varying conditions of a becoming process.

The full variability and generality of BSPs transcend the nature of any structural unit and hence, unit-focused theories. They transcend the boundaries of unit analyses as we understand the general, basic processes that shape people's lives instead of solely their particular units of participation. (We shall discuss these properties of BSPs in relation to unit analysis more fully in the next section of this paper).

BSPs are not only durable and stable over time but they can account for *change over time* with considerable ease of meaning, fit and workability. Since process connotes a temporal dimension, focus is on patterned lines of conduct as they occur over time under different conditions that generate change. Thus, change is fully as much an inherent feature of BSPs as their stability and variability. This characteristic contributes toward solving a perennial problem in sociology—accounting for change. The notion of change is not at all built into many other generic concepts in sociology such as social class, role, social structure, social system, functionalism and so forth. These categories can often be rejected when it comes to analyzing change since they become obsolete or clumsy in reflecting the realities of change.

When things change because of full variability, new conditions, stages, and transitions can be added to the BSP in order to handle the change. Take for example, locating “progress in a class” as a process. Students are able to locate themselves by comparing grades with one another. But, suppose a particular school eliminates grading. New methods of locating may be found, such as noting how often one is called upon in class, or other such subtle forms of “feedback.” At any rate, the theory of locating can be modified to handle the change. Whatever changes and adjustments take place can simply be added as conditions or consequences of the process. The theory has not been “disproved” or made obsolete in any way. A process of locating still exists—it has merely been modified slightly in form, densified and made more general.

BSPs can also handle change over much longer spans of time by merely adjusting for the changes in conditions in the same general way that adjustments could be made for changes encountered in going from one substantive area to another. What would be accounted for theoretically would be the absence of some conditions and the presence of new or different conditions. The basic theory, however, would remain intact. The “size” of temporal scale is included.

### **Basic Social Psychological Process (BSPP) and Basic Social Structural Process (BSSP)**

There are two types of BSPs—basic social psychological process (BSPP) and basic social structural process (BSSP). A BSPP refers to social psychological processes such as becoming, highlighting, personalizing, health optimizing, awe inspiring and so forth. A BSSP refers to social structure in process—usually growth or deterioration—such as bureaucratization or debureaucratization, routinization, centralization or decentralization, organizational growth, admitting or recruiting procedures, succession, and so forth. A *BSSP abets, facilitates*

*or serves as the social structure within which the BSPP processes.* Thus the growth of free clinics facilitates the prescribing process of birth control and family planning (Lindemann, 1974). The growth of spiritualizing of health food stores was necessary to “hippie” health optimizing (Hanson, 1976). Consolidating a revolution is accomplished by bureaucratization of charisma (Weber, 1947).

Most sociology these days focuses on social psychological process and assumes social structural process—or simply treats it as a changing set of structural conditions—without formulating it clearly as a process. The question remains is the latter all that necessary? Perhaps the BSPP is more prevalent and relevant to understanding behavior, since one does not need the BSSP to understand it, but usually one needs a BSPP to understand the focus on a BSSP. This question is, of course, to be answered empirically for any particular study. But given this prevalence, BSP implies a BSPP and when the analyst is generating a social structural process theory, he states it clearly as such and uses BSSP.

Society swings on the relevance of its interest, sometimes focusing on social psychological problems (getting poor people to upgrade) or sometimes focusing on social structural problems (providing opportunities for work, health distribution systems, government programs). Sociologists follow both foci. The most sophisticated sociological renditions include both processes, however; perhaps most will focus on the social psychological. It takes skill and clarity of purpose to mix both with full development, as opposed to focusing on one and using variables from the other.

Two general kinds of mix occur. One is that a BSP includes both BSSP and BSPP. Examples are admitting, screening or recruitment processes to an organization. The recruitment to a fraternity in college is a clear mix of social psychological and structural in the

screening and initiation ceremonies. The other type is that the BSPP and BSSP are clearly separate. For example, building housing tracts with better homes and on better terrain is a process growing builders go through. At the same time people are upgrading their housing circumstances when they choose new neighborhoods with better homes, schools, roads, parks and so forth. The new neighborhood can easily include new homes or old homes or both. As another example, developing health food stores was clearly separate from spiritualized, health optimizing.

When the BSSP follows and facilitates the BSPP, it takes on properties of the latter. Thus, the growth in health food stores occurred by taking on properties of the health optimizing process that it services; e.g. they sold natural vitamins with rhetoric. And vice versa, when the BSSP comes first, the BSPP takes on properties of it. Thus, in the beginning, birth control prescriptions took on the rules of family planning agencies. Women had to be married at one time to get a prescription for birth control. When the disjunction is great, as in this case, the social psychological may either exert a change over the social structural or may be purged. Thus, BSPPs can become structural conditions that affect the nature of BSSPs, and vice versa. In this way, a theoretical link is made between the two general levels.

The theoretical links that relate the two are many and emergent. Being analytically clear about their separateness allows for a well formulated analytic mix of the two. Otherwise, an analysis tends to become confused or unclear as to the referent process. For example, how does one analyze job transfers in an occupational career as related to time for personalizing rental housing, without a notion of how to develop both processes? Or how does one analyze upgrading life styles in housing related to unavailability of new and better housing, without a clear picture on the disjuncture of the stages of each process?



An analysis can emphasize the BSPP or BSSP, or some mix of the two, depending on which process or which mix emerges as more relevant in the situation under study. In studying a process that optimizes change, fluidity, and unfreezing of behavioral patterns, it is likely that the emergent mix would emphasize the BSPP. In studying a structural phenomenon as it is growing, such as behavior in new communes or people engaging in a new health practice, one would also bring in the new BSSP that supports the BSPP. In studying a phenomenon that requires little change in existing support systems, structural process might not be as important, for instance, as a process occurring in a bureaucratic setting where the actors have little control over the structural support. Even in such a situation, however, there may be informal modifications of the formal support structure.

Beside the above defining properties, a BSP has other important characteristics. For instance, a BSP applies a theoretically useful approach to deviance. It is, as well, systematically tied to a methodology. Both characteristics are further elaborated below.

### **BSP and Deviance**

It seems that most sociological theories are unable to explain with ease “negative or deviant cases” of whatever it is they are supposed to explain. So, they must resort to the use of additional theories—ordinarily some sort of deviance theory. Since deviant events could easily be explained as an integral part of a normal basic social process that takes place under certain conditions, there is no need to see the events as deviant or extraordinary. As the idea of basic social process becomes commonly used, the notion of “negative case” disappears. What were once considered negative cases merely highlight further conditions under which behavior varies according to the pertinent basic social process.

It is an error for sociologists to preconceive certain behaviors as fundamentally deviant, but even more an error for them to assume *from the start* that the most relevant thing about a particular behavior is its deviant dimension (regardless of how “deviant” is defined). Even if it is a behavior that is unquestionably far from general societal norms, values, etc., there is no reason, before it emerges, to take that as a starting point for analysis of the behavior. Such a consensual label may, in reality, have little to do with the motivation, organization, etc. of the behavior. Whether or not it does is a matter for empirical inquiry. The starting point is to discover the BSP.

If the analyst were to begin with the preconception that a particular behavior, organization, or whatever, was deviant and that was the most important thing about the study, the chance is very high that s/he would miss the core and relevance of what is actually happening. To use an example: If s/he were to study brothels (which one can safely say are generally considered deviant) from the point of view that the fact of their deviance is the most important thing about them sociologically, s/he would likely miss the more general relevant fact that sociologically—in terms of structure, function, organization, and process—they are similar to barber shops, beauty salons, garages, and so forth. All are *servicing operations*.

All of these organizations service persons or their belongings. All have steady as well as casual clients. All encourage their clients to remain on the premises only while they are being serviced. After servicing, they are “spent” and are no longer useful until they require servicing again, and so forth. These seemingly different organizations have much in common sociologically, regardless of how they are seen and defined in common sense terms, and regardless of whether or not they are defined as deviant. Servicing need not be seen as deviant or non-deviant sociologically *unless* it is discovered that the deviant label has consequences for

the servicing operation and those persons who are a part of it. In the case of the brothel, the deviant label would likely result in its being more isolated, less obtrusive, and so forth, than many other types of service operations.

In other words, from a BSP view, the deviant label (i.e. the fact that other persons see the activity and the organization as deviant) is merely one of many conditions that affect the servicing operations. Anyone who questioned the women would soon discover that their main concern is about servicing efficiently not about being “deviant.” In this fashion, deviance is put in integrative perspective as part of a BSP, rather than being developed as a separate body of theory. As such, its part in the development of theory would be reduced in importance in terms of the amount of time and effort spent, but increased in terms of its contribution to an integrated theory of what makes a part of society work.

If the analyst is interested in accounting for how particular persons engage in an act or series of acts which happened to get labeled deviant or have great potential for such a thing happening, a BSP approach would look different from other approaches, primarily because the grounded explanation for the behavior would be *contextualized* and *multivariate*.

It would be contextualized in that it would not seek to explain too much (as most other theories do), but rather would seek to explain the sources (i.e. the conditions, properties, and so forth) of “deviance” within a particular context such as a servicing operation. Once enough grounded data has been gathered, presumably through several studies and through the use of theoretical sampling, it may be possible to lift the theory out of particular contexts and elevate it to a more formal level. This could be accomplished if a number of dimensions, properties, etc., were *discovered* which were cross-contextual enough to form a foundation for a formal theory. However, this would not be taken as the starting point (as it is in functionalist theory,

for instance) but rather as the advancing of a substantive theory to a formal one, abstract of time and place.

A BSP view would be multivariate in that it would seek to discover all of the many relevant variables (conditions, consequences, properties, etc.) that constitute the process leading up to a particular form of “deviant” behavior as *covariant* among other behaviors. In contrast to this, the ordinary approach is to preconceive several variables and then go out and try to verify their existence (overlooking all the other possible variables which come into play). In addition, a grounded BSP would pick up and integrate structural as well as social psychological variables. The relationship between these various levels of variables could be shown; how they interact and affect one another in a systematic way. This has not been accomplished by the multivariate theories that exist presently. They have merely admitted that different levels of variables are involved in the explanation of deviant behavior.

### **BSP and Methodology**

As BSPs are densified and integrated, they may become multivariate to the point of including variables from other disciplines, such as psychology, political science, medicine and so forth. They easily become stages in process, consequences or conditions. Thus, as an isolating BSP, mental depression can cause social isolation that can cause physical illness that results in hospitalization, with further isolating in an isolating BSP. One handles emergence with whatever categories (from whatever discipline) that fit and work and that the analyst is trained to understand.

Since basic social processes are fundamental patterns in the organization of social behavior as it occurs over time, the BSP *conception* is a generic theoretical construct of the same genre as Max Weber’s “ideal type” and Alfred Schutz’s “homunculus.” However, unlike

these conceptions, the idea of BSP (and core variable) was developed within and is *systematically tied to a specific methodology* for generating theory. The conception is not a presupposition of the methodology, but rather is a product of its operations. The theoretical construct—BSP—was conceived as a by-product emergent in the process of doing and developing the methodology of grounded theory research. In contrast to ideal types and homunculi, BSPs are more than *post hoc* honorary labels. The BSP is fully “operational” at every step of the grounded research process. This is not the case, so far as I know, with any other type of theory construction. Weber and Schutz, for instance, leave the operationalization of their theoretical type up to one’s imagination. This may allow for flexibility, but it also allows for deductive speculation and floundering before a research method and effort is applied.

Grounded theory methodology does not rely solely on “cleverness,” “ingenuity,” “insight,” and so forth, yet it is not so rigid and specific that it can be learned and carried out by mere “technicians.” It requires theoretical sensitivity as well as technical skills, and some persons will, of course, be better at it than others. It also requires a specific course of training (by teaching or reading) because it is a system that must be used in whole. If it is used in part, or if parts are used incorrectly, it will work less than properly. We have learned that analysts who use it only partially are not likely to realize this, because many of its advantages are not evident until it is used as a whole (e.g. the advantages of writing memos, coding, sorting and so forth—both individually and combined—become evident primarily through experience in doing these things). This is not to say, however, that one should use it as a whole or not at all. Every step used will improve one’s ability to construct theory, regardless of what kind. The methodology provides a perpetual development of skill as one uses each part.

BSPs can be developed by this methodology at various levels of conceptual abstraction ranging from substantive theory (theory about a specific substantive area—e.g. Karate) (BEESON, 1973) through general substantive theory (theories about several similar substantive areas—e.g. kinds of physical self-defense) to formal theory (theory abstract of specific, substantive times and places areas—e.g. self-defending). Thus BSPs can be conceptually ordered according to abstraction, but each level is always theoretically and methodologically linked with a less abstract level and with systematically collected data of the empirical world. They never become operationally distant or remote from reality. We might add that BSPs are not theories of the middle range.

### **Finding a BSP**

There are two basic models for finding a BSP; by discovery and by emergent fit. By discovery, the analyst goes to a fairly contained social unit attempting by observation and interviewing to see as much as possible and find out the most salient social problem of the people there. Then s/he discovers the core variable—hopefully a BSP—that accounts for most of the variation in the behavior about the problem. S/he then switches focus from studying the unit to studying the process and proceeds to generate a substantive theory of the process by constant comparisons of incidents within different comparative groups in the same substantive class.

By emergent fit, the analyst has a BSP—discovered elsewhere—and wishes to extend it or to do a grounded formal theory of it. S/he then proceeds to find groups within which to study the BSP and, as in the first model, starts comparing incidents and groups within or between classes of units to achieve a level of generality, whether general substantive or formal.

Of course, we favor the first model, but since many BSPs are known already, some analysts may prefer the second model. It has, however, various pitfalls. In discovering the

emergent fit, the analyst should be cautious about assuming that if the BSP fits, it is the core variable of that unit. *It very likely is not*; the BSP is being imposed for the purpose of generating a theory of it, not of explaining the variation of behavior in the unit studied. Thus one can study temporal pacing in just about any social unit, but it is seldom, if ever, the core variable of the unit. Since it is not the core variable, the BSP will usually be less than densely developed in the study unit. It will very likely become overshadowed by a more salient core variable or BSP. Thus using the second model, the analyst skips between many chosen units looking for grounded densifications of properties and does not overwork any one group and incidents in a unit for what is not their BSP as it would be for a discovered BSP.

Furthermore, the second model is somewhat contradictory to the first and to the main theme of this paper, but it has a place in grounded theory if done carefully—since there are many grounded BSPs already discovered that need further development within and between substantive areas. The second model looks a bit like deductive, logical elaboration, but it is not, providing the analyst follows the grounded approach. S/he does not start “empty” or “non-preconceived” as in the first model. S/he engages in pre-emergent analytic thinking, and sampling before approaching the field. But once in the field, s/he starts correcting early thoughts and follows the grounding in subsequent theoretical sampling. And s/he ends up as s/he would in the first model, searching for comparison groups, as it becomes clearer and clearer where to go for fit as the theory develops.

There seems to have arisen a tacit rule in naming BSPs. It is turning a substantive noun or verb into a gerund. Thus we have “friending” and “becoming” respectively. While most BSPs are labeled with a gerund, not all are; thus, career, alarm system or recruitment system. As we said above, caution should be applied in over-use of gerunds. They may mask a basic

social structural condition, such as “security system” or “shift” (as in our earlier example). As in all grounded theory work, there is an area for theoretical creativity in labeling and rendering the BSP or core variable.

As the analyst becomes practiced in spotting and conceptualizing BSPs, s/he should avoid a probable occurrence. In reading others’ works, a BSP may become evident, which the author did not know s/he had in the data. The analyst should say as much in his/her own work, and not attribute the idea to the author. The analyst should distinguish his/her good idea from the author’s “good data but conceptual miss”. In fact, most BSPs are implicit and taken for granted in data, both by sociologists and participants alike. Only with training does the analyst see the strong contribution of a BSP to the on-going activity in the area under study, and only then can a theory be consciously generated for a BSP.

### **BSPs Compared to Units**

Most sociology is focused on a rendition of a social structural unit. That is, no matter what the substantive issues or concepts, or whether the study is description, verification or theory building, we *read about properties of a unit*; persons, groups, organizations, aggregates, statuses, nations, and so forth. In contrast, in this paper we have placed a relative emphasis on social process as the focus of analysis. *We generate properties of process*. It is important and useful to develop here the distinction between unit analysis and process analysis, so that their relative use and merits for sociology can begin to be clearly understood and used accordingly.

In itself, the focus on either unit or process sociology is not intrinsically meritorious. The test of relative worth lies in how well each may contribute to the knowledge of sociology and the purpose at hand. We, of course, are biased toward process, as we see many comparative advantages in the transcending nature of BSPs. The reader must make his/her own calculations



for each project. These distinctions listed below are opening ideas, not final dicta. Some items do not have to occur, but empirically, they do.

UNIT	PROCESS
<p><i>1. Relative Focus</i></p> <p>Process is one property of the unit. Analysis focuses on unit itself.</p>	<p>A unit is a place where a process goes on and it provides a set of conditions for its operation.</p> <p>Analysis uses properties of unit, not unit itself.</p> <p>Focus is on process as it explains or processes a problem or behavior pattern.</p>
<p><i>2. Freedom From Time and Place</i></p> <p>Unit bound. Rendition of unit is always bound by its time and place during period of study.</p>	<p>Process is free of unit’s time and place. These properties of unit are only varying conditions.</p> <p>Another unit varies process differently.</p>
<p><i>3. Generalizing</i></p> <p>Finite to unit; analyst can only generalize a study to a similar, usually larger unit.</p> <p>Generalizing is difficult and slow as must study large unit to analyze differences or use random sampling of smaller unit. Number of units to generalize to is limited.</p>	<p>Fully generalizable quite easily, as a BSP transcends the boundaries on any one unit by just varying it for another unit’s properties.</p> <p>Thus, the analyst generalizes a substantive BSP to a generic BSP. BSP is more general as it may apply to all units.</p>
<p><i>4. Action</i></p> <p>Provides the conditions that more or less allow the action. Units rely on BSPs to run.</p>	<p>The action of life is always in the process rather than of the unit itself. The unit is actuated by process as it bounds and locates it. The</p>

<p>Units are where BSSPs and BSPPs intersect.</p> <p>Units themselves may be a BSSP that processes very slowly, compared to BSPP, and is actuated by BSPP. A static unit is a frozen BSPP.</p>	<p>action process is a BSPP.</p>
<p><i>5. Freedom from Perspective</i></p> <p>Study of unit is always from perspective of analyst and/or participants. Bias is part of analysis as it is built (the establishment view of a corporation, for example).</p>	<p>BSPs are a separate perspective, irrespective of the perspective of participant or analyst.</p> <p>BSPs go on irrespective of bias of analyst. “Purging” is always purging, becoming is always becoming, no matter how perspectived the rendition. Bias is just one more variable in a multivariate analysis.</p>
<p><i>6. Durability</i></p> <p>Time and place change so studies of a unit becomes obsolete, whether unit description, unit theory, or unit formulations of change</p>	<p>BSPs are quite durable. They transcend the fallibility of units and, while keeping up with unit changes, as units change, BSPs get modified.</p>
<p><i>7. Transferability</i></p> <p>Once out of generalizing range, it is difficult and</p>	<p>Since BSPs are fully general, they transfer easily with modification. Becoming applies to both a nursing school and an air force acad-</p>

<p>hazardous to transfer ideas or findings of one unit to another unit. Transferring ideas about a nursing school to an Air Force academy probably does not apply.</p>	<p>emy.</p>
<p><b>8. Consultation Based on Transferability</b> An expert on a unit is restricted to that type of unit, and he requires much knowledge.</p>	<p>An expert on a process can consult on any unit where process is occurring by just knowing general process and applying it to new conditions.</p>
<p><b>9. Misattribution of Source</b> To describe a process as a property of a unit implies that it is uniquely the result of the people in the unit. This is inaccurate. The unit simply uses a general process. Thus, “women in karate are trying to neutralize sex status” implies they produced this process, which is inaccurate.</p>	<p>A BSP implies that it is being used by the unit, not a source of it, and the use varies within it. For example, it is accurate to say that women in karate use one mode of neutralization of an otherwise differentiating sex status.</p>
<p><b>10. Learning</b> Typical unit studies can be boring unless on a deviant or other particularly interesting group. It is hard to remember the plethora of facts, and understanding the unit is often bereft of in-</p>	<p>BSPs have much “grab”(they catch interest quickly), because they have high impact in meaning, are easily understandable, and have general ideas that are easiest to remember.</p>

<p>intrinsic scope of meaning, because of low generality.</p>	
<p><b>11. Research Sampling</b> Random sampling of unit itself is used so the analyst can generalize to a large unit.</p>	<p>Theoretical sampling of properties is used to generate to the theoretical completeness of process.</p>
<p><b>12. Research Coverage</b> Full range of representative factual coverage needed to describe the unit accurately, whether for description or verification.</p>	<p>Theoretical coverage requires only theoretical sampling of that segment of all behavior needed to generate an explanatory theory of a process. The analyst does not need representative coverage of all behavior.</p>
<p><b>13. Research Accuracy</b> Units tend to require accuracy so the descriptions will be considered correct. Statements are facts to be believed, and subject to slight correction.</p>	<p>Not crucial with a BSP, since successive comparisons correct categories and hypotheses. Statements are hypotheses, thus claimed as suggestions to be checked out; they are not claimed as facts.</p>
<p><b>14. Research Reading</b> Read as accurate description.</p>	<p>Unfortunately BSP theory is still read by many as factual description, not as hypothetical generalizations.</p>
<p><b>15. Historiocity</b> Unit studies are fixed in time. They are static.</p>	<p>A BSP, since it deals with on-going movement, implies both a past and a future that can</p>

<p>They are cross-sectional; picking up a moment in time, as if forever, but it becomes outdated, thus temporal scope is severely limited.</p>	<p>almost be .....extrapolated. A BSP has change built into it, as it is modified to incorporate new data. A BSP considers categories as part of larger ongoing process, historical scope. A BSP is in motion, not restricted to time.</p>
<p><b>16. Theoretical Impact</b>                  Based on the above differences, unit analysis has limited impact and scope.</p>	<p>Based on above differences, a BSP allows for an expansive amount of grounded theorizing about every facet of social life. It has high impact.</p>
<p><b>17. New Data</b>                  Typically refutes part of unit study.</p>	<p>Generates more BSP theory by comparing it and modifying theory by extension and densification.</p>
<p><b>18. Relationability</b>                  Units are seen as separate entities with definite boundaries. Theory related to a unit is not theoretically related significantly to other units, except perhaps to a larger similar unit to which it may be generalized. Thus unit studies are non-integrative to social organization, they make units, which are similar on under-</p>	<p>BSPs, by cutting across and transcending the boundaries of separate units, provide ways of relating units to each other through the same process; e.g., cultivating clientele, is a way of relating milkmen to lawyers. Thus BSPs tie social organization together. They are integrating. BSPs also relate to each other within units.</p>

<p>lying dimensions, seem separate, which is only arbitrarily so; e.g., normal and deviant studies appear different, not as two dimensions of the same general process. More fundamental patterns are obscured.</p>	
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### Sociology along Process Lines

The above comparisons clearly indicate the quite different appearance and import that sociological renderings of the world will take in generating grounded BSPs. Our effort is to show that focusing on process, as well as on units, will facilitate theoretical development in sociology. Process analysis will partly alter the conceptual appearance of sociology by cutting across the transcending traditional concerns, topics and boundaries, such as check forgers, political parties, adolescents, homosexuality, prisons, patient care and so forth.

Much of unit sociology is delineated along lines that are not theoretically contiguous, although they are treated as such. As we indicated above, if a unit sociologist were to begin a study of brothels, s/he would probably place the study in the traditional category of “deviant behavior” or possibly “social problem.” In doing so, the presumption is that the essence or at least a primary property of the behavior to be studied is deviant or socially problematic. Concomitant results will explain the motivations, attitudes, or other social characteristics of persons who engage in such practices as distinct from non-practitioners; i.e., “normals”. However, in categorizing brothel activities as merely another instance of deviant behavior,

other—perhaps more central characteristics of the phenomenon—are denied serious consideration by the researcher.

If we hold in abeyance the deviance assumption, we note that the area to be studied is an organized activity, established for the expressed purpose of exchanging a “service” for remuneration. Viewed in terms of process, it would be found that the structural properties of the brothel are akin to servicing operations in general—a basic social process in American society. Quite simply, the brothel exists to provide a service(s), which happens to be sex. *One property* of a servicing process in this particular context is that the service being provided is generally considered deviant in the everyday world. The “fact” that it is so conceived may have some consequences for the organization of some of its publicly visible activities, such as making it necessary to maintain a low profile, putting limits on public advertising, necessitating payoffs to the police, etc.

However, the deviant conception of brothel activities is only one among many conditions and properties in this and other servicing contexts. Compared to other possible characteristics of the general process of “servicing” such as power symmetry, role of expertise, specialized knowledge, right of grievance, duration on premises, malpractice problems, waiting properties, etc., the primacy afforded the role of deviance in a unit analysis seems more reflective of common-sense considerations than theoretical fit. Conceptualized from a process orientation, the behavior of prostitutes and their customers has more in common theoretically with behavior found in garages and beauty parlors than it does with check forgery, alcoholism, and the vast array of other instances ordinarily conceptualized as deviant behavior.

One further observation seems warranted. From our example of brothel activities, it might be concluded that we have merely transposed a hypothetical social psychological study

into one focusing on organization. We would answer that this is again a priority characterization that is not reflected in the empirical world. Instead, in our ongoing work with BSPs we have found one of its strengths to be an ability to *conjointly* render both structural and social psychological variables in terms of social process. It may be the case that either structural or social psychological variation has primacy in a given area, but that is a data-related question.

Regardless of the usual sociological interests, whether it be deviance, religion, collective behavior, etc.; and, regardless of the usual primary focus as either organizational or social psychological, the referent for BSP theory is always the process itself and not the particular substantive or conceptual unit involved. This does not mean that the analyst will be unable to explain how the particular substantive unit functions. Quite the contrary! BSP accounts of the world contribute substantial insight into the practical realities of the day-to-day world by explaining its variation (Glaser, 1969). However, as mentioned earlier, the analytic focus seeks theoretical coverage and not descriptive completeness, which is seen as impossible. As such, no claim is being made that “servicing” is the only aspect of brothels of theoretical importance. The only claim being advanced is that “servicing” explains much of the variation to be found in the actions, interactions, and perceptions found in the collected data from that research site. The process illuminates organizational features about the brothel, interactional patterns between prostitute and customer, prostitutes’ conceptions of their roles, and a wide variety of less obvious variables. As such, “servicing” is not to be taken as a “theory” about brothels (or deviance), but rather as a theoretical statement about processes that occur therein, which occurs in other areas of social life as well.

This illustrates the consequences BSP sociology would have for the manner in which sociology theoretically divides the empirical world. BSPs as basic uniformities of social life,



cut across the boundaries by which sociology has traditionally been sub-divided. Thus, one of the major ways in which we render the world sociologically should reflect this basic uniformity.

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