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Book Review: Stop, Write

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Stop, Write: Writing Grounded Theory. Barney G. Glaser (2013). Mill Valley: Sociology Press

This book on writing grounded theory is intended for the empirical GT researcher who wants to pursue his/her research until publication. It is the first book devoted entirely to such a crucial issue as writing grounded theory. Thus, Stop, Write: Writing Grounded Theory, is a practical book that fills a gap in GT methodology. In the first chapter of the book, Dr. Glaser says, "Stop unending conceptualization, unending data coverage, and unending listening to others who would egg you on with additional data, ideas and/or requirements or simply wait too long". The book teaches the reader how to actually write a grounded theory by "simply" writing up the sorted memos. This requires efficient sorting that is dealt with in chapter two on Sorting Memos, which includes precious repetition from Theoretical Sensitivity (1978). How writing can be done effectively is outlined in chapter three, The Working Paper. Then follows chapter four on how to rework the first draft with the different tasks of editing for language and professionalism. Thereafter, Dr. Glaser discusses Writing Problems in chapter five where he gives useful guidance on how to overcome writing blocks and problems with supervisors and dissertation committees. The book also deals with publishing and with collaboration as experienced between Barney Glaser and the cofounder of grounded theory, Anselm Strauss.

Another book from Dr Barney G. Glaser. So, why should I read this one when I haven't read all the others, the reader might ask himself. From my perspective, one should read those books that one's grounded theory interests require. And if you do grounded theory research or if you teach grounded theory, the requirements may be different. Yet, both doers and teachers should get this book in order to optimize their GT skills. Eventually this book is a necessity for the committed GT scholar.

Glaser analyses field notes taken during seminars and in his communication with grounded theorists worldwide. That is why this book eventually was written up from memos generated during years of seminar and mail interactions with grounded theory researchers. Dr. Glaser has apparently, in his data, seen a void that needs to be filled regarding writing GT, instead of just going on collecting data and generating concepts. Many are those PhD students using grounded theory that "outgrow their substantive GTs" (a pattern presented in this book), "grapple with worrisome accuracy," restraints of dissertation committees and keep collecting data and generating new concepts instead of pursuing the write up in order to get their PhD ready.

If it takes too long to reach the stage of writing, the joy of doing research risks getting lost and researchers may tell themselves – never again a research project using GT, which they sense is tedious and hard. Many researchers with grounded theory PhDs later lose the motivation for pursuing another project because it took too long to finish the first one. But

since the learning curve of the method is quite long, the best way to get over a post PhD low is to start a new project. This is emphasized in the chapter on writing problems, and is a way to avoid "outgrowing one's SGT." The best way to learn grounded theory is to do it. But, doing requires knowledge on how to, and that is where Dr. Glaser's books come in.

Writing grounded theory is different from writing other types of research since in grounded theory you write theory already in your first memos. The beauty of GT is that you may use written ideas that have come up during coding your field noted data already from day one. In grounded theory, written ideas are called theoretical memos. They are often modified at later stages but nevertheless the written ideas in the memo bank are the most important properties of grounded theory data. So, writing grounded theory starts with writing memos, but writing up a grounded theory first demands that these memos be sorted. Thus, how to sort is a very important part of this book. In fact, a subtitle could have been added, "Sorting and Writing Grounded Theory." Proper sorting is such a vital requisite when writing up a grounded theory explaining with much variation how people in a substantive area resolve their main concern.

And sorting is not easy. It can be hard and confusing. The sorting confusion might be even worse than the confusion at the open coding stage. Part of the sorting confusion can be overcome by reading this book. Just be aware that not all confusion can be eliminated, since confusion is part of the method. Confusion triggers the preconscious processing that takes care of assimilating ideas and parts of ideas into an integrated whole. And the preconscious processing is eventually tapped, developed and registered in memos.

The sorting chapter of this book contains modified sections of the sorting chapter in Theoretical Sensitivity (Glaser, 1978). The section on analytical sorting rules is almost entirely taken from Theoretical Sensitivity and it helps to try some of these rules when sorting your memos. I say try, since in grounded theory these analytic sorting rules are emergent as you sort. That is why Dr. Glaser calls his list of rules guides and the researcher is encouraged to "skip and dip through the obvious rules." Eventually, new rules will emerge applying to the researcher's particular study.

This book also deals with overcoming writer's blocks. One way of overcoming blocks is to write a working paper without any constraints re style and language. The chapter on the working paper is therefore vital for hesitant writers. A working paper is good for a sorting goal and the sorting levels rule comes in handy here. The sorting levels rule means to sort concepts on at least three different levels depending on type of publication. For a traditional scientific paper in the nursing and medical fields the sorting is then done for the abstract, the introduction, methods, results and discussion sections.

Problems of writing are divided into personal and structural blocks in the chapter of Writing Problems. Personal blocks of writing primarily present the pattern "outgrowing of one's substantive GT," which is closely related to writing as having a "love affair" with one's SGT, which then never gets written. The best recipe on how to overcome the outgrowing block is to start a new SGT project. I never forget the advice Dr. Glaser gave me in 2003 after I had finished my first grounded theory on balancing cancer care as a part of my PhD. He told me

to go on generating new concepts, doing new GTs, and so I did. Dr. Glaser recognized that I had fallen in love with my GT and the best way to move along was to start a new project.

Then Glaser deals with fear of writing and performance anxiety. The section on structural blocks guides the reader on how to overcome dissertation committees, deal with authoritarian supervisors, and how to pick an appropriate supervisor with examples from Dr. Andy Lowe, one of Glaser's most ardent students. The chapter on publishing gives advice on where to publish, writing tips on format and style, and discusses different peer review procedures. It also includes a section on how to bring in the literature in the written grounded theory product.

The last chapter, on collaboration, contains a 12-page section on properties of the collaboration between Barney G. Glaser and Anselm Strauss. Apart from advice on how to collaborate in research, the chapter provides treasured insights into the history of the development of grounded theory as a sociological project. Glaser learned from Strauss that a book is just part of a larger "program" or "work" that requires several books over a period of twenty to thirty years. This grounded theory project, program or work is now by far the most cited in the world when it comes to research using qualitative data. On June 19, 2013 "The Discovery of Grounded Theory – Strategies for qualitative research" by Glaser & Strauss yielded 52.452 citations in Google Scholar. As a comparison, Strauss & Corbin (1990) gets 31.888, Patton (2005) 24.856, and Denzin & Lincoln (2005) 23.129 citations. This does not mean that grounded theory is good for everything or liked by everyone. In the chapter on publication Glaser reminds the GT researcher to be prepared for the 1/3, 1/3, 1/3 phenomenon. 1/3 will like the paper, 1/3 will not care, and 1/3 will brutally criticize it. The trick is to find a large enough audience who likes your written GT product. This book will help you with that endeavor!

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Barney G. Glaser is the cofounder of grounded theory (1967). He received his PhD from Columbia University in 1961. He then went to University of California San Francisco, where he joined Anselm Strauss in doing the dying in hospitals study and in teaching PhD and DNS students methods and analysis. He published over 20 articles on this research and the dying research. Since then, Glaser has written 14 more books using and about grounded theory, and countless articles. In 1998 he received an honorary doctorate from Stockholm University. His latest book, which deals with the no preconceptions dictum in grounded theory, will soon be published. Email: bglaser@speakeasy.net

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