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Forty Years after Discovery: Grounded theory worldwide

Barney G. Glaser in conversation with Massimiliano Tarozzi, Ph.D.

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Forty Years after Discovery: Grounded theory worldwide

*Barney Glaser in conversation with Massimiliano Tarozzi*¹

Massimiliano Tarozzi (MT):

Forty years have passed since **The Discovery of Grounded Theory** was first published. Now we know that it was a revolutionary book for many sides and today we are able to carefully describe the profile of its innovative proposal. But, how was it received at that time among the scientific community? In particular among sociologists or in general among social scientists? Now it is well known the success of this book, and we know the place that it has in the history of sociology. But what was the reaction at the beginning – at the very beginning?

Barney Glaser (BGG):

Well, the reaction was big. It was like a bomb; no question. It challenged ‘received theory’ to the max and questioned the productivity and research with respect to theory, research which was being used to test hypotheses as opposed to generating them. So it was – it had many reactions but overall some of the people loved it, thought at last they were free. Others damned it because it put their work into jeopardy.

So in that sense, it was very controversial and very positive. Not only did it put a call or an attack on received theory and conjecture and speculation but it showed a way out. It wasn’t just an argument; it was a solution. And it grew as people assimilated it.

MT: I see. But at the beginning, 40 years ago, did it receive many reviews in journals? I cannot imagine what were the first comments about the book, both in the journal reviews and in informal reactions.

¹ The present conversation will be published in Italian in appendix to the first Italian translation of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, (Roma: Armando Editore, in press).

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BGG: I don't remember if **Discovery** was reviewed but it was written in response to the success of **Awareness of Dying**. **Awareness of Dying** was very successful. It was widely read and all could think, "How'd they do it? How'd they do it?" So being trained in methodology, I suggested to Anselm that we write a methodology on how we did it. In the bargain, we wrote a new methodology which changed a lot of people's views of how to do theory, how to do method and do research. So it wasn't just alone. It was a significant response to **Awareness** which itself is in four languages.

MT: So **Awareness** was a success. And the success of **Discovery** has grown year by year, as researchers keep using it with growing competence. In particular, my perception – my feeling – is that the success of the book has been a retarded burst. It was probably bigger 15 years later than at the very beginning. So it received a full international recognition only in the Eighties. It was in the next decade that the success of both the book and the method, was growing and growing, not only in North America but was spread everywhere and in particular in Europe. I believe that at the end of the sixties sociologists and laymen were not yet ready to assimilate and practice the innovations of this methodology.

A few years ago, you wrote that talking with Strauss you agreed that your book was in advance of 15 or 20 years, with respect to your times (Glaser, 1998, p.21). What did you mean? Do you think that there are specific reasons for this delayed success? Why people were not ready for this book?

BGG: Yeah, it's delayed action learning. People liked it in the beginning but as they started to use it and experience it and felt its power and success and the delayed action, they started proffering it more and more. So I mean that's the curve I was telling you about. It grows and grows. People start talking about it – its power, its grab, its endurance. And, the book itself is a grounded theory. It wasn't thought up. It was based on doing **Awareness** and **Time for Dying**. So it was grounded in research. That has tremendous grab.

Well, one delay is resistance to seeing its power. Yeah. But once again, even for the people wanting it, it's delayed action. Its grab is ever enduring. It's slow, although the concepts, like

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what you were saying – what was the one – of instant grab, the method itself has tremendous grab. I mean it holds you. And that's why I wrote *Theoretical Sensitivity* in '78? Which was 11 years later. To get more clarification 'cause people were running around with it [**Discovery**] and trying to use it. Now, forty years later, there's a growth curve.

MT: So after the success of **Awareness** there was a slow but continuing development that followed an even more aware application of the method. Did this happen at the same level, both in North America and in Europe or in other countries? Or was it recognized first in the United States and then elsewhere? My perception is that the book and its methodology arrived later in Europe, especially in continental Europe. And in particular it arrived not immediately in sociology.

BGG: Yeah. Oh, yeah. **Awareness** was published very quickly in other languages because it dealt with nursing which is universal. And it dealt with high impact variables, high impact dependent variables. And so I don't think it spread in sociology. It spread in management and in education where people were fed up with the standard categories.

MT: This introduces another key issue. What are, in your opinion, the main fields of application or disciplinary perspectives or the main research areas of grounded theory?

BGG: Oh, it's management, business, education, social work, nursing, medicine. It's growing in medicine. I mean we organized a seminar in Malmo, Sweden where there are 12 doctors, all trying to do grounded theory 'cause they have a community management orientation.

These medical doctors are social psychologically oriented, not like here. And it's big in medicine in Europe. Not in France. But it hasn't taken hold in France at all and very little in Germany 'cause Anselm had very good friends in Germany that didn't like me. However, **Discovery** has been translated into German too.

MT: What are the reasons why the grounded theory was spread about these fields of application you mentioned? I believe that one of the main characteristics of the method, clear also in the founding book, is that "it fits, is relevant and

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works". That's the reason why it is particularly suitable in those fields where people demand research practices with concrete guidelines and directions for action and change. Some practical disciplines (education, nursing, marketing, etc.)- and education is my field - those which cannot stop at a descriptive level in their theories can find affinity with a methodology that starts from the main concern of participants and ends with a theory that works, fit, is relevant and useful. Research offering as a result a theory, rather than a detailed description, allows practitioners to transform the explored contexts. And where it is necessary to train practitioners and professionals, reinforce knowledge and skills, a grounded theory seems to be a sound basis upon which to build education programs, decision making, situation change, emancipation of educators, nursing, and other practitioners.

BGG: Well, also, because those fields deal with high-impact dependent variables. The explanations of what's going on are very relevant in this sort of practice. That's why GT focuses on dependent variables. It deals with these dependent variables and their relevance and work and fit when they deal with these variables like nursing care, medical treatment, management consultancy – whatever you want to call it. It gives good answers to high-impact variables. But you have to add one more dimension to what you're doing. One of the spreads of grounded theory that is often not mentioned. You know what it is?

The jargon. The words. They have so much grab that they're used everywhere to justify research that has nothing to do with grounded theory. So I'm always telling my students if I've invented anything that really works, it's the jargon. "I did theoretical sampling". Oh. And "did you saturate your category"? Yes. It's wonderful. And "did you constant compare"? Oh, yes, "I do constant comparisons all the time" and the jargon is so –

But, you know, grounded theory is a theory and it was generated from research data and it just proves the point of how great grounded theory is but they don't realize that. They use the categories, the jargon, and it's jargonized everywhere and that's probably what you're picking up in part as its popularity. I created a concept. It's gonna live forever. It has

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enduring grab.

So the jargon is far ahead of the method as I originated, although there's people getting Ph.D.s right and left using the proper method. I'm going to Norway to hear a defense. I just read another one [thesis] today from England. Somebody else just got their degree. It's great. You know, people have remodeled the method but they haven't remodeled the jargon. They've used it to remodel grounded theory.

MT: In this sense the jargon is a way to legitimize data. And at the same time it can legitimate you in front of your committee.

BGG: That's exactly it. It's a legitimizer. The jargon is a legitimizer. Yeah. "I used grounded theory". Even the term "grounded theory" is a concept created out of studying our research [**Awareness of Dying**]. It wasn't thought up. It was generated from the research we did on dying, combining Anselm's talents and my data.

And if you – no matter who publishes this book, there are a lot of people who are gonna buy it, not because they want to do the method but because they want to read on legitimating jargon.

MT: Very interesting. According to this, the translation is very important. What you said is particularly important also for the first translation of **Discovery** in Italian. Because we have to be aware that in translating - for the first time - the language of the founders, we are creating the jargon for the future.

BGG: That's exactly it.

MT: Because in Italian, the technical jargon of GT - like these terms, theoretical sampling, constant comparative method and so on - are not so broadly spread and well established as words. So they do not have that legitimizing power you mentioned. At the same time, this is an advantage. As Grounded Theory is quite a new method [in Italian], the words that became jargon in English, when translated into Italian, these words acquire a new vitality, a new evocative power. That is my feeling. They are very powerful because they are not so established and they have not lost their original meaning. So, maybe, the fresh language, like poetic metaphors, is still the way to access the essence of the method.

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Probably this legitimating problem is mainly in English-based languages and in the English countries. In the future, as the method spreads in many fields in Italy, the question you pose about the legitimizing function of the jargon will become more evident in Italy as well. At the moment, I think, the language of GT still preserves its innovative force for us.

BGG: The current generation uses the legitimating jargon of the method, not the method. The jargon justifies everything they do.

MT: I know. That's the problem, I think. To be aware and to try to avoid: to keep the meaningfulness of your words.

BGG: Well, you can't deny the meaningful – I mean it's all data, right? And the use of the jargon for justification, legitimation, is very real – very. You know, you can say they shouldn't do that but it's very real that people need to somehow legitimize what they're doing with the proper words. That, too, was a phenomenon. And I've asked a colleague of mine to write a paper on the legitimating jargon of grounded theory.

I just read an article on Sunday on ethnography which is all description saying you can do grounded theory by generating a concept. Well, I mean if anything is further from grounded theory, it's ethnography 'cause grounded theory does away with the description. But, you know, according to this paper it's like generating a category made ethnography grounded theory.

So it's very real. If you think about legitimating jargons, they're everywhere. It's a normal human process. It occurs in marriage, child rearing, just about everything. Once legitimated, the words have such grab that they move on with no reference till they're applied.

MT: Coming back to fields of application. Probably in these fields – education, organization, management, nursing – there is a request to research, to transform the field, not only to describe.

And a theory is stronger, too, than a description to transform a field and to making decisions. As a nurse, as an educator, as a manager, you have to transform the reality you are exploring. So from another side, my opinion is that these fields need to create professionals with specific skills and these skills have to

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be based on something sound or something solid, something scientific.

BGG: Based on legitimating jargon.

MT: and also on a theoretical perspective or an epistemology

BGG: Epistemology. A theory of – or a theoretical perspective. That's all bullshit for grounded theory. You can read it in **Theoretical Coding** (2005). GT is just a stupid little method. That's all it is. The epistemology is irrelevant. It's how you use it. GT is based on a concept indicating method which has been used for years in psychology. You get concepts out of indicators and the interchangeability of indicators and you get a theory. That's it. People do them all the time.

And psychologists – they use hundreds of indicators to specify a character, whether someone's depressed, bipolar, has anger problems. But sorry, it's just a dumb little method. I mean to put it on the epistemological or the theoretical like it's a symbolic interaction method. That's nonsense. You can use it with symbolic interaction. You can use it with any kind of perspective. There's latent patterns everywhere. There's even latent patterns going on here. Did you know that?

MT: So I guess symbolic interactionism is not, in your opinion, a theoretical perspective behind grounded theory, although almost all agree in recognizing its influence through the Chicago school.

BGG: Absolutely no. It's just a dumb – you might say a routine psychological method that's used all the time in judging people. They generate psychological conditions by doing constant comparison method. It's just a concept indicating method and it gets used and then you relate the concepts to conditions. You can use it with symbolic interaction data, which I'm not sure what it is anyway. Are you? Did you know that your making meaning is like yourself indicating to myself that your meaning is the same as mine?

I mean, it's like, tell me what's the point. You know, it's like – well, it's nonsense. It's symbolic interactions and as you're reading in **Theoretical Coding**; everybody wants to possess it as their method, give it their epistemology, give it their perspective. It's a general method that anybody can use with

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any kind of data. It can be used with documents, videos. It doesn't matter; whatever the data is. What you're looking for are latent patterns and they're everywhere so one of the latent patterns is everybody wants to possess it and it's their perspective.

MT: So with any kind of data and within any kind of paradigm?

BGG: What's a paradigm? I don't know. What is a paradigm?

MT: According to Kuhn it is a framework shared by members of a given scientific community that functions as map, in a certain era or period of time, for any further scientific activity.

BGG: Like what?

MT: Like – it's – to me, it's a shared agreement among the scientific community about common beliefs, techniques, methods, the idea of science in itself.

BGG: That's all it is. Just more data generating an answer. GT can be used with any kind of paradigm and if you want to get legitimation, you throw in the paradigm buzz words. So symbolic interaction does it, right? It's just like constructionism. It's one kind of data and often not very interesting.

MT: So if I understand well, you mean that GT can be used with any kind of data and also within any kind of paradigm, including constructionism?

BGG: Yeah, 'cause there's a lot of data that's just data that you use in grounded theory. It depends. What data are you using? It can be used with any data. I talked about four kinds of data – basic data – so what were they? Proper line data. You say what you're supposed to say because who gives a shit. You're not gonna risk telling the researcher something that could wreck your life or your job. So, proper line data and there's baseline data. Interpreted data where you don't tell the data; you interpret how the data should be told.

And vague; vague data is big. Have you ever talked with a lawyer? It's always vague. They give nothing. Oh, they're big on "ahha's" and "uhmm's". They're vague, right? Oh. So

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there's vague data. One of my best students, Richard Rizzo, wrote a paper that got an award. He came back from the Haight-Ashbury saying, "I couldn't get any data." You remember the Haight-Ashbury? The flower children in San Francisco? They were all runaways and on drugs and I don't know if you remember that time.

MT: Actually no. I was in a small kindergarten in Bologna, Italy at that time.

BGG: It was a big area in the city that was being taken over by adolescents and young kids and all kinds of drugs and all kinds of – you might say benign deviants. And they were called the flower children. He went in to study the Haight-Ashbury and he said, "No one will tell me anything." So is that symbolic interaction? No. I said, "You have one of the richest studies there is in the city. Everybody's vagueing out on you. Where are your friends? Where are you from? Where do you get your money?"

And he went and did this paper on vagueing out in the Haight-Ashbury and got an award for it. So where was the symbolic meaning? I mean it was wonderful. And then I realized, yeah, so many people vague out on others which means they give nothing. Course, the flower children gave nothing 'cause they didn't want to be reported to the police, reported to their parents, you know, seen as copping out on their friends. Interesting, huh?

Now you're gonna see – you're gonna look around and see vagueing out all around you.

BGG: That's one of the powers of grounded theory which I write about in my next book [Doing Formal Grounded Theory, 2007]. The general implications of these words is phenomenal. I called my lawyer. We had a little problem. He says, "I'm gonna go on over there and see what we can do." And I said, "Why bother? He'll just vague out on you. Why should I spend the money?" He says, "You're right." I'd be told nothing except him being able to charge his client \$500.00.

That's another thing about grounded theory. You have some powerful concepts with general implications - these variables are seen everywhere. And that's what my next book is about –

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everywhere. Yesterday, I was with somebody – oh, I was with somebody, a layman, an intelligent layman who was doing graduate work in English, but for you and me, he’s an intelligent layman. He said, “Barney, I still see everywhere what you were saying.” I said, “What did I say?” He said, “You talk about super normalizing and I see it everywhere and are you super normalizing now? And you never wrote about super normalizing.”

When Kathy Charmaz was my student, she did a marvelous dissertation on super normalizing. Where you have an injury or a condition and you act more normal than ever to prove you don’t have it.

Super normalizing goes on all around you. She [Charmaz] studied heart attack victims. They were told they have a bad heart so they go out and prove they don’t by excessing and that was fear. Skiers supernormalize - maybe not in Italy – but in the Sierras. A lot of people super normalize. They get hurt and then they go out and ski even harder to prove they’re not hurt and they’re really fucking themselves up.

Football players do it. There’s a lot of situations where people go beyond the normal to prove they’re not below the normal. And now you know this concept. You’re gonna see it everywhere. It’s very real. And interesting enough, at the same time that Kathy was developing her theory of supernormalizing, somebody else was also studying heart attack victims. You know what she found? The opposite end of the continuum – cutting back.

Doctor has said you have a bad heart. You better cut back. How do I cut back? The doctor said, “How do I know? Look at what you do and don’t do it.” And so she [Patricia Mullen] did a study of cutting back. They cut back on sex. They cut back on biking, running, work. So, at the same moment that someone’s studying excessing, she’s studying decessing. Isn’t that interesting?

So you get different grounded theories out of the same data and they’re both just as real. You know how far we are beyond any crap about epistemology and theoretical perspectives? And the super normalizing? What is that?

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Back to supernormalizing, I mean I know people who have given themselves terrible injuries super normalizing in skiing. When you fall down and you hurt a knee and you go back and ski like it doesn't hurt and then you're in the hospital. I have a friend who died lifting bales of hay to prove his heart wasn't bad. Yeah. Apply that. These are concepts that just came out of this concept indicator model which is as old as the hills and it's irrelevant but call it super normalizing stuff. You get it?

MT: Yeah. You can see everywhere these key variables, key concepts.

BGG: It does – it goes on everywhere - like pain leveling. As opposed to getting cured, people go to dentists, doctors to get their pain leveled. There's a big industry on pain levelers with no cures.

MT: So you mean that the existence of these key variables, these core variables per se, that you can find in various social contexts and in diverse substantive areas, is reflecting some patterns that are into reality, some hidden structures existing objectively into the reality, irrespective of the stance or the type of perspective that one imposes on them.

BGG: They're latent patterns. It's like credentializing.

I had a student in one of my seminars. At the time, I didn't want people who were doing dissertations out of my seminars because it held up the work 'cause there's too many stakes involved but one day she came and threw a dissertation on my desk and said, "I've just got my degree. I broke your word and I did a dissertation out of your seminar without telling you." And I said, "What's it about?" She said, "Credentializing. Nurses getting credentials."

Now think about it. Credentializing is a fundamental latent pattern in all our lives. It varies from a two-week training program to a 12-year training program to get credentials, and every one of the things she said could be seen as relevant to credentializing of every kind. And, you know, that doesn't begin to cover it; there's always more. Credentializing is very big. It's the way our world is run, right?

MT: Coming back to the history of these first 40 years. Many things have happened in this time span. Deep

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transformations have occurred in social sciences, and huge reflections about its foundation. How, if at all, has grounded theory been modified or remodeled during these years?

BGG: Well, the grounded theory I deal with hasn't been but remodelers have done it to bring us back to qualitative description. One of the realities behind that is not everybody can conceptualize but they want to do grounded theory or they think – you know, all research is grounded. Just is. The notion of research is if you have an idea that you find data. So the people who can't conceptualize tend to want to use grounded theory just for qualitative data analysis which they think is grounded 'cause it's research. I wrote a book on it. You should read it.

On the default remodeling, it says there's more describers than conceptualizers. Let's put it this way. A lot of people – a lot less people can conceptualize but a lot more can than are. But most people describe at length. On and on and on. And if you were in conversation, you'd say they're saying the same thing over and over again 'cause it's just the interchangeability of indices. But they don't know it.

They say the same thing over and over again in different ways just because it's the same pattern.

So the remodeling of GT is based on a very real human condition. Ground theory has status and the jargon has status and people want to do it and call it that. They'll call a routine qualitative analysis - and just like the ethnography paper I mentioned earlier- Thank God, we're right in the middle of ethnography on grounded theory! His concepts are always going deeper but not systematically generated as the method requires.

MT: Talking about the success of grounded theory, one of the reasons for its spread worldwide has been the Strauss and Corbin's book Basics of qualitative research. An international best-seller that seemed to respond to the requirements of those who, in doing grounded theory, needed detailed practical guidelines. Your argument with Strauss is well known. But, if you do not mind to speak about it, what are the basic methodological reasons for this divide, beyond your punctual critiques to this book?

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BGG: Well, he went to forcing the data with pre-framing, preconceived concepts and preconceived frameworks like process and the 5 C's - conditions, consequence. Although I taught him that framework, I said it has to emerge. You don't know in advance what the theoretical codes are gonna be or the categories. Get away from preconceiving the research.

I can't tell you how many people who call me and say, "I'm supposed to study this and I can't find it." Well, according to Anselm's method, this is what you're supposed to look for and you will find it or die. And I get so many calls like that. So use grounded theory. Forget what you're supposed to find and just see what you are finding. A good example would be some student called me from Texas, very smart woman, saying, "I'm supposed to study context-oriented social work." You know what that is? That is - context-oriented social work is you treat these people who need social welfare like they're victims of society.

And she went out and started talking to these people, the social workers. Well, they couldn't do context-oriented social work 'cause they weren't trained in context. They had ideology but they weren't using it. They were very concerned about the every day problems of the clients. It was just so irrelevant she didn't know what to do. I said, "Look at what's actually going on. Forget it."

And she came out with a beautiful theory of accompanying, wherein the social worker accompanies the client through a phase, not getting behind and not getting ahead but helping them through a phase and staying relevant to their problem. So she made a contribution to the doing of social work and everybody took out content-oriented social work as so irrelevant. I mean would you go for food stamps and have someone say, "I don't know. But you're just a victim of society." But I need to eat!

MT: So one of the problems of Strauss' approach, late Strauss' approach...

BGG: Is forcing data. Framing elements

I'm supposed to find conditions and consequences. It's not earned relevance like I require but preconceived relevance, and

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the other problem was if what they find contradicts received theory. It's outrageous. You're not supposed to tell anybody that.

MT: I well understand what you are saying. I worked as social worker educator before enter the university. So the problem of Strauss's approach, with Corbin, is to cage research problems into rigid frameworks that force data to find dimensions and conditions. Do you believe that this is unavoidable if one tries to create detailed instructions for doing grounded theory? And that this effort to operationalize the method is the reason why basically one is framing and forcing and one ends up pre-conceiving what is supposed to discover?

BGG: Yes. He [Strauss]wanted to – there's two things. First, when you do grounded theory, you have to tolerate confusion until you see what's really going on. The person teaching also has to be able to tolerate confusion in their students, so they have to stand it too and quite often the professor can't stand it. That's a generous interpretation. So he pre-frames the student so they'll find something, even if it isn't a finding.

The other thing is the professor doesn't want them to find anything. They want them to work in their area of research which is exploitation. You will not study what you're interested in. You'll study what I wrote about and add to it. So you get pre-framed in.

MT: This is very difficult because you have to deal with this and try it. It is not easy.

BGG: No, but you have to choose the right students to do grounded theory 'cause not all can do it.

MT: In years, another new frontier of GT seems to be the constructivist approach. Kathy Charmaz outlined a divide between objectivistic and constructivist grounded theory, which has been very successful with these terms. According to her opinion, you and the "classical GT" belong to the objectivistic approach to grounded theory.

I read your reply in the "Forum of Qualitative Social Research" in 2002. But what is your opinion about this, about objectivism and grounded theory? If someone tells you, you are objectivistic, do you feel uncomfortable about this label or does

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it matter for your approach to grounded theory?

BGG: Well, she's doing what academics do – trying to lay a claim for her growth and recognition by fostering perspectives. I think it's irrelevant. You have to look at the data you've got. I don't know what objectivism or post-modernism or modernism is. I mean if I told you the theory on credentializing, was that post-modern, modern, objectivistic, constructivist?

I mean is it relevant? I mean this guy asked me the other day, "Barney, I see super normalizing all around me. Am I right?" He's trying to use this concept because it has such grab. You know, it's not relevant to me whether it's constructed, objectivist – it's not relevant. But it's in the nature of advanced academics to try and generate this perspective that they seem to get trapped into and become devotees of. It's bullshit. It's more like religion. You have a student in the field doing research. What is he supposed to do? Come back and say, "I've got some objective data and some constructed"?

Let's go back to credentializing. I think potentially there's a very big problem in California today. Do we credentialize non-registered Mexicans to drive? Credentializing is a qualifier. It qualifies you. I mean that's important, to say we can't give them a driver's license. They're here. We're not throwing them out but we can't give them a driver's license 'cause they're not citizens? We need to qualify them as drivers or they'll be killing people on the roads.

So is that objectivist, constructivist? I mean is it even relevant? But it's a major problem. Personally, I think they should all get driver's licenses. They should be credentialized no matter what. I'm interested in people doing research and getting good names for good latent patterns.

And the social structural control over epistemologies and perspectives is phenomenal. It's just another sociological phenomenon. You could say – according to Parsons, it's a functional requirement that departments have their own epistemology and perspectives and someone wants to grab that prize. But that's another phenomenon in its own right. It's just more data.

MT: Yes, I understand that from the research practice point

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of view the epistemological question is irrelevant. It is only further data but there are different ways to deal with data. When **Discovery of Grounded Theory** first came out 40 years ago, you and Strauss challenged the common way to deal with data. You proposed not just verifying preset theory, nor just describing social reality, but generating theory from data. This very simple statement at that time was very revolutionary, since you challenged the dominant paradigm. It is a fact that your contribution influenced and questioned the traditional prevailing epistemological paradigm. So the epistemological issue is not so far from GT, and your sociological revolution effected also at this level and not only in innovating research procedures.

BGG: You could put it on that level. It was also just on the level of how you do research.

But it challenged another way of doing it. See, I'm gaining more and more insight into it. Yes, we challenged a paradigm which is a model for doing research. It was – and it was a pretty fundamental model for research. A lot of these other perspectives are much more in-group and departmental oriented. I guess the paradigm - besides legitimizing the dignifying object, making it sound like science. But it's all just data. It's structures; places. It's big - Parson calls it socially structured vested social fictions that run the world.

MT: In the 40 years, from the very first revolutionary formulation of GT, many things have changed in social sciences. I would like to raise two main debates in particular. One is the new debate about using qualitative and quantitative data in grounded theory. The second is about the interpretive turn in social sciences.

BGG: Regarding the first point. I have always claimed that quantitative data can be used in GT. I am writing a book on quantitative grounded theory, which is a takeoff from that chapter in **Discovery**.

BGG: Regarding the second point, if with the interpretive turn you mean constructivism, just take the example of credentialing nurses by forcing them to get bachelor's degrees. A lot of the credentializing is poo-poo. One of the categories is "I know it all already and why do I have to relearn it." But I

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mean credentializing is not an interpretation. It goes on all over to qualify people to do jobs. You want to know they're qualified. They want to be qualified to make income. It's very real. You're flying home. You want a credentialized pilot. You want to know his training.

I think empirically the notion of interpretive and constructivism came out of one – you might say – major but minor form of qualitative research. That is 'depth' interviews. That's like we're talking and I'm feeding you more meanings and you're feeding me meanings and we construct a joint meaning. But most research is just observation and listening.

This long two-hour depth interview can be very constructivist or interpretive and that's different than interpreted data where you tell people the way they're supposed to see it. We did a study of a mental health facility. You never get real data. You get told the way they interpret it as data which is different. That's interpreted data.

MT: So interpreting is nothing more than a further and different kind of data, but it is data. It is not a different kind of stance, a particular posture of the researcher that co-constructs data or that analyses them irrespective of his/her point of view.

BGG: Yeah, it's just data. That's just like proper line. They get mixed. Proper line data is – I've seen it so many times in people starting to study management problems and they go to the workers. Now what worker in his right mind would tell you the truth? Why should he put up his job just to give you reality? He gives you what he knows he's supposed to say, especially if you have a tape recorder going. I mean it's just – you just don't get good data. You get proper lines.

That's one reason I don't like tape recorders because it forces people to tell you what they think they should be saying to cover their ass as opposed to really telling you what's going on. So – but see, none of the people really get it. I mean I've been involved in hundreds of grounded theories and I see all these things and you might say it's so far beyond this perspective and epistemology jargon.

What was it when Diane Vaughn did the study of the crash of – what was it? Apollo 13? And discovered it was

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organizationally produced error. A lot of people knew about it but they didn't have the power to stop it and maybe a few people who began to have the power were afraid because it would invalidate schedules and grants. There's a lot of issues involved.

And I would just suggest never do these in-depth interviews although some people do it. And interviews should be very open-ended where you don't say much. You will - what I call - instill a spill. Once you hit relevance then all you have to do is mention it – like I was doing a study of inheritance.

All I had to do was say I'm studying inheritance and they lined up to tell me their story. So there was no interpretivism. There was no mutual construction involved because it dealt with only four things – the anticipation, the actual inheritance, distribution and the use. But to repeat what I just said - one type of data is like another - call it interpretivist or constructivist. It's not relevant for grounded theory generation.

MT: There are several ways to conceive the grounded theory approach. In your opinion, is it a methodology or a method? I have the impression that **Discovery of Grounded Theory** is a methodological book and then years later, probably Theoretical Sensitivity is more concerned about method. What do you think?

BGG: It's a methodology. And a method. Methodology – well, theory is method. It's a theory of how to generate concepts from data that fit, work and are relevant. The books you mentioned, well, they have both dimensions, some more, some less.

MT: Looking at the future, what are, in your opinion, the new challenges or the points in which grounded theory should be improved? Or, what are at present some weak points that looking at the future you think that grounded theory should overcome?

BGG: More people who could be trained adequately. All over the world because it's being used all over the world and people are craving help one way or. You'd be surprised some of the people in the departments that have no notion or are antithetical to it [GT], then see it and they're grabbed by it and

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want to do it and they need help.

So that's a need, you might say, a well-run network of people who will help others do it. I don't know if it'll ever be seeded in one department. Well, there are departments who say they train people but it's not really grounded theory. It's more qualitative and some conceptual description. So that's where I see the training and the satisfying.

My books help. I've sent them all over the world and I think we're giving a seminar in China. I go to England. I go to New York. I just had a seminar in Mill Valley. And people come from all over. They want to get trained in the method. They don't like to be minus-mentored in its use. Interesting. So that's a big problem. It will not be seeded in any one department because there's so many people doing it in all kinds of departments.

MT: This seems to be a typical dilemma of the history and the nature of grounded theory. From on one side, you cannot establish canon, a rigid set of procedures, because GT is constitutively against closed, narrow and dogmatic perspectives. It cannot be forced with a predetermined set of detailed guidelines that would frame the data. However, from another side, you have to describe a correct way to do grounded theory.

This is maybe one of the most revolutionary aspects of **Discovery**. Because it is perhaps the first methodological book in qualitative research, seeking to outline systematic procedures for a non-formalized approach where the whole process is not fully controllable in advance.

BGG: Well, wait a minute. GT is procedures-unbendable although people bend them all the time. But they're procedures which open you up as opposed to close you down.

MT: But procedures tend to become rigid and to turn into jargon, canon, mostly when they are written. If you don't give proper training, that quite probably human networks can substitute written canon's orthodoxy. Human networks spread all over the world in training groups that help and support each other. This could probably be a way to disseminate and to preserve grounded theory but not in that rigid – strong and

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rigid – way which is, of course, the problem of Strauss and Corbin you mentioned before (as well as forcing data into preconceived thoughts).

BGG: The procedures I'd say they are rigorous in what you do as you move along to discovery. They help you discover and keep you open.

That's the big problem today. More and more people are trying to do it. I mean there's some guy in the Philippines screaming for help because there's too many things that's bullshit and he needs help. He's doing a marvelous study on how to particularize the universal. This is really good. He's a monk and his order has a universal need to help at-risk adolescents, right? You know, it's altruistic. It's ideological. He goes out and studies it. Do they help at-risk adolescents?

They particularize the universal to a small group of adolescents who are smart, sane and capable of learning. They are the dangerous ones. And so they maintain this front that they're helping people and indeed the people they help are really helped but there's another whole group who really needs help who aren't getting help.

And in the bargain, by particularizing the universal, they become altruistic which makes them look even better because they get so excited about – you know, have you taught a good student who learns and how exciting it is? They get so excited they work 12 hours a day instead of the required 8 so they chalk it up to altruism and that's perfect fiction. I mean in reality it produces the fiction to become like them and these are Jesuit monks or Buddhist monks. I'm not sure. ...

But this goes on all the time. It goes on in schools when teachers pick up the best students. It's such a universal and accepted thing. I read another study where people privatized public education tracks. They're getting involved in a merit system situation and they buy out the merit. Social influence, money, etc.

Like getting their kids into the best math class even though they're not good at math - or getting kids into the best college. But the front is public and the path has been privatized. Interesting. It doesn't matter. It's the same pattern.

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Interview conducted in Mill Valley, California, July 2006

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After Discovery: Growing Success

The following commentaries are offered in tribute to Barney Glaser for his contributions to research, knowledge and the careers of so many ...

