



GROUNDING THEORY REVIEW

An international journal

In Honor of Anselm Strauss: Collaboration

Barney G. Glaser, Ph.D., Hon. Ph.D.

November 2007

Grounded Theory Review, Vol 6 (Special Issue), 77-84

The online version of this article can be found at:

<https://groundedtheoryreview.org>

Originally published by Sociology Press

<https://sociologypress.com/>

Archived by the Institute for Research and Theory Methodologies

<https://www.mentoringresearchers.org/>

In Honor of Anselm Strauss: Collaboration¹

Barney G. Glaser, Ph.D., Hon. Ph.D.

I have known and collaborated with Anselm Strauss for about twenty-seven years, and I would like to summarize this collaboration by citing its most important properties. In doing this, I hope to evoke in the reader a feeling for the meaning, the appreciation, and the love of what it has meant for me to work with and be associated with Anselm for these years. Until Anselm taught me several related aspects of such an enterprise, I never realized that people could truly collaborate. Collaboration so often fails in a cloud of mutual distrust and hatred. It can be treacherous, and dangerous business.

1. When I started to collaborate with Anselm in 1960 on the dying studies, he generated in me a “high” for doing sociology that has never left me. I am always turned on by thinking, writing, talking, and reading sociology and by sociological research. I can hardly wait to get back to whatever task I am into. It may not seem obvious, but I do sociology every day although its product in the last few years has not taken the usual forms of lectures or writing. It is, however, very visible in the everyday world of work and action because the applicability of grounded theory is incredibly powerful.

2. I learned both the fruitfulness of collaborating with and a way of working out collaborative activities with Anselm, who I was easily at odds with because that’s the nature of this business. We are always better at criticizing others than appreciating them. It was wonderful learning to deal constructively with differences in thought and theory. Anselm taught me the skill to appreciate these differences and work them into the writings to increase insights, formulations and richness. We used the constant comparative technique to

¹ This essay originally appeared as Chapter 8, *Grounded Theory, 1984-1994*, (Barney G. Glaser, Ed.), Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press, 1995, pp.103-109

The Grounded Theory Review (2007), Special Issue

transcend our difference with underlying uniformities.

3. Anselm taught me the art of juggling. He used to say, “For God’s sake Barney, juggle! Juggle people, juggle time, juggle courses”. It was hard for me to juggle, when we first started, but now it is easier; it even comes naturally at times. I juggle, sometimes with one hand behind my back, as they say. I think it was Anselm who communicated to me the juggling formula by his example. One juggles ten things at once. If you are called upon to answer for two of them, and you are only obliged to fix one, nine have succeeded. So why worry?

4. Anselm taught me relevance in sociology. He taught me many kinds of relevance but I will only cite two: One was the true relevance of data in research. When I first met Anselm I had just come straight out of the world conjectural of sociology, very little of which was born out in reality. The second was the relevance produced by qualitative research using methods developed at the University of Chicago, principally field work. He showed me how to do research and analysis to find out “what is really going on.” In doing this he taught me that data comes first, then the theory. One does not force preconceived theory onto the data. To wit, we developed a methodology, which we called Grounded Theory. This was theory, which was not stuck in the mud, but was an elegant form of integrated conceptualization inducted from systematic research.

5. Along with the notion of deriving concepts from data, Anselm taught me another facet of conceptualization. It is the “idea” that is carried away from a research writing, not the detailed data. Anselm showed me clearly that the reader usually ends up remembering and telling others the basic ideas of the work. Facts are easily forgotten, ideas are not. And in the bargain, he taught me that ideology (or ungrounded theory) is data, too, a fact in and of itself, a perspective that people act on. So he started me off on the quest to develop conceptualization as the product of sociology. I added to this the notions of integration and formulation of theory I had bred into me at Columbia University--or as I wrote about in **Theoretical Sensitivity**, theoretical coding and theoretical connections through sorting into a framework. I also learned, in presenting research and concepts to others, that a listener may consider your data something one could find out by being his or her own

The Grounded Theory Review (2007), Special Issue

sociologist. To put it another way, laymen can produce good data, but only a good sociologist can produce a good integrated conceptualization of it.

6. In the very early stages of our work together Anselm taught me how to view other sociologists' work in several important dimensions. Just look at the kind of data they use to produce a given kind of product. Study the way they researched it and how they conceptualized it --forced, inducted, elaborated and/or deducted. And, very importantly, try to grasp their conceptualization not as something to believe, but as the author's perspective on the data for a historical or "school" point of view, and see this perspective as data itself! Also beware of the writer's need for immaculate conceptions as a prime source of distortion of obtaining theory from data. And be humble about the "holes" in the writer's theory: they are yet to be theoretically sampled for. Thus Anselm taught me to see other's work for what it is, not for what it purports to be and not as something to be idealized. So I became very quickly a "critiquer" rather than a "criticizer". And that critique should be based on the discoveries of grounded theory, which helps us to get at what is actually going on in other's work, what another's paper is actually telling us. Anselm expresses this notion quite often, to help us ward off the need to force what we want but rather discover the true emergent in the data.

7. The preceding ideas clearly lead to honesty in research. Most researchers feel that total honesty is an assumed, obvious and unstated value in their research. But a form of "nonhonesty," you might say creeps in: conceptualizing the data using pre-existing or premature ideas, before enough research collection of data and comparative analysis have been done so one can really know what he or she has. This subtle forcing easily becomes a track of thought with many branches that may never get undone, even though the researcher may eventually do enough collection, coding and analysis of each data to be able to find out what he or she really has. The theoretically sensitive reader will see that the writer has simply missed what he or she really has while pursuing a premature grounded conceptualization which has not been properly refined and modified, has no "fit" and no explanatory power. Honesty in research requires persistent openness and

The Grounded Theory Review (2007), Special Issue

patience until saturation sets in.

Thus, in my work with Anselm I developed a devotion to what “end results” can be obtained by sufficient collection of a variety of comparative data, the saturation of the concepts and properties that come from its coding and analysis and thus the core processes that emerge to make the data all come together in an integrated conceptual framework. The notion of core categories as prime movers of all the other variables involved came from the Columbia school of theory generation and survey research. It was what was needed for the conceptualization that Anselm did so well.

It follows then that one of the major insights that emerged from our collaboration was that if the researcher hangs in there long enough he will truly become honest and conceptualization will not be forced. So in the bargain I relearned the old adage again that truth is stranger than fiction and that it takes time and stamina to cross the line between the two, in spite of how fast our lively minds will tell us the true ideas long before the line is crossed to best fit theory. One has to sit on the “need to know” and take on a “not-knowing” attitude and stay open and questioning and juggling of how ideas fit and work until the constant comparative process saturates the varieties of data. Then the researcher-theorist can honestly say he knows best how to render the data theoretically within the confines of his voluminous, theoretically sampled data.

8. To accomplish the above, Anselm taught me autonomy in all facets of research and associated career work. If the researcher achieves autonomy by taking her work out of the hands of teachers and colleagues and by developing her own plan of research with its own pacing, this is an immeasurable contribution to the honesty and theoretical richness and results of her work. He should provide his own training, and see himself as someone who still learns and has to be self-trained, because he is going in a different direction. Then later, when the analysis is finished, she should bring the work back to the sociological fold as a contribution. Anselm taught me the value of taking ideas out of the hands of theoretical capitalists, especially pet ideas, and then demanding of oneself even more grounded conceptualization, using all theoretical and data sources to do one’s own sociology.

The Grounded Theory Review (2007), Special Issue

Our autonomy started at the outset of working together. Collaboration does not mean losing one's identity, one's right to think and write singularly or to rework the work of the other. Working together simply means doing what works to produce the product and this can vary quite a bit. Sometimes we wrote together, sometimes we wrote different chapters as we felt the impulse, sometimes we rewrote each other's work, sometimes one would write up the other's memos and so forth. But in the end we would both agree on the outcome, however we had arrived at it, and the route was never the same way twice. We always maintained the myth that the other could have written the chapter he did not write. I say myth because we never had the time to test this hypothesis.

On the first day I collaborated with Anselm, we met for lunch to discuss the awareness of dying data. Fran, his wife, called to "see how it was going with Barney". Anselm said that it was going well for himself, which meant that he knew, I would do my own work and that I would let him do his. He knew that we could do our own work without losing our own identities, styles and creativity by giving in, pleasing, nonexposing oneself for fear of nonappreciation or disparagement and for seniority (Anselm had many collaborators before me.) Anselm was wonderful and encouraging, and I was less so but young. Our initial work all came together -an emergent- in a book called **Awareness of Dying** that is still popular 25 years later and is translated into three different languages. Our mutual biographies and careers were launched.

9. Another crucial aspect of autonomy that Anselm taught me was that once you create your own career plan, and sociological program with autonomy and honesty, no matter what others may say about a draft or a book, if you feel it is good, then publish it. Anselm taught me, and lived it to the fullest, that a book is simply a part of a larger program that requires several books - no one being the greatest. It will be over a period of twenty to thirty years that one's books congeal into a "program" or a "work" that itself will be evaluated as a whole and perhaps even a "school." The program evaluation will transcend any one of its books, which people may use, discard or ignore.

The Grounded Theory Review (2007), Special Issue

Of course, our program - theory development and medical sociology has transcended time and place with appropriate modifications. The use of our work grows constantly. Anselm's programs include other areas and thrusts and other collaborators, which we can remember more easily than all the books. His notions of a programmatic approach to sociology has made many of us productive, contributing sociologists. Thus we are all a part of the books in which we have collaborated with Anselm and not collaborated with Anselm, because we have all been part of the even more general program of producing a sociology that fits, works and is relevant-- a grounded sociology.

10. By encouraging me in the autonomy and honesty that generated a methodology that was highly productive for writing monographs and publishing them, Anselm confronted me with the true nature of the sociological audience we were reaching, the one-third, one-third, one-third concept. One-third will read our work and love it. One-third will dislike it and criticize it according to their own canons. And one third will simply ignore it. But one third favorability among colleagues is ample for career and recognition and for attracting students and friends all over the world.

11. Another vital property of our collaboration is that we are all teachers, but who teaches us. From the beginning, Anselm teaches his collaborators a lot and in very subtle ways. But this is a mutual process, since Anselm's openness keeps him learning from his collaborators, as well as students and other colleagues. Thus, crucially, the collaboration tends to be a symmetrical exchange among presumed equals, which is intensely gratifying and gives one tolerance for the give and take of collaboration. The final conceptualizations and their connections came from equality in agreement on what has emerged from the data.

12. As a matter of fact Anselm is so open to others that it is impossible to close him down. It keeps him young and going on to the next book with the next collaborator. But Anselm teaches his collaborators very clearly that even though the story goes on, there is a time when enough is enough and it must be written up or it is wasted. In our write-ups we usually found out we had too much for one book, and probably enough for two books. Before going on with the program he always

The Grounded Theory Review (2007), Special Issue

takes the time to publish a slice of grounded theory to share with colleagues and students. At this point, each collaborator works under his or her own set of conditions which will foster his productivity, and which most likely are very different from his co-workers. Perhaps the one rule is that collaborators almost never can work together in the small office. Where, when, and for how long each writer is always different. Manuscripts fly back and forth, each collaborator waiting for the reading of his or her work by the other. It is almost impossible for one to demand pacing of the other.

13. Anselm taught me two cardinal rules of taking credit when writing is finished. First, no one wrote the whole book and both wrote the whole book together. This is the concept of jointly and severally. Thus it is impossible to pin on one and not the other for anything in the book. Also each one is responsible for everything in the book. The simple reality is that one name has to come before the other.

In closing, I wish to mention that my list of properties is long, but not exhaustive. Others may find different properties in their own collaborative relationships. My collaboration with Anselm was never that easy as work, but was always rich and fulfilling. At times, we stopped working together to write our own books, and at times we even wrote other books at the same time we were working and writing together. Collaboration never dominated our writing careers.

I have only begun to touch here on the gift that Anselm has given us all, in collegueship and collaboration. Our assumption is that the program will continue for years to come, as in fact, so many of us will continue the general program in our own writings along with Anselm, as the general reciprocity he has taught us all continues.

Thanks Anselm, you have taught me that the “sociological word” is seldom received from on high: It is discovered in the data.

