



GROUNDING THEORY REVIEW

An international journal

From the Editor

Judith Holton

November 2006

Grounded Theory Review, Vol 6 (Issue 1), p. vi-ix

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/>

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Volume 6, Issue no. 1, November 2006

From the Editor

Preparing this issue of the Review has been a wonderful learning opportunity for me and I trust that reading it will be so for you as well. The issue offers us a preview of Dr. Glaser's new book, **Doing Formal Grounded Theory (Sociology Press, 2006)**. We are pleased to be able to reprint here Chapter 4 (**Generalizing: The descriptive struggle**) in which Dr. Glaser addresses the primary challenge to generating formal grounded theory – the struggle to overcome the impulse to descriptively compare data for similarities, differences and negative cases in favour of conceptual comparison and modification through the generation of new conceptual properties and dimensions. The descriptive override is one that novice grounded theorists often struggle to overcome. Indeed, many of us have encountered the ill-informed challenges to grounded theory intent upon its remodelling to conform to the dictates of qualitative research where description rules. I speak from experience. In my doctoral viva, I encountered an external examiner who could not accept conceptual generalization without the addition of detailed unit descriptions from the research setting. Held hostage by worrisome accuracy, he needed the comfort of detailed description and completely missed the power of abstract conceptual theory to transcend context.

While very few of us have as yet taken on the challenge of doing formal grounded theory, Thomas Aström (**Moral Positioning: A formal theory**) offers us a credible effort in his novice attempt to illustrate the power of conceptual generalization. Aström has taken the core category of his doctoral research in the field of disabilities and conceptually compared it with data from other substantive fields including education, medicine, management, politics, sports, social work and child care. As his resultant theory

illustrates, the general implications of moral positioning are obvious and readily evident in many social situations.

To be a novice, however, is to experience the discomfort of grappling with the unfamiliar, raising issues of confidence and courage in offering up one's efforts for public scrutiny through peer review and publication. Aström expressed his concerns to me in an email message saying, *“As this area of grounded theory is growing and not yet spread and obvious, a formal theorist easily can become unsure and discouraged. I am also looking forward to Barney's next book. It will make it easier, not only for me, to be sure of how to scrutinize and present a formal theory.”* (Email Oct 22-06)

Astrid Gynnild (**Growing Open: The transition from QDA to Grounded Theory**) shares with us another aspect of the descriptive struggle that challenges so many novices. She details her growing awareness of the need to overcome the preconceptions imposed by qualitative data analysis procedures in favour of the openness of grounded theory's “All is data” dictum. Her paper offers us a glimpse into the mind shift that she experienced in making the transition from description to conceptualization and is valuable reading for anyone struggling to transcend the tyranny of descriptive detail.

The descriptive overwhelm of qualitative research can easily seep into writing up a grounded theory study. Even experienced writers can succumb to QDA's worrisome accuracy, aided and abetted by their training and experience in writing to the dictates of the predominant paradigm. As such, they offer up detailed contextual information and face data without the earned relevance required of a grounded theory study. The QDA-trained response is difficult to unlearn. We see this tendency to some degree in Jamieson's paper (**From Pathological Dependence to Healthy Independence: An emergent grounded theory of facilitating independent living**). While offering interesting background into the data used to generate the theory, it is the concepts with earned relevance that interest the reader of a grounded theory. These are, to some extent, diluted by face data

and extensive quoting from interviews throughout the paper. Thus, the elegance of a good conceptual theory can be undermined by the familiar requirements of a qualitative paper.

Christiansen's paper (**Opportunizing: A classic grounded theory study on business and management**) reminds us of yet another persistent problem for those new to grounded theory – the effective use of theoretical coding. Christiansen's core category of opportunizing has brilliant imagery and grab that extends well beyond the substantive area of business and management and his paper offers detailed description of the concept, its properties and dimensions. While offering us a number of possible theoretical codes that might fit with his theory, it seems that he misses the emergent fit of an appropriate theoretical code to enable overall theoretical integration. The basic social process, as a default theoretical code for many novices, doesn't produce here the parsimony and scope that a good grounded theory should achieve. And, one wonders if there is not a typology of opportunizing behaviours or strategies emerging from his theory?

As suggested above, the novice grounded theorist may encounter any number of challenges to writing for peer review and publication. A primary goal of this Review is to encourage and enable novices to publish their papers. The global reach of grounded theory as evidenced in this issue's papers from America, England, Norway, Sweden and the Faroe Islands, also reminds us that for many who undertake grounded theory, writing for publication can mean writing in a second language with all of the challenges that entails for conveying conceptual imagery and theoretical explication. To succeed in doing so often requires patience, persistence, fortitude and the courage to stand one's ground as a theorist.

As editor, it is my privilege to engage with the authors of papers submitted and I wish to acknowledge their patience and diligence in working through the review process, responding to reviewer comments and suggestions, reworking drafts and resubmitting their work. I also wish to acknowledge and thank our peer review

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editors for their time and interest in reading and offering critiques of the papers submitted. While we don't always agree, we work through the differences in perspectives and opinions to offer authors the benefit of our collective experience.

As readers, you are the beneficiaries of the efforts made by both authors and reviewers in a process that can entail several weeks of writing, reviewing and rewriting. The papers in this issue offer readers not only fascinating conceptual ideas but also opportunities to learn, to question what we think we know and to challenge what we assume to be certain. The theories offered here are good as far as they go. No paper is perfect; each could be further improved just as each of us has more to learn.

- Judith Holton