

## **How Barney Glaser and Classic Grounded Theory Have changed and Impacted my Life**

Barry Chametzky, PhD Barry Chametzky, PhD  
Senior Core Faculty, Dissertation Chair  
American College of Education  
USA

I could never have imagined, how, in 2011 or so, my life would have been positively affected by one person and a research design in my dissertation. At that time, I was starting to write my dissertation and was planning on using an ethno-phenomeno-case study-ology as my research design. Clearly, I was confused and naive. But I connected with an online cohort where I learned about classic grounded theory. I'd like to share some instances of how Barney Glaser and classic grounded theory as a research design have changed and impacted my life.

My first contact with Barney was on the phone ordering one of his books. When I sheepishly asked whether he was Dr. Glaser, he responded yes and I was in shock. I even remember not "getting" his joke about the book costing 100 dollars. Clearly, I was dumbstruck. I had never spoken with a famous person and did not want to come across as a blithering idiot. Well, when I was stammering with Barney, if I came across that way, thankfully, he never let on.

Fast forward two or so years to 2013. I earned my PhD. I remember how I sounded at my oral defense. I was able to quote various passages from several of Barney's books from memory. Since then, I've come to learn that, as Barney stated, the beauty of classic grounded theory is that it is all around us. We just need to be open to seeing and experiencing it.

The next transformative period happened a few years ago in 2017 when I was part of one of Barney's seminars and then had the incredible honor to dine with him at his home. At that time, I was extremely fortunate to meet many classic grounded theorists about whom I've only read. I remember learning that these people, whom I idolized, were just everyday people and scholars as I was. We were able to have great conversations as friends and peers.

At that time, I remember having two short conversations with Barney. The first was about a term used in French literary analysis. But the second was more personal and transformative. As I was leaving for the evening, I thanked Barney and told him that I appreciated him "for being him." Then, he hugged me. And that was a glorious moment I will never forget.

The third and final instance is happening now. Two background points are needed though. First, by training, I am an educator with a specialization in online learning and educational technology. I am not a medical professional (though, to be honest, I wish I could have gone to medical or nursing school). Second, Barney had often explained that a literature review should not be done before collecting data to avoid potentially tainting the information obtained during the data collection process. Preconception could very possibly result in a bastardization of the data. That's great, but Barney also made it clear that a *tabula rasa* is not possible (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). So, what could a researcher do? I think I discovered a viable solution.

My latest research project is very exciting for me. Not only am I broadening my research horizons but also, I am getting as close to a *tabula rasa* as possible. For my research study,

I am interested in understanding a psychiatric disorder called dissociative identity disorder (DID). Since I am not a medical professional with all the "baggage" that comes with formal, clinical training, and since I am interested in understanding the problem of DID from the perspective of the participants, I am finally experiencing what it is like to know very little about a given research topic. I am as close to a *tabula rasa* as I can be. When I am in the data collection process, I know that I will be unencumbered with previous knowledge and will be open to all that will come.

Barney and classic grounded theory have substantially impacted my life. Not only because they helped me earn my doctorate, but because they have taught me how to look at the world through different, questioning, and conceptual eyes. With this new perspective, I find that when I try to understand what is happening in the data, I can do mini-GT studies. The result is a new and uncovered perspective. The beauty of CGT is the simultaneous complex procedure of analysis and the simplicity and universality of the resultant theory. What a mind-blowing concept! People think that a doctoral dissertation topic must be esoteric. While this may be the case, if classic grounded theory is used, the resulting theory can and should be clear and simple.

I saw a LinkedIn post the other day with a quote that was truly appropriate. The quote was from Shai Reshef who is affiliated with the University of the People. The quote is "When you educate one, you change a life. When you education many, you change the world." With that quote in mind. thank you, Barney. Thank you for being you and for giving the world classic grounded theory. And most importantly, thank you for helping to change and impact the world.

### **About the Author**

Barry Chametzky, Ph.D. American College of Education. Dr. Chametzky holds graduate degrees in Music (Conservatory of Music at Brooklyn College, City University of New York), French (Middlebury College), and Foreign Language education (University of Pittsburgh). Dr. Chametzky is an active researcher in the fields of andragogy, e-learning, anxiety and online foreign language acquisition, and classic grounded theory with numerous peer-reviewed publications and book chapters to his credit. He is also one of the reviewers

and the copyeditor for the Grounded Theory Review. He facilitates online learning with master's and doctoral students in the fields of educational technology and leadership, and serves as a dissertation chairperson to a number of candidates. Email: [barry@bluevine.net](mailto:barry@bluevine.net)

### **References**

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. (1998). *Doing grounded theory: Issues and discussions*. Sociology Press.