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Teaching qualitative research methods courses: a conversation with Anselm Strauss

QSE: You retired from the University of California Medical Center this year. Will you still teach occasional courses?

Strauss: Yes, just one. I'll go on teaching a course in Qualitative Data Analysis.

QSE: Let's start there. How many students are typically enrolled in that course?

Strauss: Between 8 and 10 or 11. We meet once a week and work for two hours.

QSE: Tell me something about the background of your students. Are they medical students or sociology students?

Strauss: I am on a medical campus, but we have a graduate program here in sociology, and the class I teach is given in that program. Most of the students have an interest in medical sociology and focus their studies in that area. However, not everyone does fieldwork in medical sociology. Many of the students we recruit have backgrounds in social work, nursing, and other allied areas.

QSE: Do students come to you with a background in sociology and sociological theory?

Strauss: Some do, but those who have been nurses or social workers usually have not had much theory.

QSE: Does that hinder their ability to do qualitative research?

Strauss: The way Barney Glaser and I teach our research course helps students through that, but I don't think a lack of background in theory causes them much difficulty. It poses some problems, but they are usually minor.

QSE: Are there any prerequisites for the course?

Strauss: Yes. We give our students two quarters, that is, six months of instruction in field methods where they learn classical field method techniques. When they come to my seminar it's with that as a background. This means that they have data that they can work on and they can present to the seminar.

QSE: So your course is designed to help them analyze data they have already collected?

Strauss: Correct.

QSE: You have developed a unique graduate program that sets the traditional sequence of courses on its head. You begin your students in methods courses and move them gradually into theory rather than vice versa. How did the program get started?

Strauss: We formed our graduate program in 1968. I was the chairman then. The small group of faculty pretty much agreed that we should emphasize research in our program. The way to do it was to start students off in research classes. That's different from what is done in most sociology departments where they start with a lot of theory and survey courses. In the traditional set up it could take two or three years before students learned very much about research unless they are lucky enough to land a job on someone's project.

We thought we would turn that tradition upside down and start with the research. So we introduced the fieldwork courses in the first two quarters and laid on top of that the analysis course. Barney Glaser taught the analysis course for many years, and now I teach it also.

QSE: Has the program changed substantially over the years?

Strauss: Well, sure; there have always been

some hitches in it. There is an on-going tension; the faculty has always been of two minds about emphasizing theory or stressing research. In some years the faculty may get a little frightened and think students are not getting enough theory. In other years they relax. Students feel some of that conflict also. Over the years our program has gotten tighter and students feel requirements weighing on them more heavily. When that happens our program requirements begin to look like everyone else's. Students worry about meeting those requirements and passing their qualifying examinations. Their tendency is to neglect the research and go off for a year and a half or two years and concentrate on passing the damned exams. They always come back to the research a little rusty.

So in all fairness, I would have to say that if a program like ours is to work it would have to stay close to what we were doing in the years when everyone agreed that we should be a research-driven program. During that time we were relatively relaxed about exams and other requirements and our major focus was on research.

But the faculty splits on this issue from time to time. It can't make up its mind really and tends to waiver and then, of course, some of the game is lost.

QSE: But the program, as it was originally designed, allowed students to get theory in the course of doing research. It was not a question of giving up theory in order to do research, but rather to employ theory in the course of conducting research.

Strauss: Well that depends on what your conception of theory is. If you think theory is armchair stuff where a student reads a lot of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim and secondary commentary on what those guys meant, that's one thing. But another view is that theory is what people generate in the course of their research. People are working in fields in which research has been done and they must read that research in the process of doing their own work.

As you know, in most sociology departments we have this trinity of Durkheim, Weber, and Marx. We expect students to learn all that and then we add a few more names depending on whether the department has phenomenologist or interactionist orientation. They are going to learn all about George Herber Mead or they are going to learn all about Alfred Schutz. That may or may not be relevant to what the students are doing in their research.

QSE: Let's return to the field methods courses for a moment. Students still take those classes at the start of their program and from there move into your analysis class?

Strauss: Yes.

QSE: The field method classes are taught by your colleagues in the Sociology Department?

Strauss: That's correct.

QSE: It is in field methods courses where students learn about developing a research interest, gaining entry, interviewing, and participant observation?

Strauss: That's correct. Of course, I stay in close contact with those classes because students come from them into my courses. I know how those classes are taught, who the students are, and something about the projects they are working on.

QSE: What kind of feedback do they get on their field notes in the field methods course?

Strauss: The instructor goes over the students' work very carefully. The course is designed to teach students how to observe, how to take accurate field notes, and how to report what they have seen. Generally speaking, the course does not go very far into data analysis. In recent years they have moved into that area a little bit.

QSE: Tell me something about how you organize the qualitative analysis class.

Strauss: Sure, but I should explain that some of the things I am going to tell you appear in a book that has just been published by Cambridge University Press, titled *Qualitative analysis for social scientists.* There are a few pages in one chapter where I discuss what my seminar looks like.

I make it clear from the beginning that the class is a workshop; it is a working group of people. Therefore, I have to teach it in such a way that students very quickly begin to work together. What I want to prevent is people presenting themselves rather than working closely with others. You've got to prevent people from showing off or trying to

make a 'splash'. You have got to work it out so that those who are most vocal do not take over and those who are more reluctant to talk are pulled into the discussion.

I begin the seminar with one or two sessions where I lay the groundwork for the kind of research analysis we will be doing in the class. Most of the students know about grounded theory already, but the others quickly learn where this methodology originated, some of the work it was grounded in and some of its general features. I give them some things to read and some grounded-theory research monographs. By about the third class the course begins to look as it will look from then on out.

I explain that all persons will get a chance to present some portion of their data at least once and maybe twice in the quarter. Each week someone will present and there will always be a backup person in case the first person gets sick or is unable to attend the class. Then the presentation portion of the seminar begins and the first student presents his/her materials. The materials may consist of a portion of an interview or a portion of a fieldnote. I don't want the student to present too much material, just enough for the class to work on. So I generally restrict students to presenting 2, 3, 4 or 5 pages. Sometimes students will get the material to their classmates ahead of time, but when that's impossible, we read that material at the beginning of the class. Then we start.

QSE: And what do you start doing?

Strauss: It varies a little bit depending on the data we are looking at, but what I generally do at the beginning is to ask the student what he/she wants from the session. I try to set a mood and make it clear that the whole class is going to work with the student on issues the student identifies. Of course, students come in with very different kinds of expectations and wishes. It pays to listen to what those things are so at the end we can come back and ask, 'Did it work? Did we help you?'

QSE: And what if students ask for the wrong kind of help?

Strauss: If they do, they will know it by the end of the class. In any case, in the first couple of weeks of the course I try to show students the difference between just looking at an interview or fieldnote in search of general themes or patterns and what I call intensive coding. One of the ways I do it, and I do it several times at the beginning of the course, is to let the class read an interview. Then I ask them what they see in it. After they have discussed the interview, we go back and I get them to look again at the first sentence. In fact, I may even ask them to take a look at the first word or two.

When we look at the first two words, we discuss what those words mean or what they could mean. Sometimes we spend 30 or 40 minutes on a single phrase before moving on to the next phrase.

The effort here is to show students that they should not skim over things when doing analysis. They have to read every sentence very closely, for words and phrasing will suggest all kinds of possible hypotheses that are worth exploring. The name of the game at the outset is not to know exactly what's going on in that interview; you can only know that after you have analyzed the whole interview and have gone back to reinterview. The name of the game at the start is to open up the whole field of inquiry.

At the end of an hour and a half students sometimes think I am a genius because we have opened up an array of questions, hypotheses, possibilities, and they often leave with a great deal of confidence.

So I teach them from the very beginning that they have to scrutinize very carefully and that coding helps them to open things up. The idea is not that one always does this kind of coding, what I call 'open coding', but that they have to do that coding in order to get started.

QSE: Can you give me an example of how you teach open coding?

Strauss: I can tell you, but if you look at the chapter on coding, you will see I have included an example you might find more helpful. I don't have that example in front of me and can't remember the details, so I will give you another. Perhaps in an interview a woman says, 'I was in this bar Friday night,' and she describes how a guy came by, how they started to talk together and that they decided to go home together for the weekend. Then she asks him if he uses contraceptives and so on.

On the basis of these 15 lines, you can raise all kinds of questions like, 'Where do people meet? What is the purpose of their meeting? What is the possibility of physical intimacy opening up that quickly? Do they

talk about contraceptives or don't they? Who initiates that conversation, the man or the woman? With what degree of specificity do they talk about this topic?'

After asking such questions we might create a conception of what we might call 'contraceptive talk'.

QSE: And so 'contraceptive talk' becomes an open code?

Strauss: Yes, and you raise questions about it: 'What is contraceptive talk, Who initiates it? When, how, where, with what specificity?' You might ask when it starts, what are the conditions for not having it, and so on.

QSE: Do students do much assigned reading in the analysis course?

Strauss: I give them very little reading. They have to read the books in the grounded theory tradition. The original theory was *The discovery of grounded theory* by Barney Glaser and me. Then they read Barney Glaser's *Theoretical sensitivity*. Barney and I both teach this course. In fact, he taught it for many years before I began to teach it.

The class has been reading the *Qualitative analysis for social scientists* manuscript for the past couple of years. There are other books that talk about qualitative research in general, but they present a problem because there just isn't much writing on qualitative analysis. The books concentrate on data collection. And even the textbooks on ethnographic work are devoted mostly to data collection and areas such as ethics and so on. These are perfectly good things to take up in class, but they don't help students do qualitative analysis. So I don't have much that I can give them that will help them in the data analysis process. There are one or two books I suggest they look at, but those books come at the issue from a standpoint different from my own.

I also give students various research monographs that they can look at to see how people do qualitative research. These are finished products. I give them monographs that come from somewhat different traditions so they can see different kinds of work and how they are different.

QSE: Give me an example of a qualitative research text to which you might refer students.

Strauss: Well, for example, there is a book by Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman, entitled *Qualitative data analysis*, that's published by Sage. It is a good book, though slightly positivistic.

QSE: Tell me something about the research monographs you suggest students read.

Strauss: In the field methods courses students are introduced to a fair number of monographs that give them an idea of what a research project looks like when it is finished. They are introduced to a range of monographs so they can see that there are different ways of handling qualitative research.

One of the techniques Barney and I use is to ask students to read monographs or articles and then report on them to the class. Then we do an analysis of the logic of the monograph. We teach students to think in terms of the logic of the research presentation. That's useful.

Not all the students will read the same monograph. Different students are assigned different readings. Students report on a particular reading and even write a page-long analysis which they distribute to the class. The analysis helps us talk about how the book was put together. You can take any of the classical monographs and show its logic diagramatically. We determine whether it is a causal study, a study of strategy, a temporal study, and something else. There is one chapter in the qualitative analysis book in which I go through such an analysis with some articles and a couple of books. Sometimes that kind of analysis is done in other courses, but it's mostly done in the methods courses, at least when Glaser or I have taught them.

QSE: What happens after the students have presented their material in class and you have spent the session beginning the process of analysis?

Strauss: Students often tape the class sessions so they can go back and listen to them carefully. Originally, when Glaser and I began the course, we had a student take notes and then xerox and distribute them so everyone would have a record of the session. Then I discovered that this pulls one student out of discussion and often the notes are not particularly accurate. Students began to tape the class session, and that turned out to be much more helpful.

So that's one thing students do; they

study the tapes. I also teach students how to write research memos, so they can continue the coding process themselves.

QSE: Do they share memos and codes with you?

Strauss: No I do not bother with that because these are all graduate students. They are mature enough to do that work on their own. In the beginning they flounder and it takes a while to really get pretty good at doing analysis. I warn them that the codes they do initially might not be that good and that they will have some trouble, but later on the process should get easier and easier.

The other thing I suggest is that they meet without me. So some of the groups I have had meet twice a week, once with me and once by themselves. Sometimes they even meet in smaller groups of threes and fours. They get a lot of supplementary work that way.

QSE: What is their final assignment?

Strauss: I don't give assignments; these are graduate students. I know what you're saying, but I use a different language. I say, 'You should take the responsibility for coding this material, and as you get better at it your codes will get better.' Then I say, 'You should write memos because you would see the value of that as time goes on.' I give suggestions rather than say you must do this or that.

QSE: At the end of the course will they have completed their analysis?

Strauss: No. The effort is to teach them how to do data analysis so that when they begin their dissertations they will know what to do. For many, the work they do in the analysis course feeds right into their doctoral work. The course is designed as a learning experience where students are shown how to analyse their data and then go on pretty much by themselves.

QSE: Are the research class and the two fieldwork classes that precede it designed to help students develop a research topic for their dissertations?

Strauss: Well, it varies. Sometimes it is the beginning of that work and other times students don't really know what they want to study and just want to try the topic out. Some know the topic is not what they want to do on their dissertation, but they want to develop their research skills.

QSE: Do students often study in settings where they are already working?

Strauss: Yes, frequently.

QSE: That usually raises a number of problems about objectivity and ethics. Do you help them work through those problems or are they taken care of in the field method courses?

Strauss: They are supposed to work out those issues in the field methods courses. 'Going native', 'buying into' the position of the people under study, and questions of how to get into the field and gaining acceptance, ethical questions, all those things are taken up in those first two classes.

QSE: Do students in your classes meet with you privately as well?

Strauss: Oh, sure. There is a good deal of dropping in and asking if they can come see me, particularly as they begin to work on their dissertations. At that point I begin to help them with questions of writing and organization.

QSE: In your experience, what's the maximum size for a qualitative research class?

Strass: Eleven or twelve, certainly no more than that.

QSE: What are some of the most important things to consider when developing a course in qualitative research methods?

Strauss: There is so much to say in answer to that question. It is terribly important that students learn how to work together. Students in our program learn that very quickly. Europeans who come and occasionally sit in on the classes are often astonished. They learn that Americans are very outgoing and, even when they are competitive, they can keep the competition in check. Many of the European academics find that difficult to do.

In any case, a teacher needs to effectively guide the cooperative process. The teacher has to be there guiding and yet not being intrusive.

QSE: So a teacher has to be sensitive to how the class is organized and also to how students interact?

Strauss: That's right. And you have to step in at certain points and guide the class and at other points you can just leave them alone. I literally leave the room sometimes with the excuse that I want a cup of tea and come back ten minutes later to see how far they have gotten.

It is important that students cooperate and become conscious of their cooperation. They also have to realize what they are doing in the class and in their research. They have got to realize that it is not so much the method that is important, but learning how to use themselves as instruments and how to think things through. When we teach qualitative analysis classes we are teaching students to think in ways that they have never thought before. In time they come to understand that. They fairly quickly realize that they are thinking in new ways. In fact, of course, they have thought that way before on occasion, but they have not done so systematically and self-consciously. The teacher has to get it across that the students are their own instruments and that they have to be sensitive to their own interactions and to what they are doing methodologically.

One trick that I use is to simply stop the action in the class and ask what has been going on for the last 15 or 20 minutes.

QSE: And the class reflects on the process?

Strauss: Yes. For example, they may have been avoiding getting into analysis, so they ask for data and more data and more data because they find the data fascinating and data analysis intimidating. So the teacher must point out that the class is wasting time and that they could have started the analysis much earlier. You have to ask, 'Why do you need all that data?'

And after a while the students learn to guide themselves and the teacher does not have to step in, or at least not step in as often.

Often I ask the class, 'All right, what are the steps we have gone through?' Then the class reflects and goes back through the steps. At the end of the hour I say, 'You have to go back and think about what we did. That's the only way you learn to be reflective about what you do.'

QSE: The process you're describing will help students understand that they do not simply discover grounded theory but are participants in its development?

Strauss: I think our students learn that very quickly.

QSE: What kinds of things make it hard for students to learn qualitative research methods?

Strauss: Some of our students who have had a fair amount of statistics or who have been trained in nursing inherit from their fields a positivistic view of how research should be done. When you get students like that you have to help them learn a new perspective. It is harder for them than it is for some of the others because they cannot make themselves into a research instrument in quite the same way. Sometimes they get caught up in the excitement of the game and you can see them waiver. They try very hard to make themselves act the way other people act in class. Then you see them reverting to the positivistic base.

I try to teach students that the primary thing is not to go out and collect data. The primary thing is to get interpretations.

QSE: What qualities must a student possess in order to do good qualitative analysis?

Strauss: The people who do the best work have a combination of skills. They are analytically sharp. They are gifted analytically, but that, by itself, is not enough. They are also sensitive to interaction and, on top of that, they are theoretically sensitive. They know how to ask good questions. Those questions come out of their backgrounds and theoretical reading, though it doesn't much matter what field they have been trained in or from where they draw that theory.

That combination of being analytically sharp, socially aware, and theoretically quick enables a student to do a very good thesis. In other words, good qualitative researchers are sensitive to how people act and interact, they have a knack for asking theoretical questions, and they know what to do with their data. If they are lacking in any one of these skills they may do fairly good work, but the research they do will never be exceptional.

QSE: What about a tolerance for ambiguity? Is that important?

Strauss: Yes, I teach them that they can't get closure too quickly. They can't jump to conclusions because that forecloses everything. They can't impose someone else's theory on their data and try to get quick answers that way. That kind of quick fix just doesn't work. So students have to learn to live with not knowing the answer for quite a while. Our style of teaching tries to make that clear.

The problem is that when they work on their own materials rather than someone else's, they want to get some closure. I try to teach them to be patient and have some techniques that show them that they are making progress and that they are getting small closure all along the line. That way they can begin to see the steps in the process.

QSE: Talk a little about those techniques.

Strauss: Well, for example, one technique is to teach students how to diagram. Let me give you an example. Someone is presenting materials and is rather far along in the analysis. A lot of things have gone on in class, and they have made some progress. Then I would ask the student to go to the board and diagram the analysis so far. The student goes to the board and draws a diagram. There might be a bunch of circles that are labeled. Let's say a temporal line connects things over time. The class looks at the diagram and might ask, 'Yes, but what does that circle mean?' and we'll talk about that. Someone else might say, 'You have an arrow going in one direction, but can it also go in the other direction? Is the relationship reciprocal? So we talk about that.

The diagram opens up black boxes and suggests all kinds of connections that might be in the data. To answer those questions the student must have the data and therefore can say, 'Yes, you see it works this way.' In other cases the student has to say, 'I don't know; I have to go back into the field to find out.' In either case the student can see that he or she is making progress. I teach the class to do those diagrams and suggest that they do that work periodically on their own. That allows them to see how far they have come. It also helps them to continue their forward motion because the diagram helps them ask questions.

QSE: That must be especially useful to those students who tend to get lost in their data.

Strauss: There are two reasons why students get lost. One has to do with the way they are taught. Too often they are told to go on out and gather mountains of data and so they focus on data gathering. When they come back and start questioning what they really have got they are overwhelmed. Of course, that's the wrong way to do research. I show them that they can make a great amount of conceptualization out of one or two interviews and that they should go home and do just that. Then they know what they are looking at and what they should look for in future forays into the field. There is an interplay between the gathering of data, their interpretation, the gathering of more data, and going back to do more interpretation. If they simply gather mountains of data, they get flooded. Students just wander around and can't see the trees for the forest. That's a typical experience of qualitative researchers, especially when they are beginning.

QSE: Some of your students must come in with that mentality, because they have already taken two courses in qualitative field methods and come into your course with, I suppose, a mountain of data?

Strauss: Yes indeed, and I have to tell them we did that just so they would learn how to gather data, but that the best process is not to gather data first and then to analyze it. I send students back out into the field throughout the analysis course.

QSE: Tell me something about other courses you have taught in recent years.

Strauss: Well, I taught a class in Symbolic Interaction for many years. That primarily consisted of having students read and discuss the works of some of the more outstanding symbolic interactionists like Blumer, Becker, Goffman and George Herbert Mead.

You see, we have a graduate program and a relatively small number of students, so I have mostly taught seminars. For example, I have taught seminars on urban relations, sociology of work, and I had one class that I taught to sociologists and nurses on the social aspects of chronic illness.

QSE: So the courses you taught paralleled your research interests?

Strauss: Pretty much, yes.

QSE: Tell us about your own training in

research methods and whether your training contributed to the development of grounded theory.

Strauss: I did my graduate work in Chicago in the early 1940s. I taught fieldwork then, but I confess that I never had a class in fieldwork. I had the usual Chicago sociology background, with all that anthropology, so I knew a lot about field methods. I did intensive interviewing for my thesis, which had to do with mate selection. We did have some classes in interviewing methods, and I learned about that.

QSE: How did you come to do the book *The social psychology of George Herbert Mead?*

Strauss: When I got to Chicago I studied with Blumer. I had taken some sociology as an undergraduate student with somebody who had done his work at Chicago. So I was already familiar with Dewey. When I got to Chicago, Blumer acquainted me with Mead's work.

A fellow by the name of Alex Morin, who was social science editor at the University of Chicago Press, asked me if I wouldn't pull together some of Mead's writing, works that had been published by the Press. I knew most of them and was able to quickly review the material and pull it all together. The book developed through his impetus, not mine.

QSE: In retrospect, can you tell us what part of your own training turned out to be most helpful in developing your interest and skills in qualitative research?

Strauss: I have somewhat of a different set of experiences from those of most field workers. In my early years, I did intensive interviewing. I was 40 before I did fieldwork in any sense. I did my research on psychiatric hospitals with two colleagues, and it was there that I began to really do intensive field research. In a way I think that made some difference because I was already so far along that I wasn't wedded to the romance of the data collection. I was sufficiently far enough away from anthropology by then, although I knew the literature, that I wasn't imbued with the kind of work anthropologists do. In the psychiatric study, we were studying a hospital with five wards and another major state hospital with an incredible number of wards. So we were driven to do comparisons between the two hospitals and among the many wards. That made me develop a style which Barney Glaser and I developed further and later wrote about in *The discovery of grounded theory.*

QSE: How did that book develop?

Strauss: In 1960 when I came to California, I began to study of how dying was handled in hospitals. After I had done about a half year's fieldwork, I got some funding for it. I hired Barney and a nurse to be on my research staff.

Barney and I began to talk about what I was doing and began to analyse fieldnotes. We would talk every day about our work. The more we talked the deeper our conversations got; not just about dying, but about the research process itself. It made us very self-conscious about what we were doing.

We began taking notes on our discussions and on the research process itself. Glaser had been trained at Columbia under Lazarsfeld, so he was methodologically more astute than I was. He forced me to think more carefully about what I was doing; not directly, but simply by his questions and through our discussions. Between the two of us, a methodology evolved. At some point one of us, I don't remember who, said 'Why don't we write a book?' And so we did.

QSE: How did you organize the writing?

Strauss: We had already evolved a style of work in writing the books on dying. We would discuss the project, decide who would write what, and then go off and do it. Of course, we did a lot of conferring as we went. We followed that same process in the discovery book: he wrote some sections and I wrote some sections, but we always conferred about what we were doing.

QSE: That's interesting because the styles of the chapters are so compatible that they appear to be written by one person.

Strauss: I guess if one were linguistically astute it would be possible to tell who wrote what. I don't suppose it could be done easily, but if someone really studied the style he could do it.

QSE: Tell me about how Glaser's book, *Theoretical sensitivity*, evolved.

Strauss: Barney had been teaching the analysis course for a number of years, and

we talked frequently about how the course was evolving. Everyone thought we should describe what we were doing in our program. and share it with the wider world. We thought it was very difficult to describe what was essentially an apprenticeship method of instruction, and we didn't know how to do it. After Barney had been teaching that course for some time, we decided that he could write it up.

QSE: That book was published by Sociology Press. How did that press get started?

Strauss: Earlier I republished *Mirrors and masks* with Sociology Press. It is a private press that Glaser and I owned. *Mirrors and masks* was originally published by Free Press and they didn't want to reprint it. So I simply set up a press and reprinted it myself. That's how Sociology Press was born. Then we published a couple of other books; he published one and I published another. He decided that he would publish *Theoretical sensitivity* himself. You would have to ask him what his reasons were for not giving that to a standard publisher, but he had his own reasons for doing that.

QSE: Tell me something more about the publishing history of *Mirrors and masks.*

Strauss: Mirrors and masks had its day. It didn't sell very well for the first ten years after its publication. Then it sold massively in the early 1970s. Then the sales began to fall off drastically, maybe because I don't advertise the book any more. Every once and a while the press gets a request for it, but I think I have almost run out of the last printing.

QSE: Tell me about how you developed an interest in Medical Sociology.

Strauss: That was quite accidental. The Sociology Department at the University of Chicago blew up and my side lost. I should say *our* side lost because I was a minor member of the department. I went off to that psychiatric hospital to do research. I was thinking about where I should go next when the offer came to go out to California. It was inviting because I realized I could start a graduate program and I had already done some work in medicine. So I just rather naturally moved to this setting.

What I was primarily interested in was not medicine but the sociology at work, and I still am, although I have done most of my work in the last twenty years in medicine. In my mind it has also been in the area of the sociology of work.

QSE: Look for the moment to the future. Do you think qualitative research is on the rise or on the decline?

Strauss: Definitely on the rise. For sociology, the low point perhaps was in the early sixties. By the end of the decade and since, one form or another of interpretative sociology (such as interactionism, ethnomethodology, phenomenology, neo-Marxism) has become highly critical of the dominant quantitative methods in the discipline. This has also happened overseas. Of course, social anthropology has always been grounded primarily in ethnographic research. In the last decade especially, writings about qualitative research methods have greatly increased in sociology. I sense this has also been happening in education, social work, nursing, and psychology too. As an instance of this, I think, recently I was asked to comment on the methods used by various contributors from several different disciplines in a volume on qualitative social gerontology. All of the contributions consisted of research papers. The authors were enthusiastic about their methods and not at all defensive about them, as they might have been several years ago. Like researchers working in other substantive areas, they were also addressing or commenting on some of the usual issues that engage qualitative researchers: data collection techniques, validity, matters of ethics, etc. For the most part, however, they were not explicit in how they actually analyzed their materials. We have a very long way to go yet in understanding how we do qualitative analysis and how to improve our analysis.