

RESEARCHING THE CITY: QUALITATIVE STRATEGIES

Geography 503

**RESEARCHING THE CITY:
QUALITATIVE STRATEGIES**
Geography 503

Spring 2008 Syllabus

Instructor: Jamie Peck
243 Science Hall
Phone 262-1453

Office hours: M, 2.00-3.00; T, 3.30-4.30
email: japeck@wisc.edu

Schedule: T, 1.20-3.15
350 Science Hall

Course description and rationale

If geography's "quantitative revolution" in the 1960s was associated with a transformation in the character, scope, and ambition of the discipline, the incremental advance of qualitative approaches in the ensuing "post-positivist" period has represented a kind of quiet revolution. Today, for many researchers working in human geography and at the people-environment interface, qualitative approaches have become the methods of choice, yet the codification and formalization of these methods and their associated interpretive routines have—perplexingly—tended to lag this widespread process of adoption. As a result, qualitative methods have come to play an important, though often uncoded, role in contemporary geographical research. Their rise to prominence can be traced to a number of sources, including the development of humanistic geography in the 1970s, the emergence of socially-engaged radical geography in the late 1960s, deepening critiques of formal modeling and orthodox theoretical positions in the 1980s, the emergence of feminist geographies in the early 1980s, and the various poststructural, institutional, and cultural turns of the last two decades. For Cloke *et al* (1991), the development of qualitative methodologies was a logical counterpart to what they call the "peopling of human geography" in the decades following the quantitative revolution. In the last decade or so, the movement towards qualitative methods has also reflected growing interest in social-theoretic questions relating to discursive construction, social embedding, identity politics, and actor-centered analyses.

While qualitative methods are often discussed in oppositional terms vis-à-vis quantitative approaches, this crude polarization is unhelpful. There are many forms of qualitative research, just as there is a wide range of possibilities for "multi-method" research strategies. Moreover, there is no *necessary* one-to-one correspondence between research methods and the substantive foci of study: qualitative approaches are not uniquely suited to feminist or radical geography, for example, and neither is there "one best way" methodologically in these or other fields. Rather, the selection of research methods should be a matter of making informed choices between alternative approaches, each with different strengths and weaknesses. And ultimately what matters, as with all research methods, is how qualitative methods are *applied*. Hence this course's focus on the *deployment and development* of qualitative research strategies in human geography—where their strengths and potentialities, as well as their weaknesses and limits, are evident.

The strength of qualitative research methods is that they provide a means of accessing and understanding the social world by way of the experiences, perspectives, and constructions of social actors themselves. In geographical research, in particular, these methods have been extremely

effective in exposing underlying power relations and social structures, and the nature and scope of human agency, in the making and remaking of cities as “peopled places.”

The purpose of this course is to focus critically on the deployment and impact of qualitative research methods in geography. The course will provide an introduction to debates around the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data, as well as practical insight into the conception, execution, and evaluation of qualitative research in different settings. Particular emphasis will be placed on the *application and practice* of qualitative methods in a range of human geography and people-environment research settings.

Requirements: Students of at least Junior Standing.

Readings

The following texts will be used throughout the course and are required. They can be purchased at Rainbow Books.

Burawoy M et al (2000) *Global ethnography* (University of California Press, Berkeley)

Duneier M (1999) *Sidewalk* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York)

In addition, all of the required (REQ) readings for the course have been compiled in a reader, which is available from the Humanities Copy Center, 1650 Humanities Building.

The following books are also highly recommended, though purchase is optional:

Becker H S (1986) *Writing for social scientists* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago)

Becker H S (1998) *Tricks of the trade* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago)

Hoggart K, Lees R, and Davies A (2002) *Researching human geography* (Arnold, London)

Additional reading, and useful sources for case-study applications, are:

Clifford J and Marcus G E (1986) *Writing culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography* (University of California Press, Berkeley)

Jones, J-P, Nast H, and Roberts S (eds) (1997) *Thresholds in feminist geography* (Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham)

Shurmer-Smith P (ed) (2001) *Doing cultural geography* (Sage, London)

Tickell A, Sheppard E, Peck J and Barnes T (eds) *Politics and practice in economic geography* (Sage, London)

Course work

Active engagement and participation in this class is essential. To this end, in addition to regular discussions in class, students will be required to complete two projects during the course of the semester, both of which will involve short presentations to the class.

- First, each student will prepare a *methodological review and critique* of an individual article or book chapter utilizing qualitative methods. It is expected that the majority of students will select a chapter from Burawoy et al (2000), which is especially well suited for this purpose. The remaining students are free to choose an article or book chapter of their choice, with the agreement of the instructor. 10 minute presentations (on the aims and methods of the project, the methodological choices and theoretical claims made, forms of data presentation and analysis, etc.) will be made to the class during the first half of the semester. (Presenters will also serve as discussion leaders for the subsequent Q&A, since all members of the class will be familiar with the readings.)
- Second, each student will complete a small-scale *practicum*, a primary application of qualitative methods in a local (or otherwise easily accessible) setting. Typically, this might involve (a) an in-depth interview or focus group discussion (b) textual or discourse analysis, or (c) participant observation. 15 minute presentations (on the rationale of the project, problems encountered/lessons learned during its execution and analysis, etc.) will be made to the class during the second half of the semester.

Grading

The course will be assessed by way of class participation (40%) and a term paper (60%). The class participation grade relates to participation throughout the semester, though particular emphasis will be placed on the two presentations to the class that students are asked to make. The term paper will normally be around 15 pages in length (not exceeding 20pp) and will take the form of (a) a methodological review and critique of a significant published item of qualitative research in geography (broadly defined), such as a book or a collection of articles; (b) a qualitative research design, incorporating a discussion of the practicum or of a planned research project; or (c) an essay relating to one of the key themes addressed in the course, such as feminist methods, social relevance, or issues of positionality.

Term papers must be submitted by **May 14, 2008**. Late submissions receive a grade only.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

Jan 22	Research methods and research practice in human geography
---------------	--

This session provides an introduction to the course and establishes the ground rules for individual student contributions. A distinction is drawn between research methods *qua* techniques and research practice, the latter being the focus of the course. A work plan for the semester will also be sketched out.

REQ Limb M and Dwyer C (eds) (2001) *Qualitative methodologies for geographers* (Arnold, London) chapters 1 and 2. Consider approaches to the practicum while reading this short survey.

REC Duneier M (1999) *Sidewalk* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York). Begin reading this now, in preparation for detailed discussion later in the semester

Jan 29	No class today—reading assignment
---------------	--

In preparation for the method critique presentations, please read the introduction, plus at least the first four substantive chapters in:

REQ Burawoy M et al (2000) *Global ethnography* (University of California Press, Berkeley)

Jan 30	Research strategies: basic choices and challenges
---------------	--

Basic principles of qualitative versus quantitative methods and intensive versus extensive research strategies will be examined, as well as multi-method approaches. Three basic methods in qualitative research will be introduced: (i) in-depth interviewing, (ii) participant observation and ethnography, and (iii) the analysis of texts.

Please come to class prepared to discuss the following issues, in connection with the readings:

- What are the key differences between intensive and extensive methods?
- Is mixing methods inherently superior to relying on one?
- What are the key differences between taxonomic and causal groups? (Think of an example related to your own research interests.)
- (How) can “global” processes be studied at the “local” scale? Citing examples, what kinds of research strategies might be useful in this context?

REQ Geertz C (2000) Thick description: toward an interpretive theory of culture. In C Geertz *The interpretation of cultures* (Basic Books, New York)

- REQ Sayer A (1992) *Method in social science* Second edition (Routledge, London)
Chapter 9
- REC Graham E (1997) Philosophies underlying human geography research. In Flowerdeu R and Martin D (eds) (1997) *Methods in human geography* (Addison Wesley Longman, London)
- REC Jacobs J M (1999) The labor of cultural geography. In Stratford E (ed) *Australian cultural geographies* (Melbourne University Press, Melbourne)
- REC McKendrick J (1999) Multi-method research: an introduction to its application in population geography. *Professional Geographer* **51** 40-50
- REC Massey D and Meegan R (eds) (1985) *Politics and method: contrasting studies in industrial geography* (Methuen, London) Chapters 1 and 6

Feb 12	On the case: making the case for qualitative research strategies
---------------	---

Issues of rigor and reliability in qualitative research will be discussed, focusing in particular on the selection and defense of case studies. Different forms of qualitative methodology, interpretation, and inference will be explored. The case for and against case studies will be outlined.

Please come to class prepared to discuss the following issues, in connection with the readings:

- What is an “extended” case study, in relation to a “regular” one? (Thinking of examples from your own research interests, how might “your” case be selected and *extended*?)
- By what criteria should case studies be chosen? What factors do *geographers* need to take into account when selecting cases?
- Do case studies need to be representative?
- Can case studies determine causation?

- REQ Burawoy M (1991) The extended case method. In Burawoy M *et al* *Ethnography unbound* (University of California Press, Berkeley)
- REQ Burawoy M (2000) Conclusion: grounding globalization. In Burawoy M *et al* *Global ethnography* (University of California Press, Berkeley)
- REQ Crang M (2000) Qualitative methods: the new orthodoxy? *Progress in Human Geography* **26** 647-655
- REQ Mitchell J C (1983) Case and situational analysis. *Sociological Review* **31** 187-211
- REC Becker H S (1998) Concepts. In Becker H S *Tricks of the trade* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago)
- REC Clark G L (1998) Stylized facts and close dialogue: methodology in economic geography. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **88** 73-87
- REC Sayer A (1985) Realism in geography. In R Johnston (ed) *The future of geography*. (Methuen, London)
- REC Dion F (1998) Evidence and inference in the comparative case study. *Comparative Politics* **30** 127-146

- REC Ragin C (1981) Comparative sociology and the comparative method. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* **2** 102-120
- REC Skocpol T and Somers M (1980) The uses of comparative history in macrosocial inquiry. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* **22** 174-97
- REC Tilly C (1997) Means and ends of comparison in macrosociology. *Comparative Sociological Research* **16** 43-54

Feb 19	Doing gender: feminist research strategies
---------------	---

This session will explore the dynamic interface between qualitative research and feminist research, focusing in particular on the role of feminist research strategies in geography. This has been one of the areas where the most searching interrogation of research methods in geography has occurred.

- What are the distinctive characteristics of feminist methods?
- What accounted for the “feminist turn” in critical human geography?
- What does a geographical sensibility bring to feminist approaches and methods?

- REQ Farrow H, Moss P, and Shaw B (1995) Symposium on participatory feminist research. *Antipode* **27** 77-101
- REQ McDowell L (1992) Doing gender: feminism, feminists and research methods in human geography. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **17** 399-416
- REQ Nast H (ed) (1994) Women in the field: critical feminist methodologies and theoretical perspectives. *Professional Geographer* **46** 54-102
- REC Dyck I (1993) Ethnography: a feminist research method? *Canadian Geographer* **37** 52-57
- REC Hodge D (ed) (1995) Should women count? The role of quantitative methodology in feminist geographic research. *Professional Geographer* **47** 426-466
- REC Jones J-P, Nast H, and Roberts S (1997) *Thresholds in feminist geography* (Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham) Chapter 1
- REC Roberts H (ed) (1981) *Doing feminist research* (Routledge, London)
- REC Moss P J (2002) *Feminist geography in practice: research and methods* (Blackwell, Oxford)
- REC Women and Geography Study Group (1997) *Feminist geographies: explorations in diversity and difference* (Addison Wesley Longman, London) Chapter 4

Feb 26	Going to ground: urban ethnography and urban case studies
---------------	--

The centerpiece of the discussion will be a discussion of Duneier’s *Sidewalk*, set in the context of alternative methodological takes on New York. Students should come to the class prepared to discuss a selected passage from Duneier’s book.

Please come to class prepared to discuss the following issues, in connection with the readings:

- How does Duneier determine the subjects and site of his case study? Where are the “edges” of the case study (area)?
- Which voices do we hear in the text?
- Does Duneier bring (explicit) theories of his own to bear on the material? On what bases does he propose his explanations?
- What judgments are being made about the various characters (street vendors, cops, passers-by) in the study?

REQ Duneier M (1999) *Sidewalk* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York)

REQ Sanjek R (2000) Keeping ethnography alive in an urbanizing world. *Human Organization* **59** 280-288

REQ Sites W (2003) *Remaking New York* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis) Introduction and Chapter 1

REC Jackson P (1985) Urban ethnography. *Progress in Human Geography* **9** 157-176

REC Katz C (1992) All the world is staged: intellectuals and the projects of ethnography. *Environment and Planning D: society and space* **10** 495-510

REC Walsh D (1998) Doing ethnography. In C Seale (ed) *Researching society and culture* (Sage, London)

Mar 4	Scrutinizing the street
--------------	--------------------------------

Ethnography is perhaps the most challenging of qualitative methods. So much more than simply a methodological “technique,” participant observation raises a series of fundamental ethical, moral, and practical questions concerning the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. The (potentially serious) pitfalls of ethnography will also be examined by way of Wacquant’s scathing critique of practice in the field of contemporary urban ethnography.

REQ Wacquant L et al (2002) Review symposium: scrutinizing the street. *American Journal of Sociology* **107** 1468-1532

REC Cook I (1997) Participant observation. In R Flowerdew and D Martin (eds) *Methods in human geography* (Addison Wesley Longman, London)

REC Keith M (1992) Angry writing: representing the unethical world of the ethnographer. *Environment and Planning: society and space* **10** 511-568

REC Cook I and Crang M (1995) *Doing ethnographies*. CATMOG no. 58 (Geo Books, Norwich) Chapter 4(ii)

REC Jackson P (1983) Principles and problems of participant observation. *Geografiska Annaler* **65B** 39-46

Mar 11	Spring break
---------------	---------------------

Mar 25 Researching up: elites, power, positionality

In its defining sensitivity to context, qualitative research must take into account the role of the researcher. This session will consider the question of “positionality” in the research process, taking as a case study the issue of interviewing elites.

- REQ Herod A (1999) Reflections on interviewing foreign elites: praxis, positionality, validity, and the cult of the insider. *Geoforum* **30** 313-327
- REQ Cochrane A (1998) Illusions of power: interviewing local elites. *Environment and Planning A* **30** 2121-2132
- REQ England K (1994) Getting personal: reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research. *Professional Geographer* **46** 80-89
- REQ Sidaway J D (1992) In other worlds: on the politics of research by first world geographers in the third world. *Area* **24** 403-408
- REQ Ward K G and Jones M (1999) Researching local elites: reflexivity, “situatedness” and political-temporal contingency. *Geoforum* **30** (4), 301-312
- REC Ellwood S A and Martin D G (2000) “Placing” interviews: location and scales of power in qualitative research. *Professional Geographer* **52** 649-657
- REC Hertz R and Imber J B (1995) *Studying elites using qualitative methods* (Sage, London) Chapter 1
- REC Hertz R and Imber J B (eds) (1993) Special issue: fieldwork in elite settings. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* **22** 3-122
- REC McDowell L (1998) Elites in the City of London: some methodological considerations. *Environment and Planning A* **30** 2133-2146
- REC Rose G (1997) Situated knowledges: positionality, reflexivity and other tactics. *Progress in Human Geography* **21** 305-320

Apr 1 No class today—complete practicums

Apr 8 Conversations with a purpose: depth interviewing

This session will concentrate on the ethical and practical issues associated with in-depth interviewing as a mode of data collection, together with some of the practical and interpretive challenges involved in using interview transcripts as a data source.

- REQ Dunn E (2007) Of pufferfish and ethnography: plumbing new depths in economic geography. In Tickell et al *Politics and practice in economic geography* (Sage, London)
- REQ McDowell L (1992) Valid games? A response to Erica Schoenberger. *Professional Geographer* **44** 212-215
- REQ Schoenberger E (1991) The corporate interview as a research method in economic geography. *Professional Geographer* **43** 180-189
- REQ Schoenberger E (1992) Self-criticism and self-awareness in research: a reply to Linda McDowell. *Professional Geographer* **44** 215-218
- REC Hoggart K, Lees R, and Davies A (2002) Close encounters: interviews and focus groups. In Hoggart K, Lees R, and Davies A *Researching human geography* (Arnold, London)
- REC Valentine G (1997) Tell me about ...: using interviews as a research methodology. In R Flowerdew and D Martin (eds) *Methods in human geography* (Addison Wesley Longman, London)
- REC Cook I and Crang M (1995) *Doing ethnographies*. CATMOG no. 58 (Geo Books, Norwich) Chapters 4(iii) and 5
- REC Fielding N (1993) Qualitative interviewing. In N Gilbert (ed) *Researching social life* (Sage, London)
- REC Herod A (1993) Gender issues in the use of interviews as a research method. *Professional Geographer* **45** 305-317
- REC Silverman D (1993) *Interpreting qualitative data* (Sage, London) Chapter 5
- REC Wilson W J (1996) *When work disappears: the world of the new urban poor* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York) Chapter 5, 111-146

Apr 15	No class today
---------------	-----------------------

Apr 3	Rigor and relevance in qualitative research
--------------	--

Taking the example of recent work in economic geography and critical regional studies, this session will examine recent debates on the standards of rigor, representativeness, and policy relevance in work on issues like flexible production systems, labor markets, and world city formation. The issues raised by Ann Markusen's critique of "fuzzy" methods and theory development will be explored, along with a series of responses and reactions.

REQ Barnes et al (2007) Methods matter. In Tickell et al *Politics and practice in economic geography* (Sage, London)

REQ Grabher G and Hassink R (2003) Fuzzy concepts, scanty evidence, policy distance? Debating Ann Markusen's assessment of critical regional studies. *Regional Studies* **37** 699-751

- REC Barnes T J (2001) Rethorizing economic geography: From the quantitative revolution to the cultural turn. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **91** 546-65
- REC Eckstein H (1975) Case study and theory in political science, in Greenstein F and Polsby N (eds) *The handbook of political science*, Volume 7 (Addison-Wesley, London)
- REC Sayer A (1987) Hard work and its alternatives. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **5** 395-99

Apr 29	Quality control in qualitative research
---------------	--

One of the enduring controversies of qualitative research methods concerns appropriate ways of establishing rigor and maintaining standards. The session will apply Baxter and Eyles' framework for interrogating levels of rigor in interview-based research in geography with two examples of "normal science" urban geography. The author will be on hand to explain which corners were cut, how, and why, and—as necessary—to explain/justify/apologize for the research practices in question.

- REQ Baxter J and Eyles J (1997) Evaluating qualitative research in social geography: establishing "rigour" in interview analysis. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **22** 505-525
- REQ Peck J and Tickell A (1995) Business goes local: dissecting the "business agenda" in Manchester. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* **19** 55-78
- REQ Peck J and Theodore N (2008) Carceral Chicago: making the ex-offender employability crisis. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* forthcoming
- REC Crang M (1997) Analysing qualitative materials. In R Flowerdew and D Martin (eds) *Methods in human geography* (Addison Wesley Longman, London)
- REC Jones S (1985) The analysis of depth interviews. In R Walker (ed) *Applied qualitative methods* (Gower Press, Aldershot)

May 6	Making texts: writing up and getting published
--------------	---

This concluding session will involve a discussion of issues around narrative construction, and the writing up and publication of qualitative research. Contrasting publication and dissemination strategies will be examined, along with a consideration of publishing options in geography. A course review and evaluation will also be conducted.

- REQ Becker H S (1986) Editing by ear. In Becker H S *Writing for social scientists* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago)
- REQ Becker H S (1986) Learning to write as a professional. In Becker H S *Writing for social scientists* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago)

- REC Boyle P (1997) Writing up—some suggestions. In R Flowerdew and D Martin (eds) *Methods in human geography* (Addison Wesley Longman, London)
- REC Cronon W (1992) A place for stories: nature, history and narrative. *Journal of American History* 78 1347-1376
- REC Fielding N (1993) Writing about social research. In N Gilbert (ed) *Researching social life* (Sage, London)
- REC Piantanida M and Garman N B (1999) *The qualitative dissertation* (Sage, Thousand Oaks) Chapter 10
- REC Richardson L (1998) Writing: a method of inquiry. In N K Denzin and Y S Lincoln (eds) *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (Sage, Thousand Oaks)
- REC Wolcott H F (1990) *Writing up qualitative research* (Sage, London) Chapter 1

**RESEARCHING THE CITY:
QUALITATIVE STRATEGIES**

Geography 503

Spring 2006

Summary schedule

Jan 22	Research methods and research practice in human geography	Discussion and set up of work program
Jan 29	No class today: reading assignment	
Feb 5	Research strategies: basic choices and challenges	Method critique presentations
Feb 12	On the case: defending qualitative research strategies	Method critique presentations
Feb 19	Doing gender: feminist research strategies	Method critique presentations
Feb 26	Going to ground: urban ethnography and urban case studies	Method critique presentations
Mar 4	Scrutinizing the street <i>Virtual guest: Loic Wacquant</i>	Method critique presentations
Mar 11	Spring break	
Mar 25	Researching up: elites, power, positionality	Method critique presentations
Apr 1	No class today; finalize practicums	
Apr 8	Conversations with a purpose: depth interviewing	Practicum presentations
Apr 15	No class today (AAG)	
Apr 22	Rigor and relevance in qualitative research	Practicum presentations
Apr 29	Quality control in qualitative research	Practicum presentations
May 6	Making texts: writing up and getting published	Practicum presentations