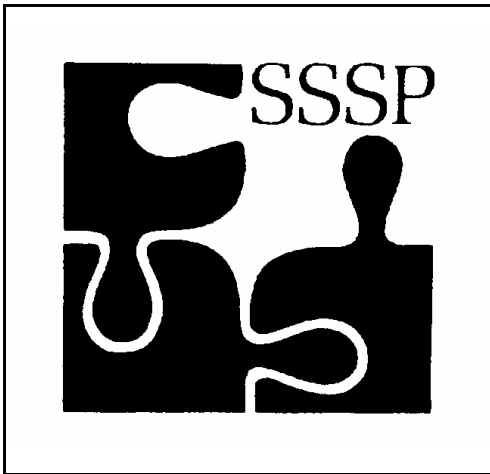


# IE NEWSLETTER

Institutional Ethnography Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems

February 2006

Vol. 3, No. 1



Alison I. Griffith  
**Division Chair**  
Faculty of Education  
York University  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

**Send correspondence to:**  
Paul Luken  
**IE Newsletter Editor**  
Dept. of Sociology and Criminology  
University of West Georgia  
Carrollton, GA 30118, USA  
[pluken@westga.edu](mailto:pluken@westga.edu)

**On the Inside**  
Student paper competition.....2  
Book reviews:  
Bahns on Eastwood.....3  
Turner on André-Bechely.....4  
Widerberg on Smith.....6  
New Weinberg book.....7  
Nichols' paper online.....7  
Congrats Margo!.....8

## FROM THE DIVISION CHAIR

*Alison I. Griffith*

Hello again! Here in Toronto it's -4C with a windchill of -12C. Thank goodness for long underwear, single malt scotch, and new IE books.

Our IE program at the meeting in Montreal is going to be very exciting. I expect the meeting itself will be smaller than usual, but the IE contingent will be well represented with eleven sessions. Soon the SSSP Program Committee will be working up the schedule of sessions and rooms. In addition to the IE scheduled sessions, we will have our annual membership meeting. Because of the size of our membership, I've asked for a separate room for the meeting. Please make sure you add the membership meeting to your conference schedule.

Of course, to find out when the exciting events and sessions are happening you need to be a member of SSSP. Make sure your membership (and that of your presenters if you are organizing a session) is up to date and that you register for the conference. All of this can be done online.

See you in Montreal.

## Welcome New Members

(11/8/05 – 2/21/06)

Sarah A. Chivers  
Joseph De Angelis  
Danielle Hidalgo  
Rachel Sebastian  
Karin Widerberg

Ashley Currier  
Kathryn Henneberger  
Paul Lichterman  
Emanda Thomas  
Bradley W. Wing

# Graduate Student Paper Competition

## George Smith Award in Institutional Ethnography

The Institutional Ethnography Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems solicits papers for its 2006 Graduate Student Paper Competition. Papers should advance institutional ethnography scholarship either methodologically or through a substantive contribution. Authors must be currently enrolled graduate students or PhD's who have completed their studies by March 2005 or later. The papers must be student-authored; co-authored are acceptable as long as all authors are students. The papers must not have been previously published and should be a maximum of 30 pages including all notes, references, and appendices. Papers must be received by May 1, 2006.

There are two ways to enter:

1. Send one copy to

Kamini Maraj Grahame  
School of Behavioral Sciences and  
Education  
Penn State University – Harrisburg  
777 West Harrisburg Pike  
Middletown, PA 17057  
USA

**AND** one copy to

Amy Best  
Department of Sociology and  
Anthropology  
George Mason University  
320 Robinson Hall B  
440 University Drive MS 3G5  
Fairfax, VA 22030  
USA

**OR**

2. Submit a copy as an email attachment to Kamini Maraj Grahame at [kmg16@psu.edu](mailto:kmg16@psu.edu). Specify "IE paper competition" as the subject.

All entries should specify that they are being submitted for the Graduate Paper Competition in Institutional Ethnography and the author should note if the paper had already been submitted as part of the Society's "Call for Papers."

The winner of the George Smith Award will be recognized at the annual banquet of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. The prize includes a cash award, registration fees, a banquet ticket, and the opportunity to present the paper at the annual meeting, during August 10-12, 2006, in Montréal, Québec, Canada.

## Reviews of Recent Books for Your Shelves

Several new institutional ethnography books have come out in the past two years. In this issue we present reviews of three of them. Thanks to the authors – Lauren Eastwood, Lois André-Béchely and Dorothy Smith – and to the reviewers – Megan Bahns, Susan Turner, and Karin Widerberg. Look for more reviews in the next issue. (Pics of the book jackets come from Amazon.com.)

***The Social Organization of Policy: An Institutional Ethnography of UN Forest Deliberations* by Lauren Eastwood. Routledge, 2005. 148 pages.**



In *The Social Organization of Policy: An Institutional Ethnography of UN Forest Deliberations*, Lauren Eastwood provides an informative and in depth look at the work of NGO delegates who participate in and contribute to the forest policy making process. Through her experiences as a researcher and a delegate she was able to observe the everyday work activities of activists and policy makers who participated in the IFF (Intergovernmental Forum on Forests) and the UNFF (United Nations Forum on Forests). Along with uncovering the work of non-governmental organization (NGO) delegates and policy makers, she also provides an important contribution to the literature by making explicit some of the ways the everyday activities that take place at the United Nations (UN) are impacted by the larger ruling relations.

In her book, Eastwood uncovers some of the powerful organizing capabilities of concepts such as “globalization” and “development.” She points out that globalization is often framed as inevitable. For example, globalization is seen as driven by technology, when in fact actual people participate in activities that drive globalization. Technological “advances” and global “development” are seen as natural and viewed as progress. Thus, those who oppose this “natural progression,” such as those who protest at G8 summits, are seen as naïve. However, Eastwood challenges this common sense understanding of development and brings to light that globalization doesn’t “just happen.” It requires central places, such as the UN, where actual activities take place, which contribute to the “accomplishment of globalization.”

Negotiations within the UN often begin with and end with texts; therefore, much of her book focuses on the work that is involved in activating texts. Through her ethnographic work she was able to observe and participate in producing and altering documents. She explains that activist delegates often push for word changes because of their awareness of how important language changes can be in impacting how a text is read or interpreted. She describes the process of getting language in or out of texts as a strenuous process. However, this work becomes invisible once the UN documents are finalized. Although NGOs are often limited in what they can accomplish, she points out that when delegates “know the system” they can often lobby for the rewording of texts.

One of the things that I enjoyed most about her book was her eloquent description of her experiences with institutional ethnography (IE).

She points out that IE allowed her to raise the questions that she was interested in. For example, she was able to describe the work done by NGOs and also make explicit the ruling relations that organize that work. However, she wrote that she found it difficult and struggled to simultaneously do both well. When she began to map out the web of relations that organize NGO's work she found that there were so many ways in which the local practices of NGOs tied to the trans-local relations. I think that because the UN is such a large textual organization that it was difficult for her to follow a trail because there were so many directions that she could go. Documents transmit so quickly through the organizations and flow through so many peoples' hands that it is easy to get lost in the web. I personally found the maps that she provided in her book to be confusing and difficult to follow at times. It is easy to get lost in the web of acronyms, which represent the organizations involved in textual production and negotiation.

Although there were moments when I would feel lost in the trail of texts and organizations, I think her book demonstrates the importance of making explicit the work that goes into social justice and environmental activism. In addition, she does a great job making visible everyday activities that are often made invisible through abstract terms such as "globalization" and "development." I would recommend this book to anyone interested in activism, policy making, or environmental issues. Also, people who study text and/or language would benefit from reading this book. I think she demonstrates nicely the importance of language and how critical it is to think about how one simple word change in a text can impact how people come to view the environment. She also demonstrates how difficult it can be to have an impact as an NGO activist. She points out that even before delegates are able to participate in textual negotiations, powerful trade organizations, such as the World Trade Organization, have already had the ability to frame trade liberalization as more important than environmental issues. Finally, I think anyone

interested in learning more about institutional ethnography would benefit from reading this book.

— review by Megan Bahns,  
Syracuse University

***Could It Be Otherwise? Parents and the Inequities of Public School Choice* by Lois André-Bechely. Routledge, 2005. 240 pages.**



*Could It Be Otherwise* draws a vivid picture of complex relations that many Americans participate in. It also does lovely work as an institutional ethnography of educational policy and practices. Editor Michael Apple situates the book in the current debates within critical race theory and educational policy studies, and praises the author for opening up to view some of the processes of "conservative modernization" that are part of educational reform going on in the US.

As a novice to critical educational theory and policy studies, I read the book to see how it worked as an institutional ethnography. I'm interested in how people are taking up "IE" to move its ethnographic project into non-academic settings. It seems the essential step to make the approach work as Dorothy Smith intended, as a sociology *for people* rather than about them (Smith 2005, and Smith ed. forthcoming 2006). André-Bechely indicates at the outset that the analysis she offers should contribute to a transformative social agenda and be able to

help parents – and importantly, educators and policy makers – to “do otherwise” than perpetuate inequitable schooling.

In her first chapters André-Bechely puts us in the location of parents given the opportunity to choose the school their child(ren) will attend. She describes how the No Child Left Behind legislation gets public “buy in” and how parents are blamed in the literature for the choices they make. From this standpoint, which includes her own practices of learning about, assessing and choosing a school for her children, she turns her attention to the institutional work processes into which parents are drawn. She jumps right into an analytic description of the texts that operate to organize what parents have to do – describing the brochure and the application form that households receive in the mail. Chapter two shows how the application can be interpreted differently by different readers, already beginning to organize the racial “positioning” that happens in the application process and procedures people must come to understand and engage with.

André-Bechely introduces the thirteen parents she interviewed gradually. We meet some in the application process, where the methodological work of illustrating how to do policy analyses of “text-reader conversations,” is done. We meet other parents in Chapter Three, engaged in the active work of getting information about schools, talking to other parents, talking to teachers, and doing that work within the district’s administrative voluntary integration programs.

The “stories” of parents that André-Bechely tells are never about the people themselves. They are always about the work they are doing in the best interest of their children, and how that work is organized by the processes in place to implement a complex of policies at the state, district and local levels. Some might be put off by the introductory stories about her own choices. She is a middle class white woman in a largely poorer, multi racial school district in Los Angeles. Seeing how her choice work is implicated in producing inequality is exactly her

entry point. Her illustrations show that whatever parents do draws them into the existing inequitable organization of education and shapes their practices so that they continue to produce those inequities. André-Bechely also shows how the well-intentioned legislations and policies get taken up and put to work in regional and local text-based practices and procedures that also perpetuate the inequities rather than eliminate them.

The key piece of analytic work is the weaving of work practices in multiple sites into an overall picture of people in situations doing what they can do to the best of their ability. It is a portrait of their coordinated practices producing the ill effects of a larger institution widely known for deeply embedded inequalities. André-Bechely makes them visible, and thus expands the work knowledges of all of the positions she explores.

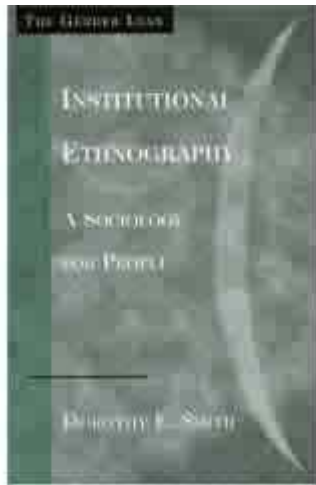
We come away from *Could It Be Otherwise* seeing, as she does, that it very well could be put together differently. Critical prescriptions are clearly set out. As activist academics too, we want to see what happens next. The ethnographic work has been a mammoth task and its rich insights and new knowledge, tremendous. We want to see now, how the work practices brought into view can be rendered open to effective interventions. I’m sure André-Bechely will write next about how the district’s parents have engaged the policy actors whose work we’ve come to understand, to do things differently. I highly recommend this already recognized and acclaimed book.

#### References

- Smith, Dorothy E. 2005. *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*. AltaMira .  
Smith, Dorothy E. ed. forthcoming 2006. *Institutional Ethnography as Practice*.

— review by Susan Marie Turner,  
University of Guelph

***Institutional Ethnography. A Sociology for People*  
by Dorothy E. Smith. AltaMira, 2005. 260 pages.**



Dorothy E. Smith, the founding mother of institutional ethnography and the key figure in the development of its approaches – although she herself always stresses it as a collective enterprise and endeavour – has written the book we all have been waiting for: a textbook where the approach is presented more theoretically coherent, elaborated and substantiated than ever before, all of it richly, empirically illustrated. The newcomer – on MA level or above – will find Smith’s earlier writings (her previous books and articles) here “handily” summarized as a set of starting points: women’s standpoint, ruling relations, ontology of the social and text as social activity. But since these starting points have been written in a dialogue with present theoretical debates – particularly the poststructuralist challenges – they seem most up to date and offer new arguments also to us old fans and disciples.

I am myself particularly impressed by how Dorothy E. Smith, stating the facticity of texts and their ever increasing role (due to technological development) in ruling relations, has made use of the poststructuralist critique to develop an alternative sociological approach to texts as well as to experience. In this book she has developed her arguments further, both theoretically and substantially. Treating texts as occurrence and as

social action, she introduces the notion of “text-reader conversation” to make visible how the reader activates a text, engages with its language and responds to it. But also the distinctive procedures institutionalized discourses provide to subsume everyday lived experiences into institutional and translocal categories. That is, she illuminates how our experiences are read and written into the ruling relations. All the steps taken in these processes are here specified – to make us recognize and look out for them in our own research – and empirically illustrated. But maybe the chapters on experience and work knowledge still are what many of us have been in most need of. Making experience a “contested area,” poststructuralists such as Judith Butler and Joan Scott have questioned the very heart of sociological inquiry. Here D. Smith confronts this critique, by reclaiming but also relocating it, hereby rescuing experience as a legitimate object of inquiry and presenting an alternative understanding of experience as dialogue (using Bakhtin). It is how the experience is told and the traces of social relations and organization present that is the sociological aim of the investigation and not the accuracy of the experience as such. Work knowledge, then, is a person’s experience of and in their own work and the implicit or explicit coordination of his or her work with the work of others. Here “institutional capture,” that is, the capture of institutional discourse to subsume and displace descriptions based on experience, is something to watch out for, problematize and investigate. If not, organizational rationale might be reproduced in interviews, hindering the production of disruptive knowledge about the workings of ruling relations.

By starting with work knowledge and investigating how text mediate experience and ruling relations, Dorothy E. Smith takes us through all the steps possible and relevant in institutional ethnography. And all along the way she argues in a theoretically sophisticated - giving us all the arguments we might need – and empirically persuasive manner. She even manages to illustrate how the kind of knowledge produced this way can be used in the struggle for



change, by activists and others. But even though it is a book that has it all – and maybe exactly therefore – it is quite intellectually demanding. The book, *Institutional Ethnography as Practice*, announced as forthcoming, will here be a most valuable addition. And even though Dorothy E. Smith stresses now and again that the approach is a method of inquiry and not about methods as such, I would also welcome a third book, a book on the very methodological choices and issues such an approach also imply. Illuminating how the approach is empirically translated on all steps of a research process, and in detail, would make more of us dare to embark on an approach Dorothy E. Smith in this book has given the best possible theoretical arguments for.

— review by Karin Widerberg,  
University of Oslo

### **Award Winning Paper Now Online**

As was announced in the last *IE Newsletter*, Naomi Nichols, a graduate student at York University, was recognized for her IE outstanding paper by the Conflict, Social Action, and Social Change Division. Her winning paper, “The Management of Activism by Corporate Discourse: The Activist as an Ideological Code,” is now available online at the IE Division web site: <http://www.sssp1.org/index.cfm/m/21/pageId/296>. Of course, Patrick Rodger’s paper that was selected for the George Smith Award can be found there as well.

I frequently recommend these papers to my graduate students. Some students have difficulty envisioning how they might develop an IE project for their class work or Masters theses, and these papers help to bridge the gap. Additionally, what better way is there for graduate students to see the quality of scholarship that is expected of those who compete for the George Smith Award or the awards of the other SSSP divisions? We are fortunate that Patrick and Naomi are willing to make their work easily accessible through the IE Division’s web site.

### **Another Book of Interest**

Darin Weinberg, IE Division member and Fellow and Director of Studies, King's College, University of Cambridge, also informs us of his most recent publication: *Of Others Inside: Insanity, Addiction, and Belonging in America* (2005) Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. According to the book’s liner notes:

There is little doubt among scientists and the general public that homelessness, mental illness, and addiction are inter-related. In *Of Others Inside*, Darin Weinberg draws upon comparative history and comparative institutional ethnography to examine how these inter-relations have taken form in the United States. He links the establishment of these connections to the movement of mental health and addiction treatment from redemptive processes to punitive ones and back again, and explores the connection between social welfare, rehabilitation, and the criminal justice system.

Seeking to offer a new sociological understanding of the relationship between social exclusion and mental disability, *Of Others Inside* considers the general social conditions of homelessness, poverty, and social marginality in the U.S. Weinberg also explores questions about American perceptions of these conditions, and examines in great detail the social reality of mental disability and drug addiction without reducing people's suffering to simple notions of biological fate or social disorder.

### **Students, Submit Those Papers**

Submissions are still welcome for the George Smith Award, the honor that the Institutional Ethnography Division bestows upon the winner of the Division’s graduate student paper competition. The deadline for entries is May 1, 2006. See the flyer on page 2 for details.

## Recent Ph.D Grad Looking for an Academic Position

Hello, my name is Margo Kushner. I am a sessional instructor, and recent graduate of the Social Work faculty at the University of Calgary. I have just defended my dissertation which is titled “Child Custody Planning in a Textually Structured Court System”. The aim of this thesis was to examine how the Queens Bench court system inhibits or promotes child custody evaluators from effectively meeting the needs of children impacted by high conflict divorce. Using institutional ethnography as an analytical framework, this study:

- 1) Investigated the structural conditions of the court system that shapes the role of child custody experts in Alberta; and
- 2) Identified the discourses that shape the child custody evaluators’ ability to plan effectively for these children.

The flow of procedural text was mapped from the initial engagement of the child custody expert to the termination of the court’s involvement. In addition, 22 Court of Queen’s Bench judges and 8 child custody evaluators employed in Alberta were interviewed in focus groups. A significant finding was that these varied forms of text were not satisfying the best interest of child principle adhered to by court professionals when deliberating on parenting plans post separation. The term “courtextual slippage” was coined to describe a process that occurs when the documentation utilized by the court system slips away from its intended ideological purpose. A second factor identified as a barrier to effective child custody planning was budget restraint within the Alberta court system. This study has implications for legislative planners interested in law reform with regard to divorce, especially those who are interested in preventing oppressive policy that marginalize children. To date the findings of this study have promoted law reform in Alberta court rooms.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank all of those who have taken the risk of presenting your IE work at conferences. I have learned a great deal listening to your presentations. Other people who have been instrumental in my graduate work include Arthur Frank who so kindly volunteered to be on my committee, and Liza McCoy who patiently taught me about IE in an independent study class. And, of course Dorothy Smith whose brilliance in so many ways kept me intrigued with the difference an IE investigation can make. When Dorothy uttered the words, “you can’t tackle the whole beast” at the OISE IE conference I was able to finalize this piece of work. Thanks Dorothy; I was starting to show the traits of an obsessive compulsive person with histrionic traits....My family thanks you.

If any of you are aware of an academic position in social work, I would be thrilled to hear from you. I may be reached at [kush.family@shaw.ca](mailto:kush.family@shaw.ca) or telephone 403-228-6091.