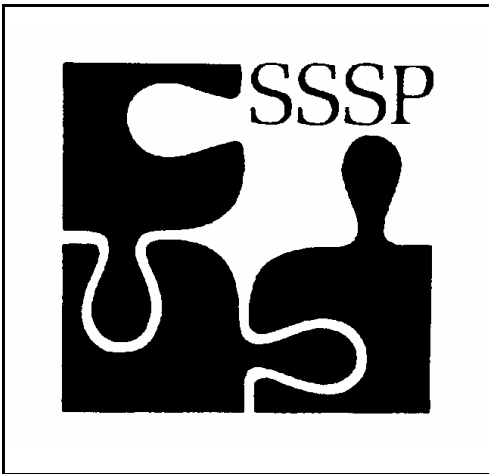


# IE NEWSLETTER

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

March 2007

Vol. 4, No. 1



## FROM THE DIVISION CHAIR

*Alison I. Griffith*

As I write this, the temperature in Toronto is -13 C (approx 4 F) and it is indeed cold. The robins came back early and they have taken to wearing little booties as they search for dinner from the deep freeze.

On a less whimsical note, sessions for our SSSP IE Division meeting in New York are being put together. Thanks to all of you who submitted abstracts and to those who are chairing and discussing in the sessions. The sessions promise to be wonderful again this year.

And this year I pass the proverbial baton to Marj DeVault who is the incoming Chair of the IE Division. This will be done, with appropriate fanfare and huzzah's, at our Divisional Meeting. Please make space at the New York Conference to attend this important meeting. Time and place will be announced on the SSSP website (<http://www.sssp1.org/>) and in the Conference Program.

This year, the Canadian Scholarly Meetings will be held at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. The Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Meetings, the Canadian Society for Studies in Education Meetings, the Canadian Association of Social Work Meetings, and other scholarly associations will be meeting at the end of May and into the beginning of June. There will be several IE scholars presenting at these meetings, including Naomi Nichols and me who are presenting at the Socinet Conference day on May 29. Please go to the various Association websites to find out details. It's an excellent opportunity to see the IE work being done by both graduate students and faculty.

Finally, I have had an unusual teaching experience this semester that I wanted to share. I teach Institutional Ethnography in a graduate Qualitative Methods course here at York University. This time, Cheryl Zurawski, a PhD student from the University of Regina, is attending the course. She is in Regina (approximately 2000 miles

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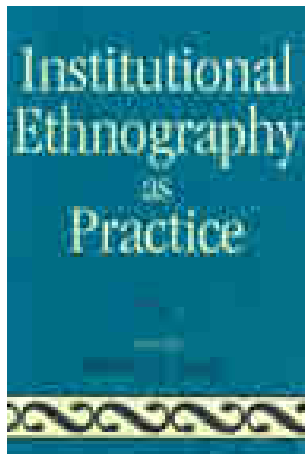
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west of Toronto) and the York students are meeting in Toronto. She attends via video streaming – that is, she is present in real time from her home via a webcam and thanks to the excellent technological resources at York University. While the technology hasn't been seamless, it has nonetheless allowed the students at York University to work with and appreciate the viewpoint of an IE student from another university and another part of the country. It has been an experience I've treasured even though there were a number of bureaucratic university rules and regulations to overcome, as well as the technological ones. This might be a new way to share expertise among universities, IE faculty and graduate students. If you have the patience and technological support, I recommend it highly. If anyone is interested in talking to me further about this method of IE course delivery, please contact me at [AGriffith@Edu.YorkU.CA](mailto:AGriffith@Edu.YorkU.CA).

See you in New York when it is warmer.

## Book Review

***Institutional Ethnography as Practice*, edited by Dorothy E. Smith. Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. 274 pages.**



One of the most perplexing moments during my doctoral dissertation fieldwork came during a visit by a “case management” team of nurse and social worker to a client of their program. “Mrs. C.” was a

woman in her late 70's who fell into the category of “homebound” that the program was designed to help by keeping them in their own homes rather than arranging for placement in a nursing home. The occasion for the visit was a six-month re-assessment designed to evaluate Mrs. C.'s well-being and service needs. Such assessment encompassed a number of scales examining physical and mental health, satisfaction with living arrangements, and so on. Watching the nurse and social worker administer these instruments, I was struck by how hard they had to work to get Mrs. C.'s responses to fit within the terms of each scale: “They [someone in her area] threw a stone through the big picture [window in the front of her house],” for example, became “somewhat dissatisfied” with her neighborhood. My sense that the reality being measured did not capture Mrs. C.'s experience escalated as I talked with her following the assessment. Having scored well on mental health status questions, she began berating Hitler – not as a historical figure, but as a “terrible man” controlling the Germany from which she said she had recently immigrated.

This volume of writings about Institutional Ethnography (IE) reveals how episodes such as this disclose the ways institutions mold lives into categories that produce the outcomes needed for institutional action, while eclipsing the actual experiences of the people involved. The focus is on practices within IE, and authors examine the collection of data, analysis of research materials, construction of research proposals, and applications of IE to social policy as well as social theory. This is not, however, a text on a research method, but rather an attempt to show how researchers can use IE to yield the discovery of “how we are ruled and participate in our ruling and... then... to make plain to people (including themselves) just how it works.” (P. 11)

The book and chapters themselves represent and model this process of discovery. Most chapters center on the authors' research experiences,

generally described in the first person. Each of the authors speaks about methodological practice, the distinctiveness of IE, the conclusions of their studies, and the conceptual implications of their research experiences. The structure of the volume flows from the collection of data, to the mapping and analysis of institutional processes, and then to the institutional processes of obtaining research funding, extending research to new sites, and advocating for social change. The chapters could also be read in different sequences to discover how IE researchers have approached the analysis of experience, the identification of institutional processes, the mapping of social relations, the significance of texts, or the reflexivity of the researcher.

The multivocality of the book is evident particularly in Part I, where authors use the very methods they are examining to demonstrate how interviews, participant observation and text contribute to IE and its larger project, the sociology of organization. In the first chapter, Marjorie DeVault and Liza McCoy use interviews, focus groups, and other accounts by institutional ethnographers to glean “practical information...that is often unarticulated in published work and (to) reflect on unresolved issues of research practice.” (p. 16) In the process of bringing us in contact with the experience of IE researchers, they manage to enfold the main premises of IE’s approach to selecting informants, interviewing, and establishing analytic rigor.

The second chapter begins with the transcript of a conversation (the typical mode of an IE interview) between author Tim Diamond and editor Dorothy Smith. Together, they reveal how Diamond’s work for *Making Gray Gold* began, how it became an institutional ethnography, and how he did his research, analysis and writing for the book. Diamond follows this experiential account with reflections on the contributions of participant observation for IE, most centrally how the researcher’s reflective and embodied stance contributes to “seeing the social organization in the local.” (p. 58)

Dorothy Smith then incorporates the texts of graduate school appraisal forms and a psychologist’s case file into her examination of how IE apprehends text as social action. Locating sequences of texts and action is critical, both methodologically and conceptually, to IE, since texts act as translocal forms of coordination shaping social relations beyond the awareness of individuals in local settings. Smith further shows how “intertextual hierarchies” (p. 66) reveal the regulatory effects of one text on others: a materialist analysis of ruling discourse.

The second part of the book takes “Analysis” as its subject, with chapters following analytically from the themes already established. Marie Campbell starts, as IE does, with personal experience – both as her chapter’s subject and that of her study of a Total Quality Management program at a long-term care hospital. Addressing critiques of studies treating experience as unitary and essential, Campbell shows how IE instead uses experiential accounts as apertures on social relations and institutional action. Liza McCoy then addresses the risks in this stance of an “unintended...drift...in which the analytic focus shifts from the institution to the informants.” (P. 109) Keeping the institution central to analysis involves, McCoy asserts, a dialog with the data, questioning accounts of experience in the light of knowledge of institutions, further exploring the institution in question, returning to the accounts, and so forth.

In the next chapters, Alison Griffith and Susan Turner show how IE researchers discover the ways texts produce and coordinate institutional discourses and activities. Griffith explores the construction of the “single parent family” discourse and how that category is used in media, social welfare, education, and other settings – used both textually and rhetorically – to signify pathologic differences. Turner works from her experience and study of the contestation of a land development project to map the sequences of text and institutional action that kept residents and environmental agencies from being able to affect the project’s outcome. Like

McCoy, Turner warns of analytic strategies that “close down the analysis” (p. 142) through the reification of categories or typologies.

In her introduction, Dorothy Smith says that Part III “looks towards how research might proceed,” (p. 9) a phrase with multiple meanings revealed by the different authors. The first chapter demonstrates how those proposing to do IE can explain its practices in ways that will satisfy criteria of evaluators accustomed to standardized, positivist investigations. The proposal at hand, developed by George W. Smith, Eric Mykhalovskiy, and Douglas Weatherbee, starts from the experience of people living with HIV/AIDS. The authors define such experience as a regime of “lifework” (p. 167) articulating formal and informal systems of care. This open conception of work is, of course, a pivotal idea in IE research (“work,” in fact, constitutes one of the longest index entries). Here, as in prior chapters, this portrayal brings out the agency in descriptions of the experience of those who might otherwise be depicted as passive victims.

Looking at sequences of texts and institutional action in a global context, the next chapter by Lauren Eastwood describes her on-going analysis of United Nations decision-making on forestry policy in relation to Indigenous people. Eastwood shows how the voices of Indigenous people are present within the actions of UN conferences and the texts of US resolutions, but sequestered within places and terms already discursively organized. Her work further suggests how the expansion of “documentary reality” (p. 184) projects into the future the results of prior negotiations, outcomes, and documents.

Last, Alex Wilson and Ellen Pence describe how a community of Indigenous professionals adapted IE to discover the biases and limitations of domestic abuse judicial procedures for Indigenous communities in the US. The professionals centered their use of an IE approach in Indigenous values, ways of knowing, and modes of action. Doing so added value well beyond the simplistic rubric of

“cultural competency;” it enabled the researchers to discover for themselves the premises and procedures within the judicial system that undermined its very objectives and made it antithetical to goals of individual safety and communal health. This chapter more than any other projects the use of IE as a tool for advocacy, as at its end the authors articulate a “vision of integrity” (p. 221) and the changes necessary to bring domestic abuse systems in line with that vision.

It should be clear that the main concepts, assumptions, and framework of IE thread throughout the chapters and sections, providing a holistic and comprehensive outline of the approach in theory as well as in practice. Further support is given by the thorough and useful index, one which actually works much as a researcher might do coding for an IE analysis (cf. pp. 38-39). While not intended as an introductory overview, the volume would be accessible to students with limited knowledge of the field. Those with more experience will be able to use the book as a standard reference as well as a source of ideas and guidance for their work. Re-reading my opening paragraph in the light of this book, I now see much more clearly the institutional foundations of what I observed, and the practices linking both the case management team and Mrs. C. to dysfunctional institutions.

For all that it provides, *Institutional Ethnography as Practice* also brings us to the edges of the approach to date. More IE in corporate settings and those beyond North America could expand our grasp of both the consequences and contestation of globalization. Use of hypertext as subject and as format would be a natural extension of the multi-layered mode of IE analysis. Further work like that of Wilson and Pence could flesh out the emancipatory project implicit in many IE accounts. This volume can do a great deal to open up IE to discovery and practice in a variety of settings.

— reviewed by Ann Dill

## Walker and Zurawski Become *IE Newsletter* Co-editors

Gillian Walker and Cheryl Zurawski will share the tasks of editing the *IE Newsletter* beginning with the upcoming issue. Gillian Walker, emerita, Carleton University, brings her familiarity with institutional ethnography and its researchers to the position. She will work primarily on soliciting, collecting, and composing items for the newsletter. Cheryl Zurawski's journalism experience will certainly enhance the publication. Cheryl is currently a PhD student at the University of Regina, and she will handle copyediting and layout.

## Call for Nominations

### *Dorothy Smith Award for Scholar-Activism*

In 2007, the Institutional Ethnography Division will inaugurate the Dorothy Smith Award for Scholar-Activism. This award will recognize the activities of an individual or group who has made substantial contributions to Institutional Ethnographic scholar-activism in either a single project or some longer trajectory of work. The contributions may involve IE research conducted and used for activist ends, or it may involve activist efforts which have drawn upon or contributed to IE scholarship.

The recipient will be chosen each year by the Dorothy Smith Award Committee, to be appointed by the Division Chair (and typically including the Chair, Chair-elect, and two other members). This year's committee is chaired by Marj DeVault and includes Alison Griffith, Paul Luken, and Tim Diamond. The committee invites members of the Division to send one-page statements describing the contributions of nominees to Marj at [mdevault@syr.edu](mailto:mdevault@syr.edu). The deadline for nominations is May 1, 2007. The honoree will be recognized and awarded a certificate during the Division's meeting in New York City.

— Marj DeVault

## Welcome New IE Division Members (November 7, 2006 – February 21, 2007)

Rebecca Conklin	Elisa Fanelli
Jon P. Fish	Melissa A. Freiburger
Maureen Ittig	Brian Jara
Pamela Labelle Jeffrey	Colin Jerolmack
Shelley L. Koch	D. Michael Lindsay
Noriko Milman	Emily Murai
Silvia Pasquetti	Erik D. Rodriguez
Nathan D. Shippee	Suzanne Sicchia

### *Materials Sought for ASA Instructor's Resource Guide on Social Problems.*

Walter F. Carroll (Bridgewater State College) and Lutz Kaelber (University of Vermont) are compiling the fourth edition of the *ASA Instructor's Resource Guide on Social Problems*. They welcome course syllabi, class exercises and assignments, online resources, examinations and evaluation instruments, computer software and film reviews, and essays on pedagogical challenges and opportunities involved in teaching Social Problems courses. Please send pertinent materials, as attachments in MS Word format, to Walter Carroll at [wcarroll@bridgew.edu](mailto:wcarroll@bridgew.edu).

## Stepping Down

With this issue my stint as editor of the *IE Newsletter* comes to a close. I did not know what I was agreeing to when I accepted the position, but now I can say that it was a terrific experience. The highlight was being able to stay in contact with so many division members throughout the year, and that I am certainly going to miss. I feel really good, however, about the team of Gillian Walker and Cheryl Zurawski taking over. They have a learning curve ahead of them, and while I have offered to help with the next issue, the help that they will need to produce this newsletter must come from you. I hope that they will receive the excellent support that the division members have provided me over the past three years.

— Paul Luken

## CALL FOR PAPERS AGENDA FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE---2008

In 2004, the SSSP and the Justice 21 Committee published the first **Agenda for Social Justice—2004**. That report contained chapters on poverty, education, unemployment, environmental health risks, global economic change, capital punishment, surveillance technologies, civil unions, domestic violence, cosmetic genital surgery, and domestic security and the Patriot Act.

We are now beginning our work on the second publication—**Agenda for Social Justice—2008**. This publication is designed to inform the public-at-large about the nation's most pressing social problems and to propose a public policy response to those problems. This project affirms the commitment of SSSP to social justice, and enables the members of the association to speak on public issues with the sponsorship of the corporate body. Every four years, coinciding with the national presidential elections, SSSP will issue a report on the nation's social ills. This report will be an “agenda for social justice,” in that it will contain recommendations for action by elected officials, policy makers, and the public. The report will be distributed to national progressive organizations, policy centers, national labor organizations, members of Congress, state governors, mayors of large cities, national newspapers, and political journals.

The quadrennial report will be a product of the most valid and reliable knowledge we have about social problems and it will be a joint effort of the members and Divisions of SSSP. We invite you to consider preparing a “chapter” for the 2008 publication. We ask you, individually or with colleagues, to consider submitting a brief proposal (1-2 pp) identifying a problem of concern to members of SSSP, and respond to the questions: *What do we know? How do we know it? What is to be done?* As the coordinating committee for **Justice 21**, we will consider all the proposals and invite members to prepare a draft statement, following specific guidelines, for inclusion in the 2008 publication.

Please submit a copy of your 1-2 page proposals to each of the members of the committee by May 30, 2007, and contact us if you have questions or would like additional information.

Sincerely,

Robert Perrucci (chair), [perruccir@purdue.edu](mailto:perruccir@purdue.edu)  
Kathleen Ferraro, [Kathleen.ferraro@asu.edu](mailto:Kathleen.ferraro@asu.edu)  
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Charles Trent, [trent@ymail.yu.edu](mailto:trent@ymail.yu.edu)

P.S. For an expanded discussion of **Justice 21** see the May 2001 issue of *Social Problems* (“Inventing Social Justice”). To see the 2004 publication, check the SSSP website (<http://www.ssp1.org>).

PLEASE POST

## **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 2007 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 2006 or later. The papers must be student-authored; co-authored papers are acceptable as long as all authors are students. The papers must not have been previously published and should be a maximum of 40 pages including all notes, references, and appendices.

To enter, submit a copy of the paper as an email attachment and send it to Brenda Solomon at [bsolomon@uvm.edu](mailto:bsolomon@uvm.edu) or Lauri Grace at [lauri.grace@deakin.edu.au](mailto:lauri.grace@deakin.edu.au). 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 for the Study of Social Problems' "Call for Papers." Papers must be received by May 1, 2007.

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. The meeting will be held August 10-12, 2007, in New York City.

## Recent IE Publications, Theses and Presentations

Church, K. with C. Frazee, T. Luciani, M. Panitch and P. Seeley. (in press) "Dressing Corporate Subjectivities: Learning What to Wear to the Bank." In *Work, Subjectivity and Learning*, edited by S. Billett, M. Somerville and T. Fenwick. Amsterdam: Springer.

DeVault, Marjorie L. 2006. "Introduction: What Is Institutional Ethnography?" *Social Problems*, 53 (3):294-298.

Grace, L. 2006. "Mapping the Social Relations of the Australian Vocational Education and Training Sector." Society for the Study of Social Problems. Montréal, Québec, Canada, August. <http://www.sssp1.org/extras/L%20Grace%202006%20Mapping%20Social%20Relations%20of%20VET.pdf>

Grace, L. 2006. "'I see nothing has changed': Reshaping Practitioner Concerns about Institutional Language." AVETRA Conference. University of Wollongong, April. <http://www.avetra.org.au/publications/documents/PA%200021.pdf>

Grace, L. 2005. "Training Packages and the AQTF: Freedom to Move or Components of a Compliance Driven Straitjacket?" AVETRA Conference, Brisbane, 2005. <http://www.avetra.org.au/publications/documents/PA008Grace.pdf>

Grace, L. 2005. "Language, Power and Ruling Relations in Vocational Education and Training." Ph.D. thesis. Faculty of Education, Deakin University, Geelong Victoria. <http://library.deakin.edu.au/search/tlanguage+power+and+ruling+relations&submit=Search/tlanguage+power+and+ruling+relations/1,1,1,E/1856~b2156517&FF=tlanguage+power+and+ruling+relations&1,1,1,0/indexsort=/startreferer//search/tlanguage+power+and+ruling+relations&submit=Search/tlanguage+power+and+ruling+relations/1,1,1,E/frameset&FF=tlanguage+power+and+ruling+relations&1,1,/endreferer/>

Grace, L. 2004. "Language and Power in Vocational Education and Training: Training Packages and the Ruling Relations of VET." Pp. 271-286 in *Alchemies: Community ExChanges*, edited by G. Pass and D. Woods. Perth: Black Swan Press. (PDF file available from the author. Email [lauri.grace@deakin.edu.au](mailto:lauri.grace@deakin.edu.au))

Grace, L. 2004. "The Positioning of Practitioners in Vocational Education and Training Research." Australian Association for Research in Education Conference. Melbourne University, Melbourne, November-December. <http://www.aare.edu.au/04pap/gra04388.pdf>

Grace, L. 2004. "Language and Power in Vocational Education and Training." In *Doing Thinking Activity Learning: Proceedings of the 12th Annual International Conference on Post-Compulsory Education and Training*, (vol. 1), edited by J. Searle, C. McKavanagh and D. Roebuck. (PDF file available from the author. Email [lauri.grace@deakin.edu.au](mailto:lauri.grace@deakin.edu.au))



Luken, Paul and Suzanne Vaughan. 2006. "Standardizing Child Rearing Through Housing." *Social Problems*, 53 (3): 299-331. (PDF file currently available as a complimentary download from SSSP. See link at <http://www.sssp1.org/>)

Luken, Paul and Suzanne Vaughan. 2005. "...Be a Genuine Home Maker in Your Own Home": Gender and Familial Relations in State Housing Practices, 1917-1922." *Social Forces*, 83 (4): 1603-1626.

Loe, Meika. 2004. *The Rise of Viagra: How the Little Blue Pill Changed Sex in America*. New York: NYU Press.

MacKinnon, Karen. 2006. "Living with the Threat of Preterm Labor: Women's Work of Keeping the Baby In." *Journal of Obstetrical Gynecologic & Neonatal Nursing*, 35 (6):700-708.

MacKinnon, K. 2005. "The Social Organization of Women's Preterm Labour Experiences." Ph.D. dissertation. University of Calgary.

MacKinnon, K. and L. McCoy. 2006. "The very loud discourses of risk in pregnancy!" Pp. 98-120 in *Risk and Nursing Practice*, edited by P. Godin. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave.

MacKinnon, K. and M. McIntrye. 2006. "From Braxton Hicks to Preterm Labour: The Constitution of Risk in Pregnancy." *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*, 38 (2):52-72.

Rodriguez, Erik Daniel. 2006. "Diagnosing Attention Deficit Disorder: An Institutional Ethnography." M.A. thesis. Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of West Georgia, Carrollton, GA.

Widerberg, Karin. 2007. "Dorothy E. Smith." In *Key Sociological Thinkers*, edited by R. Stones. London: MacMillan.

Widerberg, Karin. 2006. "Tiredness in the Light of Institutional Ethnography." *Sociologisk Forskning*, no 3.

Widerberg, Karin. 2004. "Institutional Ethnography – Towards a Productive Sociology: An Interview with Dorothy E. Smith." *Sociologisk tidskrift*, 12:179-184.

### **Search for the Next Editor of *Social Problems* Extended**

The deadline for applications to become the next editor of *Social Problems* has been extended to March 15. The editorship is a three-year term that will begin at mid-year 2008 with responsibility for editing Volumes 56-58 (years 2009-2011). Applications, requests for further

information, or names of potential nominees should be sent to James D. Orcutt, Chair, SSSP Editorial and Publications Committee, Department of Sociology, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-2270; [850] 644-6416 (Office); [850] 644-6208 (FAX); email: [jorcutt@fsu.edu](mailto:jorcutt@fsu.edu).