

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

MARIE CAMPBELL and FRANCES GREGOR, *Mapping Social Relations: A Primer on doing Institutional Ethnography*. Aurora, ON: Garamond Press. 2002, 130 p., Index. \$22.95 paper. ISBN 155193-034-X.

Mapping Social Relations does a splendid job of introducing for beginning researchers the theory of institutional ethnography and its methods. The authors describe the book as a primer, and it is; but the slimness of the book, the conversational readability, and the plentiful examples make it likely that this book will be well used by any graduate students who pick it up.

Institutional ethnography arises from the social theory of Canadian scholar Dorothy Smith, who illustrated how social relations organize everyday life "systematically, but more or less mysteriously and outside a person's knowledge, and for purposes that may not be theirs" (p. 18). Institutional ethnography "maps" the social relations, particularly those that are missing from the awareness of the subject. Most importantly, what happens in the local setting is often organized from outside. Institutional ethnography's theoretical basis conditions what the researcher looks for—namely, expressions of these "ruling relations."

Six chapters and an introduction comprise *Mapping Social Relations*. The theoretical underpinnings are well covered in the first half of the book. Two-and-a-half chapters discuss methods, and a final chapter illustrates the process through six examples of research done with institutional ethnography. The book builds on the authors' experience in teaching these methods to graduate students. Instructive examples are liberally sprinkled throughout. The authors state that they want to make the complex ideas that inform institutional ethnography more accessible. In this they succeed admirably.

I would have preferred even more practical nuts-and-bolts on entering the field, note-taking, interviewing, and other researcher practices. As a reader of the research, I want to know that the data are well-gathered. Rigour is crucial to the social scientific endeavour, and more so when the subject is contentious and the research is undermining socially-instituted practices. But as I sat with book in hand one day, a student spoke gushingly about how useful this text has been to her own research project. The book is

being read and used in the field; more detail might only have added unnecessary and potentially counter-productive pages.

Another difficulty is that the authors repeatedly assert that institutional ethnography is different than other ethnographies, but it is not clear how. For instance, they write, "For institutional ethnographers, the conceptualization of power as ruling is decisive for how the inquiry (data collection) is taken up" (p. 67). It is not unreasonable to suggest that many other ethnographers are also taking up this problematic. Furthermore, the recognition of extended social relations "outside or beyond people's experiential accounts" that create unreflexive or tacit knowledge are also acknowledged by other ethnographers.

Most egregiously, the authors never address critical ethnography. That institutional ethnography "takes the standpoint of those who are being ruled"(p. 16), combined with other aspects of its theoretical stance, make it quite different than traditional (the authors use "conventional") ethnography. But critical ethnography also emphasizes a social analysis that explicates oppressive social conditions that are not necessarily of the local setting's or actors making, and the taking of a politically engaged stance through method and results.

The point is that institutional ethnography may not be as unique as this primer makes it out to be. Nevertheless, institutional ethnography is specific about the operation of ruling relations in socially organizing individuals' lifeworlds. This explicitness orients a researcher to attending to these relations, thus fulfilling a mission to uncover and act upon such relations. Institutional ethnography's "politics are built into its mode of inquiry" (p. 103).

To conclude, I liked *Mapping Social Relations* a great deal. It reminds me of another Garamond text - Kirby and McKenna's *Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods from the Margin* (1989). Both books are quite readable, give clear exposition of the utility of research to anti-oppressive practice, and give detailed exposition of methods. *Mapping Social Relations* is far more theoretically informed, and is well-referenced but not obtrusively. It is an superb resource for beginning researchers, field-based practitioners or others interested in this methodology.

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