

Accounting for Accounts

Crafting Ethnographic Validity Through Team Ethnography

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Introduction: From Individual to Team Ethnography

A number of early “classics” in ethnographic sociology conducted research in teams (e.g., Becker, 1961; Gouldner, 1954). With the recent resurgence of interest in ethnographic research, we see some projects conducted in multisited teams (e.g., Anderson, 2000; Burawoy, 1998; Cress & Snow, 2000; Heimer, 2008; Newman, 2009), although by and large, a single ethnographer still more often goes into the field alone for extended periods of time and subsequently produces an individually authored account (e.g., Blee, 2003; Duneier, 1994, 1999; Espeland, 1998; Fine, 2008, 2009; Heimer, 1989; Wacquant, 1998, 2002; Wagner-Pacifi, 2000). The solo ethnographer generally remains the most common model in organizational studies, urban sociology, and anthropology, and yet it may not always be the most appropriate model, particularly for those heading into the field for the first time or for those who wish to study large organizations or complexly coordinated distributed practices characteristic of many contemporary phenomena. In this chapter, we describe our experiences using a team model of ethnographic fieldwork, focusing on its implications for training and, more generally, for improving the validity of ethnographic fieldwork.

According to Van Maanen, fieldwork and ethnography are distinguishable:

Fieldwork usually means living with and living like those who are studied. In its broadest, most conventional sense, fieldwork demands the full-time involvement of a researcher over a lengthy period of time (typically unspecified) and consists mostly of ongoing interaction with the human targets of study on their home ground. (1988:2)

Ethnography is the written product of the fieldwork and a standard method for those who wish to describe the culture of a group or organization—how its members “go about their everyday lives” and what sense the group members make of their activities (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011:1). Ethnographies describe, and often explain, “the actual social context and life worlds of those being studied” in detail and with a depth not often available in other forms of research (Snow, 1999:97). As the written representation of a social system, ethnography

carries quite serious intellectual and moral responsibilities, for the images of others inscribed in writing are most assuredly not neutral. Ethnographic writings can and do inform human conduct and judgment in innumerable ways by pointing to the choices and restrictions that reside at the very heart of social life. (Van Maanen, 1988:1)

In effect, as Van Maanen writes, “ethnographies join culture and fieldwork . . . [they] are documents that pose questions at the margins between two cultures. They necessarily decode one culture while recoding it for another audience” (Barthes, 1972).

Beyond the stereotypical image of ethnography as “one anthropologist per tribe” (Van Maanen, 1988), there are two models of group ethnography. The first is the collaboration model in which researchers disperse to study a particular selected phenomenon *across sites*. Although they share their field notes and interview transcripts, discussing and analyzing them as a group, they write independent papers about different sites (Bearman, 2009), or they may pool their data to generate insights comparatively (Barley, 1996). This model of ethnography has been used successfully in several major projects in urban sociology (e.g., Anderson, Brooks, Gunn, & Jones, 2004; Newman, 2009). In the second team model, a group of ethnographers observe and interview *within the same site*, coordinating their observation and interview activities and discussing shared notes and transcripts as observation and analysis unfolds. This is the method used in the classical ethnographies by Becker, Greer, Hughes, and Strauss (1961) on medical education and by Gouldner (1954) on industrial relations in a gypsum mine. These two team models differ according to whether there is a single site or multiple sites and fields (industries, economic sections, and organizations), either unified or distributed, creating variable implications for validity and generalizability. Both team models are often used as a means of training students.

Although writing *about* qualitative methods has proliferated in the last two decades, there has been, according to Huberman and Miles (2002: x) “no parallel proliferation of studies of the actual *process of doing* qualitative research.” For example, while there are numerous texts that describe how to analyze, then theorize, and finally write up accounts from ethnographic data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Saldaña, 2012), collecting data is rarely specified with explicit techniques, and until very recently it was even less consistently reported in publications (but see Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). The cause of this inattention to the process is overdetermined: a product of ethnography’s own history, the epistemological debates among different approaches within qualitative methods, vociferous antagonisms between qualitative and quantitative researchers, as well as the heated culture and science “wars” following the 1980s poststructural turn in the social sciences. As a consequence, the practical skills of data collection and analysis, as well as the distinctions and connections among these, are not well understood, especially among nonpractitioners and novices. Thus, it seems important to direct more intense effort to unpacking the process and practical skills of fieldwork. This is as important for the collection of data as for the analysis, which in ethnographic fieldwork is always continuous and simultaneous with data collection (Becker, 1998; Silbey, 2004).

We unpack the processes and practical skills of fieldwork by looking through the lens of team ethnography. In the remaining text, we identify the added value that working in teams can bring to ethnographic research. Although we focus on the benefits for enhancing validity, fieldwork in teams is also an excellent method of training ethnographers. In the context of showing how validity is strengthened by (a) continuously improving accounts to create thicker description, (b) triangulating across accounts to identify subjects’ interpretations, and (c) refining conceptual categories to clarify theoretical contributions, we also illustrate the range of support that group work provides for the novice fieldworker. Working in a team increases efficiency for both the supervisor and the students, while continually offering examples of more and less useful techniques. Students more quickly learn that one researcher’s problems have also been experienced by others. Because skilled fieldworkers eventually develop what can be an exhausting double consciousness (observing a group while

becoming part of it), working with others to develop this sensibility is especially helpful, emotionally supportive, and efficient. Sharing fieldwork stories—blunders as well as successes—helps students to develop the appropriate skills more quickly by seeing that the difficulties they are experiencing are not unique. The ethnographer is entirely dependent upon the willingness of subjects to be available for close and perhaps intrusive scrutiny; conversely, the research subjects are entirely dependent on the integrity of the researcher to protect the subjects' dignity and autonomy. Such responsibilities become more visible and tractable when fieldwork experiences are narrated, interrogated, and scrutinized among a group of similarly engaged researchers.

Seeking Ethnographic Validity

One of the most frequently voiced concerns about ethnography asks whether a different observer would have come away from the field, independent of the variations in the voice with which the account may be written, with the same basic descriptive account, interpretation, and theoretical contribution. In other words, how reliable is the description of social worlds depicted in ethnographies, and how valid is the explanation of what was observed? In ethnographic research, reliability is closely connected and perhaps best understood as a form of validity (Hammersley, 1992:79). Although these terms are conventionally discussed with respect to quantitative and positivistic research, with respect to qualitative field work we use them to refer to the ability to produce similar data from multiple observers and to produce consensually agreed upon, corroborated interpretations and theoretical explanations of a site, person, or process.

It is essential, as we will note herein, that accounts claiming to be more than personal opinions, accounts that seek the status of knowledge, be produced with methods permitting the community of observers to collectively assess its truth status. Although ethnography is a distinct model of inquiry and representation, as a social scientific enterprise it claims status as truthful knowledge. The value and truth claims of science, including social science, derive “primarily from the transparency and public representation of its methods, by displaying the grounds of [its] claims and the sources of [its] evidence” (Silbey, 2013). As such, in its most fundamental and comprehensive sense, scientific “knowledge production [is] a collaborative activity, a public civic engagement with others, other scholars and audiences” (Silbey, 2013:22–23).

With only slight modification from standard understandings of scientific reliability and validity, we can deploy these terms quite productively for ethnographic research. Maxwell (1992), for example, proposes five types of validity for qualitative researchers that offer a useful advance on the usual discussions of reliability and validity. First, *descriptive validity* refers to the factual accuracy of an account, that researchers “are not making up or distorting things they saw or heard” (Maxwell 1992:45). This is the basis for all other forms of validity and the foundation on which all subsequent interpretation and analysis builds. As Geertz (1973:17) put it, “behavior must be attended to, and with some exactness, because it is through the flow of behavior—or more precisely, social action—that cultural forms find articulation.” This “reportage” function (Runciman, 1983) includes descriptions of specific events and situations, as well as of objects and spaces.

Second, *interpretive validity* refers to the meanings of the described behaviors, events, and objects for the actors observed, which is one of the central goals and most common justifications for qualitative research, especially ethnographic fieldwork. Interpretive validity seeks to capture the participants' perspectives, providing an account in emic (actors' rather than theoretical—etic) terms. Interpretive validity

has no real counterpart in quantitative-experimental validity typologies. . . . [It] is inherently a matter of inference from the words and actions of participants in the situations studied . . . grounded in the language of the people studied, [and] relying as much as possible on their own words and concepts. (Maxwell, 1992:48)

The interpretation is the barest level of generalization across the described data: what do these activities, these things, these relationships mean to the actors? The goal of interpretation is to describe the actors' "lay sociology" (Garfinkel, 1967) or "theories-in-use" (Argyris & Schon, 1974)—their understandings of their social worlds. This criterion of interpretive validity distinguishes a form of accuracy that lies between the first form, descriptive validity, resting entirely on observable, consensually validated data and the more contestable inferences of the third type, theoretical validity. While there is "no in-principle access to data that would unequivocally address threats to [interpretive] validity" (Maxwell 1992: 290), the descriptive accounts serve as warrants. In other words, has the ethnographer/observer provided sufficient evidence to substantiate his or her claim or interpretation of what these events and actions signify to the actors? Consensus should be achievable within the relevant community of actors and/or readers that the interpretation is supported by the reported descriptive data. The terms (language and concepts) of both descriptive and interpretive validity are, to use Geertz's term, "experience-near"—the local language in use among the actors—although interpretive validity might also involve assessments of the accuracy of informants' reports (to which we will return later with an example from our fieldwork).

Third, *theoretical validity* moves the ethnographic account further from the actors' behavior, language, meanings, and interpretations to a more abstract account that proposes to explain what has been observed in the terms of the scholarly literature. No longer a matter of what the described activity means to the actors, theoretical validity asks what this activity or group signifies to the scholarly audience. What is this an example of, and to what other examples should we compare it? What conceptual label shall we affix to this setting and activity? "Theoretical validity thus refers to an account's validity as a theory of some, phenomenon" (Maxwell, 1992:51). Both the concepts used and the relationships proposed are independently assessed for what is conventionally called *construct validity* (Bernard, 2000:50–51) and *inferential or causal validity* (Cook & Campbell, 1979), although not all theories attempt to offer causal explanations.

The key distinction between the types of validity (descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical) in this schema lies in the "presence or absence of agreement within the community of inquirers about the descriptive or interpretive terms used. Any challenge to the meaning of the terms, or appropriateness of their application to a given phenomenon, shifts the validity issues from descriptive or interpretive to theoretical" (Maxwell, 1992:52).

Generalizability, a fourth form of validity, invokes considerations that are common across the social sciences, referring to "the extent to which the particular situation is representative of a wider population" or set (Hammersley, 1992:79). There is, however, a level of analysis issue here concerning generalizability that distinguishes internal from external validity. For generalizability (external validity) beyond the particular group or organization, the qualitative researcher must meet the same standards as any quantitative researcher: demonstrate representativeness. For most qualitative researchers, however, internal generalizability is far more important because there are strong arguments for studying outliers and unique cases as existence proofs and means for identifying variation (Small, 2009). For internal validity, however, we need to know whether the reported data (activities, statements, documents) are representative of the activities, statements, and materials of that particular group or organization, regardless of whether the group or setting is representative of some larger set. We need to avoid cherry picking examples that support a claim rather than synthesizing across all the evidence and examples.¹

Training Ethnographers and Enhancing Ethnographic Validity Through Group Collaboration

Although some universities provide excellent training in fieldwork and ethnography, it is neither as common nor as consistent as is the preparation in quantitative data collection and various modes of statistical analyses. Thus, it is not unusual, for example, to meet a graduate student eager to begin

fieldwork on a subject about which he or she has read a great deal and knows a range of scholarly positions and arguments, but who does not know how to take the first step in formulating a research design, identifying a field site, or gaining access. Or, one encounters more advanced graduate students about to write dissertations based on extensive fieldwork who have never had training in qualitative data analysis urgently seeking advice about how to make interpretive and theoretical inferences from their data. The conventional pattern of training is most often through one-on-one mentoring, although we may achieve more successful and more efficient training if we work with students in groups. In addition, training students in groups would work to challenge the fetish of ethnographic research as a personal immersion and form of creative discovery.

The Governing Green Labs project began in 2002 when Professor Susan Silbey initiated a study of the development and implementation of an environmental health and safety management (EHS) system at Eastern University, a large research university in the United States. The project included Ph.D. students from four interdisciplinary graduate programs at MIT: Urban Studies and Planning in the School of Architecture and Planning; History and Anthropology of Science, Technology and Society in the School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences; Behavior and Policy Studies in the Sloan School of Management; and Technology and Public Policy in the School of Engineering. The diversity of students' background knowledge, training programs, and distinct research interests was simultaneously exciting and challenging. Depending on their interests, students were assigned to collect data via participant observation and interviews within a particular group or department in the organization being studied (either Welldon University or Eastern University): senior administrators, department managers, legal-technical specialists, and laboratory researchers. Extending over 10 years, the project involved two generations of students. Beginning in the spring of 2003, the research group met every Wednesday afternoon during the summer and Friday mornings during the term to exchange information and begin to piece together a complicated field site. Students were asked to send in weekly field notes. Selections of these field notes were discussed collectively and coded during team meetings. This routine helped aspiring ethnographers develop a work discipline that, as we describe later, improved the descriptive, interpretive, and internal validity of the data. At the outset, the single most notable consequence of the group activity was its success in overcoming individual reticence about sharing one's experiences, appearing inadequate to the task, or displaying ignorance.

The general project was driven by Silbey's initial research questions, but it slowly evolved, as much fieldwork does, as more and more was learned about the organization and the problem of transforming laboratory practices to improve EHS performance. The research sought to understand how diverse institutional resources and organizational constraints influenced individual and organizational performance (and if they did)—in this case, performances mandated by law. And further, it sought to understand the relationships between law and science by looking directly within the home of science, the laboratory. Through participant observation, interviewing, and inductive analysis, Silbey intended to capture the variations in interpretation and consciousness of legal regulations that are sedimented in and through organizational cultures (Edelman & Suchman, 1997; Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Silbey, 1992). She sought, also, to understand what place law may have, or not, in routine scientific practice. By observing the invention of a new management system from day one of the commitment to create such a system, implement it, and disseminate it across the university, the research sought to unpack the black box of regulatory performance. By mapping the ways in which local organizational processes and subcultures produce environmental health and safety practices, the research hoped to discover the conditions and challenges for sustainable improvement in environmental conditions. Alternatively, the research sought to understand how good intentions may nonetheless produce unwanted or unanticipated outcomes and not actually improve environmental sustainability. As the project unfolded, many more questions arose, providing opportunities for students to follow lines of analysis fed by their disciplinary interests. Figure 14.1 provides an overview of how the process of validity enhancement unfolded through ongoing engagement among ethnographers.

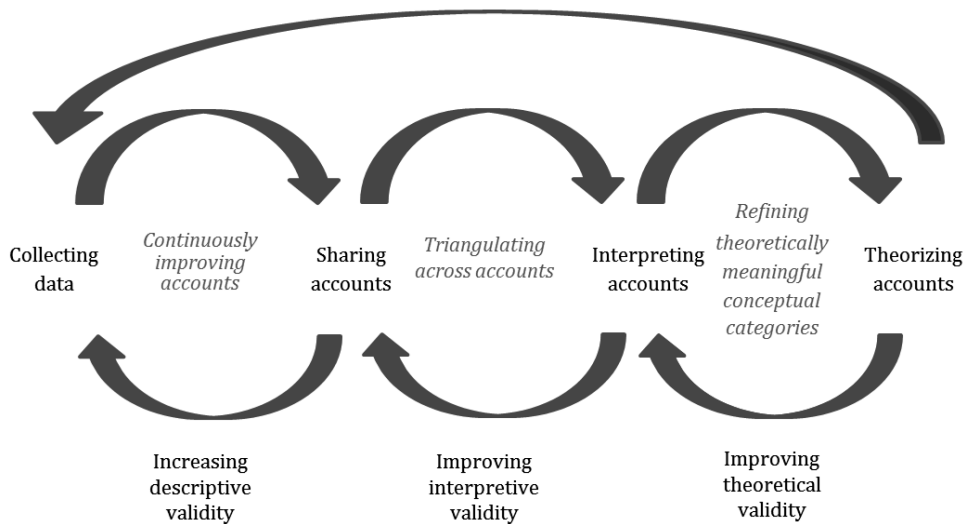


Figure 14.1 Collecting, Analyzing, and Theorizing Accounts Through Team Ethnography

Continuously Improving Accounts for Descriptive Validity

Researchers exchanged field notes, reading and discussing not only the substantive content of the notes but also critiquing the quality of the text of the notes. Was this thick description? What assumptions were embedded in particular words and concepts? What needs to be known to understand a reference? Were phenomena and actions situated locally as well as in relation to alternatives not present or possibly seen elsewhere? What was missing? Was the observer noticing silences and omissions? Was the researcher's focus too close or too distant? Most of these conversations concerned how the ethnographer could know or might have apprehended what was being described, striking out statements that were impressionistic rather than empirically observable, shifting linguistic terms to stay as close to the native categories and terms as possible, and offering local definitions where necessary.

Through these discussions, the ethnographers in training were challenged to write detailed descriptions of the scene, sometimes attending to the material conditions, the aural and aromatic sensations, and at other times focusing on language and affect. Sometimes two or more researchers attended the same meeting, learned of the same laboratory accident or injury from different sources, and heard the same gossip circulating from one group to another. Field notes were compared and discrepancies and omissions were discussed along with emerging commonalities. These discussions were opportunities to learn the discipline of constructing an empirical account and testing its descriptive validity against other empirical accounts and multiple forms of data (e.g., looking for paper records, disseminated memos, email trails). Field workers also became aware of their tendencies to report some types of data (e.g., conflict or noncompliance) and gloss over other observations (e.g., agreement or compliance) and were able to correct these tendencies, taking in the full picture over time. Descriptions generated more questions than answers, pushing the researchers in diverse directions to seek out more informants, to visit archives and organizational records, and to search the scholarly literature for comparisons and variations. This ongoing reflexive engagement about what could be known informed the practice of collecting data and continuously improved the descriptive validity of the data.

Triangulating Across Accounts for Interpretive Validity

While the accounts that our subjects gave were taken at face value, scenes were triangulated to extract a richer empirical reconstruction, often demanding that participants' divergent accounts be explained and reconciled. The data collected in one lab or one series of meetings was put in the context of other labs and meetings. For example, at different meetings with different groups, fieldworkers heard stories that the dean of science had closed a laboratory because of failures to meet environmental health and safety regulations—in other words, because the lab had consistently “failed” inspections. We collected all the different accounts heard by different researchers and assessed the ways in which they differed and collided. Together, these accounts told us about how the actors understood the authority of the dean, the limits of academic freedom, and the authority of law. However, it was also important to understand whether the dean had in fact closed a laboratory for failing an inspection. We pursued these two avenues collectively and in parallel; that is, we collected all the stories and noted in what situations they were narrated, and we also traced the story back to the actors in the stories. In doing so, we became sensitive to the differences between descriptive and interpretive validity and also to the analytical opportunities offered by our recognition of the discrepancies in the stories.

Rookie ethnographers often face an overwhelming amount of stimuli in the field. When a researcher enters the field, much is different from what was expected. We are not blank slates; we are competent mature social actors and we come with an abundance of tacit as well as explicit assumptions about how the world works. We are social scientists, after all, and we have read a great deal about the site and the phenomena we are studying. We deal simultaneously with our interpretations and our subjects' interpretations. Although our initial naïve interpretations must give way to the data and analysis process, they can be stubborn and overshadow those of our subjects. The continuous discussion about our subjects' interpretations helped to excavate and subsequently submerge our own perspectives, and we became more open to local understandings and to the need to triangulate and validate empirical observations. Every ethnographer must do this to succeed; the group process seemed to accelerate the development of this fieldwork skill.

As it turned out, the dean had shut down a laboratory some years earlier while he had been serving as a department head. It was not, however, in response to safety or environmental violations, but because the principal investigator—the professor—had overspent his research accounts and had not responded to requests to reign in his spending. Nonetheless, an apocryphal account that miscreant laboratories could be shut down was circulating as a warning to lab managers and scientists. The message was clear: This dean and these new regulations carried consequences should the lab managers and scientists become lax and inattentive to the safety requirements. At the same time as we were able to record the circulating stories and track the accurate historical event, we were discovering the hierarchy of organizational concerns. Although creating safer and cleaner laboratories was a high priority at the university that garnered abundant resources, financial and scientific misconduct called forth more immediate and serious sanctions: shutting down a scientist's laboratory. This story, what is sometimes referred to as an *atrocious tale* (Best, 1990), allowed us to locate the various regulatory regimes and organizational practices within an overarching account of the university's values and enacted priorities. We could offer a more accurate interpretation of the story for the various and differentially located actors.

Refining Conceptual Categories for Theoretical Validity

Newcomers were always presented with an overview of the project: a history of what had been done to date; an opportunity to explore published and unpublished accounts; and initial questions to consider for their own work, questions posed in the form of “what is this site or activity a case of?” For instance, initial questions centered on the role of monitoring systems in organizing working

relations and the effects of professional authority and autonomy on responses to regulation. The project also included a database with relevant readings on science, safety, and knowledge-sharing in organizations. This initial scoping helped individual researchers focus on theoretically relevant categories of interest. Discussions around “what is this site a case of?” provided an array of topics to investigate. The questions and associated readings allowed researchers in the team to focus observations, see data in a broader context and build on contemporary debates in sociology, legal, science, and organizational studies. While researchers eventually deviated from these orienting questions as they developed their own interests, the students were provided with an initial heuristic with which to engage conceptually meaningful categories. Theoretical validity can be challenging when members of the team are drawing from diverse literatures and are unfamiliar with the theoretical debates and advances in a field. However, exploring shared yet diverse avenues of inquiry and attempts to theorize the data together helped the research team to discard theoretical preoccupations that were valued in some disciplines and fields but were not salient in the field site. Textual coding of fieldnotes and interview transcripts was done on a continuous basis and early cohorts of fieldworkers did this collectively. However, because each team member came with different theoretical backgrounds and interests and was planning to produce a scholarly work relevant for the field in which he or she was seeking a degree, attempts to create common conceptual codes was a struggle and was eventually abandoned.

Because the team included members from diverse disciplines and professional communities, the theoretical analyses addressed multiple phenomena and theoretical questions, (e.g., organizational change and regulatory compliance; disciplinary variations in doing science; institutional and normative ordering) and produced theories of newly discovered phenomena (e.g., relational regulation [Huising & Silbey, 2011; Silbey, 2011]) and role performance (e.g., sociological citizen [Coslovsky, Huising, & Silbey, 2009]).

External and Internal Generalizability

The team project is the most effective means of dealing with questions of external and internal validity. Obviously, multisited ethnography can produce accounts that apply across a larger population, offering generalizability that one site cannot. More often than not, research teams offer more extensive and deeper multisited ethnography than can be produced by one field worker (Marcus, 1995). So, for example, Burawoy (2000) collated studies conducted by his students of the responses of individuals and organizations to processes of globalization. In our study of the development and implementation of a management system for laboratory hazards, we did not seek external generalizability through multiple organizational sites, although several students worked in laboratories in more than one university. Rather, the overall project was an in-depth case study of one university, tracing over time the processes of organizational change as enacted by participants across all levels of the organization and variations in departments and disciplines. Without question, working as a research team enhanced the internal validity because data was shared across diverse analysts and because analysis proceeded systematically by multiple researchers. There could be no purposive selection of evidence that was not corroborated across organizational locations and across observers.

Challenges of Team Ethnography

One essential, practical challenge for team ethnography is the need to balance data sharing and individual contributions. Although students were invited into the project to address questions Silbey had identified in her research proposals, students in the project were asked to write their own papers, allowing them to develop their own theoretical and empirical interests. For instance, while the project had an initial emphasis on how regulation filters through large and complex organizations,

fieldworkers developed other themes, such as how professional and occupational struggles shape regulatory compliance or how experimental materials shaped laboratory practice. The theme of safety regulation functioned as a lens revealing other organizational dynamics, and this expansion of focus enabled multiple contributions.

Early writings and attempts at theorizing also functioned as a heuristic for later contributors. New observations and interpretations were compared to existing works and created an impetus to build on extant interpretations. For instance, while early works focused on the role of EHS personnel in mediating regulatory compliance (Huising 2014, 2015; Huising & Silbey, 2011, 2013), later works explored how ground-level personnel (researchers and technicians) creatively recombined legal rules with local practice (Evans, 2014; Evans & Silbey, 2014) and struggled with moral dilemmas engendered by research strategies (Evans, 2015). Some papers pursued lines of analysis related to the use of technologies to audit regulatory compliance (Silbey & Agrawal, 2011). Others considered the place of law in the laboratory (Silbey & Cavicchi, 2005) and controversies in science (Silbey & Roosth, 2008).

Conclusion

Contemporary scholarly norms considerably limit the time frame within which researchers can collect, analyze, and publish their results. Professional expectations for a greater volume of publications as the standard of respectable accomplishment, coupled with the increasing importance of journal articles rather than book-length manuscripts, mitigate against the traditional practices of ethnographic research: one scholar totally immersed in one location for a long period of time. In this new hyperproductive scholarly universe, working in teams becomes ever more attractive, and thus group ethnography is a more interesting research option. In a sense, transforming ethnography from a personal exploration to a research collaboration mimics the evolution of scientific research practices that were the subject of this project.

Contemporary experimental science is almost exclusively a collaborative group effort. Not only is team ethnography more efficiently productive, but as we indicated previously, it also offers increased validity across all dimensions—descriptive, interpretive, theoretical, and generalizable.

For those interested in studying organizational processes, especially complex processes and distributed organization characteristic of our historical time, a fieldwork team allows deep, spatially and temporally extended involvement to study not only the entire organization from top to bottom, but also often from the beginning to the end of a project or organizational change. Team work permits members to enter and exit and to be replaced or supplemented to create continuity where one or few researchers could not.

The lasting value of many ethnographic works has relied primarily on the authors' abilities to convey with clarity and nuance and make familiar the everyday experience of unfamiliar groups and cultures. As Alexander (1989) notes: "Because [social science's] object is life, it depends on the [social] scientist's own ability to understand life. It depends on idiosyncratic abilities to experience, to understand and to know." Alexander (1989) suggests two ways in which this knowledge distinguishes itself: through the interpretation of states of mind and through the reconstruction of the empirical world. Although ethnographers may bring unique sensitivities to their fieldwork, the skills needed to create detailed, subtle observation and interpretation and for the careful reconstruction of raw and disorderly empirical worlds can be made explicit and developed more effectively through collaborative strategies. Rather than being idiosyncratic, it can be a shared set of highly skilled techniques as well as developed sensibilities. Team ethnography allows for this collective construction of sociologically meaningful categories of interest, the development of more complex and complete accounts, and ultimately the transformation of a personal understanding of a field to generalizable social science.

Table 14.1 Examples of Team Ethnographies

<i>Reference</i>	<i>Research Context/ Phenomena</i>	<i>Types of Group Allocation and Engagement With Research Context/Phenomena</i>	<i>Outcomes/Results of Methodological Approach</i>
Burawoy (2000)	Globalization	Multiple industries; multiple organizations; multiple roles within and across organizations; collection of independent student projects	Diverse examples across varied sites to develop a general theory of the implications of globalization on work, communities, and organizations
Stark (2009)	Creative work	Multiple industries; multiple organizations; multiple roles within and across organizations; three ethnographies of different organizations engaging in creative work	Diverse examples across varied sites to develop a general theory of the role of competing accounts of worth on creative work
Barley (1996)	Technical work	Multiple industries; multiple organizations; same role in different industries and organizations; nine mini-ethnographies of different technicians' occupations	Large sample of same role across varied sites to develop general theory of technicians' work
Heimer (2008, ongoing)	Development and use of medical protocols in AIDS clinics	Single industry; multiple clinics; three types of medical protocols (clinical practice guidelines, rules for the conduct of research, and governance protocols); ethnographies in matched AIDS clinics in the U.S., Uganda, Africa, and Thailand	International sampling to allow for institutional comparison of the intersection of law and medicine
Bearman (2009)	Unique occupation: Doormen in New York City	Single industry (real estate); multiple organizations of same type (housing); same role in different organizations within single industry; sample of dispersed members of an occupation in a large city	Large sample of same role across similar organizations to develop in-depth, detailed account of a role, an occupation
Becker, Greer, Hughes, & Strauss (1961)	Medical education and practice	Single industry (medicine); single typical organization; same role at different stages of professional development; engaged full organizational population, no sampling	Efficiently observed 4-year process in 1 year, holding historical context constant; in-depth account of a single institution (medical education); proposed general model of a social process (professional socialization)
Gouldner (1954)	Organization of industrial production	Single industry (mining); single typical organization; multiple roles across single organization; engaged full organizational population	Able to observe entire organization over time to map change processes within limited historical frame; in-depth account of a common phenomenon (bureaucratic organization); proposed general model of the phenomenon

Reference	Research Context/ Phenomena	Types of Group Allocation and Engagement With Research Context/Phenomena	Outcomes/Results of Methodological Approach
Huising & Silbey (2011)	Risk management, regulatory compliance, scientific practices	Single industry (university research science); single typical organization; multiple roles across single organization; engaged across full organizational hierarchy, stratified sample of disciplines/departments and random sample of labs within disciplines/departments	Able to observe entire organization over time to map change processes within limited historical frame; in-depth accounts and models of multiple phenomena (organizational change, regulatory compliance, disciplinary variations in doing science); proposed model of relational regulation.

Note

1 Maxwell offers a fifth form of evaluative validity, referring to the normative assessment of that which has been described or explained. This category ought not to be intrinsically different in qualitative or quantitative studies. There is, however, a large body of scholarship written from a specifically critical perspective that is designed to reveal the organization of power and interests in social organization as well as the interests served by those scholarly accounts of social practices. Such scholarship may be considered evaluative in the sense that it seeks not only to describe the interests operating in social practices—the phenomena being described as well as the descriptions, but “adds to them a superordinate benchmark . . . [and] considers a [scholarly] work more fundamentally according to the interests it serves” (Koval, 1988:127–128). From some points of view, the entire history of sociology as a critical enterprise, written from the perspective of outsiders unmasking social forms to identify what is partially hidden, categorizing what is revealed, and labeling what is sorted, does not achieve the status of critique or fidelity to its critical mission unless it adopts normative positions and attempts to shape the uses to which knowledge is put (Horkheimer, 1972). In other words, forgoing evaluative validity, ethnography cannot serve as social critique (cf. Marcus & Fischer, 1999).

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