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ABSTRACT

We extend Fine's (2003) model of 'peopled ethnography' for studying small groups to the study of larger social units, including organizations and communities. While studies of small groups often recognize the presence of macro-level social structures, they typically treat these as backdrops to the interaction scene which constrain and enable group life, not as units of analysis in their own right. Yet small groups are embedded in and help constitute larger units of analysis, such as organizations and communities. We argue that studies of these larger social structures can be extended beyond ethnographic observation of the interactions that help comprise them, making peopled ethnography applicable to units of analysis larger than the small group. We offer illustrative examples of organizational and community ethnographies.

KEYWORDS

community, ethnography, organization, peopled ethnography, small group, sociology

In his paper 'Towards a Peopled Ethnography' (2003), Gary Alan Fine reflects on his own research to develop and articulate the principles of 'peopled ethnography,' a methodological strategy that takes interacting small groups as the primary focus of ethnographic investigation. Given this research strategy, Fine observes that his 'studies of culture are fundamentally micro-sociological, even when theoretical concerns are grounded in more macro-sociological concepts' (2003: 53). In this paper, we suggest that researchers can use 'peopled ethnography' to study units of analysis larger than the small group, making the method relevant to macro-sociological theorizing. After summarizing the principles of 'peopled ethnography,' we discuss how to modify

this strategy to study higher-level units of analysis. We then offer examples of organizational and community ethnographies that demonstrate both the theoretical contributions gained from this strategy as well as the challenges researchers confront in ‘peopling’ ethnographies of higher-level units of analysis.

Peopled ethnography

Peopled ethnography, a model for both conducting and presenting ethnographic research, has two distinguishing features. First, peopled ethnography gives primacy to the observation of social interaction while recognizing the presence of macro-sociological conditions that enter into and shape such encounters.

The term peopled ethnography suggests that it is not the individuals being observed who direct our interest but rather their position within a group or social system: the set of actors and their group ‘peoples’ the ethnographic analysis and description ... The ultimate goal of this writing is to see people in action, or perhaps more precisely, to see people in interaction.

(Fine, 2003: 46)

Second, peopled ethnography emphasizes the interdependent relationship between theory and data, calling for tight integration of the two. Researchers do not use data passively to illustrate theory, but use data to ground theoretical claims and facilitate theoretical development (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). Peopled ethnography is a methodological strategy producing ‘grounded theory’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) rich in theoretical development and in the presentation of empirical data (e.g. Burawoy, 1979; Fincham, 2006; Horowitz, 1983; Thorne, 1993), creating a sense of place while generalizing from that place (Sikes, 2005). It is distinct from ‘personal ethnography,’ which is rich in ethnographic description but lacking in theoretical development (e.g. Jackall, 1997), and ‘postulated ethnography,’ which is rich in theoretical development but lacking ethnographic description (e.g. Hochschild, 1983).

Peopled ethnography, in its ideal form, rests on the collective support of ‘seven pillars’ (Fine, 2003). First, a peopled ethnography is theoretical, moving beyond mere description to answer the questions of ‘how?’ and ‘why?’ so as to establish the scope conditions of a theory and identify other empirical settings to which the theory applies.¹ Second, it builds on other ethnographies and research studies. Ethnographers do not enter the field blind but use previous research to inform data collection and analysis. Third, peopled ethnography examines interacting small groups – locations where interaction is ongoing and meaningful (Pettinger, 2005). Fourth, it relies on multiple research sites to satisfy the need for generalizability (see Clarke, 2003: 556, 559; Katz, 2001: 446). Fifth, peopled ethnography is based on extensive observation. Ethnographers immerse themselves in their field sites, emerging when their observations reach a point of saturation (Rock, 2001: 32). Duration of fieldwork by itself is therefore not an adequate indicator of extensive observation. Sixth, reports of peopled ethnography are richly ethnographic. Ethnographers present detailed vignettes to develop and elaborate theoretical concepts and ideas; in so doing, they demonstrate that their observation was extensive. Last, a peopled ethnography distances the researcher from the researched. The researcher

maintains analytical objectivity even while immersed in the field and does not regard his or her informants as possessing all relevant knowledge of the setting (Adler and Adler, 1987; Belousov et al., 2007; Pollner and Emerson, 2001: 124; Rock, 2001: 32).² This model emphasizes *'theory building, detailed observation and data presentation, a focus on continuing group interaction, and the downplaying of individual actors and individual scenes to fulfill the need for generalizability'* (Fine, 2003: 54–5).

Moving beyond small groups

As formulated, peopled ethnography privileges small groups as units of analysis, but in this paper we propose that we need not restrict peopled ethnography to the study of small groups. We can employ this strategy to study larger units, such as organizations, neighborhoods, and towns, while building on a group model. Social systems of all sizes (not just small groups) constitute sites of interaction and are amenable to a peopled ethnography. However, to study large collectivities using peopled ethnography, we make two modifications to the above model. First, we recognize that levels of analysis are embedded within one another. That is, small groups produce and are products of organizations and communities. To offer a holistic account of a collectivity, peopled ethnography of higher-order units of analysis requires ethnographic observations of interaction occurring within and across the social actors and groups that embed in and help constitute it. Second, for reasons of practicality and generalizability, examining additional data sources – including interviews, texts, and quantitative data – becomes increasingly important when studying large units of analysis such as an organization or a community area.³ Below we consider these points in detail.

SAMPLING EMBEDDED SOCIAL ACTORS

All macro-sociology has micro-sociological foundations; social structure exists in the ongoing interpersonal interactions that comprise it (Collins, 1981; Maines, 1977). This is the theoretical justification for extending the model of peopled ethnography to the study of larger collectivities. The peopled ethnography of a higher-level unit of analysis (e.g. an organization or a community) is built up from observations of the interactions within and between the lower-order social actors (e.g. individuals, small groups, departments) who comprise it.

Retaining a concern with social interaction, this principle is consistent with – and extends – the focus on interacting small groups. Interaction occurs between a variety of social actors – individuals, small groups, and other lower-order collectivities (e.g. organizational departments, neighborhood blocks) that may be embedded within one another (e.g. the organization, social movement, neighborhood). These lower-order social actors are our *units of observation* – they 'people' the ethnography. The interactions occurring within or between these embedded social actors are strategic points at which to 'observe' the larger collectivity. However, if we limit our units of observation to the small groups traditionally studied by social psychologists, we ignore less group-like units of observation and the interaction scenes in which they participate. Numerous interaction scenes occur within and across the boundaries of different units of observation, and a holistic study of a given higher-order unit of analysis must sample the variety of its constituent units and their associated

interaction scenes.

The peopled ethnography of large collectivities confronts the issue of generalizability on two levels. Sociologists traditionally concern themselves with higher-order generalizability – the generalizability of their findings across units of analysis of the same type (e.g. across similar organizations or across similar neighborhoods). Before researchers studying large collectivities grapple with higher-order generalizability, they first must come to terms with lower-order generalizability: the generalizability of findings *within* their unit of analysis. This may be difficult to ascertain when the unit of analysis is a large, geographically dispersed collectivity comprised of numerous lower-order social actors. To obtain lower-order generalizability, ethnographers must investigate the range of interaction situations among the units of observation in the larger collectivity, so as not to generalize mistakenly about their unit of analysis based on findings idiosyncratic to a particular unit of observation.

THE VALUE OF INTERVIEWS AND TEXTS

Although Fine's abstract suggests that in peopled ethnography 'the understanding of the setting is grounded in a set of detailed vignettes, based on field notes, interview texts, and texts that group members produce' (2003: 41), the paper does not detail the use of interviews and texts for peopled ethnography. We assert that for reasons of practicality and generalizability, interviews, texts (including artifacts we can analyze as texts), and even survey data gain importance as additional and complementary data sources when studying large units of analysis ethnographically (Clarke, 2003: 559; Rock, 2001: 37; Weiss, 1994: 7, 10).

Ethnography is a time-consuming method of data collection no matter what the unit of analysis. When one's unit of analysis is significantly larger and more geographically dispersed than a small group (as many organizations and communities are), ethnography is especially daunting (Tota, 2004). A thorough ethnographic study of just one of these as a research site is difficult, if not impossible – an ethnographer cannot witness everything simultaneously, and it is often impractical to spend time studying all such subunits in succession, frustrating attempts to obtain lower-order generalizability. Studying multiple research sites to obtain higher-order generalizability, as the ideal-typical peopled ethnography does, is even more difficult. Given these practical limitations of ethnography, conducting interviews or surveys and analyzing texts offer less time-intensive and more efficient means of data collection, allowing the ethnographer to sample the perspectives of multiple actors from within and across large units of analysis, contributing to lower- and higher-order generalizability. These supplementary sources also allow us to gain access to the perspectives of actors and scenes that may otherwise be closed (see Clarke, 2003).

Aside from these practical considerations, theoretical reasons exist to supplement ethnographic data with interviews, texts, and quantitative data. Macrosociology rests on micro-sociological foundations, but the reverse is also true: all micro-sociology has a macro-sociological basis. Macro-sociological concepts of central importance to the interpretation and explanation of social action are *constraint*, or 'perceived boundaries on action,' and *exteriority*, or the 'real effects of societal infrastructure that transcend the sense

that individuals might make of it,' (Fine, 1991: 163). Organizations, communities, and other collective actors are more than the sum total of the interactions that comprise them. Interviews, texts, and quantitative data can reveal perceived and real limitations on (and facilitators of) action that may not be apparent from the ethnographic observation of interaction. In interviews, respondents reflect upon their actions, giving insight into the constraints they perceive given their location in the social system. Analyzing texts, artifacts, and quantitative survey or network data may reveal limitations on action of which social actors are unaware. Texts may be reified and have consequences for action long after their individual authors are gone; the architecture and planning of the built environment patterns action whether or not social actors perceive it; and an actor's location in a broader social network may also constrain or enable action independent of that actor's perceptions. Further, finding systematic differences in data from different types of sources may be theoretically important. Recognition of the differences between an organization's structure, as codified in organizational texts, and how organizations actually operate, as observed through ethnography, has contributed important concepts to organizational theory, such as 'organizational decoupling' (Scott, 1995).

Below we offer a set of organizational and community ethnographies that exemplify the methodological strategy of peopled ethnography, but these are by no means the only 'large-n' ethnographies that fit the peopled ethnography prototype. In the end, we chose to highlight four ethnographies that span a broad historical and topical gamut. We do not provide an exhaustive list of peopled ethnographies of communities and organizations, and we should also note that 'peopled ethnography' is an ideal type and its perfect incarnation is elusive. The studies we discuss are supported by several of the pillars of peopled ethnography, illustrate the challenges of applying the model to complex social structures, and are exemplary in the way that they integrate (and illustrate the interdependence of) theory, methods of data collection, and data presentation. We begin by detailing how each study utilizes the pillars of peopled ethnography, before using the studies to demonstrate the challenges of studying higher-level units of analysis.

'Peopling' organizational ethnography

As a methodological strategy for studying organizations, peopled ethnography has been underutilized. Ethnographers often treat organizations as a structural backdrop for interaction, rather than as units of analysis in their own right. Both Barley and Kunda (2001) and Morrill and Fine (1997) have lamented the current paucity of ethnographic studies of work informing organizational theory. The nostalgia for classic organizational ethnographies of industrial work that refined theories of bureaucracy reveals a yearning not only for ethnography, but for peopled ethnography and the grounded theory it yields.

For example, Alvin Gouldner's (1954) classic *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy* follows many principles of peopled ethnography. An empirical investigation of bureaucratization within a single gypsum plant, it builds on, challenges, and revises Weber's theory of bureaucracy by demonstrating that Weber's ideal type encompasses but fails to recognize variation in bureaucratic forms. Gouldner identifies three forms or patterns of bureaucracy present in the plant: the mock bureaucracy, the representative bureaucracy, and the

punishment-centered bureaucracy (but see Hallett and Ventresca, 2006, for a reading of Gouldner as a micro-analysis). Gouldner's research design examines multiple embedded social actors, including workers and management as well as two culturally and physically distinct production spheres of the plant: the underground gypsum mine and the surface factory. His understanding of these segments of the plant is grounded in three years of observation at the plant as well as data from 174 extensively cited interviews and analyses of documentary sources, including 'newspaper clippings, interoffice memoranda, private correspondence, Company reports, government reports about the Company, union contracts, and arbitrators' decisions' (Gouldner, 1954: 251). Of particular import among the documentary sources are the company rules Gouldner uses as his indicator of bureaucracy.

Gouldner writes, 'The objective of [this] research is to clarify some of the social processes leading to different degrees of bureaucratization' (1954: 27). He finds that one factor leading to increased bureaucratization is the entrance of a new manager into the existing informal order of the plant, upsetting that order. Bureaucracy is a solution to the problems faced by the new manager, who is charged with increasing efficiency, but who has no informal social ties to draw on to carry this out. Gouldner's summary reveals the theoretical benefits of studying multiple segments of the organization: 'Since groups possess forms of stratification, it cannot be tacitly assumed that all individuals, or all positions in a system of stratification, exert equal influence on those decisions from which bureaucratization emerges as a planned or unanticipated consequence' (1954: 98).

Gouldner found that bureaucratization did not proceed evenly throughout the plant. The subsurface mine and the surface factory exhibited different degrees of bureaucratization. The different motivations of the miners, the greater informal social cohesion among them, and the high level of physical danger present in the mine all militated against bureaucratization, causing the mine to be less bureaucratized than the surface factory. In addition to identifying different *degrees* of bureaucratization, Gouldner also analyzes and compares particular rules resulting in the construction of ideal types identifying three *qualitatively* different patterns of bureaucracy. These different patterns derive less from rules than from differences in their perceived legitimacy and enforcement by both management and workers. The pattern of 'mock bureaucracy' existed when neither management nor workers believed in the legitimacy of a rule imposed by outsiders and so both groups violated it regularly. The pattern of the 'representative bureaucracy' existed where *both* management and workers initiated a rule and perceived it as legitimate (e.g. safety rules). The third pattern of 'punishment-centered bureaucracy' existed where *either* management *or* workers perceived the rules as legitimate, so that enforcing the rule violated the values of one of the groups. In short, Gouldner's study rests on many of the principles of peopled ethnography, illustrating the application of this model to the study of large units of analysis. *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy* is theoretically informed by Weber's theory of bureaucracy. It is based on extensive observation and rich data, building theory and constructing empirically grounded ideal types. Gouldner devotes attention to interacting small groups, and immerses himself in his site while maintaining analytic distance.

A more recent example of a 'peopled' organizational ethnography is Gideon Kunda's (1992) *Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation*. Building on his other research (see Barley and

Kunda, 1992), which argues that 'the idea of developing strong cultures ...is the latest stage in the historical evolution of managerial ideology toward an emphasis on normative control' (Kunda, 1992: 217–8), Kunda explores organizational ideology on the ground. In *Engineering Culture*, he conducts a year-long ethnography of an organization widely known for its normative control strategy, asking whether and how this ideology is implemented in practice and with what consequences for its members.

Kunda limits his unit of analysis to High Technologies Corporation's ('Tech's') Engineering Division, a large subunit with 600 employees, most of whom work at the Lyndsville facility. The Engineering Division, like Tech, contains many subgroups and segments. Kunda captures the complexity of this environment by sampling the lower-order social actors in the Engineering Division. For instance, his ethnography consists of six months of observation at the Lyndsville facility where the engineers work, and six months of observation at the corporate office where management works. Adding to the richness of his research, Kunda triangulates data from multiple sources, using interviews and texts to complement his ethnography.

Consider Kunda's analysis of organizational texts and their relationship to his other data sources: before Kunda can examine the implementation of an organizational ideology, he must first identify the ideology disseminated to Tech members. He uncovers it by analyzing the 'varieties of printed and recorded work available to Tech members – the articulated and relatively enduring inscriptions and codifications of the company point of view' (1992: 53). Organizational texts articulate an ideology that characterizes the organization and elaborates the 'member role,' or the desired attributes of employees. Kunda demonstrates that the organizational ideology disseminated to members is pervasive and rather uniform by analyzing texts that sample the voices of multiple actors embedded in the organization, allowing him to compare these texts for consistency. These texts reflect the authority of three classes of authors: managers, culture 'experts,' and objective observers. The voice of management appears in anonymously authored documents such as the 'company philosophy,' where 'management's collective preferences are distilled as abstract principles, catch phrases, and key words,' as well as in the more pervasive personal views of known managers whose expressions of the ideology appear in one of Tech's 200 newsletters or videotapes housed in the company library. The voice of 'expert authority' is that of Tech's in-house ethnographers, who produce handbooks, manuals, self-help literature, and culture studies that provide a more independent and 'scientific' analysis of the organizational culture. The third set of texts rests on the 'objective authority' of outside observers, including academics, consultants, and journalists who made Tech the subject of their research and whose reports are stored in the company library or selectively excerpted and displayed in the organization. While there are some differences in form and content of the ideological statements across sources, they are largely consistent. Kunda's systematic analysis of texts produced by different types of authors convince us of the lower-order generalizability of his findings, and given that he accessed these texts in the course of fieldwork, they suggest that his study rests on extensive observation.

Kunda follows this analysis of the codified ideology with a discussion of the 'social context in which these claims are made and enforced' (1992: 91), providing rich ethnographic descriptions of 'the symbolic interaction through which ideology is brought to life.' Kunda observes numerous more or less group-like

interaction scenes – including formal meetings and seminars, training sessions, lunchtime talks, workgroup meetings, and daily informal interaction among co-workers – where ideology is not only disseminated, but enacted. Theoretically informed by the work of Goffman and Bourdieu, Kunda presents numerous vignettes from the various interaction scenes to demonstrate that the presentations are rituals following rules for the construction of a ‘ritual frame’ and offering opportunities for members, regardless of their status, to exercise symbolic power so as to maintain a definition of the situation consistent with the organizational ideology. As such, the interaction rituals provide occasions for embracing the member role as well as for distancing oneself from it. Kunda’s analysis is impressive for its careful attention to detail, demonstrating the extent of his observation. Kunda notes the differential organizational status of interactants in the interaction scenes, and his analysis reveals that the opportunities for and the forms of ‘role distancing’ and ‘role embracement’ differ depending on the status of those interacting. Kunda finally considers the effects of the organizational ideology and its implementation on the self, using ‘interviews in which members discuss their own experiences; observation-based descriptions of members’ behavior; and analysis of self-display through the use of artifacts’ (1992: 162). Again sampling the variety of social actors in the Engineering Division, Kunda analyzes three categories of workers: engineers, the staff, and temporary workers. He discovers that not all organizational members are equally subject to normative control and the demands of the member role.

While Kunda’s sampling of embedded social actors reveals that not all ‘selves’ are affected similarly, his use of multiple methods reveals the complex relationship between the self and organization, especially for the engineers who were the primary targets of the ideology. Interviews reveal that engineers ‘feel a need to construct and manage an organizational self’ (1992: 163). Ethnography and analysis of artifacts revealed that members also establish such boundaries between the ‘personal’ and ‘organizational’ self through modes of self-display. During behavioral displays in work-related social interaction, members embrace or distance themselves from the member role, while the artifacts displayed in their work cubicles were often divided into regions separating their organizational and personal lives. Members experienced sociological ambivalence; their acceptance of the organizational ideology was neither uncritical nor complete. Thus, Kunda demonstrates that the relationship between self and organization is more complex than either proponents or opponents of normative control strategies recognize.

Engineering Culture follows many of the principles of peopled ethnography. Kunda systematically samples actors embedded in the organization - persuading us that his study is comprehensive and has lower-order generalizability. The study is both theoretical and richly ethnographic; his detailed vignettes (along with quotations from interviews and texts) do not just describe the setting, they are theoretical building blocks that reveal mechanisms of role distancing and role embracement. The study builds on other ethnographies and research studies, including Kunda’s own research on managerial ideologies (see Barley and Kunda, 1992), Goffman’s (1959) work as it relates to the ‘self,’ and Bourdieu’s (1989) work on symbolic power. It examines interaction and is based on extensive observation, which reveals itself in the level of detail and systematic quality of his analysis. Finally, Kunda tries to maintain distance between himself and the researched. He writes in the genre of ethnographic realism, but more importantly, he includes an appendix in which he reflects on his methods, biases, and position in the field. Together with Gouldner, Kunda’s work suggests the

applicability of peopled ethnography to the study of organizations.

‘Peopling’ community ethnography

The community ethnography⁴, whether one is observing a neighborhood, suburban cul-de-sac, or small town, requires the study of several embedded units of observation: the individual, small group, and organization. These units of observation are the fundamental components of a community area; to neglect one is to forego a holistic treatment of community as a unit of analysis. Many of the best examples of community ethnography follow the principles of peopled ethnography. William Kornblum's (1974) ethnography of a Chicago steel mill neighborhood, *Blue Collar Community*, and Michael Mayerfeld Bell's (1994) ethnography of an English town, *Childerley: Nature and Morality in a Country Village*, demonstrate how the tenets of peopled ethnography can be applied to the study of communities.

William Kornblum's *Blue Collar Community* (1974), based on nearly three years of intensive fieldwork, presents an empirically grounded and theoretically insightful analysis of social interaction, politics, economy, and culture in the ‘South Chicago’ neighborhood during the late 1960s. Polish and Italian steel mill workers had comprised much of the local population, but during the period of study African-American and Mexican laborers entered the neighborhood and its mills. Kornblum's study is a holistic ethnography of this community – of its institutions, families, neighborhoods, friendship groups, and workers – that is theoretically attentive to the relationships among working class members of ethnic and racial groups in a changing neighborhood, as well as to how local organizations and broader economic factors shape those relationships. Kornblum devotes analytic attention to the question of what divides South Chicago's steel workers – what hinders their organizing efforts - and he turns for an explanation, in part, to tensions generated by population succession. In this, the book is an insightful study of community segmentation. However, the text is so richly ethnographic that one might turn to it for any number of reasons: for a sense of the organization of tavern life in Chicago in the 1960s, or for an understanding of inter-ethnic and inter-racial neighboring patterns.

Blue Collar Community fits the principles of peopled ethnography. First, it offers several theoretical contributions. We learn much about status negotiations in a neighborhood undergoing population succession. For instance, we learn of the power of familial, ethnic, and social organizations as Polish and Italian old-timers contemplate white-flight when Mexican and African-American families arrive. Specifically, Kornblum suggests that anxiety about the ‘end of a family organization’ (1974: 213) and ‘the continuing dependency of blue collar ethnicity on local social organization’ can lead ‘people to remain in their neighborhoods after racial integration begins’ (213–14) despite significant inter-group conflict and racism. In this way the book underlines the import of local organizations for the sustenance of community, as well as for ethnic identity. *Blue Collar Community* also generates theory by attending to the relationship between macro- and micro-level social phenomena. For instance, while immersing himself in his site and attending to small group interaction, Kornblum is attentive to the presence and influence of the steel mill, as well as that of the broader economic structure of which the mill is a part. This empirical attention to the relationship between micro- and macro-level units of analysis

adds to the book's theoretical contributions, particularly by demonstrating how institutions shape racial and ethnic relationships and in turn how racial dynamics influence class-based organizing: findings deeply rooted in South Chicago but also applicable to other settings. Finally, Kornblum's theoretical interest in understanding the community's culture, social life, and economy positioned him to conduct a richly ethnographic and truly holistic study. Thus, Kornblum's work illustrates that while a rich ethnographic approach cultivates theory, a sophisticated theoretical approach is also conducive to rich ethnography (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007: 1). Following a second principle of peopled ethnography, Kornblum turned to existing ethnographies and studies to shape not only his research questions but also his research strategy. For instance, he borrowed William F. Whyte's model of entering the field by building a relationship with restaurant owners and, in turn, their patrons (Kornblum, 1974: 231).

Evidence of Kornblum's attention to interacting small groups – a key facet of peopled ethnography – is apparent throughout his book. He attends to the interactions of politicians, families, friendship groups, neighbors, steel mill laborers, and managers, as well as interactions between members of the neighborhood's racial and ethnic groups. He does this, in large part, by relying on multiple internal sites. That is, Kornblum compares interactions in a multitude of settings within a single community area, capturing social life on back porches, in work places, and on union buses.

As the above suggests, *Blue Collar Community* draws from extensive observation, and as a result the book is richly ethnographic. Kornblum reports that he attended the 'yearly round of social and political events for all ethnic and neighborhood groups' (1974: 229), but this only touches on the depth and expansiveness of his approach. Kornblum spent six months observing mill life in an entry-level managerial position, while still observing life beyond the mill gates. He provides a rich portrait of the mill – of its layout (depicted pictorially and textually), organization, and of how its workers spend their days – as well as the contours of the Mexican Independence Day Parade, the groups that visit a Polish church, and the tenor of local political meetings. Yet, despite his attention to a wide variety of groups, like many other community ethnographers Kornblum pays relatively little attention to the women in the community (Lofland, 1975).

Finally, Kornblum maintained distance between himself and his research subjects. While he spent much time with informants and built close relationships with some, *Blue Collar Community* reveals a high level of self-reflexivity about the author's role in the field. For instance, Kornblum is cognizant of how his own changing personal life brought him into closer contact with some neighborhood groups and distanced him from others. Specifically, when he and his wife (who lived with him in the site) had their first child, this brought them closer to Mexican residents who were more likely to have children than older Slavic and Italian residents (1974: 233). Thus, aside from the suggestion that one should rely on multiple sites, Kornblum's study fits the precepts of peopled ethnography. As a result, his monograph is a rich, historical portrait of life in South Chicago that offers enduring theoretical contributions.

Michael Mayerfeld Bell's *Childerley: Nature and Morality in a Country Village* (1994) also exemplifies the employment of peopled ethnography for the study of a community, in his case of a gentrifying English village. Bell examined the relationships of individual villagers and the groups of which they are a part to one another

and to the rural landscape in which they live. *Childerley* insightfully reveals that when villagers talk about nature they also express beliefs about themselves, their neighbors, social groups, and most notably about class. Bell's repeat visits to informants' aviaries, evenings in a village pub, and tours of local gardens led him to conclude that "there is a class-based spirit to villagers' natural experience,' which 'informs their experience of nature' (p. 163). The author suggests that we can understand the 'pattern of human social relations' (p. 166) by examining the ways villagers think about nature; class tensions, interests, and cultures follow social actors even when they believe they are leaving the social world behind by stepping into or speaking of nature (p. 175).

Bell's work emphasizes the interdependent relationship between theory and data. Like other peopled ethnographies, his empirical findings and theoretical contributions are closely connected (Brunt, 2001; Bryant and Charmaz, 2007; Gubrium and Holstein, 1997). His observation of fox hunters is tightly bound to the conclusions he offers about how talk of nature serves as a mode of social distinction, and his observation of the different ways in which villagers approach neighboring – '*back door* for the working people and *front door* for the wealthier villagers' (Bell, 1994: 52) – contributes to an understanding of how habitus shapes even the most minute social interactions. While the relationships between fox hunters, conceptions of nature, and class are not altogether surprising, Bell generates theoretical contributions from less likely ethnographic sources. For instance, his participant observation of changeringers who make music in the church's bell tower was fodder for his proposal of a theory of 'resonance' (pp. 234–9), and we learn much about the import of group membership and informal interaction for 'ordinary villagers' from his observation that it is these villagers, not the wealthiest, who keep the largest aviaries (p. 178). This speaks both to Bell's ethnographic attention to detail and to his commitment to answering the questions of 'how?' and 'why?' which produce peopled ethnography (Fine, 2003: 52; see also Katz, 2001). Finally, throughout the text there is ample evidence that Bell builds on existing theory. For example, in a single chapter he draws on economists, linguists, sociologists, and psychologists to offer his own theoretical insights, always supporting his conclusions with ethnographic data (pp. 227–41).

Bell's observations are rich, focusing on interacting small groups, and leave not a corner of *Childerley's* society unobserved. His sites of observation and interaction with residents included 'dinner parties, tea, nights out drinking, evenings watching telly, walks, idle kitchen chat, days out at the seashore, rides through the countryside' (1994: 247). His descriptions of *Childerley's* institutions, such as the town's two popular pubs, are suggestive of the keenness of his observations. Early in the book we learn of the types of cars parked outside each pub, the men's facilities (or lack thereof) in one, and what townspeople say about each (27–8). Bell spent time with the town's interest and hobby groups, such as the all-wheeling club, foxhunters and their audience, as well as with immediate families and groups of families living communally. Thus, like Kornblum, Bell relied on a variety of observational sites: the individual in her garden, a small group of hunters, a noisy bar, the formal setting of a church service. In this sense, Bell's work corresponds with the principles of peopled ethnography by being richly ethnographic and demonstrating a commitment to the intensive study of interacting small groups.

Finally, Bell is highly cognizant of his place in Childerley. While he integrated himself into the community – living in the village, joining local clubs, and socializing with neighbors – in his methodological appendix Bell acknowledges that to put his informants at ease he engaged in moments of ‘some slight deceit ...’ (1994: 244). For instance, his wife, with whom he lived in the field, retained her maiden name, but she responded to ‘Mrs Bell’ for the duration of the research and Bell did not readily volunteer his Jewish heritage. Bell writes, ‘I was well aware that these assumptions on the part of [informants] contributed to my acceptability, something which I stood to benefit from’ (p. 244). In this sense, instead of inserting his own identity or self-understanding into his interactions with villagers he allowed his informants to see him as they wished. More importantly, Bell is aware that he relied on this device; he is self-reflexive about his approach to ethnography and his place in Childerley, writing, ‘My position on the margin of the village gives me some hope that I can give the closest we may ever come in ethnography to literal truth’ (p. 244; see also Rock, 2001: 32).

In summary, Bell and Kornblum both employ the core principles of peopled ethnography. Their books reveal several areas of community life, focusing on its public and private, individual and collective, informal and formal dimensions. The reader is guided from the words of individual informants to their physical, social, and political place in the community. In turn, both authors use this individual- and small-group-level data to place their sites within a broader cultural and economic context and to offer lasting theoretical contributions to the sociological literature.

Tailoring peopled ethnography for the study of larger units of analysis

While each of the four ethnographies we highlighted meets many of the precepts of peopled ethnography, none fully satisfies them. Specifically, they each rely on a single research site and rely on data that is not strictly ethnographic. Below we discuss how the four studies depart from peopled ethnography's seven pillars, and we conclude with suggestions for tailoring peopled ethnography to the study of larger units of analysis.

Several of the studies we have featured are less richly ethnographic than we might expect, supplementing observation with interview and survey data and organizational documents. For instance, Gouldner (1954) triangulates data from multiple sources, including fieldwork, interviews, and documentary sources. The benefits of this endeavor are substantial: Gouldner could not have identified the three patterns of bureaucracy had he not examined the written rules of the plant and attended to their acceptance and enforcement in multiple segments of the organization. Similarly, *Engineering Culture* (Kunda, 1992) also relies on interviews and texts. These data revealed the disjuncture between formal, written rules and practice, demonstrating the theoretical import of viewing an organization from multiple angles. Each of the data sources offers distinct information that, when taken together, offers a comprehensive understanding of the setting and suggests the limits of a theory based on data gathered through a single method. Together, Gouldner and Kunda suggest that multiple data sources can be crucial for generating organizational theory.

Many community ethnographers also supplement their observations with interviews and other data sources. For instance, Kornblum took field notes, but he also relied on interviews, census data, voting tallies, archival

materials, and letters to the editor (1974: 151, 229). This community-wide data balances the author's attention to certain individuals, groups, and settings within South Chicago, and by providing historical data contextualizes his findings within a broader field. Likewise, Bell analyzed occupational and educational data about Childerley's residents, comparing local demographics to national figures gathered by the British Registrar General and the Essex Group (1994: 45–9). This helps the reader (and author) assess Childerley's traits vis-a-vis other British towns.

Many community ethnographers manage the scope of their unit of analysis by supplementing observations with interviews to capture perspectives and populations they might otherwise overlook due to the sheer size of the unit (Kefalas, 2003; Lloyd, 2005; McIntyre, 2002; Pattillo, 2007; Taylor, 2002). In Bell's case, early in his research he surveyed 109 villagers. He later conducted second interviews with 28, and performed a series of in-depth interviews with another 10. His interviews 'amounted to 81 hours of recorded material' (1994: 247). Formal interviews serve an important role in community ethnography, for they counter the ethnographer's tendency to turn toward larger units of observation for reasons of access and time constraint. While the observation of larger units can be productive, it risks attending to power holders – community leaders – and to other civically engaged individuals at the cost of a more holistic survey of local perspectives, interactions, and experiences. In Bell's case, interviews revealed how an array of residents think about the village, class, and nature. Thus, supplementing observation with other data sources, particularly interviews and demographic data, is also of import for community ethnographers.

None of the studies we highlight examines multiple research sites – a departure from the ideal-typical peopled ethnography and a methodological choice that risks generalizability. This suggests one of the difficulties of applying peopled ethnography to the study of large units of analysis: the study of just one such unit demands much time and effort, making it nearly impossible to study multiple units of analysis. Each of the ethnographies we have highlighted addresses this problem by relying on multiple *internal* sites. The authors retain an interest in generalizability and use internal comparisons to formulate hypotheses about the applicability of their theories to other units of analysis. For instance, Gouldner (1954) considers multiple segments of a single plant. As a result, he found that the plant was not homogeneous; bureaucratization was evident in different degrees and forms. Understanding these differences helped Gouldner to establish scope conditions for his theory and form hypotheses. Additionally, as a result of his internal-comparative work, his empirically grounded ideal types are portable to other settings as instruments with which to make comparisons. Kunda (1992) exemplifies another strategy for dealing with the size of one's unit of analysis. Like the company in Gouldner's study, High Technologies Corporation (or 'Tech') is a large company with numerous, geographically dispersed facilities. Kunda limits his unit of analysis to its Engineering Division, yet he is attentive to the fact that this subunit is composed of different categories of actors, and he examines different types of actors within the Engineering Division. By sampling the variety of lower-order social actors embedded in the organizations, both Gouldner and Kunda demonstrate that organizations are not homogeneous. By confronting the issue of lower-order generalizability to understand the limits of their theories *within* their units of analysis, they derive informed hypotheses from their cases that they can subsequently extrapolate to other units of analysis.

The community ethnographers also utilize multiple internal sites. For instance, Michael Bell (1994) relied on the observation of distinct organizations, establishments, and social groups within his site, which allowed for a theoretically productive comparison of nature talk among, for instance, all-wheelers and foxhunters, or at a pub versus in a church. Indeed, his understanding of the similarities and differences of nature-talk in each of these settings is central to the book's theoretical contributions. Kornblum (1974) also found that to capture South Chicago he had to observe mill, tavern, civic, political, family, and street life. The import of this multi-faceted approach is apparent in *Blue Collar Community* and its theoretical contributions. For instance, Kornblum's reliance on multiple internal sites facilitated an examination of how racial and ethnic cleavages in the mill permeated its walls. He writes, 'In the mill community men not only produce steel ... but bring into the mill all of the primordial cleavages which separate them outside of the plant' (p. 65). Yet the strict racial divisions present in the mill and embodied in segregated residential areas dissipated in some taverns beyond the mill gates: a fact he might have missed had he limited observation to mill, residential area, or tavern alone.

Despite the trend apparent above, we do not wish to suggest that the comparative ethnographic study of large units of analysis is impossible (for instance, see Brown-Saracino, 2004, 2007, forthcoming; Greenhouse et al., 1994; Salamon, 2003). Instead we argue that it is challenging and requires trade-offs. Below we introduce a few works that model the ethnographic study of multiple large units of analysis.

Among organizational ethnographies, Calvin Morrill's (1995) *The Executive Way: Conflict Management in Corporations* is particularly impressive as a multi-site ethnography. Consistent with the modifying principles of a peopled ethnography, this study uses multiple methods. It is based on 'two years of intensive fieldwork – semi-structured and conversational interviewing, individual and group observation, and the collection of documents – among 305 top managers and their staffs in 13 private corporations'. Morrill classifies each corporation into one of three categories – the mechanistic bureaucracy, the atomistic organization, or the matrix organization – based on its structure. He claims that each of these three organizational types has a corresponding normative order that includes customs for conflict management. Morrill's study is an excellent example of a multi-site ethnography, but it also suggests a tradeoff of studying multiple sites. Morrill limits his analysis to a narrow segment of the organizations, considering conflict management only among upper-level executives, as is necessary to make a 'large-n' ethnography feasible for a single researcher.

Another method for tackling multiple-site data collection is reliance on multiple ethnographers. An exemplary model of this approach is *Law and Community in Three American Towns* by Carol Greenhouse, David Engel, and Barbara Yngvesson (1994). The authors studied conflict resolution in three changing towns; they regarded the court as a window into community relationships and conflicts, particularly those between local 'insiders' and 'outsiders.' Each of the authors used some combination of archival and quantitative data, textual analysis, interviews, and courtroom observation. Their reliance on multiple sites allowed them to generalize their findings to other changing towns. It also served to underline the impact of broad trends (such as urbanization and multi-national corporations) in three distinct locales, while still uncovering residents' varying responses to those trends (1994: 14). But trade-offs exist. Coordinating data collection among multiple researchers is difficult, leaving room for inconsistencies. The authors began their research independently; the

book is not the result of pre-planned group ethnography and this raises questions regarding the uniformity of methods.

We have restricted our examples to organizational and community ethnographies, but the world consists of many large collectivities that are amenable to a peopled ethnographic investigation. Rick Fantasia's *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers* (1998) is one such example. Fantasia's units of analysis are large groups of workers in three distinct organizational contexts: a New Jersey casting company, a Vermont hospital, and an Iowa corn processing plant. Barley's (1996) 'Technicians in the Workplace: Ethnographic Evidence for Bringing Work into Organization Studies' provides another example, taking occupations as its units of analysis. Barley constructs 'technician' as an empirically informed ideal type, which is portable as a concept against which to compare other occupations. While this article-length study includes less ethnographic detail than the books reviewed above, the research rests on extensive observation. The study is a five-year collaboration among eight researchers who conducted studies of nine different technicians' occupations in addition to conducting interviews and collecting archival data.

In closing, we propose that the multi-site peopled ethnography of large units of analysis is feasible, but that it does require some trade-offs, such as reliance on multiple researchers or a less holistic ethnographic approach. For this reason, we suggest that those seeking to apply the principles of peopled ethnography to the study of larger units of analysis regard this comparative directive as a goal rather than a requirement. We also propose that for the study of large units of analysis, non-ethnographic sources are an especially crucial supplement to field notes, and we encourage researchers to draw on them. Finally, attention to multiple *internal* sites or contexts can provide some of the theoretical leverage promised by comparative studies. We believe peopled ethnography is best applied to the study of large units of analysis when researchers tailor its principles by attending to *within*-site variation and analyzing a variety of data sources.

Conclusion

At its best, ethnographic research must recognize the interaction between micro- and macro-levels of analysis. However, ethnography has traditionally emphasized micro-sociological phenomena, even though many researchers have recognized the presence of macro-sociological forces shaping interaction in their chosen settings. We believe ethnography can more fully examine and theorize the relationship between micro- and macro-levels of analysis by taking larger, more macro-sociological units of analysis as the subject of its investigation and revealing their micro-sociological foundations. Peopled ethnography, with its concern for examining ongoing interaction, is such a strategy. Collectivities, no matter what size, are built upon interaction. Even though ethnography has its origins in the examination of groups, the examination of communities and organizations are not outside of the scope of a theoretically informed ethnography.

Yet there are challenges in extending ethnography from scenes that can be watched in their entirety. First, interaction isn't everything; collectivities are more than the sum of their interactions. This is in part why the peopled ethnography of large collectivities requires researchers to supplement observation with additional

data sources, such as interviews and texts, which reveal aspects of social structure that may not be apparent from the focus on interaction alone. Second, by selecting larger units, the examination of multiple groups is replaced by the examination of internal variation within parts of the community or units in the organization. Our selection of canonical texts in community and organizational ethnography is designed to showcase not only studies that we admire, but also those that incorporate the virtues of a peopled ethnography, while transcending the limitations of that micro-sociological perspective.

In summary, we argue that the model of peopled ethnography deserves the attention of all ethnographers, not just of those micro-sociologists who study small groups. The application of the seven pillars of peopled ethnography to studies of larger collectivities and social organizations will be a theoretically fruitful enterprise. Thus, we encourage others to employ this model and to join a conversation about how best to extend these precepts beyond small groups and to tailor them for the study of large units of analysis.

NOTES

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1. On using ethnographic data to provide not only descriptions, but also questions of why and how that aid in the development of theory, see Brunt (2001: 89), Bryant and Charmaz (2007: 1), Gubrium and Holstein (1997) and Katz (2001).
2. In this sense, the seventh principle of peopled ethnography departs from the ethnomethodologists' tradition of regarding informants as the keepers of much of the relevant knowledge about a setting or context (see Pollner and Emerson, 2001), as well as from some scholars' criticisms of the notion of an ethnographer's distance from his or her informants (see Bryant and Charmaz, 2007: 6).
3. Adele Clarke suggests that reliance on multiple data sources is of import for the renovation and regeneration of grounded theory (2003: 558). She suggests that, regardless of research site, ethnographers should rely on multiple sources, 'including discursive textual, visual, and archival historical materials and documents, as well as ethnographic (interview and observational) transcripts and field notes to more fully take into account the sea of discourses in which we are continually awash in the postmodern era' (p. 559).
4. Community, as used here, refers to a group of people who share a commonly demarcated and named geographical space. We use 'community ethnography' to refer to the study of villages and official urban neighborhoods, as well as 'symbolic' communities within or crossing official boundaries (Hunter, 1974).

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