Moving Beyond Everyday Life in Institutional Ethnographies: Methodological Challenges and Ethical Dilemmas

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Abstract: Institutional ethnography (IE) is a method of social inquiry that sets out to explore and analyze how people's daily activities are "hooked up" into institutional arrangements and ruling relations. Using the everyday life of people and their experiences as points of departure, the overall goal is to trace how these experiences are linked to translocal processes. When engaged in empirical inquiries, most IE researchers achieve this goal by moving beyond everyday "levels" of experience into various institutional settings. This article illuminates and critically analyzes the possible pitfalls of moving between various sites of empirical investigation. The article uses comparisons of two studies conducted in similar research settings and both concerning rehabilitation processes to describe two possible ways of conducting this kind of research. The aim is to contribute to a discussion of methodological and ethical challenges in institutional ethnographies in order to enrich it as a method of inquiry.

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1. Introduction

Institutional ethnography (IE) is an approach to social inquiry developed by the Canadian sociologist Dorothy E. SMITH and her co-workers, and it has gained increased attention in recent years. Building on ethnomethodology, phenomenology and Marxism, IE studies start in the everyday lives and work experiences of people affected by some type of institutional arrangements. However, the overall objective is to map the institutional practices and ruling relations at work in a given setting (SMITH, 2005). Since the objective of institutional ethnographies is to investigate "how things work" (CAMPBELL &

GREGOR, 2004, p.13), it becomes crucial in most studies to move beyond this starting point of the inquiry. As SMITH (2005, p.35) puts it,

> "each next step builds from what has been discovered and invades more extended dimensions of the institutional regime. The mapping of social relations expands from and includes the original site so that the larger organization that enters into and shapes it becomes visible." [1]

The fact that most IE studies move beyond the everyday knowledge of people and into institutional settings means that it is especially important to be aware of potential ethical dilemmas. Although some authors have debated a few of these dilemmas, we argue that there is still a need to illuminate and discuss them. [2]

We build on a growing body of literature to investigate the possible methodological and ethical challenges related to institutional ethnographies (BISAILLON & RANKIN, 2013; GRAHAME & GRAHAME, 2009; MIKHAILOVSKY & McCOY, 2002). One of the challenges that BISAILLON and RANKIN (2013) raise is how to maintain a standpoint "on the side of a particular set of people" and how this "shapes the fieldwork practices" (§3). Although we also acknowledge this methodological challenge of going back and forth between informants from different sites, our main purpose is to raise and discuss the ethical questions that arise in this process. By using two of our research projects that are concerned with disability and rehabilitation issues in Scandinavian settings, we aim to analyze the challenges and dilemmas in our own work in order to enrich institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry. [3]

In this article, we will illuminate and critically discuss the merits and pitfalls of balancing between stories told and information given by interviewees who are positioned differently in relation to the research process and the institutions studied. BREIMO's study deals with the problems of coordinating rehabilitation processes in Norway, and NORSTEDT's study is related to hidden disabilities in working life in Sweden. Recognizing that not all readers will be familiar with IE, we start out with brief overview of IE and a discussion of what we find useful about this approach. We then provide a description of methodological problems and ethical issues encountered in our two case studies, and continue with a discussion of the potential for harm and how to avoid such pitfalls. [4]

2. What Is Institutional Ethnography?

Institutional ethnography is a "method of inquiry" (SMITH, 2005) that strives to describe the interface between individual experience and institutional relations (McCOY, 2006 p.109). The purpose of IE is to describe or explicate practices that are "usually obscure," thereby describing the ruling relations and how they are done (rather than what they "are"). The starting point is always from the perspective of a specific group of people. However, the purpose of IE is not to generalize from a particular group of people; rather, it is a way for

> "elucidating and understanding the connections between people where these
> institutional arrangements are the objects of analysis. This particular analytical
> emphasis on social and organizational arrangements produces research findings that
> stretch beyond individual accounts (...) How society's institutions govern people's
> lives, and where explications of how things are socially coordinated are key
> endpoints" (BISAILLON & RANKIN, 2013, §8). [5]

Another feature of IE is how texts are understood to coordinate people's
activities. With this focus, IE strives to find and describe social processes that
have "generalizing effects" (DeVAULT & McCOY, 2006, p.18). Methodologically,
this can be done in many different ways. [6]

CAMPBELL and GREGOR (2004, p.60) make a distinction between "entry-level"
data and "level-two" data in institutional ethnographies. Researchers doing
institutional ethnographies usually start their investigations at the "entry level,"
which more often than not is the everyday life and work-related knowledge of a
specific group of people. Then, investigations turn to "level two," which typically
consists of frontline professionals:

> "Frontline professionals, such as teachers, nurses, trainers, social workers,
> community agency personnel, and other bureaucrats, often become informants in an
> institutional ethnography. Frontline professionals are especially important because
> they make the linkages between clients and ruling discourses, 'working up' the
> messiness of an everyday circumstance so that it fits the categories and protocols of
> a professional regime" (DeVAULT & McCOY, 2006 p.27). [7]

The challenge of interviewing these frontline professionals is that they are
"trained to use the very concepts and categories that institutional ethnographers
wish to unpack" (p.28). In order to not succumb to what SMITH (2005) calls
institutional capture, one of the challenges of doing IE is to move beyond this
institutional language and "subsume the actual under the institutional" (p.156). [8]

Trying to go beyond these institutional terms and discourses often produces
challenges of various sorts. BISAILLON and RANKIN (2013, §16) explain that
they gained contradictory information from informants on the two levels, what
they call standpoint informants (entry level) and extra-local informants (level two),
and they problematize the relationship between the stories told by the two groups.
While administrators claimed that restructuring efforts did not affect the nurses'
work in RANKIN's study, her fieldwork among the nurses illustrated the opposite.
Likewise, BISAILLON identified flaws at the "entry level" with which she had to
confront her "level-two" informants. In their article, they explore how standpoint
politics shaped their fieldwork practices. They discuss how they received ethical
approval and shielded the identity of their informants. However, the article does
not explicate *how* they managed to shield the identity of their informants.
Although it is of great relevance to researchers who are doing institutional
ethnographies, the issues of different interpretations given at different levels and
how to handle data gathered at the two levels have rarely been critically reflected

upon in the growing IE literature. In the following, we present the two studies that illustrate the points we are making. [9]

3. A Presentation of the Two Studies

In order to discuss the issue of how to map social relations beyond everyday life, we will now present two studies in which we have used institutional ethnography. The aim of NORSTEDT's study was to identify institutional practices and discourses in working life that influence peoples' experiences of disclosing hidden disabilities in Sweden. Earlier studies of disclosure often used sociological theories of stigma to explain why people might hide certain diagnoses from their surroundings (GOFFMAN, 1986 [1963]). Concepts like "coming out," borrowed from queer theory, have also been used to understand processes of disclosing chronic illness or disabilities (MYERS, 2004; SAMUELS, 2003; SOLIS, 2007). In line with SMITH's argument that sociological inquiries should start from the standpoint/problematic of a group of people rather than from a theoretical concept, NORSTEDT interviewed ten people with hidden disabilities due to impairments or chronic illness (such as multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder [ADHD], fibromyalgia, depression, and bipolar disorder). They were asked questions regarding their experiences and decision to disclose or not to disclose. Even though most of them had disclosed their disability to both their coworkers and employers, she found that regardless of their diagnosis, disability, workplace, etc., they had all experienced that they had something to lose through disclosure. The interviews with employees show that these experiences of risk had several causes. Several interviewees talked about bullying or the stigma of living with different forms of impairment. Others talked more about processes of marginalization in terms of not being promoted or being treated as different. In the interviews in NORSTEDT's study, one person who had disclosed her disability to her employer and colleagues and had a positive experience with the company health care service, said that she did not want NORSTEDT to interview her manager or the Human Resource (HR)[1] personnel at her workplace. She had found that her disability was a career barrier since she no longer got promoted or assigned more demanding projects. This indicates that even those who are "out" about their disability might fear that reminding managers, employers, and co-workers about the disability will undermine others' understanding of them as able and the "same" and in turn cause career barriers. When disability involves a limited workability, resources or assistance may be needed. However, the need for resources or assistance can also highlight difference and stigma (WHITT, CAWLEY, YONKER & POLAGE, 2014)—exactly what the entry-level informants in NORSTEDT's study were so reluctant to do: They wanted to be treated "just like anyone else" and not as being ill, disabled, or different. In order to "pass" as everyone else, they needed to downplay or conceal their hidden disability. But in order to be able to work, they might need special accommodations (for example in their working hours or work

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1   In larger organizations it is the Human Resource Department that is responsible for recruiting and managing employees in the organization. Professionals from the Human Resource Department thereby work with issues concerning for example rehabilitation, disability, illness and workability.

tasks) that require them to highlight, remind, and explain their disability to others in the workplace. In institutional ethnographical terms, such strategies are understood as *work*: Practices that take time, energy, and have a purpose (SMITH, 2005, p.229). Having interviewed the employees and identified this tension, NORSTEDT decided to interview employers, co-workers, or HR personnel but not at the same workplace as these entry-level informants. This decision was strengthened by findings from earlier studies, which discuss how disability is associated with stigma and is likely to have "negative social and work-related consequences" (SANTUZZI, WALTZ, FINKELSTEIN & RUPP, 2014; WHITT et al., 2014). [10]

BREIMO's study also mapped processes of rehabilitation for people with disabilities, but in Norway. The study differed from NORSTEDT's research in that it did not mainly focus on working life, but rehabilitation processes in general. The problematic took its starting point in Norwegian white papers showing that service users reported a lack of coordination of services to be the biggest problem associated with being in a process of rehabilitation (NOU, 2004, p.13, 2005, p.3). Consequently, the objective was to use the experiences of service users and service providers to identify the institutional issues from their various points of view by mapping work performances and how these were connected to the work of others. BREIMO mapped rehabilitation processes by interviewing those involved. [11]

She interviewed service recipients twice over a period of one to two years. There were various reasons why they were in a rehabilitation process, but their diagnoses or functional impairments were not the focus of the study. Instead, the study focused on the collaboration that took place between service providers and service recipients, which in turn made it possible to also interview the service providers involved. The number of service providers involved and the extent to which they were involved varied from person to person, but each service recipient had extensive contact with service-providing agencies. This was the reason that the decision was made to interview the service workers and practitioners involved in the processes. The objective of interviewing these "level-two" informants was to explicate and further develop the map of how the rehabilitation process was organized. The professionals represented different professions, service providing agencies, and administrative levels. Additionally, written decisions and other documentation were analyzed as traces of institutional processes. [12]

4. Methodological Challenges and Ethical Dilemmas in the Two Studies

In the following, we describe four stages of our research processes to illustrate our discussion. The first has to do with the selection of informants with a view to mapping the relations intersecting the everyday life of the informants and the institutions being studied. The second has to do with how to map work practices and how to avoid institutional captures. The third has to do with how to handle information given in one research site when dealing with another, related, research site. The fourth has to do with how to write up the analysis in compliance with ethical research norms. [13]

4.1 Selection of "second-level" informants

In both studies, after having interviewed the "entry-level" informants, the next step was to interview persons who, in their professional role, played a central part when an employee became ill or disabled (in NORSTEDT's study) or in the rehabilitation processes (in both studies). The "level-two" informants in NORSTEDT's study were identified by sending a request for informants to managers who in turn sent out the information letter about the study to their personnel. The informants were personnel in HR departments (one public and one private company) and employers (headmasters from one independent school and one public school). Also, a request was sent to professionals within two different occupational health care organizations, resulting in interviews with one physician and one psychologist. All of these informants will be referred to in this article as representatives of the employer. The informants were asked to describe their work practices, the texts and models used in their work, and other important actors they were in contact with both inside and outside their own organizations. The first interviews were conducted with HR personnel, as their position involves communicating with both employees and employers. When they identified employers and the company health care as other important actors for their work, interviews were also conducted with representatives from these groups. The "second-level" informants had no connection to the "entry-level" informants, but nevertheless used examples with either real or hypothetical cases (without revealing any names). These interviews also provided data on institutional processes, how the informants experienced the positive and negative aspects of disclosure, and how they handled this situation in practice. [14]

In BREIMO's study, the "second- level" informants were recruited directly based on the recommendation of the "entry-level" informants. Thus, the service providers that were affiliated with the specific rehabilitation processes of the recipients were interviewed. The decision to include them in the study was considered very carefully, as the interviews would be about actual persons and not just anonymous "cases." BREIMO concluded that it would be difficult to map rehabilitation processes without including the service providers as well. She wanted to find out what was actually done in specific rehabilitation processes, not what the service providers' work instructions were: She wanted to "subsume the actual under the institutional" (SMITH, 2005, p.156). The logic behind this

decision was that whatever people present as their theoretical work tasks often differs from what they do in practice. Thus, by interviewing the service providers about actual rehabilitation processes she could gain a more in-depth picture in which both providers and recipients talk about rehabilitation work practices (involved in the latter's rehabilitation). Therefore, at the start of the interviews she emphasized that it was the work performed that was of interest to the research, rather than personal information about diagnoses, disease progression, etc. This was also made clear in the information given (in the letter in which she requested informed consent) to the providers before they were interviewed. Although there is an uneven power balance between service users and service providers in a rehabilitation process, the consequences of disclosing information was not considered as severe within these relationships as it could be in a relationship between representatives of employers and employees. [15]

4.2 How to map the work practices (and escape institutional captures)

Interviewing in IE studies often follows a specific kind of logic. The objective is to learn "how things work" by studying the coordination of people's actual activities (DeVAULT & McCOY, 2006, p.25). When moving from the "entry level" to the "second level" of the interviewing process, the importance of escaping from what SMITH (2005) calls *institutional capture* increases. Institutional capture means that "the informant's account is in institutional terms and is descriptively empty' (p.156). This often happens when "both informant and researcher are familiar with the discourse and know how to speak it." In other words, how interviews are performed and which questions are asked is of great relevance to what kind of information will be obtained. While BREIMO tried to escape these institutional captures by asking questions related to "real" cases, NORSTEDT relied on other methods to avoid this. [16]

One way of asking questions in IE is to ask about texts or listen to accounts of how texts are activated through work practices. Studying texts is central, as they allow practices to be repeated in different settings. Therefore, NORSTEDT asked about policies, flowcharts, or models that the "second-level" informants used in their work or that affected and structured their work. For example, the psychologist at the company health care described how she was bound by how the contract with the employer is written, for example stipulating how many times an employee is allowed to meet with her and whether or not she was supposed to report to the employer after each meeting with the client. Still, she described herself as free within that framework to say and do what she would have done as a psychologist in any setting. [17]

As previously mentioned, NORSTEDT did not interview "second-level" informants that were connected to the "entry-level" informants. This entailed a methodological challenge in her study. For example, she could not ask questions about practices in a specific case, and could not follow up on what happens when people disclose or do not disclose their disability. "Second-level" informants in the study often ended up generalizing rather than being specific, though specificity is important if one wants to know "how things work." To encourage the "second-

level" informants to talk about their practices, NORSTEDT therefore asked questions about how they would handle a situation in which an employee did not want others at work to know about the employee's hidden disability. This conversation revealed discourses that she might not otherwise have become aware of. For example, one employer talked about how it was inappropriate for a person with epilepsy to apply for a position as a teacher since a seizure could scare the children, among other things. This shows that the institutional concept of "workability" is connected to discourses of morals, stigma, and specific diagnoses, and that this in turn includes more diverse understandings of workability than is possible to detect in policies, laws, and other texts. Still, the choice not to interview people from the same workplace or organization made it more difficult to map social relations and specific courses of action. [18]

In BREIMO's study, the connection between the first-level and second-level informants opened up some opportunities, while at the same time creating some ethical challenges. BREIMO also studied textual practices, but in a more "material" way than NORSTEDT. She followed actual texts produced in the rehabilitation processes in order to map how the processes were organized. This strategy revealed some institutional traces that would have been difficult to discover with another strategy. For example, one of the informants in the study told BREIMO in their first interview that she was very happy that she was granted the right to an *individual plan* and that the work on producing this plan had started. She explained that her financial situation depended on this plan, and therefore it was very important to her. She stated that: "The individual plan is very important for my private financial situation. If I hadn't gotten the plan I wouldn't have had any money to support myself." [19]

BREIMO was puzzled by this assertion, but by studying the documents for the recipient's rehabilitation process, as well as interviewing service workers connected to this specific rehabilitation process, she understood why the informant made this statement. The written decisions made by the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) stressed that in order for the informant to receive financial support, she had to follow up on the goals and actions that she had listed in her individual plan. In fact, four of seven written decisions the informant received from NAV stated that she needed to follow up her individual plan in order to receive benefits. It stated that: "If you do not follow up on your individual plan, you need to get this corrected or contact us." [20]

Because BREIMO knew that this was not the intention behind the individual plan, she asked the service workers involved why this was done. They confirmed that this was the practice and that they considered the individual plan to be like a contract that the service user had to comply with in order to receive financial benefits. The benefit of being able to ask professionals questions based on real cases is being able to trace institutional practices that may otherwise remain obscure. The drawback is that the professionals may feel that they compromise their professional integrity by talking to an "outsider" about a service user or a specific case. Whether the professionals would have answered the same in an interview that was not connected to a specific case is uncertain. Since the

individual plan is not supposed to be a contract between the parties, it is easy to suspect that they would not have admitted to this practice. [21]

4.3 How to handle information given at different sites

That a researcher cannot know how the presence or result of a study will affect relations in the field once the study is completed is not a research ethics question specific to institutional ethnography. However, this question is especially vital in IE studies, since these studies often aim to map work practices at different levels that are connected to each other in different ways. It is therefore of utmost importance that the power relations between "entry-level" informants and "second-level" informants are considered. In NORSTEDT's study, the tension between what and whether to disclose a disability to others at work is more sensitive than the issues in BREIMO's study, and the power relations between the different levels could be considered to be more immediate and opaque between the representatives of employers and employees in NORSTEDT's study. This results in different ethical dilemmas for the two studies; hence, the way we chose to handle the dilemmas differently led to distinct methodological challenges. BREIMO did not find that the service recipients found it problematic that she was to interview the service providers. On the contrary: They often said, "You should ask [the service provider] about this, because she knows a lot about it." This response likely reflects that the service recipients who agreed to participate in the project saw the project as relevant: They wanted their experiences to be documented. Still, BREIMO encountered problems and ethical dilemmas along the way. Several times, she discovered that she herself became an "actor" in the recipients' rehabilitation process. For example, sometimes it became obvious to her that the "entry-level" informants lacked information about services they were entitled to. This was information BREIMO gained from the "second-level" informants, and which she felt morally obligated to pass on to the "entry-level" informants, even knowing that this would affect her research to some degree (since coordination and thereby communication in the rehabilitation processes was what she was studying). This ethical dilemma can be illustrated by the following example: [22]

One of the service recipients BREIMO interviewed expressed her frustration about how difficult it was to get admission to rehabilitation institutions. The wait was generally a year or longer. When she asked a physiotherapist at a municipal rehabilitation institution about this issue, the physiotherapist said that the rehabilitation institution had a list of the service recipients who had been there and whom they thought would benefit from returning. Those not on the list were unlikely to be given a place again if they applied for one. She said:

> "We have a list (laughs) ... so regardless of what the service recipient says, we make up our mind about the benefits we think they have had from their stay. They may want to come back though we do not think there is any point to that. Then we have a dialogue with the granting office and ... now I should be a bit careful, but most likely they will be rejected. Probably. Because there is quite a lot of pressure on this unit, so getting someone who is not motivated or who just has a room here ... then someone

else who needs [the place] may as well get it. There are some who we think will
benefit from returning. They will be put on a list where they get to stay here a specific
number of times per year." [23]

The problem is that people who are in a process of rehabilitation are probably not
aware of the fact that the likelihood of their being awarded a place in the future is
dependent upon the effort and stamina they invest in training their functional
abilities. In this specific incident, BREIMO did not report to the "entry-level"
informants what the practice of the rehabilitation institution was. She felt awkward
telling the recipient that "you should have made more of an effort the last time,
maybe then you would have had a better chance." However, in other situations,
she felt morally obliged to pass on information that she got from "second-level"
informants. One such example was that a service recipient was not made aware
of one of his welfare rights. The researcher learned about this from one of the
professionals, and in this case she felt obliged to share this information with the
recipient. [24]

4.4 How to write up the analysis

Regardless of the strategy chosen for how to map the institutional complex being
studied, the way the data and the analysis are presented is crucial to securing the
anonymity of the informants. However, this becomes particularly important when
the two "levels" are connected by real cases. BREIMO therefore had to consider
carefully what could be included and what should not be included. In the very few
cases where service recipients criticized named service providers, they were not
quoted or their comments were anonymized by not linking the statements to the
individuals in question. This decision was made based on the risk that revealing
these tensions would hamper the cooperation between the service recipient and
the professional after the researcher had left. The same was true for statements
service providers made about service recipients, other service providers, the
municipalities, or other issues that BREIMO found inadvisable to include for the
same reason. In her dissertation, service recipients were given fictitious names in
the presentation of the empirical material. Service providers were referred to by
their professional title rather than by name. This naming practice aimed to ensure
that the connection between the service recipient and the professional would not
be made visible for others outside of the relationship. [25]

NORSTEDT made the same choice: She gave the informants with hidden
disabilities fictitious names, and used their professional titles when referring to the
"level-two" informants. No names of workplaces or organizations were mentioned:
Instead they were described in general terms such as "school" or "a public
organization within the service sector." Even though the informants at the two
levels were not known to each other, the motive was to protect them from being
identified by readers. [26]

5. Production of Knowledge from Different Research Sites

In both studies we regarded informants in various research sites as "knowers"—those who are knowledgeable about their everyday work (in a broad sense) and about the practices in their institutional setting—and see their accounts as central to understanding how things work. Where BREIMO interviewed the second-level informants in order to investigate why a lack of coordination was reported to be the largest problem in the rehabilitation process, the research question in NORSTEDT's study aimed at understanding what influences peoples' decisions to disclose hidden disabilities, focusing on the processes in working life. These distinctions mean that in this study, the analysis largely revolves around practices but also discourses that the "second-level" informants make use of in their work and around how the "entry-level" informants and "second-level" informants relate to the problematic differently. This has meant that NORSTEDT has received information that at times was contradictory. For example, she discovered that employers, HR-personnel, and the professionals from the occupational health service distinguished between a situation-dependent disclosure of hidden disabilities and disclosure in a recruitment situation. In the latter situation, different legally stipulated rights and obligations for both employer and employee were at play as compared to situations in which a person was already an employee in the workplace. However, informants with hidden disabilities did not make this distinction equally clearly. To them, the question of whether or not to disclose had to do with the risk of being treated differently by co-workers or losing their position in their current workplace. Not being hired due to having disclosed their disability or their need for adaptations of the working environment, work tasks, or work hours, was also a common fear. These factors were all interlinked, and also tied in with their earlier experiences of disclosure. This illustrates the tension and sometimes paradox inherent in the employers' responsibility to make sure that the work environment is adapted, their responsibility for the rehabilitation of their employees, and their need to handle risk. Findings about such differences raise questions about knowledge production and about how to map institutional practices. In NORSTEDT's study, one way to do this has been to look for discrepancies between what the "entry-level" informants have said and what the "second-level" informants have said. On the other hand, BREIMO's research questions focused on the courses of action undertaken in the rehabilitation process and the consequences for the people involved from the start. [27]

The ethical dilemmas that emerged in both studies related to mapping of courses of action, or, in other words, how the "entry-level" and "second-level" informants were related to each other. Although there will always be a gap between these two levels, the objective of IE is in many ways to bridge this gap and to explore how they are related, or as McCOY puts it, "to make visible ways the institutional order creates the conditions of individual experience" (2006, p.109). Analyzing the methodological and ethical challenges and dilemmas in the two studies, leads us to two different approaches on how to protect informants from harm that also have implications for the mapping. NORSTEDT interviewed persons from the "second level" in their professional role but these informants were not part of the

same organizations as the standpoint informants. BREIMO, in contrast, followed her standpoint informants through the rehabilitation process and interviewed the professionals they interacted with. Her approach enabled her to identify the "second-level" actors and map the course of action in a particular institution. In order to protect her informants from harm, she relied on the way she summarized the results and on her decision to leave out certain information. NORSTEDT, on the other hand, considered the power relations between the representatives of employers and employees too sensitive to risk their future relationship by interviewing persons from the same work place. Instead, she "kept the institution in view" (ibid.) when analyzing her interview data and used informants' descriptions of their experience in her further research. When not talking about real cases, the researcher risks getting stories from the "second-level" informants about how things *should* work rather about what actually happens in their work and organizational setting. However, this strategy might also produce more frank stories about what actually happens in institutional processes since they do not have to take anyone's feelings into account. This allows the researcher to identify discourses at work in institutions that might not be seen otherwise. BREIMO, in contrast, was forced to think carefully about how to write up her findings to protect her informants from harm and avoid interfering in their relationships. [28]

Another challenge when interviewing people on the "entry level" is being left with many questions about the stories that have been relayed. The concept of "institution" in IE frequently concerns "clusters of ruling or administrative relations organized around specific functions, such as health care, law, finance, social services, or municipal government" (McCOY, 2006, p.124). Often, these institutional orders have their own cultures and ways of doing things, which may not be visible to "entry-level" informants. In the search for how things are done, we found that interviews with standpoint informants in some cases made them question certain accounts: Was that what really happened? Was this legal? While this is not the purpose of IE, KJELLBERG (2015, p.136) also discusses how researchers risk being side-tracked by such questions when trying to identify what happened. McCOY (2006, p.110) makes the same point, reminding us that the focus should be on the "institutional order that gives rise to the conflict in the first place." Thus, the focus should be on what accounts from the "entry level" can tell us about the institutional setting we want to investigate or map. [29]

So what could be said about practices and social relations in institutions on the basis of information found at the "entry level"? How can we "keep the institution in view" by analyzing interviews of "entry-level" informants? The goal of an IE researcher is to learn about the social organization, which is something that is present in everyday discourses. SMITH (2005) gives an example from one of her own studies about informal learning on the job, in which she interviewed Marco, a person on level one. From his account, SMITH (p.132) was able to identify the "social relations and social organization in which Marco's experience is embedded." Similarly, the standpoint informants in both studies mentioned actors and practices that point towards important "second-level" informants and practices at a second level. The informants themselves might not identify these persons as having an impact on their practices and everyday life; however,

researchers may choose to pursue this information further in the interviews with second-level informants. [30]

Whether the mapping is an ethical problem or not depends on the research question, the group of informants, and the power relations between "entry-level" and "second-level" informants. We chose two different approaches to deal with the ethical dilemma of how to protect informants from harm: BREIMO relied on her choices about whom to interview and on her ability to write up the analysis in such a way that the quotes could not be traced to specific informants. These choices had implications for the knowledge production. She followed real cases and was thus able to produce a more detailed map, answering the question of *what happens* in the process. NORSTEDT did not follow real cases, and this study answered the question *how discourses and work practices are used* in different work places, thereby gaining knowledge about the process of disclosure in a specific institution, the working life. [31]

6. Conclusions

Through a comparison of the strategies and choices made in our two studies, we can conclude that there are at least two important issues to consider when making decisions about how to map within institutional ethnographies: The balance of power between the informants in the field under investigation, and how sensitive the topic of research is for the informants. Although these issues need to be considered within any research project, not only in institutional ethnographies, the very nature of IE makes these issues pertinent. [32]

By comparing our two cases we have demonstrated that institutional ethnographies can be undertaken in two different ways, which each bring about methodological problems and ethical dilemmas that needs to be overcome. These issues are important to consider for every researcher who are doing institutional ethnographies. The ethical issues that arise when moving between a first and a second level of informants as in these two studies, are relevant for all research that builds on moving between various sites of empirical investigation, that is 1. to consider the power balance between informants positioned in the different sites and 2. to write up the analysis so that informants cannot identify each other in the text. A comparison between the two studies shows how the same ethical considerations, to protect informants from harm, lead the researchers to decide on different methodological approaches affecting the focus of the mapping and leading to differences in the knowledge production. [33]

In the two projects discussed in this article, NORSTEDT's research topics are more sensitive than those in BREIMO's study. Furthermore, the power relations may be more immediate and the relationships more opaque between representatives of employer and employee than between service provider and service recipient. In other words, if the relationship between an employer representative and an employee was to deteriorate, this could lead to severe and direct consequences for the employee, for example in the form of career barriers or stigmatization. In BREIMO's project, the balance of power was also uneven,

but more often than not there were several stakeholders involved and power was therefore more diffused. Nevertheless, being attentive to what this uneven balance of power may lead to is crucial. It is important to consider how the two levels relate to each other, in order to consider the possible negative effects the mapping may have on the people involved, especially for "entry-level" informants. As in any qualitative analysis, it is also necessary to think through how to write up findings, so that no one will be harmed in any way. By using institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry, researchers aim for social change and a sociology that people can use. IE could therefore be thought of as a method highly sensitive to research ethics. However, that in itself does not ensure that informants are not exposed to harm. This is something researchers must consider in each research project. We hope this contribution can trigger a further discussion of how to deal with the intimately connected questions of knowledge production, research ethics, and methodology in future studies inspired by institutional ethnography. [34]

Acknowledgments

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