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Community, Frame of Reference, and Boundary: Three Sociological Concepts and their Relevance for Virtual Worlds Research

Abstract

Virtual-worlds research is a dynamic and growing interdisciplinary area in the social sciences and humanities. Sociological theory can play an important role in how virtual worlds are conceptualized and studied. Drawing on data from ethnographic projects on two distinct types of virtual worlds, an asynchronous text-based internet forum and a massively-multiplayer online game, I consider what social and cultural similarities these two types of virtual worlds have with one another, despite their radically different forms and functions. My comparative analysis is framed in terms of three questions. First, are virtual worlds temporary and/or intentional communities? Second, what are the frames of reference through which virtual-world communities are built? Third, how do boundaries function in virtual worlds? My discussion suggests some of the common social and cultural features of virtual worlds.

Keywords

Massively-multiplayer online game (MMO); Online community; Straight edge; Subculture; Videogame; World of Warcraft.

At the turn of the millennium, tens of millions of people watched "The Matrix" films and were fascinated by their images suggesting a future in which human beings would become entombed in a digitally-mediated world. Such ideas have not been limited to the Wachowski brothers' imaginations, though their films seem to have brought those ideas into the popular imagination like nothing before them. In fact, they drew from decades of science fiction work within which the concept of virtual worlds developed. William Gibson's (1984) "Neuromancer" gave birth to the now ubiquitous term "cyberspace" within a dystopian future where "virtual reality" and "real life" overlapped significantly in people's lives (see also Mortensen 2007). "Neuromancer", "The Matrix" and other such works illustrated a relatively bleak technological future for humankind that played on fears that perennially circulate in popular culture via stories of "internet addiction" and the alleged relationships between video games and violence, among others (see Williams 2007).

Despite the dystopian imagery of "The Matrix", none of us yet live full-time in virtual worlds, nor do most of us experience significant negative effects from our time spent online. People around the world do, however, move regularly into and through digital environments and participate in communities of a thousand kinds. A number of loosely-related technologies—websites, chat rooms, internet forums, instant messaging, online game worlds, mobile phones and text/audio/video-messaging—are the media through which these virtual worlds are constructed. Digital environments have not yet reached the sophistication of Star Trek's "holodecks," where people immerse themselves in computer-simulated realities that the human mind cannot distinguish from obdurate reality. But new media visionaries such as Will Wright, creator of "the Sims" games, believe that we are already creating "possibility spaces"—digital spaces that share a basic, well-defined structure, yet allow users to carve unique paths through them (Wright 2006). From this perspective, such virtual worlds are socially shaped and therefore deserve serious attention by sociologists.

As part of a new generation of sociological research on online environments, this article considers the roles of digital technology and culture in building and sustaining the interpersonal networks that structure virtual world formations. In what follows, I first (re)consider the idea of virtual worlds as communities. I then rely on my involvement in long-term ethnographic studies on two different kinds of virtual worlds—subcultural internet forums and massively-multiplayer online games (MMOs)—to discuss the relevance of the community concept, the cultural frames of reference that shape participation, and the function of socio-cultural boundaries. My goal is to provide a useful platform from which future sociological research on virtual worlds may be launched.

Virtual Worlds and Community Types

Since the 1980s a growing number of scholars have given serious attention to the form, function, content, and meaning of virtual worlds. One of the first sociological concepts used to describe them was "community," as we see in Howard Rheingold often-cited remark that "words on a screen are quite capable of…creating a community from a collection of strangers" (Rheingold 1987). His statement was simultaneously simple and profound, and digital communities became quickly distinguished in the literature from their more traditional counterparts (see Etzioni and Etzioni 1999). Distinctions were most often described in terms of propinquity, which emphasizes the source of, or reason for, a community. Classic social theorists such as Tönnies (1988[1887]) posited that communities were rooted in extended kinship systems, shared land and culture (ethnicity, religion, language, and so on). Communities from this perspective were seen as a social force that affected other social relations. Digital communities on the other hand have, from the start, been framed as consequences of intentional social interaction. From this perspective, it is not the community into which a person is born that shapes her outlook on life, but rather her outlook on life that shapes the communities in which she is likely to participate (e.g. Bagozzi and Dholakia 2002). This more recent conceptualization of community is by no means new. Sociologists in the 1960s-1970s began using the term "intentional community" to describe new social collectivities such as hippie communes and nudist colonies that were geared toward living in harmony with others who shared a moral outlook on life (e.g. Bourvard 1975).

The idea of virtual worlds as intentional communities seems to be a move in the right direction because the idea of intentionality highlights that individuals choose their communities. Yet it still leaves something to be desired, primarily because most

studies of intentional communities still assume the idea of propinquity as well as the existence of a normative morality. That looks something like this: people, dissatisfied with what mainstream society offers them, remove themselves to a remote or isolated location where they can experience "authenticity" via a community of similarly-minded others. Some virtual worlds can be usefully framed in this way while others cannot. A more recent concept still, "temporary intentional community" provides even more specificity when trying to make sense of how people congregate in the 21st century. Temporary intentional communities refer to groups of people who are brought together by shared interests and/or beliefs for specified amounts of time, after which they return to their own separate lives, usually embedded in mainstream culture. Some examples of this line of research include participation in annual festivals like Burning Man, in volunteer groups that respond to national emergencies or in Rainbow Family tribal gatherings (Gardner 2007; Niman 2007). In each of these cases, we find people who do not necessarily know or keep in regular contact with each other, yet meet to share in mutual fellowship either regularly or intermittently. Could or should virtual worlds be conceptualized as digital temporary intentional communities?

The task of considering virtual worlds as any kind of community remains problematic because the concept of "virtual community" has had its share of ups and downs over the years. According to past research, virtual communities are comprised of people who may not share local space, but who share a specific set of interests and who interact with each other through new media technologies. Rheingold's research, for example, suggested that virtual communities are built on "sufficient human feeling" which promotes the construction of new identities (which is a basic assumption of intentional communities as well). Meanwhile, dystopian pundits such as Sarder (2000) argue that virtual communities offer no useful identities. Rather, they are stripped of the ethical dimensions of traditional organic communities and result in vacuous spaces where users care for nothing but themselves. Besides these debates, we must contend with the sociological meaning(s) of the "virtual" and what it represents. Hand and Moore (2006) demonstrate its polysemic nature by citing contradictory statements by two cultural theorists:

> "The virtual is real but not concrete" (Shields 2003:2)
> "The virtual is precisely not the real…" (Haraway 1992:325)

Is the virtual an *alternative* to the real, the *opposite* of the real, or *is it* real…or something else entirely? One way past this conundrum is to conceptualize "virtual worlds" and "communities" separately. Castronova (2005: 4) defines virtual worlds as "crafted places inside computers that are designed to accommodate large numbers of people." His definition is technologically oriented and implies a connotation between virtual and computerized. I prefer this line of reasoning because it allows community to remain a sociological concept that emphasizes relations among people, without constraining how those relations are mediated.

Internet Forums and MMOs

My own experience studying virtual worlds comes in two forms. The first is through three years of participant observation in an asynchronous internet forum dedicated to the straightedge youth subculture. "Straight edge" was originally a schism of punk, a collective reaction to the sexism, drug-abuse and nihilism that characterized many punk communities in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The

straightedge normative system was constructed through a subcultural rejection of alcohol and drugs, as well as promiscuous sexual activity. Straightedge youths believe that such indulgent behaviors dull the senses and dumb people down. Through an abstinent lifestyle, they strive to create a better world through a do-it-yourself ethic of self-empowerment as well as through collective identification and community.

As with many other place-based communities, straight edge made its way onto Usenet in the 1980s. Its address was *alt.punk.straight-edge*.[1] Populated by early adopters of computer-mediated communication, Usenet functioned as a means of bringing geographically dispersed people together online. Few records of this early digital straightedge community remain on public servers, but its members also participated in several related Usenet communities, including *alt.music.hardcore*, *alt.lifestyle.substance-free*, and *alt.skate-board* (Norved n.d.). Participants shared an interest in straightedge music and culture and, as a second function, the Usenet community served as a knowledge-base for subcultural participants and curious visitors alike. The community was a collective effort, as described in Norved's introduction:

> This [FAQ] aims to provide information about being straight-edge. The information…is believed to be close to the truth but there is no guarantee given. If you know better, contribute your wisdom! (no page - website)

Hundreds of people sent thousands of messages to each other explaining their own understandings of straightedge ideology and practice. Although Usenet communities had largely died out by the late 1990s, its general purpose persists in dozens of online straightedge bulletin boards and forums around the world.

My research data come from a straightedge internet forum (SIF) that started in the late 1990s. It is one of many internet sites explicitly dedicated to providing an online community presence for members of the straightedge subculture. Since I first logged on in 2000, SIF has remained active, with thousands of current and past participants from North America, Europe and Austral-Asia. Anyone with an internet connection and computer can access the site and registering is both free and anonymous—a person may either log in as a "guest" or choose a username and password. Once logged in, participants see a list of conversations, arranged chronologically, with titles that summarize what each conversation is about. Unlike chatrooms, people interacting in forums need not be digitally co-present to interact. Rather, a user can click a conversation link, read what other participants have posted on the topic, and then may reply if they want to add something to the conversation. One may reply one minute or one year after the last comment was posted. Many conversations are about participants' everyday lives, such as "So I saw this documentary today about the dangers of alcohol…," but more often conversation are constructed in terms of question-answer: "I have a friend who wants us to have sex. If we are close but not a 'couple', would this break my edge?" The conversations represent straightedge in a very real way. People tend to take other's opinions seriously and collectively construct a straightedge ideology and identity. It is through such interaction that straight edge as a virtual world comes into existence (Williams 2007).

My other long-term research interest has been in MMOs, and in particular "World of Warcraft" (WoW), in which I have also been a participant observer for approximately three years. MMOs are video games played entirely online by players whose computers link to a remote server through an internet connection. Most

[1] For a practical history of Usenet, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Usenet

popular MMOs today are based on fantasy and science fiction genres and are direct descendents of early text-based digital role-playing games called multi-user domains/dungeons or MUDs (Mortensen 2006). “Ultima Online” was the first remarkable example of the graphical MMO genre, but “Lineage” and now WoW appear to have attracted the largest numbers of players. A player installs the game software on her computer, which then functions as the portal for online play. Once a player logs into a game server, she becomes synchronously co-present in a shared game space with all the other players on the server. The game world has a geographical design with players spanning hundreds of “square miles” of territory (see Castronova 2005, chapter 1 for a good lay-introduction to MMO design and play).

The most significant aspect of MMOs for this discussion is their social character. Steinkuehler and Williams (2006) provide a cogent overview of the genre:

> Technically, [MMOs] are the latest step in a progression of social games that originated with paper-and-pencil fantasy games (e.g. “Dungeons and Dragons” [Gygax and Arneson 1973]) and later migrated to computers, first as mainframe text-based multi-user dungeons - MUDs (Trubshaw and Bartle 1978) and later as the high-end 3-D digital worlds of today (Koster 2002). The virtual worlds that today's MMO players routinely plug in and inhabit are persistent social and material worlds, loosely structured by open-ended narratives, where players are largely free to do as they please, to slay ogres, siege castles, etc. They are known for their peculiar combination of designed "escapist fantasy" and emergent "social realism" (Kolbert 2001)…. The online gaming industry continues to prosper, with over nine million subscribers worldwide (Woodcock 2006). MMOs are played heavily (average time spent in-game is 20 hours per week [Yee 2002]) and often with friends and relatives (Yee 2006). (no page – online journal)

In short, MMOs have taken digitally-mediated sociality and sociability to new levels. Players can play with or without the help of others, but they can never really play alone. Further, there are definite benefits to playing *with* other people. For example, players regularly find themselves forced to work together, for protection and support, in order to achieve difficult in-game goals. Someone playing a warrior-type character will benefit from the life-giving support of a healer, while healers benefit from the protective strength of warriors. As long as players share common goals and perform complementary roles, some form of community seems certain to emerge.

In some ways, the two virtual worlds I have described could not be more different. SIF is limited to text and is asynchronous, meaning that users are not necessarily aware of other user’s real-time presence, while WoW features synchronicity and visual co-presence—you must physically see other players’ characters running around with you in real time in order to progress through the virtual world. SIF is a normative space, complete with gatekeepers and expectations attached to user’s offline behavior in addition to their behavior online. WoW, on the other hand, is leisure-based with a very different culture, where many players do not even think to ask who another player is in “real life,” and there are few expectations for offline behavior.

Participants in both communities use a digital interface as both a *means* and an *end* to intentional community building. Many straightedgers use SIF as a means of keeping up with events in other areas (e.g. what bands are on tour), while others rely on the internet as their sole access to a straightedge community (Williams 2006). For WoW players, the digital technology primarily represents an object of collective

interest, i.e., it is a fantasy game to play and enjoy. At the same time, it is a medium through which players interact and thus build/maintain community. There are many examples of player groups (e.g. guilds) that move from game to game together, practicing that community through a series of fantasy worlds. Similarly, SIF users sometimes become face-to-face friends or bands link up online and then go on tour together, thereby building/maintaining community as well.

In what space remains, I want to consider some of the similarities between these digital spaces as digital, temporary and intentional communities. My purpose here is to drawn attention to some meso-level processes that affect both, and therefore perhaps many other virtual worlds as well.

Pertinent Questions regarding Communities in Virtual Worlds

Question One: Are virtual worlds temporary and/or intentional communities?

I will start with intentionality because it is easily handled when discussing digital "communities." Once we remove the idea of propinquity from the definition of community, it becomes obvious that almost any conceivable online community is comprised of individuals who intend to participate it in. None of us participate in what we would call online communities because we "have to." Some of us may have to work together online as part of teams, but teams and communities are not synonymous. In other words, all virtual worlds are populated by intentional actors. Likewise, all communities are temporary in one way or another (i.e. nothing lasts forever). When I first started researching SIF in 2000, there were a few hundred registered members. By 2003 there were more than 1,200. That number, along with the interactions taking place among participants, suggested to me a critical mass of participants necessary to support a community in Rheingold's (1993) sense of the term. But what does "registered member" mean? It means that a person clicked the "register" link and then chose a username and password. Nothing else is required, and thus it is difficult to accept the idea that "membership" alone counts for much. I was able to track registered member's activity on the forum and found that, of the 1,200, a quarter of them had posted one message or less. Further, there is nothing to prevent an individual from registering multiple times under multiple names. If a person posts sometimes as "charlie" and sometimes as "edge4life" and does not tell other members that they are both *the same person*, then the community at large will recognize two members. If that member decides to quit posting as "edge4life" then other members might experience a loss of community, although she/he remains in the forum as "charlie."

Choosing how we measure participation goes a long way in shaping how temporary they appear. Looking at the growth of "registered" populations of SIF and WoW, neither appears necessarily temporary—they both are very active digital spaces that have only grown since being created. Steady growth like this suggests that both digital communities could survive indefinitely. There are however several processes that indicate their temporary nature, two of which affect both communities: a significant turn-over rate and the limitations on time spent online. Youth culture scholars have for some time studied the shifting terrain of subcultural life. Bennett (1999: 600, 614) for example expanded Maffesoli's concept of "neo-tribes" to describe the nature of young people's participation in postmodern communities, describing them as "groupings which…are better understood as a series of temporal gatherings characterized by fluid boundaries and floating memberships" based on "the shifting nature of youth's musical and stylistic preferences and the essential

fluidity of youth cultural groups". Certainly his ideas can be transplanted to make sense of SIF as a temporary community. During my research, I watched hundreds of forum members come and go, often over the course of only days or weeks. I emailed some of them to ask why they had quit posting messages. A regular reply suggested that they hadn't found what they were looking for in the forums, or they felt marginalized by other forum members, or they just got bored with it. The anonymity associated with participation—where one may be known only by a self-selected username—made it very easy for individuals to come and go from SIF as they pleased.

Server crashes were perhaps the other most salient aspect of the straightedge community's temporariness online. Between 2000 and 2003, host servers crashed three times—each time all posts and membership records were lost and the community had to start from scratch. Each crash resulted in new people (or at least new usernames) emerging as core members and some long-time members not re-registering. The dynamics of the forum changed over time as well because each crash erased the textual history of the community. Having no collective written history to draw upon, new members regularly started new conversations about the same limited range of topics. For example, many threads could be reduced to questions about straightedge norms, such as "Can I be straightedge an drink caffeine," or "If I love my girlfriend and we have sex, can I still be straightedge?" Probably half the discussions I read on any given day on the forum represented some version of these basic normative concerns. These topics, sometimes "beat to death" in previous iterations of the forum as one of my interviewees put it, annoyed many long-time users, who came to see the forums as little more than boring Q&A sessions about the basic assumptions underlying straightedge subculture rather than a community built upon "sufficient human feeling" (Rheingold 1993:5).

Blizzard Entertainment, who produces WoW, advertises their game and its players as a community. The community exists in two distinct digital forms: in-game as people playing together (which I will focus on in this chapter), and out-of-game, where people meet online to share in the production of WoW culture (see www.worldofwarcraft.com/community/). The WoW community also experiences a high turn-over rate, but for quite different reasons than the straightedge forum. First, while SIF is free, WoW requires a 13-15 USD monthly subscription fee, depending on the subscription plan. Second, the game is not only socially oriented, but achievement-oriented as well. Once players have achieved their in-game goals, they are less likely to continue to participate[2]. Game designers recognize the limited economic potential of this model and are constantly developing new content, releasing it slowly enough that players are not overwhelmed, but not so slowly that the subscription base decreases sharply. Third, WoW is in constant competition with other MMOs and other game platforms. Many players prefer moving from one game to the next every few months rather than remaining in one gameworld for too long.

Among both SIF and WoW communities, long-term members regularly find that changes in their offline lives—school, work, personal relationships, as well as goals and interests—affect their desire and/or ability to continue participating in the virtual world with the same intensity. Among SIF participants, this can be explained by the youth-oriented nature of the subculture. Many participants are teenagers for whom the straightedge label functions as an important social identity as they negotiate the

[2] Literally half an hour after I wrote this sentence, a colleague called to tell me his teenage son had just cancelled his WoW account the night before. I knew that his son had logged more than 1,100 hours of gameplay in WoW over the previous year (an average of about twenty-three hours per week) and so I asked why. He said he'd done everything he needed to do there, so he and his friends are all moving on to a newer game

pitfalls of teenage life. Presented with tobacco, alcohol, drugs and sexuality in their everyday lives, many kids use the forum as a site for practicing a presentation of the abstinent self. Over time, most become comfortable enough with their decisions to abstain that they no longer need the community-support offered in the virtual world. MMO players, on the other hand, sometimes find themselves battling what some scholars have called "addiction" (Kelly 2005; Young 1999). For both achievement-oriented and social-oriented reason, players are rewarded for staying online. However, gameplay for some reaches the point where other personal and social obligations suffer significantly. Once these obligations weigh on the player sufficiently, all but the most hardcore cut back or cut off gameplay altogether.

Intentional but temporary participation in online communities may last for minutes, days, or years. Many people who spend time online come in contact with people from around the world with whom they share moral or leisure interests. Yet the chances are relatively low that a person will become a permanent (i.e. life-long) member of any particular virtual world. She or he might become an active participant for ten days or for ten years, but even core members drift in and out of participation. This is true in SIF and in WoW. Many youths treat the straightedge subculture as an identity fad, discarding the label when it no longer works for them, while most gameplayers share their allegiances among many different games, moving from one to the next along with their shifting interests and friendship networks.

Question Two: What are the frames of reference through which virtual-world communities are built?

Regardless of how temporary each virtual world might be for its participants, we need to understand how and why people intentionally engage in community-building in the first place. In order for a community to exist at the most basic level, participants must interact with each other in meaningful ways. Albert Cohen (1955) and Herbert Blumer (1969) noted that people regularly align their actions with one another in order to satisfy even the most basic of human needs. The recurrent and often mundane practice of aligning actions becomes, at a meso-level, the collective actions that are evident in most communities. In order to align actions and thus build community, people must share a "frame of reference": a social lens made of preconceptions, stereotypes and values that structures how people see the world around them (Cohen 1955). The more intensely people interact, the more salient a shared frame of reference is likely to become. Frames of reference do not proscribe attitudes or behavior, but rather socialize individuals to accept certain sets of best practices. In my research on SIF and WoW, I noticed several different frames of reference: shared norms, interests and goals; guidelines for reciprocity; and a shared sense of identity.

Whether in an internet forum or an MMO, individuals come together because of shared interests and/or goals. For SIF participants, the interest is the lifestyle norms and identity associated with the subculture, while the goal is either to expand their social networks within the subculture or to collect/share knowledge of lifestyle norms. A significant amount of interaction on SIF relates directly to subcultural norms and behaviors. One participant posted the following message: "A few guys at my school pick on me all the time because I don't smoke pot. Has anyone else had this problem?" The question not only begs for practical advice to solve the problem, but also provides the opportunity for members to discuss shared values and beliefs about drug-use. As participants discuss such topics, they actively construct a collective frame of reference and, over time, a set of topics emerge as central to the

community. The interests and goals that bring WoW players together are not too different. Two motives I hear players express when explaining how they got involved in the game are the fun associated with playing with friends and exploring new leisure content. Like SIF members, WoW players ground their communal experiences in shared interests or a shared lifestyle with other virtual world users.

Social interaction is an explicit desire for users of both spaces, as is the development of a status-identity. In both virtual worlds, users must learn to align their personal interests and goals with other members' in order to maximize the pleasure associated with participation. Reciprocity—the bits of culture that members share with one another such as emotional support, favors, economic exchange, and so on—is a basic dimension of both digital communities. For straightedge kids, reciprocity is grounded in ideology. SIF is a space where members share stories about their everyday lives, ask for others' opinions about what is appropriate straightedge behavior, and support one another in times of need. When a participant complains online about being picked on at school, other SIF members offer coping strategies or methods for dealing with it. In short, SIF forum is a space for sharing strategies for living.

For WoW players, there is relatively less ideological reciprocity (though I would not say it is entirely absent from the game). Instead, WoW players mutually benefit from working together to complete quests or kill enemies. MMOs are designed to become more difficult as players advance through the game content and, quite literally, the game designers force players to band together under certain circumstances. If a player needs to journey between two distant areas of the virtual world, she may publicly request that either a high level character escort her (usually in exchange for gold or items), or try to assemble a party of players to trek together. Such groupings are oftentimes *ad hoc* affairs. Players band together because everybody benefits, and when the immediate goal has been reached the party disbands, most likely never to reform. Taking an example from another popular MMO, "Guild Wars*"*, one of the first quests requires that a player invite another player to form a party for the express purpose of walking outside the city gates. Once outside, the players meet a non-player character, who rewards them for having ventured outside as a team.

One may ask how this fits with the notion of community? Does one straightedge kid posting a story online about being picked on at school really constitute a moment in the process of making community? Likewise, when a player in WoW sends the message "lfg SM" (shorthand for "looking for group to complete quests in the Scarlet Monastery") and a group invites her to play with them for an hour or two, is there really community being created? Singled out and isolated as individual instances, such examples seem tenuous. Further, such fragile and momentary social ties may be seen as "merely virtual," lacking any "real" substance. If a young person asks for advice online about what to do when he gets picked on at school, he must still face the bullies alone the next day. As for WoW players, no matter how much gold they earn or how quickly their characters gain experience, nothing has necessarily improved in their offline lives. But when we consider that these interactional moments occur millions of times every day in thousands of virtual worlds around the globe, the concept of community becomes more tenable (see Denzin 1999). And when I ask the participants of either virtual world about the meaning of such relations, I have found that these temporary forms of communities are often very meaningful to them.

Question Three: How do boundaries function in virtual-worlds?

As mentioned previously, a third frame of reference in virtual worlds is based on shared identity. Identity is a tricky concept that is utilized in a number of ways, so here I rely on a cultural sociological approach to studying identity in terms of "boundaries." By looking at the boundaries that community members construct through interaction, we get a sense of how they see themselves in contrast to "outsiders" on the one hand, and how they internally differentiate among themselves on the other. Studying both aspects of identity work is a particularly useful and interesting exercise because there remains widespread debate about the production and consequences of identities and boundaries in digital spaces.

To talk about virtual world boundaries, we can frame SIF and WoW as examples of symbolic communities—communities characterized by "indirect relationships mediated by information technology" (Lamont and Molnar 2002: 182) where participants may be "linked primarily by common identities but minimally by networks of directly interpersonal relationships" (Anderson 1983:96). Symbolic communities are now more common than ever, though neither of the virtual worlds I studied should be characterized as *merely* symbolic (where symbolic connotes insubstantiality). I use the term symbolic here to emphasize the meanings that people attribute to their participation in digital formations and how these meanings result in a shared sense of "we-ness." Using symbolic in this way allows us to focus on how meanings are created, activated and diffused among community members, rather than on some vague, ephemeral sense of a shared something (be it a straightedge or gamer identity, or whatever).

Etymologically, the idea of community is very near the idea of commitment. In turn, commitment is often seen as an important measure of status-identity within a community. Many people in SIF are active members of face-to-face straightedge scenes, but the forums also receive visits from subcultural tourists—individuals who participate in the virtual world but whose commitment to an overarching lifestyle is less than that of "hard core" members. Due to the high turn-over rate of participants in SIF, it can be difficult to distinguish tourists from more active straightedge scene members. This difficulty, combined with the high value that many young people attach to a subcultural identity, results in forum participants regularly constructing boundaries that differentiated "authentic" from "inauthentic" members (Williams 2006). The varying levels of commitment among forum members highlight the tenuous nature of the community, especially when people who self-identify as non-straightedge work to construct boundaries that place themselves inside the virtual world community (Williams and Copes 2005). Similar boundaries between "power gamers" and casual gamers have also been studied among MMO players (see Taylor 2006), where the level of commitment required for the former gives them a shared sense of status vis-à-vis players who may not be "serious enough." Some players take their role-identities (e.g. melee combat or healer), social-identities (e.g. Horde or Alliance) and personal-identities (e.g. elite or casual-player) very seriously because it locates their social position within the virtual world's community.

Community boundaries are most often visible in digital spaces through language use. Several researchers have demonstrated how text is used to divide people online (Kelly 2005; Taylor 2005). One way to frame language use is with what Thornton (1995) calls the *embodied* and *objectified* forms of subcultural capital. Embodied subcultural capital refers to the knowledge and skills that individuals utilize to express their positions as core community members. WoW players show their status through

expressed knowledge about game-relevant argot (i.e. “leetspeak”), multiple character classes and character-builds, high-level areas of the gameworld, and the value of rare and unique in-game items. When inexperienced players ask “dumb” questions about these topics, more advanced players sometimes demean them as a means of status differentiation. Similar processes occur in SIF, for example when core community members tell new participants that anyone who is not “really” straightedge should not post in the forum.

Objectified subcultural capital, on the other hand, refers to the accoutrements (in these cases digital objects) that individuals use to publicly display their community commitment and/or status-identity. In SIF, such displays are most evident in the choice of usernames, avatars and signature files (Williams 2003). The username “edge4life,” for example displays a certain commitment to the subculture that “charlie” does not. Signature files might include references to what band a person plays in, or some other marker of distinction. In WoW, players’ status is objectified through armor, hit points, weapons and damage statistics, as well as through military-like titles and affiliations, which float above characters’ heads during gameplay. Game designers understand the attraction of visibly displaying one’s status in the game. Therefore, rarer items are made to appear more obvious when worn by characters. At level 12 running around with simple leather pants, a shirt and a short sword, I feel less significant than a level-80 character who travels around replete in colorful, pulsating gear with a brilliant nimbus surrounding her and an impressive dragon to ride.

These displays of subcultural capital (embodied and objectified), when combined with the concepts of commitment and status-identity, give us some important insight into community boundaries in virtual worlds. Certainly these boundaries are salient to users—subcultural forum participants and MMO players have each told me that higher-status members of each virtual world can make life difficult for more casual participants. But how permeable are these boundaries? Research on SIF suggests that the boundaries are quite permeable in terms of how people may potentially cross them, but are strategically used in rigid ways by individuals in identity-making processes. As for MMOs, some research has shown how significant effort must be put into achieving high-status boundaries (Silverman 2006). Yet such boundaries may easily dissolve in a virtual world where there is no one-to-one relation between player and character. Among at least one local group of WoW players I studied, players regularly use each other’s characters. One player who may have an obligation to an in-game group of friends to participate in a raiding party may ask a real life friend to sign on her account and play in her stead. If that character’s performance is recognized by other players as particularly praiseworthy, who receives the subsequent status: the player or the character? Finally, what happens when people leave one virtual world for a newer, hipper one? As the nature of the boundary between life online and offline shifts, there are likely to be numerous effects on both the form and function of virtual worlds.

Conclusions

In this article, I have preliminarily sketched out answers to three sociological questions related to two types of virtual worlds. The first virtual world was a normative community comprised of participants in the straightedge youth subculture. The second was the leisure-based world made up of players of the massively-multiplayer online game “World of Warcraft”. The community concept itself remains vague to some extent because there are multiple ways of understanding it. The traditional

definition of community highlights propinquity. People who maintain close relations with others within a bounded physical space, who interact regularly and who share culture are said to constitute an "organic" form of community (Tönnies 1988[1887]). This kind of community was allegedly on the decline during the second half of the 20th century, and depending on one's perspective new media technologies have either helped correct (technotopian) or exacerbate (dystopian) that decline. I briefly introduced to the idea of symbolic community in the previous section. Symbolic community, also called "imagined community" (Anderson 1983), was originally based on the idea that people need not share geographical space or even a direct knowledge of others to share community. Rather, people come to share a collective definition of specific symbols (e.g. a flag, song lyrics, an image, a ritual) through which they construct a shared sense of identity and we-ness. In this version of community, people need not ever meet to share a sense of community, so long as they imagine that the community exists. Increasingly, virtual world-builders are working to ensure their worlds provide just that.

Virtual worlds also exemplify "discursive environments": miniature social worlds that encapsulate the day-to-day, ongoing concerns of people (Gubrium and Holstein 2001). Our homes, workplaces, and leisure spaces are all characterized by unique forms of discourse and interaction. Within each environment, we work together with others to solve personal and social problems. The types of discursive environments have increased exponentially in recent decades with the growth of information and communication technologies, giving many of us a plethora of new sites for building meaningful communities and selves. Internet forums and MMOs are but two of the most recent and they give us insight into the future significance of virtual worlds for the 21st century.

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Engaging Technology: A Missing Link in the Sociological Study of Human Knowing and Acting

Abstract

Whereas technology has been the focus of much discourse in both public theatres and sociological arenas, comparatively little attention has been given to the study of the ways that people actually deal with technology as realms of human knowing and acting.

Working from a symbolic interactionist perspective (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969) and drawing on classical Greek scholarship as well as some interim sources, this paper addresses technology as a humanly engaged process.

Attending to human group life as "something in the making" and focusing on the activities entailed in encountering, using, developing, promoting, obtaining, and resisting instances of technology, this paper outlines a research agenda intended to foster situated (i.e. ethnographic) examinations of technologically-engaged, humanly enacted realities. It also serves as a reference point for assembling and comparing studies of the technology process that deal with this set of activities.

Keywords
Technology; Science; Sociology; Theory; Ethnography; Community; Pragmatism; Symbolic Interaction; Constructionism; Activity; Process

Although our contemporaries often envision technology as residing in material goods, particularly those associated with mechanized or automated, if not also electronic and computer aided, processes, this paper outlines a research agenda for studying technology more fundamentally as humanly engaged, conceptually achieved instances of enabling devices.

Rather than adopting the standpoint that technology resides in particular objects and their functions, we take the viewpoint that technology is achieved as people invoke concepts, understandings and procedures in pursuing particular realms of activity and the objectives applied therein. The emphasis, therefore, is on the ways that people engage technology not only as instances of enabling devices "in the

making" but also as matters that can be comprehended only within the context of people's participation as agents and interactors in ongoing community life.

Once technology is envisioned as consisting of humanly engaged enabling devices, it becomes more readily apparent that virtually every area of community life is saturated with instances of technology. This includes all realms of: religion, morality and spirituality; education, science and scholarship; speech, communication and literature; government, politics and policy; health, hygiene and medicine; deviance, law and regulation; food, clothing and fashion; industry, business and consumer behavior; sports, recreation and entertainment; agriculture, forestry and animal care; travel, transportation and tourism; family, friendship and collective events. Although particular modes and instances of technology may vary greatly from society to society as well as within societies and the subgroups therein overtime, humanly known and engaged reality is thoroughly interfused with instances of technology.

Moreover, technology would have no existence apart from human notions of purpose, usage, development and transformation as socially engaged, interlinked sets of processes. It is most ironic, therefore, that sociologists and other students of the human condition have given so little attention to this exceedingly consequential and pervasive feature of community life.

It is not the case that technology has been neglected in day to day practical, applied-vocational or academic contexts. However, little consideration has been given to technology as a humanly experienced, actively engaged phenomenon.

Whereas (a) the practical day-to-day community emphasis typically is one of finding more immediate, better ways of accomplishing certain tasks or objectives (as in enabling devices associated with concepts, procedures, and material goods) and (b) technicians, instructors and innovators in applied fields have endeavored to maintain current technologies, educate others on procedures and develop more viable instances of enabling devices, (c) the dominant social science emphasis has revolved around questions pertaining to the impact of instances of technology on one or more realms of community life. These are important matters pertaining to technology more generally. Still, none of these emphases provide (d) a means of studying the ways that people, as functioning members of the community, actually experience instances of technology or actively and knowingly participate in the technology-making process.

Although some might question the importance of this latter objective, saying that it does little to help solve problems of more immediate or pressing sorts, we take the position that this latter objective is exceedingly important. By examining the ways that people engage and experience technology in enacted, process terms we not only will better understand the "what and how" of technology but we also will better comprehend others as well as ourselves as participants in the human community. The study of technology as an actively engaged, social process is highly consequential for the understanding of community life - both in terms of the more immediate present and in broader, more extended transsituational and transhistorical comparative terms.

Interestingly, too, although sociologists and other academics, like people more generally, often become intrigued with the "new and exciting" features of particular instances of technology, there is comparatively little appreciation of the developmental potency or foundational relevance of the enabling devices that people earlier had developed. As we hope to indicate as well, these developmental, cumulative and yet often disjunctured flows of community life are important aspects of a scholarly consideration of technology as also is the potential that historical

materials addressing people's experiences with instances of technology offer for comparative analysis.

Whereas sociologists often envision symbolic interaction and the related pragmatist,[3] ethnomethodological and social constructionist approaches as pertinent to the analysis of interpersonal relations, these theoretical and methodological approaches are less frequently referenced in discussions of social change and technology. Instead, sociologists and many others in the social sciences typically contend that change and technology can be best understood through the use of "macro-oriented" analyses (wherein scholars broadly talk about the impact or implications of technology for social change in society).

Because notions of social change, technology and human living conditions represent consequential and intriguing issues, we may expect people to attend to "impact" considerations of technology both in the present and throughout the future of the human experience. At the same time, though, these discussions, even when they focus on particular kinds of technologies (such as automobiles, airplanes or computers) and reference particular users, specific outcomes, life-style implications and the like, tend to be (unavoidably) vague and are largely disconnected from people's first-hand experiences with the particular realms of technology under consideration.

These macro-oriented modes of research and analysis also fail to recognize that human group life does not take place as abstracted sets of variables but is accomplished and built up only as people do things and fit their lines of activity together, in purposive, meaningful ways, with the activities of others. People need not assume cooperative stances on any consistent basis and may define themselves in competitive, oppositionary and disinterested terms relative to others. However, it is within these realms of activity and interchange that technology achieves its viability and virtual existence. As a result, whereas more sweeping "macro" analyses may be instructive in certain respects, they are notably ineffectual for informing social scientists about people's *experiences with* technology.

In what follows, we attempt to move past these more speculative macro analyses by focusing on technology as denoting instances of human involvement.[4] Working directly within the symbolic interactionist tradition (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969; Strauss 1993; Prus 1996, 1997b), this statement emphasizes the importance of addressing technology in *enacted* terms.

This paper assumes three objectives: (1) to present a more fully sociological, humanly experienced vision of technology;[5] (2) to indicate some of the enduring features of this orientation by acknowledging early Greek thought on *technê* and (3) to develop a research agenda that would enable scholars to attend, in more focused and

[3] A sociological extension of American pragmatist philosophy (as articulated by Charles Sanders Peirce 1934, William James 1975[1909] and 1979[1907], John Dewey 1975[1910], and George Herbert Mead 1934), symbolic interactionism has been most notably shaped by the works of George Herbert Mead and especially Mead's (1934) *Mind, Self and Society*. Also see Blumer (1969, 2004).

[4] The terms "culture" and "technology" may seem synonymous in some respects. However, as used herein, the term "technology" suggests a specificity of human focus (as in context, activity, purpose and adjustment) that the more encompassing term "culture" tends to obscure. Further, as indicated throughout, the emphasis is not on technology as a general cultural concept or as particular configurations of material artifacts, but rather on the ways in which people *engage* specific instances of technology.

Relatedly, although people often talk about technology in general terms, the position adopted here is that things achieve no technological essences (as enabling devices - concepts, equipment, procedures) apart from the humanly experienced instances in which they are invoked.

[5] As suggested in some philosophical considerations of technology (e.g. Heidegger 1927, 1954; Ihde 1991; Johnson 1998) some of those in the "philosophy of technology" tradition also view technology most fundamentally as a "social process." However, they have given little direct attention to the study of the ways in which people engage technology in enacted instances. Ihde and Johnson provide valuable reviews of the philosophic literature in this area.

sustained manners, to the ways in which people engage technology. Although the emphasis, thus, is on grounding theory pertaining to technology (and social change) in more situated instances, the material developed here not only has a transsituational or transcontextual relevance, but also has a transhistorical dimension.

Further, by indicating the various standpoints that people may assume in engaging instances of technology, we begin to see the ways in which more molar or macro social processes are built up around the things that people actually do and the enabling devices that people specifically use in pursuing their endeavors.

Still, readers are cautioned about the inevitably tentative nature of the present statement. While (a) suggesting lines of inquiry that researchers might productively pursue in comprehending human experiences with technology and (b) serving as a reference point for synthesizing research on technology as something in the making, this statement is apt to be of most value as an enabling device when (c) it is reconfigured to more accurately (and completely) reflect researchers' examinations of people's experiences with enabling devices.[6]

Defining Technology

As used herein, *technology* refers to any object (i.e. any enabling "device") that people use in attempts to accomplish any activity.[7] While people often invoke the term "technology" to refer more exclusively to physical or material artifacts (and especially more complex pieces of equipment), technology always has a conceptual, intentioned or purposive dimension. Consequentially, every instance of technology achieves its fullest meaning when envisioned as an *intersubjective, mindfully enacted process*.

Addressing the human endeavor entailed in activities ranging from people attending to the fundamental necessities of physiological existence to all realms of playful experience, technology encompasses all manners of [objects] that people use to do things within their theaters of operation. This includes not only the sorts of things (e.g. material products and processes) commonly associated with physical phenomena but also, and even more centrally, people's language (and concepts) and instrumentally-focused activities (and procedures).[8]

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[6] Although the use of [brackets] to offset particular references may be disconcerting to some readers, we have occasionally used this device to alert readers to the problematic nature of the particular terms being referenced.

[7] While technology implies a means-ends or instrumentalist orientation, there is no requirement that any instances of technology that people invoke need be effective (e.g., efficient viable, or "wise") in enabling them to achieve intended objectives.

[8] Although this approach to technology may seem excessively broad to some readers and some might even suggest that it encompasses all artifacts, if not all physical phenomena and all human behavior, we retain a pragmatist position in defining technology. That is, **nothing represents an instance of technology (i.e. an enabling device) until someone defines or otherwise acts toward it as such**.

Technology, thus, does not reside in any phenomena but things "take on a quality as technology" when people define or otherwise knowingly act toward those things as enabling devices (a rock only becomes "part of the technology process" when someone uses it to pound a stake into the ground, for example). Or, somewhat relatedly, the seemingly material Berlin Wall has become used by some psychologists as a mechanism for interpreting the cultural mindsets of the German people (Leuenberger 2006).

We may distinguish (a) things that are intended and/or developed as enabling devices from (b) things that are envisioned as having the potential to become enabling devices and (c) those things that are knowingly used in attempts to accomplish something. Further, although the people whose lives intersect at some point with particular instances of technology may assume highly diverse roles in the particular technology process at hand (e.g. from developers and users to unwitting targets and disinterested bystanders), it also is important to be mindful of people's tendencies to take earlier instances of technology for granted. Thus, for example, people often assume language, the alphabet,

Further, while people may develop and employ enabling devices in both more individualized and more collective, interactive settings, there is no requirement that specific instances of technology be effective in allowing people to achieve desired or intended outcomes.

As well, enabling devices need not be pursued to their "full development" to constitute technology for our purposes. Indeed, many [enabling devices] may be only vaguely envisioned or articulated and only partially developed or implemented.[9]

Likewise, regardless of how compelling, groundbreaking, or challenging particular instances or fields of technology may seem, it is exceedingly important, at the outset, to acknowledge *the intersubjective foundations of technology*; to emphasize that people *use language* (i.e. a community-based enabling device) as *the* primary means of envisioning, transmitting and engaging other instances of technology.

Language may not be the first capacity that [humans] developed in the process of becoming humans, but speech as a mechanism for collectively developing and sharing meanings is the singularly most consequential feature of *being human*.[10] Indeed, symbolic interchange represents the most fundamental, unique, versatile and encompassing enabling device to which those who constitute the human community have access.

This is not to discount human capacities for encountering sensations,[11] engaging other modes of activity or the importance of the [physical / material] environments in which people exist, but rather to recognize the profoundly intersubjective or linguistically-mediated (meaningful, deliberative, interactive) essence of all aspects of people's *enacted* realities.

Over the centuries a number of people have explicitly commented on the enabling features of language. This includes Thucydides (c460-400BCE), Plato (c420-348BCE), Aristotle (c384-322BCE), Cicero (c106-43BCE) and Augustine (c354-430CE), amongst others.[12] The following quote from Isocrates (c436-338BCE), while strikingly elegant in its formulation, is not especially atypical of Greek and Roman views of language among philosophers and rhetoricians; Isocrates (1928):

> For in the other powers which we possess we are in no respect superior to other living creatures; nay, we are inferior to many in swiftness and in strength and in other resources; but, because there has been implanted in us the

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containers, electricity, books and computers are "merely there" as they engage other instances of technology - even though these latter enabling devices may be centrally contingent on these earlier developments. The implication for us, as scholars, is to be mindful of the broader contexts of the technology process while attending to the more particular notions of technology that people invoke in the specific settings at hand.

[9] Some readers may consider this conception of technology to be excessively sweeping, but by maintaining these broader parameters one may be better able to appreciate the variants that "technology" may assume without artificially blunting, obscuring or unduly restricting our consideration of the human condition.

[10] As used herein, "language" encompasses all of those symbols that people use in making indications to (and receiving indications from) others. To be humanly meaningful as a mode of communication, it is necessary as Durkheim (1912) and Mead (1934) observe that symbols acquire some sharedness, that any indications or signification directed toward the other achieve some mutuality (or invoke reference points in the other that approximate those experienced by the self). Also, see Prus (2007b, 2007d).

[11] It is appropriate to acknowledge that people encounter the environment via "the senses" (i.e. sound, sight, touch, smell and taste) but these matters, too, are only meaningfully experienced (interpreted, defined, acted toward) though the use of language (see Durkheim 1912; Mead 1934). Aristotle's observations (see *On the Soul* and *Sense and Sensibilia*) on these and some related matters (e.g. locomotion, memory, recollection) remain remarkably compelling (e.g. see Prus 2007b).

[12] Also see, for instance, the interim scholarship of Thomas Aquinas [1981], Dante Alighieri [1989], John Locke [1995], Johann Herder [1966], Wilhelm Dilthey (see Ermarth 1978), Emile Durkheim (1915 [1912]) and George Herbert Mead (1934).

> power to persuade each other and to make clear to each other whatever we desire, not only have we escaped the life of wild beasts, but we have come together and founded cities and made laws and invented arts; and, generally speaking, there is no institution devised by man which the power of speech has not helped us to establish... With this faculty we both contend against others on matters which are open to dispute and seek light for ourselves on things which are unknown; for the same arguments which we use in persuading others when we speak in public, we employ also when we deliberate in our own thoughts; and while we call eloquent those who are able to speak before a crowd, we regard as sage those who most skillfully debate their problems in their own minds. And, if there is need to speak in brief summary of this power, we shall find that none of the things which are done with intelligence take place without the help of speech, but that in all our actions as well as in all our thoughts speech is our guide, and is most employed by those who have the most wisdom. (pp. 79-81)

Thomas Hobbes (c1588-1679), who has a good working familiarity with some of the Greek literature, also makes this point in a compelling fashion; Hobbes (1994):

> The invention of printing, though ingenious, compared with the invention of letters is no great matter... A profitable invention for continuing the memory of time past... But the most noble and profitable invention of all other was that of SPEECH, consisting of names or appellations, and their connexion, whereby men register their thoughts, recall them when they are past, and also declare them one to another for mutual utility and conversation, without which there had been amongst men, neither common wealth, nor society, nor contract, nor peace, no more than amongst lions, bears and wolves. (pp. 15-16)

A similar, but also fundamental observation is made by a contemporary philosopher, Robert R. Johnson (1998):

> As unreflective we may be of language as a technology, it is still a human construct, a human invention that is taught, learned, and used in strategic ways, much as we might use hammers, automobiles, or computers. (p. 9)

Still, as with technology more generally, it should not be assumed that all or even most instances of language usage within particular group settings will achieve a degree of mutuality or sharedness that allows the participants to completely (or even adequately on many occasions) comprehend the viewpoints (and intentions) of the other.

Relatedly, because language represents the most effective (foundational) means of establishing the meanings (and utilization) of all technologies, the problematics of humanly achieving intersubjectivity are (by extension) pertinent to people's encounters with technologies of all sorts.

For all practical purposes, then, all of those who become linguistically socialized into particular human communities as newborns and other newcomers effectively become “technologically engaged” in the process. While these newcomers subsequently may develop other enabling devices on their own or in conjunction with others, they are first *witnesses* to, and *users* of, pre-established community-based technologies (also see Prus 2007d).

As a corollary of sorts, it may also be observed that if any of the enabling devices that people later develop are to achieve more consequential senses of continuity (and become more fully integrated into people’s life-worlds), it will be necessary that others be able to access (i.e. share, achieve some mutuality with) these technologies.

Further, although people often envision, discuss and use technology as though the objects (e.g. airplanes, telephones, computers, watches) to which they refer are distinct enabling entities, it is important that analysts acknowledge the *multi-technologically* embedded features of particular instances of technology. Quite directly, all instances of (humanly meaningful) technology are built on, are composed of, or require the implementation of, a multiplicity of subtechnologies or (primary and secondary) enabling devices.

It is both convenient and typical for people to refer to enabling devices in more singular terms, but such notions are highly misleading. Thus, for example, if one considers some currently commonplace items such as automobiles, televisions, computers, shoes, pencils and erasers, cups and spoons, it becomes apparent that they (a) consist of (or their production requires) particular subarrays of technologies.

Likewise, their use presumes that people (b) will specifically be able to connect these items with other (humanly meaningful) objects and (c) possess broader, contextual stocks of knowledge (including objectives, procedures, and proficiencies), as well as (d) embark on focused (reflective, intentional, interactive) enterprise in order to "give existence, shape and signification" to these [devices]. The same notions seem to hold for enabling devices such as laws, governments, scholarly disciplines, books, poetry, humor and other human interchanges, concepts, logic, theory and other realms of enterprise that are thought to have a more limited or minimalist "physical" or "material" nature.

We will be discussing the ways in which people engage technology in more situated terms within the core of this paper, but by examining some early Greek thought on technology we arrive at a more comprehensive base with which to approach, demystify and study technology on the continually unfolding "contemporary" scene.

Technê as a Concept

> *Now, isn't it of the greatest importance that warfare be practiced well? And is fighting a war so easy that a farmer or a cobbler or any other craftsman can be a soldier at the same time? Though no one can become so much as a good player of checkers or dice if he considers it only as a sideline and doesn't practice it from childhood. Or can someone pick up a shield or any other weapon or tool of war and immediately perform adequately in an infantry battle or any other kind? No other tool makes anyone who picks it up a craftsman or champion unless he has acquired the requisite knowledge and has had sufficient practice.*
>
> *If tools could make anyone who picked them up an expert, they'd be valuable indeed*. (Plato, *Republic*: 374c-e [Reeve Trans.])

Clearly, technology did not originate with the classical Greeks (circa 700-300BCE). Likewise, much Hellenistic technology (and thought) did not originate with the Greeks.[13]

[13] For some general sources on classical Greek thought, see Freeman (1949), Popper (1957), Bogardus (1960), Gouldner (1965), Peters (1967), Guthrie (1971), Becker and Barnes (1978) and McKirahan (1994). However, there is no substitute for more direct examinations of the texts associated with Plato, Aristotle and others of the era.

See Popper (1957), Bogardus, (1960), Becker and Barnes (1978), Martindale (1981) and Bryant (1996) for materials that more directly acknowledge the significance of early Greek thought for contemporary structuralist sociology. Popkin (1999) and Habib (2008) provide valuable historical reviews of the development of philosophy and literary criticism, respectively, from the classical Greek era to the

The Greeks were highly active travelers and traders in the larger Mediterranean arena, but they also appear to have learned much from an array of visitors and migratory peoples.

As well, the early Greeks (possibly building on materials from the Phoenicians, Babylonians, Egyptians and Sicilians) not only developed a highly sophisticated phonetic written language, but also were among the greatest scholars and compilers of knowledge known to mankind. Still, this is not an essay on Greek technology or a tribute to Hellenistic accomplishments. Our intention, much more modestly, is to utilize some writings from the classical Greek era that address technology as "something in-the-making."

As Roochnik (1996) observes, Greek scholars, reputedly at least as far back as the legendary figures Homer (circa 700BCE) and Hesiod (circa 700BCE), not only made reference to *technê* as a concept but also used the term in ways that encompassed (a) such things as the skill of craftspeople as well as (b) people's capacities for developing and implementing plans and (c) altering the forms of things presented to others.

At some basic levels, too, their use of *technê* also implies (d) a particularized knowledge of, or set of procedures for dealing with, some subject matter (tangible or intangible), (e) an instrumental orientation in pursuing a goal or objective and (f) something (e.g. knowledge, procedures, products) that can be appreciated by, or shared with others who might pursue similar objectives.

Relatedly, Roochnik (1996) notes that *technê* subsequently was not only applied (and debated with respect) to matters of medical practice (Hippocrates [460-359BCE]) and rhetoric (e.g. Gorgias [480-380BCE], Plato [427-327BCE], Aristotle [384-322BCE], Isocrates [436-338BCE]), but *technê* also was invoked (promoted and questioned) with regard to the shaping of character and community morality (as in Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*).

For our present purposes, though, it may be adequate to focus more directly on Plato and Aristotle (given the sociological relevance of, and the philosophic detail associated with, their works, as well as a greater familiarity with their texts within the academic community).

Given both the incredibly vast array of topics with which Plato and Aristotle dealt and the highly diverse conceptual (and often morally / religiously inspired) viewpoints with which they and others have approached their works, it need not be surprising that the Greek concept *technê* has been comparatively neglected over the millennia. Still, the early Greek literature suggests a more comprehensive view of technology than that with which most social scientists presently work.

More directly, this material (along with the early philosophic insights on which Plato and Aristotle build) encourages us to view technology as (a) consisting of multidimensional, humanly engaged [intellectual and material] essences, (b) an enduring, transsituational concern and (c) a dynamic, enacted, community-based phenomenon.

Although much of Plato's work (particularly that which is associated with Socrates) may be seen as questioning the viability (possibility, authenticity and relevance) of people knowing about (and knowingly engaging) the [sensate world], Plato's fuller considerations of the human condition suggest otherwise. Thus, even the dialectic (*dialecktike*) method of philosophizing that Plato utilizes in presenting (and contesting)

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present time. Emile Durkheim (1977[1903-1904]) provides an especially valuable analysis of the development of Western social thought.

For a more explicit consideration of the linkages of classical Greek thought with American pragmatism and Chicago-symbolic interactionism, see Prus (2003a, 2004, 2007a, 2008, 2009a).

Socrates' thoughts takes Plato squarely into considerations of technological practices (and *reasoning* as an essential "enabling device"), as also do some other tasks he pursues.

Plato may not have developed an explicit "theory of technology," but his little known *Charmides* presents a highly insightful statement on the desirability of establishing a "science of science." As such, it represents an early, very thoughtful precursor to more contemporary considerations of a sociology or philosophy of knowledge – as also does Plato's more extensive *Theaetetus*.

While often arguing for Socratic notions of apriori or preexisting forms (of things) and the impossibility of people attaining viable knowledge about the world, Plato also remains attentive to a variety of dimensions of *technê*. Thus, in developing his dialogues, Plato explicitly acknowledges a broader set of (humanly invoked) features of *technê*, as expressed by matters pertaining to *gnostike* (theoretical), *logistike* (logic), *kritike* (critical), *poietike* (craftsmanship), *mimesis* (developing images, imitating), *praktike* (building) and *epitaktike* (directive, as in statesmanship).[14]

Whereas Plato promotes a rigorous conceptually enabling, dialectic philosophy, many other aspects of Plato's attentiveness to *technê* are notably evident in *Republic* and *Laws*. Working with the moral ideal (and clearly preMarxist vision) of a communist state, Plato invokes wide ranges of technologies (concepts, organizations, physical structures, materials, procedures, and interpersonal relations) in discussing the development and maintenance of the city-state.

Thus, matters pertaining to city location and arrangements, agriculture, politics, military, trade, morality, religion, education, recreation, taxation and welfare, criminality and justice, family routines and population composition, amongst others, are presented as arenas that are clearly intended to be objects of deliberative planning and ongoing human (crafted, mindful, adjustive) enterprise.

Still, despite Plato's sweeping (and yet comparatively detailed) emphasis on enabling devices (including his explicit considerations of religion and mythology as means of fostering community cohesion, maintaining the social order, and building character), Plato's considerations of technology (i.e. enabling devices) pale when compared to those of Aristotle.

Perhaps, most centrally, whereas Plato remains somewhat wedded to Socrates' notions of the impossibility of people achieving viable knowledge about the sensate world, Aristotle intends to develop materials that directly *build on* and *facilitate human knowing* of the world. Clearly, Aristotle has benefitted extensively from Plato's scholarship. However, Aristotle's emphasis on the ways that humans might more knowingly and effectively engage the world is much more explicit and encompassing than is that of Plato.

Indeed, given Aristotle's pronounced emphases on developing, explaining, and analyzing enabling devices across the fuller range of his texts, Aristotle remains *the* intellectual exemplar of the technological perspective. However, and rather ironically, given Aristotle's enduring contributions to academia (including the foundational development of the analytic, physical and social sciences), there has been a comparative disregard of *technology as denoting realms of human activity and interchange* over the millennia.

As active, day-to-day participants in community life, almost everyone seems to (a) recognize that they use things (as enabling devices) to accomplish particular objectives, (b) know that some of their contemporaries are working on "new, improved" versions of enabling devices, and (c) talk about (if also not wish for) new kinds of technology.

[14] We found Peter's (1967) consideration of "Greek philosophical terms) helpful in developing this material on Plato.

However, (d) when people can conveniently access and use particular enabling devices, much of the mystique that they earlier might have associated with these particular instances of technology often becomes taken for granted.

Even sociologists, historians, philosophers and other students of the human condition frequently become caught up in the technology mystiques of their own present (or specific other past or futuristic eras) and lose perspective on the longer-term developmental flows (and disjunctures) of realms of technological innovation. Many forget or disregard the point that the technology of the more immediate present is contingent on the technologies that people earlier had developed. As well, they often overlook the point that the technologies of the present can only be comprehended in terms of the enabling devices of the past (see Durkheim 1912, 1977 [1903-1904]; Prus 2007b). Whereas a more adequate sociological theory of technology would require a comparative, historical (i.e. transhistorical) knowledge base, the more fundamental conceptual relevance of technology as an *engaged* feature of human life-worlds has been obscured over the millennia.

In, "The Question Concerning Technology," Martin Heidegger (1954) directly links Aristotle's "doctrine of the four causes" to the concept of technology by focusing on the "instrumentality" or means-ends aspects of technology. Addressing Aristotle's generic depiction of "the four causes,"[15] Heidegger draws attention to (1) *hyle* or the material or physical features of some phenomenon (i.e. that of which it is made); (2) *eidos* or the form that something assumes; (3) *telos* or the emergent and eventual (possibly anticipated) outcome and (4) *kinoun* or the mover of the process or effect.[16] At base is the recognition that *without human agency* (especially the capacities for intention and action), there is no technology.

Heidegger addresses these four features of technology in an insightful manner but, unlike Aristotle, Heidegger fails to sustain his analysis on a more participatory or humanly enacted level. Instead, Heidegger subsequently asks about the (broader) historical implications of technology for society. Working at this latter level, Heidegger posits that the key feature (now "function") of technology is not one of producing specific things, but rather to reveal or uncover potentialities; to (more or less continuously) allow people to "bring forth" new variants of technological revelations.

Consistent with Durkheim (1912, 1977 [1903-1904]; also see Prus 2009b), the present statement acknowledges the broader, historical-developmental capacities of people to use technology to prepare themselves for subsequent encounters with phenomena of all sorts.

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[15] What would become known as Aristotle's "doctrine of the four causes" is stated most directly in "*Physics* (especially 194b-196a) and *Metaphysics* (980a-983b; 1013a-1014a). However, those who examine either of the fuller texts will appreciate that Aristotle not only (a) recognizes that the number, variations and interrelatedness of "causes" can be great indeed, but that he also (b) envisions causes as terms that people call or assign to things. As well, Aristotle (c) observes that causality may be distinguished with respect to: potential, engaged and past effects; natural and human causes; accidental and intended human causes. Also see Miller (1969), Puddephatt and Prus (2007), Grills and Prus (2008).

[16] Relatedly, when discussing human agency more directly and singularly (see *Nicomachean Ethics"* (1110a-1115a) or *Eudemian Ethics* (1222-1227a), Aristotle is particularly attentive to the deliberative nature (i.e. minded capacity) of human conduct (in producing "cause and effect"). *Rhetoric*, *Poetics*, and *Politics* attest somewhat more directly to people's capacities to shape or effect outcomes by influencing and resisting one another. In these sources, too, Aristotle acknowledges the uniquely enabling feature of human language (logos) for the human condition (and some related [interactive and inter-agency] notions of human causation).

Thus, in contrast to many in the contemporary social sciences, Aristotle is highly mindful of the ways that people enter into the causal process as agents – both on a more solitary, reflective basis and as interactants with the potential to persuade and accept as well as resist the influences of others. For further considerations of these matters, see Blumer (1969), Prus (1996) and Grills and Prus (2008).

Thus, technology is envisioned as consisting of humanly invoked *instances* of situated enabling devices. Technology revolves around the things that people purposively use when they pursue some objective or otherwise act toward aspects of the more immediate "here and now" implied in ongoing community life.

While re-establishing connections with the images of technology put forth by the early Greeks, and epitomized most centrally by Aristotle, the current statement extends these in two noteworthy respects. First, whereas Aristotle is intent on fostering the development of a great variety of enabling technologies (i.e. a vast array of scholarly disciplines and practical endeavors as well as the stocks of knowledge, theoretical developments and procedures implied therein) and insists on focusing on activity in the study of the human condition (see *Nicomachean Ethics*), the present project (much more modestly) encourages sustained ethnographic examinations of the ways that people *engage* instances of technology.

Secondly, while Aristotle was a most astute observer (and possibly the most remarkable scholar in recorded history), his analyses of the human condition (technological ventures included) could be supplemented by instances of more sustained comparative analyses and the associated assessment and systematic articulation of process-oriented concepts pertaining to the ways that people engage instances of technology across the entire range of human group life.

Hence, while benefiting centrally from contemporary pragmatist / interactionist and associated scholarship as well as from more explicit examinations of Aristotle's texts (e.g. see Prus 2004, 2007a, 2008, 2009a), the present project focuses on people's situated experiences with instances of enabling devices. *Methodologically*, it encourages extended and explicit reliance on open-ended ethnographic inquiry with people engaging instances of technology in all of their facets. Indeed, this researcher-participant interchange is seen as the essential means of generating and qualifying knowledge about technology in the human community.

Consistent with Aristotle's comparative analytical (i.e. analytic induction) emphasis, the material presented here has a pronounced generic or transcontextual thrust. The position taken here also stresses Aristotle's (pragmatist) emphasis on developing analyses of the human condition by focusing on people's activities as meaningful, purposive endeavors. This statement is intended to enable scholars to examine, comprehend and develop viable theory about the ways in which all manners of people actively (and mindedly) invoke instances of technology in order to deal with matters in their respective "here and now" situations.

Experiencing Technology

Although building on the social phenomenological considerations of science and technology associated with constructionist and ethnomethodological approaches,[17] as well as Thomas Kuhn's (1962, 1970) analysis of "the structure of scientific revolutions," the material that follows is centrally informed by the symbolic interactionist tradition associated with George Herbert Mead (1934) and Herbert Blumer (1969). Whereas Chicago-style interactionism represents a synthesis of pragmatist philosophy with ethnographic research, it also assumes the task of defining the features of human group life in comparative analytic process terms. This

[17] We here refer to the social phenomenological analysis of human lived experience associated with Alfred Schutz (1962, 1964, 1967), Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) and Harold Garfinkel (1967). Those familiar with this literature may appreciate the many affinities of this material with the pragmatist / interactionist tradition.

reflects what Glaser and Strauss (1967) term "grounded theory" or what Blumer (1969) and Prus (1996) reference as generic processes.

At a foundational level, it is assumed that (1) people are community-based beings who, in the process of learning language (from those who pre-exist them in the community), acquire mindedness or ways of making sense of [things in the world], including themselves; (2) on acquiring the viewpoints of others in the community (i.e. achieving intersubjectivity), people act toward the objects of their awareness in meaningful (self-reflective and adjustive) manners and (3) people not only develop assortments of associations with others, but also have capacities to anticipate, influence, cooperate, resist, and otherwise adjust to others (and the things that others do) as they go about their activities.

Approached thusly, (4) things envisioned or otherwise referenced as objects are not self-evident entities nor do they possess inherent qualities or properties. Instead, phenomena are "brought into existence as objects" and assume particular qualities as people acknowledge, delineate, name, define, and otherwise act toward these [things].[18,19]

Relatedly, objects assume emergent, situated qualities. Rather than matters whose realities pre-exist human awareness or that exist independently of human definition, objects encompass only those matters that people know about, acknowledge, or otherwise refer (including things that they consciously "notice" or "wonder about") within their more situated, here and now invoked frames of experience.

Like those in the social sciences more generally, the interactionists have given little explicit attention to science and technology as fields of study. Still, the interactionists and the kindred community of scholars (constructionists, ethnomethodologists and realist anthropologists) have made some important contributions to science and technology studies (STS).[20] Included among those who have contributed to the broader pragmatist (activity oriented) study of science and

[18] For more complete considerations of the premises undergirding interactionist analysis, see Mead (1934), Blumer (1969), Strauss (1993), Prus (1996, 1997b, 1999, 2007b, 2007d) and Prus and Grills (2003).

[19] Methodologically, the emphasis is on researchers achieving extended levels of intimate familiarity (Blumer 1969) with their human subject matter by attending in great detail to people's lived experiences. This is to be accomplished not only through (a) researchers' observations of others in the settings at hand and (b) by researchers drawing on their own experiences in related settings, but much more centrally by (c) pursuing intersubjectivity with others by engaging in extended open-ended inquiry with these people about their experiences with instances of technology. The objective is to provide a careful, thorough analysis of the life-worlds under consideration by attending to (and representing) the viewpoints, practices and other experiences of those engaged in these settings.

[20] As may be apparent to those who examine three interrelated handbooks devoted to the study of science and technology (Spiegel-Rosing and de Solla Price 1977; Jasanoff et al. 1995; and Hackett et al. 2008), those focusing more directly on science and technology are far from homogeneous in their emphases.

Not only are there substantial tensions between those who more pluralistically study science and technology as realms of human accomplishment (as fields of activity and interchange) and those who intend (moralistically) to shape the directions of science and technology (and the people involved in production and usage), but the sociological field of science and technology (as with religion, family, politics, and deviance) has become interfused with wide arrays of theoretical, methodological, analytic, moralist, trendy and opportunistic emphases. Accordingly, it is the terms "science" and "technology" amidst people's broader scholarly interests in these phenomena, rather than a more coherent scholarly orientation, that provides the primary reference point for the field.

By contrast, those adopting a constructionist approach (like the interactionists) generally are attentive to the matters of intersubjectivity, multiple realities or life-worlds, agency (as in knowing, interpretation, purpose, intention), activity, interchange and [objects] as points of knowing engagement. The emphasis, thus, is on science and technology as social products and social processes – with concepts, agency, activity and interchange recognized as central features of all realms of community life.

technology are: Thomas Kuhn (1962), Barry Barnes (1974), David Bloor (1976), Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar (1979), Karin Knorr-Cetina (1981, 1995, 1999, 2002), H. M. Collins (1983, 1985), Andrew Pickering (1984, 1992, 1995), Michael Lynch (1985, 1993), Michael Mulkay (1985), Trevor Pinch (1986, 1993, 1996, 2007, 2009), Trevor Pinch and Weibe Bijker (1987), Sharon Traweek (1988), Gideon Kunda (1992), Bryan Pfaffenberger (1992a, 1992b, 2001), H. M. Collins and Trevor Pinch (1993, 1998), Stephen Barley and Beth Bechky (1994), Adele Clarke and Joan Fujimura (1992), Kathryn Henderson (1995, 1998, 1999), Frank Nutch (1996), Diane Vaughan (1996, 1998, 2004, 2006), Robert A. Campbell (2003), Carrie Sanders (2006), Gary A. Fine (2007), Max Travers (2007), Adele Clarke and Susan Leigh Star (2008), Ariane Hanemaayer (2009) and Philip Vannini, (2009).[21]

Even though their focus generally was not on science or technology, the interactionists and their kindred scholars have given extended attention to a wide array of "enabling devices" in their quests to comprehend the ways that *people do things.* As a result, these ethnographic considerations of the matter of people "developing and using enabling objects" have great relevance for comprehending the ways in which people engage science and technology.[22] See, for instance, studies of mountain climbers (Mitchell 1983), tattoo artists (Sanders, 1989), magicians (Prus and Sharper 1991), deep-sea divers (Hunt, 1995), "white water rafters" (Holyfield 1999), work dogs (Sanders 1999), and music enthusiasts (Merrill 2009).

Also pertinent to understanding how people go about activities in the realms of science and technology are ethnographic studies of "the acquisition of technique." This is apparent in studies of hobos (Anderson 1923), thieves and hustlers (Sutherland 1937; Prus and Sharper 1977, 1991; Prus and Irini 1980; Adler 1985; Steffensmeier 1986), cabdrivers (Davis 1959), bus drivers (Slosar 1973), drug users (Becker 1963), musicians (Becker 1963; MacLeod 1993), medical students (Haas and Shaffir 1987), comedians (Stebbins 1990), people involved in marketing and interpersonal sales (Prus 1989a, 1989b; Prus and Frisby 1990), restaurant chefs Fine (1996), preadolescents fitting in with their peers (Adler and Adler 1998) and high school debaters (Fine 2001).

Some ethnographic work dealing with "the formation and coordination of associations" as enabling devices, can be found in ethnographic studies of hustlers (Sutherland 1937; Prus and Sharper 1977), union organizers (Karsh et al. 1953), street and biker gangs (Thrasher 1927; Keiser 1969; Wolf 1991), service providers (Wiseman 1970), marketers (Prus 1989a,b; Prus and Frisby 1990), political parties (Grills 1994), role-playing games (Fine 1983), baseball teams (Fine 1987), musicians (MacLeod 1993), those involved in high school debates (Fine 2001) and emergency services (Sanders 2006). Indeed, once one overcomes the mystique associate with "science and technology," it becomes evident that a great deal of interactionist ethnography, along with realist ethnography in anthropology (see Pfaffenberger 1992a), can be invoked in suggestive as well as comparative, analytic terms.

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[21] More sustained reviews of what may be termed "the constructionist literature on science and technology" can be found in Pfaffenberger (1992a), Knorr-Cetina (1995), Pinch (1996, 2007), Collins and Evans (2002), Sismondo (2004, 2008) and Clarke and Star (2008).

[22] Readers may find *Subcultural Mosaics and Intersubjective Realities* (Prus 1997b) useful in comprehending the potential of interactionist ethnography for enabling the study of any and all realms of community life. In discussing interactionist ethnography, we are referring to what, more precisely, would be defined as Chicago-style or Blumerian symbolic interactionism, with its emphasis on pursuing the study of human group life in more pluralistic (nonpartisan, nonmoralist, nonprescriptive) terms. This may be contrasted with the neomarxist emphases of postmodernist or "cultural studies" approaches that sometimes are presented as interactionist ethnography (e.g. Denzin 1992). See Prus (2007c) for a more sustained consideration of a pluralist "public sociology."

Studying Technology: A Research Agenda

In what follows, we provide a relatively encompassing portrayal of the ways in which humans experience technology. Although this material has been organized around the activities that people do as they "engage instances of technology," readers are cautioned that this statement is primarily analytic in character and simply cannot offer the compelling, in-depth data-base (exploratory field and testing zone) that one obtains through sustained, situated ethnographic examinations of people's activities.

This statement, then, is intended to encourage ethnographic research. It is *not* and should not be seen as a substitute for first-hand field research or any ensuing comparative analysis. Accordingly, the material introduced here is inevitably tentative and, as such, represents something to be assessed, extended, reconstituted and possibly rejected, as scholars ethnographically examine the ways in which people experience technology in the evershifting "here and now" of community life.

Approached in this fashion, we expect that this framework can provide a highly instructive way of envisioning technology within the context of human endeavor. Drawing a closer linkage between social theory and human activity, the present material also encourages a conceptual, methodological and substantive coherence that is lacking in other approaches to technology in the social sciences.[23]

Before turning our focus more directly to the seemingly endless human quest for enabling devices or instances of technology, two other conceptual qualifications are in order. These revolve around (a) the multiplicity of *meanings* that people may associate with particular phenomena and (b) the somewhat related multiplicity of *operational standpoints* with which people may engage specific objects. Since this statement represents an excursion into human enacted realities, it is necessary to make these matters more explicit before proceeding further. Indeed, without some direct appreciation of these notions, any analysis of technology as a humanly experienced phenomenon would be most inadequate.

Because people may define any [object] in a wide variety of manners, even such seemingly simple or obvious "objects" as those *intended* as shoes, cups or spoons need not be experienced as "shoes," "cups," or "spoons" by others. Thus, even when others acknowledge the existence of particular things, they may attribute quite different meanings (e.g. fascinations, utilities, irrelevancies) to these [objects], perhaps completely nullifying or recasting any intended "technological" features. Since things take on meanings by virtue of the ways that people act toward them, *objects become* ***instances of technology*** when and according to the ways in which, people act toward these particular essences *as enabling devices* of some sort.

Relatedly, it is highly instructive to distinguish at least five aspects of technology. Thus, in addition to (a) any physical or material qualities associated with instances of technology, it is essential that researchers also attend to (b) technique – as in developing and sustaining generalized sets of intentions or objectives, situated types of applications, procedures, and instruction, as well as invoking more regularized in-use modifications and procedural adjustments; (c) the conceptual base that people experientially and mindfully develop over time in the historical flows, challenges, activities and interchanges associated with the ongoing accomplishment of human group life; (d) the more immediate, situated, participatory roles that people invoke in creating, applying, producing, testing, interpreting, assessing, promoting, purchasing, adjusting, extending, reconfiguring, resisting and otherwise knowingly engaging

[23] In addition to Blumer's (1969) critique of the limitations of variable analysis for examining and comprehending all realms of human group life, readers also are referred to Prus (1996, 1997b, 1999, 2007b, 2007d), Puddephatt and Prus (2007) and Grills and Prus (2008).

instances of technology amidst their activities and interchanges with others in the community and (e) the ways that people define and attempt to manage themselves and their associates with respect to particular instances of technology. This latter matter includes people coming to terms with their own stocks of knowledge and their senses of purpose, applications and challenges, as well as their more immediate strategic adjustments, disaffections, resistances and associated interchanges. It also would encompass the associated matters of people experiencing elements of success, satisfaction and frustration as they define and relate to others with respect to particular instances of technology.

In short, far from being something that is to be valued for any particular material essences or behavioral procedures, all instances of technology are to be understood within the contexts of ongoing community life and people's activities and experiences therein. Accordingly, the more fundamental question is *not* how instances of technology impact on people but how people make sense of and otherwise engage instances of technology within the ongoing accomplishment of human group life. Indeed, instances of technology would have no meaning apart from the humanly enacted reality of community life.

Technology, thus, does *not* inhere in particular objects but rather things *acquire* technological essence only when specific people envision, approach, or otherwise act toward those items as a means of accomplishing something in some particular context. Like other aspects of the situation that the participants may define in one or other ways, the people involved may later decide that specific instances of technology failed to offer the advantages they had anticipated. Relatedly, people may take certain (earlier defined) enabling devices for granted or let them fall into disuse, thereby relinquishing or negating some or all of their technological qualities.

In addition to appreciating people's capacities to envision and act toward specific instances of technology in a great many ways, both across and within cultural contexts, it is also analytically instructive to attend to the *multiple standpoints* that people involved in the broader theatres of operation may assume with respect to particular enabling devices.

As well, because the same people can adopt a multiplicity of viewpoints on things, the very same people may approach and act toward instances of technology in a plurality of manners on a shifting, if not also sometimes a simultaneous, basis. Indeed, the very same people may both appreciate and resent particular instances of technology or aspects thereof and face the prospects of dealing with these tensions (in greater and lesser degrees) as they go about their activities.

Still, on a broader basis, we may distinguish those who engage particular instances of technology as (1) observers (attendees, witnesses, targets); (2) users (adaptors); (3) developers (also conceptualizers, designers, producers); (4) promoters (conveyers, instructors, marketers); (5) acquirers (general public; commercial, industrial and governmental agencies) and (6) resisters (as in disinterested, disaffected, competitive, oppositional parties).

Focusing on the latter six *modes of engaging instances of technology*, the discussion following outlines some of the more central processes entailed in *encountering*, *using*, *developing*, *promoting, acquiring* and *resisting* instances of technology. These processes have been given an ordering for presentational purposes, but this does not imply any necessary flow with respect to specific instances of technology. Thus, for example, while resistance might seem to logically follow the introduction of some particular technology, people may develop (preliminary) resistances to certain kinds of ideas or concepts, with the result that some (contingent) innovations might only later, or perhaps never, be developed.

Although some might have found the material following more intriguing had we developed a research agenda that was derived more exclusively from studies of science and technology, we did not do that. In part, studies of science and technology, while increasing overall, are notably limited in number, substance, depth and intellectual coherence. As well, because of its sustained emphasis on process, the interactionist approach enables scholars to transcend the mystiques associated with particular substantive fields (such as science and technology, religion, deviance, politics, and entertainment) and focus on the more generic or transcontextual features of human group life. Moreover, once scholars focus on process and activity in interactionist terms, they not only have access to a body of ethnographic research and analysis that has been accumulated over the past century (see Prus 1996, 1997b; Prus and Grills 2003) but that also has an exceptional degree of theoretical and methodological coherence - thereby allowing for more sustained transcontextual (transsituational and transhistorical) comparative analysis.

Thus, while presenting the materials following in ways that are consistent with developments in the interactionist and kindred interpretivist literature on science and technology, we have been able to incorporate a comparatively vast and potent set of conceptual, ethnographic and comparative analytical resources into the research agenda presented here. We also have benefitted from the articulation of some earlier, notably parallel analytic paradigms (see Prus 1996, 1997b, 1999, 2003b, 2004; Prus and Grills 2003).

Still, although we have tried to be comprehensive in suggesting several lines of inquiry (and associated subthemes) for research on technology as well as providing a means of integrating studies of people's experiences with technology into the broader study of community life through the use of symbolic interaction, this statement is cast as a research agenda. Accordingly, this material is to be tested in the field and assessed for its viability at each point in the process.

Engaging Instances of Technology

Denoting an emergent, interactive, often disjunctured process, technology implies continuity as well as ongoing activity, assessment and strategic adjustment and interchange in the midst of disruption and change. Thus, to help frame the materials following for the reader, we have provided an overview of the major processes and subthemes entailed in engaging instances of technology. Although we have given an order to the lists that follow, it should not be assumed that people's considerations of instances of technology will encompass all of these subprocesses or that people need follow the particular ordering of the subprocesses identified here. Likewise, since we are focusing on a set of interrelated processes, some overlap of the activities subsumed in these processes is inevitable.

Encountering Technology
- *Attending to and Defining Instances of Technology*

Using Technology
- *Anticipating the Utility of Instances of Technology*
- *Directly Engaging Instances of Technology*
- *Sharing Instances of Technology with Others*
- Incorporating Instances of Technology into Present Life-world Activities

Developing Technology
- *Articulating Concepts and Envisioning Instances of Technology*
- *Assembling Instances of Technology*
- *Developing Procedures for Utilizing Instances of Technology*

Testing Instances of Technology for Quality
Funding (and resourcing) Instances of Technology
Collectively Developing Instances of Technology
Promoting Technology
Promoting Awareness of Instances of Technology
Encouraging Usage of Instances of Technology
Embarking on Marketing and Sales Activities
Acquiring Technology
Purchasing Instances of Technology
Resisting Technology
Experiencing Reservations about Instances of Technology
Resisting Instances of Technology
Defining Instances of Technology as Threats to the Collectivity

Encountering Technology

Because of the different ways that people may acknowledge and act toward things, the matter of "encountering technology" is steeped in ambiguity. First, whether people become cognizant of particular instances of technology on either a more solitary or collective basis, they need not share the meanings that others might assign to these things. Thus, specific people's appreciations of particular instances of technology that others (or even that they, themselves, develop) may seem acutely limited, if not also highly inappropriate, from other people's viewpoints.

Notably, too, even when people directly acknowledge the specific instances of technology that others intend, it is not apparent that they will focus on the particular features of these devices that these others had defined as consequential. Because people may attend (and give meaning) to anything that they associate with specific enabling devices, particular audiences may focus on any variety of aspects of the phenomena (instances of technology) they encounter.

While the specific qualities of objects to which people attend in any instance may be quite variable, people knowingly encountering enabling devices may acknowledge things such as: underlying concepts (e.g. principles, viability, novelty); materials (e.g. shapes, surfaces, composition, subcomponents); procedures of use; potential applications or demonstrated outcomes; users (e.g. characteristics, prestige attached to, affinities with users) and producers (e.g. reliability, loyalties).

Although these (and other object demarcations, such as weight, color, prestige considerations) may seem mundane in certain respects, a more explicit recognition of the *variable focal* points that people may invoke is essential if analysts are to comprehend the ways that people envision specific instances of technology in the setting at hand.

An attentiveness to people's reference points vis-à-vis particular instances of technology is consequential not only in respect to (a) participants' preliminary awareness and sustained attentiveness of items as enabling devices of any sort, but also (b) the ways in which participants bring notions of self and other into play as they *engage* particular instances of technology. Accordingly, it is most instructive for analysts to be mindful of the ways that people envision and act toward themselves and others (e.g. observers, buyers, producers) as they encounter specific instances of technology.

Since people may vary so extensively both with respect to (a) the particular objects that they discern and (b) any enabling qualities they associate with those

items[24], processes of the following sort may enable researchers to more directly examine the ways in which people *encounter or attend to [things]* and *define the particular relevance* of these things as enabling devices or instances of technology.

Attending to and Defining Instances of Technology

- ⇨ Learning about instances of technology from others.
- ⇨ Attending to instances of technology on one's own.
- ⇨ Experiencing ambiguity regarding instances of technology.
- ⇨ Attending to particular aspects of technology (e.g. functions, components design).
- ⇨ Experiencing intrigues with instances of technology.
- ⇨ Experiencing disaffections with instances of technology.
- ⇨ Discussing instances of technology with others.
- ⇨ Defining instances of technology as notably functional, advantageous.
- ⇨ Defining instances of technology as inconsequential, irrelevant, or problematic.

Using Technology

While people may be seen to engage technology whenever they knowingly encounter or attend to things that they define as enabling devices of some sort, we may also ask about the more explicit deployment, application or adoption of specific enabling devices or those instances in which people assume a more focused, participatory orientation with respect to specific instances of technology.[25]

Because people engage enabling devices with varying interests, applications, intensities, enthusiasm, ambiguities, competence and reservations, they may not only invoke specific technologies in wide varieties of solitary and group contexts, but they may also redefine the relevance of particular instances of technology as they work their ways through the settings at hand. Still, by acknowledging subprocesses of the following types, analysts may develop more viable appreciations of what is involved in people *using technology* (in their own terms and instances).

Anticipating the Utility of Instances of Technology

- ⇨ Envisioning applications or utility of instances of technology.
- ⇨ Experiencing reservations about using instances of technology.
- ⇨ Accessing / acquiring instances of technology.
- ⇨ Preparing for specific engagements with instances of technology.

[24] Attributions are seen as "enabling" when they point to distinctions, properties, or other qualities that people associate with some objective or accomplishment. Thus, people may distinguish between "red" and "green" color demarcations but these designations only become enabling features when people incorporate those distinctions into some objective (e.g. traffic safety, fashion design, more consistently reproducing nature scenes in a piece of artwork or even attending to aesthetic appreciation).

[25] While scientists (see Knorr-Cetina 1995; Campbell 2003) may be one of the most revered users (as well as producers) of technology, it should be appreciated that virtually anyone who attempts to employ things (i.e. concepts, procedures, equipment, teams) in the course of trying to accomplish something is a user of technology. Thus, for instance, although some may be inclined to dismiss the activities of drug users in considerations of technology, Howard Becker's (1963) ethnographic consideration of "becoming a marihuana user" provides a particularly compelling illustration of a number of aspects of the process of engaging technology in people's pursuits of desired recreational-emotional effects.

Directly Engaging Instances of Technology

- ⇨ Making contact with instances of technology.
- ⇨ Achieving familiarity with instances of technology.
- ⇨ Encountering limitations with instances of technology.
- ⇨ Developing procedures for using instances of technology.
- ⇨ Assessing experiences with instances of technology.
- ⇨ Comparing options / ideals relative to instances of technology.
- ⇨ Modifying / customizing / personalizing instances of technology.
- ⇨ Experiencing failure, frustration, loss with instances of technology.
- ⇨ Discontinuing usage of instances of technology.
- ⇨ Seeking alternatives to instances of technology.
- ⇨ Devising other uses for existing instances of technology.

Sharing Instances of Technology with Others

- ⇨ Using instances of technology in group settings.
- ⇨ Using instances of technology to affect other people's experiences.
- ⇨ Informing others of instances of technology.
- ⇨ Instructing others on the use of instances of technology.
- ⇨ Making instances of technology available to others.

Further, whereas people may actively promote and facilitate the use of particular instances of technology or otherwise be highly instrumental in encouraging others to attend to these enabling devices amidst other (existing and emerging) developments, the longer-term viability of these items is contingent on the ways and extent to which users integrate (i.e. engage, utilize) particular innovations within their own theaters of operation.

Incorporating Instances of Technology into Present Life-World Activities

- ⇨ Envisioning utility / applications of instances of technology.
- ⇨ Experiencing reservations regarding instances of technology.
- ⇨ Anticipating difficulties with instances of technology.
- ⇨ Engaging / assessing / rejecting instances of technology.
- ⇨ Achieving fluency in the use of instances of technology.
- ⇨ Extending applications of instances of technology.
- ⇨ Organizing other things around instances of technology.

The processes just delineated need not be invoked in the order presented here and researchers are apt to encounter considerable diversity in the ways that people engage particular instances of technology. Thus, for example, some people may have no reservations about using particular enabling devices and others may never own certain things themselves. In other cases, too, people may develop techniques for using items prior to encountering limitations, while others may set out to “acquire techniques” for using things only after encountering difficulties in earlier attempts to use those particular enabling devices.

Developing Technology

While people sometimes envision themselves as highly accomplished performers because they are able to employ existing instances of technology with some proficiency,[26] we would be most remiss were we not to attend to the processes by which people generate, devise, manufacture, or otherwise modify the enabling devices that subsequently are put into operation.

Recognizing both the more cooperative and cumulative, as well as the more sporadic, disconnected and competitive (if not also sometimes highly hostile) endeavors that undergird the production of specific technologies,[27] terms such as "develop," "create" or "generate" are used here to refer to any cases in which people (individually or collectively) devise or even conceptually identify (seemingly) new, different or altered connections between things.

Viewed thusly, some things may be "invented" and "reinvented," as well as "repackaged" over perpetuity. Likewise, only some of the more substantial innovations that people develop may be recognized by others in the community as unique, noteworthy or valuable contributions. The emphasis, hence, is not on identifying "genius," the first originators, key figures or major breakthroughs associated with specific instances of technology, but to attend more generically to the processes by which people develop instances of enabling devices.

Moreover, it may be useful at certain points (or contexts) to distinguish between people producing "prototypes" (as with conceptual models, working equipment, procedures of use and testing for quality) and those manufacturing or otherwise reproducing existing instances of technology for themselves and others. However, these processes are often much more interconnected than might first seem (as with purposes or objectives for use or concerns about funding, testing, revisions and so forth).

Since the people involved in "creating," generating or producing all manners of prototypes as well as those reproducing existing instances of enabling devices appear to engage in activities of the following sort, detailed ethnographic research along these lines would help social scientists better comprehend "the innovation process" as well as the ways that people engage (and pursue) projects revolving around instances of technology more generally.[28]

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[26] For example, consider the sense of accomplishment that people sometimes experience when they are able to "drive a car," encode telephone numbers or "surf-the-net" (on a computer system).

[27] See, for instance, Thomas Kuhn's (1970) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

[28] Although comparatively little of the material developed within "the sociology of science" is informed by direct ethnographic inquiry, these field studies provide some exceedingly valuable insights into the ways that the sets of scholars working in the physical sciences deal with technology. While best known for their conceptual developments, products, and results, those in the broader scientific community also encounter, use, promote and resist as well as develop technology. Knorr-Cetina's (1995) review of this literature is highly instructive in this regard as, for instance, also are Barley and Bechky's (1994) consideration of the work of "technicians" in science programs, Henderson's (1995, 1998) study of the production of prototypes in the medical field and Campbell's (2003) study of producing scientists in academia.

Hopefully, by laying out a set of processes that deal with people's experiences more generally, the present statement may provide an analytical prototype that encourages some syntheses of a highly insightful but conceptually fragmented literature, as well as suggest some future lines of inquiry for this exceedingly promising area of research.

Articulating Concepts and Envisioning Instances of Technology[29,30]

- ⇨ Acquiring (community-based) stocks of knowledge about things.[31]
- ⇨ Delineating, naming, categorizing, defining things.
- ⇨ Attending to ("previously unrecognized") linkages between things.
- ⇨ Questing for enabling devices[32].
- ⇨ Defining particular instances of enabling devices in the situations at hand.
- ⇨ Defining procedures and associated concepts regarding emergent instances of technology.[33]
- ⇨ Revising / rejecting concepts associated with particular instances of technology.

Assembling Instances of Technology

- ⇨ Gathering materials / components for instances of technology.
- ⇨ Designing (shaping, packaging, illustrating) instances of technology.
- ⇨ Integrating components / processes of instances of technology.
- ⇨ Comparing (and contrasting) instances of technology.
- ⇨ Testing (and assessing) instances of technology.
- ⇨ Standardizing and maintaining instances of technology.
- ⇨ Encountering operational limitations with instances of technology.
- ⇨ Assessing / revising / dismissing instances of technology.

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[29] While concepts, equipment, procedures, and tests may overlap in many cases, it should be appreciated that although all equipment, procedures and tests presume concepts of sorts, a great many "prototypes" need not move beyond the conceptual stage. Likewise, relatively distinct realms of enterprise (and industries) may develop around the production of particular kinds of concepts, equipment, practices and testing procedures. Henderson's (1995, 1998) examination of the production of paper and plastic (modelled) prototypes is particularly relevant to notions of these sorts.

[30] One may also envision interpersonal associations and other human arrangements (e.g. understandings, organizations, policies, laws) as denoting "enabling devices" or technologies of major consequence in the human community. Although some of these associations (and the arrangements implied therein) may never move beyond the emergent prototypical stage, other associations may assume more objectified forms (i.e. more enduring, broadly recognized, frequently referenced, imitated). As with all instances of technology, human associations achieve their technological essences when they are acted toward as "enabling devices" or as ways of achieving (however problematic this may be in practice) some objective by those attending to these matters.

Although the practices of "forming and coordinating associations" and "reaching understandings" are highly complex topics that take us well beyond the scope of the present paper, readers may find some earlier works (Prus 1997b, 1999, 2003b; Prus and Grills 2003) suggestive in coming to terms with a related set of issues. These human arrangements may lack some of the physical features or material qualities associated with other technologies, but in no way does this minimize their consequence for those pursuing particular objectives within the community.

[31] As suggested by Aristotle and Francis Bacon, for instance, in their respective considerations of scholarly disciplines, more extended technological advances are contingent on people developing focused realms of community-based knowing (and interchange). Also see Durkheim (1977) and Latour (1987).

[32] The assumption here is that people have some problem, task, or unresolved tension associated with earlier and/or ongoing encounters with particular objects, situations, or objectives. These endeavors may be systematically or only occasionally pursued. They may be highly focused and precise or only vaguely defined. Likewise, they may be casually, playfully, experimentally, determinedly or desperately implemented.

[33] Although theory is intended to indicate linkages between two or more concepts (as abstract object representations), theory (too) is subject to revision whenever people examine the instances presumably encompassed by the theory at hand (thereby allowing for extensions, reformulations and rejections of that theory). Notably, however, without some preliminary expressions or articulation of these notions, the opportunities for more enhanced or viable linkages would be severely limited. Glaser and Strauss's (1967) statement on "grounded theory" is instructive vis-à-vis the theoretical insights in the social sciences that may be generated as people more directly examine instances in (developmental) process terms.

Developing Procedures for Utilizing Instances of Technology

- ⇨ Invoking procedural stocks of knowledge / applications of instances of technology.
- ⇨ Attending to secondary agendas (e.g. efficiency, costs, safety) in using instances of technology.
- ⇨ Comparing and testing instances of technology.
- ⇨ Standardizing procedures and maintenance for instances of technology.
- ⇨ Encountering procedural limitations with instances of technology.
- ⇨ Assessing and revising procedures for evaluating instances of technology.

Testing Instances of Technology for Quality

- ⇨ Invoking objectives for instances of technology.
- ⇨ Articulating quality-related standards for instances of technology.
- ⇨ Attending to concepts, equipment, procedures.
- ⇨ Establishing procedural criteria for assessing instances of technology.
- ⇨ Specifying indicators (of quality) for instances of technology.
- ⇨ Monitoring conditions / recording effects for instances of technology.
- ⇨ Interpreting and assessing results for instances of technology.
- ⇨ Encountering operational limitations regarding instances of technology.
- ⇨ Assessing / revising criteria for instances of technology.

Funding (and resourcing) Instances of Technology

- ⇨ Developing projects (instances of technology) on one's own.
- ⇨ Seeking, obtaining, and maintaining sponsors for instances of technology.[34]
- ⇨ Arranging for personnel, equipment, procedures.

Collectively Developing Instances of Technology[35]

- ⇨ Attending to other people's productions of, experiences with, instances of technology.
- ⇨ Copying instances of technology (concepts, equipment, procedures, applications) from others.
- ⇨ Consulting with others / obtaining instruction from others regarding instances of technology.
- ⇨ Receiving encouragement, assistance, and other technology-related resources from others.
- ⇨ Coordinating instances of technology projects with others.
- ⇨ Encountering instances of technology-related resistance from associates, sponsors.
- ⇨ Becoming disengaged from collective ventures involving instances of technology.
- ⇨ Resurrecting collective ventures dealing with instances of technology.

Promoting Technology

People sometimes develop and use enabling devices largely on their own, but in order to achieve broader viability it is necessary that instances of technology become shared with others in the community. It is not supposed that technological developments are adopted by others simply because they are thought "valuable" in

[34] Bruno Latour's (1987) consideration of networks and other modes of support is suggestive here.
[35] For fuller discussions of people's involvements in associations, collective events, and influence and resistance work more generally, see Prus (1999) and Prus and Grills (2003).

certain respects by their innovators, but rather because others develop interests in these items and begin to incorporate them, as enabling devices, into their more particular theatres of operation.

Further, even when others develop interests in particular enabling devices, it should not be assumed that their appreciations of these objects are direct, quick and enduring or even vaguely consistent with the intentions of those involved in their development.

From the promoters' viewpoint, the tasks of "generating awareness" and "encouraging the use" of particular enabling devices, while interrelated, both seem consequential in sharing technology with others.

Promoting Awareness of Instances of Technology

- ⇨ Identifying and naming instances of technology.
- ⇨ Communicating / disclosing / recording instances of technology.
- ⇨ Emphasizing / justifying / encouraging instances of technology.

Encouraging Usage of Instances of Technology

- ⇨ Providing others with instances of technology.
- ⇨ Providing instruction / simplifying operations / enhancing safety regarding technology.
- ⇨ Generating trust regarding technology (concepts, products, applications, producers).
- ⇨ Extending features, applications, support systems of instances of technology.
- ⇨ Increasing durability, portability, accessibility of instances of technology.

Although some may intend to isolate technology from the seemingly "crass and commercial" features of the marketplace, the two are much more inseparable than may seem on the surface. Accordingly, those interested in the technology process may find it useful to locate technological ventures within the context of marketplace activities.[36]

Embarking on Marketing and Sales Activities

- ⇨ Setting up businesses involving instances of technology.
- ⇨ Developing management activities around instances of technology.
- ⇨ Purchasing products (instances of technology) for manufacture, resale.
- ⇨ Setting prices for instances of technology.
- ⇨ Using the media to promote instances of technology.
- ⇨ Approaching prospective buyers at their places of business, homes.
- ⇨ Promoting instances of technology at trade shows, other exhibits.
- ⇨ Presenting instances of technology to prospective buyers on an interpersonal basis.
- ⇨ Generating trust among prospective buyers.
- ⇨ Neutralizing resistance from prospective buyers.
- ⇨ Obtaining commitments from prospective buyers.
- ⇨ Encountering troublesome customers.
- ⇨ Developing loyalty regarding instances of technology.
- ⇨ Reducing prices or "holding sales" on instances of technology.
- ⇨ Maintaining enthusiasm on the part of marketing and sales staff.

[36] These processes have been adopted from Prus (1989a, 1989b). These texts offer ethnographic materials and analysis of marketing and sales activity pertaining to a wide variety of consumer, industrial and commercial products and services. Also see Prus and Frisby (1990). A more extended conceptual statement on "the influence (and resistance) process" is available in Prus (1999). Because of the generic nature of these materials, they would apply to any [instance of technology] that anyone might attempt to promote or convey to anyone else on a more solitary or collective basis.

Whereas comparatively few of the day to day "makers and shakers" of the marketplace may innovatively contribute to the development of new instances of technology, as well as have more ready access to certain instances of technology as members of particular communities, there can be little doubt that their enthusiasm (i.e. enterprise) in promoting products and services, even if primarily financially motivated, has created a profound receptivity to new technological developments and the consumption of these instances of technology more generally.[37]

Still, the producers and sponsors of any technology are dependent on others obtaining these devices for the popularity and endurance of these objects as well as the continuity of their own technological ventures. Thus, although we earlier considered the ways that people might engage instances of technology as users, it also is important to acknowledge the ways that people enter into the technology process as purchasers.

Acquiring Technology

While people may freely obtain instruction from others on some matters of technique or otherwise learn ways of integrating objects that are more readily available to them into their activities, the focus here is on the ways that people acquire instances of technology through trade or exchange.

There are many ways of obtaining technology other than through the direct exchanges of goods, services, and related capital (consider borrowing, copying, informal instruction, theft, espionage).[38] However, the acquisition of technology by the general public as well as those involved in industrial, commercial, and governmental ventures represents a particularly consequential feature of the technology-engagement process (see Prus 1989a, 1989b; Prus and Fleras, 1996; Oudshoorn and Pinch, 2003). Furthermore, as with the promotional process more generally, a great deal of activity in contemporary society is organized around the quest for goods and services that "do things" or enable people to achieve various objectives.

Whereas some sectors of the community (such as those involved in science, technological development and medicine, as well as the military and other branches of the government) may be seen as particularly important consumers of technology, the general public also is extensively involved in the acquisition of technology. Further, even though some of the products and services that members of the general public pursue may have obvious instrumental utility (i.e. work, health, home related applications), a considerable amount of commonly sought after technology pertains to matters of recreation and entertainment (including children's playthings).

Derived from a study of consumer behavior, the following processes have been recast somewhat more generically so that they could be used as points of departure for

[37] Assuming roles as intermediaries between manufacturers and consumers, merchants not only may provide feedback on the popularity of many instances of technology but also may serve as especially noteworthy testing grounds for manufacturer's products and may provide suggestions for technological adjustments and other innovations pertaining to existing instances of technology.

[38] As most readers realize, it is much easier as well as faster and often more effective to copy ideas, procedures, and material developments from others than to create these on one's own. Thus, in addition to the more dramatic instances of industrial espionage, it is not uncommon for manufacturers to purchase instances of technology that competitors have developed with the express purpose of disassembling these items to permit closer analysis, modification and reproduction. Even highly fleeting examinations of enabling devices or small bits of information pertaining to the construction or usage of certain instances of technology may be adequate on occasion to reproduce and/or enhance their potential as enabling devices.

studying the ways that people more generally enter into the technology process as purchasers or traders of various sorts.

Purchasing Technology

- ⇨ Learning about products (i.e. instances of technology).
- ⇨ Assessing purchasing arenas.
- ⇨ Venturing into purchasing arenas.
- ⇨ Attending to interests, ambiguities, and finances.
- ⇨ Shopping and purchasing instances of technology in groups.
- ⇨ Anticipating encounters with salespeople.
- ⇨ Attributing trust and invoking scepticism.
- ⇨ Averting interpersonal influence.
- ⇨ Pursuing quality in purchasing instances of technology.
- ⇨ Attending to brand differentiations regarding instances of technology.
- ⇨ Engaging in comparison shopping.
- ⇨ Pursuing discounts, bargains, deals.
- ⇨ Making situated adjustments regarding instances of technology.
- ⇨ Managing expenditures pertaining to instances of technology.
- ⇨ Stabilizing purchasing practices involving instances of technology.[39]

Whereas aspects of resistance (as in reservations, limitations and direct opposition) permeate a great many features of the acquisition processes just outlined (and consumptive activity cannot be adequately understood apart from traders' involvements as *both* targets and tacticians - see Prus 1999), it is instructive to consider people's resistances to technology in somewhat broader terms.

Resisting Technology

It may be tempting to focus on "success" stories and audience receptivities when considering technological developments, but it may be no less instructive to more directly acknowledge (and inquire into) the resistances, reservations, opposition or other obstacles that those promoting specific instances of technology may experience.

Resistance from other people is not synonymous with technological inadequacy, "dead ends," or failure. Nevertheless, these resistances signify noteworthy challenges that those promoting enabling devices may encounter. Indeed, the "lack of receptivity" on the part of consuming audiences is apt to contribute more centrally to the eventual neglect or demise of specific technological innovations than might any features, functions or qualities of those instances of technology. Thus, it is essential to consider the inattention, reservations, criticisms, and other obstructions associated with particular technologies by perspective users and others in the broader community.

As a particularly consequential case in point, one might consider the resistances of various peoples (academics included) to classical Greek scholarship over the millennia. Thus, following the death of Alexander the Great (c356-323BCE) and the break up the Greek empire, the Greeks (after 300BCE) themselves, became proportionately more attentive to morality, religion, and totalizing skepticism (vs. knowing and examining the sensate world). After invading Greece (c150BCE), the Romans adopted much material

[39] While informed by research on marketing and sales (Prus 1989a, 1989b; Prus and Frisby 1990; Prus and Fleras 1996), these processes also have been refined through an ethnographic study of consumer behavior (partially developed in Prus 1991, 1993, 1994, 1997a; Prus and Dawson 1991).

and poetic Greek technology, but were considerably less attentive to classical Greek philosophy as an instructive realm of conceptual technology.

In turn, the early Christian fathers maintained some contact with Greek philosophy (most notably the religious texts associated with Plato), but approached Greek pagan philosophy (most consequentially Aristotle) with considerable hostility. The Vikings and others who later sacked Roman and Christian informed European settlements displayed little regard for written text of any sort. Somewhat ironically, European scholars would later (amidst the crusades) become re-acquainted with more aspects of Greek scholarship (and conceptual technology) through contacts with Islamic and Judaic scholars in Spain.

Still, as Durkheim (1977[1903-1904]) indicates in his analysis of the evolution of Western social thought, there would be many other resistances to (the technologically enlightened) classical Greek scholarship in the centuries that followed (including the artistic, expressive [vs. philosophic] emphases of the 16th century Renaissance).

Speaking more generally, though, because of the vast assortment of viewpoints that people may adopt with respect to the presence or use of any object relative to their own theaters of operation, one finds that resistances to instances of technology are commonplace, if not also particularly intense in many cases.

First, just as some people may be attracted to specific enabling devices because of the potential that they associate with these developments so, in somewhat parallel fashions, others may view particular technologies as likely to have disruptive or other undesired effects on their own life-worlds (or those of others whose situations they hope to regulate in some way).

Thus, in addition to those who may resist particular instances of technology on more highly direct, device-related grounds (as with disinterest, skepticism, and competitive viewpoints), people may oppose particular instances of technology because of threats or more pressing emphases that they associate with notions of community morality, physical safety, profit motives, intergroup relations, interpersonal relations, and personal competence and prestige, for instance.

Relatedly, too, many instances of technology may never encounter resistance from outsiders because their productions, applications, or promotions were curtailed by insider (e.g. producers, sponsors) disinterest, reservations, or more overt opposition at earlier stages of development. Likewise, while some people (insiders or outsiders) may resist instances of technology on a more solitary basis, other oppositional endeavors may reflect wide assortments (and perhaps highly sustained realms) of collective endeavor.

Given the potentially broadly-based and diversely-constituted sources of resistance that those using, developing and promoting instances of technology may encounter from others, it seems most instructive for researchers to focus on processes of the following sort:[40]

Experiencing Reservations about Instances of Technology

- ⇨ Defining instances of technology as problematic in some way.
- ⇨ Envisioning instances of technology as counter-productive, irrelevant, redundant or obsolete.
- ⇨ Opposing particular features (concepts, devices, components, applications, outcomes).

[40] Whether or not the originators or others who support specific enabling devices might be able to offset individual and collective resistances to their instances of technology, a fuller appreciation of promoted and contested technologies takes us more directly into a consideration of influence and resistance work (see Prus 1999).

- ⇨ Experiencing disaffection with the innovators, promoters, or users of instances of technology.
- ⇨ Viewing instances of technology as competitive with one's own instances of technology.

Resisting Instances of Technology

- ⇨ Proposing modifications to instances of technology.
- ⇨ Promoting (and sustaining) alternative technologies.
- ⇨ Encountering encouragements from others to use alternative technologies.
- ⇨ Opposing instances of technology on a solitary and/or collective basis.

Defining Instances of Technology as Threats to the Collectivity

Although we have approached technology as representing instances of enabling devices, it is the case (as this broader discussion of resistance implies) that instances of technology are not always welcomed in these terms. Accordingly, we may ask more specifically when particular instances of technology are defined as threats, problems or disasters within the broader community or some more substantial sector within. Notably, too, whereas some threats may be related to potential, claimed or "proven" malfunctions of particular enabling devices (and associated physical or physiological risks), other concerns may revolve around definitions of particular instances of technology as disruptive, corrupting, immoral, sacrilegious or threatening in other ways.

Deriving conceptual inspiration from Herbert Blumer (1971; also see Prus and Grills 2003) who emphasizes the point that *social problems represent the processes and products of community definition* rather than objective matters of fact, we attend to the ways that people may define and deal with instances of technology as threats to the collectivity. This includes processes of the following sort:

- ⇨ Generating preliminary definitions of instances of technology as troublesome or threatening.
- ⇨ Focusing audience attention on instances of technology or otherwise dramatizing concerns.
- ⇨ Vilifying instances of technology and any supporters (producers, promoters, users).
- ⇨ Justifying concerns by referencing supporters, experts, evidence, and threats.
- ⇨ Emphasizing the necessity of immediate action to deal with instances of technology.
- ⇨ Developing alliances and coordinating activities with other oppositionary parties.
- ⇨ Neutralizing alternative viewpoints regarding instances of technology.
- ⇨ Articulating preliminary agendas for dealing with instances of technology.
- ⇨ Dealing with internal (insider) disagreements regarding instances of technology.
- ⇨ Developing specific policies and programs for opposing instances of technology.
- ⇨ Assigning responsibility for opposing instances of technology to prominent persons or agencies.
- ⇨ Dealing with resistance from any supporters of instances of technology.
- ⇨ Assessing and readjusting plans and tactics to make resistance more viable.

In Perspective

Although technology is often envisioned in more material (and "scientific") ways, if not also vague, more discursive terms that seem beyond the realms of sustained sociological (and ethnographic) inquiry, technology becomes notably demystified and better understood when it is approached as a realm of human *enacted* reality.

Moreover, by approaching technology as "enabling devices in the making," as matters that are most centrally realized through humanly engaged realms of activity, this latter viewpoint also suggests some consequential lapses in social theory and substantive inquiry.

Adopting a viewpoint that is more thoroughly "transmodernist" or that would allow us to examine the nature of human knowing and acting across the corridors of time (also see Prus 2004), we observe that, like structuralist and idealist approaches to technology more generally, many of the central features of a pragmatist, interactionist or constructionist approach to technology may be located in the scholarship of the classical Greek era (c700-300 BCE).

However, in contrast to more structuralist (factors-oriented) and more idealist (prescriptive, moralist, totalizing relativist or cynicist) viewpoints, the emphasis here is on *connecting theory with human enacted reality.* Focusing on instances of technology as humanly experienced (and engaged) phenomena, the position adopted here is not only grounded in activity but also is *transcontextual* and *transhistorical* in emphasis.

Encompassing an endless array of *enabling devices*, technology is fundamental for comprehending the human condition in both situated and transsituational respects. Indeed, without a conceptual scheme and a methodology that enables social scientists to examine technology as a humanly engaged essence, sociological theory will have limited relevance for understanding the ways in which community life is accomplished. It is here that we strive for a theory of technology that is highly attentive to the linkages of language, objects, activity and adjustive interchange.

While the early Greek concept of *technê* instructively draws attention to (1) the enduring, multiplistic, humanly engaged essences of technology, a more adequate sociological approach to the study of technology also requires (2) an explicit appreciation of the linguistic, definitional, enacted and adjustive features of people's attempts to do things in their respective life-worlds; (3) a sustained, intersubjectively-informed examination of the ways in which people do things in actual, situated (as opposed to ideal, hypothetical or normative) instances and (4) the necessity of scholars attending directly to the multiple standpoints that *people invoke* (variously) in *encountering, using, developing, promoting, acquiring and resisting* instances of technology within their particular theaters of operation.

Beyond suggesting lines of research on the ways that people engage technology, the present statement provides a set of focal points that may be used in synthesizing research materials that deal with human group life in the making. Accordingly, the material presented here should become more valuable as it is reworked and reconstituted to more accurately and fully reflect subsequent research on people's experiences with technology.

The approach taken to the study of technology in this paper generally would not require a major adjustment to the ways that ethnographers working in the interactionist and kindred traditions conduct research or do analyses. Still, this more explicit *technology-as-experienced* emphasis may help researchers permeate "the technology mystique" as well as alert scholars to some matters that might have remained in the background as researchers engaged the field in other ways. The present statement also may suggest some additional ways of recasting materials that people already may have collected; thereby adding another dimension to the studies at hand.

Given the centrality of enabling devices for the entire realm of meaningful human activity, it may be anticipated that, in addition to learning more about the processes entailed in engaging technology in a more generic sense, sustained ethnographic examinations of people using enabling devices also would provide an invaluable set of avenues by which scholars may learn a great deal about people's activities in particular substantive arenas.

Finally, because the instances of technology that people experience keep changing, the agenda outlined here suggests some viable opportunities for new realms of ethnographic inquiry. Moreover, in drawing attention to the socially constituted and actively engaged features of all manners of enabling devices, ethnographic research and transsituational comparative analysis focusing on the ways that "people engage technology" is relevant not only to sociologists and others in the human sciences but to everyone who would like to know how people accomplish things within the evershifting, "here and now" essences of community life.

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Expressing and Examining Morality in Everyday Life: Social Comparisons among Swedish Parents of Deaf Children

Abstract

Social comparisons, seeing oneself in relation to others, are universal, common, and perhaps even necessary. In a study of parents of deaf children, intense, open, and mutual examinations were voiced in parental groups, meetings between parents and professionals, and interviews. These comparisons were generated in a specific situation created by successful claims for separate milieus advocated by the Deaf movement. The local culture, "the deaf world," was characterized by close proximity and a highly charged ideological moral climate.

With the central argument that strong integration breeds comparisons and examinations, we conclude that the integration of parents creates a situation perfect for drawing comparisons, creating not only cohesion, but also renewed separatist distinctions, expressed in terms of moral examinations, competition and envy. Studying the content and details of comparisons in any given field makes the particular morality that is bred, fed, and elaborated obvious**.**

Keywords

Integration; Social comparisons; Morality; Everyday life; Identity work; Deaf culture; Hard-of-hearing; Sign language; Sweden.

> *Each of us—noble or common, good or evil—continually compares his own value with that of others…. All jealousy, all ambition … are full of such comparisons.*
> Max Scheler 1992: 122-23

According to the classical sociologist Max Scheler, seeing oneself in relation to others is universal, common, and perhaps even necessary. Others become a yardstick: one is nicer or not so nice, wittier or less witty, smarter or maybe less smart. In an era as child-centered as this, which has been characterized since the late nineteenth century by a "sacralization of childhood" (Zelizer 1985), parenthood constitutes an important moral identity. In this moral context, examinations and comparisons arise: aren't they a bit too hard on their kids, but maybe we're too lenient? The comparisons are numerous but can differ in their explicitness and

charge. Furthermore, in areas such as daycare, education, and medical care, parental involvement is cherished and its positive effects are often taken for granted without much attention paid to what kinds of unintended effects it may cause.

To investigate these processes, parents of deaf children voicing intense, open, and mutual comparisons in parental groups, meetings between parents and professionals, and interviews were studied. In this local culture, parental morals are chiseled out through comparisons and critical examinations of one's own family as well as others', a form of identity work concerning who one is and what others are: friends or enemies, knowledgeable or ignorant, involved or uninvolved parents. In addition, social comparisons may serve as rhetorical tools when putting forward socio-political complaints.

Using the central argument that strong integration breeds comparisons and examinations, we consider the interviewees' use of social comparisons in two analytically distinguished contexts: first, in the context of "Deaf Culture ideology"[41] being translated into everyday practices and comparisons relating to individual morale; second, in situations where interviewees formulate socio-political arguments at a group level by comparing common rights.

Social comparison is a central theme in sociology and has been analyzed by several sociologists. Scheler (1992), as mentioned above, and others have commented on people's habitual comparisons and examinations of each other. Another classical sociologist, Georg Simmel (1971), claimed that poverty is not absolute but seen in relation to others. In a more limited analysis, Albert Cohen (1955) viewed juvenile delinquency as an expression of "relative deprivation." A few decades ago, Merton (1968) coined the term "reference groups," but this concept would seem to imply static group boundaries. Our analysis has been inspired, instead, by Scheler (1992) and Snow and Anderson's (1987) use of "social comparisons," a concept more easily associated with flexible relations in which actors are ascribed an active interpretative role. This creation of contrasts in relation to others is two-fold: one's own identity is expressed, as is one's dissociation from others.

The examinations and comparisons studied here were generated in a specific situation, the Swedish world of the deaf during the 1990s. This time was characterized by close proximity and a highly-charged ideological moral climate, a community of parents adhering to Deaf Culture, in which right and wrong in relation to sign language has been much debated. This study is not a study of Deaf Culture per se*;* it is used to illustrate how a situation of strong integration breeds distinctions and critical examinations in any community. To this aim, we were inspired by a Simmelean perspective with an emphasis on opposing forces (Sellerberg 1994); Simmel (1964):

> Concord, harmony, co-efficacy, which are unquestionably held to be socializing forces, must nevertheless be interspersed with distance, competition, repulsion, in order to yield the actual configuration of society. (p. 315)

Parents of deaf and severely hard-of-hearing children have what Gluckman (1955: 18-29) called "multi-stranded relationships"; they see each other in a variety of settings. The father of the friend of one's child might also be a representative of the Deaf Children Association and, furthermore, be a member of the school board, of

[41] In the text, capital D in "Deaf," will be used when referring to a Deaf Culture-perspective, as "deaf" according to this perspective signifies only the medical perspective (see for instance Berbrier 1998).

which one is also a member. Thus, parents meet each other in several contexts. This situation is because the Deaf movement's struggle for its own milieus has been successful in Sweden; deaf children are largely cared for in sign language pre-schools and taught in schools for children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. One consequence of this separatist tendency is strong, mutual parental integration. Many families move to "deaf centers" (i.e. areas centered around one of the five national schools for the deaf and hard-of-hearing) and meet at sign language pre-schools, schools for the deaf, and deaf association meetings. Parental integration is reinforced through participation in sign language classes, and some parents become involved in one or more deaf associations (cf. Najarian 2006). Events such as parent meetings, sponsor families, and parent education constitute other forms through which parents gather.

Opinions, experiences, and choices of action are discussed in all of the above-mentioned settings. These settings are part of a local culture in which parental morals are examined and negotiated through comparisons, examples, and critical examinations.

Deaf Culture Ideology: A Background

In this context, comparisons arise from a particular ideological, practical, and socio-political context. "Normalization" and "integration" have long been prestige words within treatment and educational ideologies for the disabled (see for example: *Normalization, Social Integration, and Community Services*, an influential anthology by Flynn and Nitsch 1980). The philosophy of integration entailed that the disabled should not be cared for in institutions but, instead, incorporated into society. Various practical aids, transportation services, and sloping curbs are physical, visible impressions of this philosophy. As Corker (1993: 145) points out, however, "Deaf people, whether they be children, young people or adults, have always posed something of a challenge to generalized policies of integration." The Deaf have demanded respect for the distinctive character of their group (e.g. Berbrier 1998, 2002; Davis 1995). With regard to the question of integration, the Deaf movement has been distinguished from the disability movement in general.[42]

For Deaf Culture activists, integration is associated with "oralism," an educational ideology whereby deaf individuals adjust to the rest of society – become "normalized" – through training in lip reading and speech production. The concept of "disability" itself has been called into question by the Deaf movement with the argument that Deaf people are not a medically disabled group, but a linguistic minority.

The Deaf community's demand to be considered a language minority is essential. In the politics of identity, such a definition would mean that society can be persuaded to invest in sign language interpreters, sign language schools, and pre-schools, among other payoffs. Thus, the question of identity is closely interwoven with socio-political institutions, subsidies, and actions. Within the Deaf movement, the survival of their own deaf milieus has been a central issue. For many deaf persons, schools and associations for the deaf have been an important social context, and the relationships developed there are sometimes presented as being on par with familial relationships.

[42] Their different outlooks caused such great problems that, in 1992, SDR (The National Swedish Organization for the Deaf) left the central organization for the disabled, HCK.

The ideology of integration has made its breakthrough into practice in most special schools, and institutions have been closed.[43] The exceptions are daycare facilities, pre-schools, and schools for deaf children (Gustavsson and Söder 1993).

Above, we described a struggle for separate schools and milieus. However, the activists do not strive for a situation of isolation. The recognition of Deaf Culture is constructed as a platform from which deaf people can be integrated into hearing society. The socio-psychological rhetoric states that one cannot face hearing society unless one is, as one activist put it, "strong and secure in one's Deaf identity." Thus, demands that interpreters, computers, and text telephones should be made available to deaf people are put forward as means of communicating with the surrounding world. Several changes during the 1980s and 1990s clearly show that this struggle has been successful: an increasing number of television programs were signed; schools for deaf and hard-of-hearing children invested in sign language competence; and the number of interpreters increased from 30 to 300 between 1981 and 1989 (SOU 1991:). Ten years later, the number was around 330 and a lack of sign language interpreters was reported (Socialstyrelsen 2001).

This change was accomplished through a continuous battle. In its own literature, the Deaf movement has, naturally, concentrated on conflicts with the outside world: struggles with educators, authorities, and physicians are described (Berbrier 1998; Lane 1984; Sacks 1989). Stories about the struggle, defeats, and victories belong to the writing of history and are an important part of identity construction (Engel 1993), but the internal battles have also been intense (Jacobsson 2000). Various issues have been strongly emotionally charged and people are said to belong to different wings. Even though the centrality of sign language and the importance of milieus for deaf people were generally accepted in Sweden throughout the 1990s, some actors were, at times, described as "oralists" by their accusers, and those on the other side were accused of being "sign fanatics" (ibidem). The threat of the oralist, once old-fashioned educators, was kept alive and transferred to people in favor of cochlear implants in deaf children - a medical procedure resulting in "artificial" hearing. Today's socio-political rhetoric and its impact are radically different given that, nowadays, most deaf children are subjects for cochlear implants. Yet, as a setting for our analysis, we use the Swedish world of the Deaf during the 1990s with the aim of investigating social comparisons in a strongly integrated local culture.

Methods of Procedure

The material for this analysis was derived from a larger project on the immediate environment of deaf and hard-of-hearing people that started in 1990 and involved the authors as well as several graduate students (at the time, Jacobsson, was also a graduate student). Thus, we have been able to draw on a collection of investigations of ideological and practical changes in the care and education of deaf people in Sweden (see for example: Jacobsson 1999, 2000; Jacobsson and Åkerström 1997; Säwe 1999, 2004; Åkerström et al. 1995).

[43] Deinstitutionalization is one sign of this development, and the figures show the reality of this process. In 1970, in Sweden, 49% of mentally disabled children lived at home; the 1988 figure was 82%. Similarly, special classes and special schools in general have been reduced: in 1968, 95% of mentally disabled children attended special preschool classes; today, such classes hardly exist (Gustavsson and Söder 1993: 9).

Several kinds of empirical material have been collected during this long-term project: interviews, observations, and documents. More than a hundred unstructured taped interviews were carried out to reflect descriptive practices. The interviews averaged one and a half hour and were conversational in style. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the quotations used in this article were translated into English in a way that preserves the original meaning and style. Thus, the translation is not literal, and the word order has been altered to follow Standard English usage.

The interviewers and observers were all hearing Swedes, as were the majority of parents, despite approximately 10% of parents of deaf children being deaf themselves (Maxwell and Kraemer 1990). Conversations with the interviewees were originally conducted in Swedish. The two interviews with deaf parents were conducted with the help of a sign language interpreter.

Roughly twenty parental meetings were attended, during which we had access to deliberations and constructions concerning identities, culture, and decisions regarding choices of schools and medical treatment. Most of these meetings were also recorded with a tape recorder. Several conferences arranged for different professional groups dealing with deafness have also provided valuable observations. Field observations were made primarily to study the interaction between parents, medical staff, school staff, and different organizational parties at the conferences.

Additionally, documents considered to be "literature from within the movement" have been systematically collected for the last few decades. Journals from organizations for parents of deaf children and for the deaf and hard-of-hearing are significant voices in forming public opinion; as such, they work as integrating forces.

While the text presented here draws its background knowledge from the total of the collected material, the data included for analysis consists of interviews with thirty-four parents of deaf children. The parents were asked about their experiences of having a deaf child. This starting point most often led to discussions on themes such as their involvement in deaf issues and their relation to various professional categories and other parents within "the Deaf world," a concept its members use themselves.

Methodological Discussion

Most of the interview material was collected in the southern part of Sweden where a so-called Deaf center, harboring day-care facilities, pre-schools, and schools for deaf children, is situated. Less material was collected in other regions containing Deaf centers. If we had conducted interviews geographically far from the Deaf centers, we would most likely have had rather different material at our disposal because parental and professional activities are not as intense there. Still, the majority of parents do live within the Deaf center regions. Furthermore, the ideological climate was concentrated not only in specific geographical regions, but also particular categories: parents of deaf children associated with one of the organizations, DHB[44], and among deaf people, those who were born deaf. This difference in ideology was obvious when we interviewed adults who had turned deaf at a later stage in life and asked about their choice to have a cochlear implant. Many of these interviewees were ignorant of the fierce resistance against cochlear implants in children.

[44] Riksförbundet för döva, hörselskadade och språkstörda barn (DHB) - The Swedish National Association for Deaf, Hearing-Impaired and Language-Impaired Children

None of us, including the graduate students on the project, have personal involvement in deaf issues. Our intention has always been to remain outside and emphasize that fact in approaching the field. Generally, this approach was welcomed, although some met it with suspicion. For some, our lack of personal experiences with deaf people raised questions such as “What are they up to?” and “What if they hurt deaf people out of ignorance?” These reservations turned out to be useful during the interviews and while making observations because we were generally viewed as people who needed to be taught “how this world works.” Also, our research has been appreciated for not taking a stand on ideologically charged issues in the field.

Findings

The following analysis takes two theoretical themes as points of departure: firstly, that separation demands integration; secondly, that integration breeds new separating distinctions. This article focuses on this last theme. We consider the separating distinctions by examining the specific comparisons made among the members with regard to sign language use and competence, as well as comparisons expressing socio-political resentment.

Separation Demands Integration

As has been sketched above, within the Deaf movement it is argued that keeping exclusive milieus for deaf people is essential for maintaining the Deaf Culture and the identity of its members. The concept of “sign language environments” ties into the idea of places where deaf people are able to “just be themselves” without troublesome communication and reliance on technical devices.

In the discourse of the Deaf movement, parents (most of them hearing) are assigned the responsibility for seeing that children have access to environments in which they meet other deaf or hard-of-hearing children. Parents are encouraged to establish contact with other parents of deaf children so that their children can play on weekends and during vacations. If parents do not currently live in a Deaf center, a place with sign language pre-schools and schools for the deaf, of which Sweden currently has five, they are encouraged to move to one. Some families move to the same neighborhood so the children can play during their leisure time. A mother conveys the advantages of living in a “Deaf neighborhood”:

> ... we keep to the green area here (laugh). Within bicycling distance, you know. They come home, leave their school bags and say, “Now I’m going to his house or her house,” right. If they’re not home, then on to the next friend.

The mother quoted above has moved to a deaf center and is active in an association for parents of deaf children. Within this deaf center, the family has chosen a housing area in which several families with deaf children live. They are a typical example of families who maintain the value of a “separatist structure” and of the integration of parents that this demands. Parents such as this woman refer not only to the children’s fellowship in ordinary, practical, and joyous terms, but also to that of the parents: “We have guy nights and girl nights, just for the parents…” Through efforts to accomplish separate Deaf milieus, itself implying a critique of

normalization and integration, the outcome, paradoxically, is the celebration of normalcy (cf. Berbrier 2002). Such constructions of normalcy may be particularly desirable because of their de-stigmatizing power (Wästerfors 2008). The mother above is emphasizing that her family is a typical, normal, modern family by saying, in effect: we are like anyone else – we live in row houses, parents socialize, and the children stop by and play at each other's houses after school.

Integration Breeds Comparisons

Happy and positive descriptions of the separate Deaf environments are common in interviews emphasizing solidarity and family-like community. However, descriptions containing ambivalence and dissociation vis-à-vis other parents are no less common. This intense integration fosters a series of comparisons and mutual examinations. People compare reactions, comments, and advice from professionals, relatives, and friends. Studies of patient and next-of-kin associations have shown how such organizations communicate a world view in which central actors are portrayed (Cain 1991; Karp 1992; Gubrium and Holstein 2002: 21-22). Parents in the Deaf world relate their own problems and solutions to, and get stories in return from, other parents. Parents often talk appreciatively about such interactions, "No one understands as well as someone in the same situation." Thus, comparisons voiced in integrated networks of people in separatists milieus, can serve to unite.

Furthermore, both Deaf activists and their critics can come together in complaining about circumstances distant in time and space, the situation for deaf people in the past and in other countries. Illustrative distant examples in time and space promote consensus of opinion that, in terms of the situation for deaf people, is often summarized by contending that the socio-political situation in Sweden is "way ahead."

Integration, however, also leads to conflict and thus, at times, to renewed separatist tendencies. Annoyance, condemnation, and dissociation – groupings and counter-groupings – can be observed at association meetings, interviews, and journals relating to deaf issues. Parents criticize one another for negligence and for being too ideological or too passive. When it comes to questions of a socio-political character, arguments are presented as group claims through comparisons or complaints about other parental groups. The following section will address how interviewees critically examine their own and others' ways of practicing Deaf Culture ideology. Thereafter, we will pay attention to comparisons of common socio-political rights.

Comparisons Breed New Separating Distinctions

Critical examinations of others, uttered in interviews or overheard during field observations, do not address whether parents are for or against sign language. Currently, sign language as the main form of communication for deaf people is generally accepted in Sweden.[45] The comparisons are more specific. One theme concerns commitment. How much effort is put into signing? How involved are other

[45] This idea is challenged by the fact that many deaf children currently have cochlear implants (CI), and most of them can hear speech and benefit from practicing speech. However, the idea that deaf children without CI have sign language as a first language seems to be unthreatened.

parents in various associations, day-care institutions, or the schools? Some parents are attributed with over-involvement and others with under-involvement.

Different concrete and specific issues are treated as ideological questions. Standpoints concerning hearing aid use, speech training, and cochlear implantation give rise to pro and con formations. Parents view themselves and others in terms of the prevailing ideological climate. Through "examination rhetoric" (Hunt and Miller 1997), moral prescriptions can be highlighted, disarmed, or softened. Thus, social comparisons are made in regard to a variety of topics, but we concentrate our analysis on the main ingredient of Deaf Culture ideology: sign language.

Within the Deaf movement, the central ideological issue has concerned sign language and Deaf Culture on the one hand and oralism (i.e. a combination of speech training and medical aids) on the other (Berbrier 1998). Sign language is portrayed as the natural and right alternative, whereas medical technology and educational methods emphasizing speech and lip reading represent the artificial and unnatural (Jacobsson 2000). In everyday conversations and documents, hearing aids and cochlear implants are criticized by using ironic twists and turns. In deaf periodical cartoons, school situations or conferences with hard-of-hearing persons are pictured as absurd, a jumble of amplifiers, microphones, and hearing coils wrapped around people's heads and cables winding through the lecture halls. The fiercest attacks have concerned cochlear implants. The operation has been viewed as a symbolic attack on deaf people and as a signal that deafness per se is objectionable. Thus, for a long time, the implant was described as an "electric antennae in the skull" and the children as "guinea-pigs," tacitly subordinate to the medical scientists' own ambitions.

Parents who instead of only relying on sign language, place hearing aids on their severely hard-of-hearing child can be viewed as parents who fail to "accept their child as he or she is" – this being particularly immoral parental conduct. The same is true of parents who choose the cochlear implant for their child. Such views have resulted in parents, physicians, and educators publicly asserting their sincerity when insisting on the necessity of sign language.[46] Yet, such declarations were met by suspicion and, at times, depicted as only paying lip service to the importance of signing. Moreover, medical/technical solutions (hearing aids or cochlear implants) were sometimes talked about as indicators that parents were acting in their own interest. This assertion is, of course, a serious critique because good parental morals are characterized by acting in the child's best interest. According to the above logic, certain parents break with these fundamental morals, as suggested by this mother:

> A lot of times it's the parents' wish, you know. But this is about the child. "I want my child to hear but she doesn't, so hang a bunch of hearing aids on her and..." I mean the child didn't choose this; they [the parents] somehow just can't accept the child how they were born. Sometimes I think this is a question of some type of morals, ethics in a way.

True Signing Commitment?

All parents of deaf or severely hard-of-hearing children we met were positive to the sign language approach. They also followed the dictum of separatist recommendations: they lived in a deaf center, most placed their children at deaf pre-

[46] This is not necessarily the case in other countries. Parents are sometimes encouraged to not disrupt oral training with sign language (Noble 1997). In Sweden, various parties have reported that physicians initially assumed that the operation would improve hearing to such a degree that the implant could replace sign language.

schools and schools, attended various deaf association meeting, went to sign language classes, and so on. However, some of the strong advocates of signing suggest that not all parents are making the proper effort to teach themselves and their children, criticizing them for an insufficient commitment to their children. Even those who are said to be making an effort are criticized by some parents: people's motives for participation in sign language courses are questioned. Some parents are said, for instance, to enroll because they:

> Just like to take classes. There are lots of parents of kids here that do it, too – run around to a bunch of goddamned signing classes…. You can do that just for yourself, to be able to say, "I've taken that class, signed up for everything, see." But the thing is you've got to use it later.

Sign language classes for parents or siblings are offered by various Swedish organizations. Some classes are publicly financed, whereas courses given by deaf or educational associations often require partial payment from the family. The care allowances given to parents of disabled children are intended to cover such costs. This situation gives rise to a socio-political surveillance of morals. For example, a father comments on the use of care allowances:

> You know there are parents who don't — I mean both work full-time — don't go to a sign language class but buy a new car instead. I mean, somehow this money is supposed to be used for the children.

Many parents mentioned this particular priority with the car sometimes concretized as a "new Mercedes." Such an assertion can be viewed as an expression of a local, modern myth. Myths reflect a special sort of truth; they provide models of human behavior and give life meaning and worth (Engel 1993). Through myths, experiences are transformed into moral narratives. In light of this background, a luxury car can be seen as a metaphor representing the reprehensible. As such, the car is well chosen because the Mercedes constitutes the antithesis of those values that are celebrated. The car is used and enjoyed by the parents, and it consumes the funds that should be invested in sign language for the sake of the children. Whether such stories are true or not, the narrators tell these stories as uncontested facts, and thus create new distinctions among the collective of parents.

The "factuality" of the stories is based on a claimed insight into other people's handling of their allowances that the separate milieus provide, an insight we commonly cannot claim as work colleagues, neighbors, or parents. The Deaf world contains a specific feature that gives critics credibility in the eyes of their audience: insight into, and detailed knowledge of, others. One can observe the language competency and class participation of others. One has seen that the Andersons bought a new car, or they might tell you that they have taken a charter trip. Thus, in conversation, arguments based on such concrete events can appear credible (cf. Persson and Wästerfors 2009). Although the particulars of the regulations can be tricky, most people are, or become, quite familiar with what is offered: financial allowances, transportation services, school support, and contact families, among others. Thus, the above criticism can be made even more concrete, as when this interviewee exclaims, "My God, they get 5,000 kronor (about $600) every month!" To someone who is unfamiliar with what rights and allowances the parents of deaf children have, it sounds reasonable that time off from work to take signing classes is too costly, but the initiated know better: "You know, they get monthly care allowances."

"Do They Sign During Dinner?"

Everyday situations are integrated into "distinction-markings" separating people who act according to the morally right, versus those who do not. For instance, one commonly voiced exhortation among Deaf Culture advocates is to always sign at home and those who do not are criticized. One father uses the example of parents watching television with the child and asks rhetorically, with a sarcastic tone of voice, "Do they translate to sign language? Well, we do. Others don't in spite of 'their great commitment.'"

Among professionals and parents, a frequently used everyday example is the meal situation, particularly dinner, which is probably not coincidental because dinner symbolizes family life as a whole (DeVault 1991). Some families describe signing during dinner as a matter of course, whereas other families talk about it as a difficulty. At times, one parent, often the mother, expresses a wish that other family members would learn more sign language (cf. Najarian 2006) but admits that she cannot change their attitudes or habits. Siblings would "rather play soccer than go to signing classes." Still others argue that demands for using sign language should not be pushed too far. They refer to their general parental responsibility: "We have several children to consider, some of them are hearing." Such claims about morally correct parenting include the argument that all of the children have to be cared for, including the ones who can hear. Other parents argue that the existence of hearing siblings is not a tenable argument. One interviewee admits that "it's a situation of conflict" for most, but:

> Mother: What they're really saying is: exclude your deaf child on those occasions...
> Interviewer: The child would feel left out?
> Mother: Uh huh...then it's better to take your hearing children and do something else, go out with just them.

The "We", that was supposed to be the result of a separate milieu fostering an integrated Deaf culture collective, is replaced in comments as the above when the mother points to the moral failings of what "they" do: in this case "excluding your deaf child."

Competition for Signing Competence

Language competence becomes apparent in the interplay among parents. All parents refer to mutual examinations: those who do not appear to be as capable and those who are more proficient. One difficult phase in sign language acquisition is said to be learning to read (i.e. understand the signing of others). Deficiencies become clear during joint classes as this mother relates:

> When you go to signing classes you really feel that you must be able to read the signs. It's hard and, well, I didn't really get this part [reading others' signs, as opposed to making one's own signs]. Yeah, there are big demands, I felt that.

Deficiencies are thus said to be observed, creating distinctions among those who are competent and those who are less competent sign-language users. In the context of the open comparisons facilitated by meetings in language classes, those

who have put great effort into signing also talk about distinctions; they report that they are seen as too competent in relation to other, envious, parents. A father says:

> We've felt that, I mean competition from other parents. We've been, well a bit, well we've made pretty good progress, you could say. Worked at it and … I mean I think I've felt from other parents … I don't know how to put it but … a little envy somehow.

Socio-political Envy and Resentment

Socio-political comparisons can be presented in relatively objective measures. How does the hearing care system work in a specific municipality? How much care allowance is given to hard-of-hearing children in comparison to deaf children? Such socio-political comparisons provide raw material for moral indignation and resentment. Envy per se includes what, in sociological terms, would be called relative deprivation. It is not a question of simply lacking something desirable; instead, desirability is viewed in relation to what other individuals or groups have. Socio-political envy entails something extra, notions of justice and social rights (Lyman, 1989); criticism is framed as legitimate moral indignation and comparisons are made across categories of people as well as across time.

Comparisons Across Categories

Perhaps it is natural that we find this type of envy in an area concerning the disabled, where several groups are involved in a socio-political struggle and compete for recognition of their particular problem (Sellerberg 1993). Moreover, the victories and defeats of at least some categories are mutually apparent. Other studies on parents of disabled children provide comments that illustrate such experiences. For example, Kristina Jarkman's (1996) study shows how parents of children with meningomyelocele end up in different care systems. Some parents experienced a more advantageous situation, causing others to ask, "Why not us?"

The "Deaf world" harbors more than one parental category; apart from parents of deaf children, there are parents of hard-of-hearing children, parents of children with cochlear implants, and parents of deaf children with other disabilities in addition to deafness. In the public discourse of the Deaf movement, all these categories were said to be welcomed into the Deaf culture and that they all benefit from using sign language. Deaf culture activists and professionals who advocated sign-language schools tried, for instance, to recruit hard-of-hearing children to these schools, and criticized parents who preferred to place their hard-of-hearing children in regular schools.

Still, socio-political discussions confirmed or even accentuated the various categories of parents in the field of the "deaf world." It was primarily parents of hard-of-hearing children who voiced criticism; they claimed that deaf children and their families have received too much attention. Although many parents of hard-of-hearing children, who sometimes are also placed in schools for the deaf, adopted the sign language approach, the perception was that certain concrete opportunities were reserved for deaf children. Deaf children were said, for example, to have better access to sign language instruction. A mother says:

> Nobody's come to us straight out and asked, 'Would you like to have a sign language teacher in your home?' Like they (parents of deaf children) get, right, they have it once a week, a signing teacher at home ..."

As shown in this example, comparisons with the other group may be used as a tool in constructing injustice. Even the siblings of deaf children were said to receive instruction that was difficult to get for their own hard-of-hearing children: "It doesn't just go without saying." The parental groups act in the same social field; comparisons are made to see what "we" and "they" get. The rhetoric is formulated to convey a general criticism of the socio-political situation, appealing to the rights of the collective of *hard-of-hearing*; a criticism voiced within a context meant to integrate a collective of sign-language users.

Comparisons Across Time

Parents who have "been around a while" and adopted the sign language approach sometimes talk about younger parents with a tone of bitterness, a form of what Scheler (1992) termed ressentiment. In this case, their own efforts are compared to those of people who "are handed everything." There is a particular duplicity in the arguments of parents advocating for the Deaf Culture perspective. On the one hand, socio-political improvements are emphasized – "we've come a long way" – implying a criticism of the previous situation. On the other hand, their own parental morals are expressed through the sacrifices they themselves have made. In other words, the previously criticized situation is utilized, "We didn't get any allowances, but we gave it our all anyway."

Resentment arises from this duplicity. One cannot criticize today's opportunities; they are the result of what one strived for, the aim of the struggle in the past. Instead, one's own sacrifices are viewed in relation to described attitudes or behavior of others. This tendency can be illustrated in the below conversation about a new system of publicly-financed sign language courses. The interviewee reveals moral indignation towards those he claims attend classes only when they are free of charge, whereas, classes subject to a fee were previously difficult to arrange as too few attended them. This tendency is seen in relation to one's own struggles to learn sign language:

> Father: And then suddenly, I mean we've gone for classes.... and paid 20,000 kronor [about $2,500] in fees and… we've.... scrimped and saved, our care allowances and all. And nobody else has attended.... But now that it's free all of a sudden. It's been impossible to arrange [sign language classes in the past]: "We can't take our vacation time," [but] now all of a sudden, all the parents go.
> Interviewer: Because it's free?
> Father: Yes, you make money on it. You earn more going to the training than staying home.

Descriptions of personal sacrifices can also entail efforts one has made on the part of others. Some parents claim to devote considerable time to planning association activities, arranging classes, participating in school activities, and so forth. Others, they state, cannot manage to drag themselves to such events. One father tells a story of how he has tried to get members to attend lectures he has arranged, "their response was to complain about the fee!"

Resisting Deaf Culture Demands

Another aspect of parental morals is honed in relation to activists' claims and criticism. Arguments are formed as Bahktinian dialogue in response to Deaf Culture discourse (Jacobsson 2000). For example, in response to the ideological stance favoring separatism, a formulation of normality different from that indicated above is used. In the interviews, parents related how they have essentially adopted the correct approach; they request more instruction in sign language and plan to place their child in a school for deaf children. However, they are not prepared to "adopt the Deaf Culture a hundred percent." The parents say they cannot give it their all when "four of five of us are hearing." One descriptive marking is that one "lives in the regular world." This way of reasoning keeps the parental morals intact, or may even be thought of as superior; you have to care for all of your children, deaf or not. Other parents display parental morals by contrasting descriptions, suggesting a broader supply of future opportunities for the deaf child, in order to illustrate the positive values of one's own approach, "We who choose cochlear implants give the children an alternative that Deaf activists deny them." Still other parents clearly formulate their distance to the well-integrated, active Deaf world. Illustrative stories or linguistic turns are used to picture the Deaf activists as unreasonably demanding. One socio-political proposal for a one year-long parent training class in which the entire family would move to a boarding-school was characterized, for instance, as "internment."[47] One mother wonders, "What siblings would want to leave their friends to live in a sign language Gulag?" Such statements paint a picture of the unreasonable, that which is a far cry from all things commonsensical.

Not all parents' statements were so directly oppositional. The parents adopt a framework in which they show that they have accepted the suggestions, but also that they cannot always follow them. This is a form of "accepting counter-rhetoric" (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993). Criticism is not only aired behind closed doors. In this local culture, much is stated publicly or simply leaks out; as mentioned, it is a small world. Knowledge of others is the ammunition of criticism, but it also provides opportunities for framing counter-arguments.

Concluding Remarks

Comparison situations between people are ever present, but they may be more or less marked or dense, more or less mutually visible, and more or less intensely moralized. The object of this study, the "Deaf world," concerns a crystallized form of "comparison situations." Such situations were established when the Swedish Deaf movement was successful in its "separatist ideology", encouraging specific sign-language milieus for deaf and hard-of-hearing people. Parents in this study lived in a deaf center providing daycare, pre-schools and schools where sign language was used. This "separatism" constituted a context of intense integration among parents of deaf and hard-of-hearing children. Parents are integrated in neighborhoods, in language classes, through day-care and school meetings, and their integration concerns a highly moralized subject in today's society: our children. All in all, this situation invites and fosters various examinations of what is considered good or bad

[47] This proposal did not come from an individual sign language supporter but was presented in a publication from the Swedish Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs (SOU 1996) entitled "Sign Language Education for Parents" (our translation).

parenting. The integration of parents creates a situation perfect for the drawing of comparisons, creating renewed separatist distinctions, based on sign language competition and socio-political resentment. Thus, the situation provided an opportunity to express belonging as well as dissociation.

One explanation for the intensity of these critical examinations is that the Deaf world is so small, thereby inviting such examinations. The more ties between people, the more intense the conflicts (Simmel 1971: 70-95). Everyone knows everyone, or at least is acquainted with everyone, in this world. Moreover, these acquaintances are not merely short-term or tied to just one aspect of life. The parents meet in several contexts and have to deal with multi-stranded relationships (Gluckman 1955: 18ff). These strands take the form of common experiences, memories, and gossip to be exchanged, agreed upon, or fought about. Comparisons and critical examination of others are, as argued here, inevitable and, as such, of a general interactionist theme. Separation creates a specific and more dense integration, which in turn creates renewed separatist tendencies. Studying the content and details of separating distinctions in any given field makes the particular morality that is bred, fed, and elaborated obvious.

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Ritual and Boundary Distinction in a Recreational Community: A Case Study of Motorcycle Rallies and Riders

Abstract

Attending motorcycle rallies is an important component of social life for many touring motorcyclists. The significance of these events transcends the mere recreational experience of riding a motorcycle and spending time with other riders. This project is an examination of brand specific motorcycle rallies as a process and social world that has ritualistic features and activities that serve to bond members of the group, reinforce their identity, and distinguish members of this subculture from other motorcyclists and from the larger social world. Drawing on classical social theory and more contemporary research, a framework is established to discuss the activities and social organization of rallies. Objects from the material culture of those involved are examined as distinguishing components used to establish boundaries and confer membership. An in-depth description of rally activities and interactions, enhances the understanding of these events.

Keywords

Recreation; Ethnography; Motorcycling; Ritual.

A solo motorcyclist arrives at a gathering of other motorcycle riders, most of which have arrived via a BMW motorcycle, the sacred symbol (Goodall 2004) of this particular consumer tribe (Maffesoli 1996). He[48] rides into a fairgrounds facility, campground, or some other location featuring large open spaces and parks his motorcycle between two bikes that have already arrived. Most of the motorcycles carry a relatively heavy burden of camping gear. His helmet and gloves are slipped off as he disembarks from his bike leaving it resting on the sidestand while removing the protective plugs from his ears. A quick glance at the odometer informs him of the distance he traveled today. He may have ridden only a short distance, or may have left his home the day before. If he is lucky, this event is part of a longer trip that may

[48] The term "he" is used because of the need to use a gender specific pronoun and the recognition of the fact that the vast majority of participants at these rallies are male.

encompass several weeks of travel. The rider leaves his expensive helmet and favorite pair of riding gloves resting unguarded on his motorcycle with the key in the ignition as he has no concern about the theft of his prize possessions while in the company of his fellow tribal members. If the weather is warm, he slips his protective jacket off and leaves it resting on the seat of his motorcycle, while cooler weather encourages him to leave the jacket on. He slips a ballcap over his head to cover the flattened look of his "helmet hair", resulting from several hours of wearing a full face motorcycle helmet, while looking around for a familiar face or two. This also gives him a few seconds to shake off the mental buzz of the road that is familiar to long distance motorcyclists. He has arrived at his destination for the weekend, a brand specific rally for riders of BMW motorcycles, and has slipped into a well-known world of friends, acquaintances, and shared interests while taking a temporary reprieve from his usual lifestyle of family and work responsibilities. This is a familiar world for him. The rituals, artifacts, and norms of the tribe are well-known and serve to distinguish the true members from the outsiders, while providing comfort and identity to those on the inside.

Observers tell us that the daily lives of human beings are structured with rituals (e.g. Knottnerus and Loconto 2003; Goffman 1967) that can be important in the understanding of consumer behavior (Rook 1985). The concept of ritual provides a window through which to view motorcycle rallies, as well as other important social, sporting, and recreational gatherings, as meaningful constructions of social life. Motorcycle rallies are an important source of community for this subculture of motorcyclists (Austin and Gagné 2008), and, rituals are part of the boundary building and maintenance process. The seemingly trivial day-to-day rituals and the more structured ceremonial rituals help humans to construct their lives. The examination presented here suggests that motorcycle rallies have classic features of rituals and these ritualistic practices have implications for those involved. In addition, various behaviors and material products are used to mark the boundaries of the subculture and to structure the subculture to help preserve its integrity and insure its continuation.

Only 1.7% of new motorcycle registrations in the United States were BMWs in 2000 (Motorcycle Industry Council 2001) with a very similar percentage for 2008 (Snyder 2009). Additionally, only a portion of the relatively few riders of BMW motorcycles regularly attend rallies. Attending a BMW rally is a means of connecting with others that participate in this statistically rare recreational and social activity. Therefore, the reference group for members of this subculture may involve individuals that are spread across a wide geographic area; Pierson (1997):

> For people who long to be with other like-minded people, in however large or small a dose, rallies fit the bill. They become highlights on the calender; goals; purposes; small pleasures. (p. 114)

Ritual and Social Theory

Durkheim, in The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1915/1965), asserts that society recreates the basic components of religion, in a secular form (Turner and Beeghley 1981). These new secular forms of the previously sacred take over the functions earlier provided by religious rituals, which can mobilize commitment from individuals and reaffirm values and beliefs while serving to integrate individuals into the group or collective (Turner and Beeghley 1981). Ritual performances reinforce

and increase the level of attachment between participants and the larger social order (Turner 1986) while the established norms of the group may be utilized in consciously orchestrating rituals to commemorate or initiate an event that is important for a community and its collective life (Wuthnow 1988).

Modern society is often characterized as a "disenchanted social world" or one characterized by rationalization and intellectualization (Weber 1922/1959; Griesman 1976; Mitchell 2002). In a post-industrial society, different groups and/or forms of community, in particular circumstances, can replace and/or supplement more traditional religious, neighborhood, kinship, and occupational groups in terms of integration and regulation. Research has indicated that important communities of choice can develop among subcultures ranging from internet users (Forster 2004) to recreation vehicle owners (Counts and Counts 1996) and messenger bicyclists (Kidder 2006).

Recreational groups and rituals can be examined within this context as fulfilling community functions while taking on some of the characteristics of ritual associated with other groups. A modern or post-industrial society can produce a condition in which consumers form collective identifications that are ephemeral and "participate in rituals of solidarity that are grounded in common lifestyle interests and leisure associations" (Arnould and Thompson 2005: 873) to replace group integrative functions previously provided within institutional frameworks surrounding the confines of religion, geographically based community or neighborhood, and/or kinship. These activity based communities of choice can allow individuals to experience some of the collective sentiment of community and belonging without some of the more restrictive normative regulations that exist in more all-encompassing forms of community as these have more respect for individuality (Brint 2001).

Rituals are used to enforce the "collective conscience" (Durkheim 1915/1965) or the commonly held sentiments and beliefs (Nisbett 1966: 83) which have in term evolved from interaction among individuals. These rituals can help to moderate the "free rider" problem that can arise in group contexts (Hilke 1980; Wuthnow 1987) as some individuals are able to access the benefits of group membership without contributing to the maintenance of the group. In many cases, religious organizations structure rituals to restrict the full benefits to those that are contributing members of the group (Ibidem 1987) and ceremonies can help to maintain the social heritage of the group (Coser 1977). Rituals structure and encourage participation by routinization of activities and incorporation of members into the process. However, secular rituals are also important in the process of creating meaning (Kidder 2006). In a recreational context, rituals can meet these same functions as the ritualized behaviors and social structures reinforce the preferred normative behavior of the group while also preserving and emphasizing the importance of the social history of the group.

Turner (1986) provides a summary of Durkheim's principles regarding the conditions that produce ritual activity. The presence of other people increases ritual activity, as does the duration of this presence and the extent of a common focus. As the degree of ritual activity increases, this in turn furthers the level of attachment and shared outlook of the group. The increase in ritual activity, accompanied by the heightened attachment and shared outlook leads to a situation in which it is more likely that deviations from the ritual will be met with severe negative social sanctions.

Utilizing the work of Durkheim, we can develop a better understanding of why seemingly unimportant issues, such as brand of motorcycle and selection of riding apparel, become so important to the ritualization process among motorcyclists. Through informal and formal enforcement of the norms of the group, motorcycle rally participants use ritualistic activities to help insure that group norms are not violated to an extent that the normative order will be disturbed. The level of attachment and

commitment to the group is increased through the ritual process, which in turn makes normative violations less likely.

In Goffman's (1967) view, we have rituals to maintain society and they occur in our everyday encounters. Even though emotions that are produced in ritualistic settings can be temporary (Shrum and Kilburn 1996), ceremonies are essential for the social order (Collins and Makowsky 1989). Knottnerus and Loconto (2003) point out that many of the studies that focus on ritual have examined religious and/or sacred aspects of social life. The group integration functions that religious rituals provide (Durkheim 1915/1965), such as motivation and regulation, are found in many secular settings and can serve many of the same needs for those involved.

Tilley (2006) helps us to understand how a particular place will be experienced differentially based on individual characteristics and Haldrup and Larsen (2006) point out that tourists experience locations through traditional lenses of gender, race, sex, and age. Shared ritualized experiences can help to moderate these individual micro-level differences and construct a common history, heritage, and understanding, while preserving some individual differences in experiences. Tilley (2006: 14) uses parades and carnivals to help explain how space and time are brought together while creating "a sense of belonging through assuming a particular material form in which inhabitants both present themselves to others and present themselves to themselves," a process that seems to be at the heart of motorcycle rallies.

One theorist that is particularly useful in understanding motorcycle rallies as ritual is Collins (2004) as he provides a list of ingredients for interaction ritual. The first ingredient involves at least two people assembled in the same location and this physical presence has an impact on those involved, regardless of the level of consciousness they have of this. Secondly, participants sense boundaries separating those that are participating and those that are not. A third component are people focusing on a common activity or object and, through communication of their focus, they eventually become aware of their mutual focus of attention (Collins 2004). The final ingredient in this recipe for interaction ritual is a mood or emotional experience shared in common. As described later in a thick description (Geertz 1973) of the culture and activities, BMW motorcycle rallies fit all four of the criteria for interaction ritual. Tourism itself is performed (Haldrup and Larsen 2006) and rallies provide an avenue for individual subcultural performances en route to and from the rally and collectively after arrival.

Methods

A primary research method used for this research was participant observation. It was used to study informants in their natural social surroundings. Studying a group in which the research shares an affinity is an important aspect and can enhance trust between the researcher and members of the social group under examination (Fielding and Fielding 1987).

Adler and Adler (1987) discuss three levels of involvement in the lives of participants being studied which go beyond the level involved in traditional participant observer. The most involved role of the three, "complete membership researcher," was used in this project. In this role, the researcher and informants have a more equal status with shared experiences and sentiments (Adler and Adler 1987: 67).

A complete membership researcher role can be subdivided into two distinct types. The "convert" researcher pursues participation in the group for research purposes and as the process continues, they undergo a type of conversion in which the researcher recognizably moves from one status or social world to another. The

other complete membership role is the "opportunistic researcher," used in this project, in which the researcher examines people and social settings in which she/he is already a member (Adler and Adler 1987). This role has been successfully employed to examine a variety of social environments and/or subcultures (e.g. Palmer and Forsyth 2002; Hayano 1982; Ouellet 1994; Gagné 1992; Hopper and Moore 1990).

The researcher took advantage of the opportunity to study a familiar subculture by attending approximately eighty BMW motorcycle rallies throughout the U.S. and Canada with attendance ranging from about fifty to over 9,000. This provided for an examination of a wide range of activities associated with rallies and allowed for the identification of any regional differences that may exist. "Assumed identities" are typically developed from a social world in which the researcher is familiar (Tewskbery and Gagné 1997: 138). These factors seemed to work favorably in this project in terms of knowledge of the group, acceptance into the subculture, and willingness of respondents to participate.

The membership role involved participating in rally activities, observing rally attendees, and listening and participating in conversations, as well as traveling by BMW motorcycle extensively in Canada and the U.S. while recording fieldnotes. Additionally, the researcher participated in other activities commonly associated with membership in this subculture, such as reading motorcycle related literature and internet based information. Over the course of the research project, the researcher became immersed in the community of BMW motorcycle riders.

In addition to the above methodology, this study used survey and interview data from a larger project. A non-random survey was completed by a number of motorcyclists. Some questionnaires were distributed to riders by researchers and other questionnaires were strategically placed to be picked up voluntarily by riders at events attended by motorcycle riders. The sample was supplemented by a women rider that volunteered to distribute surveys to a local chapter of Women on Wheels (a national organization of women motorcyclists) to increase the representation of women in the survey. Utilizing these distribution techniques, a total of approximately 450 questionnaires were distributed.

The survey contained approximately twelve questions with a fixed response format which ascertained demographic information (age, gender, etc). and ten open-ended questions that allowed respondents to express themselves in their own words. A stamped envelope was provided for return of the questionnaire of which ninety-five were returned.

Questionnaires contained a pre-addressed postage paid postcard that a respondent could return in a separate mailing if she/he was willing to participate in an in-depth semi-structured interview. Twenty-seven postcards were returned. Additionally, contacts in the field were used to expand the pool of potential interview participants. Nineteen women were eventually interviewed with nine interviews conducted with men. As women are a substantial minority of participants at BMW motorcycle rallies, augmenting the interview and survey data hopefully provided information that might have otherwise been unavailable.

The consistency of data from all three sources (participant observation, survey, and interviews) indicated that the point of theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967) was achieved. For this particular project, only the data from BMW motorcycle riders were used, which was the majority of the respondents and interview participants. For further discussion of research methodologies used in this research, see Austin and Gagné (2008).

The Rally Setting

Motorcycle rallies provide an opportunity for riders to interact and develop a sense of community and common identity (Maxwell 1998; Austin and Gagné 2008) through social interaction and ritualistic practices inviting a comparison to county fairs and parish picnics (Pierson 1997). Goodall's (2004: 732) research on a gathering of Ferrari owners provided a conceptual description appropriate for BMW rallies as "ritual celebrations" in which participants are able to spend time with others that share their unique pastime. In his work on a group of bicycle messengers, Kidder (2006) describes how illegal bicycle races serve as ritual activities that extend their meaning far beyond the actual time involved in the rituals while solidifying the identity and lifestyle of participants. Ritual activities provide much more for participants than just a forum to enjoy their chosen hobby or specialized interest.

A number of local BMW motorcycle clubs organize and sponsor rallies throughout the United States and Canada. These local clubs serve as "ritual sponsors" (Knottnerus and Loconto 2003) for the larger collective. Rallies are most commonly held at campgrounds or other large gathering spots, such as fairgrounds, and tend to be held in or near relatively smaller towns. A local club may be based in a large city but still organize and operate a rally in a small town or rural setting, which is generally more conducive to camping. Most locally sponsored BMW rallies are weekend long events which begin on Friday (a few on Thursday) and end on Sunday and can range in attendance from less than one hundred to several hundred or more. Attendance at these rallies consists of mostly BMW riders, although there are usually a few riders on other brands of motorcycles. Rally attendees usually arrive on Friday for a weekend rally, although some may arrive late at night due to other obligations and the distance needed to travel. On rare occasions, motorcyclists leave work on Friday afternoon and ride all night to attend a weekend rally, arriving on Saturday morning and leaving to return early Sunday. Rallies provide a meeting point for riders to congregate and the ritual activities reinforce their identity despite living in widely dispersed geographic areas.

The rallies organized by local clubs are smaller in scale than the annual "International" rallies sponsored by the two U.S. based clubs for owners of BMW motorcycles. These two clubs, the BMW MOA (BMW Motorcycle Owners of America) and the BMW RA (BMW Riders Association), each sponsor an annual rally. These rallies can attract several thousand riders, particularly the event sponsored by the larger of the two clubs, the BMW MOA.

Local rallies usually follow a prescribed format. Rally attendees pay a registration of usually $15 to $45 which typically includes camping, a patch or pin to commemorate the event, door prizes, and, in many cases, some of the meals for the weekend. Some rallies also provide live music. In many instances, the meals are provided by a local vendor or non-profit community group to provide funds for the organization. In addition, food may be available for purchase at the rally site.

The Rally Ritual

Collins (2004: 53) reminds us that "Ritual is a body process" starting by the movement of bodies into the same place. The gathering of individuals in a common location with a common focus helps to start the ritualization process of a motorcycle rally. Following arrival at a rally, riders go to a central location to register for the rally where they talk with each other and with volunteers helping with the operation of the rally. Initial conversations may focus on issues related to the ride to the rally, such as

the weather and the number of miles traveled. Registration areas tend to be centrally located and serve as places for informal meetings and conversations among riders. It is an area for riders that arrive alone to meet others and for acquaintances to reconnect with each other. Registration is a simple process where information, such as name, address, and number of miles ridden to the rally is provided along with the registration fee. The always present release form is signed to protect the club from lawsuits resulting from mishaps associated with rally participation.

Setting Up Camp

After registering, the next step is usually selecting a campsite and setting up a tent. Some rally goers prefer to stay in local motels, but the majority camp at the rally site. Older riders, and those with unwilling to camp spouses or partners, may be among those that frequent the motel facilities. Campers favor small backpacking style tents as they must be carried with other equipment and clothing on a motorcycle. Tents are setup near each other and most riders have only one person per tent, unless occupied by a domestic couple or family. The campground resembles a small tent city with a relatively large number of tents in a small geographic area. In many cases, tents are placed much closer to each other than in traditional campgrounds in the U.S., which serves to encourage interaction and conversation in this temporary shared living arrangement. Despite the close proximity of campers, or perhaps because of it, there seems to be an attempt to respect each others privacy and desire for quiet. This is perhaps an attempt by rally attendees to create a backstage world (Goffman 1959) for themselves and others as sleeping is usually a backstage event, but the close proximity of tents and the relative lack of privacy makes the staging less certain. When large amounts of open space are available, there is still a tendency for campers to place tents in clusters.

After dark, small groups gather near common areas, such as around registration, throughout the campground, and around campfires. Others may ride to a nearby restaurant for dinner. At some rallies a band is provided and a group will congregate near it. Groups may consist of individuals who all know each other or a group in which some members know a few of the others but not everyone. A stranger riding solo may join a group of friends. The relaxed informal atmosphere gives participants the opportunity to share motorcycling and travel experiences, as well as to reinforce bonds. The importance of sitting around these campground gatherings is emphasized by the fact that most participants bring a small folding chair with them to rallies. Despite the very limited carrying capacity of a motorcycle, the ritualistic aspects of sitting around a camping area for hours with other riders talking and telling stories is such a central component of the rally experience that this valuable space is well-worth the sacrifice for transporting a chair.

Storytelling

Stories and tales of travel and adventure are frequent fare for these nightly gatherings. Travel tips that focus on budget travel, good camping locations, and scenic roads are especially welcome. Nostalgic recollections of earlier owned motorcycles that should have never been sold, memorable trips and experiences, and past rallies are also potential topics of discussion. Motorcycle maintenance and repair are also popular areas to cover. Telling a good tale is an important skill at these gatherings and can be viewed as a means for individual riders to increase their

symbolic or cultural capital (Turner 1986; Collins 2004; Best 2006) within the group (Austin and Gagné 2008) and manage impressions (Goffman 1959). Consumption, in this case of BMW motorcycles and associated material goods, and language can combine to confirm and display status for members of a particular community (Shankar 2006). The importance of this type of phenomenon is present in other groups that value long-term budget travel (Riley 1988; Adkins and Grant 2007).

In Mitchell's (2002) analysis of survivalists, we see a very similar phenomenon as storytelling provides functions of information exchange, structuring the subculture, and maintaining identity. Storytelling among the survivalists and among these motorcyclists becomes an end in itself, but also provides preparation for difficulties that may occur in the future, such as mechanical problems with motorcycles and various future societal scenarios constructed by survivalists. Telling of stories helps to structure the events in a consequential fashion with meaningful and agreed upon conventions that allow the teller and the listener to construct similar interpretations of their shared reality (Singleton 2001; Langellier 1989). This "communal understanding of events and history" (Seaton 2008: 293) helps to weave personal stories and histories with those of the group itself and individual members of the group.

One thirty-five year old that began riding at age nineteen stated:

> I'm usually going to rallies and drinking some beer and maybe learning some new tech tips or such and hearing stories from old men and maybe the old ladies who ride with the old men.

Another rally participant, a forty-nine year old woman with a number of years riding experience, explained why she especially enjoyed one particular annual rally:

> It's in the fall. It's the second weekend in October. I like fall temperatures and scenery, you know, with the colors. It's not a real big rally. I like the smaller rallies where you have a chance to either talk with a few more people or there's a few more people that are recognizable. That rally has um, an opportunity with the cooler temperatures for campfires. Goin' from campfire to campfire. Sit and listen, you know? Don't necessarily have to talk. Just let me listen and gather information that way.

When asked what people talk about, she responded

> Usually, uh, places they've been, you know. Things that have happened to em. How they've come through different incidents or you know, different uh, maybe mechanical problems that you can kinda listen into and find out what to expect, maybe, on what's gonna happen with the bike or somebody's got a solution of what they did do. Uh, how different people pack and different attire. You know, gettin' different input on what works best for who and why, on whether it be clothes or things for the bike. That kindathing. I like to eavesdrop.

A cigar and/or an alcoholic beverage may accompany the conversations, but without the boisterous behavior that the uninitiated might expect at a gathering of motorcyclists. As the night wears on, one by one the riders excuse themselves and head for their respective tents. On Saturday morning riders begin crawling, literally, out of their small tents at about the time that the sun rises. BMW riders are noted for being early risers. The first stop for some rally participants is a restroom or one of the portable toilets scattered around the campground as there is a price to pay for drinking beer well into the nighttime hours.

Activities of the Day

During morning hours, as participants rise for the day, rally organizers are very conscientious about having coffee ready and available. At some rallies, breakfast is served at the rally site as part of the rally fee, or an additional fee may be charged. Members of the club that organized the rally and/or representatives of a local charity may arrive early to prepare breakfast.

Riders may also assemble in small groups to ride to a nearby restaurant. Many rally participants seem to prefer locally owned "mom and pop" restaurants over establishments that are part of national chains. This may be a reaction to the rationalized lives (Weber 1922/1959) that riders experience in their daily world or an attempt to localize their experiences by getting away from a McDonaldized society (Ritzer 2004) and its world of standardized food and experiences. For these, or other reasons, it is not uncommon for a larger number of motorcycles to be parked outside of small cafés in a town hosting a rally than are parked at a large fast food chain restaurant nearby. News of a popular locally owned restaurant can spread throughout the campground and riders may have a favorite local establishment from attending the rally in past years. Riders sometimes make an effort to advise each other of well-respected local restaurants that they know of when someone mentions that they will be riding through a particular area or town. In this group, experience seems to be a primary objective in life and avoiding a homogenized fast food dining experience is one way to enhance one's life experiences while traveling.

After breakfast, rallyers are faced with a number of choices for their Saturday activities. Some choose to explore local roads and scenery, either alone or with a small group. Historic sites, parks, or other local attractions may be the destination of choice. At some rallies, the local club organizes a group ride for riders of motorcycles that are designed for travel on dirt roads. Organizers may also furnish riders with suggested routes that include local scenic roads. Some rally participants may choose to spend the day at the rally site talking to others, reading, or taking an afternoon nap.

One of the long-term features of motorcycle rallies is a poker run. While not included at all rallies, this is a popular Saturday activity for many riders. In this long established rally event, participants follow a prescribed route while stopping at particular locations to draw a card to complete a poker hand. These events are used to provide rally goers with a tour of the local area as organizers typically try to choose scenic roads for the route. It can also be used to encourage riders to patronize local merchants. For example, establishing a location to draw a card at a local restaurant or gasoline station can promote the business as a place of commerce for the participants. A poker run encourages participants to ride scenic routes and interact with each other, as well as promoting economic activity for the local economy (see Goodall 2004 for a description of a poker rally as experienced by a gathering of Ferrari owners). Cash awards, small plaques, or other small prizes are used to award the riders with the best hand(s) and sometimes a prize is also presented for the worst poker hand drawn by a rider.

One feature at some rallies is the presences of vendors, selling an assortment of goods useful for motorcycle travel and camping. Items that riders browse on Saturday might include motorcycle apparel, camping accessories, gear designed to assist in packing a motorcycle, and motorcycle accessories. These "ritual entrepreneurs" (Knottnerus and Loconto 2003) provide another type of economic activity for the rally settings. Many of the vendors are motorcycle enthusiasts themselves.

Saturday afternoon entertainment may take the form of “field events” which are safe low-key contests that involve riders and their motorcycles in typically foolish looking activities to entertain both participants and spectators. One featured field event may be a slow motorcycle race in which contestants try to ride as slow as possible, without putting their foot on the ground, to be the last to pass the finish line. Another events might involve a passenger throwing a water balloon over an overhead bar and attempting to catch it while the driver keeps the motorcycle moving or a sidecar obstacle course where the driver is blindfolded and the passenger must give directions. Field events are a lighthearted ritual that contributes to the festivities by encouraging interaction among spectators and participants while utilizing motorcycles, which reinforces their identity as riders.

On Saturday evenings or late afternoons many rallies have a dinner which encourages rally goers to eat together and promotes interaction. Sharing of meals in ritual settings can increase the bonds that participants feel toward each other (Mintz and DuBois 2002) and seems to encourage riders to meet new acquaintances and share further experiences. If a meal is served it typically, but not exclusively, occurs before an awards or closing ceremony.

Closing Ceremony

The closing ceremony may not be the last scheduled event for the rally, but it is generally the best attended single activity. At some rallies, door prizes are given away during the ceremonies, while at other rallies, door prizes are awarded throughout the rally weekend by posting winning numbers at the rally site. Awarding the most valuable door prizes may be postponed until the closing ceremony, which lends an air of anticipation to the event. Usually a local club member of the sponsoring club, or perhaps the club president, is in charge of conducting the closing ceremony.

At the ceremony, prizes may be presented to winners of the poker run and field events. Awards are also typically given in various categories for noteworthy riders which may include oldest male and female rider, youngest male and female rider, longest distance ridden to the rally (sometimes divided into male and female), oldest motorcycle ridden, and other similar awards. Rituals help to link the past, current, and future together (Kertzer 1988), in this case by recognizing special accomplishments.

During some award ceremonies rally organizers present monetary donations to local groups that provide services to the local community. As some rallies are held in small remote communities, these contributions can be a significant source of revenue. For example, one rally contributes to a local organization that provides Christmas presents for children in the community. Particular individuals, members of the club and local residents, may be recognized for their contribution to the success of the rally.

While almost all BMW based rallies feature some type of closing ceremony, there are differences based on variables such as level of formality, types and number of awards presented to riders, recognition of volunteers, and size of the rally. Additionally, special events, accomplishments, or other unique situations may be recognized during these ceremonies. For example, at a rally the weekend following the attacks on the U.S. of September 11, 2001, the ceremony provided a moment of silence. Ceremonies are very important human activities that can strengthen the bonds of group members (d'Aquili 1985).

A closing ceremony at the larger International rallies, such as the annual one sponsored by the BMW MOA, tends to have more activities and recognitions as one

might suppose. Ritual occasions allow participants to "come together to celebrate a symbol of their collective identity" which can serve to strengthen community-building (Brint 2001: 19-20) as both our personal and social identities are intertwined (Tilley 2006). Closing ceremonies allow for a type of semi-formal closure as most attendees congregate together for this event. Although live music later in the evening and breakfast on Sunday may still remain as potential activities, these events do not carry the same symbolic importance as the closing ceremonies.

After the ceremony some riders leave the rally to begin their trip home. Occasionally, someone may ride all night while others may begin their trip home with a later stop for the night. Riders who live nearby may return home that evening but most remain at the rally and may watch the musical entertainment if provided and/or continue the discussions in small groups as occurred the night before.

Going Home

Many riders rise early on Sunday mornings and begin to pack their camping equipment on their motorcycles. By 8 or 9 am the campground may be as much as one-half to two-thirds empty. A short non-denominational Christian based religious service is held at some rallies for those wishing to attend. Sunday mornings are a time for old and new friends to say their goodbyes with handshakes and hugs. Among BMW riders, there seems to be a strong emphasis on telling each other to have a safe trip utilizing various phrases which may initially seem to be a typical version of "easy talk" (Liebow 1967), however this practice seems to occur even among riders that are involved in more substantive conversations with close friends. This may serve as a tacit warning of the understood dangers of motorcycling. During the rally, riders may exchange telephone numbers, business cards, or e-mail addresses with new acquaintances. Frequent rally participants can develop a friendship network that extends throughout the country. As one rider explained:

> ...over the years and over a lot of riding I've made really good friends and, well, um, they're in different places in the states so, and Canada, you know, so I uh, I've got lots of friends, it's just that they're all real scattered, so I have to ride by myself to see the various people, unless you know, somebody's visiting me, which, has been, uh, more common lately.

A fifty-five year old female rider that attends a number of rallies each year explained what she likes about rallies as:

> Oh, I like being with fellow addicts, I guess. I like being around people that are as pumped up about living as I am. You know, that, you just start talking to them and riding is so important and it's just that you share that.

Rallies and travel seem to be inexorably linked for many of those that were involved in this research. A rider may focus on a particular rally as a destination for a specific weekend, or a rally may be part of a longer trip that allows the individual to experience the freedom of travel and escape the confines of day-to-day life, but punctuate the trip with connections to a larger community. As one female rider with twenty-seven years of experience explained:

> A friend and I went to Newfoundland, we ended up there, but we were gonna go for a month and we went to the Iowa rally and then to the New Hampshire rally and to Nova Scotia and then came back and we went to an Ontario rally so we had four rallies on weekends, which just felt, I don't

know, it has a feel of being around friends even if you're at a rally that's that far away from home and you might not know anyone.

Group Normative Behavior

Behavior at BMW rallies is sedate compared with stereotypical images of "biker" gatherings (Endres 2002; Page 2001), as emphasized by the fact that children are welcome at these rallies with some rallies having events specifically designed for their participation and many featuring reduced registration fees for children. Although alcohol consumption is a part of many rally settings, it takes on a quiet and controlled appearance. Loud drunken behavior is rarely, if ever, a part of rally life and can result in strong informal sanctions. One stereotypical joke about BMW riders is that they are usually getting up in the morning about the time that Harley-Davidson rally goers are going to bed. The group norms discourage loud behavior, including loud motorcycles, and acceptance of those that share these norms but intolerance of those that do not. It is fairly common to hear BMW motorcyclists complain of loud motorcycles and the impact that they have on public perceptions of riders. At larger motorcycle gatherings, such as Bike Week in Daytona, Florida, it is not uncommon for BMW riders to segregate themselves from other motorcyclists in terms of camping location.

Additionally, motorcyclists at these rallies have a high degree of trust exhibited toward other attendees. As mentioned, some rallies may have several thousand participants. Despite the anonymity afforded such large groups, riders feel comfortable leaving items such as helmets, camping equipment, riding suits (which may cost close to $1,000 or more), and motorcycles with keys in the ignition unguarded for hours or even overnight. This sense of common trust also contributes to a sense of community as riders feel safe, from both violent and property crimes, while participating in rallies. One rider stated: "I seldom worry about equipment being stolen at a motorcycle event and have never lost anything." Another experienced rider commenting on rallies stated: "even if you don't know each other, you're friends and you're not going to take something from a friend."

Women, although a noticeably small minority of the BMW rally population, appear to be accepted as full participants in this group (Gagné and Austin 2002) somewhat atypical of the gendered spaces (Bird and Sokolofski 2005) found in many social settings. Despite cross-cultural evidence that men's interaction with machinery, particularly motorcycles and automobiles, provides an avenue for homosocial bonding experiences that exclude women (Mellstrom 2004) this subculture seems to transcend this gender division.

It should be pointed out that a good deal of the conversations at rallies tend to focus on instrumental aspects of life rather than the expressive conversations that are stereotypically associated with female based gatherings, which may be reflective of larger differences in patterns of conversation between the genders (Tannen 1990; for a comparison with a female dominated setting see Montemurro's 2002 examination of bridal shower ritual). Stereotypical "biker" behavior involving objectification of women (Hopper and Moore 1990; Quinn 1987) is not part of the BMW rally scene, despite the general association of motorcycles with masculinity (Chambers 1983).

Past research suggests to us that many women motorcyclists (Glamser 2003; Auster 2001; Gagné and Austin 2002) were introduced and/or mentored into the world of motorcycling by males that were part of their life, such as boyfriends, spouses, or brothers. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the women in this

setting have adapted their behavior and orientation to fit into the male dominated world of BMW rallies, as occurs in other recreational settings (Raisborough 2006). Riding a high number of miles is a status marker in this group and some of the recognized high mileage riders are women, which helps to confer their status in the group. Women are involved in the operation and organization of the rallies, as well as leadership roles in clubs at the national and local level.

The ritualistic aspects of these rallies and motorcycling seem to transcend larger social divisions, such as race, gender, occupation, and social class. These divisions are not invisible, but are negated in comparison to the out-group and in-group divisions based on the rider/non-rider division and reinforced by the motorcycle brand of choice. Hierarchies in this subculture are based on issues that are salient to the group, such as riding ability and adventurous travel experiences (Austin and Gagné 2008). Commitment to the normative structure replaces traditional status markers. As one forty year old female rider explained when asked if she has gained or learned anything that has helped her in other aspect of her life:

> It's helped me, like I said, meeting people. If you don't know their backgrounds and it's made me a little bit more accepting and open and not judgmental, you know, as far as occupations and where a person comes from or whatever.

In his examination of edgeworkers or risk-takers, of which motorcyclists can be included, Lyng (2005a: 4) points out that when people that are separated by these divisions get together "and discover deep-seated commonalities of personal experience, they often feel a sense of connection rooted in something basic to their souls." In his discussion of those that voluntarily take risks, Lyng suggests that there are social and cultural forces in modern life that lead to psychic issues that link participants together. The rituals of rallies serve to reinforce and strengthen these bonds by providing an avenue in which participants are bound together due to their participation in a risk-taking activity or edgework (Lyng ibidem) and additionally by the nature and impact of ritual activities (Durkheim 1915/1965; Collins 2004).

Tribal Markers and Boundary Distinction

Recreational subcultures use jargon, equipment, and processes to identify members (Wheaton 2000), and the choice of riding gear and motorcycle provides an avenue for group identity and boundaries to be reinforced at rallies and while riders are away from the safe confines of a rally. The equipment, clothing, and other identifying artifacts can become totems to the subculture (Kidder 2006). While not formally required for rally participants, these accouterments help to insure full acceptance into the subculture and are a ubiquitous feature of rally life.

The Machine

Social scientists recognize that in the human world, material objects represent more than their simple use value to their owners as members of society interrelate with material objects in their culture and, more specifically, within subcultures. One of the ways that we express ourselves and develop self-identity is through consumption and use of products with the accompanying social interaction (Dant 1999). Rituals and the qualities that a culture assigns to an object can provide the object with a fetish quality (Baudrillard 1972/1981). As Dant, (1996: 511) points out, as

consumption becomes fetishized it includes "the social negotiation and sharing of the values of the object so the ritualistic practices that fetishise objects will involve discursive action related to the object and its capacities." This suggests to us that motorcycle rallies provide a social avenue for the collective and individual fetishization of the artifacts in this subculture where adherents to this shared culture gather for intense interaction centered on the consumption of the product. It must be remembered that we are speaking in the expansive sense of the word consumption, where the product is enjoyed and revered beyond the mere function- transporting an individual from one location to another- that it serves.

For this tribe, the design of some of the current sacred objects (Durkheim 1915/1965; Collins 2004) can be traced back to 1923 when the first BMW motorcycle was produced. This first BMW motorcycle had a horizontally opposed twin cylinder engine. While the technology has improved and the design has evolved dramatically, the basic feature of a twin cylinder motorcycle with opposing cylinders protruding from the side of the bike has remained a choice for many tribal members. While many current BMW models do not exhibit this design feature, those owners with this design are able to trace their chosen sacred object back to its origin, which provides a sense of continuity and a form of fetishism (Dant 1996).

The sacred object for this tribe, the BMW motorcycle, serves as another means of identifying in-group members. The branding of the bike is more important than the age, cost, or aesthetic condition of the motorcycle. Oddly enough in this group, aesthetically challenged bikes are regarded with special esteem if their condition is attributed to high mileage and adventurous travel (Austin and Gagné 2008), much like well-worn clothing among mountain climbers (Mitchell 1983). For this group, looking at odometer mileage is a search for high status riders and motorcycles and can be an important pastime at rallies.

Furthermore, Chambers (1983) provides insight in understanding the importance that riders attach to this form of transportation and their individual machines as motorcycles are described as an individualistic and personal mode of transportation. Kidder (2006) found a similar phenomenon in his examination of bicycle messengers and their reverence for the sacredness of their bicycles which were indued with qualities that represent freedom and devotion to a lifestyle for members of their subculture. We would not expect to find this respect and symbolic importance assigned to a bicycle only ridden occasionally around a suburban neighborhood for recreation. The social processes involved with use of the product impact relations between the members of the subculture, but also bears directly on how the individuals interact with the material object itself (Dant 2008). As one rider stated:

> I think all riders regardless of the style of riding or the make of the bike, feel a connection to each other. It is an unspoken understanding that we all share a passion. People who don't ride have no concept of that connection, people in four wheel vehicles don't wave to each other going down the highway.

O'toole and Were (2008) help us understand the intensity of feeling and emotion that these riders experience with their motorcycles and how rallies and the accompanying ritualization serves to intensify these emotions. They utilize the work of Hodder (2000), who asserts that there are different approaches to the interpretation of material culture. One category requires that we interpret and understand material culture as much more than just the sum of the use values of the artifacts of a culture or subculture. We must understand that in this approach "material culture represents social and symbolic meaning that is tacit in nature and is

embedded in the culture and practices of the group" (O'toole and Were 2008: 621). The historical, cultural, and circumstantial forces associated with the material aspects of this culture, such as motorcycles and riding gear, combine with the social history of the subculture to combine into a highly symbolic and meaningful social experience. This combination of material and non-material culture and social history can be captured by mechanical representation in the form of a motorcycle.

Automobile use and operation involves an interplay of complex human and mechanical relationships (Thrift 2004). With the exception of particular automotive based subcultures (Best 2006; Goodall 2004), we can assume that many drivers do not embellish their respective vehicles with the same emotional and experiential attributes that these motorcyclists do. Combining this passion with the specialized skills required to operate a motorcycle, compared to an automobile (National Highway Transportation Safety Administration 2007), and the intensity of those involved in "serious leisure" (Stebbins 2001) can help us to comprehend the attachment to material objects that are enmeshed in a subculture devoted to their consumption and use.

The brand and/or style of motorcycle serves to divide riders into various groups(Pierson 1997), in a somewhat sectarian manner which is more traditionally reserved for disagreements over interpretations of ancient sacred texts, ritual, and practices, much like the differences in automotive enthusiast subcultures (Goodall 2004; Best 2006). While other motorcyclists are believers, each brand loyal group realizes that they are the only true believers and feel a certain disdain, or in some cases pity, for those that are not part of the chosen. As is the case in the spiritual world, recent converts are viewed as a victory and may serve as some of the most vocal two wheeled apostles of their new creed, much like a recently reformed smoker being the first to complain about the nearby inconsiderate smoker that just lit up. In discussing the brand and style of riding divisions one rider explained, "I believe there are a number of identifiable sub-groups in motorcycling: Harley true believers; Gold Wing people; hardcore sportbike riders; squids; sport-touring people; BMW people. Many riders identify strongly with their subgroup more than with the sport as a whole. It's very tribal."

The Clothing

Possessions can be an important part of self-identity (Belk 1988; Tharp 2007) and leisure experiences are influenced by the equipment utilized by participants (Chambers 1983). Clothing itself can serve to as a means for socialization and/or social control or, conversely, for liberation (Crane and Bovone 2006). Clothing is one marker of territory, like motorcycle choice, for this tribe as it serves to distinguish between members and non-members when riders encounter each other in a setting other than rallies, such as during the trip to and from a rally location. Black leather vests, doo-rags, and large wallets attached to chains mark the members of a competing tribe, but not this group. This is the world of the familiar blue and white BMW roundel which replaces symbols of other tribes, such as eagles and Harley-Davidson emblems, that predominate at other respective gatherings. Clothing for this tribe takes on a much more functional look inviting comparisons to the Michelin man, a road warrior, or a smurf. Clothing can serve as a marker or sign of membership in a culture or subculture (Kidder 2006), and reflects how we define ourselves (Crane and Bovone 2006), and this group is no exception. While not the exclusive choice, the majority of riders show up wearing leather or synthetic one and two-piece riding outfits designed to protect the rider from adverse weather and the unwelcome spill

that punctuates the risk of motorcycling. Heavy boots, also specifically designed for motorcycling, with some reaching almost to the knee, reside below the riding suit.

This tribal apparel is best suited for the ride as the primary sacred ritual of this group is riding, not walking. The cut of the clothing, designed for sitting on a motorcycle, and its weight can make walking a bit of an awkward appearing experience. Padded jacket sleeves dangle well below the wrist as they appear to be cut for someone with the reach of a heavyweight boxer. They are designed to fit the outstretched arms of someone riding a motorcycle, not the typical use of a jacket designed to merely keep the wearer warm, dry, or stylish. Riding pants appear to be in need of a tailor's attention as they drape lazily over the boots of riders. These too are cut for the ride and fall into a more precise fit with a rider's legs tucked beneath his torso in the riding position associated with European and Japanese touring and sport motorcycles, as compared to the position of legs extended forward in the position more associated with a cruiser style motorcycle. Knee and hip pads lend to the ungainly appearance of walking riders. During times of cold weather, electrically heated clothing may be tucked underneath the exterior garments. Heavy leather, sometimes synthetic, gloves and a full face motorcycle helmet, which surrounds the rider's entire head in a protective cocoon, complete the ensemble and are usually the first items to be removed after climbing off the bike. The gloves, also designed specifically with the motorcyclist in mind, may have a gauntlet that reaches several inches above the wrist to keep the wind and rain from creeping up the sleeves of a jacket. Gauntlets also provide more protection in the unfortunate event of an accident.

The dress code helps to insure that these members are never regarded as "one of those." For this group, the prescribed apparel helps to protect from outside invasion and to identify other true-believers. These tribal members seem to be able to identify each other at rest-stops and gasoline stations, as well as when they pass each other riding in opposite directions at highway friendly speeds. Despite the costly price of the tribal wear for this subculture, it is generally considered a necessity for participation. Safety is of utmost importance, as well as being able to ride in adverse weather conditions. These objectives result in a type of anti-fashion fashion statement.

BMW riders are sometimes known as a conservative and stodgy lot (Slawinski 2005) and the dress code does nothing to dispel the stereotype. The clothing of this group serves both functional and symbolic purposes and helps to delineate the boundaries of the tribe. The symbolic aspects of the clothing help to distinguish these riders as true enthusiasts (Goodall 2004) involved in serious leisure (Stebbins 2001) and edgework (Lyng 1990; 2005a) from those viewed as mere recreational riders, or worse, those labeled as posers.

The Outsiders

This group regards posers as those that dress and act as if they are motorcycle riders or "bikers" while actually riding very few miles and possessing questionable riding styles and skill levels (Austin and Gagné 2008). Posers are regarded as dressing the part of a real biker while more concerned with appearance, both their own and those of their motorcycle, than with serious riding and high mileage that is so important to this group. In his work on bicycle messengers (Kidder 2006) reports a very similar subcultural bias against "rookie" messengers that too early adopted the symbols of long-term messengers. Best (2006) found comparable sentiment against those in a car subculture that were regarded as fakes rather than racers that are real

or authentic. Those that are labeled as posers may be regarded as not "paying their dues" by long-distance riding, developing their riding skills, and other normative practices that make one a serious rider.

While they may not be that different than this tribe, in terms of their socioeconomic status, the so-called RUBS (Rich Urban Bikers) are stereotypical of those they regard as posers. A sixty-seven year old rider with fifty-three years of riding experience stated that the social aspect of riding the he disliked the most is "the false image portrayed by false wannabes" while also responding that he feels a bond with his peers that "assemble at rallies all over the country and are high mileage riders." A thirty-three year old rider with fourteen years of riding experience captured the negative sentiment targeted toward those that are regarded as riders that haven't captured the true essence of motorcycling as he responded that the intellectual or emotional aspect of motorcycling that he dislikes the most is that biking has "developed an amazing number of symbols, which are adopted by a spiritually thirsty population, say yuppies of Daytona. It's like having the form of something without the soul." He also stated that he has "met some strange and wonderful people on bikes, as I stated before, but I've met a lot of posers, rednecks, assholes, reprobates, scalawags as well."

This tribe seems to reserve special contention for those stereotyped out-group members that dress the part of the biker with leather vests, jackets, and jeans, but ride few miles and pose as true believers (Austin and Gagné 2008). Although this subculture seems to reserve special contention for stereotyped out-group members that play the role of biker and pose as hard-core riders, the true outlaw bikers, or the so-called one-percenters (Quinn 2001), are so few in number and so far removed that they are virtually irrelevant to this group, as this group is to them. However, the posers with their typically loud exhaust pipes are a contemptuous lot to this tribe. In this social world, motorcycles are viewed as objects of adventure, speed, and travel. Loud pipes do not enhance this experience, but are viewed as creating hard feelings in the civilian population and the prevailing attitude is that this negative imagery can effect all riders with restrictions and negative attitudes.

Touring motorcyclists want to encounter those that are receptive to them (Corey 1996). When a wet and cold BMW rider pulls into a small town mom-and-pop motel to find the vacancy sign does not apply to them, their thoughts of a warm dry motel room shift to blame and anger at the biker image that has been part of American culture for over half a decade (Austin, Gagné and Orend forthcoming; Reynolds 2000) as they wonder if loud pipes and posers have brought the image to this immediately full motel.

A motorcycle rider and writer compared this division of riders in various groups as making it easier to understand how a single religion can be the source of so many diverse groups (Pierson 1997). In this world, as in other motorcycling subcultures (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), these divisions are taken seriously and serve to reinforce the choice of motorcycles, and by extension, type of clothing and riding style that mark each group. In a manner typical of in-group and out- group differences (Tajfel 1982), each group tends to stereotype the other while possessing an overly positive imagery of their group at the expense of others.

One 49 year old BMW rider, in explaining distinction between a motorcyclist and biker, alluded to the importance of protective clothing and the style of bike in her self-image

> See it was the biker to me that's no helmet, no jacket, you know. A motorcyclists to me is, bein' as safe as you possibly can and protectin' your body. The type of bike Um, you know, I've, I'm from the days where

> choppers were the whole thing, too. You know, everybody took a bike and extended the forks and had the big handlebars, which I can't imagine ever riding. How would you ride that safely? Just, yeah, that's what I consider a biker.

Riders hinted of these divisions in their responses when they described the social aspects of motorcycling they like the best. One fifty year old rider liked "Rallies, club events, and other events with like-minded people". Another sixty year old rider responded "meeting and riding with like-minded people" and reported enjoying "rallies and camping". When asked about a connection with other riders, this latter rider responded that "within the BMW community, there is a sense of community."

Discussion

Motorcyclists are notorious for separating themselves into subgroups based on brand and/or model of motorcycle (Pierson 1997; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). This project examines only one brand specific category of motorcycle rallies as we focus on those associated with riders of BMW motorcycles therefore care should be taken before using these observations to generalize to other groups. Hopefully, however, this discussion can inform the analysis of other sporting and recreational groups.

As we return to Collins' (2004: 48) theoretical work on interaction ritual, we can see how these rallies contain all four of the prescribed ingredients: 1) "Group assembly (bodily co-presence)"is apparent throughout the rally process due to the high level of physical and social interaction; 2) "Barrier to outsiders" are apparent as non BMW riders, with a few exceptions, are excluded from rally participation mostly through informal mechanisms such as self selection and other social processes. This exclusion is reinforced by markers of the subculture, such as group norms, clothing, and motorcycle choice; 3) "Mutual focus of attention" occurs as common objects, such as BMW motorcycles and riding gear, and common activities, such as field events and closing ceremonies, promote the mutual awareness of participants in terms of "each other's focus of attention"; 4) A "shared mood" exists as participation encourages a common mood and/or shared emotional experience through activities, shared temporary living conditions, and consumption of common products (BMW motorcycles, riding apparel, etc.). Collins (ibidem) points out that these four ingredients feed on each other. This can produce a process similar to Durkheim's "collective conscience" with the sharing of beliefs and norms.

Turner (1986: 415) summarizes Durkheim's theory on ritual among those gathered together as promoting "a sense of solidarity, a convergence of outlooks, and an increase in social attachments." Durkheim's work helps us understand the broader context of the importance of ritualistic practices in attributing unique or special characteristics to inanimate objects. Groups assemble and focus on an emotionally laden object, which leads to the production of a sacred object (Collins 2004: 37) and, for society; this is an ongoing process as sacred things are constantly created from the ordinary. In this case, the BMW motorcycle fulfills this function. Dant's work (1996; 2008) suggests to us that the consumption of a product, in the broad sense which includes concepts such as ritual and fetishism of the object, results in a "cultural production" (Dant 1996: 514) that is as real for the consumer as the physical product itself. The cultural production of the object can be more important than its actual physical existence.

Motorcycle rallies, BMW based or otherwise, provide a microcosm of the larger social world. They provide an avenue for a glimpse into a classic world of in-group and out-group (Tajfel 1982) boundary distinctions. The clothing, motorcycles of choice, and behavioral norms of various types of rallies reinforce the choices that individuals make in their daily lives. The ritualistic practices reinforce the identity of participants and help to distinguish the boundaries of the group.

In a post-industrial world the role of non-geographically bounded communities appears to be becoming more important in terms of our sense of community and attachment to a larger collective (Counts and Counts, 1996; Forster, 2004). As we move further into a post-industrial world, consumer tribes (Maffesoli 1996) appear to be increasingly important in the construction of society and our personal lives. Additionally, these groups and others such as survivalists and bicycle messengers can help us to understand the ability of people to construct meaning in their lives in a post-industrial society (Mitchell 2002; Kidder 2006). Tilley (2006: 10) argues that society is in a condition which results in more uncertainty in terms of class, culture, and community and, as such, social identity has become more of a matter of "self-conscious reflection." Online recreational based interaction even allows for the construction of identification across national boundaries with complete strangers (Adkins and Grant 2007). Rallies help to reinsure participants that they have constructed the appropriate identity for themselves, while also constructing and maintaining a collective and historically based identity for the group. This process links micro-level interaction with the larger social processes of the subculture and, even, the larger culture.

Edgeworkers, those involved in voluntary risk-taking, seem to thrive on the balance between control and catastrophe as they push the edge of this balance. Micro-level experiences, such as self-actualization, are linked with the macro-level influences, such as rationality in the dominant culture, in these subcultures (Lyng 1990; Lois 2005). Perhaps, rituals within groups dedicated to edgework help to moderate between the individual micro-level interactions and the macro-level forces, which operate to encourage the development of edgework as a reaction to these forces. Although, it is not completely clear where edgework and post-industrial culture coincide and conflict with each other. It is somewhere at this intersection of modern social constraints and the attraction of the intensity of edgework that the appeal plays itself out (Lyng 2005b). Rituals may be the functional equivalent of an intersection for these various forces.

It is difficult to isolate specific reasons why particular individuals chose this particular avenue to construct at least a portion of their social life. Insight into these consciously chosen groups can aid in the understanding of the changes occurring in the larger society and the role that recreational and other subcultures of choice can play in replacing more traditional forms of community, ritual, consumption, and identity.

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Qualitative Sociology Review - Book Reviews
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Book Review:
The Good Temp by Vicky Smith and Ester B. Neuwirth. Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 2008

I remember my experiences working as a temp very well; the monotony of continuous data entry for eight hours a day, the piles and piles and piles of paper waiting to filed neatly away in alphabetical order, the days that seemed to drag on without end, the paper cuts, the time sheets, the low pay. So, having worked as a temp myself in numerous work environments I was keen to crack open Smith and Neuwirth's "The Good Temp" to see what their sociological imagination could bring to bear in an analysis of this particular kind of employment. The book is not principally concerned with the experiences of temps themselves. It is an analysis of the changing nature of the temporary help service (THS) industry as a whole, and examines the day-to-day work practices of temp agencies and the self-legitimating discourses which the temp agencies themselves create and disseminate. The central argument of the book is that in the latter half of the twentieth-century temp agencies, motivated by their need for profit, began to actively construct and disseminate discourses which promoted temporary work over full-time work and framed temporary work as a normative and highly productive form of employment. At the core of this emergent discourse is the notion of the "Good Temp"; a semi-mythical employee, who was promoted as being just as productive and reliable as the full-time employee, but as much less costly in terms of salary expectations, required training, and medical benefits. Smith and Neuwirth chart the rise of this new staffing paradigm in the US, noting the various ways in which temporary workers become commodified and sold by the THS industry. Interestingly, while the authors clearly recognize the negative aspects of temporary employment their treatment of the subject is the extremely balanced. They note their inclination is to take "a middle path between seeing temporary employment as exclusively negative (the oppressive model) or exclusively as liberating (the free agent model)" (p.5). An additional argument made throughout the book is that the increased use of temporary employment over time was not simply a result of an increase in demand for that kind of work, but rather was the result of the wide-spread adoption of attitudes and beliefs within the corporate world regarding the supposed benefits of temporary labor; attitudes and beliefs which had been carefully constructed by the THS industry itself.

Smith and Neuwirth take a twofold methodological approach. Firstly a content analysis of 263 articles published between 1960 and 1990 in THS industry magazines allows for a close examination of the prevalent discourses within the industry regarding temporary employment. The findings of this content analysis are presented in chapter two of the book entitled "The Social Construction of New

Markets and New Products". Here the authors present compelling evidence to suggest a systematic ideological project by the THS industry, aimed at changing the minds of employers regarding the potential benefits of using temporary labor. In addition of selling the notion of the "Good Temp" these discourses also made employers aware of the hidden costs of permanent labor, suggesting that permanent employees were in fact much more harmful to companies than temporary ones. The second methodological element of Smith and Neuwirth's research is an eight month ethnography of two temp agencies in Silicon Valley in 2000 and 2001. Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of this data is a tension which seems to be inherent in the work of temp agencies. On the one hand Smith and Neuwirth make clear that temp agencies are businesses, and like any other business they have a commodity to market and sell – in this case, the temporary worker. Their discussion also suggests that the kinds of jobs temps could hope to obtain through these agencies are often little more than dead end jobs with low pay and no job security. However, on the other hand the authors cite evidence to suggest that staff in the temp agencies they studied were often extremely concerned about the personal well-being of their temps, the quality of the work placements, and the potential for the temp to grow in the job. Far from being manipulative or exploitative, it seems temp agency staff often went out of their way to help their temps in any way possible, even on occasion personally driving the temp to their place of work if they were unable to get there on their own. Furthermore, Smith and Neuwirth argue that temporary employment, while perhaps not being the most fulfilling kind of work is nevertheless a better alternative for many than being out of work altogether.

Therefore, what ultimately emerges from Smith and Neuwirth's book is an extremely balanced account of temp agencies and temporary employment. In fact their account is a little too balanced for my liking. At the end of the book the authors state:

> Our analysis should not be construed as an endorsement of profit-making temporary help service agencies or the industry as a whole. The fact that the practices we have discussed take the edge off temporary employment, in our view, is a byproduct of the explicit profit-seeking strategies of private-sector business, profits created by the labor of temporary employees (p.176).

However, this is one of the few times Smith and Neuwirth take this explicitly critical stance, and by this point in the book it seems like too little too late. It would have also been useful if the authors had spent a little more time discussing existing literature in the field in order to place their study in a broader theoretical context. Nevertheless, "The Good Temp" will make compelling reading for anyone interested in this particular subject matter, and it provides is a fascinating window into the world of temporary employment and the THS industry.

Citation

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Book Review:
Encountering the Everyday. An Introduction to the Sociologies of the Unnoticed edited by Michael Hviid Jacobsen. Palgrave MacMillan, Houndmills 2009

The sociology of everyday life is an old topic in the sociological research, although the tradition consists of different theoretical and methodological views. In this sense, the edited volume "Encountering the Everyday" is the first comprehensive and updated book on everyday sociologies for many years, as Michael Hviid Jacobsen, the editor, states in the long introduction of the study. Hviid Jacobsen also stresses the plural form "sociologies" while writing about sociological research on everyday life. Since the tradition is formed of different philosophical and methodological orientations, it is right to say that there is not just one sociological approach to study everyday life or just one understanding of what everyday life is about. Therefore, it is incorrect to speak of everyday sociology in singular form, because it is "best thought and spoken of in the plural" (p. 15). So the right form should be "sociologies of everyday life" or "everyday life sociologies". This remark is not just a trivial detail. In order to understand the theoretical traditions concerning everyday life, a plural form makes it understandable that everyday life is a key concept in many sociological approaches both in North America and Europe.

The book contains an Introduction and 16 chapters, which are divided into three separate parts. These are "Foundation", "Fermentation" and "Dissemination". In a way, the study is a chronologically ordered analysis on the development of everyday sociologies, and in this sense the different parts of the study illuminate some important orientations in the everyday life sociologies. But the structure is actually very flexible and the chapters can also be read as separate introductions to the topic. Most of the contributors are well-known experts in their field, like Paul ten Have (conversation analysis), Norman K. Denzin (interpretive interactionism), Phillip Vannini (semiotics), Stephen Hester (ethnomethology), Robert C. Prus (pragmatism) and Dan Zahavi (phenomenology), just to mention some of the scholars. When thinking of the structure of the anthology, the exceptionally broad theoretical scope of the book raises some sceptical ideas concerning the logic of analysis, but Hviid Jacobsen's excellent introduction to the topic gives important information to the reader on the formation of everyday life sociologies and delineates the research field in a new, more detailed way. The different chapters are also written with the idea that the reader gets the main ideas of the theoretical traditions and is able to understand how the everyday life is conceptualized in these sociological approaches.

The first part of the anthology ("Foundation") is the widest. In this part all the essential traditions or roots of everyday sociologies are introduced. To these belong such orientations as Chicago sociology, sociological pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, phenomenological sociology, existential sociology and critical everyday life sociologies. A common denominator to these traditions is the point that the stress is on the meaning of subjective experiences in understanding interaction, social processes and conflicting situations in everyday life. In this respect, everyday life is not something irrelevant or unscientific. What makes everyday sociologies relevant for sociological research, is the point that social action is based on rules, norms, values and ideologies, which are social in their origin. According to these traditions everyday life is based on culturally mediated symbols and socio-cultural constructions. There are also some similarities with the different approaches. Especially pragmatist, symbolic interactionist, phenomenologist and existentialist sociologies stress the point that everyday life is the most essential area of social behaviour in order to understand human sociality.

In the second part of the study ("Fermentation") some important micro-sociological research traditions are introduced. These are the French Sociologies of the Quotidian, dramaturgical sociology, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and the sociology of absurd. Compared with the emergence of everyday sociologies, these approaches are founded on more elaborated qualitative methodologies and have also developed into outstanding directions in the sociological research with the exception of the sociology of absurd worked out by Stanford M. Lyman and Marvin B. Scott at 1970s. All the articles are excellent introductions, which contain basic knowledge of some of the most powerful research directions in modern sociology. A common background for these orientations is a critical attitude toward Talcott Parson's functionalist and system theoretical sociology and an interest to study micro-scale social processes in everyday settings. Hviid Jacobsen's analysis of the sociology of absurd is a fresh and conceptually inspiring introduction on somewhat radical view of social world as meaningless and arbitrary. Contrast to some more rational sociological approaches, the sociology of absurd stress the incidental nature of social world and individual's effort to make sense of the meaningless world around them. Since the social world is absurd, individuals are forced to construct social meanings in order to live their life meaningfully.

The last part of the study ("Dissemination") contains some reflections of current state of affairs in sociological research on everyday life. The analysis widens to the main currents in the social scientific thinking and relates to other areas of everyday life research, as Scandinavian everyday life research and feminist, anthropological, semiotic, cultural and postmodern research on everyday life. The idea of the articles is to map the key areas of research during the last two decades. In this respect, everyday life research has, on the one hand, had a specific role in Scandinavian countries (in Denmark and Norway), because of the feminist and anthropological orientation. On the other hand, socio-semiotic tradition, cultural studies and postmodern theories offer new ways of conceptualizing the everyday life in the form of emotion management, sign systems or cultural resources. In these traditions everyday life is seen as a new cultural form of social and personal life, where consumption, media and private experiences dominate the subjective experiences.

Why is everyday life an important research area in sociological research? In the first pages of the study Hviid Jacobson refers to Alvin W. Gouldner and Harold Garfinkel's view that everyday life is an unnoticed part of human life. We seldom think or criticize some elementary things in everyday life: using cars daily, surfing in the Internet, buying food from the local markets or watching television many hours every evening. By this way, some unnoticed elements of everyday life become

ordinary habits, and the whole society is, actually, based on unnoticed or unconscious habits. These form the enormous fly-wheel of society, as pragmatist philosopher William James stated. According to Hviid Jacobson, sociologists should make sense of unnoticed parts of everyday life. Instead of seeing everyday life as trivial or banal, sociologists should focus more on small-scale social processes as microcosm of late-modern life. “Encountering the Everyday” reflects this change in attitudes. As an updated and theoretically informed analysis of the sociologies of everyday life, the anthology will be an outstanding work for researchers and students interested in questions related to study everyday life in late-modern societies. It offers a broad variety of articles, which are at the same time historically informative and conceptually clarifying analyses on the various sociologies of everyday life.

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Book Review:
Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History by Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce and Barbara Laslett. Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 2008

The book "Telling Stories. The Use of Personal Narratives in The Social Sciences and History" is written by three scholars representing disciplines of social science and history. As the Authors stress, they belong to three generations what differentiates their political experiences, values and intellectual priorities (p. viii). These diverse perspectives are to be a specific input to the one project based on a few shared assumptions. Firstly, all three Authors have used personal narratives as empirical sources for their studies and therefore they want to propagate this perspective as well as share with their research and theoretical experiences. Secondly, the Authors aim to present interdisciplinary approach, which appears to be a very fruitful project in face of contemporary, very blurry limits of disciplines in social science, especially when one uses qualitative approach. Finally, all three Authors have been interested in problems of gender and feminism, therefore they very often address to the projects exploring this field and thanks to it a reader may learn about many researches concentrated on this problem.

The book consists of an Introduction and five extended chapters in which the Authors characterize specific features of personal narratives in terms of their social/sociological meaning, theoretical perspectives supporting using narrative approach as the means enabling to show subjectivity of a social actor, interrelation between an individual, his or her story and historical context. The Authors also enumerate and characterize different forms of telling and retelling/reproducing life stories, they pay attention to the social context of evoking the situation of story telling what makes it an intersubjective encounter. Finally, they share with methodological and epistemological remarks related to the problem of theorizing on the basis of personal narratives, namely to what extent and how a researcher is entitled to form generalization when using narratives.

As a scholar who also uses biographical narratives in social research I may say that the Authors touch all the most important problems and dilemmas connected with the process of collecting the material, its analysis and founding theoretical background for theorizing about social reality when using this kind of material. Thus, when reading the book I had a feeling of authentic involvement in the discussed problems and their real relationship to the Authors' interests and experiences. We may then pose the question to whom the book can be addressed? And in my opinion it is not an easy task to answer. Perhaps it is a good reading for "beginners"- that is

those who need to be encouraged to use personal narratives. In such case they will find in the book many examples of researches done this way and representing different fields of social science. Therefore, the book is a very good source for knowing many American as well as European works belonging both to classic output (like Thomas and Znaniecki) and contemporary projects. By saying "a very good source" I do not mean the sufficient one. The Authors use examples to illustrate their points but for sure the bibliography of the book cannot be treated as an overview of even main works based on narrative biography analysis. Again, if personal narratives researches are to be introduced to "the beginners", they must be conscious that they do not find in the book any systematic lecture on the above mentioned problems. These are rather some hints or glosses not really related to what we call a "main stream" of analytical and theoretical approaches of this field. For example, the Authors do not mention main representatives of English oral history approach, German works or even well known American authors involved in the process of propagating as well as theorizing on storytelling analysis. Just to mention two names of Anselm Strauss or Norman Denzin. Therefore, I would recommend the book as a form of inspiration, but I cannot advise it as the source of basic knowledge about the use of personal narratives. At the same time this disadvantage becomes an advantage when addressing the book to scholars experienced in this area as the publication is a good source to learn what is going on in some extracted fields of storytelling analysis, especially in American environment, particularly related to gender studies.

When reading the book I have come to a general conclusion that also very often appears when I take part in many, especially international, conferences -although there are networks devoted to biographical approach where researchers using this kind of method meet and exchange their experiences, it is very difficult to establish a common methodological and theoretical background known to scholars and then eventually discussed. Whereas it seems to happen so in other social sciences sub-disciplines when scholars share common knowledge about certain theories or approaches, where, in other words, exists something that we can call a "canon knowledge". In case of narratives this knowledge seems to be often "nationalized" by local projects. As the result, something what is treated as a sort of "common truth" by some researchers is not defined by the others in terms of "the known truth". Just to give one example. In the last chapter the Authors discuss the problem of generalizing and categorizing based on personal narratives resources and they do not mention the assumptions of grounded theory that has achieved "grounded" position in qualitative approach and it gives answers to problems that the Authors analyze on their own without referring to rich reflection on the topic. Therefore, when reading the book, I have got an impression that lots of presented problems and dilemmas have already been discussed. Of course it is very fruitful and inspiring, that the Authors work by themselves on these problems and try to find explanation based on their theoretical and empirical experience. What bothers me is that they do not place their reflections in the wider context of well developed discourse in the field of biographical/storytelling research in social science.

Citation

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Book Review:
Handbook of Emergent Methods edited by Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy. The Guilford Press: New York – London 2008

As researchers, we are always expected to present our methodological approach, the chosen epistemology and research methods which we are going to apply while presenting a future research project. As Gouldner noticed already in 1971 in his "The coming crisis in Western sociology", usually the funding institutions tend to be conservative and preferring projects using well-known methodologies and common research tools, despite the fact that they might be obsolete and not adjusted to new issues being researched. Furthermore, the scientific work, when discussed by the experts and supervisors, is expected to follow well-known guidelines because what is new and unknown can be seen as suspicious. For these reasons researchers are often cautious in innovating and experimenting, sometimes even preferring to hide the fact that they have discovered new research method! The authors call for courage in exploration and publication of texts on "emergent" methods, that is the new methods that emerge in the fieldwork to cover "method gaps", that is discrepancies between "true and tried methods" and requirements of new complex issues.

You can learn about new developments in qualitative research such as hypermedia methods, metaphor analysis, performance-based methods such as ethnodrama, or "new critical collaborative ethnography" by reading this book. As it offers a panoramic view, it is possible to see how many doors were recently opened in social sciences research methods. Of course, if you got attracted by any of these methods, you need to search elsewhere for more information as this book provides you just with a brief introduction. Although not all new developments represent a rupture with well-known methodological approaches. The methods with a few decades of tradition, such as grounded theory, are able to adapt to dynamic social reality thanks to its open-endness and flexibility, as Kathy Charmaz convinces in her text. New developments in focus group interviews are also reported, especially application of focus interviews in international environment seems very promising.

Of course there are serious reasons for precautions against free quest for new methods. If we allow freedom of methods exploration – the critics would say- anything can go. Experienced scholars might be afraid that research can change in an artistic cocktail not grounded in any kind of ontology and methodology. However, as Chinese painter Lu Ch'ai wrote in The Tao of Painting in 1701:

> To be without method is deplorable, but to depend on method [is] entirely worse. You must first observe the rules faithfully; afterwards modify them according to our intelligence and capacity. The end of all methods is to have no method. (p. 2)

I could not agree more, but I do not remember most of my teachers inviting me to modify methods. I agree with Jennifer Platt's observation that there is something wrong about the fact that the history of sociology is usually presented as history of theories, while "has seldom given attention to practical research methods or, indeed, to empirical research" (p. 9).

There are new complex issues emerging which push on the boundaries of traditional domains of science such as gene research. There are movements that reshaped the very concept of research such as feminist or social justice movement. In addition, there are new research tools available thanks to technological progress, such as usage of global information system (GIS) for spatial research. Moreover, most experienced researchers experienced that their initial research tools, methods and theoretical concepts appeared to be useless in the field and had to develop new ones. Which issues can force us to broaden scope of research? The authors provide us with a case study of genetic testing which is brought by technological changes and broadens the frontiers of medicine (p. 8). The medicine doctors are facing ethical and political decisions which need to be explored in an interdisciplinary way. For example, should the gene information be guarded from employers and insurance companies? What consequences can have reading of "gene maps"? Even good news can produce bad results as in case of 37-year old woman who learned that on the contrary to her mother and sisters she has very low risk of breast cancer. She suffered depression because of deep sensation of guilt. Also working in interdisciplinary teams with doctors, engineers or artists requires the social scientists to "de-disciplining" (p. 12) and broadening borders of their disciplines.

Many of these essays not only present new methods but also pose ethical and practical questions regarding their use. Gunilla Holm in her chapter "Visual Research Methods. Where are We and Where Are We Going" poses the question whether visual methods such as video or photography are more neutral than verbal ones? (p.325). Some leading authors in this field such as Hockings, talk about "film-as-a-constructed-text", a joint product of its producer, the subject and the viewers (p. 326). From this text we can learn about new applications of visual methods in research. In particular, Photovoice is a methodology designed especially for community action research projects. The participants are simply given cameras "to take pictures of aspects of their lives that they see as relevant and important for improving their community" (p. 329). It is an empowerment methodology that seeks transmission of knowledge from communities to policy makers through photography and narratives following them. In case of photo elicitation, pictures serve in eliciting information that the researcher otherwise would not learn about. Sometimes photographs can offer different from the oral narratives version of the story. In the study of teenage mother made by Holm (p. 333) the visual story of photos made by the girls themselves is much more happier presenting them in a way they want to be seen. However, the accompanying verbal comments talk about the girls' struggles. To produce real visual anthropology, the texts and visual materials should be interwoven, just as in daily life and the pictures should be discussed.

This handbook convinces me how much research methods are changing. Limiting teaching of social scientists to traditional not-digital, separated from the body and emotions research methods seems to be similar to teaching art students realistic painting of the19th century, while the art around them is dominated by use of body and multimedia digital technologies. This handbook can inspire you a lot with methods that cross borders between art and science, visual and verbal, mind and emotions and many others. The authors pay tribute to embodiment theories which tracing back to Merleau-Ponty in argue, that "experience exist between the body and the mind" (p. 346). In many feminist and performance-based methodologies body represents the "condition and context through which social actors have relation to objects and through which they give and receive information" (p. 346). Last year, when I participated in a methodological conference of International Sociological Association in Naples, I listened to a presentation of an indigenous Canadian feminine researcher Alex Wilson who went a step further and incorporated records of her dreams occurring during research as hints basing on "indigenous research methodology". Although the authors often emphasize importance of author's intuition, this method, however, did not emerge in this book. Well, it is good to remember that there are more things in heaven and earth, than the social scientists dreamt of…

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Author-Supplied Abstracts & Keywords

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Community, Frame of Reference, and Boundary: Three Sociological Concepts and their Relevance for Virtual Worlds Research

Abstract
Virtual-worlds research is a dynamic and growing interdisciplinary area in the social sciences and humanities. Sociological theory can play an important role in how virtual worlds are conceptualized and studied. Drawing on data from ethnographic projects on two distinct types of virtual worlds, an asynchronous text-based internet forum and a massively-multiplayer online game, I consider what social and cultural similarities these two types of virtual worlds have with one another, despite their radically different forms and functions. My comparative analysis is framed in terms of three questions. First, are virtual worlds temporary and/or intentional communities? Second, what are the frames of reference through which virtual-world communities are built? Third, how do boundaries function in virtual worlds? My discussion suggests some of the common social and cultural features of virtual worlds.

Keywords: Massively-multiplayer online game (MMO); Online community; Straight edge; Subculture; Videogame; World of Warcraft.

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Engaging Technology: A Missing Link in the Sociological Study of Human Knowing and Acting

Abstract
Whereas technology has been the focus of much discourse in both public theatres and sociological arenas, comparatively little attention has been given to the study of the ways that people actually deal with technology as realms of human knowing and acting.
Working from a symbolic interactionist perspective (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969) and drawing on classical Greek scholarship as well as some interim sources, this paper addresses technology as a humanly engaged process.
Attending to human group life as "something in the making" and focusing on the activities entailed in encountering, using, developing, promoting, obtaining, and resisting instances of technology, this paper outlines a research agenda intended to foster situated (i.e. ethnographic) examinations of technologically-engaged, humanly enacted realities. It also serves as a reference point for assembling and comparing studies of the technology process that deal with this set of activities.

Keywords: Technology; Science; Sociology; Theory; Ethnography; Community; Pragmatism; Symbolic Interaction; Constructionism; Activity; Process

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Expressing and Examining Morality in Everyday Life: Social Comparisons among Swedish Parents of Deaf Children

Abstract
Social comparisons, seeing oneself in relation to others, are universal, common, and perhaps even necessary. In a study of parents of deaf children, intense, open, and mutual examinations were voiced in parental groups, meetings between parents and professionals, and interviews. These comparisons were generated in a specific situation created by successful claims for separate milieus advocated by the Deaf movement. The local culture, "the deaf world," was characterized by close proximity and a highly charged ideological moral climate. With the central argument that strong integration breeds comparisons and examinations, we conclude that the integration of parents creates a situation perfect for drawing comparisons, creating not only cohesion, but also renewed separatist distinctions, expressed in terms of moral examinations, competition and envy. Studying the content and details of comparisons in any given field makes the particular morality that is bred, fed, and elaborated obvious.

Keywords: Integration; Social comparisons; Morality; Everyday life; Identity work; Deaf culture; Hard-of-hearing; Sign language; Sweden.

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Ritual and Boundary Distinction in a Recreational Community: A Case Study of Motorcycle Rallies and Riders

Abstract
Attending motorcycle rallies is an important component of social life for many touring motorcyclists. The significance of these events transcends the mere recreational experience of riding a motorcycle and spending time with other riders. This project is an examination of brand specific motorcycle rallies as a process and social world that has ritualistic features and activities that serve to bond members of the group, reinforce their identity, and distinguish members of this subculture from other motorcyclists and from the larger social world. Drawing on classical social theory and more contemporary research, a framework is established to discuss the activities and social organization of rallies. Objects from the material culture of those involved are examined as distinguishing components used to establish boundaries and confer membership. An in-depth description of rally activities and interactions, enhances the understanding of these events.

Keywords: Recreation; Ethnography; Motorcycling; Ritual.

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