

1-1-2011

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Published version. "The Constructionist Analytics of Interpretive Practice," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Eds. Norman K Denzin and Yvonna S Lincoln. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2011: 341-358. [Publisher Link](#). © 2011 Sage Publications. Used with permission.

THE CONSTRUCTIONIST ANALYTICS OF INTERPRETIVE PRACTICE

James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium

For the last half century, qualitative inquiry has focused increasingly on the socially constructed character of lived realities (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). Much of this has centered on the interactional constitution of meaning in everyday life, the leading principle being that the world we live in and our place in it are not simply and evidently "there," but rather variably brought into being. Everyday realities are actively constructed in and through forms of social action. The principle supplies the basis for a constructionist perspective on qualitative inquiry that is both an intellectual movement and an empirical research perspective that transcends particular disciplines.

With its growing popularity, however, the constructionist approach has become particularly expansive and amorphous. Often it seems that the term "constructionism" can be applied to virtually every research approach imaginable. James Jasper and Jeff Goodwin (2005), for example, have wryly noted, "We are all social constructionists; almost" (p. 3). But there is a drawback to this popularity, because, as Michael Lynch (2008) suggests, the perspective may have become too diverse and diffuse to adequately define or assess. In the process, constructionism sometimes loses its conceptual bearings.

Elsewhere (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008), we have argued that constructionism resists a single portrait but is better understood as a *mosaic* of research efforts, with diverse (but also shared) philosophical, theoretical, methodological, and empirical underpinnings. This does not mean, however, that just anything goes under the constructionist rubric. We should resist the temptation to conflate constructionism with other contemporary or post-modern modes of qualitative inquiry; it is not synonymous with symbolic interactionism, social phenomenology, or ethnomethodology, for example, even as it shares their abiding concerns

with the dynamics of social interaction. Nor should we equate all variants of constructionism.

Darin Weinberg (2008) has argued that two important threads weave throughout the mosaic of constructionist thought: antifoundationalist sensibilities and a resistance to reification. These threads, of course, also wend through early statements of analytic philosophy, critical theory, pragmatism, and the hermeneutic tradition (see Weinberg, 2008). Joel Best (2008) traces the origins of the term "social constructionism" within sociology as far back as the early-20th century. He notes numerous appearances of the term in disciplines as varied as anthropology, history, and political science in the earlier parts of that century. At the same time, proto-constructionist sensibilities were evident in the work of a variety of scholars including W. I. Thomas (1931), George Herbert Mead (1934), Alfred Schutz (1962, 1964, 1967, 1970), and Herbert Blumer (1969), among many others. Best, however, suggests that the expansive popularity of the perspective, or perhaps the term, burst forth in the wake of the 1966 publication of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*.

This chapter outlines the development of a constructionist analytics of interpretive practice, a particular variant of constructionist inquiry. In our view, the approach unites enough common elements to constitute a recognizable, vibrant research program. The program centers on the interactional constitution of lived realities within discernible contexts of social interaction. We use the term "analytics" because the approach and its variants produce understandings of the construction process by way of distinctive analytic vocabularies, what Blumer (1969) might have called a systematically linked set of "sensitizing concepts" spare enough not to overshadow the empirical, yet

robust enough to reveal its constructionist distinctive contours. Our analytics of interpretive practice is decidedly theoretical, not just descriptive, but concertedly minimalist in its conceptual thrust. The chapter's aim is neither historic nor comprehensive. Rather, it looks more narrowly at the development of a particular strain of constructionist studies that borrows liberally, if somewhat promiscuously, from the traditions of social phenomenology, ethnomethodology, ordinary language philosophy, and Foucauldian discourse analysis.

■ CONCEPTUAL SOURCES

The constructionist analytics of interpretive practice has diverse sources. For decades, constructionist researchers have attempted to document the agentic processes—the *hows*—by which social reality is constructed, managed, and sustained. Alfred Schutz's (1962, 1964, 1967, 1970) social phenomenology, Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social constructionism, and process-oriented strains of symbolic interactionism (e.g., Blumer, 1969; Hewitt, 1997; Weigert, 1981) have offered key elements to this constructionist project. More recently, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (CA) have arguably supplied a more communicatively detailed dimension by specifying the interactive procedures through which social order is accomplished (see Buckholdt & Gubrium, 1979; Garfinkel, 1967, 2002, 2006; Heritage, 1984; Holstein, 1993; Lynch, 1993; Maynard & Clayman, 1991; Mehan & Wood, 1975; Pollner, 1987, 1991).¹ Discursive constructionism (see Potter & Hepburn, 2008)—a variant of discourse analysis bearing strong resemblances to CA—also has emerged to examine everyday descriptions, claims, reports, assertions, and allegations as they contribute to the construction and maintenance of social order.

A related set of concerns has emerged along with ethnomethodology's traditional interest in how social action and order are accomplished, reflecting a heretofore suspended interest in *what* is being accomplished, under *what* conditions, and out of *what* resources. Such traditionally naturalistic questions have been revived, with greater analytic sophistication and with a view toward the rich, varied, and consequential contexts of social construction. Analyses of reality construction are now re-engaging questions concerning the broad cultural and the institutional contexts of meaning making and social order. The empirical horizons, while still centered on processes of social accomplishment, are increasingly viewed in terms of what we have called "interpretive practice"—the constellation of procedures, conditions, and resources through which reality is apprehended, understood, organized, and conveyed in everyday life (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Holstein, 1993; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000b). The idea of interpretive practice turns us to both the *hows* and the *whats* of social reality; its empirical purview relates to both how people methodically construct their experiences and their

worlds and the contextual configurations of meaning and institutional life that inform and shape reality-constituting activity. This attention to both the *hows* and the *whats* of the social construction process echoes Karl Marx's (1956) maxim that people actively construct their worlds but not completely on, or in, their own terms.

This concern for constructive action-in-context not only makes it possible to understand more fully the construction process, but also foregrounds the realities themselves that enter into and are reflexively produced by the process. Attending closely to the *hows* of the construction process informs us of the mechanisms by which social forms are brought into being in everyday life, but it may shortchange the shape and distribution of these realities in their own right. The *whats* of social reality tend to be deemphasized in research that attends exclusively to the *hows* of its construction. We lose track of consequential *whats*, *whens*, and *wheres* that locate the concrete, yet constructed, realities that emerge.

Ethnomethodological Sensibilities

Ethnomethodology is perhaps the quintessential *how* analytic enterprise in qualitative inquiry. While indebted to Edmund Husserl's (1970) philosophical phenomenology and Schutz's social phenomenology (see Holstein & Gubrium, 1994), ethnomethodology struck a new course, addressing the problem of order by combining a "phenomenological sensibility" (Maynard & Clayman, 1991) with a paramount research concern for the mechanisms of practical action (Garfinkel, 1967; Lynch, 2008). From an ethnomethodological standpoint, the social world's facticity is accomplished by way of members' discernible interactional work, the mechanics of which produces and maintains the accountable circumstances of their lives.² Ethnomethodologists focus on how members "do" social life, aiming in particular to document the distinct processes by which they concretely construct and sustain the objects and appearances of the life world. The central phenomenon of interest is the *in situ embodied* activity and the practical production of accounts (Maynard, 2003). This leads to inquiries into how mundane practices are actually carried out, such as doing gender (Garfinkel, 1967), counting people and things (see Martin & Lynch, 2009), or delivering good or bad news (see Maynard, 2003).

The policy of "ethnomethodological indifference" (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970) prompts ethnomethodologists to temporarily suspend all commitments to a priori or privileged versions of the social world. This turns the researcher's attention to how members accomplish a sense of social order. Social realities such as crime or mental illness are not taken for granted; instead, belief in them is temporarily suspended in order to make visible how they become realities for those concerned. This brings into view the ordinary constitutive work that produces the locally unchallenged appearance of stable realities.

This policy vigorously resists judgmental characterizations of the correctness of members' activities (see Lynch, 2008). Contrary to the common sociological tendency to ironicize and criticize commonsense formulations from the standpoint of ostensibly correct sociological understanding, ethnomethodology takes members' practical reasoning for what it is—circumstantially adequate ways of interpersonally constituting the world at hand. The abiding guideline is succinctly conveyed by Melvin Pollner's "Don't argue with the members!" (personal communication; see Gubrium & Holstein, 2011).

Ethnomethodological research is keenly attuned to naturally occurring talk and social interaction, orienting to them as constitutive elements of the settings studied (see Atkinson & Drew, 1979; Maynard, 1984, 1989, 2003; Mehan & Wood, 1975; Sacks, 1972). This has taken different empirical directions, in part depending upon whether the occasioned dynamics of social action and practical reasoning or the structure of talk is emphasized. Ethnographic studies tend to focus on locally accountable social action and the settings within which social interaction constitutes the practical realities in question. Such studies consider the situated content of talk in relation to local meaning structures (see Gubrium, 1992; Holstein, 1993; Lynch & Bogen, 1996; Miller, 1991; Pollner, 1987; Wieder, 1988). They combine attention to how social action and order is built up in everyday communication with detailed descriptions of place settings as those settings and their local understandings and perspectives serve to mediate the meaning of what is said in the course of social interaction. The texts produced from such analytics are highly descriptive of everyday life, with both conversational extracts from the settings and ethnographic accounts of interaction being used to convey the methodical production of the subject matter in question. To the extent the analysis of talk in relation to social interaction and setting is undertaken, this tends to take the form of (non-Foucauldian) discourse analysis, which more or less critically orients to how talk, conversation, and other communicative processes are used to organize social action. Variations on this analytic have also emerged in a form of discursive constructionism that resonates strongly with ethnomethodology and CA, but orients more to epistemics and knowledge construction (Potter & Hepburn, 2008; also see Nikander, 2008; Potter, 1996, 1997; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wodak, 2004; Wooffitt, 2005).

Studies that emphasize the structure of talk itself focus on the conversational "machinery" through which social action emerges. The focus here is on the sequential, utterance-by-utterance, socially structuring features of talk or "talk-in-interaction," a familiar term of reference in conversation analysis (see Heritage, 1984; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Silverman, 1998; Zimmerman, 1988). The analyses produced from such studies are detailed explications of the communicative processes by which speakers methodically and sequentially construct their concerns in conversational practice. Often bereft of ethnographic detail

except for brief lead-ins that describe place settings, the analytic sense conveyed is that biographical and social particulars can be understood as artifacts of the unfolding conversational machinery, although the analysis of what is called "institutional talk" or "talk at work" has struck a greater balance with place settings in this regard (see, for example, Drew & Heritage, 1992). While some contend that CA's connection to ethnomethodology is tenuous because of this lack of concern with ethnographic detail (Atkinson, 1988; Lynch, 1993; Lynch & Bogen, 1994; for counterarguments see Maynard & Clayman, 1991 and ten Have, 1990), CA clearly shares ethnomethodology's interest in the local and methodical construction of social action (Maynard & Clayman, 1991).

Recently, Garfinkel, Lynch, and others have elaborated what they refer to as a "postanalytic" ethnomethodology that is less inclined to universalistic generalizations regarding the enduring structures or machinery of social interaction (see Garfinkel, 2002, 2006; Lynch, 1993; Lynch & Bogen, 1996). This program of research centers on the highly localized competencies that constitute specific domains of everyday "work," especially the (bench)work of astronomers (Garfinkel, Lynch, & Livingston, 1981), biologists and neurologists (Lynch, 1985), forensic scientists (Lynch, Cole, McNally, & Jenkins, 2008) and mathematicians (Livingston, 1986), among many others. The aim is to document the "haecceity"—the "just thisness"—of social practices within circumscribed domains of knowledge and activity (Lynch, 1993). The practical details of the real-time work of these activities are viewed as an *incarnate* feature of the knowledges they produce. It is impossible to separate the knowledges from the highly particularized occasions of their production. The approach is theoretically minimalist in that it resists a priori conceptualization or categorization, especially historical time, while advocating detailed descriptive studies of the specific, local practices that manifest order and render it accountable (Bogen & Lynch, 1993).

Despite their success at displaying a panoply of social production practices, CA and postanalytic ethnomethodology in their separate ways tend to disregard an important balance in the conceptualizations of talk, setting, and social interaction that was evident in Garfinkel's early work and Harvey Sacks's (1992) pioneering lectures on conversational practice (see Silverman, 1998). Neither Garfinkel nor Sacks envisioned the machinery of conversation as productive of recognizable social forms in its own right. Attention to the constitutive *hows* of social realities was balanced with an eye to the meaningful *whats*. Settings, cultural understandings, and their everyday mediations were viewed as reflexively interwoven with talk and social interaction. Sacks, in particular, understood culture to be a matter of practice, something that served as a resource for discerning the possible linkages of utterances and exchanges. Whether they wrote of (Garfinkel's) "good organizational reasons" or (Sacks's) "membership categorization devices," both

initially avoided the reduction of social practice to highly localized or momentary haecceities of any kind.

Some of the original promise of ethnomethodology may have been short-circuited as CA and postanalytic ethnomethodology have increasingly restricted their investigations to the relation between social practices and the immediate accounts of those practices (see Pollner 2011a, 2011b, 2011c). A broader constructionist analytics aims to retain ethnomethodology's interactional sensibilities while extending its scope to both the constitutive and constituted *whats* of everyday life. Michel Foucault, among others, is a valuable resource for such a project.

Foucauldian Inspirations

If ethnomethodology documents the accomplishment of everyday life at the interactional level, Foucault undertook a parallel project in a different empirical register. Appearing on the analytic stage at about the same time as ethnomethodology in the early 1960s, Foucault considers how historically and culturally located systems of power/knowledge construct subjects and their worlds. Foucauldians refer to these systems as "discourses," emphasizing that they are not merely bodies of ideas, ideologies, or other symbolic formulations, but are also working attitudes, modes of address, terms of reference, and courses of action suffused into social practices. Foucault (1972, p. 48) himself explains that discourses are not "a mere intersection of things and words: an obscure web of things, and a manifest, visible, colored chain of words." Rather, they are "practices that systematically form the objects [and subjects] of which they speak" (p. 49). Even the design of buildings such as prisons reveals the social logic that specifies ways of interpreting persons and the physical and social landscapes they occupy (Foucault, 1979).

Similar to the ethnomethodological view of the reflexivity of social interaction, Foucault views discourse as operating reflexively, at once both constituting and meaningfully describing the world and its subjects. But, for Foucault, the accent is as much on the constructive *whats* that discourse constitutes as it is on the *hows* of discursive technology. While this implies an analytic emphasis on the culturally "natural," Foucault's treatment of discourse as social practice suggests, in particular, the importance of understanding the practices of subjectivity. If he offers a vision of subjects and objects constituted through discourse, he also allows for an unwittingly active subject who simultaneously shapes and puts discourse to work in constructing our inner lives and social worlds (Best & Kellner, 1991; Foucault, 1988).

Foucault is particularly concerned with social locations or institutional sites—the asylum, the hospital, and the prison, for example—that specify the practical operation of discourses, linking the discourse of particular subjectivities with the construction of lived experience. Like ethnomethodology, there is

an interest in the constitutive quality of systems of discourse; it is an orientation to practice that views lived experience and subjectivities as always already embedded and embodied in their discursive conventions.

Several commentators have pointed to the parallel between what Foucault (1980) refers to as systems of "power/knowledge" (or discourses) and ethnomethodology's formulation of the constitutive power of language use (Atkinson, 1995; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Heritage, 1997; Miller, 1997b; Potter, 1997; Prior, 1997; Silverman, 1993). The correspondence suggests that what Foucault's analytics documents historically as "discourse-in-practice" in varied institutional or cultural sites may have counterpart in what ethnomethodology's analytics traces as "discursive practice" in varied forms of social interaction (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000b, 2003).³ We use these terms—discourses-in-practice and discursive practice—throughout the chapter to flag the parallel concerns.

While ethnomethodologists and Foucauldians draw upon different intellectual traditions and work in distinct empirical registers, their similar concerns for social practice are evident: they both attend to the constitutive reflexivity of discourse. Neither discursive practice nor discourse-in-practice is viewed as being caused or explained by external social forces or internal motives. Rather, they are taken to be the operating mechanism of social life itself, as actually known or performed in real time and in concrete places. For both, "power" lies in the articulation of distinctive forms of social life as such, not in the application of particular resources by some to affect the lives of others. While discourses-in-practice are represented by "regimens/regimes" or lived patterns of action that broadly (historically and institutionally) "discipline" and "govern" adherents' worlds, and discursive practice is manifest in the dynamics of talk and interaction that constitute everyday life, the practices refer in common to the lived "doing" or ongoing accomplishment of society.

If ethnomethodologists emphasize *how* members use everyday methods to account for their activities and their world, Foucault (1979) makes us aware of the related conditions of possibility for *what* the results are likely to be. For example, in Western postindustrial society, to seriously think of medicine and voodoo as equally viable paradigms for understanding sickness and healing would seem idiosyncratic, if not preposterous, in most conventional situations. The power of medical discourse partially lies in its ability to be "seen but unnoticed" in its ability to appear as *the* only possibility while other possibilities are outside the plausible realm.

It bears repeating that both ethnomethodological and Foucauldian approaches to empirical material are analytical, not explanatory theories in the causal sense. Conventional, understood, theory purports to explain the state of matters in question. It responds to *why* concerns, such as why the suicide rate is rising or why individuals are suffering depression.

Ethnomethodology and the Foucauldian project, in contrast, aim to answer how it is that individual experience is understood in particular terms such as these. They are pretheoretical in this sense, respectively seeking to arrive at an understanding of how the subject matter of theory comes into existence in the first place, and of what the subject of theory might possibly become. The parallel lies in the common goal of documenting the practiced stuff of such realities.

Still, this remains a parallel—not a shared—scheme. Because Foucault's project (and most Foucauldian projects) operates in a historical register, real-time talk and social interaction are understandably missing from empirical materials under examination (but see Kendall & Wickham, 1999, for example). While Foucault himself points to sharp turns in the discursive formations that both shape and inform the shifting realities of varied institutional spheres, contrasting extant social forms with the "birth" of new ones, he provides little or no sense of the everyday interactional technology by which this is achieved (see Atkinson, 1995; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000b). Certainly, he elaborates the broad birth of new technologies, such as the emergence of new regimes of surveillance in medicine and modern criminal justice systems (Foucault, 1975, 1979), but he does not provide us with a view of how these operate on the ground. The everyday *hows*, in other words, are largely missing from Foucauldian analyses.

Conversely, ethnomethodology's commitment to documenting the real-time, interactive processes by which social action and order are rendered visible and accountable precludes a broad substantive perspective on constitutive resources, possibilities, and limitations. Such *whats* are largely absent in ethnomethodological work. It is one thing to show in interactive detail that our everyday encounters with reality are ongoing accomplishments, but it is quite another to derive an understanding of what the general parameters of those everyday encounters might be. The machinery of talk-in-interaction tells us little about the massive resources that are taken up in, and that guide, the operation of conversation, or about the consequences of producing particular results and not others, each of which is an important ingredient of practice. Members speak their worlds and their subjectivities, but they also articulate particular forms of life as they do so. Foucauldian considerations offer ethnomethodology an analytic sensitivity to the discursive opportunities and possibilities at work in talk and social interaction, without casting them as external templates for the everyday production of social order.

■ DIMENSIONS OF CONSTRUCTIONIST ANALYTICS

The constructionist analytics of interpretive practice reflects both ethnomethodological and Foucauldian impulses. It capitalizes on key sensibilities from their parallel projects, but it is

not simply another attempt at bridging the so-called macro-micro divide. That debate usually centers on the question of how to conceptualize the relationship between preexisting larger and smaller social forms, the assumption being that these are categorically distinct and separately discernible. Issues raised in the debate perpetuate the distinction between, say, social systems on the one hand, and social interaction, on the other.

In contrast, those who consider the ethnomethodological and Foucauldian projects to be parallel operations focus their attention instead on the interactional, institutional, and cultural variabilities of socially constituting discursive practice or discourses-in-practice, as the case might be. They aim to document how the social construction process is shaped across various domains of everyday life, not in how separate theories of macro and micro domains can be linked together for a fuller account of social organization. Doctrinaire accounts of Garfinkel, Sacks, Foucault, and others may continue to sustain a variety of distinct projects, but these projects are not likely to inform one another; nor will they lead to profitable dialogue between dogmatic practitioners who insist on viewing themselves as speaking different analytic languages. In our view, what we need is an openness to new, perhaps hybridized, analytics of reality construction at the crossroads of institutions, culture, and social interaction.

Beyond Ethnomethodology

Some ethnomethodologically informed varieties of CA have turned in this direction by analyzing the sequential machinery of talk-in-interaction as it is patterned by institutional context, bringing a greater concern for the *whats* of social life into the picture. Some field-based studies with ethnomethodological sensibilities have extended their concerns beyond the narrow *hows* of social interaction to include a wider interest in *what* is produced through interaction, in response to *what* social conditions. Still other forms of discourse analysis have similarly focused on the discursive resources brought to bear in situated social interaction or the kinds of objects and subjects constituted through interaction (see Wooffitt, 2005). These trends have broadened the empirical and analytic purview.

CA studies of "talk at work," for example, aim to specify how the "simplest systematics" of ordinary conversation (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) is shaped in various ways by the reflexively constructed speech environments of particular interactional regimes (see Boden & Zimmerman, 1991; Drew & Heritage, 1992). Ethnomethodologically oriented ethnographers approach the problem from another direction by asking how institutions and their respective subjectivities are brought into being, managed, and sustained in and through members' social interaction (or "reality work") (see Atkinson, 1995; Dingwall, Eekelaar, & Murray, 1983; Emerson, 1969; Emerson

& Messinger, 1977; Gubrium, 1992; Holstein, 1993; Mehan, 1979; Miller, 1991, 1997a). Foucault has even been inserted explicitly into the discussion, as researchers have drawn links between everyday discursive practice and discourses-in-practice to document in local detail how the formulation of everyday texts such as psychiatric case records or coroners' reports reproduce institutional discourses (see Prior, 1997). Others taking related paths have noted how culturally and institutionally situated discourses are interactionally brought to bear, to produce social objects and institutionalized interpersonal practices (see Hepburn, 1997, and Gubrium & Holstein, 2001).

In their own fashions, these efforts consider both the *hows* and the *whats* of reality construction. But this is analytically risky business. Asking *how* questions without having an integral way of getting an analytic handle on *what* questions renders concerns with the *whats* rather arbitrary. While talk-in-interaction is locally "artful," as Garfinkel (1967) puts it, not just anything goes. On the other hand, if we swing too far analytically in the direction of contextual or cultural imperatives, we end up with the cultural, institutional, or judgmental "dopes" that Garfinkel (1967) decried.

Accenting Analytic Interplay

To broaden and enrich ethnomethodology's analytic scope and repertoire, researchers have extended its purview to the institutional and cultural *whats* that come into play in social interaction. This has not been a historical extension, such as Foucault might pursue, although that certainly is not ruled out. In our own constructionist analytics, we have resurrected a kind of "cautious" (self-conscious) naturalism that addresses the practical and sited production of everyday life (Gubrium, 1993a). More decidedly constructionist in its concern for taken-for-granted realities, this balances *how* and *what* concerns, enriching the analytic impulses of each. Such an analytics focuses on the *interplay*, not the synthesis, of discursive practice and discourses-in-practice, the tandem projects of ethnomethodology and Foucauldian discourse analysis. In doing so, the analytics assiduously avoids theorizing social forms, lest the discursive practices associated with the construction of these forms be taken for granted. By the same token, it concertedly keeps institutional or cultural discourses in view, lest they be dissolved into localized displays of practical reasoning or forms of sequential organization for talk-in-interaction. First and foremost, a constructionist analytics of interpretive practice has taken us, in real time, to the "going concerns" of everyday life, as Everett Hughes (1984) liked to call social institutions. This approach focuses attention on how members artfully put distinct discourses to work as they constitute their social worlds.

Interplay connotes the acceptance of a dynamic relationship, not a to-be-resolved tension, between the *hows* and *whats* of interpretive practice. We have intentionally avoided analytically

privileging either discursive practice or discourses-in-practice. Putting it in ethnomethodological terms, in our view the aim of a constructionist analytics is to document the interplay between the practical reasoning and interactive machinery entailed in constructing a sense of everyday reality, on the one hand, and the institutional conditions, resources, and related discourses that substantively nourish and interpretively mediate interaction on the other. Putting it in Foucauldian terms, the goal is to describe the interplay between institutional discourses and the "dividing practices" that constitute local subjectivities and their domains of experience (Foucault 1965). The symmetry of real-world practice has encouraged us to give equal treatment to both its articulative and substantive engagements.

Constructionist researchers have increasingly emphasized the interplay between the two sides of interpretive practice. They are scrutinizing both the artful processes and the substantive conditions of meaning making and social order, even if the commitment to a multifaceted analytics sometimes remains implicit. Douglas Maynard (1989), for example, notes that most ethnographers have traditionally asked, "How do participants see things?" while ethnomethodologically informed discourse studies have asked, "How do participants do things?" While his own work typically begins with the latter question, Maynard cautions us not to ignore the former. He explains that, in the interest of studying how members *do* things, ethnomethodological studies have tended to deemphasize factors that condition their actions. Recognizing that "external social structure is used as a resource for social interaction at the same time as it is constituted within it" (p. 139), Maynard suggests that ethnographic and discourse studies can be mutually informative, allowing researchers to better document the ways in which the "structure of interaction, while being a local production, simultaneously enacts matters whose origins are externally initiated" (p. 139). "In addition to knowing how people 'see' their workaday worlds," writes Maynard (p. 144), researchers should try to understand how people "discover and exhibit features of these worlds so that they can be 'seen.'"

Maynard (2003) goes on to note significant differences in the way talk and interaction typically are treated in conversation analytic versus more naturalistic, ethnographic approaches to social process. His own work, like many similarly grounded CA studies, exploits what Maynard terms the "limited affinity" between CA concerns and methods and more field-based ethnographic techniques and sensibilities (see Maynard, 2003, chapter 3). While a broad-based constructionist analytics would argue for a deeper, more "mutual affinity" (Maynard, 2003) between attempts to describe the *hows* and *whats* of social practice, there is clearly common ground, with much of the difference a matter of emphasis or analytic point of departure.

Expressing similar interests and concerns, Hugh Mehan has developed a discourse-oriented program of "constitutive ethnography" that puts "structure and structuring activities on an

equal footing by showing *how* the social facts of the world emerge from structuring work to become external and constraining" (1979, p. 18, emphasis in the original). Mehan examines "contrastive" instances of interpretation in order to describe both the "distal" and "proximate" features of the reality-constituting work people do "within institutional, cultural, and historical contexts" (1991, pp. 73, 81).

Beginning from similar ethnomethodological and discourse analytic footings, David Silverman (1993) likewise attends to the institutional venues of talk and social construction (Silverman, 1985, 1997). Seeking a mode of qualitative inquiry that exhibits both constitutive and contextual impulses, he suggests that discourse studies that consider the varied institutional contexts of talk bring a new perspective to qualitative inquiry. Working in the same vein, Gale Miller (1994, 1997b) has proposed "ethnographies of institutional discourse" that serve to document "the ways in which setting members use discursive resources in organizing their practical actions, and how members' actions are constrained by the resources available in the settings" (Miller, 1994, p. 280). This approach makes explicit overtures to both conversation analysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis (see Miller, 1997a, and Weinberg, 2005) for rigorous empirical demonstrations of analytic interplay.

Dorothy Smith (1987, 1990a, 1990b) has been similarly explicit in addressing a version of the interplay between the *whats* and *hows* of social life from a feminist point of view, pointing to the critical consciousness made possible by the perspective. Hers has been an analytics initially informed by ethnomethodological and, increasingly, Foucauldian sensibilities. Moving beyond ethnomethodology, she calls for what she refers to as a "dialectics of discourse and the everyday" (Smith, 1990a, p. 202).

A concern for interplay, however, should not result in integrating an analytics of discursive practice with an analytics of discourse-in-practice. To integrate one with the other is to reduce the empirical purview of a parallel enterprise. Reducing the analytics of discourse-in-practice into discursive practice risks losing the lessons of attending to institutional differences and cultural configurations as they mediate, and are not "just talked into being" through, social interaction. Conversely, figuring discursive practice as the mere residue of institutional discourse risks a totalized marginalization of local artfulness.

Analytic Bracketing

A constructionist analytics that eschews synthesis or integration requires procedural flexibility and dexterity that cannot be captured in mechanical scriptures or formulas. Rather, the analytic process is more like a skilled juggling act, alternately concentrating on the myriad *hows* and *whats* of everyday life. This requires a new form of bracketing to capture the interplay

between discursive practice and discourses-in-practice. We refer to this technique of oscillating indifference to the construction and realities of everyday life as "analytic bracketing" (see Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). While we have given it a name, it resonates anonymously in other constructionist analytics.

Recall that ethnomethodology's interest in the *hows* by which realities are produced requires a studied, temporary indifference to those realities. Ethnomethodologists typically begin their analysis by setting aside belief in the objectively real in order to bring into view the everyday practices by which subjects, objects, and events come to have an accountable sense of being observable, rational, and orderly. The ethnomethodological project moves forward from there, documenting how discursive practice constitutes social action and order by identifying the particular interactional mechanisms at play. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953, p. 19) is instructive as he advocates taking language "off holiday" in order to make visible how language works to produce the objects it is otherwise viewed as principally describing.

Analytic bracketing works somewhat differently. It is employed throughout analysis, not just at the start. As analysis proceeds, the researcher intermittently orients to everyday realities as both the *products* of members reality-constructing procedures and as *resources* from which realities are reflexively constituted. At one moment, the researcher may be indifferent to the structures of everyday life in order to document their production through discursive practice. In the next analytic move, he or she brackets discursive practice in order to assess the local availability, distribution, and/or regulation of resources for reality construction. In Wittgensteinian terms, this translates into attending to both language-at-work and language-on-holiday, alternating considerations of how languages games, in particular institutional discourses, operate in everyday life and what games are likely to come into play at particular times and places. In Foucauldian terms, it leads to alternating considerations of discourses-in-practice on the one hand and the locally fine-grained documentation of related discursive practices on the other.

Analytic bracketing amounts to an orienting procedure for alternately focusing on the *whats* then the *hows* of interpretive practice (or vice versa) in order to assemble both a contextually scenic and a contextually constitutive picture of everyday language-in-use. The objective is to move back and forth between discursive practice and discourses-in-practice, documenting each in turn, and making informative references to the other in the process. Either discursive machinery or available discourses and/or constraints becomes the provisional phenomenon, while interest in the other is temporarily deferred, but not forgotten. The analysis of the constant interplay between the *hows* and *whats* of interpretive practice mirrors the lived interplay between social interaction and its immediate surroundings, resources, restraints, and going concerns.

Because discursive practice and discourses-in-practice are mutually constitutive, one cannot argue definitively that analysis should begin or end with either one, although there are predilections in this regard. Smith (1987, 1990a, 1990b), for example, advocates beginning "where people are"; we take her to mean the places where people are concretely located in the institutional landscape of everyday life. Conversely, conversation analysts insist on beginning with discursive practice (i.e., everyday conversation), even while a variety of unanalyzed *whats* typically inform their efforts.

Wherever one starts, neither the cultural and institutional details of discourse nor its real-time engagement in social interaction predetermines the other. If we set aside the need for an indisputable resolution to the question of which comes first, last, or has priority, we can designate a suitable point of departure and proceed from there, so long as we keep firmly in mind that the interplay within interpretive practice requires that we move back and forth analytically between its facets. In the service of not reifying the components, researchers continuously remind themselves that the analytic task centers on the *dialectics* of two fields of play, not the reproduction of one by the other.

While we advocate no rule for where to begin, we need not fret that the overall task is impossible or logically incoherent. Maynard (1998, p. 344), for example, compares analytic bracketing to "wanting to ride trains that are going in different directions, initially hopping on one and then somehow jumping to the other." He asks, "How do you jump from one train to another when they are going in different directions?" The question is, in fact, merely an elaboration of the issue of how one brackets in the first place, which is, of course, the basis for Maynard's and other ethnomethodologists' and conversation analysts' own projects. The answer is simple: knowledge of the *principle* of bracketing makes it possible. Those who bracket the lifeworld or treat it indifferently, as the case might be, readily set aside aspects of social reality every time they get to work on their respective corpuses of empirical material. It becomes as routine as rising in the morning, having breakfast, and going to the workplace.⁴ On the other hand, the desire to operationalize bracketing of any kind, analytic bracketing included, into explicitly codified and sequenced procedural moves would turn bracketing into a set of recipe-like, analytic directives, something surely to be avoided. We would assume that no one, except the most recalcitrant operationalist, would want to substitute a recipe book for an analytics.⁵

The alternating focus on discursive practice and discourses-in-practice reminds us not to appropriate either one naively into our analysis. It helps sustain ethnomethodology's important aim of distinguishing between members' resources and our own. Analytic bracketing is always substantively temporary. It resists full-blown attention to discourses as systems of power/knowledge, separate from how these operate in lived experience. It also is enduringly empirical in that it does not

take the everyday operation of discourses for granted as the truths of a setting *tout court*.⁶

Resisting Totalization

Located at the crossroads of discursive practice and discourses-in-practice, a constructionist analytics works against analytic totalization or reduction. It accommodates the empirical realities of choice and action, allowing the analytic flexibility to capture the interplay of structure and process. It restrains the propensity of a Foucauldian analytics to view all interpretation as artifacts of particular regimes of power/knowledge. Working in relation to the broad sweep of his "histories of the present," Foucault was inclined to overemphasize the predominance of discourses in constructing the horizons of meaning at particular times or places, conveying the sense that discourses fully bear the nuances of everyday life. A more interactionally sensitive analytics of discourse—one operating in tandem with a view of discursive practice—resists this tendency.

Because interpretive practice is mediated by discourses through institutional objectives and functioning, the operation of power/knowledge can be discerned in the myriad going concerns of everyday life. Yet, those matters that one institutional site brings to bear are not necessarily what another puts into practice. Institutions constitute distinct, yet sometimes overlapping, realities. While an organized setting may deploy a gaze that confers agency or subjectivity upon individuals, for example, another may constitute subjectivity along different lines (see, for example, Gubrium, 1992; Miller, 1997a; Weinberg, 2005).

If interpretive practice is complex and fluid, it is not so fully arbitrary. In the practice of everyday life, discourse is articulated in myriad sites and is socially variegated; actors methodically build up their intersubjective realities in diverse, locally nuanced and biographically informed terms. This allows for considerable slippage in how discourses do their work; it is far removed from the apparently uniform, hegemonic regimes of power/knowledge in some Foucauldian readings. Discernible social organization nonetheless is evident in the going concerns referenced by participants, to which they hold their talk and interaction accountable.

Accordingly, a constructionist analytics deals with the perennial question of what realities and/or subjectivities are being constructed in the myriad sites of everyday life (see Hackman, 1999). In practice, diverse articulations of discourse intersect, collide, and work against the construction of common or uniform subjects, agents, and social realities. Interpretations shift in relation to the institutional and cultural markers they reference, which, in turn, fluctuate with respect to the varied settings in which social interaction unfolds. Discourses-in-practice refract one another as they are methodically adapted to practical exigencies. Local discursive practice makes totalization impossible, instead serving up innovation, diversification, and

variation (see Abu-Lughod, 1991, 1993; Chase, 1995; Narayan & George, 2002).

■ DIVERSE DIRECTIONS

Considering and emphasizing diverse analytic dimensions, variations on the constructionist analytics of interpretive practice continue to develop in innovative directions. Some are now "maturing," such as the "institutional ethnography" (IE) that Dorothy Smith and her colleagues have pioneered, and continue to expand. Others are of more recent vintage, such as the growth of discursive constructionism or Gubrium and Holstein's (2009) development of a constructionist analytics for narrative practice. Old or new, in their own fashions all take up the interplay of discursive practice and discourses-in-practice, variously emphasizing the *hows* and the *whats* of everyday life.

Ethnography of Narrative Practice

Let us begin with a recent development centered on how to analyze the interpretive practices associated with narrative and storytelling. Narrative analysis has become a popular mode of qualitative inquiry over the past two decades. If (almost) everyone is a constructionist, today nearly everyone also seems to be doing what they call narrative analysis. As sophisticated and insightful as the new wave of narrative analysis has become, most of this research is focused closely on texts of talk (e.g., Riessman, 1993). Researchers collect stories in interviews about myriad aspects of social life, then the stories are transcribed and analyzed for the way they emplot, thematize, and otherwise construct what they are about.

While attempts at narrative analysis have evinced constructionist sensibilities from the start, the socially situated, unfolding activeness of the narrative process has been shortchanged. The emphasis on the transcribed texts of stories tends to strip narratives of their social organization and interactional dynamics, casting narrative as a social product, not as social process. Emphasis is more on the text-based *whats* of the story and how that is organized, than on the *hows* of narrative production. Paul Atkinson (1997), among others, promotes a shift in focus:

The ubiquity of the narrative and its centrality . . . are not license simply to privilege those forms. It is the work of anthropologists and sociologists to examine those narratives and to subject them to the same analysis as any other forms. We need to pay due attention to their construction in use: how actors improvise their personal narratives. . . . We need to attend to how socially shared resources of rhetoric and narrative are deployed to generate recognizable, plausible, and culturally well-informed accounts. (p. 341)

This reorientation encourages researchers to consider the circumstances, conditions, and goals of narratives—how

storytellers work up and accomplish things with the accounts they produce. Adapting once more from Wittgenstein (1953, 1958), storytellers not only tell stories, they *do* things with them.

Capitalizing on Atkinson's and others suggestion, we have recently turned our brand of constructionist analytics to issues of narrative production (see Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). The challenge is to capture narrative's active, socially situated dimensions by moving outside of story texts to the occasions and practical activities of story construction and storytelling. By venturing into the domain of *narrative practice*, we gain access to the content of accounts and their internal organization, to the communicative conditions and resources surrounding how narratives are assembled, conveyed, and received, and to storytelling's everyday consequences.

The focus on practice highlights the reflexive interplay between discursive practice and discourse-in-practice. The narrative analysis of story transcripts may be perfectly adequate for capturing the internal dynamics and organization of stories, but it isolates those stories from their interactional and institutional moorings. For example, a transcript may not reveal a setting's discursive conventions, such as what is usually talked about, avoided, or discouraged under the circumstances. It may not reveal the consequences of a particular narrative told in a specific way. In order to understand how narrative operates in everyday life, we need to know the details and mediating conditions of narrative occasions. These details can only be discerned from direct consideration of the mutually constitutive interplay between what we have called "narrative work" and "narrative environments."

Narrative work refers to the interactional activity through which narratives are constructed, communicated, sustained, or reconfigured. The leading questions here are, "How can the process of constructing accounts be conceptualized?" and "How can the empirical process be analyzed?" Some of this is visible in story transcripts, but typically, narrative analysts tend to strip these transcripts of their interactional and institutional contexts and conversational character. This commonly results in the transcribed narrative appearing as a more-or-less finished, self-contained product. The *in situ* work of producing the narrative within the flow of conversational interaction disappears.

To recapture some of this narrative activity, we examine narrative practice for some of the ways in which narratives are activated or incited (see Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, 2000b). Working by way of analytic bracketing, these studies concentrate on conversational dynamics, machinery, and emerging sequential environments (many traditional CA concerns), while retaining sensitivity to broader contextual issues. Other studies focus on narrative linkages and composition, the ways in which horizons of meaning are narratively constructed (see Gubrium, 1993b; Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). Studies of narrative performativity document the ways in which narratives are produced and conveyed in and for particular circumstances

and audiences (see Bauman, 1986; Abu-Lughod, 1993; Ochs & Capps, 2001). Collaboration and control are additional key concerns in analyzing narrative practice (see Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, 2000b; Norrick, 2000; Young, 1995). Because they are interactionally produced, narratives are eminently social accomplishments.

The other side of our analytics of narrative practice centers on narrative environments—contexts within which the work of narrative construction gets done. Narratives are assembled and told to someone, somewhere, at some time, with a variety of consequences for those concerned. (In contrast to CA, we do not limit narrative environments to the machinery of speech exchanges.) All of this has a discernible impact on how stories emerge, what is communicated, and to what ends. The environments of storytelling shape the content and internal organization of accounts, just as internal matters can have an impact on one's role as a storyteller. In turning to narrative environments, the analytic emphasis is more on the *whats* of narrative reality than on its *hows*, although, once again, analytic bracketing makes this a matter of temporary emphasis, not exclusive focus. One key question here is, "How is the meaning of a narrative influenced by the particular setting in which it is produced, with the setting's distinctive understandings, concerns, and resources, rather than in another setting, with different circumstances?" A second question is, "What are the purposes and consequences of narrating experience in particular ways?" A turn to the narrative environments of storytelling is critical for understanding what is at stake for storytellers and listeners in presenting accounts or responding to them in distinctive ways.

A growing body of work addresses such questions in relation to formal and informal settings and organizations, from families, to friendship networks, professions, and occupations (see Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). The comparative ethnographies of therapeutic organizations conducted by Miller (1997a) and Weinberg (2005) are exemplary in this regard. The influence of narrative environments is portrayed even more strikingly in *Out of Control: Family Therapy and Domestic Disorder* (Gubrium, 1992), which describes the narrative production of domestic troubles in distinctly different family therapy agencies. Susan Chase's (1995) *Ambiguous Empowerment: The Work Narratives of Women School Superintendents* and Amir Marvasti's (2003) *Being Homeless: Textual and Narrative Constructions* offer nuanced examinations of the accounts of some of society's most and least successful members, accenting the environmentally sensitive narrative work that is done to construct vastly different accounts of life and its challenges.

To move beyond transcribed texts, narrative analysis requires a methodology that captures the broad and variegated landscape of narrative practice. In essence, the researcher must be willing to move outside stories themselves and into the interactional, cultural, and institutional fields of narrative production, bringing on board a narrative ethnography of storytelling (see Gubrium &

Holstein, 2008, 2009).⁷ Applied to storytelling, this ethnographic approach is attuned to the discursive dynamics and contours of narrative practice. It provides opportunities for the close scrutiny of narrative circumstances, their actors, and actions in the process of constructing accounts. This clearly resonates with contextually rich work done in the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1964), the study of orally performed narratives (Bauman, 1986; Briggs & Bauman, 1992; Ochs & Capps, 2001), and ethnographically grounded studies of folk narratives (Glassie, 1995, 2006).

Concern with the production, distribution, and circulation of stories in society requires that we step outside of narrative texts and consider questions such as who produces particular kinds of stories, where are they likely to be encountered, what are their purposes and consequences, who are the listeners, under what circumstances are particular narratives more or less accountable, how do they gain acceptance, and how are they challenged? Ethnographic fieldwork helps supply the answers. In systematically observing the construction, use, and reception of narratives, we have found that their internal organization, while important to understand in its own right, does not tell us much about how stories operate in society. This does not diminish the explanatory value of text-based narrative analysis, but instead highlights what might be added to that approach if we attended to narrative practice.

Institutional Ethnography

Another approach relating discursive practice and discourse-in-practice is Smith's "institutional ethnography" (IE) research program.⁸ IE emerged out of Smith's (1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1999, 2005) feminist work that explored the ruptures between women's everyday experience and dominant forms of knowledge that, while seemingly neutral and general, concealed particular standpoints grounded in gender, race, and class (McCoy, 2008). The approach takes the everyday world as both its point of departure and its problematic. Inquiry begins with ongoing activities of actual people in the world, "starting where people are," as Smith characteristically puts it. The aim is to map the translocal processes of administration and governance that shape lives and circumstances by way of the linkages of ruling relations. Recognizing that such connections are accomplished primarily through what is often called textually mediated social organization, IE focuses on texts-in-use in multiple settings. Across a range of locations—embodying people's everyday concerns, professional, administrative and management practices, and policy making—IE studies examine the actual activities that coordinate these interconnected sites (see DeVault & McCoy, 2002).

The dominant form of coordination is what Smith calls "ruling relations"—a mode of knowledge that involves the "continual transcription of the local and particular activities of our lives into abstracted and generalized forms . . . and the creation

of a world in texts as a site of action" (Smith, 1987, p. 3). In IE, "text" orients the analyst to forms of representation (written, spoken, visual, digital, or numeric) that exist materially separate from embodied consciousness. Such texts provide mediating linkages between people across time and place, making it possible to generate knowledge separate from individuals who possess such knowledge. Modern governance and large-scale coordination occur through rapidly proliferating, generalized, and generalizing, text-based forms of knowledge. These texts promote the "ruling relations [that generate] forms of consciousness and organization that are objectified in the sense that they are constituted externally to particular people and places" (Smith, 2005, p. 13). But to appreciate how texts do their coordinative work, the researcher must view them "in action" as they are produced, used, and oriented to by particular people in ongoing, institutional courses of action (see DeVault & McCoy, 2002; McCoy, 2008).

Therein lie the institutional and ethnographic dimensions of the approach. In IE, "institution" refers to coordinated and intersecting work processes and courses of action. "Ethnography" invokes concrete modes of inquiry used to discover and describe these activities. The IE researcher's goal is not to generalize about the people under study, but to identify and explain social processes that have generalizing effects. Practitioners of IE characteristically have critical or liberatory goals, an aim that we will address shortly. They pursue inquiry to elucidate the ideological and social processes that produce the experience of domination and subordination. As Smith and colleagues often point out, institutional ethnography offers a sociology *for* people not just about them (see DeVault & McCoy, 2002; McCoy, 2008; Smith, 2005).

While IE is not typically categorized as a variant of constructionism (McCoy, 2008), its conceptual antecedents and empirical interests often converge with the general constructionist project, especially with respect to the ways in which discursive resources and constraints affect social life and social forms. Centering on textually (discursively) mediated social relations, IE studies examine how forms of consciousness and organization are objectified or constituted as if they were external to particular people and places. IE analysis, however, strives to show that, at the same time, seemingly obdurate forms of social life are realized in concerted actions—produced, used, and oriented to by actual persons in ongoing, institutional courses of action (McCoy, 2008; Smith, 2005). From the standpoint of IE, the interplay between structures and agency is key to the social organization of lived experience.

As an alternative "sociology for people," IE has been adopted by researchers working in a wide variety of disciplines and settings: in education, social work, nursing and other health sciences, as well as sociology (see McCoy 2008; Smith, 2006). In a general sense, IE addresses the socially organized and organizing "work" done in varied domains of everyday life.

Work is construed in a very broad sense—activities that involve conscious intent and acquired skill; including emotional and thought work as well as physical labor or communicative action. It is not confined to occupational employment, although this form of work is also ripe for analysis. Marjorie DeVault (1991), for example, has examined the work of feeding a family, while several IE studies have investigated various aspects of mothers' experience and the deeply consequential mothering work done by women in diverse domestic and organizational settings (see Brown, 2006; Griffith & Smith, 2004; Weigt, 2006). Other studies have examined the situated experience of living with HIV infection (Mykhalovskiy & McCoy, 2002), child rearing and housing (Luken & Vaughan, 2006), nursing home care (Diamond, 1992), and job training and immigrant labor (Grahame, 1998). IE investigations conducted in more formal (occupational) work settings include studies of the work performed by teachers (Manicom, 1995), security guards (Walby, 2005), social workers (De Montigny, 1995), nurses (Campbell & Jackson, 1992; Rankin & Campbell, 2006), and policing in the gay community (G. Smith, 1988). Across these IE studies, the goal is to discover how lives are socially organized and coordinated. The analytic basis for all these projects is to display the interplay between institutional practices and individual actions. If IE resists a constructionist designation, it nonetheless shares many of the sensibilities embodied in a constructionist analytics.

Discursive Constructionism

Another innovative approach has been grouped loosely under the banners of discursive constructionism, or DC, and discourse analysis, or DA (see Potter, 1996; Potter & Hepburn, 2008). Its constructionist analytics also centers on the interplay of interpretive practice. As Jonathan Potter and Alexa Hepburn (2008) note, the DC label is itself a construction that supplies a particular sense of coherence to a body of more-or-less related work. If it is not singularly programmatic, it nevertheless represents a cogent analytic perspective that addresses the reflexive complexity of social interaction.

Centering attention on everyday conversations, arguments, talk-at-work, and other occasions where people are interacting, DC focuses on action and practice rather than linguistic structure. The approach emerged from the discourse analytic tradition in the sociology of scientific knowledge (e.g., Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984) and within a broader perspective developed within social psychology (e.g., Potter & Wetherell, 1987; see Hepburn, 2003). It is indebted in many ways to ethnomethodology (especially work by Harvey Sacks), and draws heavily on CA methods and findings. DC differs from CA, however, because it explicitly brings substantive issues of social construction to the fore; it is more concerned with the *whats* of social interaction than CA generally has been. While there are many other subtle

distinctions, areas of overlap are substantial (Wooffitt, 2005), and in recent years DC and CA have found increasing areas of convergence (Potter & Hepburn, 2008).

DC approaches social construction in two fashions. In one, investigation aims to describe how discourse is constructed in the sense that it is assembled from a range of different resources with different degrees of structural organization. At the most basic level, these resources are words and grammatical structures, but they also include broader elements such as categories, metaphors, idioms, rhetorical conventions, and interpretive repertoires. The second approach emphasizes the constructive aspects of discourse in the sense that assemblages of words, repertoires, categories, and the like assemble and produce stabilized versions of the world and its actions and events. Central to DC is the notion that discourse does far more than describe objective states of affairs; it is used to construct versions of the world that are organized for particular purposes (Potter & Hepburn, 2008).

Following this commitment, DC treats all discourse as situated. At one level, it is located in the sequential environment of conversation (see Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) and other forms of mediated interaction (e.g., turn allocation in legal or medical proceedings, screen prompts on computer displays). On another level, discourse is institutionally embedded. That is, it is generated within, and gives sense and structure to routine, ongoing practices such as family conversations, shopping transactions, and twelve-step meetings, for example. On a third level, discourse is situated rhetorically, in that discursive constructions are produced to advocate a particular version and counters possible alternatives (Potter & Hepburn, 2008). In this regard, analysis of the interest-related and consequential *whats* of discursive constructions is imperative.

While DC incorporates a view of discourse-in-practice, it stops short of the extended notion of discourse used in some of Foucault's work. DC's view of discourse is more restricted, emphasizing its use in everyday practice. Nevertheless, DC is dynamic and flexible enough to potentially address phenomena that Foucauldian analysis might also contemplate, or to inscript some of Foucault's insights about institutions, practice, and the nature of subjectivity into its own service (Potter & Hepburn, 2008). For example, Margret Wetherell (1998) argues that social identities cannot be understood apart from consideration of the discourses that provide the subject positions through which those identities are produced.

DC is not a "coherent and sealed system" (Potter & Hepburn, 2008, p. 291). Its field of interest is extremely broad, including but not restricted to, studies in discursive psychology and social psychology (e.g., Edwards, 2005; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Hepburn, 2003; Potter, 2003; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), cognition (e.g., Potter & te Molder, 2005), race and racism (e.g., Wetherell & Potter, 1992), gender (see Speer & Stokoe, in press), age (e.g., Nikander, 2002), facts (e.g., Wooffitt, 1992), and emotion (Edwards, 1999).

DC is not without its analytic tensions. For example, the issue of social structure and context remains a subject of debate. There is considerable contention regarding how the researcher might analyze utterances within conversation with an eye to identifying transcending discourses, subject positions, or repertoires. As in Foucauldian or critical discourse analysis (see, for example, Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1993; Wodak & Meyer, 2009), the issue is how critically to address the substantive *whats* of social construction while attending to the interactional dynamics and circumstances that construct them (Wooffitt, 2005). The danger in turning too fully to the study of transcendent discourse (*writ large*) is that it can shortchange the artful human conduct and agency involved in discursive practice (Wooffitt, 2005).

■ SUSTAINING A CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

This brings us to the concluding issue of how to maintain a critical consciousness in constructionist research while upholding a commitment to the neutral stance of bracketing. We have just noted that this is a desire shared by both DC and IE. But it does pose competing aims: documenting the social construction of reality, on the one hand, and critically attending to dominant and marginalized discourses and their effects on our lives, on the other. Exclusive attention to the constructive *hows* of interpretive practice cannot by itself sustain a critical consciousness.

Our way of addressing the issue comes by way of analytic bracketing. Our constructionist analytics sustains a critical consciousness by exploiting the critical potential of the analytic interplay of discourse-in-practice and discursive practice. Attending to both the constitutive *hows* and substantive *whats* of interpretive practice provides two different platforms for critique. The continuing enterprise of analytic bracketing does not keep us comfortably ensconced throughout the research process in a domain of indifference to the lived realities of experience, as phenomenological bracketing does. Nor does analytic bracketing keep us engaged in the unrepentant naturalism of documenting the world of everyday life as if it were fully objective and obdurate. Rather, it continuously rescues us from the analytic lethargies of both endeavors.

When questions of discourse-in-practice take the stage, there are grounds for problematizing or politicizing what otherwise might be too facilely viewed as socially or individualistically constructed, managed, and sustained. The persistent urgency of *what* questions cautions us not to assume that agency, artfulness, or the machinery of social interaction is the whole story. The urgency prompts us to inquire into broader environments and contingencies that are built up across time and circumstance in discursive practice. These are the contemporaneous conditions that inform and shape the construction

process, and the personal and interpersonal consequences of having constituted the world in a particular way. While a constructionist view toward interpretive practice does not orient naturalistically to the "real world" as such, neither does it take everyday life as built from the ground up in talk-in-interaction on each and every communicative occasion. This allows for distinctly political observations since the analytics can point us toward matters of social organization and control that implicate matters beyond immediate interaction. It turns us to wider contexts (as constructed as they may be) in search of sources of action, control, change, or stability.

When discursive practice commands the analytic spotlight, there are grounds for critically challenging the representational hegemony of taken-for-granted realities. Researchers unsettle or deconstruct taken-for-granted realities in search of their construction to reveal the constitutive processes that produce and sustain them. Critically framed, persistent *how* questions remind us to bear in mind that the everyday realities of our lives—whether they are being normal, abnormal, law-abiding, criminal, male, female, young, or old—are realities we *do*. Having done them, they can be undone. We can move on to dismantle and reassemble realities, producing and reproducing, time and again, the world we inhabit. Politically, this recognizes that in the world we inhabit, we could enact alternate possibilities or alternative directions, even if commonsense understandings make this seem impossible. If we make visible the constructive fluidity and malleability of social forms, we also reveal a potential for change (see Gubrium & Holstein, 1990, 1995; Holstein & Gubrium, 1994, 2000b, 2004, 2008).

The critical consciousness of a constructionist analytics deploys the continuous imperative to take issue with discourse or discursive practice when either one is foregrounded in research or seemingly obdurate in everyday life, thus turning the analytics on itself as it pursues its goals. In this sense, analytic bracketing is its own form of critical consciousness. Politically framed, the interplay of discourse-in-practice and discursive practice transforms analytic bracketing into critical bracketing, offering a basis not only for documenting interpretive practice, but also for critically commenting on its own constructions.

■ NOTES

1. Some self-proclaimed ethnomethodologists, however, might reject the notion that ethnomethodology is in any sense a "constructionist" or "constructivist" enterprise (see Lynch, 1993, 2008). Some reviews of the ethnomethodological canon also clearly imply that constructionism is anathema to the ethnomethodological project (see Maynard, 1998; Maynard & Clayman, 1991).

2. While clearly reflecting Garfinkel's pioneering contributions, this characterization of the ethnomethodological project is perhaps

closer to the version conveyed in the work of Melvin Pollner (1987, 1991) and D. Lawrence Wieder (1988) than some of the more recent "postanalytic" or conversation analytic forms of ethnomethodology. Indeed, Garfinkel (1988, 2002), Lynch (1993), and others might object to how we ourselves portray ethnomethodology. We would contend, however, that there is much to be gained from a studied "misreading" of the ethnomethodological "classics," a practice that Garfinkel himself advocates for the sociological classics more generally (see Lynch, 1993). With the figurative "death of the author" (Barthes, 1977), those attached to doctrinaire readings of the canon should have little ground for argument.

3. Other ethnomethodologists have drawn upon Foucault, but without necessarily endorsing these affinities or parallels. Lynch (1993), for example, writes that Foucault's studies can be relevant to ethnomethodological investigations in a "restricted and 'literal' way" (p. 131), and resists the generalization of discursive regimes across highly occasioned "language games." See McHoul (1986) and Lynch and Bogen (1996) for exemplary ethnomethodological appropriations of Foucauldian insights.

4. There are other useful metaphors for describing how analytic bracketing changes the focus from discourse-in-practice to discursive practice. One can liken the operation to shifting gears while driving a motor vehicle equipped with a manual transmission. One mode of analysis may prove quite productive, but it will eventually strain against the resistance engendered by its own temporary analytic orientation. When the researcher notes that the analytic engine is laboring under, or being constrained by, the restraints of what it is currently geared to accomplish, she can decide to virtually shift analytic gears in order to gain further purchase on the aspects of interpretive interplay that were previously bracketed. Just as there can be no prescription for shifting gears while driving (i.e., one can never specify in advance at what speed one should shift up or down), changing analytic brackets always remains an artful enterprise, awaiting the empirical circumstances it encounters. Its timing cannot be prespecified. Like shifting gears while driving, changes are not arbitrary or undisciplined. Rather they respond to the analytic challenges at hand in a principled, if not predetermined, fashion.

5. This may be the very thing Lynch (1993) decries with respect to conversation analysts who attempt to formalize and professionalize CA as a "scientific" discipline.

6. Some critics (see Denzin, 1998) have worried that analytic bracketing represents a selective objectivism, a form of "ontological gerrymandering." These, of course, have become fighting words among constructionists. But we should soberly recall that Steve Woolgar and Dorothy Pawluch (1985) have suggested that carving out some sort of analytic footing may be a pervasive and unavoidable feature of any sociological commentary. Our own constant attention to the interplay between discourse-in-practice and discursive practice continually reminds us of their reflexive relationship. Gerrymanderers stand their separate ground and unreflexively deconstruct; analytic bracketing, in contrast, encourages a continual and methodical deconstruction of empirical groundings themselves. This may produce a less-than-tidy picture, but it also is designed to keep reification at bay and ungrounded signification under control.

7. The term "narrative ethnography," which is an apt designation for an ethnographic approach to narrative, is also associated with

another approach to qualitative inquiry. Some researchers have applied the term to the critical analysis of representational practices in ethnography. Their aim is to work against the objectifying practices of ethnographic description. Practitioners of this form of narrative ethnography use the term to highlight researchers' narrative practices as they craft ethnographic accounts. They feature the interplay between the ethnographer's own subjectivity and the subjectivities of those whose lives and worlds are in view. Their ethnographic texts are typically derived from participant observation, but are distinctive because they take special notice of the researcher's own participation, perspective, voice, and especially his or her emotional experience as these operate in relation to the field of experience in view. Anthropologists Barbara Tedlock (1991, 1992, 2004), Ruth Behar (1993, 1996), and Kirin Narayan (1989), and sociologists Carolyn Ellis (1991), Laurel Richardson (1990a, 1990b), and others (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992; Ellis & Bochner, 1996) are important proponents of this genre. The reflexive, representational engagements of field encounters are discussed at length in H. L. Goodall's (2000) book *Writing the New Ethnography*, while Carolyn Ellis (2004) offers a description of the autoethnographic approach to narratives.

8. According to McCoy (2008), institutional ethnographers generally resist the tendency to be subsumed under the constructionist umbrella. By not affiliating with constructionism, she argues, IE has been free to participate in constructionist conversations, but on its own terms. This independent positioning is important for the IE project that aims to begin, not from theoretical vantage points, but from the actualities of people's lives.

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