

Do You See What I See? Examining a Collaborative Ethnography

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Although there are increasing examples of collaborative ethnography, there are few explicit reflections on its process. The authors systematically juxtapose their jointly collected but separately recorded observations in a neighborhood recreation center in Chicago to examine points of similarity and difference. They find that collaborative ethnography can be useful for providing a richer description, highlighting perceptual inconsistencies, and recognizing the influence of ethnographers' personal and intellectual backgrounds on the collection and recording of data. The authors' reflexive analysis also illustrates that the choice of collaborators is key for influencing the depth or breadth of the data collected. Finally, they show that there is neither one truth, nor one reality, nor one stable social world to observe.

Although many researchers have turned to collaborative ethnography as a way in which to explore a variety of social phenomena, we find that there are few *explicit* reflections on doing collaborative ethnography or on the systematic juxtaposition of observations, what caused those particular observations, and their possible interpretations. There are many comparative ethnographies or ethnographic monographs that use a team approach. In fact, the comparative and team approaches to ethnography have become quite popular, especially in urban sociology, challenging the research done by the lone ethnographer in his or her exclusive domain (see, e.g., Burawoy et al., 1991; Newman, 1999; Sullivan, 1989; Wilson, 1996). Yet, often these studies are written by one voice (or perhaps two voices) who compiles the data collected by others to offer his or her realist narrative of social life in the setting(s) under study.

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There are few reflections by the researcher in the field (who usually is a graduate student) on his or her group or collaborative experience. Indeed, most academic writing (primarily journals and books) requires that there be some suggestion that the author is offering the "truth" about the field he or she studied. What our experience taught us was that there is neither one truth nor one reality. Comparing our simultaneous observations underlined the subjectivity of the initial field experience, its recollection, and its recording as well as the ephemerality of the time and space in which that experience was rooted. Although we attempt to set up our analysis to compare specific instances when we observed the same setting, neither the "specific instances" nor the "sameness" of the setting could ever be realized. Realities ultimately are unstable and personal.

Despite these persistent analytic quandaries, we venture to draw certain conclusions from this exercise. We found that collaborative ethnography increases the body of data that can be used to describe and understand the social world under observation. At the same time, the reflexive analysis of our own personal and intellectual biographies illustrates how the composition of an ethnographic team (or duo) clearly influences the type and content of data collected. As Fine and Weis (1996) note, "Our obligation [as ethnographers] is to . . . interrogate in our writings who *we* are as we coproduce the narratives we presume to collect" (p. 263, emphasis in original). Unlike Fine and Weis's research experience, our self-interrogation provides an example of minimal distance between Self (the researcher) and Other (the researched) and how such closeness can be both facilitative and oppressive. Our likenesses—to each other and to the people we studied—are the basis for our suggestion for more diversity among collaborating ethnographers.

COLLABORATIVE ETHNOGRAPHY

Several researchers have turned to collaborative ethnography as a way in which to explore a variety of social phenomena. By *collaborative ethnography*, we mean those studies in which two or more ethnographers coordinate their fieldwork efforts to gather data from a single setting. A common type of collaborative ethnography is the husband and wife fieldwork team (see, e.g., Adler & Adler's, 1990, study of sports roles or Adler & Adler's, 1998, study of preadolescent identity). A modified version of collaborative ethnography includes studies in which several researchers gather data concerning the same *social phenomenon* (e.g., delinquency) but from different *social settings* (Burawoy et al., 1991; Sullivan, 1989). For this article, however, we focus our discussion on the former type, namely the observation of one setting and phenomenon by two or more researchers.

Collaborative ethnography shares similar limitations of lone ethnography, but it also presents special opportunities for expanding and improving the

ways in which ethnographers present their work. For example, in collaborative ethnography, at least two researchers view a particular setting and can compare their field experiences, thereby highlighting more than one perspective of the complex social world. We explore this particular advantage of collaborative ethnography by comparing our fieldnotes gathered in a Chicago neighborhood. Juxtaposing the fieldnotes of one ethnographer against those of the other highlights the angles at which both researchers come to see an ever-changing set of social phenomena. This exercise provides an opportunity to explore the influence of the particular subjective status of each researcher and how those statuses affect data collection and interpretation. Because the researcher himself or herself is a key variable in the ethnographic process, characteristics of the researcher—including (but not limited to) gender, race, socioeconomic status, age, and prior exposures and experiences—are independent variables that influence interaction and outcomes. We explore the ways in which our personal biographies and characteristics, as well as our very human incapacities, are reflected in our fieldnotes.

The fieldnotes presented in this article were collected as part of the Comparative Neighborhood Study (CNS) in Chicago. The CNS examined the social organization of four neighborhoods using participant observation and open-ended interviews to gather data about residents' social networks, family lives, formal and informal organizations, and attitudes concerning issues of class and race. Research assistants on the CNS were divided into fieldwork teams, with each team having at least one male and one female investigator. The CNS also aimed to match field-workers and neighborhoods by race/ethnicity. Because both of us are African American, we studied Groveland, a middle-class African American neighborhood on Chicago's South Side.¹ The research design assumed that neighborhood residents would be more forthcoming about issues of race if they were discussing those issues with people of a similar racial/ethnic background as their own.

Each field-worker was responsible for independently getting involved in his or her neighborhood, gathering data, and recording fieldnotes. This meant that within the four neighborhoods, the research assistants assigned to each neighborhood were a "team" only insofar as they chose to coordinate their activities. Because the neighborhoods were relatively large (e.g., Groveland was the *smallest* of the neighborhoods, with a population of more than 11,000 residents), it was possible for field-workers to completely split up and study distinct aspects and spaces of neighborhood life. The fieldnotes were photocopied and disseminated to the principal investigators, to the other members of that neighborhood's team, and to the researchers who were studying other neighborhoods. This method of independent collection and reporting of fieldnotes produced a useful exercise for collaborative ethnography. Because we were writing for an audience of readers who were not as familiar with Groveland as we were, our fieldnotes had to be written in great detail. We could not assume that others on the project team were aware of the

fine details that we might observe during our daily visits to the field. We then discussed our fieldnotes with the project members during weekly CNS project meetings. Research assistants from each neighborhood were given the opportunity to compare field observations, discuss difficulties and accomplishments, and provide interpretation; however, the principal investigators were responsible for final interpretation and analysis of fieldnotes, to be presented in a forthcoming book. This division of research and writing labor is key for understanding the progression and focus of the present article.

We entered Groveland via our personal interests, with the understanding that we eventually would branch out and get involved in other parts of the community. The first author, Reuben May, played basketball with teenage and adult males at the neighborhood outdoor court of the neighborhood recreation center as a way of entering Groveland. The second author, Mary Pattillo-McCoy, began her fieldwork by interviewing community leaders, one of whom was the supervisor of the same recreation center. During that interview, she learned of the center's weekly volleyball night. She soon joined residents and played informal games of volleyball on Wednesday nights. Despite Reuben's lack of serious interest (or skill) in volleyball, he began to attend and play as well. The fieldnotes presented in this article were taken from our first joint visit to the recreation center on volleyball night. There were a total of 11 joint visits to the fieldhouse.

The diversity of approaches to fieldwork among the CNS teams is noteworthy. Although much of the data for the project were gathered by fieldworkers working independently of one another in distinct neighborhood settings, there were occasions when members of the same fieldwork team observed a social setting at the same time. For example, one research team occasionally visited a restaurant in its neighborhood together, and another jointly attended meetings of the local school council. On those occasions, the research assistants were given flexibility in the way in which they recorded their field experiences, producing a variety of approaches. One team alternated the responsibility for recording fieldnotes between its two members. They visited the field together, returned to their separate residences, and only one was responsible for writing the fieldnotes for the team. On their next visit to the field, they would reverse responsibility for recording observations. Another approach, frequently used by the husband-and-wife team, was a similar alternating of writing responsibilities. In their case, however, the couple briefly discussed their observations after a visit but before writing, and then one took responsibility for writing their collective observations.

We decided on still a different approach to reporting on joint field visits. We agreed to complete our visits to the fieldhouse with very little conversation about what we had observed. We then returned to our separate residences to write our fieldnotes. In essence, we shared our perceptions of Groveland with each other *by writing those perceptions directly into the fieldnotes* and reading them after this separate recording. This process of exchange is

unlike that of married or cohabiting collaborative ethnographers between whom it would be almost impossible not to verbally and collaboratively construct the meanings of their interactions prior to the actual writing of their fieldnotes. Comparing our fieldnotes, which were not colored by each other's vision, demonstrates the usefulness of independent collection and writing of field events while also illustrating the importance of ethnographer as a research tool and, indeed, a "variable."

In addition to being "collaborative," our fieldwork experience most often was "cooperative" in that there was little conflict or competition between us as field-workers. In reflecting on their joint experience, Theophano and Curtis (1996) recognized strains of competition underlying their research efforts as each felt pressure to distinguish herself from the other in the eyes of the principal investigators. For reasons we outline in what follows, we did not experience this pressure. Or, as Belgrave and Smith (1995) discuss, they underwent a process of "negotiating" their narrative to account for the personal and intellectual differences that each brought to the topic of study. Although we had differences, the fact that we were not responsible for the final narrative made it unnecessary to continuously negotiate our observations.

As research assistants on the CNS, our responsibilities were to feverishly record the everyday interactions in Groveland. In most cases, we were not in the same place at the same time, but for those times that we were, both of us were mentally logging the details of the interaction to be reported in our separate fieldnotes. It is important to note that at this stage of data collection, we felt little ownership of our fieldnotes given that the principal investigators were to be the ones to do the final analysis and interpretation. Instead, our attentions were directed at being extensive in our recording, not deep in our understanding. Because of this minimal commitment to a coherent interpretation of the incidents we observed and relayed in our fieldnotes, there were almost no times when we, as a team, came into conflict with one another. When we disagreed on details, we chalked it up to different perceptions, minor inaccuracies in observations, or the possibility that the venue had in fact changed between the times of our separate observations. Any of these factors could explain times when, for example, one of us reported that there were about 15 men in the fieldhouse gym, whereas the other might have reported that there were about 10 men in the gym. Because we were not responsible for interpretation at that point, we were not as invested in having consensus. It was not until writing this article that we truly began to look more systematically at our shared fieldwork experience and wanted to understand the moments of inconsistency or blindness on one or the other of our parts. Writing this article has required that we more deeply investigate what we, as individuals, brought to the field and how that altered our field experience and the data we recorded.

Our personal biographies perhaps also lead to the minimal conflict that we experienced in our fieldwork. Like the people in the neighborhood we stud-

ied, both of us are middle-class African Americans. Although Reuben comes from a more lower middle-class background (more similar to Groveland residents) and Mary from an upper middle-class background, the fact that both of us were Ph.D. students at the most prestigious university in Chicago attenuated our family background differences in many ways.

Mary spent her entire childhood and adolescent years in a predominantly Black neighborhood in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, that was not too unlike Groveland. Reuben moved around more frequently as a youngster but, nonetheless, spent the majority of his preadult years in Black neighborhoods around Chicago. Although our neighborhood experiences were mostly Black, both of us went to mixed high schools and predominantly White colleges. Throughout our youth, we both met, were friends with, and were related to African Americans from across the socioeconomic spectrum. We knew the gang members and people on public assistance, as well as the teachers, nurses, and college professors, in our respective neighborhoods. These exposures made our entry into Groveland very smooth. More important, these similarities in background and age (Reuben was 28 and Mary was 23 years old when the research began), created similarities in our Groveland experience and in how we observed various scenes in the neighborhood. Once we began to interpret some of our data, these similarities continued to ensure that we had few differences of opinion.

Despite all of the characteristics that we shared, we were, of course, not the same person, and our differences led to interesting twists in the data we collected. As we discuss later, the fact that Reuben is a married male and Mary is a female who was single at the time influenced our access to gendered groups and spaces. That is not to say that Mary did not have access to men and that Reuben did not speak with women. It was clear, however, that the types of data Mary could collect on men almost always were governed by the rules of heterosexual courtship, whereas Reuben needed to continuously restate his innocent intentions when he was with women by talking frequently of his wife and daughter. Because of the difficulties of interacting outside of the flirtatiousness of intergender encounters, "effortless sociability" (Liebow, 1967, p. 22) was possible only in gender homogeneous groupings. This meant that even if we were in the same space at the same time, there could be two different stories going on: one including the women and the other including the men. Thus, our experience underscores the importance of using a mixed-gender team to capture some part of the experience of both men and women.

Another important difference was the fact that Reuben was a native Chicagoan and Mary was not. Having grown up in three different neighborhoods on Chicago's South Side, not only was Reuben generally "street-smart," but more specifically, he was "smart" in the specific symbols, colors, and vernacular that is particular to Chicago's Black neighborhoods. Although Mary understood Black neighborhood life more generally, she was less prepared to read the certain cock of a hat, the twist of a handshake, or the place-specific

nickname of a rival gang. Reuben's familiarity led to more interpretation of a setting because the setting had a richer meaning to his Chicago-trained eyes. However, Mary's more detached cataloging of data in Groveland did help in balancing Reuben's depth because there always was the possibility that Reuben's preprogrammed reactions were incorrect for the certain scene under observation.

COMPARING NOTES

The texts presented in what follows are excerpted from each of our fieldnotes because to include one full fieldnote entry from our joint experience would require in excess of 25 pages of written text. We attempt to set up each fieldnote with enough contextualizing information that readers can follow the substance of the interaction. Our goal was to narrow down the full written accounts to those moments when our positioning within the field was comparable. Still, we are aware that our selection and condensation of particular segments of fieldnotes in some ways undermines the reflexive account we are attempting to provide. Nevertheless, to be confined by this reality that everything we touch is forever modified would mean that no analytic movement is possible in ethnography. Instead of yielding to this constraint, we provide explanations for our methodological choices in hopes that it will help readers to evaluate the analysis.

Because fieldnotes generally are for the ethnographer's internal records, they do not always follow the cadence of good grammar and clear writing style. The act of "getting it all down" (or as much as one can) means that the writing itself suffers. Despite the occasional irritation this disjointed writing style might cause readers who are unfamiliar with the particular social world under study, it is useful, in the current article, to leave the fieldnotes in this generally unedited state as a way of realizing the potential of collaborative ethnography for reflexivity. Any major editorial changes made to the content of the fieldnotes on our part might alter the meanings that we originally were attempting to convey. As a way of bringing clarity to the fieldnotes, we give detailed explanations of the events and dialogue within the analysis portion of the text.

We selected most of the fieldnote segments that appear in this article using time and space as the organizing framework. That is, this analysis of fieldnotes is based on a reading of the field-workers' separate descriptions of events that occur roughly within the same setting at the same time. What do we mean by "roughly"? As the fieldnotes will indicate, we both desired to maintain separate identities within Groveland. That is, although residents of the neighborhood knew that we were friends and that both of us were studying the neighborhood, we did not want to be seen as a pair or dependent on one another. During those times that we visited the fieldhouse together, we

purposefully engaged in separate conversations and activities. For this analysis, we have included all of the interactions in which we were in the same setting sharing time and space within close proximity to one another. Sometimes we were in totally different rooms in the fieldhouse, other times we were crossing paths, and still other times we were engaged in direct conversation. Most important, however, we include fieldnotes from when we were in the same room, talking to the same person, and/or participating in group activity where we had the potential for face-to-face interaction. Key to this analysis is the presentation of two ethnographers' observations as we individually perceived an event. This might be referred to as the duality of reality—what is real for Reuben and what is real for Mary. In other words, our fieldnotes pose the question: Do you see what I see?

THE GROVELAND FIELDHOUSE

The fieldhouse is located in Groveland Park, which is almost in the center of the Groveland neighborhood. Groveland Park has eight baseball diamonds, a play lot, an outdoor basketball court, and a swimming pool. For many residents, Groveland Park and its fieldhouse are the central locations for leisure activity. The main entrance to the park and fieldhouse are just off of 8th Street, one of the main thoroughfares that connects Groveland to other surrounding neighborhoods. There is a one-way double-lane driveway that passes in front of the fieldhouse and facilitates easy drop-off and pick-up of fieldhouse users. The fieldhouse is constructed of cinderblock and cement. Inside the fieldhouse, there are three meeting rooms, a television room with a color television, a weight room, an arts and crafts room, and an indoor gymnasium used for basketball, volleyball, and a number of other indoor sports for young and old alike. Despite having similar physical characteristics as other Chicago Park District fieldhouses, the decor of Groveland's fieldhouse is decidedly African American. There are pictures of famous African Americans including Frederick Douglas, Michael Jordan, Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman, Booker T. Washington, Michael Jackson, David Dinkins, and Duke Ellington. There also is a portrait of the late Harold Washington, who was the first African American mayor of the city of Chicago. Like at many other Chicago Park District fieldhouses, much of the equipment and facilities are outdated and worn, but the park staff works to maintain them.

The gymnasium has a full-length basketball court as well as retractable baskets along the sides. There are four rows of bleachers along the south wall; on the north wall are entrances to the men's and women's locker rooms. The locker rooms are well maintained with the exception of a few lockers in disrepair. Both the rest rooms and showers are clean.

The fieldhouse hosts a number of activities for Groveland residents. Church groups use the meeting rooms for bible study and Sunday service,

park staff teach arts and crafts to senior citizens, recreation leaders organize basketball and baseball leagues for boys and girls, the park supervisor organizes day camp activities for youths during the summer and after-school programs during the school year, and adults play informal basketball and volleyball games weekly.

The fieldhouse, despite its usefulness as a center of recreation for many residents, also has its problems. When we first began our research, the fieldhouse and its surrounding park, outdoor basketball court, and baseball diamonds were considered to be unsafe by some residents. Older residents complained that many of the neighborhood's young people had taken over the park and that it had become a haven for gangs. Over the course of conducting fieldwork, we learned that, in fact, many youths who used the park were involved in gangs. This was evident by the use of certain greetings and handshakes and the presence of certain colors, T-shirts, and tattoos; it was verified in many conversations.² Atop the hierarchy of gang members who frequented Groveland Park was Lance, who was later arrested in a widely publicized police sting that netted several gang leaders from one of Chicago's largest street gangs. The fieldnotes presented next are from the time when both of us first saw Lance at Groveland Park.

DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?

During our fieldwork, we visited the same social setting as a way in which to "double check" one another's observations. The following notes are taken from our first visit to the Groveland fieldhouse together. By this time, Mary already had established herself as a regular participant in Wednesday night volleyball. Reuben started visiting the fieldhouse for both volleyball on Wednesday nights and basketball on Sundays. We present the fieldnotes of this first joint visit in the order in which events unfolded. They have been cut into segments to facilitate comparison of how we perceived our joint experiences of being a part of the activities at the fieldhouse. Portions of the fieldnotes that present data when we are not in the same social space have been omitted for the most part. In our analysis, we suggest a reading of the fieldnotes that we believe highlights how we arrived at our particular perception of the social world.

What Reuben Saw (1)³

Mary and I decided that I would attend one of the Wednesday night volleyball nights at the fieldhouse. I arrived at 6:40 [it wasn't supposed to start before 7:00 p.m.]. As I sat in front until Mary arrived, I noticed a maroon-colored, late-model Cadillac Seville with vogue tires and five-star rims. I also saw a bronze, late-model Cadillac DeVille with vogue tires and five-star rims. These cars were

parked a couple of spaces away from an early '70s green Buick Electra 225 with spoke rims and vogue tires. This car looked to be in the middle stages of renovation. In the 20 minutes I spent outside, I watched two African American males dressed in hip-hop/gangster gear [two-piece jean outfit, knit winter hats, and the latest gym shoes colored black] leave the gym. One of the guys came out and stood in front of the fieldhouse door, and the other walked to the Buick Electra. He got to the car and opened the door. He reached inside and got a long blue jean jacket and put it on, then walked back to the other guy. They walked over to the maroon Cadillac, got in, and drove off. The Electra pulled out right behind the maroon car. [I hadn't even noticed that there was someone in the Electra because the windows were tinted.]

When they left, I pulled up into the cul de sac in front of the fieldhouse. A guy [whom I later found out was Ellis] came to his car, which was a Buick 5th Avenue [I think] with a "phiton" roof [convertible-looking top but not convertible] and spoke rims. He drove away and then came back. [I don't know what all this means, but it seemed important to note especially since the cars that were driven are the cars of choice for people that I have known to be either active as gang members or drug dealers.]

As I sat in the car, I saw Spider walk into the gym. He was walking as opposed to driving. A few minutes later, Mary pulled up. I waited for her to park, and then we went in together.

What Mary Saw (1)

I arrived at Groveland Park a little before 7 p.m. because I find that the before-and-after interaction is the most substantive. Reuben had already arrived and was sitting in his car in front of the building. We walked in together.

We wrote our entrance into the fieldhouse from very different perspectives. Because Reuben had arrived earlier than Mary that evening, he had the opportunity to record a few details about what he perceived to be suspicious movement that occurred at the fieldhouse entrance. His discussion of car and clothing styles certainly was written with the knowledge that a few of the neighborhood residents suspected that there were gangs at the fieldhouse. Their concerns heightened his awareness of events and symbols, such as car models and clothing styles, that could be construed as "gang activity." Therefore, he provided meticulous details of these events and symbols that he had come to recognize as gang related from his days as a young Black male growing up in Chicago.

By the time Mary arrived, these men had departed, and so Mary did not witness the young men's movements. Still, she provided little description of the outside physical setting that evening. There were, indeed, cars still parked in front of the fieldhouse that Mary did not mention. This can be attributed to the fact that Mary had been to the fieldhouse for Wednesday night volleyball on several prior occasions, and so the events and symbols so noteworthy for Reuben had become part of the taken-for-granted atmosphere of the fieldhouse for Mary. In fact, Reuben later discovered that Mary already knew both

young men whom he had described so meticulously. If Mary had arrived at the same time as Reuben, then she might have been less thorough in describing their outfits and behaviors because they were familiar to her. Yet despite this, Reuben's knowledge of automobile makes, models, and accessories, as well as his attention to these as "cars of choice" for Chicago's gang members, exceeded anything Mary could have provided even if she had witnessed the scene. Reuben's *personal biography*—as a male perhaps, but definitely as a native Chicagoan—greatly enhanced his ethnographic description.

This comparison illustrates both the ways in which field-workers can become desensitized to the details of a setting after they have become regular participants in that setting and the importance of the particular subjectivity of field-workers for collecting certain types (and levels) of data. Because such a detailed account of the cars and clothing actually proved important for richly describing the consumer world of gang members in Groveland, Reuben's observations (compensating for Mary's oversights) illustrate the usefulness of collaborative ethnography for improving the understanding of local social phenomena. Furthermore, a reflexive analysis of our fieldnotes highlights the important axes of gender and personal experience for how we saw Groveland.

The next set of fieldnotes (2) describes our joint entrance into the Groveland Park fieldhouse that night. Mary's familiarity with the people of the fieldhouse meant that she could act as Reuben's sponsor, introducing Reuben to the park employees, the "regulars," and the setting of the fieldhouse. In many ways, Mary already had introduced the fieldhouse setting to Reuben through her previous fieldnotes. In reviewing and comparing these notes, we find that we shared the same interaction with Spider and Vern, two park employees, yet there were inconsistencies in our notes about what transpired.

What Reuben Saw (2)

We stopped at the front desk where Spider (SP) and Vern (V) were standing, going over the schedule. Mary said, "What's up?"

V and SP: What's up, Mary?

Mary: Who's here?

Vern: Nobody yet.

Spider and Vern continued to talk, and I waited. Mary politely interrupted them and said, "Vern and Spider, I want y'all to meet my friend Reuben, the one I told you about." Spider held out his hand, and I said as I shook his hand, "I met you before, Spider."

Spider: When?

Reuben: I was in here Sunday, and I asked you did you know my girl Mary. [He looked as if he were recalling the event. I continued.] You were eating.

Then Spider said, "Oh yeh." Vern made some kind of remark as to Spider's eating, but I didn't catch it. I shook Vern's hand. I then picked up an announcement sheet that was on the counter. Mary said, "I'm goin' in the gym." I stood reading the paper. [It was at this point that I decided that I would not be able to interact well with Mary and her friends until I established my identity on my own terms.] Vern and Spider continued to talk. I went into the gym about 1 minute after Mary went in. She came out fanning and saying, "It's hot in there." I went in and saw three guys shooting baskets. Mary walked past me, and I stayed in the gym.

What Mary Saw (2)

Spider was standing behind the front desk. He greeted me as usual, and Reuben and I walked to the desk. I introduced them, and Reuben reminded Spider that he had met him before at the center. Spider didn't seem to indicate any familiarity and actually looked a bit suspicious but not mean. He must have just recently arrived because he still had his coat and winter hat on. [Wednesday is really his day off, but he comes up to play volleyball.] I asked if anyone had come yet, and Vern told me that the net wasn't even set up yet. I took a walk into the gym to see. There were two young men (17-19?) that I did not recognize shooting around in the gym. As I walked back from the gym, I saw all the guys I know—"the regulars"—in the meeting/game room to the east of the front desk. Darren, Terry, Ellis, and two or three other guys were sitting around the table. Terry and Darren saw me and gave a very casual recognition of my presence—a kind of slight lift of the head to say "What's up?" The other men in the room looked like the men from last week who Spider referred to as "security." They were both very dark-skinned and wore finger waves. I went back to the desk to talk with Spider. [At this point, I had kind of lost track of Reuben, but soon after he yelled to me that he was going to shoot around in the gym. I think we both implicitly understood that we didn't want to look like a couple or that he was dependent on me to show him around or be a kind of sponsor. I knew he would do his own thing, and he knew I would do mine.]

There is a rich variety of comparisons to be made about these two fieldnote segments, ranging from the diversity of style (with Reuben recording dialogue and Mary offering summaries of that dialogue) to the inconsistencies in details. To analyze this event, we first focus on the actual details of the event and then compare our impressions.

We were consistent in our brief descriptions of the events that led up to Reuben's introduction to Vern and Spider. It is only after Spider and Reuben have been introduced that our notes diverge. Reuben interpreted Spider's pause and look to be a contemplation and remembrance of their prior meeting, whereas Mary indicated that Spider seemed not to remember meeting Reuben and might even have been a bit suspicious. Here is a case where collaborative ethnography gives readers an opportunity to view the interaction from two perspectives. But why the different interpretations? We suggest that the act of being ethnographers seriously alters our interactions within the field. The clarity with which Reuben remembered talking to Spider prior to this Wednesday night meeting (and remembering that Spider was eating at

the time) can be attributed to the actual ethnographic practice itself. That is, ethnographers develop specific memories because of the repeated practice of interacting with others and retaining those interactions in memory so that they can be recorded later. Therefore, Reuben had three levels of “experience” in his initial encounter with Spider: the meeting itself, his replaying of that meeting in his head so as to record it later, and the actual recording in his fieldnotes. Furthermore, Mary’s fieldnotes about Spider and other participants in the fieldhouse made Spider seem much more familiar to Reuben than Reuben was to Spider. Perhaps the sense of familiarity that Reuben conveyed to Spider in their interaction was what made Spider respond to Reuben in what Mary characterized as a “suspicious” manner. At the same time, Reuben’s desire to become a part of this new setting could have influenced his reading of Spider’s reaction as a welcoming acknowledgment of the prior meeting.

Contrary to this divergence in experience, there is a striking similarity when we move from the content of the actual interaction to analyze our independent thoughts about the interaction as it unfolded (which are represented in the bracketed material). Without prior discussion, we still shared an understanding of how we wanted to shape our identities. Reuben felt as though he “would not be able to interact well with Mary and her friends until [he] established [his] identity on [his] own terms,” whereas Mary thought that “we both implicitly understood that we didn’t want to look like a couple or that he was dependent on me to show him around or be a kind of sponsor. I knew he would do his own thing, and he knew I would do mine.” Our subsequent actions in the field were shaped by shared but unspoken methodological considerations. We wanted to be identified as two individuals who knew one another but not so intimately connected that our identities were fused together as Mary and Reuben or vice versa. We separated so that Mary could maintain her identity and Reuben could establish one. Mary sought out “the regulars” with whom she had become familiar, while Reuben located the gymnasium, a social space where he would be comfortable and could interact with just about anyone who “hung out in the gym.”

As these fieldnote entries (2) ended, we were in separate physical places in Groveland Park. In the following texts (3), Reuben is playing basketball in the gym, and Mary is in the lobby area talking to Michelle (a volleyball regular), Spider, and Ellis and Terry (two regulars). Although these two places are physically separate, they are socially connected. That is, what goes on in the hall and lobby area can be apprehended by individuals in the gymnasium, depending on their location on the court. Mary’s fieldnotes describe the activity around the front desk, whereas Reuben’s fieldnotes describe what occurred once Mary returned to the gym. This is our first encounter with Lance, who we later learned was very high in the local gang hierarchy. Because Lance was new to both of us, we both paid close attention to physical descriptions of people and their activities. Our descriptions highlight the ways in which joint observations of field activities provide collaborative eth-

nographers with an opportunity to review field experiences in a way that lone ethnographers cannot.

What Mary Saw (3)

Someone said something near the door that caught the guys' attention, and Spider, Ellis, and Terry went out the front door. Michelle and I stood there. They didn't run out of the door, but they did hurry a bit. They were not out there long when a very short (5 feet 6 inches?) dark-skinned man who wore a short black mink coat and a felt hat returned with them. He had on a couple of large gold and diamond rings and a gold chain with a big "G" medallion. [In slang, "G" stands for "gangster." It is popular now to claim to be an "OG" or "original gangster."] There was a really big man with him who wore a Georgetown Hoyas jogging suit and gold rings. This man was there for a total of about a half-an-hour. He was in the side room at one point with his "bodyguard" and Ellis. There was another shorter fat man around at the same time, but I don't know if they were all together. This possibly unrelated guy also wore gold rings. The man in the mink coat used the park phone to make a call. [Although he was standing probably only 6 feet from me, I could not hear what he was saying because there were other conversations going on. But the fact that he was speaking in a regular tone and not putting his back to us but speaking freely exhibited either a comfort with what he was saying—meaning he was having a simple phone conversation—or he was sure that no one in the park would be a threat and so he could conduct whatever phone "business" freely. Still, even if the park is comfortable, he didn't know me, and it seems that if he were doing something really bad, he wouldn't carry on a phone conversation with me standing right there.] He stayed until we were all in the gym warming up. He came in the gym a couple of times to look but didn't stay long. All the guys knew him, and he knew all of them. I saw him speaking with Ellis most often. [At one point, this man's presence just seemed so interesting to me that I went in the gym to tell Reuben to come out and just see what was going on. Reuben was already clued in.]

What Reuben Saw (3)

During the games and in between games, I noticed some interesting things. The office that Spider usually works at was being occupied with the door closed. There was a short guy with a black gangster brim, black leather coat with black fur around the collar, black slacks, black shoes, and a thick gold rope around his neck. He spent a lot of time in the office. To my knowledge, he did not work for the park district. Anyway, people kept going in and out of the office. There was an older guy—he had to be in his 50s—that moved around with no particular official purpose. He wore a three-quarter length ski jacket. [He, in my mind, reminded me of someone's bodyguard or of the security that Spider talked about. During this entire time, Spider was comfortable with people moving in and out of the office and shutting the door. The room has a TV, but there is also a TV room where people can go to watch television. Why were people moving in and out?] One of the girls that played on our team left early. We asked her to play but she said emphatically, "I got somewhere to go." Before she left, she went into the room with her purse and coat. She closed the door after her. Two minutes

later, the door opened and she put her coat on and left the building. [I thought this was strange as hell. I just kept taking a look just out of the gym door to make sure that there was nothing else going on.]

In these field events, those things that occurred were of interest to both of us. Mary was curious about Lance's presence, and she wanted Reuben to pay special attention to him, but as she indicated in her fieldnote comments, Reuben "was already clued in." The social connection between the individuals in the lobby area and those in the gymnasium made Lance's presence and the movement of "regulars" observable and of interest to Reuben. Both of us described Lance's physical stature, clothing, and demeanor. Here again, collaborative ethnography helps in painting a broader picture of the social setting because it seems that what Reuben missed describing, Mary noted, and what Mary missed, Reuben noted. For example, Reuben noted Lance's thick gold chain around his neck, but Mary was able to specify that there was a gold medallion "G" on the chain. In this instance, jointly collected but independently written fieldnotes provided more information about Lance and the social setting than we would have had if we were lone ethnographers.

The current discussion assumes that details as minor as physical characteristics are important for understanding any particular social world. It could be argued that knowing that Lance had a "G" on his gold necklace is irrelevant to the overall understanding of the fieldhouse social setting. However, we argue that such detail is, in fact, relevant. Its relevance often is discovered later in the fieldwork when other data gathered helps to explain the significance of those previously unimportant details. As Lofland and Lofland (1984) point out,

The researcher does not only (or mainly) wait for "significant" (sociologically or otherwise) events to occur or words to be said and then write them down. An enormous amount of information about the settings under observation or the interviews in process can be apprehended in apparently trivial happenings or utterances, and these are indispensable grist for the logging mill. (p. 46)

Hence, minor details discovered earlier in the fieldwork can help to uncover symbolic structures during the data analysis. As mentioned earlier, these details of dress and demeanor ultimately were useful in thickly describing the emphasis that Groveland youths, like other American youths, put on consumer goods.

Much larger than the particular charm on a gold chain, we both observed a significant change in the fieldhouse social atmosphere on Lance's arrival. This was evident from a number of jointly and separately experienced events from the field. For example, Spider, Terry, and Ellis dropped their conversation with Mary and moved quickly to meet Lance as he arrived at the fieldhouse; Mary and Reuben both observed "bodyguards" protecting Lance; Mary watched as Lance used a park district phone for personal phone calls;

and Reuben observed Lance's appropriation of fieldhouse office space for his personal use. Although our isolated observations might mean little in and of themselves, we can compare our notes for consistencies in observations that highlight the underlying structure of relationships between Lance and others in the fieldhouse. The mere fact that *both of us* recorded his presence as substantial, and indeed powerful, strengthened our individual hunches that he was important in the neighborhood or at least in the fieldhouse. It is the complementary force of our independently written fieldnotes that helps to confirm that changes occurred in the fieldhouse social atmosphere.

As Mary noted in her fieldnotes, Lance did not stay long, and both of us turned our attention to the activities within the gym during and after the volleyball games. The next set of fieldnotes (4) illustrates how our gender differences allowed us to participate and gather data in gender-segregated groups where they formed. We had been playing volleyball for a few games when some of the neighborhood teenage girls entered the gym to watch us play. One of them was carrying a young baby. Having met these young ladies previously, Mary decided to sit and talk with them after we finished our games. It is at this point that gender takes on specific relevance for our data collection.

What Mary Saw (4)

We probably only played four games this evening, and they were four quick games. The teams kind of disintegrated because the competition wasn't too intense. We sat on the bleachers around the baby and talked while the guys played basketball. [The conversation was mostly about men and kids, but things jumped around so much that I can only try to retell it with some kind of cohesiveness. This was the first truly all-female interaction!] I used my best friend's children, who I take care of every weekend, as a way to enter in the discussion.

What Reuben Saw (4)

While Mary sat talking to the women, I sat on the end of the bleachers. Spider brought a basketball into the gym, and Vern, Ellis, Spider, and Terry played every man for himself. I took this opportunity to get myself in good with the staff [well, at least Spider and Vern]. I won the game.

Here our gender difference became an important factor in helping our fieldwork team to gather data from both male- and female-segregated social groups within the fieldhouse. After the preceding fieldnote excerpt, Mary's fieldnotes reproduce the conversation she had with the three young women. "You got any kids?" Michelle asked Mary in the beginning, and from there a full discussion developed about boyfriends and children, relationships and jealousies, lovers and providers. It is unlikely that the women would have shared with Reuben comments such as the following: "If you wanna make a niggah mad after you had his baby, have another one and it ain't his. Shit,

that'll make they shit know [that they don't own you]. They can have babies all around the city but don't let you have one."

During this time, Reuben played basketball with the men. Interestingly, Reuben's fieldnotes from this particular encounter do not contain any dialogue, only the fact of his intention to "get myself in good with the staff." The manner of establishing rapport among men differs from that among women. Reuben's physical participation in the informal basketball game constituted his association and, indeed, "bonding" with the men at Groveland Park, whereas the women's interaction was more focused on talking and sharing personal stories and experiences. Reuben does have data collected from other occasions in the gym where the men do have what might be considered gender-segregated conversations, but this divergence in the manner of *making the initial connection* enriches our understanding of the social world we studied.

Our efforts to connect with fieldhouse participants of the same gender generally were met with easy acceptance. However, there were times when even "insider research" (Brewer, 1986) was not as "insider" as we might have expected it to be. The fact that Mary had to "use [her] best friend's children . . . as a way to enter in the discussion" illustrated that there are so many distinctions above and beyond the supra-categories of race, gender, and class that affect data collection. Merely being a woman did not provide smooth access to this social world. The fact that Mary was unmarried and childless complicated her interaction in all-women settings.

Another important qualification of insider research, or male and female researchers gathering data from their same-sex social groups, is that observations of same gender activity might be given little attention because, as pointed out earlier, people become accustomed to what is familiar and, thus, less attentive to detail. We tried to work against this temptation to be lulled by the familiar, but it remains possible that if Reuben had gathered data on the female group and Mary on the male group, our presentations of gendered activities in the fieldhouse would have been different. We might have highlighted more of the nuances in the opposite sex's group interaction, taking less for granted. Nevertheless, what the collaborative ethnography provides is the ability to pool these two data sources, as well as instances of intergender interaction, to create a fuller picture of neighborhood life and to offer the opportunity to reflexively analyze the axes of gender (and class and background) for their effects on interactions and the ability (or inability) to enter certain social spaces.

The final fieldnote excerpts (5) describe our departure from the fieldhouse. As we begin to exit the gym, it becomes apparent from the fieldnotes that gender interaction could and would substantially affect the ways in which we perceive activities within the field. Both of us had completed our interactions in the all-male and all-female groups and were preparing to depart.

What Reuben Saw (5)

Once I finished my game, I came over and sat next to Mary, but I did not interrupt her because it seemed as though she was on a roll. Mary stood up and began to get her things on. I stood up and grabbed my coat, sweater, and hat. . . . Mary and I kept walking to the door. I stopped at the water fountain, and Mary went into the TV room to tell Spider good-bye. She met me in the lobby, and I walked over to the glass room, and when Spider looked up, I waved and said, "Later" [as in "I will see you later"]. Spider looked up and said, "All right, Reuben."

What Mary Saw (5)

We finished this conversation, and it was getting time to go. Reuben was ready to go too, so we gathered our stuff and headed for the door. As I walked out, Ellis put his arm around my waist. I said, "Are you sweaty?" He replied, "Naw, how you gon' think I'd put my arm around you all sweaty. You know I wouldn't do that." I told him I was probably sweaty too, so it probably didn't matter. We walked to the door and said good-bye to Spider and Terry and went out the front.

One of the key developments during our fieldwork was Mary's ability to negotiate the single yet "taken" female field-worker identity. Mary had to handle occasional flirting in an effective yet unoffensive manner because flirting is part of how young men interact in intergender settings such as the fieldhouse. Mary's ability to negotiate such an identity is evident in our exit from the gym. If she had responded to Ellis by directly rejecting his overture, then her access to intergender interaction would have been substantially affected for the duration of our study. Unlike Mary's single status, Reuben's married status inhibited his intergender interaction, especially with regard to flirting, but he remained a part of male conversations about women, invoking the line, "Yeah, but back in the day I used to . . ."

Our experience of jointly collecting data but independently recording fieldnotes provides us with the post-field opportunity to ask the question, "Do you see what I see?" The differences and similarities highlighted in the excerpted fieldnotes just presented provide the basis for the observations and suggestions made in the following section concerning collaborative ethnography.

DISCUSSION

Our analyses illustrate the factual and perceptual tensions inherent in our separate descriptions of the social world of the fieldhouse. Thinking reflexively about our time in the Groveland field forced us to examine the ethnographer's role in the setting and how that influenced the data collection process and the data themselves. We highlighted how gender, background, and expe-

riences alter our perceptions but also how our similarities minimized the moments of disagreement. We also illustrated the usefulness of collaborative ethnography that is summarized in the following three points. In collaborative ethnographies, (a) important details from the field are supplemented, (b) inconsistencies in data are brought to the fore, and (c) the influence of the ethnographers' social identities is recognized. We now elaborate on these points.

First, we find that collaborative ethnography enhances the ethnographic endeavor by allowing the researchers to gather data jointly but to report it separately. Gathering data in this way increases fieldnote detail for a richer description of the social world under study. We wrote fieldnotes that detailed our field experiences and thoughts to one another as well as to the other members of our project. We asked questions, made comments, and shared our feelings and findings on paper. By approaching our data collection and reporting in this manner, we were required to be more descriptive in our writing. There were many examples of the complementarity of our fieldnotes in providing a more detailed portrait of the Groveland Park fieldhouse and the people there. Whereas Reuben meticulously described the types of cars parked in front of the fieldhouse, Mary described the gold medallion around Lance's neck. Whereas Reuben provided dialogue at our joint entry, Mary provided the dialogue between herself and Ellis at our departure. These examples support the important, if cliché, observation that two pairs of eyes are better than one. The presence of inconsistencies somewhat tempers this conclusion but also presents the benefit of collaborative ethnography for providing a more reflexive account.

Our second conclusion is that collaborative ethnographers can analyze their notes for discrepancies or perhaps even present fieldnotes in their published texts, giving readers an opportunity to explore the discrepancies and consistencies within data collection. We might have had divergent views on some descriptive issues, but we were less likely to have them with regard to substantive issues given that, as fieldwork partners, we were constantly engaged in the exchange of information outside of Groveland and we ultimately were not responsible for reconciling differences. Nonetheless, in informal discussions with one another (e.g., over coffee, after team meetings, in the office, at lunch), we did create a type of consensus that no doubt affected our vision in the Groveland Park fieldhouse.

Collaborative ethnographers also can elaborate how they resolved the discrepancies in their notes for the purpose of writing a final report. In this way, competing views of the field can be worked out by readers who will have access to more than one "reality." Sharing fieldnotes in this way is useful for supplementing traditional research reports or, as Van Maanen (1988) refers to them, "realist tales." The notion of appending one's fieldnotes follows Sanjek's (1988) suggestion that ethnographers publish their fieldnotes in the appendix of their completed texts as a way in which to improve ethnographic validity (p. 401). The major drawback of this suggestion is that the ethnogra-

pher generates an incredible volume of fieldnotes over time. Even for a journal-length article, the fieldnotes on which that article is based would require a separate volume. Here again, the ethnographer must make choices about how much raw data will be presented. Whatever the decision, the jointly collected but separately recorded fieldnotes make it necessary to investigate the reasons for inconsistencies, as we did with our different interpretation of Mary's introduction of Spider and Reuben.

Postmodernists' critiques of ethnographic writings (see, e.g., Baudrillard, 1988; Clifford, 1988; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Denzin, 1986; Lyotard, 1979) have moved many ethnographers to become increasingly reflexive about their own roles in the social worlds they study. Reflexivity is the process by which ethnographers recognize that they are "part-and-parcel of the setting, context, and culture they are trying to understand and represent" and that they confront a variety of interpretive issues in "showing the realities of the lived experiences of the observed settings" (Altheide & Johnson, 1994, p. 486). The central postmodernist question concerning the "scientific" or "objective" nature of ethnography is whether ethnographers ever can accurately represent the Other given their own influence on the gathering, recording, and representation of data. Thus, our third and final observation is that examining collaborative ethnographies is one means by which to address the postmodernists' critique that ethnographers pay little attention to subjectivity in the collection and reporting of data. Readers of collaborative ethnography can apprehend the influence of ethnographers' personal characteristics on their presentations of the social phenomena by reviewing the divergent patterns of data collection and presentation that individual ethnographers use. Despite the usefulness of collaborative ethnography in addressing subjectivity through comparative analysis, we do not propose that it is a means of achieving a scientific understanding of social phenomena. There is subjectivity inherent in all social science and scientific inquiry. Collaborative ethnography cannot escape this constraint.

Let us return to our motivating question: Do you see what I see? Our first answer to that question must be *no*. The simultaneous reading of the fieldnotes we have presented illustrates the failings of each of our memories, the inaccuracies in each of our perceptions, and the different ways in which people in the field react to each of us that creates a unique reality for each of us. Although collaborative ethnography has the previously discussed advantages, we do not believe that if we just had enough people in the field, then we might have got at some reality that is more true than the one we recorded. The other participants in the settings we describe experienced it quite differently from either of us. Reality is in each of our heads. What we were faced with in writing this article as collaborative ethnographers was to be confronted with one another's reality. The principal investigators on this project also will have to do the same as they write the final monograph. They will have to compro-

mise where there are inconsistencies or leave out things that still are too unclear.

Furthermore, not only is there no reality that individuals share, but there is no stable reality. If Reuben observed something just 1 second later than did Mary, then it no longer was the same setting. One person could have left the fieldhouse gym, Lance could have hung up the phone, or Spider could have put down his sandwich. As Lofland and Lofland (1984) point out, "Because the situations of living are constantly changing, new and often novel meanings are constantly being generated to cope with the new contingencies" (p. 75). The instability of the situation means that we (or any number of researchers in a collaborative endeavor) would be profoundly unable to capture the incredible dynamism of any social world.

Yet, with those points made, in many ways we did see what the other saw, and this was the basis for the significant lack of conflict. Our similar personal biographies, professional training, and stage in the life cycle gave us like lenses. The analysis of our collaborative experience suggests to future organizers of such projects that there are fruits to having less likeness among collaborative teams. Even if the desire of having researchers of the same race is maintained, principal investigators might think more seriously about other axes of class background, youthful neighborhood experiences and exposures, age, and disciplinary training. Our backgrounds were complementary and, thus, reduced the number of times when we saw things radically different from one another. But conflict might improve the final narrative by pushing the field-workers to gather more data that inform those discrepancies.

A final strategy that stems from our analysis is the separate writing of fieldnotes. "Contamination" is inevitable when two (or more) field-workers are in the same field at the same time. Their presence alone affects the interaction as well as the way in which the other field-worker sees the interaction. Reuben might probe a resident on a shared interest in basketball, which might serendipitously lead to a discussion of educational aspirations. This secondary conversation would not have occurred without Reuben's probe, and because Mary is not a basketball player, she would have been unlikely to initiate such a probe. Mary would not have elicited these data without her collaboration with Reuben. This level of contamination is unavoidable in collaborative fieldwork. We advocate for the separate writing of fieldnotes to minimize the extra contamination that exists when the ethnography team members talk about their joint field experience and then produce fieldnotes or when one or the other is charged with writing the notes. Separate writing allows each to recreate his or her reality without the influence of the other. It highlights the conflicts of meaning and positioning. Furthermore, it reinforces the understanding that others in the field, most notably the population being studied, also retain their own subconscious fieldnotes about the interaction.

NOTES

1. Pseudonyms are used for people and places to maintain subjects' anonymity.
2. The threat to community social organization that gang activity poses to many of the youths and adults in Groveland is documented elsewhere. See, for example, Pattillo-McCoy (1998, 1999) for discussions of how middle-class African Americans negotiate issues of crime when their neighborhoods are in close proximity to high-poverty areas.
3. The numbers in parentheses after the subsection headings (e.g., "What Reuben Saw (1)") correspond to the group of the other ethnographer's fieldnotes to which it should be compared. This is to help readers keep the segmented fieldnotes in sequential order. Words enclosed in brackets represent statements of clarification for the larger research team and the principal investigators. That is, the bracketed material was written as part of the original fieldnote entries.

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