



Me, Myself, and IE: describing the actualities of undertaking institutional ethnography

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Abstract

Through Institutional Ethnography (IE), one can explicate how people's lives are being socially organised. The ethnographer creates an empirical account of what happens within a complex of institutional order, moving iteratively between data collection methods to see how the 'institution' occurs through people's work, how texts are used to coordinate it, and how these texts reproduce ideology. They follow findings as they arise, with reference to the perspectives of 'standpoint informants'. However, because this process is iterative, descriptions of IE studies vary greatly. Guidance on how to undertake IE's methods is often specific to the institution being studied. To aid prospective ethnographers, the article describes a step-by-step process through which IE was interpreted and implemented in practice in a healthcare setting. Though it references research at an Opioid Substitution Treatment (OST) service, the account is not prescriptive; rather, it illustrates how one might undertake IE-informed data collection and analysis while being consistent with what is expected of an IE.

Keywords Institutional ethnography · Mapping · Opioid substitution treatment · Practical guidance · Qualitative methods · Disjunctures

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Introduction

Historically, opioid use has been problematised to serve various socio-political interests. In critical literature, treatment services for opioid use have been argued to create self-managing subjects who consume substances in ways that do not impede their ability to be productive (Niculescu 2012; Oksala 2013). Though I found this compelling, I began my inquiry (as the primary author and principal researcher) by wanting to query whether equivalent services in Aotearoa New Zealand might instead result from a varied set of intentions, only some of which are concerned with making substance users self-responsible (Prince et al. 2006). Supported by [names of chors], I thus sought to assess an Opioid Substitution Treatment (OST) service in the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, to understand various groups' conceptions of dependence, and how they were operationalised in the work at this institution. Operated by a multidisciplinary team of medical and allied health staff, these services provide substitute opioids (such as methadone or buprenorphine) to those diagnosed with an opioid dependency. To assess how it operated (and why it operated in this way), I used Dorothy Smith's Institutional Ethnography (IE) (Smith 2005).

When researching an 'institution' such as that of OST provision, IE allows one to observe how it operates day-to-day, the values and intentions that are at play as part of this, and how these are coordinated by texts. Increasingly, institutions rely on texts to standardise work across varied settings and by various individuals (Smith, 2006). Any project seeking to describe the apparent intent of an institution would be remiss to not include an assessment of the texts which organise it (McGibbon et al. 2021). However, despite the usefulness of IE for this type of research, guidance on how to actually undertake it is necessarily diverging. IE has evolved significantly since its inception (and has thus been interpreted in varying ways by its various practitioners), and published studies tend to report findings and processes that are specific to the given institution being described; IE follows an iterative process, making it difficult to define recommendations for conduct which might be applied when researching another institutional context (Comer 2023; Ion 2020; MacKinnon et al. 2021; Smith and Griffith 2022). While there are several papers detailing IEs of opioid-prescribing healthcare services, these generally focus on intimating research findings (Comer 2023). This paper, by referencing my recent IE research at an OST service, instead walks through, step-by-step, how I interpreted the various lineaments of IE, and applied these in practice through an iterative process, to illustrate how one might themselves undertake IE-informed research, regardless of their intended institutional context.

Coming to terms with IE

To contextualise how I developed my project, in this section, I briefly overview how IE directs one to approach the social world, and how this therefore set the parameters for my methods (which are described in the following section). IE explicates the translocal ruling relations (defined below) that govern informants within an institution (Smith 2005). One who adopts this methodology assesses how an institution



works, and how people within it have their work socially organised (through the aforementioned ruling relations). These values are accessed by considering how people within the institution interact with various texts, and how these texts are encoded with institutional interests (Smith 2005). Through my assessment of texts within the institution of OST, I moved from what I could observe at my site of research (an OST service in Aotearoa New Zealand), to seeing the ways this was organised by the ruling relations that pervade texts, and therefore this work, at these services. IE allowed me to observe an OST service and interview those within it, but to then (through analyses of texts and how they were interpreted and used) uncover what those people could not necessarily grasp about the institution as a whole from their own experiences (Smith and Griffith 2022). In doing so, I could describe how OST informs how those at the service have come to describe themselves, and in the case of the service users, their own opioid use. In the following passages, I will outline the key features of IE, as are relevant to the research of this kind.

Institutions

In her early work developing IE, Smith (1987) defined institutions as organised ruling apparatuses. They are complexes of institutional order constituted by multiple local settings representing “sites of interface between individuals and a vast network of relations, discourses, and work processes” (McCoy 1987, p. 105). An IE seeks to access these networks by assessing individuals’ locally situated activities within an institution and how they are organised by institutional texts (discussed explicitly in subsequent sections) (McCoy 1987; McKelvie 2019). In my research, the institution was OST treatment in Aotearoa New Zealand. This included the service, at which I, and most of my participants were situated, but it also accounted for the external health care and social service providers associated with specialist services by the 2014 OST practice guidelines in Aotearoa New Zealand (Ministry of Health 2014). More broadly, the institution was the sum of any activities and interactions that functioned to treat opioid use. It thus included the work of the policy makers who are tasked with creating the legislation that guides OST services.

Translocal ruling relations and ideology codes

The purpose of IE is to explicate ‘translocal ruling relations’ at an institution. Smith (1987) defines these as concerted sequences of social action that implicate individuals throughout an institution. They shape the socio-political contours of individuals’ experiences (McKelvie 2019). Translocal ruling relations insert institutional interests into individuals’ activities as said individuals interact with texts across different settings (hence ‘translocal’). They organise them through bureaucracy (Deveau 2009). Such bureaucratic order is taken for granted, as individuals enter its courses of action through engaging with texts, while the institution operates covertly (McKelvie 2019). In practical terms, McKelvie (2019) offers the example of a medical nurse, whereby their personal ethos – plus the needs of a service user in their care – may be overridden by a hospital’s (institutional) priority of a timely discharge. It is these ruling relations that IE seeks to explicate. My descriptions of translocal ruling relations within



OST had to account for the complex discursive tensions at play between people at various times, as opioid dependence was being constructed.

To do this, I was vigilant while interviewing and analysing texts for ideology codes. In her IE of nurse practice and translation of healthcare reform, Rankin (2004) showed that it was through these that her informants' work was accomplished in contexts increasingly known and managed abstractly. These codes – such as critical, unstable, and long-term care – were abstracted categorisations of patients that guided work. Each were theorised as entering into nurse's thinking, how they understood their work, and how they undertook their work. Rankin (2004) described ideology codes as schemas that would replicate their organisation in various sites within an institution. They appear in texts, which may be accessed in various sites across an institution, and infiltrate people's work as they engage with these texts. Subsequently, they come to structure how people describe their work and themselves across various sites. Individuals activate ideology by writing, reading, and acting on behalf of texts (McKelvie 2019). Accordingly, analyses of texts and how they were activated by those at the service became central to my IE – as were my informants' accounts, which were littered with noteworthy ideology codes (Campbell and Gregor 2002).

Texts

Within the scope of IE, texts are “the material forms of words, images, and sound that we can see, hear, and touch” (Turner 2006, p. 139). Two stipulations separate how texts are conceived through IE, compared to most other epistemologies (Smith and Turner 2014). First, texts must be replicable (Smith and Turner 2014). They must be reproduced so that individuals may access the same texts in different settings across the institution, or at different times (or both). This, according to (Smith 2006), organises these individuals, “hooking up an individual's consciousness into relations that are translocal” (p. 66). Texts are integral to how the institution is brought into being; when they are interpreted and then activated (read, seen, or heard and consequently interpreted then acted upon) through work, they mediate discourse and work and insert ruling relations into the consciousness of the reader through ideology codes.

Second, texts must be approached as occurring in the actualities of individuals' everyday lives, rather than abstracted objects of research that are separated from how they co-ordinate happenings within an institution (Smith and Turner 2014). Texts themselves have no agency; the organising of work is something the text could not accomplish without being activated by people (Dobson 2001). What is critical is how the text is encoded with various interests, and how this encoding affects work when informants interact with the text. By approaching texts in this manner, the ethnographer is able to see the institution in motion. A text may be assessed to see how it is constructed and encoded with various interests. It is then referenced in discussions with informants (through interviews), to see how they engage with the text, and how it informs their work. Texts are not assessed in abstraction from how they enter into, and coordinate work. Rather, the ethnographer is seeking to clarify how texts replicate ideological organisation in various sites within an institution, through various actors' work (Smith and Turner 2014).



The importance of work

IE positions participants as experts in the ordinary social processes through which they engage in their daily work (Ng et al. 2017). Within an IE, work refers to those activities that individuals consciously engage in with regularity (Ng et al. 2017). This broad definition stems from IE's feminist development, as Dorothy Smith sought to create a sociology which accounted for the work of women (during the 20th century) which was largely not otherwise acknowledged as being work (Smith 1987). However, this regularisation, to the worker, obscures the values and interests pervading the institution that are implicit in their own work (Smith 1987). Thus, while informants are positioned as experts regarding their own work, the ethnographer must use their accounts to eventually (through analyses of texts and how they are activated) move beyond what is locally observable. One assesses informants' work and the material conditions under which it occurs in their everyday lives to produce accounts capable of tracing the ruling relations that co-ordinate it (Campbell and Gregor 2002).

Standpoint informants and Extra-Local informants

This process begins in the accounts of one's standpoint informants. According to Smith (2006), these are the "small heroes at the bottom of a vast complex of socially organised knowledge". They are those perceived to be the most obviously affected by ruling relations at a given setting (p. 12). They are local to the setting at which the ethnographer begins. They are named standpoint informants, as the ethnographer uses their accounts to assume a standpoint early in the inquiry; a standpoint is a fulcrum from which to later look up through the institutional complex, discovering how the interests and work of these informants is being organised (Smith 2006). Standpoint informants are selected after the research has begun, as the ethnographer identifies social relations deemed worth exploring (Rankin 2017a). It quickly became clear through my initial observations of the service I attended, that the service users were the standpoint informants, though the development of this position shall be clarified in due course.

Whilst standpoint informants are considered experts regarding their interpretations of their own work, descriptions of their work are examined for any embedded contradictions, not accepted as somehow objectively true for all individuals within the organisation (Rankin 2017a). It is assumed too that the described experiences of those informants not occupying the standpoint location may be organised differently. These informants' knowledge (called extra-local informants) is contrasted to descriptions offered by standpoint informants, exposing the ruling relations that sustain these differences (refer to the below 'Disjunctures and the Problematic' section for further discussion of this) (Rankin 2017a). Extra-local informants are typically located in a different setting to the immediacy of the work of standpoint informants, whilst still discernibly affecting standpoint informants' daily lives and work (Bisaillon and Rankin 2013). Extra-local informants receive accounts of institutional work that subsume local happenings; the texts are encoded with certain interests, and these texts then translate work to extra-local settings which establish differences in knowledge



between the two groups regarding work undertaken. It is these differences (amongst many others, described below) which inform much of the analysis work in an IE.

Disjunctures and the problematic

IE describes these discrepancies between different ways of knowing as disjunctures (McKelvie 2019). Each disjuncture represents a chafing point, located where institutional knowledge of happenings (often offered by extra-local informants) intersects with standpoint informants' experiences of them (Melon 2012). A relevant disjuncture can be between material accounts, or discursive descriptions, or encodings in texts. For example, disjunctures may also occur between explanations provided by standpoint informants, and observations of actualities by the ethnographer (Benjamin and Rankin 2014).

A disjuncture may also be between what 'should' occur (as per the stipulations of some text) and what is seen to actually be occurring in people's work, or between standpoint informants' descriptions of themselves and their work, and descriptions of these people by extra-local informants (Smith and Griffith 2022). Regardless, their purpose is to offer clues regarding the ruling relations to be discovered. They allow the ethnographer to begin to uncover the socially constructed means by which differently located informants are organised, and why these differences exist (Melon 2012). Given this, as they are noted, they are useful to begin directing the early stages of the inquiry (as they can then be pursued through further data collection), but also, the key disjunctures can form the basis of the late-stage analysis, as the ethnographer seeks to understand how they are sustained across the institution, by the translocal ruling relations which are growing ever-clearer.

First though, one utilises disjunctures early in the inquiry to establish the research problematic. A problematic is neither a summary of early informants' experiences, nor a research question (Benjamin and Rankin 2014). Rather, it is the acknowledgement of disjunctures, so that the direction of investigation may be organised accordingly. It sets out the scope of the research and grounds it in the actualities of informants' experiences (Kearney et al. 2019). Early disjunctures may expose power differentials (for example), or in this research, socio-political power techniques, to then be assessed through further data collection. One might establish disjunctures between how standpoint informants describe themselves and their work, and how both of these are described in institutional texts early in the inquiry, to then guide subsequent interviews to understand how and why these discrepancies exist. The problematic then may only be formulated following immersion within the institution (Smith and Griffith 2022). In the following section, I detail how and why I undertook each method, to then later explain how I developed the research problematic for this project.



Collecting data and finding the problematic

To identify disjunctures, establish a problematic, and ultimately, explicate translocal ruling relations, IE generally involves some combination of observations, considering the roles of texts, and interviewing. In this section, I outline how I undertook process, with some reference to the limited guidance found elsewhere in reports of IE work. To briefly summarise the particularities of my study, across 12 months, I interviewed nine informants and observed their work at the service. I also assessed around 20 texts, to understand how these texts organised their work. Findings were organised into a map of the treatment institution; informants' work was connected by the texts that coordinated it. This map, and the findings that comprised it, were then analysed to describe the ideologies that permeated these texts, and how they affected informants' work and the construction of opioid dependence. What follows is a description of how I undertook each step of this process.

The practicalities of my observation work

The observation of work allows one to integrate “place, time” and “motion” into descriptions of the institution (Diamond 2006, p. 45). The place is the starting point on the analytic map (mapping is discussed in a data analysis section below); these are the local particularities observed that ground IE's inquiry. Informants' actual work may be analysed rather than (or as well as) objectified accounts of it. This experiential base (the ‘micro’) functions like an anchor for the ‘macro’ (the ruling relations); the ethnographer ultimately seeks to explain the everyday with these latter abstractions.

Diamond (2006) argues that observation helps to establish the research problematic, by focusing on informants' work in action. To do so, he recounts the complexity of the work being observed in his IE of nursing assistants, versus how it was otherwise documented (in assistants' medical charts for example) and spoken about by them. Informants' experiences were emotionally and physically demanding, yet this was suppressed in their accounts of it. Confirming whose work went unnoticed in textual accounts represented traces of the ruling relations that perpetuated this. The regularised nature of informants' work and language exposed traces of being conditioned by organisational texts (McKelvie 2019). Observation therefore acknowledged this previously ‘hidden’ work, where textual analyses could not (although this is not a flaw of IE's design). It is in these discrepancies between accounts (in this example) that Diamond's IE found its problematic.

My initial observations took place within staff meetings rooms to encounter how they talked about their work. I was also afforded opportunities to observe the service more generally though, to see how staff work differed (if at all) from their talk of it in meetings, and to also witness service users' work within the service. Across a 12-month period, I attended monthly operational and governance meetings, in which staff discussed the day-to-day translation of service guidelines into work, as well as their responsibilities given their roles.

My notes taken during these meetings were ‘indexed’ into the following categories: examples of potentially noteworthy ideology codes and practices, examples of work, texts (particularly service guidelines and SOPs), plus my personal reflections



on intangibles such as the atmosphere and tone of the meetings for broader context. Indexing (as a key process of IE) is explained subsequently, but for now, it is described as a way of extracting and organising into groups noteworthy information that I came across, for later analysis. I also noted any outstanding queries I had regarding what had been discussed during the meetings, to then follow these up in future interviews with staff. During these meetings, I was directed to various texts which I then sought out for analysis (such as Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) noted by staff). I also came across accounts of work and other noteworthy findings which I noted for discussion in interviews (such as mandatory, random urine drug screens, and the fallout of service users altering their own medication plans being described by a staff member as a “learning opportunity”). When I was able to see the rest of the service, I also noted its layout and built structure, who could go where (and who could not), and some of the work that was happening and who was involved.

Observation allowed me to contrast accounts of work from interviews, with how it actually seemed to be occurring, as I observed it. It was in disjunctures such as these (amongst others) that I began to access the ruling relations that sustain them (Balcom et al. 2021). I continued to visit the service for observations until I had also finished interviewing local informants. When interviewed, the institutional interests in their work may be obscured even to them through regularity (Ng et al. 2017). This method is therefore only valuable to IE when contextualised by other findings. Successful observation notes informants’ work, but through IE, one is concerned with *how* it ‘is there’, yet rendered invisible, requiring engagement with interviews and found texts.

The practicalities of my interviews

Early observations, and my initial engagements with service guidelines and SOPs, were used to form the initial research problematic while I interviewed my first group of (standpoint) informants – the service users. They were interviewed first, as much of the work of the institution sought to affect them. It quickly became evident that they were the standpoint participants, as I noted the various disjunctures between their accounts of what actually took place at the service, and how the service was supposedly ‘ought’ to run according to service guidelines. Subsequent interview plans and analyses of findings were completed, always with reference to these disjunctures, collecting data on accounts of work that, while not obviously involved with sustaining them, were nonetheless implicated with them by virtue of being subject to the same translocal ruling relations. These descriptions of disjunctures, provided the framework from which to later understand how all work was happening in the institution, while keeping my analyses grounded in my standpoint informants’ actual accounts.

Anyone who was in some way involved with (or affected) the work taking place at the service could be interviewed. I began with three service users as the standpoint informants, to glean how they described themselves and their work, and how this was informed by institutional texts (Melon 2012). I then progressed to interviewing three service staff, before moving on to interview three extra-local informants (two policy makers and one general practitioner). These later interviews were oriented around how their work was organised by textual sequences (defined subsequently); I sought



to explicate how the work of standpoint informants was being organised relative to extra-local informants by texts (DeVault and McCoy 2012). Though this was not my initial intention, I therefore undertook interviewing across three discrete phases, the inquiry in each being informed by the last. Given this, my interviews did not follow a standardised plan each time. Instead, as is typical in IE, procedures and directions for each were based on previous efforts (DeVault and McCoy 2012).

Each interview was around one hour in length. All of those with staff and service users took place at the service. The extra-local informant interviews took place via Zoom, an online communication platform. Before each meeting, I prepared a brief interview schedule. The focus of the schedule was informed by the last interview, although looking for texts and at how work is perceived was consistent throughout. I did approach the first interview with several general areas of interest, however. These were determined to some extent by my early observations, as well as my early encounters with texts (such as those of the service's SOPs), and the work I had undertaken to background my inquiry. For example, in my first interview, I asked my service user informant to reflect on several claims made in the national OST guidelines as to how the service should run (as compared to how they thought it was run), the sort of language staff were using to describe their use (as well as the language they were using to do the same), and whether they could identify any texts that were used by them or by staff when they visited the service. In subsequent interviews, I would also encourage informants to reflect on previous informants' accounts of work at the institution, as well as asking some of the same questions, to begin identifying disjunctures between accounts.

I transcribed each interview immediately after it was completed. After transcribing an interview, I indexed it (again, this process is covered in a later section) in a Microsoft Word document for relevant information. My transcriptions were indexed by the following categorisers: examples of ideology codes and practices in my informants' talk, examples of work at the institution, noteworthy texts described, my personal reflections on the interview, as well as generally interesting comments by my informant, and any outstanding queries I had based on what they said, which I wished to follow up in the next interviews. After indexing my transcription, I would then update my interviewing schedule to reflect my developing understanding of the institution, and to organise what I needed to be asking my next informants. Each interview provided insight into a point (that represents some regularised work process) along an extended relational sequence linked by texts – developing a map (discussed later) of the institutional process, which in turn created new questions to be addressed. This process of interviewing continued until I had accounts from people from various relevant settings within the institution, and had built a map of how their work was related by various textual sequences (that is, a description of how what they all did was organised by the same texts in different locations).

Though a comprehensive summary of my findings is beyond the scope of this piece, to give examples of what constituted noteworthy work, I noted my informants describing that service users had to consume their opioid doses under observation at the in-house pharmacy, and that they had to regularly meet with their caseworkers to measure their recovery progress. As data collection progressed, these became 'note-



worthy', as they were processes seen to be being organised by certain texts, and being undertaken to certain ends (such as the responsabilising of service users).

I also noted various ideology codes being used by informants, such as 'recovery', stability', and so on, each used in a variety of ways by different informants, but each reflecting a particular conception of opioid use, and those who used opioids. For example, 'stability', from the perspective of the staff, required service users to be self-managing when receiving treatment and to comply with the requirements of the service (such as offering up urine samples when required and not frequently requesting dose changes). Given that 'stability' affected the number of doses one could request to consume off-site (which was generally a preference of service users), how it was constructed and utilised informed work, as it could be used to manage service users. Interviewing also allowed me to identify disjunctures between work and texts, and different informants' accounts of work; for example, I noted gaps between what the service (through its guidelines and SOPs) claimed it provided, versus what it actually provided, and numerous inconsistencies in accounts regarding whether or not service users should (or could) be made responsible in managing their opioid use by the service.

The practicalities of how I analysed texts and how they were activated

After my initial observations, and each phase of interviewing, I was directed to various texts which I then sought out for analysis. Foremost, the materiality of texts was assessed, to understand how the way they were encoded affected work. To do this, using a Microsoft Excel file, texts were indexed by the following categorisers, and for each, I queried where it was found, what information it was being used to record (if any), how it was worded, whether any examples of work were mentioned within it, in what ways it could reduce and objectify the actualities of informants (if it was used to collect information about work), and so on.

I was interested in the way the text was constructed, and the values and interests implicit in this. I was also looking at who used the text and where it could be found (its replicability) to see how it might be accessed by a variety of informants. Importantly though, I had to give evidence through my informants' accounts of how these texts directly organised work, to show how these values and interests pervaded what happened at the institution across various sites. To access this mediation between textual realities, ruling relations, and the construction of knowledge and work, I sought to uncover textual sequences. These were sequences which either involved texts where the sequence may be easily identified (through interviewing those amending the text and those that do work on its behalf), but also sequences including texts where interviewing informants about it was not possible – where I examined for traces of the institution in the text itself while considering what it might have projected into the work it could organise (de Montigny, 2017; Smith and Turner 2014).

By paying attention to how a text was interpreted, amended, and sent to the next local setting; as well as to the work individuals undertook on behalf of it, I brought into view 'text-act-text sequences' (or 'act-text-act' sequences) which are pre-determined by institutional processes (de Montigny, 2017). This generally occurred with more readily replicable texts that informants access and amend day-to-day, as



opposed to national guidelines. de Montigny (2017) states that these “instances of textual work connect particular and local occasions to seemingly transcendent institutional order” (p. 342). For example, work occurred (an act), a text was amended to document this work (a text) – objectifying it in certain ways, then other work was done based on what has been noted in the text (act). The text was then assessed to see how it was encoded, and how this objectified work. I met with individuals to discuss their work, uncover any relevant texts pertaining to it, then meet with those who are identified as eventual recipients of these texts. The disjunctures between the two accounts marked how local accounts of work were reduced and standardised by the constraints of the form (or any text): its structure recoding and filtering actualities in line with institutional interests that informed it. Ruling relations were then later explicated through this process, in analysing how the text systematically shaped informants’ accounts of work and to what end.

Of the texts that I encountered, some later aided in developing the problematic. For example, in the service waiting room, staff would use a notice board to share their responses to service users’ feedback about treatment provision. These were littered with ideology codes, but also disjunctures between service users’ accounts of what ‘should’ happen in their complaints, versus staff’s responses to these. Others, such as the SOPs, were considered as they outlined how work ‘ought’ to take place (therefore forming one half of a potential disjuncture). These were included so that an idealised map of the institution could be built; how work should take place was made clear in these SOPs, and disjunctures between these texts and how work actually happens could then later be assessed. Some though, such as the ‘*My Recovery Action Plan*’ text, were only brought to my attention after phase one, but were seen to be directly organising work. This text was used during meetings between service users and their case worker, and guided the ‘recovery’ process. The form objectified the actualities of service users’ accounts of their opioid use and measured ‘recovery’ progress, between meetings. Through its encoding, it was identified as a responsabilising tool, which directed service users to be self-managing regarding their use, but also their broader life circumstances.

Bringing the institution into view: indexing and mapping

To prepare my data for analysis, I concurrently undertook indexing and mapping (Turner 2006). In short, though observing, interviewing, and analysing texts allowed for entry into the ruling relations, these processes facilitated their explication.

Indexing

To begin compiling data within an IE, Rankin (2017b) suggests indexing. Indexing, distinct from thematic analysis, enables one to discover linked practices in an institution. IE requires the ethnographer to preserve actualities of informants’ accounts; developing themes that are abstracted from the data is therefore inappropriate. One instead links data through various index headings, each related to an overarching



work process of note, though I also indexed examples of texts and ideology codes, as these were particularly critical in my project.

For example, one text in the described study was a document displaying staff's written responses to various service user complaints about the service's operations. This text, given its placement in an area all visiting service users would see it, could function to quash potentially challenging rhetoric, such as that government policy has, in the words of service users, "lied so much" and "is not trustworthy at all", while also challenging their claims that specialist OST services should be expected to "offer a daily drug supply", and "be open 24/7" by reiterating that "money and staff availability" do not allow for this. The text was indexed accordingly, as were several ideology codes included within it, so that future interviews could be oriented around them. Examples of such codes included staff's use of 'evidence-based' (to justify the service's work), and 'dependence' (positioned as a necessary requisite, whatever it might look like, for admission to the service), for example.

As has been mentioned previously, indexing happened in a Microsoft Excel file. Accounts of all activities relating to a noteworthy work process were indexed together, as they were performed by a certain group of informants; texts relating to this work are added also. The overall inquiry relies on exposing disjunctures between knowledge of work (as described in texts for example) and work itself. Building substantive accounts of the actualities of some form of work and its associated texts within an index aided this. At all times, analysis was therefore grounded in certain informants' practices; the disjunctures, not thematic similarities were the objects of interest. Each work index was analogous to a point on a map (explained below) of the institution; each index or work process is itself connected through the ruling relations mediated by texts. Indexing was thus the first step to accessing these, to building up a picture of how they organised individuals within an institution.

Mapping

Turner (2006) advocates for indices of work processes to be mapped, each a single point on it. My informants' work at each index was linked by texts (also indexed and mapped) as they engaged with them at different points in certain textual sequences. Once the map was built, work was shown to be part of an extended dialogic chain of textual interactions. Mapping allowed me to read back the organisation (as it is realised through the activation of texts) into work at local settings. For IE, texts coordinate work to produce the institutional interests'; individuals' consciousnesses are informed by these. Mapping moved my analysis from the micro (a single index at a single setting), to the macro (translocal ruling relations and how they organise the micro).

While in my analysis, I adopted several angles of interpretation to reflect on the complexities of my findings, doing so with reference to my map allowed for my argument to be substantiated by informants' accounts, and based in their actualities, working from the standpoint at all times (Turner 2006, p. 139). Claims regarding how the institution of OST acted upon (through treatment), and reproduced understandings of opioid dependence could therefore be substantiated by (amongst other things) referencing how texts reflect socio-political interests, how the service building itself



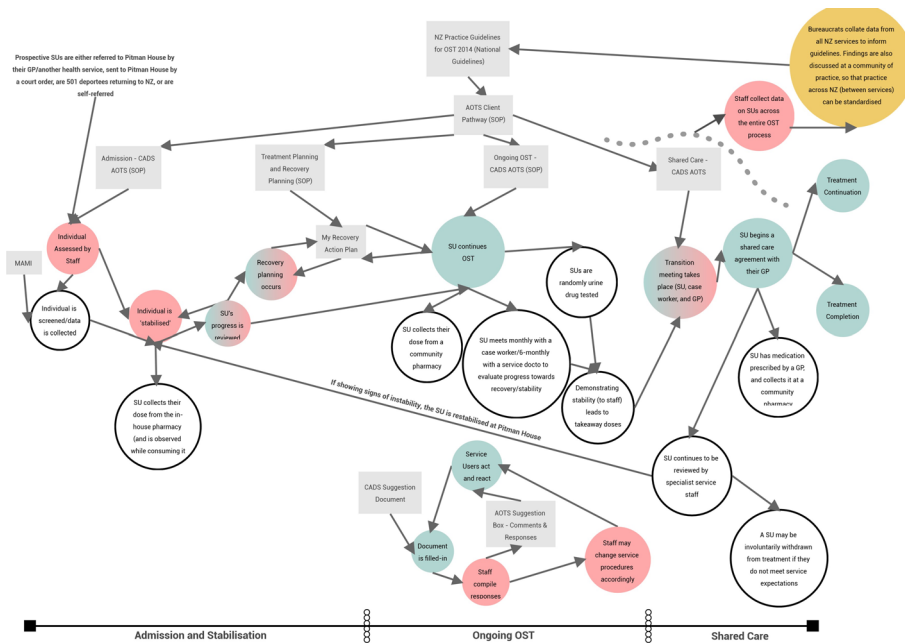


Fig. 1 The Idealised Institution

informs this, and how individual informants understand opioid dependence and their role in the institution because of this.

Crucially though, the map that one produces is ‘a’ map of an institution, not ‘the’ map of the institution. It represents only the sum of the ethnographer’s encounters with texts and informants. It is not representative. Had I interviewed a different set of informants, my final map would likely have looked different. My aim though was not to argue that texts organise work in one manner, all of the time; nor was it to argue that the institution is one, knowable monolith which consistently manages service users to a particular end. Rather, it was to show how I uncovered examples of various texts organising work in a variety of complex manners. Mapping my findings was merely a means of moving from scrutinising individual examples of work and texts, to visualising how both were related, so that I could then assess how and why they related to each other as they did; to see how work was textually mediated, and how texts were amended based on work. Mapping was a way of moving my analysis from the local (what was observed at the service), to the institutional, to begin to assess the socio-political values that pervaded texts, and how they organised the work that I encountered.

In Fig. 1 below, I provide a visualisation of the ‘idealised’ institution that I created after my initial engagements with service texts and informants. Though within IE, mapping ultimately charts how work is actually textually mediated, I have here included a figure which depicts the official, expected flow of service delivery, to clarify for the prospective IER how one then might uncover disjunctures in relation to this idealised account of work that ‘should’ be happening, to eventually build their



finalised map (Rankin 2017b; Turner 2006). In Fig. 1, texts are represented by boxes, whereas work is represented by circles. Blue circles denote work expected to be undertaken by service users (who are referred to as SU/SUs in this map), red circles denote work expected of staff, blue and red circles represent work that should be undertaken by both, and the yellow circle represents work that should be undertaken by extra-local informants (those working outside of the service). There are also clear circles, which are sub-processes of work; they are undertaken as part of a broader work process. Arrows can be taken to mean ‘informs’, or ‘leads to’. For example, the *CADS – Medical Assessment AMS Detox (MAMI)* text is written to inform how an individual is screened by service staff for admission to the service. To give another example, a service user continuing OST generally informs certain sub-processes of work. Also, certain work is required before other work takes place; a service user must be assessed and admitted to the service by staff before they are ‘stabilised’.

Note too, the textual hierarchy, whereby the national guidelines affect how SOPs are written and utilised, those SOPs affect how texts such as *‘My Recovery Action Plan’* are written, and those texts then are expected to organise work. Finally, the map is roughly organised in line with the expected treatment trajectory of a service user. From left to right, the first examples of work and texts relate to the admission and (physiological) stabilisation phase which occurs at the start of treatment. In the middle of the map, all work and texts shown are part of the ‘ongoing OST’ phase (which should begin after service users are adjudged to be stable). At the right is the shared care phase (whereby their treatment becomes primarily managed by their General Practitioner).

In short, the figure details an idealised summary of work at the institution. This is also reflected in the examples of work and texts that were chosen as I created it. It does not account for disjunctures, or instances where my informants noted that work described in texts is not necessarily undertaken regularly. It represents what ‘should’ be done, according to institutional texts. This was then used to reflect on disjunctures for analysis. After the inclusion of the figure below, I wish to draw your attention to one particular text-act-text sequence that was made visible through this stage of mapping.

Surrounding the *‘My Recovery Action Plan’* text (as has been described), is the ‘recovery loop’ text-act-text sequence. The text is encoded with responsabilising expectations for service users, but also, particular constructions of recovery and stability. It is used at case meetings (or at least SOPs stipulate that it should be), to inform service users’ work pertaining to their opioid use. Their work then follows on from this (as did their talk of themselves in interviews, as being self-responsible), until they have their next meeting again at the service. At this time, the plan is then amended to track the service user’s progress, and plan out further goals. The particular formulation of this text, how it directed work (and how it did not), and what this text betrayed about translocal ruling relations within the institution were key to the subsequent analysis, but are largely out of the scope of this piece. This sequence is noted here, only to justify the usefulness of mapping as an analytic process, as disjunctures are subsequently found (generally, through interviewing) between what ‘ought’ to happen, and the work actually being described in informants’ accounts.



Ultimately, mapping the institution shows how material forms, such as texts, coordinate work and informants' accounts of their work. Texts can be seen to both coordinate work (and sometimes, fail to coordinate work), but also themselves be amended because of work (such as when staff fill in certain forms or update service user case files), with translocal ruling relations organising each part of these processes (Smith 2006). This allows my analysis to reach beyond what I could observe locally, to describing how these translocal ruling relations pervaded work and conceptions of opioid use through texts. This then frames my analysis; though I sought to describe dominant ideology (through ideology codes), and the specific power techniques (in the form of identified work) and how they organised service users, my analysis was therefore always grounded in the actualities of my informants' accounts and my observations of their work.

Analysing the mapped institution

In earlier sections, I briefly detailed the early disjunctures as I encountered them within my inquiry. Often, these were between what informants said about work and the institution, and texts' stipulations of how both 'should' be occurring. These disjunctures were noted to explain how I progressed through interviewing and how my inquiry was developing to explore these disjunctures. Through this progression, I created my map of the institution. Critically though, I was creating a map of the idealised institution; it was constituted by work that 'should' be undertaken, as according to guidelines, and so on. My analysis, however, had to then assess the disjunctures that had been identified along the way. It had to ask how the idealised view of work within the institution differed from informants' accounts of it, and my observations of it, and also, to analyse the disjunctures between understandings of opioid dependence (and any associated ideology codes) amongst informants to assess the institution, as its constitution is what sustains these disjunctures in understandings. The result was not an appraisal of the service I observed, or any OST service, but an empirical account of how dependence can be negotiated through work, texts, and talk at a treatment service in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In short, though the importance of responsabilisation, and the influence of medicalisation were regularly noted in my informants' accounts of opioid dependence (as they talked about 'recovery' as becoming self-managing, and 'addiction' as being 'chaotic'), and the work undertaken to address it, what constituted dependence manifested in a variety of ways in my informants' talk. Given this, my analysis would have been remiss to not have acknowledged how this uneven utilisation, and the multiplicity of socio-political values embedded in understandings of 'opioid dependence' (and its equivalents) were leveraged in different scenarios throughout the institution to some end.

Confirming previous claims (in Foucauldian studies of equivalent services), from institutional texts to the talk of some of the research informants, successful recovery required individuals to become self-responsible (Niculescu 2012; Oksala 2013). Service users were described by staff as being 'chaotic' before presenting to the service, and recovery was described, by staff and in texts, as requiring individuals to maintain



employment and to manage their treatment. Accordingly, service users were expected to collect their opioid doses within a narrow time window and were made accountable for their own recovery.

However, though dominant, responsabilising modes of constructing opioid dependence and recovery were identified (as translocating relations, particularly in staff's talk and service guidelines), these manifested in myriad complex and conflicting ways, as were identified through various disjunctures. Analytical focus on these disjunctures allowed my project to draw from – but also occasionally move beyond – others' devoutly Foucauldian descriptions of OST services (Niculescu 2012; Oksala 2013). How service users described themselves and their opioid use was equally varied, but was also a product of opportunistic utilisation by this group. It was thus argued that there was evidence of a complex performativity of dependence amongst the informants. Service users constructed themselves and their dependence in relation to the expectations of the service, but also in resistance to these, despite the seeming intent of the treatment institution.

Conclusion

As I researched the institution of OST, IE structured the observation of how it operated day-to-day, the values and intentions that guided this, and how these were informed by 'the institution' (through texts). It allowed for the explication of how people's understandings of opioid dependence (and their associated work) was organised by socio-political interests through the texts that they activated to mediate this. However, despite IE's usefulness for assessing institutions, its iterative nature makes it difficult to create practical guidance on how one should actually undertake it. To address this, this article has described the methods of data collection and analysis which are routinely used within IE, but also, how one might use them to assess an institution. This article has documented each stage of an IE study, from engaging with IE literature, to developing a toolkit of various methods, to indexing and mapping, and finally, interpreting results in a way which is methodologically coherent. Though the specifics of my methods may not translate to others' future IE work, given this iterative (and therefore institution specific) nature of undertaking IE, here, I have outlined how anyone might undertake an IE of an institution in a way which is consistent with its ontology and epistemology.

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