

“I Grew Up a Working-Class Evangelical”: Lived Experience, Intersubjectivity, and Ethnography

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Abstract

This article explores three ways intersubjectivity is implicated in an ethnography of the lived experience of members of an interfaith and labor coalition. First challenging dualistic thinking and the strict application of typologies, I emphasize the importance of understanding faith practices through the study of lived experience. When one studies lived experience, several layers of intersubjectivity are at play. Because I grew up in a religious, working-class family, aspects of my life now serve as cultural capital in understanding the daily challenges of coalition participants who redefine the institutional boundaries between religion and work. Furthermore, field interactions between the researcher and participants affect members' explanations of their activism. Finally, the life of the ethnographer is affected by the overall experience of fieldwork.

Keywords

ethnography, everyday life, intersubjectivity, lived experience, lived religion

The project on which this present discussion draws asks how understanding work as sacred and embracing a view of religion as concerned with social justice enlivens and deepens sociological understandings of religion. The project locates religious experiences within the everyday lives of practitioners as they go to work, spend time with their families, and care for others in their communities. I investigate these dimensions by illuminating areas of social life in which the boundaries of the sacred and the secular are being pushed and negotiated through interfaith labor activism.

Interfaith Worker Justice of Greater Kansas City (IWJ-GKC), at the time of the study, was a diverse coalition of religious practitioners and labor union members that mobilized to promote worker justice. They worked to fight economic, racial, and gender inequalities through the support of unionization, fair wages, keeping immigrant families united, and equal access to health care and jobs. Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ)—the national organization located in Chicago of which IWJ-GKC became an affiliate—is currently focused on mobilizing congregation-based and interfaith coalitions for the fight against economic inequality. At the local level, activists are challenged by the effort to push the cultures of their faith communities from mercy and service work to cultures focused on activism based on a moral responsibility to principles of human rights and social justice.

In this work, I not only look to understand lived religion but also how lived religion interplays with lived labor activism and class in everyday experiences. IWJ-GKC participants claimed work and activism as realms of the sacred, imbued with religious meaning and inhabited by forms of

religious practice. By organizing low-wage workers, meeting with union and company representatives, passing out fliers, and raising a billboard on I-70 which read “Love the Immigrant as Yourself,” members of IWJ-GKC engaged practices that are at the same time religious as they are political and oriented toward class consciousness. In so doing, they not only engaged forms of religious practice that carried into everyday lived experience, through their struggles and interactions they built new varieties of institutional ties, thereby transforming the American religious scene.

The present article is not about the ethnography and its findings. Rather, it is a reflection on the experience of doing the ethnography and treats the research process and its results as the media through which to consider important theoretical and conceptual positionings. I draw on my experiences of studying lived religion to explore three levels of intersubjectivity implicated in the process of doing research with religious persons who view religious—and other institutional—boundaries as permeable. When entering the field, the ethnographer's past, present, and future are implicated in the relationships one develops with research participants and subsequently affect the kinds of data gathered. In lived reality—that which treats the researcher as a part of the lived experiences of others—the lives of the researcher and the researched become intricately

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intertwined, especially in ethnographic projects (Neitz, 2002). While it is possible to use aspects of one's own lived experience to understand and engage others, the lived experiences of the researcher can also serve as the media through which people of faith daily negotiate their own forms of religious practice. In taking these processes and interactions seriously, the lived reality of the ethnographer himself or herself may be changed. These intersubjective processes are illustrated below by connections to the ethnographic experience and the resultant data derived from my study with IWJ-GKC.

First, however, to contextualize the significance of intersubjectivity in the research process, I briefly discuss the limitations of dualistic thinking and the application of rigid typologies. Viewing ethnographic work through the lens of intersubjectivity challenges these ways of categorizing the social world, and thereby the ethnographer gets closer to the lived experience of research participants. This closeness to lived experience, through the interactive intersections of intersubjectivity, provides a deeper look into the ways culture and structure penetrate human lives through their everyday practice.

Literature Review

Deposing Dualisms

The explanatory power of studying from the perspective of lived experience means that all human action can be viewed without the risk of dismissal through the use of categories rooted in the biases of classical Western philosophy and social science. Much of this dismissal is due to dualistic thinking which placed "reason" in the realm of the "mind" and therefore it transcended lived experiences (Alcoff, 2000). Similarly, much of classical sociology was based on this dualism and therefore pitted the "subjective" against the "objective." Because lived experience was viewed as a matter of the body—and not reason—"experiential qualities [were submerged] in the psyche [and] sociology has tended to argue that explorations of experience cannot be based on empirical evidence, only 'on nondemonstrable intuitions about the "inner" content of mental states'" (Ostrow, 1990, p. 5).

Alcoff (2000) points out that the "mind-body dualism" which permeates Western thinking can be traced "as far back as Plato"; this dualism assumed that lived experience rested in the body—primarily experienced by women—whereas reason—primarily belonging to men—inhabited the mind (p. 41). Alcoff argues simply moving women into the realm of the mind while maintaining the mind-body dualism is not the solution because this move effectively disregards the lived experiences that are central to human life and maintains the masculinist notion that mind and body are always separate. What we need, instead, is to bring theory and experience closer together, understanding that theory—also discourse—and experience are "imperfectly aligned, with

locations of disjuncture" (Alcoff, 2000, p. 47). Weber understood this, as Ostrow (1990) argues. Even while proposing ideal types, Weber emphasized the importance of understanding lived experience through his concept *Verstehen*. From Weber's perspective, this understanding of lived experience was "an absolute prerequisite for the articulation of social structure" (Ostrow, 1990, p. 6).

Deposing Typologies

By emphasizing the intersubjective nature of social life and the importance of investigating lived experience, typologies—rigidly applied—become problematic. While, as Jackson (1998) asserts, any individual "universalizes and objectifies his or her epoch . . . the singular *I* cannot be reduced to this otherness"; through lived experience, an individual subjects "objective" forms—such as class, gender, race, and history—to her "will" (p. 8). Furthermore, "though individuals speak, act, and work toward belonging in a world of others, they simultaneously strive to experience themselves as world makers" (Jackson, 1998, p. 8). This kind of explanation of the experience of "existence" raises the question of how, as social scientists, we use typologies.

In *Tricks of the Trade*, one of Becker's (1998) "tricks" is to turn "types" of people into "activities" (p. 44). Jackson (1998), like Becker, argues that in many ways, reducing individuals to objective categories devalues them as human beings. By imposing rigid typologies on persons we observe and study, we run the risk of devaluing them and rendering their lived experiences insignificant. Munson (2007) brings this insight into the study of lived religion by suggesting that researchers pay attention to the "polysemy" of social life to notice that "religious beliefs, rituals, experiences, and expectations overlap other domains of life. But why is this important?" (p. 127). He argues that "the polysemy of social situations . . . is a key concept in understanding social change" (p. 128). Viewing social action in this way challenges rigid understandings of "types."

Seating Lived Experience: Lived Religion and Intersubjectivity

Emphasizing lived experience as analytically important means that we gain a better understanding of how religious practitioners live their faiths and consequently, also gain a fuller knowledge of religion in society. First, what constitutes "religious experience"? Nelson (1997) asserts that religion "is a way of experiencing the world" (p. 5). Religious experiences are, first, those experiences *described as* religious by people who live them (Nelson, 1997, p. 7). Nelson (1997) argues further that all experiences, "no matter how ordinary or mundane," can be considered religious experiences if the practitioner describes them as such (p. 8). Callahan (2008) likewise points out that the significance of everyday life is frequently dismissed in studying religion for

the very fact that it is “mundane”; this dismissal is based on dualistic thinking which places lived experience in the realm of the “profane” while that which is considered extraordinary—or religious—is purely “sacred” (p. 9). However, religion is lived through daily experiences and by focusing on these experiences, scholars necessarily depose dualities and typologies. Moving away from dualities and rigid applications of religious types involves intersubjective processes and expands understandings of the workings of religions.

Because individuals construct faith through interactions with religious histories and with religious others (Bender & Cadge, 2006), intersubjectivity becomes a significant component to understanding lived religion. Alcoff (2000) points out that lived experience and intersubjectivity go hand-in-hand. Furthermore, because we always exist *in the world rather than separate from the world*, “lived experience is open-ended, plural, fragmented, and shifting not because of the limitations of language, but because of the nature of embodied, temporal existence” (p. 49).

This assertion does not mean that history and culture are ignored; rather, they are a part of the inhabited world which is lived through embodiment and the inseparability of reason and experience. Furthermore, structure is revealed, “Neither in the hidden recesses of the psyche nor in the transpersonal field of history and culture, but in the forms of encounter, interaction, exchange, and dialogue of everyday life” (Jackson, 1998, p. 207).

It is in this way that Alcoff (2000)—drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s work—brings theory and discourse closer to lived experience. Experience can therefore be treated as worthy of analysis because by erasing the mind–body dualism, we also accept that understanding *subjective* realities and experiences is as analytically significant as “objective” categorization.¹ Intersubjectivity—the notion that what is significant about social life is that it is only made meaningful through the mutual, embodied experiences of the world²—is central to the study of lived experience, and therefore lived religion because, to go back to Nelson (1997), religion is more than a set of doctrines and institutions; it is a way of experiencing the world.

Robert Orsi (2003) points out that intersubjectivity is central to the study of lived religion on two levels: “First, it recognizes the intersubjective nature of individual, social, cultural, and religious identities and indeed of reality itself” (p. 174). This means that to understand how faith is lived by contemporary persons and how the resources of faith communities are brought closer to lived experience, a project must be situated within the corridors of daily life (Ammerman, 2007; Bender, 2003; Bender & Cadge, 2006; Orsi, 1997). Similarly applied to lived class, Fantasia (1988) points out that within a capitalist system, the overall structure is set up in such a way as to discourage workers from organizing. Therefore,

To understand the dynamics of worker mobilization and collective action, it is necessary to peer into the interstices of the

routinized collective bargaining system, where, in order to realize their collective power against a wall of opposition, workers are often forced to act independently of that system. (p. 72)

This first level of intersubjectivity points to the importance of investigating lived experience whether studying religion, labor activism, or some combination of the two.

A second way intersubjectivity is central to studies of lived religion and lived class is by recognizing “the intersubjective nature of research and religion” (Orsi, 2003, p. 174). Likewise, Jackson (1998) argues, “Some part of the ethnographer’s own life experience always forms the basis for approaching the other, just as the other must see something of himself or herself in the ethnographer’s actions, reactions, and comportment” (p. 109); there is never “complete overlap” but there has to “be *some* recognition of common identity if any kind of interaction—self-interested *or* otherwise—is to proceed” (p. 109).

Method

Between the fall of 2005 and the spring of 2008, I attended monthly meetings of the general membership of IWJ-GKC and meetings of the governing board and action committees, along with fundraising events, rallies, religious services at members’ congregations, and group retreats. On these occasions, I kept detailed notes in the moment as circumstances allowed. At other times, such as during rallies or pickets when my physical presence was centered in the experience, I voice recorded reflections immediately following the events and wrote field notes later.

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with active members, had numerous conversations while in the field, and had several telephone and email discussions. By the end of the study, I was able to interview 10 core members in depth. I used a non-rigid set of open interview questions to get at core concepts and ideas, particularly related to the meanings of faith in everyday experience. During the interviews, respondents told life and faith history narratives in the ways they understood them. I used my interview schedule to prompt interviewees to reflect on specific topics throughout our conversations. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed word-for-word. Furthermore, my fieldwork and interviews were supplemented with national and local news media resources to fill in and elaborate contextual details. Overall, I found useful source material from media resources from Kansas City, the state of Missouri, and national sources.

Because I worked with a variety of data, I also used a variety of techniques to make sense of the data. I used a combination of deductive and inductive coding (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) to organize the data. My coding was partially deductive (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999), in that some codes came from the research questions that were informed by the literature especially that which related to lived

religion as described above. However, other codes were formed inductively, in that I looked for items, patterns, and structures in the data (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Finally, throughout the coding process, following the advice of LeCompte and Schensul (1999), I constantly referred back to the research questions and the working outline of my project to “check” that the coding process was not proceeding circuitously.

Recognizing that my overall ethnographic work with its focus on lived religion relates to Orsi’s initial level of intersubjectivity as described above, I move forward to expand upon Orsi’s three-tiered, second-level of intersubjectivity. I first discuss how the intersubjective nature of research and religion implicated aspects of my (past–present) working-class, (past) evangelical identity and how they surprisingly became media through which relationships formed and through which I engaged the worlds of IWJ-GKC members. Second, I elaborate ways in which my lived experiences not only helped in the formation of trusting relationships in the field, they also fed back into IWJ-GKC members’ interpretations of their own religious realities. Recognizing the dialectical nature of relationships, I conclude by discussing how my fieldwork was in dialogue with aspects of my lived reality outside of the field.

Intersubjectivity: Biography as Capital in the Field

The title of this article speaks from two past locations intersubjectively woven into my research. In the good, old evangelical tradition of giving testimony I stake out claim to a portion of my past implicated in researching an interfaith coalition. As an evangelical, I was taught what “real religion” looks like. As an academic, I have been seeking to understand what religion looks like in everyday life in the context of the United States. The two are not incompatible.

Respecting people of faith also comes from my upbringing. It was this respect that fostered openness to understanding a complicated and complex relationship between religious institutions and labor organizations throughout U.S. labor history. It is also a position that does not view all religion as incompatible with ideals of equality and justice. As a person once committed to a particular brand of faith, I have always known that religion happens not only in the obvious places and in evident ways; rather, much of what counts as faith practice to the faithful “cannot be neatly separated from the other practices of everyday life, from the ways that human beings work on the landscape” (Orsi, 1997, p. 7).

When I first started to engage the group by attending monthly meetings, exchanging emails and phone calls, one of the first questions asked of me was whether I am a person of faith. I wanted to explain briefly my religious history because there was initially a little tension over my role as an academic researcher. Growing up in a faith context meant to participants that I could at least “get” a portion of what they

were talking about. Interestingly, several people were excited that *as a past evangelical* I had come to be interested in social justice because they were looking to extend and diversify the religious base of the organization. They thought that maybe I could offer some insights into how to frame issues to appeal to that crowd.

The title of this article is derived from a second location based on a proclamation of class identity through class consciousness. This class location invokes memories of picket lines, United Automobile Workers (UAW) banners, and union halls amidst the factory-dotted landscape in Flint, Michigan. This is not an uncomplicated identity. Because I have completed a PhD, I recognize the emergent difficulty of any longer locating myself within the working class. But, as cultural studies scholar Andy Medhurst (2000) notes, “My own class history is central to my understanding of how culture works, and it would be disingenuous to pretend otherwise” (p. 21). Reflections on the sometimes thorny paths traveled by working-class kids transitioning into the academic world are not new (e.g., Mahony & Zmroczek, 1997; Munt, 2000; Williams, 1979). However, my encounter with class and class-ist dialogues within the university setting suggests the need for further reflections on the ways class-oriented assumptions are made within the very structure of academic departments. Class is just as much about cultural practices, performances, languages, and ideologies as it is about occupation and materiality. Personal accounts of experiencing an in-between class identity do not always attest to the liberatory quality of fluidity and multiplicity. As Medhurst (2000) points out, “Those triumphalist celebrations of fluidity always overlook the fact that being unfixed, mobile, in-between, can distress as much as it liberates. So my sense of class identity is uncertain, torn and oscillating—caught on a cultural cusp” (p. 20).

Before doing fieldwork, I knew that there was something a little more difficult about my trek through the academy in comparison with some of my colleagues. As such, I was not naive about my class location; rather, it did not bubble to the surface until my conversations in the field with working-class women and men disentangled the piece of my identity I had been hammering away at for several years through what we call “professional socialization.” In the field, that occasional roadblock to academic success has become a form of currency. Working-class culture is rarely viewed as cultural capital. Its exchange value is devalued next to the pieces of culture held and cultivated by the rapidly shrinking middle-to-upper middle class in the United States. For the first time, it did not count against me that my dad worked for General Motors (GM) or that my mom moved in and out of jobs for most of my life. No longer just “the university student here to study us,” I came to be seen as an active, supporting member of an interfaith and labor coalition fighting for worker justice.

What came as a greater surprise was how class came to be the most important role played in becoming accepted as

more of an insider. For about 6 months, I attended meetings and events. In the fall of 2006, a fundraiser was held for one of IWJ-GKC's primary programs "Building Bridges." This is a training program for low-income, minority women and men to gain the necessary skills to be able to pass the initial exams required for entering the building and trades professions. I sat at a table with seven active members of the group and over dinner, they began to ask me about my life: where I grew up, what my parents did, and so on. When I started to talk about Flint, one of the women said, "Well, then. You *do* get it! You know what we're talking about."

Once my class location was "exposed," people began to talk to me differently. They shared their stories more openly. They came to care about me as one of their own. My identity—person of faith/working class—is what made the project make sense. It explained why I was there. Being able to place me comfortably within a narrative construction of how I came to be interested in labor and religion, my presence at events and meetings became more "natural." I was later asked to tell my story to new members of the group who entered about 1 year later, so that they too could understand why I was there. For once, growing up in Flint, Michigan, did not count against me.

Intersubjectivity: The Interview Context and the Co-Construction of Religious Realities

I secondly describe a way in which a lived experience in the preliminary stages of my research influenced how two members of IWJ-GKC interpreted their roles as religious persons in the fight for worker justice. If, as researchers, we recognize that interviews are "reality-constructing, meaning-making occasions" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 4), it is also important to point out that the meanings constructed within the context of interviews can also become available in other life-contexts. In keeping with my position that institutional boundaries are fluid, some interview contexts become locations in which respondents can work out interpretations and meanings of their own social actions and subsequently utilize these meanings in other contexts. In the interview, religious and other realities can be co-constructed because of the intersubjective nature of social life.

Before discovering IWJ-GKC, I conducted an exploratory interview in St. Louis, Missouri, with an Episcopal minister active in the coalition Jobs with Justice. She characterized her work in the labor movement as moving beyond mercy and service work and moving into activism. Mercy work is what she said most clergy and lay people are comfortable doing: collecting food for the food pantry, visiting the sick and the elderly, working in a soup kitchen. She said, "Sure this work is important, but God calls us to enact justice in this world and therefore activism must be a part of our faith."

After having spent several months with IWJ-GKC, I started to schedule interviews. In those interviews, I used the

minister's story to elicit reflections from IWJ-GKC members on how they characterize their justice work. Interestingly, this minister's story had an influence on two of my respondents' conceptions of their justice work. A couple weeks after the interview in which I used this story, the phrase—from mercy to activism—surfaced at a monthly meeting of the general membership during the opening "reflection" conducted by a woman I had just interviewed. She intermingled this characterization of their justice work with a call to action on increasing the minimum wage in the state of Missouri. I had not previously heard this characterization used in the context of an IWJ-GKC meeting.

Earlier in the summer of 2007, I interviewed a retired United Methodist minister who also described her work with the labor movement as beyond mercy work. She illustrated this point with a story from the life of Moses. She told me the fact that Pharaoh's daughter lifted Moses from the river was an act of mercy. But what we are called to do is to go up that river, see what is happening there that made the situation so bad that Moses was put in the river in the first place and stop it from happening. That is justice. The Reverend had clearly already been thinking about her work as moving from mercy to activism, but once discussed openly in the interview, she also came to use the phrase during moments of reflection at monthly meetings. In the interview context, when asked to reflect on the meanings of justice work and service, she pointed out that highlighting distinctions between the two forms of action is a powerful way to describe the work and faith-orientations of IWJ-GKC members.

Rather than looking at these moments as contaminating the research context, I am more aware of the intersubjective nature of doing fieldwork and interviews. I have viewed this phrase as a useful analytical tool. Members of IWJ-GKC saw it as a catchy phrase to understand the work they are daily carrying out in their communities. Transferred from one context to another, this experience further attests to the permeability of institutional boundaries. As Munson (2007) argues, when we think about agency we need to see that it "can be located in the spaces where multiple meanings overlap" (p. 132).

Intersubjectivity: The Lived Reality of the Researcher

A third way intersubjectivity has been enacted through this project is in the dialogue with my own life, influenced by the intersubjective experience of doing fieldwork. In some ways, my past has been resurrected through my engagement with members of IWJ-GKC. The implication of the resurrection story is not that the same old thing has risen again, but that something new is born out of the old. First, I finally got to put to rest the evangelical "demons." I have been able to recognize the positive aspects of my faith upbringing and to divorce them from the negative carryovers best illustrated by those typical stories of oppression of women and sexuality

along with the ever-present fear of hell. I had to exorcise this demon because it bore direct implications on my fieldwork.

In the church where I grew up, on a typical Sunday morning, testimonies from members of the congregation would follow rounds of choruses and hymns. We might hold hands during songs or prayer, expressing a sense of unity. McGuire (2008), drawing on Alfred Schutz's metaphor "making music together," points out how in song, people have an intersubjective experience that produces "an experiential sense of togetherness" (p. 112). These moments, while meaningful and even beautiful, were called to mind in a way that led me to resist engagement in some aspects of my fieldwork, early on. When IWJ-GKC members held hands or sang songs together—especially the *same* songs I sang as a youth—I resisted full engagement. Because I wanted to be "present" in my fieldwork in a way that I could hopefully come to grasp the lived experience of interfaith labor activism, I sought to quickly resolve my old hang-ups. Ruth Frankenberg (2004) points out,

Ethnography immerses one in the subject—the line between academy and religion/spirituality, between the rational and irrational, believer and skeptic becomes blurred, so that accounting for one's place in the field—reflexivity—helps to "undo" some of the compartmentalization. (pp. 14-15)

The intersubjective experiences of religious expression in the field helped me to gain a new understanding of my personal faith and further convinced me of the necessity to understand religion as lived experience. Reflecting on years of studying Buddhism, Liberman (2001) asks whether it is problematic for the academic to become transformed by practices observed in the field. He responds by asserting that to be a dispassionate observer is to run the risk of missing important religious practices and failing as an ethnographer.

Most interesting to me now, however, is the weight of class on my conscious mind and how this intermingles with reflections on my upbringing and my relationship with my parents. Because of this project, I have resurrected several memories and I have come to appreciate my parents more. During my fieldwork, I found myself talking more about my parents than I had in a long while. The fact that my class and religious backgrounds served as cultural capital meant that members of IWJ-GKC asked about my family often. They were curious about my experience growing up in Flint and consequently, my parents' experiences working in Flint. As I listened to members' stories in the field and recorded their narratives in the interview context, though my parents were states away, they were virtually present with me through these intersubjective experiences in the field. Jackson (1998) argues, "The life stories that individuals bring to a relationship are metamorphosed in the course of that relationship. They are thus in a very real sense, authored not by autonomous subjects but by the dynamics of intersubjectivity . . ." (p. 23).

I did not spend a lot of time thinking deeply about Flint's economic circumstances while growing up, but even a young

person tunes into the discourses of strikes, layoffs, forced retirements, and those late-night talks of how the parents were going to make the next mortgage payment. When I was in elementary school, one of our class field trips was to the GM Truck and Bus plant where my dad worked. Looking back I ask why a "career-day" field trip took us to that factory instead of one of the two major hospitals in town. Later, I read in *Rivthead* (Hamper, 1991)—a novel/autobiography by former GM employee Ben Hamper about working at a Chevy plant—that executives at GM saw these field trips for the kids of workers as an act of goodwill toward the community.

Still, somewhat startled by the roar of machinery when we walked through those doors, I was proud to see my dad waiting to give me a hug and hand me a pair of earplugs. Before going there, I figured it just made sense my dad would wear earplugs to work. He was a quiet man. I assumed that he did not feel like listening to or talking to his co-workers. I did not know until then his everyday world—from 4 a.m. to 5 p.m.—was cluttered by such peace-shattering noise. The smell of hot oil, sweat, and grime; rough hands; and dirty fingernails were my dad's "signature." Only there for an hour or so, we kids walked out smelling like our parents and happy to breathe the fresh air. Looking back now, I can recall how I knew my dad differently then. Even as a child, something changes when you realize your dad goes to "the hole" everyday just to keep you alive.

In June, 2008, my dad passed away. At his funeral, my brother—an evangelical minister—told his story about going to the factory on a school field trip. He was similarly greeted by my dad. One of my dad's co-workers reached over and, jostling my brother's shoulder a bit, asked, "Are you gonna work here too just like your dad?" Before John could speak up, my dad said, "No. He's going to college." At the funeral, John also read a note from my dad that was written on the day my brother left home to be married. In the letter, my dad apologized for never being a talkative or intellectual man: "Your mother is much better with things like that," he wrote.

Though I remember my childhood as being infused with my dad's love and his presence, he said that he wished he could have been around more, but that working in the factory overtime meant we would not have to do the same thing when we grew up. Though quiet and perhaps not an intellectual, he worked his whole adult life in a place he never wanted his kids to have to set foot inside. But we did see the inside, thanks to the outreach programs of GM. Today I am thankful for that memory as I was on the morning I last hugged him and told him I would be back to see him in August. He said, "Ok babe. I love you" and I heard from my sister the following morning at 4 a.m. that he had passed away.

Discussion

Thinking seriously about the intersubjective nature of ethnographic work calls into question both the dualism and the

typologizing that has permeated not only Western philosophy, but Western social science as well. Dualistic thinking pits the objective against the subjective, glorifying the former as the primary means through which to engage science. However, Jackson (1998) points out that the two do not in lived reality exist in opposition; rather, they are dialectically related. Furthermore, returning to the foundational ideal that typologies were not meant to be rigidly applied, typologies instead are tools for thinking, always meant to be placed within the context and enriched by experience (Ostrow, 1990). Setting forth these challenges frees the researcher to positively view and value areas of intersubjectivity in the processes and relationships developed in the course of researching human beings whose lived realities are constituted through intersubjective processes (Alcoff, 2000; Jackson, 1998; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Orsi, 2003; Ostrow, 1990).

First, the ethnographer's biography can serve as cultural capital in the field. I have described one aspect of my biography that intersected with my research participants' and another aspect that posed a potential challenge to participants' understandings of religious types, but one which they turned into a useable resource. My class location growing up indicated I understood the struggles for working-class social justice, which allowed me to become a cared-for member of the IWJ-GKC community. This aspect of intersubjectivity necessarily intersects with the third level of intersubjectivity in which the life of the researcher can change. As indicated above, my class location finally became something I did not have to struggle against or hide. Furthermore, the research participants saw that aspect of my biography enmeshed in evangelicalism to be a resource asking questions about how to frame workers' rights issues in such a way as to resonate with the evangelical religious worldview. In this, a further intersecting reality of intersubjectivity rises to the surface in the process of the co-construction of lived reality. Just as the interview context begs reflection on its meaning-making quality (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), researchers' biographies also trickle into the second level of intersubjectivity. Our understandings of the workings of human social life are deepened when this aspect is treated as an important—even observable—part of the research process.

Finally, the intersubjective experiences in the field made poignant my (past) evangelical identity and my (past-present) class identity and thereby made my parents—especially my dad—virtually present for me on a day-to-day basis through the stories I shared about him with people in the field. Jackson (1998) points out that when people tell stories at funerals about those passed, those stories are often told not to “preserve an exact record,” but to “remaster experience” (p. 24). The effect on meaning is such that human beings also experience—intersubjectively—the stories they construct. He asserts that it matters little whether the stories are exact records of life experiences because, “It is, therefore, not what they *apparently do* that wholly defines their

humanity—or would suffice as a scientific description of their nature—but what they *virtually experience* in the course of their actual lives” (p. 25). The stories I told in the field somehow prepared me for my dad's death. Not in such a way that they eased my distress; rather, in that by cultivating his virtual presence through the intersubjective experience of telling stories about him in the field, his virtual presence can still remain as a comfort to me. Jackson (1998) strikingly argues, “That we exist solely in relation to others is dramatically borne out by studies of human responses to loss” (p. 75); when a significant other passes away, we “in reality [experience] a rupture in *intersubjective life*” (p. 76).

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that to more fully understand lived experience and therefore lived religion and lived class, ethnographers must challenge dualistic thinking and explore the possible limitations of the rigid applications of typologies. Doing so means that one engages with processual thinking and is invited to consider how the researcher, the researched, and the research process are engaged intersubjectively, enlivening not only the ethnography, but potentially the ethnographer as well.

This processual thinking led to the discovery of three levels of intersubjectivity (Orsi, 2003) interwoven into my fieldwork experience with an interfaith and labor coalition in Kansas City, Missouri. First, the biographies of researchers have the potential to serve as cultural capital in ethnographic fieldwork. Second, sometimes the stories we tell in the field come to be incorporated into the everyday narratives of our research participants. Third, the subjective life of the researcher can be changed in unexpected ways through the intersubjective nature of the lived experience of doing fieldwork. Rather than viewing these intersubjective processes as research “contaminants,” they were discussed as aspects of a co-constructed, lived reality: The recognition of which places a more human face on our ethnographies and brings understandings gleaned from research closer to the lived experiences discovered in the field.

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Notes

1. I use “objective”—emphasizing the quotation marks—to indicate that objective categories are *intersubjectively constituted*. Ostrow (1990) suggests this intersubjective constitution means that we can “escape from the division between ‘subjective’ and

'objective' orders of existence that has dominated Western philosophy" (p. 3). Similarly, Jackson (1998) emphasizes that the two are always dialectically related.

2. The notion of embodied experiences as central to intersubjectivity comes from the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962), who unlike Husserl (e.g., Crossley, 1996) and Schutz (e.g., Ostrow, 1990) did not separate reason/mind (consciousness) from body/subject (perception); consciousness and perception form a "gestalt structure," which means "that all meanings and ideas must be embodied (e.g. in words, gestures, artefacts, rituals, etc.)" (Crossley, 1996, p. 29).

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