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# Kleine Geheimnisse

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Alltagssoziologische Einsichten

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## Preface

# Story-telling, Community-Making and the Sociology Everyday Life

Scott Grills

The socialization of the scholar involves a process of learning how to tell particular kinds of stories. We learn the questions to ask and the specialized language of the discourse. We learn what counts as evidence and what others define as interesting. Importantly, we learn how to tell our stories in ways that connect them to a tradition, a literature and to a community of scholarship. To join a particular subculture of story-tellers is to learn to take on the meanings of the group and to find one's voice within that group. It is, in part, to tell a familiar story anew. This volume is a part of this subculture of story-telling and story-tellers and speaks to the importance of maintaining, sustaining and nurturing the relational dynamics of the scholarly enterprise.

If I might be allowed something of a personal reflection here, my own acculturation into symbolic interactionist sociology was facilitated by two loose associations of scholars, the wonderful people who have nurtured and sustained the Qualitative Analysis Conference in Canada over the past 30 years (the first such gathering was held at the University of Waterloo in 1984) and the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction which, since the late 1970's has provided multiple forms for the expression of interactionist scholarship: the journal *Symbolic Interaction*, the annual meetings of the Society, the Couch-Stone Symposium, support for regional meetings to include interactionist thought, and a series of awards recognizing distinguished scholarship and mentoring.

These kinds of associations are crucial to the scholarly enterprise. They are, in part, how communities of inquiry sustain their traditions and maintain their relevance. They provide forms in which our stories can be told and can be told to audiences that are willing to participate in the conversation. They allow for a telling that would not be otherwise possible. As someone new to academic life I benefited tremendously from these associations. It was not just the chance to present works in progress that mattered, but the mentoring questions that were offered, the op-

portunity to meet those whose work would come to influence my own, and learning the history of the area from some of those who had help create it. The personal value of these interactions has encouraged me, over the years, to make time in my professional life to help to create these kinds of spaces for others. For most certainly these spaces do not create themselves, they require nurturance.

This is something that sociologists should appreciate. The relational aspects of our work matter. In 1996, when Lonnie Athens served as President of the SSSI, he encouraged the Society to take the problem of internationalization seriously and created a working committee for this purpose. It is a project that we have not lost sight of. Robert Prus became the first Canadian President in 2007, at which time I served as his Vice-President. In 2010 I became the President of the Society and was the second Canadian to do so. During this time period European meetings committed to the interactionist perspective were organized. Host sites have included Pisa, Kassel, Rotterdam, Uppsala, and Aalborg. The editorship of *Symbolic Interaction* currently resides with Robert Dingwall in Great Britain. The internationalized project continues.

During my term as president, I had the privilege of joining the meetings in Kassel. What stood out for me at those meetings was that the vibrancy that I had experienced at the first Canadian meetings in 1984 was to be found in these young European meetings – the generosity of senior scholars (many of whom travelled great distances to attend), the lively conversations, and the creative research of graduate students. This volume captures some of this energy and promise. For it was made possible by those meetings – by conversations over dinner, over wine, and over the importance of sustaining research into everyday life. The networks that help make it possible are truly international. This book, in a modest way, is a further indicator of a vision being realized.

Symbolic interaction owes its greatest debt to the founding members of the University of Chicago's sociology department and their students. The great gift of this tradition is that its most central concepts are not bound by place or time. While symbolic interaction is far from a singular perspective and like any well-established intellectual tradition it has developed its own schools of thought, there is a shared commitment to engaging the world of everyday life. For it is within this world that human agency is played out. The world of everyday life is our point of departure and it is to which we return. While there is diversity in this volume there is also an important unity, a unity to be found in the pursuit of understanding the human condition. In this task we join the other story-tellers whose voices are a part of this tradition. If we are serious about the study of everyday life then the diverse application of concepts and constructs is an essential part of the work. For the best of what symbolic interaction has to offer allows for a move from the particular to the generic. This project makes a contribution to that extended conversation.