

The Boundaries between Your Brain and Me:
Mental Categories in the Cognitive Neurosciences

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation identifies classifications and preferences for cognitive neuroscientific data collection and analysis that shape standards for research. Moreover, I develop ways for (1) writing reflexive ethnography in social studies of scientific practice, and (2) identifying and analyzing information that is gathered in cognitive neuroscience studies but not analyzed in their research projects. Participant observation was conducted for four months at Oxford, England, and at the Massachusetts General Hospital/Massachusetts Institute of Technology/Harvard Medical School Visiting Fellowship Program in Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI). Audio-taped interviews, group meetings, and discussions provide ethnographic data, as well as audio tapes of research subjects at the Oxford site as they were administered standardized cognitive tests. I propose theoretical and methodological developments using Mary Douglas' cultural theory and Randall Collins' interaction ritual theory to classify four types of rationality in interpersonal interaction, whether the interaction is played out between individuals or "in the head" of a single person. Using the proposed approach, I show that taken-for-granted information can help answer questions asked but unanswered using current sociological and anthropological approaches.