

# ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

# ETHNOMETHODOLOGY- DEFENITIONS

- 1. Ethnomethodology is a theoretical approach in sociology based on the belief that you can discover the normal social order of a society by disrupting it**
- 2. Ethnomethodology- the study of the ways in which ordinary people construct a stable social world through everyday utterance s and actions**
- 3. Ethnomethodology is a perspective within sociology which focuses on the way people make sense of their everyday world**

October 29, 1917- April  
21, 2011

He developed this approach  
based on Alfred Schütz's  
phenomenological  
reconstruction of Max  
Weber's verstehen sociology



**Harold Garfinkel-**  
**Father of**  
**Ethnomethodology**

# Harold Garfinkel- Life History

- Born at Newark on October 29, 1917
- Master's degree in sociology from the University of North Carolina
- Served in the Army, as a noncombatant, during World War II
- He earned a Ph.D. at Harvard
- He was a professor emeritus at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he was affiliated with the sociology department for more than half a century
- Died at Calif on April 21, 2011

# Popular Books of Harold Garfinkel on Ethnomethodology

- Studies in Ethnomethodology
- Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology
- Ethnomethodology's Program: Working Out Durkheim's Aphorism
- Ethnomethodological Studies Of Work
- More Studies in Ethnomethodology
- Garfinkel wrote a short story, "Color Trouble," which was published in Opportunity magazine and subsequently anthologized in "The Best Short Stories, 1941.

# Influences

- EM is influenced by phenomenology, linguistics, anthropology, symbolic interactionism, and other mainstream concepts found in sociology.
- Influenced by Parsons, Alfred Schutz, Aron Gurwitsch, and Edmond Husserl
- Gave high recognition to Parsons, but did not agree on many things

# Influences

- Parsons (1927 1973)– Action theory Involves these basic elements
  - Actors are individual persons
  - Actors are viewed as goal seeking
  - Actors also possess alternative means to achieve goals
- Actors are confronted with a variety of situational conditions, such as their own biological makeup and heredity as well as various external ecological constraints, that influence the selection of goals and means.
- Actors are governed by values, norms, and other ideas such that these ideas influence what is considered a goal and what means are selected to achieve it.
- Action involves actors making subjective decisions about the means to achieve goals, all of which are constrained by ideas and situational conditions.

# Influences- Phenomenology

- Parsons introduced Garfinkel to the theories of Alfred Schutz and Edmond Husserl.
- Schutz's phenomenological ideas involving the common sense world, methodology, and concepts were crucial in the development of EM
- Schutz – everyone carries with them a “stock of knowledge” at hand that are common sense and of social origin when interacting with others
- **Edmund Husserl**
- Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), is the “father” of the philosophical movement known as phenomenology.
- Phenomenology can be roughly described as the sustained attempt to describe experiences (and the “things themselves”) without metaphysical and theoretical speculations.
- He insisted that phenomenology is a science of consciousness rather than of empirical things.



- Indeed, in Husserl's hands phenomenology began as a critique of both psychologism and naturalism.
- Naturalism is the thesis that everything belongs to the world of nature and can be studied by the methods appropriate to studying that world
- Husserl argued that the study of consciousness must actually be very different from the study of nature
- Phenomenology does not proceed from the collection of large amounts of data and to a general theory beyond the data itself. Rather, it aims to look at particular examples without theoretical presuppositions (such as the phenomena of intentionality, of love, of two hands touching each other, and so forth), before then discerning what is essential and necessary to these experiences.
- Aron Gurwitsch(1901-1973)- American phenomenologist, He wrote on relations between phenomenology and Gestalt psychology
- He was a student of Edmund Husserl

# What is Ethnomethodology

- Ethno = people; Method = method; ology = study
- The study of ordinary members of society in the everyday situations in which they find themselves and the ways in which they use commonsense knowledge, procedures, and considerations to gain an understanding of, navigate in, and act on those situations
- Ethnomethodology's interest is in how ordinary people make sense of their social world.

# What is Ethnomethodology

## contnd....

- For Ethnomethodology the objective reality of Social facts in that and just how it is every society's locally, endogenously produced, naturally organized, reflexively accountable, ongoing, practical achievement, being everywhere, always, only, exactly, and entirely, members work with no time out, and with no possibility of evasion, hiding out, passing, postponement, or buy-outs, is thereby sociology's fundamental phenomenon
- Every topic of detail and every topic of order is to be discovered and discoverable and is to be respecified and is respecifiable as only locally and reflexively produced naturally accountable phenomena of order

Harold Garfinkel

- In other words ethnomethodology is concerned with the organization of everyday, ordinary life
- Ethnomethodology attempts to reveal the subjective nature of human interaction. It has a microfocus on daily life and on the thoughts and actions of human behavior.

# Ethnomethodology- Key Points

- Ethnomethodology means a study of the methods used by people.
- Fundamental sociological phenomenon for ethnomethodologists is the social fact
- The social fact is the product of the social member's methodological activities; it is their understanding of their everyday world
- Members means any social entity (individuals and organizations) that can produce a social fact.
- members of society (individuals and organizations) make sense of and function in society by creating social facts or understandings of how society works
- ethnomethods or social facts are reflexively accountable

# Accounts

- The study of ordinary society reveals how individuals work hard to maintain consistency, order, and meaning in their lives.
- Garfinkel sought to understand the methods people use to make sense of their world – emphasized language (verbal description) as the tool in which this is done
- In this way, people use their accounts to construct a sense of reality
- The accounts of people reflect how social order is possible

# Accounts contnd....

- Accounts are the ways members describe or explain specific situations
- Accounting is the process of describing or explaining social situations or how members make sense of their everyday world, ie, Accounting is an entire process
- Ethnomethodologists analyze accounts and how accounts received by others
- The interest is not in determining if the account is accurate or otherwise judging the account but rather in exploring how the account is conveyed.

# commonsense world

- Defining an event as an occurrence in the commonsense world includes:
  - Viewing events as objective facts
  - Viewing the meaning of events as products of a socially standardized processes of naming, reification, and idealization of a person's stream of experience (products of language)
  - Applying past determinants of events to similar present and future events
  - Viewing alterations of descriptions of events as remaining in control of the participating actors

# The Commonsense World

- Sociologists distinguish the “product” from the “process” meanings of a common understanding
- PRODUCT – a *common understanding* consisting of *shared agreement* on substantive matters
- PROCESS – various methods whereby something that a person says or does is recognized to accord with a rule
- Scientific sociology is a fact, and not merely based on common sense. It can be a science if it follows certain policies of scientific procedures.



# Policies of Scientific EM Study

- 1) If researchers use a search policy that any occasion whatsoever has an opportunity to be chosen, objectivity is more likely
- 2) Sociology must go beyond empirical data collection and examine the mundane and taken-for-granted phenomena
- 3) All aspects of behavior are to be examined – not relying on a standard approach or preconceived rule of research procedure

# Policies of Scientific EM Study contnd..

- 4) Every social setting is to be viewed as self-organizing as either representations of or evidence of a social order
- 5) The rational properties of indexical expressions and indexical actions is an ongoing achievement of the organized activities of everyday life

# Applying Ethnomethodology

- Ethnomethodologists are interested in disturbing the normal situations of interaction to uncover taken-for-granted rules
- Takes place in casual, non-institutionalized settings such as the home
- Usually include open-ended or in-depth interviews, participant observation, videotaping, documentary, and ethnomethodological experiments, often called *breaching experiments*

# *Breaching Experiments*

- *Breaching Experiments*

- The breaching experiment is a type of empirical inquiry in which normal interaction is interrupted
- Social reality is violated in order to reveal the methods of reality construction
- This research is based on these foundations:
  - Production of social life occurs all the time
  - Participants are unaware that they are engaging in such actions
  - Breaching must be radical because people will naturally assimilate strange situations into familiar ones, and in order to cause disruption, one must create a radical enough breach that it cannot be normally constructed

# *Breaching Experiments contnd...*

- Individuals attempt to normalize imbalances in the breaching experiment. Seeking balance is a normal constant and is an attempt at putting meaning to the world
- Breaching experiments can be done in fairly casual settings
- Breaching experiments will often cause the subjects to become confused, angry, and upset

# Conversation analysis

- Garfinkel's definition of communication is a means of clarifying or repairing social problems created by human communication.
- Garfinkel believes that a greater aspect of communication is what goes unsaid, rather than what is said
- Anticipatory knowledge from previous interactions guide the conversation
- Without this knowledge, conversations would spend all their time explaining history of interactions
- Language is a tool for interpreting and clarifying social interactions

# Phenomena of Order

Garfinkel stressed the importance of ethnomethodologists' conducting more studies on social order.

Durkheim said that the objective reality of social facts is sociology's fundamental principle.

Garfinkel argued that social order is an on going process subject to constant change and even misinterpretation by the members of the society.

Garfinkel wanted ethnomethodological researchers to focus on the production and accountability of order, and especially on the methods that individuals utilize to maintain order and normality.

# Intersexuality

- Garfinkel shows how people in societies maintain order and normality with intersexuality and the case of Agnes.
- Garfinkel says that every society exerts close controls over the transfers of persons from one status to another. Where transfers of sexual statuses are concerned, these controls are particularly restrictive and rigorously enforced.
- In most cases sexual statuses are black and white you fit into one of two classes either male or female and peoples lives are made easier by this reality.



# Intersexuality continued...

- But sexual statuses are not always so black and white, in 2,000 births is characterized by a distinguishable degree of intersexuality that is they are hard to classify as male or female because they have both male and female characteristics. Such is the case of Agnes who was born a male but passes in society as a female.
- Agnes had to develop passing devices and techniques in order to be accepted as a woman in society and Garfinkel was very interested in these passing techniques. What Garfinkel was trying to show in studying Agnes's passing techniques was that we are not simply born men and women - we also learn and use practices that allow us to pass as men or women.

# Degradation ceremony

- Degradation ceremonies are public attempts to inflict identity alteration
- Identity Degradation involves destroying the offender's ( person being degraded) identity and transforming it into a lower social type.
- Garfinkel Published a article about this called "Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies"
- Garfinkel described a Degradation ceremony as an attempt to transform an individual's total identity into an identity lower in the group's scheme of social types.
- Garfinkel said that individuals who are being degraded must be placed outside the everyday moral order and defined as a threat to that order.
- Some degradation of status inflicted on the accused by one social group may actually lead to rewards by another group. (e.g. Rosa Parks)
- Garfinkel said that the structural conditions of status degradation are universal to all societies.

# Degradation ceremony contnd..

- Garfinkel identified eight conditions for a successful denunciation of ones social type.

1. Both event and perpetrator must be removed from the realm of their everyday character and be made to stand as out of the ordinary.
2. Both event and perpetrator must be placed within a scheme that shows that no preferences where given. The condemner has a personal agenda against the accused, objectivity is lost. Witnesses must not be swayed by such biases.
3. The denouncer must so identify himself to all the witnesses that during denunciation they regard him not as a privately but as a publically known person in an attempt to show objectivity. Without bias. The denouncer must be presenting facts to the witnesses.
4. The denouncer must make the dignity of the suprapersonal values of the tribe salient and accessible to view, and the denunciation must be delivered in their name. This reinforces the values of the group in the name of greater society.

# Degradation ceremony contnd..

5. The denouncer must arrange to be invested with the right to speak in the name of these ultimate values (i.e. the denouncer represents society.)
6. The denouncer must be recognized as this representation of society and its moral code.
7. The denouncer must maintain proper social distance from the accused and the witnesses.
8. Finally, the denounced person must be ritually seperated from a place in the legitimate order. She or he must be placed “outside” and made to feel “strange”.

# Aaron V. Cicourel

- Belief that quantitative research methods does not guarantee more objective research study
- Renamed his brand of ethnomethodology as Cognitive Sociology
- Goal: uncover the universal interpretive procedures that humans use to give meaning to social situations

# Dierdre Boden

- Attempted to integrate ethnomethodology with symbolic interactionism
- She focuses on conversation and focuses on the verbal talking aspect of conversations
- Coined the term interactional analysis
- She attempts to highlight the importance of the thought process involved in conversation
- People don't only react to talk, but interpret it.

# Harvey Sacks

- He also studies talk
- He wants to discover universal forms of interactions that apply to all conversations

# Relevancy

- The greatest contribution of ethnomethodology is conversation analysis - the description and explanation of everyday talk. It reveals the many rules participants use and rely on while interacting with others.
- Garfinkel's Agnes study illustrates how gender identities are socially produced and not biological.
- All societies use degradation techniques to control behavior. It is also true that nearly all social groups and organizations have such disciplinary reviews in place to punish those who stray from the expected norm.
- Not considered mainstream sociology
- Has not produced "laws" of general behavior
- Ignores macrostructural factors in micro-interactions



# Criticism

- Many contemporary sociologists believe that the scope of analysis used in ethnomethodology is too narrow.
- Aaron V. Cicourel questioned Garfinkel's assertion that interaction and verbal accounts are the same process, he believes that humans see, sense, and feel much that they cannot communicate in words.

*THANK YOU*