CHAPTER 11

Ethnomethodology

Chapter Outline

Given its Greek roots, the term *ethnomethodology* literally means the "methods" that people use on a daily basis to accomplish their everyday lives. To put it slightly differently, the world is seen as an ongoing practical accomplishment. People are viewed as rational, but they use "practical reasoning," not formal logic, in accomplishing their everyday lives.

Defining Ethnomethodology

We begin with the definition of *ethnomethodology* offered in Chapter 6: the study of "the body of common-sense knowledge and the range of procedures and considerations by means of which the ordinary members of society make sense of, find their way about in, and act on the circumstances in which they find themselves" (Heritage, 1984:4; Linstead, 2006).

We can gain further insight into the nature of ethnomethodology by examining efforts by its founder, Harold Garfinkel (1988, 1991), to define it. Like Durkheim, Garfinkel considers "social facts" to be the fundamental sociological phenomenon (Hilbert, 2005). However, Garfinkel's social facts are very different from Durkheim's social facts. For Durkheim, social facts are external to and coercive of individuals. Those who adopt such a focus tend to see actors as constrained or determined by social structures and institutions and able to exercise little or no independent judgment. In the acerbic terms of the ethnomethodologists, such sociologists tended to treat actors like "judgmental dopes."

In contrast, ethnomethodology treats the objectivity of social facts as the accomplishment of members (a definition of "members" follows shortly)—as a product of

HAROLD GARFINKEL

*A Biographical Sketch**

Like many who came of age during the Depression and later World War II, Harold Garfinkel took a convoluted path into sociology. Garfinkel was born in Newark, New Jersey, on October 29, 1917. His father was a small businessman who sold household goods on the installment plan to immigrant families. While his father was eager for him to learn a trade, Harold wanted to go to college. He did go into his father's business but also began taking business courses at the then-unaccredited University of Newark. Because the courses tended to be taught by graduate students from Columbia, they were both high in quality and, because the students lacked practical experience, highly theoretical. His later theoretical orientation and his specific orientation to "accounts" are traceable, at least in part, to these courses in general, and particularly to an accounting course on the "theory of accounts." "'How do you make the columns and figures accountable [to superiors]?' was the big question according to Garfinkel" (Rawls, 2000). Also of importance was the fact that Garfinkel encountered other Jewish students at Newark who were taking courses in sociology and were later to become social scientists.

Graduating in 1939, Garfinkel spent a summer in a Quaker work camp in rural Georgia. There he learned that the University of North Carolina had a sociology program that was also oriented to the furtherance of public works projects like the one in which he was involved. Admitted to the program with a fellowship, Garfinkel chose Guy Johnson as his thesis adviser and Johnson's interest in race relations led Garfinkel to do his master's thesis on interracial homicide. He also was exposed to a wide range of social theory, most notably the works of phenomenologists and the recently published (in 1937) *The Structure of Social Action,* by Talcott Parsons. Although the vast majority of graduate students at North Carolina at that time were drawn toward statistics and "scientific sociology," Garfinkel was attracted to theory, especially Florian Znaniecki's now almost forgotten work on social action and the importance of the actor's point of view.

Garfinkel was drafted in 1942 and entered the airforce. He eventually was given the task of training troops in tank warfare on a golf course on Miami Beach in the complete absence of tanks. Garfinkel had only pictures of tanks from *Life*

members' methodological activities. Garfinkel, in his inimitable and nearly impenetrable style, describes the focus of ethnomethodology as follows:

> 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

> magazine. The real tanks were all in combat. The man who would insist on concrete empirical detail in lieu of theorized accounts was teaching real troops who were about to enter live combat to fight against only imagined tanks in situations where things like the proximity of the troops to the imagined tank could make the difference between life and death. The impact of this on the development of his views can only be imagined. He had to train troops to throw explosives into the tracks of imaginary tanks; to keep imaginary tanks from seeing them by directing fire at imaginary tank ports. This task posed in a new and very concrete way the problems of the adequate description of action and accountability that Garfinkel had taken up at North Carolina as theoretical issues.
>
> (Rawls, 2000)

When the war ended, Garfinkel proceeded to Harvard and studied with Talcott Parsons. Parsons stressed the importance of abstract categories and generalizations, but Garfinkel was interested in detailed description. When Garfinkel achieved prominence in the discipline, this became a focal debate within sociology. However, he soon became more interested in the empirical demonstration of the importance of his theoretical orientation than in debating it in the abstract. While still a student at Harvard, Garfinkel taught for two years at Princeton and, after obtaining his doctorate, moved on to Ohio State, where he had a two-year position in a "soft money" project studying leadership on airplanes and submarines. That research was cut short by reductions in funding, but Garfinkel then joined a project researching juries in Wichita, Kansas. In preparing for a talk on the project at the 1954 American Sociological Association meetings, Garfinkel came up with the term *ethnomethodology* to describe what fascinated him about jury deliberations and social life more generally.

In the fall of 1954 Garfinkel took a position at UCLA, a position he held until he retired in 1987. From the beginning, he used the term *ethnomethodology* in his seminars. A number of notable students were taken by Garfinkel's approach and disseminated it around the United States and eventually the world. Most notable were a group of sociologists, especially Harvey Sacks, Emmanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson, who, inspired by Garfinkel's approach, developed what is, at least at the moment, the most important variety of ethnomethodology—conversation analysis.

* This biographical sketch is based on Anne Rawls, "Harold Garfinkel," in George Ritzer, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorists* (Malden, Mass., and Oxford, Eng.: Blackwell, 2000). See also Maynard and Kardash (2007) and Rawls (2005b).

> evasion, hiding out, passing, postponement, or buy-outs, is *thereby* sociology's fundamental phenomenon.
>
> (Garfinkel, 1991:11)

To put it another way, ethnomethodology is concerned with the organization of everyday life, or as Garfinkel (1988:104) describes it, "immortal, ordinary society." In Pollner's terms, this is "the extraordinary organization of the ordinary" (1987:xvii).

Ethnomethodology is certainly not a macrosociology in the sense intended by Durkheim with his concept of a social fact, but its adherents do not see it as a microsociology either. Thus, while ethnomethodologists refuse to treat actors as judgmental dopes, they do not believe that people are "almost endlessly reflexive, self-conscious and calculative" (Heritage, 1984:118). Rather, following Alfred Schutz, they recognize that most often action is routine and relatively unreflective. Hilbert (1992) argues that ethnomethodologists do not focus on actors or individuals, but rather on "members." However, members are viewed not as individuals, but rather "strictly and solely, [as] membership activities—the artful practices whereby they produce what are *for them* large-scale organization structure and small-scale interactional or personal structure" (Hilbert, 1992:193). In sum, ethnomethodologists are interested in *neither* micro structures nor macro structures; they are concerned with the artful practices that produce *both* types of structures. Thus, what Garfinkel and the ethnomethodologists have sought is a new way of getting at the traditional concern of sociology with objective structures, both micro and macro (Maynard and Clayman, 1991).

One of Garfinkel's key points about ethnomethods is that they are "reflexively accountable." *Accounts* are the ways in which actors explain (describe, criticize, and idealize) specific situations (Bittner, 1973; Orbuch, 1997). *Accounting* is the process by which people offer accounts in order to make sense of the world. Ethnomethodologists devote a lot of attention to analyzing people's accounts, as well as to the ways in which accounts are offered and accepted (or rejected) by others. This is one of the reasons that ethnomethodologists are preoccupied with analyzing conversations. To take an example, when a student explains to her professor why she failed to take an examination, she is offering an account. The student is trying to make sense out of an event for her professor. Ethnomethodologists are interested in the nature of that account but more generally in the *accounting practices* (Sharrock and Anderson, 1986) by which the student offers the account and the professor accepts or rejects it. In analyzing accounts, ethnomethodologists adopt a stance of "ethnomethodological indifference." That is, they do not judge the nature of the accounts but rather analyze them in terms of how they are used in practical action. They are concerned with the accounts as well as the methods needed by both speaker and listener to proffer, understand, and accept or reject accounts (for more on this, see Young, 1997).

Extending the idea of accounts, ethnomethodologists take great pains to point out that sociologists, like everyone else, offer accounts. Thus, reports of sociological studies can be seen as accounts and analyzed in the same way that all other accounts can be studied. This perspective on sociology serves to disenchant the work of sociologists, indeed all scientists. A good deal of sociology (indeed all sciences) involves commonsense interpretations. Ethnomethodologists can study the accounts of the sociologist in the same way that they can study the accounts of the layperson. Thus, the everyday practices of sociologists and all scientists come under the scrutiny of the ethnomethodologist.

We can say that accounts are reflexive in the sense that they enter into the constitution of the state of affairs they make observable and are intended to deal with. Thus, in trying to describe what people are doing, we alter the nature of what they are doing. This is as true for sociologists as it is for laypeople. In studying and reporting

on social life, sociologists are, in the process, changing what they are studying. That is, subjects alter their behavior as a result of being the subject of scrutiny and in response to descriptions of that behavior (for a similar idea, see the discussion of Giddens's "double hermeneutic" in Chapter 14).

The Diversification of Ethnomethodology

Ethnomethodology was "invented" by Garfinkel beginning in the late 1940s, but it was first systematized with the publication of his *Studies in Ethnomethodology* in 1967. Over the years, ethnomethodology has grown enormously and expanded in a number of different directions. Only a decade after the publication of *Studies in Ethnomethodology,* Don Zimmerman concluded that there already were several varieties of ethnomethodology. As Zimmerman put it, ethnomethodology encompassed "a number of more or less distinct and sometimes incompatible lines of inquiry" (1978:6). Ten years later, Paul Atkinson (1988) underscored the lack of coherence in ethnomethodology and argued further that at least some ethnomethodologists had strayed too far from the underlying premises of the approach. Thus, while it is a very vibrant type of sociological theory, ethnomethodology has experienced some increasing "growing pains" in recent years. It is safe to say that ethnomethodology, its diversity, and its problems are likely to proliferate in the coming years. After all, the subject matter of ethnomethodology is the infinite variety of everyday life. As a result, there will be many more studies, more diversification, and further "growing pains."

Studies of Institutional Settings

Maynard and Clayman (1991) describe a number of varieties of work in ethnomethodology, but two stand out from my point of view.[1] The first type is ethnomethodological *studies of institutional settings.* Early ethnomethodological studies carried on by Garfinkel and his associates (which are discussed below) took place in casual, noninstitutionalized settings such as the home. Later, there was a move toward studying everyday practices in a wide variety of institutional settings—courtrooms, medical settings (Ten Have, 1995), police departments—and studies of this type have been increasing since the early 1990s (Perakyla, 2007). The goal of such studies is an understanding of the way people perform their official tasks and, in the process, constitute the institution in which the tasks take place.

Conventional sociological studies of such institutional settings focus on their structure, formal rules, and official procedures to explain what people do within them. To the ethnomethodologists, such external constraints are inadequate for explaining what really goes on in these institutions. People are not determined by these external

[1] Another body of ethnomethodological work deals with the *study of science,* particularly in fields such as mathematics, astronomy, biology, and optics (for example, Lynch, 1985, 1993). In common with the rest of ethnomethodology, studies in this area concentrate on the commonsense procedures, the practical reasoning employed by scientists even in some of the greatest discoveries in the history of mathematics and science. The focus is on the work that scientists do as well as the conversations in which they engage. The ethnomethodologist is concerned with the "workbench practices" employed by scientists on a day-to-day basis.

forces; rather, they use them to accomplish their tasks and create the institution in which they exist. People employ their practical procedures not only to make their daily lives but also to manufacture the institutions' products. For example, the crime rates compiled by the police department are not merely the result of officials' following clearly defined rules in their production. Rather, officials utilize a range of common-sense procedures to decide, for example, whether victims should be classified as homicides. Thus, such rates are based on the interpretive work of professionals, and this kind of record keeping is a practical activity worthy of study in its own right.

Conversation Analysis

The second variety of ethnomethodology is *conversation analysis* (Rawls, 2005a; Schegloff, 2001).[2] The goal of conversation analysis is "the detailed understanding of the fundamental structures of conversational interaction" (Zimmerman, 1988:429). Conversation is defined in terms that are in line with the basic elements of the ethnomethodological perspective: "Conversation is an *interactional activity* exhibiting *stable, orderly* properties that are the analyzable *achievements* of the conversants" (Zimmerman, 1988:406; italics added). Although there are rules and procedures for conversations, they do not determine what is said but instead are used to "accomplish" a conversation. The focus of conversational analysis is the constraints on what is said that are internal to the conversation itself and not external forces that constrain talk. Conversations are seen as internally, sequentially ordered.

Zimmerman details five basic working principles of conversation analysis. First, conversation analysis requires the collection and analysis of highly detailed data on conversations. These data include not only words but also "the hesitations, cut-offs, restarts, silences, breathing noises, throat clearings, sniffles, laughter, and laughterlike noises, prosody, and the like, not to mention the 'nonverbal' behaviors available on video records that are usually closely integrated with the stream of activity captured on the audiotape" (Zimmerman, 1988:413). All these things are part of most conversations, and they are seen as methodic devices in the making of a conversation by the actors involved (Lynch, 1999).

Second, even the finest detail of a conversation must be presumed to be an orderly accomplishment. Such minute aspects of a conversation are not ordered just by the ethnomethodologist; they are first "ordered by the methodical activities of the social actors themselves" (Zimmerman, 1988:415).

Third, interaction in general and conversation in particular have stable, orderly properties that are the achievements of the actors involved. In looking at conversations, ethnomethodologists treat them as if they were autonomous, separable from the cognitive processes of the actors as well as the larger context in which they take place.

Fourth, "the fundamental framework of conversation is sequential organization" (Zimmerman, 1988:422). Finally, and relatedly, "the course of conversational interaction

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[2] While I am treating conversation analysis as a variety of ethnomethodology, it should be noted that conversation analysis has distinctive roots in the work of Harvey Sacks (who was a student of Erving Goffman, not Harold Garfinkel; see Jacobsen, 2007) and has over the years developed a distinctive set of interests.

is managed on a turn-by-turn or local basis" (Zimmerman, 1988:423). Here Zimmerman invokes Heritage's (1984) distinction between "context-shaped" and "context-renewing" conversation. Conversations are context-shaped in the sense that what is said at any given moment is shaped by the preceding sequential context of the conversation. Conversations are context-shaping in that what is being said in the present turn becomes part of the context for future turns.

Methodologically, conversation analysts are led to study conversations in naturally occurring situations, often using audiotape or videotape. This method allows information to flow from the everyday world rather than being imposed on it by the researcher. The researcher can examine and reexamine an actual conversation in minute detail instead of relying on his or her notes. This technique also allows the researcher to do highly detailed analyses of conversations.

Conversation analysis is based on the assumption that conversations are the bedrock of other forms of interpersonal relations (David Gibson, 2000). They are the most pervasive form of interaction, and a conversation "consists of the fullest matrix of socially organized communicative practices and procedures" (Heritage and Atkinson, 1984:13).

I have tried to give a general sense of ethnomethodology in the preceding pages. However, the heart of ethnomethodology lies not in its theoretical statements but in its empirical studies. What we know theoretically is derived from those studies. Thus, I turn now to a series of those studies in the hope of giving the reader a better feel for ethnomethodology.

Some Early Examples

We begin with some of the early research in ethnomethodology that gained for it much early notoriety. While some of the early methods are rarely, if ever, used today, they tell us a good deal about ethnomethodological research.

Breaching Experiments

In breaching experiments (Jansen, 2008), social reality is violated in order to shed light on the methods by which people construct social reality. The assumption behind this research is not only that the methodical production of social life occurs all the time but also that the participants are unaware that they are engaging in such actions. The objective of the breaching experiment is to disrupt normal procedures so that the process by which the everyday world is constructed or reconstructed can be observed and studied. In his work, Garfinkel (1967) offered a number of examples of breaching experiments, most of which were undertaken by his students in casual settings to illustrate the basic principles of ethnomethodology.

Lynch (1991:15) offers the following example (Figure 11.1) of breaching, derived from earlier work by Garfinkel (1963): This, of course, is a game of tic-tac-toe. The well-known rules allow participants in the game to place a mark *within* each of the cells, but the rules have been breached in this case and a mark has been placed *between* two cells. If this breach were to occur in a real game of tic-tac-toe, the other player

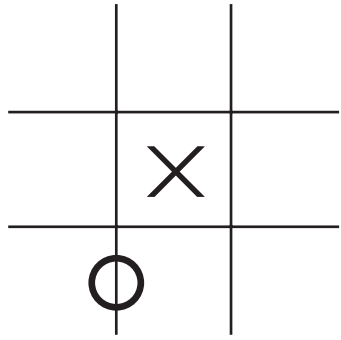

FIGURE 11.1 ***Breaching In Tic-Tac-Toe***

SOURCE: Michael Lynch, 1991. "Pictures of Nothing? Visual Constructs in Social Theory." *Sociological Theory* 9:15.

(player 2) would probably insist on a correct placement. If such a placement did not occur, player 2 would try to explain why player 1 had taken such an extraordinary action. The actions of player 2 would be studied by the ethnomethodologist to see how the everyday world of tic-tac-toe is reconstructed.

To take one other example, Garfinkel asked his students to spend between fifteen minutes and an hour in their homes imagining that they were boarders and then acting on the basis of that assumption. "They were instructed to conduct themselves in a circumspect and polite fashion. They were to avoid getting personal, to use formal address, to speak only when spoken to" (Garfinkel, 1967:47). In the vast majority of cases, family members were dumbfounded by such behavior: "Reports were filled with accounts of astonishment, bewilderment, shock, anxiety, embarrassment, and anger, and with charges by various family members that the student was mean, inconsiderate, selfish, nasty, or impolite" (Garfinkel, 1967:47). These reactions indicate how important it is that people act in accord with the commonsense assumptions about how they are supposed to behave.

What most interested Garfinkel was how the family members sought in commonsense ways to cope with such a breach. They demanded explanations from the students for their behavior. In their questions, they often implied an explanation of the aberrant behavior:

> "Did you get fired?"
> "Are you sick?"
> "Are you out of your mind or are you just stupid?"
>
> (Garfinkel, 1967:47)

Family members also sought to explain the behaviors to themselves in terms of previously understood motives. For example, a student was thought to be behaving oddly because she was working too hard or had had a fight with her fiancé. Such explanations are important to participants—the other family members, in this case—because the explanations help them feel that under normal circumstances interaction would occur as it always had.

If the student did not acknowledge the validity of such explanations, family members were likely to withdraw and to seek to isolate, denounce, or retaliate against the culprit. Deep emotions were aroused because the effort to restore order through explanation was rejected by the student. The other family members felt that more intense statements and actions were necessary to restore the equilibrium:

> "Don't bother with him, he's in one of his moods again."
> "Why must you always create friction in our family harmony?"
> "I don't want any more of *that* out of *you* and if you can't treat your mother decently you'd better move out!"
>
> (Garfinkel, 1967:48)

In the end, the students explained the experiment to their families, and in most situations, harmony was restored. However, in some instances hard feelings lingered.

Breaching experiments are undertaken to illustrate the way people order their everyday lives. These experiments reveal the resilience of social reality, since the subjects (or victims) move quickly to normalize the breach—that is, to render the situation accountable in familiar terms. It is assumed that the way people handle these breaches tells us much about how they handle their everyday lives (Handel, 1982). Although these experiments seem innocent enough, they often lead to highly emotional reactions. These extreme reactions reflect how important it is to people to engage in routine, commonsense activities. The reactions to breaches are sometimes so extreme that Hugh Mehan and Houston Wood have cautioned about their use: *"Interested persons are strongly advised not to undertake any new breaching studies"* (1975:113).

Accomplishing Gender

It seems incontrovertible that one's gender—male or female—is biologically based. People are seen as simply manifesting the behaviors that are an outgrowth of their biological makeup. People usually are not thought of as *accomplishing* their gender. In contrast, sexiness is clearly an accomplishment; people need to speak and act in certain ways in order to be seen as sexy. However, it generally is assumed that one does not have to do or say *anything* to be seen as a man or a woman. Ethnomethodology has investigated the issue of gender, with some very unusual results (Stokoe, 2006).

The ethnomethodological view is traceable to one of Harold Garfinkel's (1967) now classic demonstrations of the utility of this orientation. In the 1950s Garfinkel met a person named Agnes, who seemed unquestionably a woman.[3] Not only did she have the figure of a woman, but it was virtually a "perfect" figure with an ideal set of measurements. She also had a pretty face, a good complexion, no facial hair, and plucked eyebrows—and she wore lipstick. This was clearly a woman, or was it? Garfinkel discovered that Agnes had not always appeared to be a woman. In fact, at the time he met her, Agnes was trying, eventually successfully, to convince physicians that she needed an operation to remove her male genitalia and create a vagina.

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[3] For an interesting debate over Garfinkel's interpretation of Agnes, see Denzin (1990a, 1991), Hilbert (1991), Lynch and Bogen (1991), and Maynard (1991).

Agnes was defined as a male at birth. In fact, she was by all accounts a boy until she was 16 years of age. At that age, sensing something was awry, Agnes ran away from home and started to dress like a girl. She soon discovered that dressing like a woman was not enough; she had to *learn to act* like (to "pass" as) a woman if she was to be accepted as one. She did learn the accepted practices and as a result came to be defined, and to define herself, as a woman. Garfinkel was interested in the passing practices that allowed Agnes to function like a woman in society. The more general point here is that we are not simply born men or women; we all also learn and routinely use the commonplace practices that allow us to pass as men or women. It is only in learning these practices that we come to be, in a sociological sense, a man or a woman. Thus, even a category like gender, which is thought to be an ascribed status, can be understood as an accomplishment of a set of situated practices.

Conversation Analysis

We now turn to what has become the major type of research within ethnomethodology—conversation analysis. The goal of conversation analysis is to study the taken-for-granted ways in which conversation is organized. Conversation analysts are concerned with the relationships among utterances in a conversation rather than in the relationships between speakers and hearers (Sharrock and Anderson, 1986:68).

Telephone Conversations: Identification and Recognition

Emanuel A. Schegloff (1979) viewed his examination of the way in which telephone conversations are opened as part of a larger effort to understand the orderly character of social interaction:

> The work in which my colleagues and I have been engaged is concerned with . . . *detecting* and *describing* the *orderly* phenomena of which conversation and interaction are composed, and an interest in depicting the *systematic organizations* by reference to which those phenomena are produced.
>
> (Schegloff, 1979:24, italics added)

This interest extends to various orderly phenomena within interaction, such as the organization of turn taking in conversations and the ways in which people seek to repair breaches in normal conversational procedure. In addition, there is interest in the overall structure of a conversation, including openings, closings, and regularly recurring internal sequences.

In this context Schegloff looked at the opening of a phone conversation, which he defined as "a place where the type of conversation being opened can be proffered, displayed, accepted, rejected, modified—in short, incipiently constituted by the parties to it" (1979:25). Although the talk one hears on the phone is no different from that in face-to-face conversations, the participants lack visual contact. Schegloff focused on one element of phone conversations not found in face-to-face conversations: the sequence by which parties who have no visual contact identify and recognize each other.

Schegloff found that telephone openings are often quite straightforward and standardized:

A. Hello?
B. Shar'n?
A. Hi!

(Schegloff, 1979:52)

But some openings "look and sound idiosyncratic—almost virtuoso performances" (Schegloff, 1979:68):

A. Hello.
B. Hello Margie?
A. Yes.
B. hhh We do painting, antiquing,
A. is that right.
B. eh, hh—hhh
A. hnh, hnh, hnh
B. nhh, hnh, hnh! hh
A. hh
B. keep people's pa'r tools
A. y(hhh)! hnh, hnh
B. I'm sorry about that—that—I din' see that.

(adapted from Schegloff, 1979:68)

Although such openings may be different from the usual openings, they are not without their organization. They are "engendered by a systemic sequential organization adapted and fitted by the parties to some particular circumstances" (Schegloff, 1979:68). For example, the preceding conversation is almost incomprehensible until we understand that *B* is calling to apologize for keeping some borrowed power tools too long. *B* makes a joke out of it by building it into a list (painting, antiquing), and it is only at the end, when both are laughing, that the apology comes.

Schegloff's conclusion was that even very idiosyncratic cases are to be examined "to extract from their local particularities the formal organization into which their particularities are infused" (Schegloff, 1979:71).

Initiating Laughter

Gail Jefferson (1979; see also Jefferson, 1984) looked at the question of how one knows when to laugh in the course of a conversation. The lay view is that laughter is a totally free event in the course of a conversation or interaction. However, Jefferson found that several basic structural characteristics of an utterance are designed to induce the other party to laugh. The first is the placement, by the speaker, of a laugh at the end of his utterance:

Dan. I thought that was pretty out of sight. Did you hear me say you're a junkie . . .
heh, heh Dolly. heh, heh, heh.

(adapted from Jefferson, 1979:80)

The second device reported by Jefferson is within-speech laughter—for example, in mid-sentence:

A. You know I didn't . . . you know
B. Hell, *you* know I'm on ret (haha);
A. ehh, yeh, ha ha.

(adapted from Jefferson, 1979:83)

Jefferson (1979:83) concluded from these examples that the occurrence of laughter is more organized than we realize.

Jefferson was interested not only in the decision to laugh but also in the declining of an invitation to laugh. She found that silence after an invitation is not enough, that a clear signal is required indicating refusal of the invitation. If, for example, someone refuses to laugh, a strategy would be to commence, just after the onset of the speaker's laugh, a serious pursuit of the topic.

Phillip Glenn (1989) has examined the initiation of shared laughter in a multiparty conversation. Glenn argues that whereas in two-party interactions the speaker ordinarily laughs first, in multiparty interactions someone other than the speaker usually provides the first laugh. In a two-party interaction, the speaker is virtually forced to laugh at his or her own material because there is only one other person present who can perform that function. However, in a multiparty interaction, the fact that there are many other people who can laugh first means that the speaker can better afford the risk of not taking the initiative of being the first to laugh.

Generating Applause

John Heritage and David Greatbatch (1986) have studied the rhetoric of British political speeches (derived from a body of work developed by J. Maxwell Atkinson [1984a, 1984b]) and uncovered basic devices by which speakers generate applause from their audiences. They argue that applause is generated by "statements that are verbally constructed (a) to *emphasize* and thus highlight their contents against a surrounding background of speech materials and (b) to *project a clear completion point* for the message in question" (Heritage and Greatbatch, 1986:116). Emphasis tells the audience that applause is appropriate, and advance notice of a clear completion point allows the audience to begin applauding more or less in unison. In their analysis of British political speeches, Heritage and Greatbatch uncovered seven basic rhetorical devices:

1. *Contrast:* For example, a politician might argue: "Too much is spent on war . . . too little is spent on peace." Such a statement generates applause because, for emphasis, the same point is made first in negative terms and then in positive terms. The audience also is able to anticipate when to applaud by matching the unfolding of the second half of the statement with the already completed first half.
2. *List:* A list of political issues, especially the often used three-part list, provides emphasis as well as a completion point that can be anticipated by the audience.

3. *Puzzle solution:* Here the politician first poses a puzzle for the audience and then offers a solution. This double presentation of the issue provides emphasis, and the audience can anticipate the completion of the statement at the end of the solution.
4. *Headline—punch line:* Here the politician proposes to make a statement and then makes it.
5. *Combination:* This involves use of two or more of the devices just listed.
6. *Position taking:* This involves an initial description of a state of affairs that the speaker would be expected to feel strongly about. However, at first it is presented nonevaluatively. Only at the end does the speaker offer his or her own position.
7. *Pursuit:* This occurs when an audience fails to respond to a particular message. The speaker may actively pursue applause by, for example, restating the central point.

In the political party conferences studied by Heritage and Greatbatch, these seven devices accounted for slightly more than two-thirds of the total applause. Of the seven, *contrast* (accounting for almost a quarter of applause events) was by far the most commonly applauded format. The speaker's manner of delivering the message ("intonation, timing, and gesture") also is important (Heritage and Greatbatch, 1986:143). Finally, Heritage and Greatbatch note that the seven devices are not restricted to political speech making, but also are found in advertising slogans, newspaper editorials, scientific texts, and so forth. In fact, they conclude that these devices have their roots and are found in everyday, natural, conversational interaction. The implication is that we all use these devices daily to generate positive reactions from those with whom we interact.

Booing

In a later and parallel piece of research, Steven Clayman (1993) studied booing as an expression of disapproval in the context of public speaking. While applause allows the audience to affiliate with the speaker, booing is an act of disaffiliation.

There are two fundamental ways in which responses such as applause and booing begin—as a result of independent individual decision making and as a product of the mutual monitoring of the behavior of members of an audience. Previous research has demonstrated that individual decision making predominates in the onset of applause. Because the decision is made largely alone, applause occurs almost immediately after a popular remark is made. Also consistent with individual decision making is the fact that applause occurs in a burst that reaches its peak in the first second or two. Further, as demonstrated in the preceding section, a series of well-known devices are employed by speakers to lead audience members to the decision to applaud and then to the applause itself.

Booing, however, is a result more of mutual monitoring than of individual decision making. There is usually a significant time lag between the utterance of the objectionable words and the onset of booing. If booing were the result of a number of individuals making independent decisions, it would occur about as quickly as

applause does. The time lag tends to indicate that audience members are monitoring the behavior of others before deciding whether booing is appropriate. In addition, the onset of booing often is preceded by displays by the audience.

For example, the audience may engage in incipient displays of its disaffiliation[4] from the speaker through "a variety of vocalizations—whispering or talking among themselves, talking, shouting, or jeering at the speaker . . . the resulting sound can be characterized as a 'murmur,' 'buzz,' or 'roar'" (Clayman, 1993:117). Audience members monitor these sounds; they indicate to the members that the audience is predisposed to disapprove of the utterance in question. A given audience member feels freer to boo because she has reason to believe that she will not be alone and therefore suffer the disapproval of other audience members.

Of course, one might ask where the incipient displays come from, if not from independent decision making. Clayman believes that some degree of independent decision making is involved here. Individual decision making occurs in the case of incipient displays because the resulting behaviors (for example, private whispering with neighbors, self-talk [for example, "yikes"]) are more private and less likely to be disapproved of by the rest of the audience than is booing. Thus, there is little or no need to monitor the audience in order to determine the appropriateness of such behaviors.

Clayman concludes that collectively produced applause and booing are very much like individually produced agreement and disagreement in everyday behavior. In both cases, "Agreements tend to be produced promptly, in an unqualified manner, and are treated as requiring no special explanation or account. Disagreements, by contrast, typically are delayed, qualified, and accountable" (Clayman, 1993:125). This similarity leads to the conclusion that applause and booing may be explained by general interactional principles that cut across all sectors of life and not just by the organizational and institutional structures and norms involved in public speaking. Those "general principles of human conduct" are part of the interaction order that "is a species of social institution in its own right, one that predates and is constitutive of most other societal institutions, and possesses its own indigenous organizational properties and conventional practices" (Clayman, 1993:127). In other words, the fundamental principles being uncovered by conversation analysts allow us to understand positive (applause) and negative (booing) responses to public speeches.

The Interactive Emergence of Sentences and Stories

Charles Goodwin (1979) challenged the traditional linguistic assumption that sentences can be examined in isolation from the process of interaction in which they occur. His view was that "sentences emerge with conversation" (Goodwin, 1979:97). The fact is that the "speaker can reconstruct the meaning of his sentence *as he is producing it* in order to maintain its appropriateness to its recipient of the moment" (Goodwin, 1979:98; italics added).

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[4] Booing is also likely to occur after displays of affiliation such as applause, but a different process is involved and we will not deal with it here.

Speakers pay acute attention to listeners as they are speaking. As the listeners react verbally, facially, or with body language, the speaker—on the basis of those reactions—adjusts the sentence as it is emerging. The reactions allow the speaker to decide whether his or her point is being made and, if not, to alter the structure of the sentence. Goodwin described some of the alterations that took place in a particular sentence sequence: "the unfolding meaning of John's sentence is reconstructed twice, a new segment is added to it, and another is deleted prior to its production but replaced with a different segment" (1979:112). In other words, sentences are the products of collaborative processes.

Mandelbaum (1989) examined the interactive emergence of stories. Her key point is that the audience is not passive, as is conventionally assumed, but rather can be seen as the "co-author" of the story. Paralleling Goodwin's analysis of the interactive emergence of sentences, Mandelbaum shows that the audience members have resources that allow them to work with the author to alter a story while the storytelling is in process. The audience participates by allowing the suspension of turn-by-turn talk so that the storyteller may dominate the conversation. The audience members also help the story along by displaying their understanding through the use of expressions such as "uh huh" and "mm hm." The audience may also "repair" some problem in the story, thereby permitting it to proceed more smoothly. Most important for the purposes of this discussion, the audience may intervene in the story and cause it to move off in a new direction. Thus, in a very real sense, stories, like sentences and conversations in general, are interactional products.

Integration of Talk and Nonvocal Activities

Conversation analysts have focused on talk, and other ethnomethodologists on nonvocal activities. Some researchers use videotapes and films to analyze the integration of vocal and nonvocal activities. Charles Goodwin (1984), for example, examined a videotape of a dinner party involving two couples. One issue in the relationship between vocal and nonvocal activities is the body posture of a person (in this case Ann) who tells a story at the party:

> Ann clasps her hands together, places both elbows on the table, and leans forward while gazing toward her addressed recipient, Beth. With this posture the speaker displays full orientation toward her addressed recipient, complete engagement in telling her story, and lack of involvement in any activities other than conversation. The posture appears to . . . constitute a visual display that a telling is in progress.
>
> (C. Goodwin, 1984:228)

More generally, Goodwin concludes, "Ann's telling is thus made visible not only in her talk but also in the way in which she organizes her body and activities during the telling" (1984:229).

Another nonvocal activity examined by Goodwin is the gaze, which he relates to talk:

> When a speaker gazes at a recipient that recipient should be gazing at him. When speakers gaze at nongazing recipients, and thus locate violations of the rule, they frequently produce phrasal breaks such as restarts and pauses, in their talk. These

> phrasal breaks both orient to the event as a violation by locating the talk in progress at that point as impaired in some fashion and provide a remedy by functioning as requests for the gaze of the hearer. Thus just after phrasal breaks nongazing recipients frequently begin to move their gaze to the speaker.
>
> (C. Goodwin, 1984:230)

Body posture and gaze are only two of many nonvocal activities that are intimately related to vocal activities.

Doing Shyness (and Self-Confidence)

We tend to think of shyness and self-confidence as psychological traits, but Philip Manning and George Ray (1993) have attempted to show that they are things that we "do" as we are managing conversational encounters. There are a range of typical procedures that we all use to get acquainted with those we do not know, and the shy and the self-confident modify these procedures, albeit in different ways, in order to deal with social situations distinctively. Thus, the shy and the self-confident employ different conversational strategies.

Manning and Ray conducted a laboratory study with college students involving videotaping and transcribing the interaction of ten shy and ten self-confident dyads. While we all engage in "setting-talk"—that is, talk about our immediate environment—shy people do this much more than do those who are self-confident. Take the following example:

> A. (nervous laughter) A microphone
> B. We're being tape recorded
> A. I know probably
> B. Huh
> A. Okay
> B. I guess they're going to observe how nervous we are (laughs)
> A. I know
>
> (Manning and Ray, 1993:182)

Manning and Ray found that shy participants were more than two and a half times as likely to engage in setting-talk at the beginning of a conversation than were those who are self-confident. Further, those who are shy were eight times more likely to return to setting-talk later, whenever the conversation flagged. Manning and Ray conclude, "We believe that shy participants used setting-talk as a 'safe' topic, comparable to discussions about the weather. By contrast . . . self-confident participants viewed setting-talk as a dead end to be avoided" (1993:183). Instead, those high in self-confidence were more likely to exchange names and move immediately into the introduction of a topic for conversation (a "pretopical sequence"). While shy participants tend to reject these pretopical sequences, those who are self-confident are likely to respond to them, and in depth.

One key issue is whether these and other differences in conversation are symptoms of underlying psychological differences or whether shyness and self-confidence *are* the different conversational procedures. Needless to say, Manning and Ray (1993:189), adopting the ethnomethodological perspective, tend to prefer the latter view.

Studies of Institutions

As pointed out earlier in this chapter, a number of ethnomethodologists have become interested in the study of conversation and interaction in various social institutions. In this section we examine a few examples of this kind of work.

Job Interviews

Some ethnomethodologists have turned their attention to the work world. For example, Button (1987) has looked at the job interview. Not surprisingly, he sees the interview as a sequential, turn-taking conversation and as the "situated practical accomplishment of the parties to that setting" (Button, 1987:160). One issue addressed in this study involves the things that interviewers can do, after an answer has been given, to move on to something else, thereby preventing the interviewee from returning to, and perhaps correcting, his or her answer. First, the interviewer may indicate that the interview as a whole is over. Second, the interviewer may ask another question that moves the discussion in a different direction. Third, the interviewer may assess the answer given in such a way that the interviewee is precluded from returning to it.

Button wonders what it is that makes a job interview an interview. He argues that it is not the sign on the door or the gathering together of people. Rather, it is "what those people do, and how they structure and organize their interactions with one another, that achieves for some social settings its characterizability as an interview. This integrally involves the way in which the participants organize their speech exchange with one another" (Button, 1987:170). Thus it is the nature of the interaction, of the conversation, that defines a job interview.

Executive Negotiations

Anderson, Hughes, and Sharrock (1987) have examined the nature of negotiations among business executives. One of their findings about such negotiations is how reasonable, detached, and impersonal they are:

> Everything is carried out in a considered, measured, reasonable way. No personal animus is involved or intended in their maneuverings. It is simply what they do; part of their working day. . . . Animosities, disagreements and disputes are always contained, in hand, controlled. If a deal cannot be made this time, so be it.
>
> (Anderson, Hughes, and Sharrock, 1987:155)

This kind of interaction tells us a great deal about the business world.

Interestingly, Anderson, Hughes, and Sharrock go on to argue that what takes place in the business world is no different from what takes place in everyday life. In most of our social relationships we behave the way the business executives described above behaved. "Business life does not take place in a sealed compartment, set off from the rest of social life. It is continuous with and interwoven with it" (Anderson, Hughes, and Sharrock, 1987:155).

Calls to Emergency Centers

Whalen and Zimmerman (1987) have examined telephone calls to emergency communications centers. The context of such calls leads to a reduction of the opening of telephone conversations. In normal telephone conversations we usually find summons-answer, identification-recognition, greeting, and "howareyou" sequences. In emergency calls, however, the opening sequences are reduced and recognitions, greetings, and "howareyous" are routinely absent.

Another interesting aspect of emergency phone calls is that certain opening events that would be ignored in a normal conversation are treated quite seriously:

> . . . those situations in which caller hangs up after dispatcher answers, or there is silence on the line or sounds such as dogs barking, arguing and screaming in the background, or a smoke alarm ringing. Despite the lack of direct conversational engagement on the line, dispatchers initially treat these events as possible indicators of a need for assistance, and thus as functional or *virtual* requests.
>
> (Whalen and Zimmerman, 1987:178)

The peculiar nature of the emergency telephone conversation leads to these and other adaptations to the structure of the normal conversation.

In a related study, Whalen, Zimmerman, and Whalen (1988) looked at a specific emergency telephone conversation that failed, leading to the delayed dispatch of an ambulance and the death of a woman. The media tended to blame the dispatcher for this incident, but Whalen, Zimmerman, and Whalen trace the problem to the nature of the specific emergency phone conversation:

> Our investigation revealed that the participants had rather different understandings of what was happening and different expectations of what was supposed to happen in this conversation. Over the course of the interaction the talk of both caller and nurse-dispatcher (and her supervisor) operated to extend and deepen this misalignment. This misalignment contributed in a fundamental way to a dispute that contaminated and transformed the participants' activity.
>
> (Whalen, Zimmerman, and Whalen, 1988:358)

Thus, it was the nature of the specific conversation, not the abilities of the dispatcher, that "caused" the mishap.

Dispute Resolution in Mediation Hearings

Angela Garcia (1991) analyzed conflict resolution in a California program designed to mediate a variety of disputes—between landlord and tenant, over small sums of money, and among family members or friends. Her ultimate goal is to compare institutional conflict resolution with that which takes place in ordinary conversations. Garcia's key point is that institutional mediation makes conflict resolution easier by eliminating processes that lead to escalating levels of strife in ordinary conversation. Further, when arguments do occur in mediation, procedures exist that do not exist in ordinary conversation that make termination of the conflict possible.

Garcia begins with the familiar concern of conversation analysts with turn taking. Mediation stipulates who is allowed to speak at any given time and what form

responses may take. For example, complainants speak first and may not be interrupted by disputants during their presentations. These constraints on interruptions greatly restrict the amount of conflict in mediated disputes. In contrast, the ability to interrupt in normal conversations greatly escalates the likelihood and amount of conflict. Also reducing the possibility of conflict is the fact that disputants must ask the mediator's permission to speak or to use sanctions. The request may be denied, and even if it isn't, the fact that a request has been made serves to mitigate the possibility of direct conflict between disputants. Another key factor in reducing the possibility of conflict is the fact that disputants address their remarks to the mediator rather than to each other. During periods when an issue is under joint discussion, the mediator, not the participants, controls both the topic and who participates by asking disputants directed questions. The mediator therefore serves as both a buffer and a controller and in both roles operates to limit the possibility of conflict.

The mediator seeks especially to limit the possibility of direct and adjacent accusations and denials by the disputants. Such "cross talk" is highly likely to lead to conflict, and mediators seek to prevent it from occurring and are quick to act once it begins. To halt cross talk, the mediator may try to change topics, redirect a question, or sanction the disputants.

In sum, "in mediation, the adjacent and directly addressed oppositional utterances that constitute argument do not occur" (A. Garcia, 1991:827). Garcia summarizes her conclusions by offering four characteristics of mediation that allow disputants to reduce or eliminate arguments while at the same time saving face:

1. Accusations and denials are not adjacent to one another in the turn-taking system of a mediated dispute, thereby reducing the possibility of escalation into an argument.
2. Denials are made not directly to accusations, but to queries by the mediator. Because they are separated from responses, denials are less likely to provoke disputational responses.
3. Because there is a delay between accusation and response, disputants are permitted not to respond to certain accusations without their lack of response implying that they are guilty of those accusations. The delay allows the disputant to "bypass some accusations, focus on the more important accusations, or ignore accusations she or he cannot credibly deny" (A. Garcia, 1991:830). The result is that there generally end up being fewer issues on the table about which arguments can occur.
4. Accusations and denials are mitigated by the mediation system. For example, the agent being accused may be referred to implicitly rather than explicitly, that agent may be referred to collectively as "we" with the result that the complainant is including himself as the blamed party, or the accusations themselves can be downgraded by the use of words and phrases such as "I would imagine" and "maybe."

Unlike Clayman in his study of booing, Garcia does not argue that the structure of interaction in mediation is similar to the interactional organization of everyday life. In fact, her point is that they are very different interactional orders. However, like

Clayman and other conversation analysts, Garcia (1991:833) does see the key to understanding what goes on in interaction, specifically in this case in mediation, in "the interactional order of mediation itself," rather than in the social or normative structure of mediation.

Greatbatch and Dingwall (1997) examined divorce mediation sessions conducted in ten agencies in England. In contrast to Garcia's study, disputants do talk directly to one another and often become involved in arguments. Given this, Greatbatch and Dingwall are interested in the ways in which such arguments are exited. While mediators can take various actions, the focus in this study is on things that the disputants can do to exit an argument, such as one party passing on the opportunity to speak and leaving only the other party talking, taking the initiative and addressing the mediator rather than the other disputant, announcing that one is withdrawing from the argument, and offering conciliatory accounts (e.g., "I'm to blame"). Nevertheless, in most instances in the British case disputants do not talk directly to one another; they do address mediators. Perhaps of greater importance than the specific differences between the two studies is the fact that Greatbatch and Dingwall (1997:164) also take issue with Garcia's argument that what takes place in such settings is not similar to everyday life: "The deescalatory practices described here are not unique to mediation; they are generic speaking practices deriving from ordinary conversation." In other words, the things that disputants do to exit arguments are similar to the ways in which we extricate ourselves from arguments on a daily basis.

Criticisms of Traditional Sociology

Ethnomethodologists criticize traditional sociologists for several reasons.

Separated from the Social

Sociologists are critiqued for imposing *their* sense of social reality on the social world (Mehan and Wood, 1975). They believe that sociology has not been attentive enough to, or respectful enough of, the everyday world that should be its ultimate source of knowledge (Sharrock and Anderson, 1986). More extremely, sociology has rendered the most essential aspects of the social world (ethnomethods) unavailable and focuses instead on a constructed world that conceals everyday practices. Enamored of their own view of the social world, sociologists have tended not to share the same social reality as those they study. As Mehan and Wood put it, "In attempting to do a social *science,* sociology has become alienated from the social" (1975:63).

Within this general orientation, Mehan and Wood (see also Sharrock and Anderson, 1986) leveled a number of specific criticisms at sociology. The concepts used by sociologists are said to distort the social world, to destroy its ebb and flow. Further distortion is caused by sociology's reliance on scientific techniques and statistical analyses of data. Statistics simply do not usually do justice to the elegance and sophistication of the real world. The coding techniques used by sociologists when they translate human behavior into their preconceived categories distort the social world. Furthermore, the seeming simplicity of the codes conceals the complicated and distorting work involved in turning

aspects of the social world into the sociologist's preconceived categories. Sociologists also are seen as tending to accept unquestioningly a respondent's description of a phenomenon rather than looking at the phenomenon itself. Thus, a description of a social setting is taken to *be* that setting rather than one conception of that setting. Finally, Mehan and Wood argued that sociologists are prone to offer abstractions of the social world that are increasingly removed from the reality of everyday life.

Confusing Topic and Resource

Taking a slightly different approach, Don Zimmerman and Melvin Pollner (1970) argued that conventional sociology has suffered from a confusion of *topic* and *resource.* That is, the everyday social world is a resource for the favorite topics of sociology, but it is rarely a topic in its own right. This can be illustrated in a variety of ways. For example, Roy Turner (1970; see also Sharrock and Anderson, 1986) argued that sociologists usually look at everyday speech not as a topic in itself but as a resource with which to study hidden realities such as norms, values, attitudes, and so on. However, instead of being a resource, everyday speech can be seen as one of the ways in which the business of social life is carried on—a topic in itself. Matthew Speier (1970) argued that when sociologists look at childhood socialization, they look not at the processes themselves but at a series of abstract "stages" generalized from those processes. Speier argued that *"socialization is the acquisition of interactional competencies"* (1970:189). Thus, the ethnomethodologist must look at the way these competencies are acquired and used in the everyday reality of the real world.

Another analysis of childhood socialization, by Robert W. Mackay (1974), is even more useful as a critique of traditional sociology and the confusion of topic and resource. Mackay contrasted the "normative" approach of traditional sociology with the interpretive approach of ethnomethodology. The normative approach is seen as arguing that socialization is merely a series of stages in which "complete" adults teach "incomplete" children the ways of society. Mackay viewed this as a "gloss" that ignores the reality that socialization involves an interaction between children and adults. Children are not passive, incomplete receptacles; rather, they are active participants in the socialization process because they have the ability to reason, invent, and acquire knowledge. Socialization is a two-sided process. Mackay believed that the ethnomethodological orientation "restores the interaction between adults and children based on interpretive competencies as the phenomenon of study" (1974:183).

Zimmerman and Pollner (1970) cited other examples of the confusion of topic and resource. For example, they argued that sociologists normally explain action in bureaucracies by the rules, norms, and values of the organization. However, had they looked at organizations as topics, they would have seen that actors often simply make it *appear* through their actions that those actions can be explained by the rules. It is not the rules but the actors' *use* of the rules that should be the topic of sociological research. Zimmerman and Pollner then cited the example of a code of behavior among prison convicts. Whereas traditional sociology would look at the ways in which actors are constrained by a convict code, ethnomethodologists would examine how the convicts use the code as an explanatory and persuasive device.

Don Zimmerman and Lawrence Wieder offered the following generalization on the confusion of topic and resource:

> The ethnomethodologist is not concerned with providing causal explanations of observably regular, patterned, repetitive actions by some kind of analysis of the actor's point of view. He *is* concerned with how members of society go about the task of *seeing, describing,* and *explaining* order in the world in which they live.
>
> (Zimmerman and Wieder, 1970:289)

Social order is not a reality in itself to the ethnomethodologist but an accomplishment of social actors.

Stresses and Strains in Ethnomethodology

Although ethnomethodology has made enormous strides in sociology and has demonstrated, especially in the area of conversation analysis, some capacity to cumulate knowledge of the world of everyday life, there are some problems worth noting.

First, while ethnomethodology is far more accepted today than it was a decade or two ago, it is still regarded with considerable suspicion by many sociologists (Pollner, 1991). They view it as focusing on trivial matters and ignoring the crucially important issues confronting society today. The ethnomethodologists' response is that they *are* dealing with the crucial issues because it is everyday life that matters most. Paul Atkinson sums up the situation: "Ethnomethodology continues to be greeted with mixtures of incomprehension and hostility in some quarters, but it is unquestionably a force to be reckoned with when it comes to the theory, methods, and empirical conduct of sociological inquiry" (1988:442).

Second, there are those (for example, Atkinson, 1988) who believe that ethnomethodology has lost sight of its phenomenological roots and its concern for conscious, cognitive processes (exceptions are Cicourel [1974] and Coulter [1983], although Coulter is inclined to embed cognition within the everyday world). Instead of focusing on such conscious processes, ethnomethodologists, especially conversation analysts, have come to focus on the "structural properties of the talk itself" (Atkinson, 1988:449). Ignored in the process are motives and the internal motivations for action. In Atkinson's view, ethnomethodology has grown "unduly restricted" and has come to be "behaviorist and empiricist" (1988:441). In moving in this direction, ethnomethodology is seen as having gone back on some of its basic principles, including its desire not to treat the actor as a judgmental dope:

> Garfinkel's early inspiration was to reject the judgmental dope image in order to focus attention on the skillful and artful, methodical work put into the production of social order. In the intervening years, however, some versions of ethnomethodology have returned to the judgmental dope as their model actor. Intentionality and meaning have been all but eliminated.
>
> (Atkinson, 1988:449)

Third, some ethnomethodologists have worried about the link between the concerns in their work (for example, conversations) and the larger social structure. This concern exists even though, as we discussed earlier in the chapter and will return to toward

the end, ethnomethodologists tend to see themselves as bridging the micro-macro divide. For example, some years ago, Zimmerman viewed cross-fertilization with macrosociology as "an open question, and an intriguing possibility" (1978:12). Later, Pollner urged ethnomethodology to "return to sociology to understand those [taken-for-granted] practices in their larger social context . . . mundane reason in terms of structural and historical processes. Mundane reason, it is suggested is not simply the product of local work of mundane reasoners, for it is also shaped by longer term and larger scale dynamics" (1987:xvi). Some such cross-fertilization has been undertaken by people like Giddens (1984), who has integrated ethnomethodological ideas into his structuration theory. More generally, Boden (1990; see the next section) has outlined what ethnomethodology has to offer to the issue of the relationship between structure and agency. She argues that the findings of ethnomethodological studies are relevant not only to micro structures but to macro structures as well. There is hope that institutional studies will shed more light on the macro structure and its relationship to micro-level phenomena.

Fourth, and from within the field, Pollner (1991) has criticized ethnomethodology for losing sight of its original radical reflexivity. Radical reflexivity leads to the view that all social activity is accomplished, including the activities of ethnomethodologists. However, ethnomethodology has come to be more accepted by mainstream sociologists. As Pollner puts it, "Ethnomethodology is settling down in the suburbs of sociology" (1991:370). As they have come to be more accepted, ethnomethodologists have tended to lose sight of the need to analyze their own work. As a result, in Pollner's view, ethnomethodology is in danger of losing its self-analytical and critical edge and becoming just another establishment theoretical specialty.

Finally, it should be noted that although they are discussed under the same heading, there is a growing uneasiness in the relationship between ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (Lynch, 1993:203–264). As mentioned earlier, they have somewhat different roots. More important, in recent years it is conversation analysis that has made the greatest headway in sociology as a whole. Its tendency to study conversations empirically makes it quite acceptable to the discipline's mainstream. The tension between the two is likely to increase if conversation analysis continues to settle into the mainstream while ethnomethodological studies of institutions remain more on the periphery.

Synthesis and Integration

Even ethnomethodology, one of the most determinedly micro-extremist perspectives in sociological theory, has shown some signs of openness to synthesis and integration. For example, ethnomethodology seems to be expanding into domains that appear to be more in line with mainstream sociology. Good examples are Heritage and Greatbatch's (1986) analysis of the methods used to generate applause from audiences and Clayman's (1993) study of booing. Typologies developed by such ethnomethodologists seem little different from the kinds of typologies employed by various other types of sociological theorists.

However, ethnomethodology remains embattled and insecure and thus, in some ways, seems to run counter to the trend toward theoretical synthesis. Seemingly rejecting the idea of synthesis, Garfinkel sees ethnomethodology as an "incommensurably alternate sociology" (1988:108). Boden (1990) finds it necessary to make a strong, albeit somewhat self-conscious, case *for* ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. It is certainly true, as Boden suggests, that ethnomethodology has widened and deepened its support in sociology. However, one wonders whether it, or any other sociological theory for that matter, is, as Boden contends, "here to stay." In any case, such an argument contradicts the idea that theoretical boundaries are weakening and new synthetic perspectives are emerging. It may be that ethnomethodology is still too new and too insecure to consider an erosion of its boundaries.

Nevertheless, much of Boden's (1990) essay deals with synthetic efforts *within* ethnomethodology, especially regarding integrative issues such as the relationship between agency and structure, the embeddedness of action, and fleeting events within the course of history. Boden also deals with the extent to which an array of European and American theorists have begun to integrate ethnomethodology and conversation analysis into their orientations. Unfortunately, what is lacking is a discussion of the degree to which ethnomethodologists are integrating the ideas of other sociological theories into their perspective. Ethnomethodologists seem quite willing to have other theorists integrate ethnomethodological perspectives, but they seem far less eager to reciprocate.

Ethnomethodology and the Micro-Macro Order

Hilbert (1990) deals with the relationship between ethnomethodology and the micro-macro order. As we saw earlier, Hilbert rejects the conventional idea that ethnomethodology is a microsociology, but it is not, in his view, to be seen as a macrosociology either. Rather, Hilbert argues that ethnomethodology "transcends" the micro-macro issue because it is concerned "with social practices [membership practices] which are the methods of producing *both* microstructure and macrostructure as well as any presumed 'linkage' between these two" (1990:794).

Hilbert, somewhat erroneously (see Chapter 14), reduces the micro-macro linkage issue to a set of structural concerns. That is, it involves a focus on micro structures, macro structures, and the linkage between them. In Hilbert's view, ethnomethodologists are "indifferent" to structures *at any level.* Instead of being concerned with either micro or macro structures, ethnomethodologists are interested in the membership practices, the "ethnomethods," "the artful production," of structure in general. That is, ethnomethodologists are interested in the "methods of producing, maintaining, sustaining, and reproducing social structure by and for the membership, whether oriented to large scale institutional (macro) structure or smaller, more intimate (micro) structure" (Hilbert, 1990:799).

Hilbert offers what he calls the "radical thesis" of ethnomethodology, which serves to transcend the issue of micro-macro linkage:

> The empirical phenomena that conversation analysts witness but which members cannot possibly know about, and . . . the structural phenomena that members orient

> to and take for granted but which nevertheless are nonempirical and unavailable for social science are (in a subtle way) . . . *the same phenomena*.
>
> (Hilbert, 1990:801)

In other words, to the ethnomethodologist there is no distinction to be made between micro and macro structures because they are generated simultaneously. However, neither ethnomethodologists nor any other sociological theorists have offered the ultimate solution to the micro-macro issue. Hilbert's effort is marred by his reduction of this issue to a concern for the linkage of micro and macro *structures.* As we will see in Chapter 14, there is far more to this issue than such a linkage. Nevertheless, the ethnomethodologists do offer an interesting, indeed radical, approach to this question, dissolving it and arguing that the micro and the macro are the same thing! Certainly one way to deal with the micro-macro issue is to refuse to separate the two levels, seeing them instead as part of the same general process.

Summary

This chapter is devoted to a very distinctive kind of sociology and sociological theory—ethnomethodology. Ethnomethodology is the study of the everyday practices used by the ordinary members of society in order to deal with their day-to-day lives. People are seen as accomplishing their everyday lives through a variety of artful practices. Over the years, ethnomethodology has grown increasingly diverse. However, the two main varieties of ethnomethodology are institutional studies and conversation analysis.

We examine several early examples of ethnomethodology, including "breaching experiments," as well as Garfinkel's famous study of Agnes and the ways in which "she" accomplished being a female (even though she was actually a he). The bulk of the chapter is devoted to a discussion of the heart of ethnomethodology—studies of conversations and institutions. Included in the discussion of studies of conversations are reviews of work on such things as how people know when it is appropriate to laugh, applaud, and boo. We also discuss several institutional studies, including one that deals with the way disputes are resolved in mediation hearings.

Ethnomethodologists tend to be highly critical of mainstream sociology. For example, mainstream sociologists are seen as imposing their sense of social reality on people rather than studying what people actually do. Sociologists distort the social world in various ways by imposing their concepts, utilizing statistics, and so on. Sociologists also are accused of confusing topic and resource—that is, using the everyday world as a resource rather than as a topic in its own right.

There are a variety of stresses and strains within ethnomethodology, including its continued exclusion from the mainstream of sociology, the accusation that it has lost sight of cognitive processes, the inability to deal adequately with social structures, the loss of its original radical quality, and the tension between ethnomethodologists and conversation analysts. The chapter closes with a discussion of some work within ethnomethodology on integration and synthesis. However, there are those who regard ethnomethodology as incompatible with other sociological theories.