

Ethnomethodology

Ethnomethodology: Study of how people make sense of the world and the methods people use in their everyday lives

Developed by Harold Garfinkel (b. 1917). Studied under Parsons at Harvard). Coined term in 1954 during research on jury deliberations. Professor at UCLA from 1954-87.

Some key ideas:

Social facts are not external and coercive. Rather, they are the accomplishment of people. (Eth-meth doesn't focus on micro- or macro-structures, but on the practices that produce them.)

Most action is routine and relatively unreflective.

Reality is precarious because nothing is really out there. Everything we know is constructed through conversation, records, etc. All we have are these interpretations or *accounts*.

People make accounts to explain particular situations. This is called *accounting*.

Our strongest social principles is to leave these interpretations alone. People resist when the taken-for-granted reality is questioned.

The breaching exercise attempts to uncover taken-for-granted rules by breaking them.

One of the strongest areas to eth-meth research is conversational analysis.

Some research topics: how phone conversations opened, record keeping, accomplishing gender, how we know when to laugh, applaud or boo, negotiations.

Some disagreements with symbolic interactionism: (1) ethmeth focus on precariousness of social order (as opposed to SI's resourceful actors), (2) ethmeth rejection of social science constructs (as opposed to SI's "grounded theory" approach), (3) ethmeth rejection of theory and claim that it is entirely empirical.

Breaching the Congruency of Relevances

“This expectancy consists of the following. The person expects, expects that the other person does the same, and expects that as he expects it of the other the other expects the like of him that the differences in their perspectives that originate in their particular individual biographies are irrelevant for the purposes at hand of each and that both have selected and interpreted the actually and potentially common objects in an “empirically identical” manner that is sufficient for the purposes at hand.” (Garfinkel 1963)

Case 2. (S): “Hi, Ray. How is your girl friend feeling?”

(E): “What do you mean, how is she feeling? Do you mean physical or mental?”

(S): “I mean how is she feeling? What’s the matter with you?” (He looked peeved.)

(E): “Nothing. Just explain a little clearer, what do you mean?”

(S): “Skip it. How are your Med School applications coming?”

(E): “What do you mean, ‘How are they?’ “

(S): “You know what I mean.”

(E): “I really don’t.”

(S): “What’s the matter with you? Are you sick?”

Case 5. My friend said to me, “Hurry or we will be late.” I asked him what did he mean by late and from what point of view did it have reference. There was a look of perplexity and cynicism on his face. “Why are you asking me such silly questions? Surely I don’t have to explain such a statement. What is wrong with you today? Why should I have to stop to analyze such a statement. Everyone understands my statements and you should be no exception.”

Case 6. The victim waved his hand cheerily.

(S): “How are you?”

(E): “How am I in regard to what? My health, my finance, my school work, my peace of mind, my...”

(S): (Red in the face and suddenly out of control.) “Look! I was just trying to be polite. Frankly, I don’t give a damn how you are.”

Breaching the expectancy that a knowledge of a relationship of interaction is a commonly entertained scheme of communication

Illustrated in the boarder exercise (from the assigned reading)

“Schutz proposed that from the member’s point of view, an event of conduct, like a move in a game, consists of an event-in-a-social-order. Thus, for the member, its recognizably real character is furnished by attending its occurrence with respect to a corpus of socially sanctioned knowledge of the social relationships that the member uses and assumes that others use as the same scheme of expression and interpretation.” (Garfinkel 1963)

Breaching the Interchangeability of Standpoints

Schutz: “I take it for granted—and assume my fellow-man does the same—that if I change places with him so that his ‘here’ becomes mine, I shall be at the same distance from things and see them with the same typicality as he actually does; moreover, the same things would be in my reach which are actually in his. (The reverse is also true.)”

Case 2. We went to V’s book store.... I approached a gentleman who was browsing at a table stacked neatly with books.

(E): “I’m in a hurry. Would you get a copy of *Sociopathic Behavior* by Lemert, please?”

(S): (Looked *E* up and down, drew himself very straight, slowly laid the book down, stepped back slightly, then leaned forward and in a low voice said) “I’m interested in sociopathic behavior, too. That’s why I’m here. I study the fellows here by pretending to be...”

(E): (Interrupting) “I’m not particularly interested in whether you are or are only pretending to be. Please just get the book I asked for.”

(S): (Looked shocked. More than surprised, believe me. Stepped around the display table, deliberately placed his hands on the books, leaned forward and shouted) “I don’t have such a book. I’m not a clerk! I’m— Well!” (Stalked out of the store.)

Case 3. When we entered I. Magnin’s there was one woman who was fingering a sweater, the only piece of merchandise to be seen in the shop. I surmised that the clerk must be in the stockroom.

(E): “That is a lovely shade, but I’m looking for one a little lighter. Do you have one in cashmere?”

(S): “I really don’t know, you see I’m...”

(E): (Interrupting) “Oh, you are new here? I don’t mind waiting while you look for what I want.”

(S): “Indeed I shall not!”

(E): “But aren’t you here to *serve* customers?”

(S): “I’m not! I’m here to...”

(E): (Interrupts) “This is hardly the place for such an attitude. Now please show me a cashmere sweater a shade or two lighter than this one.”

(The clerk entered.)

(S): (To clerk) “My dear, this—(pointed her face toward *E*)—*person* insists on being shown a sweater. Please take care of her while I compose myself. I want to be certain this (sweater) will do, and she (pointed her face again at *E*) is so *insistent*.” (*S* carried the sweater with her, walked haughtily to a large upholstered chair, sat in it, brushed her gloved hands free from imaginary dirt, jerked her shoulders, fluffed her suit jacket, and glared at *E*).