Mid-American Review of Sociology
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ETHNOMETHODOLOGY AND ETHNOSOCIOLOGY

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Understanding ethnomethodology seems to pose severe problems for many social scientists. The discussions and critiques of ethnomethodology by nonpractitioners are almost uniformly viewed by insiders as incompetent, and that is often so for even the sympathetic discussants. It is my intention, here, to try to provide the grounds for an intuitive grasp of what "classical" ethnomethodology is about and to do so in a way in which it can also be appreciated just why this discipline should be so difficult to grasp. One of the difficulties in understanding ethnomethodology is that it both involves a substantive area of study, and its practice requires the use of a specific attitude or posture which is related to but different from that of traditional sociology. This means that ethnomethodology is, in a sense, a discipline which is distinct from sociology, although both its attitudes and its subject matter are related to and relevant to the concerns of sociology.

Garfinkel coined the term "ethnomethodology" (recounted in Garfinkel, 1974, pp. 15-18) after seeing interests cognate to his own in the developing "ethnosciences" of ethnobotany, ethnomedicine, ethnopharmacology, ethnogeology, and the like. It was the initiating idea of ethnosciences which caught Garfinkel's attention and not the specific attitudes, orientations, theories, and methods which, in fact, markedly contrast with those of ethnomethodology (cf. Wieder, 1970; and Eglin, 1975). The initiating idea of the ethnosciences was the notion that the knowledge possessed by members of some societies could be viewed as analogous to the knowledge systems of the sciences (cf. Sturtevant, 1964, pp. 91-100; Tyler, 1969, pp. 5-7).

Along the same lines, one could also propose an