

Review:

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Paul ten Have (2004). Understanding Qualitative Research and Ethnomethodology. London, etc.: Sage, 199 + xv pages, 0-7619-6684-6 (hardcover) \$115/ £60/ EUR 105,90; 0-7619-6685-4 (paper) \$36.95/ £19.99/ EUR 34,50

Key words:

ethnomethodology,
ethnography, qual-
itative
methodology,
grounded theory,
conversational
analysis

Abstract: Paul TEN HAVE presents an overview of qualitative methodology approaches and compares selected approaches to ethnomethodology. TEN HAVE differentiates methods from methodology. The book offers a collection of qualitative methods but not a methodology for doing qualitative research. TEN HAVE defines methods as research strategies and contends that methods are central to qualitative inquiry from start to finish. The text is organized into nine chapters covering topics related to ethnomethodology's perspective, methods, and research, and comparisons to ethnography and grounded theory. This review provides a commentary on TEN HAVE's text for qualitative researchers. The core of the book is on ethnomethodology.

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1. Overview of TEN HAVE's Text

Paul TEN HAVE's text *Understanding Qualitative Research and Ethnomethodology* is written for sociologists and qualitative researchers from social science fields to serve as an introductory text for advanced students and professionals interested in qualitative research methods. The text is not an exhaustive methodology but a loose collection of qualitative methods aimed at piquing the interests of researchers. Beginning in the first chapter TEN HAVE distinguishes between methods and methodology. He defines methods as procedures and strategies for doing research. Methodology, on the other hand, comprises systematic integration of methods that contain a philosophical

perspective underlying the approach as well as step-by-step procedures for approaching research that guide the qualitative inquiry. [1]

In chapter one TEN HAVE draws a distinction between quantitative and qualitative research, noting that quantitative methods condense data into summaries of empirical findings in tables. Qualitative research, on the other hand, takes the expansion-of-data approach by searching for elaborations of hidden meanings and multiple perspectives, and letting the voices of the participants become the dominant mode of presentation rather simply condensing the data into depersonalized descriptions that are removed from social interaction and human experiences in the larger cultural context. [2]

1.1 Ethnomethodology: Background and perspective

In chapters two and three Paul TEN HAVE outlines the fundamental perspective and method central to ethnomethodology. He reminds us that scholars following two basic traditions, symbolic interaction and phenomenology, introduced the core principles underlying ethnomethodology into the social science literature in the late 1960's. In his text TEN HAVE discusses the seminal contributions of Harold GARFINKEL and Harvey SACKS. [3]

Harold GARFINKEL is the father of ethnomethodology. GARFINKEL was trained in the classical sociological traditions of Talcott PARSONS at Harvard University. It was while at Harvard that GARFINKEL first began to question the traditional Durkheimian explanations of social facts that had become central to sociological thought. GARFINKEL challenged the factuality of "social facts" and raised questions about how they became classified and documented to constitute a social fact. For GARFINKEL a more intriguing question was what makes up the social facts and the authenticity of the so-called social blocks of explanation of social life. [4]

At the beginning of Paul TEN HAVE's chapter on the ethnomethodological perspective he quotes GARFINKEL as saying that "ethnomethodology's standing task is to examine social facts, just in every and any actual case asking for each thing, what makes it accountably just what that social fact is?" (GARFINKEL, 2002, p.25). TEN HAVE elaborates on this seminal idea by sketching out the historical evolution of what has come to be known as ethnomethodology. [5]

It is clear in TEN HAVE's account of ethnomethodology that the focus of the perspective is on the social construction of meaning. Max WEBER's notion of Verstehen is introduced to remind us that the process of understanding, in a sociological sense, is a process of relational reconstruction that attempts to juxtapose the observed sense of social action with ideal types that typify the characteristics. [6]

Ethnomethodology is tied to the sociology of knowledge and those postmodern perspectives in social science research that take the not-knowing and emergent vantage point that allows the data to emerge without preconceived notions of the

meaning of social action that must be understood in the broader social context. In this sense the social construction of "social facts" becomes more central than what the actual "social facts" are in an objective sense. It is in the creation of description that the "social facts" take on a life of their own. [7]

The social construction of these images of social action emerges through social conventions that become recognized as explanations. It is through the emergent social conventions that "Verstehen" is created. This understanding of the social fabric of life becomes a key organizing principle of the social construction of meaning. Three key elements (account, accountability, and reflexivity) of this are highlighted by TEN HAVE as being central to ethnomethodology. [8]

Thus in ethnomethodology, accounts of social phenomena become the essence of social research. The way in which these descriptions and explanations are fashioned portrays the images of the social world that ethnomethodologists make the crux of their inquiries. At the same time, accounts need to be understood in the context of what makes them credible explanations. This phenomenon requires us to focus on the accountability of actors' social explanations by examining the methods and procedures for classification of accounts. GARFINKEL (1967) reminds us that researchers are liable to produce explanations of social phenomena in a clear way that ordinary people can understand. [9]

GARFINKEL (1967) notes that accountability is reflexive, and that reflexivity is the self-explicating of common ordinary actions that become the core of social life. TEN HAVE notes that in this context GARFINKEL is not focusing on the individual but the social phenomenon that treats the individuals as members of social cohorts not as individuals. The reflexive nature of inquiry is thus a collective social consensus. [10]

Harvey SACKS introduced two core notions in ethnomethodology. The first is the concept of "membership categorization analysis" that permits the researcher to create categorical distinctions in conversation analysis such as "gender" that can be broken into "male and female" categories. TEN HAVE labels the second SACKS core concept "sequential analysis." Sequential analysis permits us to identify patterns of "turn taking" in conversations. [11]

1.2 Interviews and natural documents

In chapters four and five Paul TEN HAVE groups data collection procedures and distinguishes between interview methods and natural documents. Interview methods are based upon assumptions that societal processes and social actions can be understood from the vantage point of the voices of individuals living those experiences. The interview method is central to sociological research that provides an understanding of the opinions, actions, and values individual members of society convey and can give us an understanding of the unique individual characteristics and preferences of individuals on a variety of topics ranging from social issues to consumer behavior norms of consumption. In

political elections, the use of opinion polls provides candidates a measure of standing on important values and norms within society as perceived by demographic group comparisons. [12]

"Natural documents" refer to the records available to portray social life in written texts, photographs, and drawings that become part of the social record of events and historical profiles. These are produced both in a current societal process and through the longer-term events in historical epochs. Both official records such as court records, legal documents, almanacs of social events, etc., and informal records of the marginalized voices in the counterculture that may be depicted in forms of graffiti, cultural symbols of identity, etc., have been central to the work of archaeologists and historians for decades. [13]

The ultimate meaning of documents is understood in the social context in which they were produced and discovered. HAVE notes that a core concern in documentary analysis is establishing the factuality of the claims through the authenticity, credibility, and representativeness of artifacts. He reminds us that even when documents are factually established as credible representatives we still must struggle with the issue of establishing their "social meaning." For example, researchers may examine the lyrics in music within a culture to discover the themes of daily life, values, and normative patterns within the broader culture within a specific epoch of interest. [14]

1.3 Ethnography and field methods

In chapter six TEN HAVE outlines ethnographic field methods and draws upon classic ethnographic research to demonstrate how ethnographies provide excellent sources of data for ethnomethodologists. TEN HAVE points out that ethnography is a research method that permits the researcher to live in the natural environment of a group as a part of the culture and so to gain a holistic perspective of the group, its culture and societal norms and patterns, based upon intense observations over an extended period of time. Ethnography is a key method used in anthropology to do prolonged field work; it involves the use of key informants from the culture to help describe an insider perspective that is juxtaposed with the researcher's outsider perspective to provide detailed pictures of social interaction patterns and cultural norms. [15]

TEN HAVE provides examples of classical ethnographies such as William Foote WHYTE's study of street life in an Italian subculture. Based on extended field work in the Italian slums of Boston, WHYTE (1955) portrays the culture and social structure of the informal social structure of "street corner society" in the late 1930's. WHYTE's research is a classic in sociological and anthropological circles upon which current ethnographers draw to develop multiple perspectives on the interfaces of cultural subcultures with dominant society and its social control structures of society. TEN HAVE uses verbatim passages from WHYTE (1955) to raise issues of interconnectedness among the (subjective) experiences of the researcher, observations (documented field notes of interactions within the field

setting by members of the subculture as well as with outside agents, such as the police), and analytical preferences. [16]

TEN HAVE also cites the exemplary work of Erving GOFFMAN on social institutions. In *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and inmates* (1961) GOFFMAN demonstrates how institutional ethnographies pose a dual description: the "officially maintained" social accounts of institutional policies, procedures, and patterns differ from the "unofficial accounts" that present inmates' lived experiences through their descriptions of the same policies and procedures from a perspective that is often hidden from the public. The "down to earth" accounts of how these procedures and policies are experienced in everyday life are uncomplimentary to the dominant perspective of the "official record" of the social institution. HAVE notes, as GOFFMAN did in "Asylums," that the mere fact of researchers being present and making observations has a latent function of disrupting the daily routines and patterns of staff and inmates that alters what is being observed and described in the ethnography. It is the commentary and analysis of this latent function that makes it possible for the ethnography to be analyzed from an ethnomethodological perspective. [17]

TEN HAVE presents an exemplary illustration of an ethnomethodological ethnography in the form of the classic study by David SUDOW (1967), *Passing on: the social organization of dying*. The ethnomethodological analysis of the relationship between social institutional patterns of handling the course of dying among the ill in a hospital setting is reflective of how the emotional aspects of relating to the dying patient are handled through the formality and social distance of professionals. The professionals' behavior leads to the establishment of social norms by which the professionals show no emotional reactions to the death and dying experience in the presence of the dying patient's family, friends, and in many cases even hospital co-workers. [18]

1.4 Contrasting grounded theory and ethnomethodology

Grounded theory emerged in the 1960's from the work of Barney GLASER and Anselm STRAUSS. GLASER was a graduate of Columbia University and influenced by the work of Paul LAZARFELD on verification. STRAUSS was a student at the University of Chicago and was heavily influenced by the symbolic interactionist theory that played a significant role in the development of the qualitative research traditions of today. In their 1967 book *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research* (GLASER & STRAUSS, 1967) these two introduced the field of sociology to a research methodology that attempted to both generate theory and test theory. [19]

It is ironic that ethnomethodology emerged in the same period of time. TEN HAVE contends ethnomethodology has remained more atheoretical and that it has resisted the tendency to do what TEN HAVE contends grounded theory has sometimes done: be reductionist and attempt to force theoretical categories. I am not convinced that grounded theory has actually abandoned the tradition of generating explanation from the data, as TEN HAVE contends, but I do see

ethnomethodology at one end of the continuum of qualitative approaches and grounded theory at the other end. With the emphasis in grounded theory on coding (STRAUSS & CORBIN, 1990; STRAUSS & CORBIN, 1998) and development of propositions, grounded theory is clearly more closely linked to quantitative research traditions than any other qualitative methodology. [20]

It is clear in reading Paul TEN HAVE (2004) that he is skeptical of the grounded theory approach. He sees grounded theory's emphasis on codification and propositional linkages as an almost ritualistic exercise. To TEN HAVE, analysis always involves a dialectic confrontation of emergent discoveries with previous knowledge claims. I am not certain that grounded theorists would disagree with the idea of a confrontation, at least in the form of the production of categorical evidence claims that can be either refuted or verified. What I think TEN HAVE may not be taking into account in his critique is that grounded theory uses the "deviant case" to explain exceptions and move to higher levels of abstraction in the naming of categories that are inclusive of the full description and explanation offered in their propositions and descriptive narrative accounts. [21]

1.5 Reflections and doing ethnomethodological studies

In the eighth chapter TEN HAVE attempts to demonstrate how to do ethnomethodological studies. He presents a series of observational assignments he has used with his students in sociology classes to teach fundamentals of observation and demonstrate how ordinary social situations can become the foci of inquiry. He notes that the use of "bracketing" serves as a technique for illustrating the foci of what is studied, with attention to what is observed, that is distinguishable from what is already known about the phenomena observed. TEN HAVE emphasizes that in ethnomethodological analysis the researcher attempts to discover the specifics of how social actions take place contextually. He contends ethnomethodology moves to specificity by consciously noting the procedural aspects and steps in observation and observer reaction to the observed. [22]

In the final chapter, TEN HAVE offers reflections on the purposes of research. He notes that ethnomethodological indifference tends to be perceived as critical of established conventions of doing social research (both quantitative and qualitative). In this sense he is arguing, as did Aaron CICOUREL (1974), that ethnomethodology places itself outside normative research practices. TEN HAVE notes that: "The major function of this 'indifference' seems to be to clear the way for a reconsideration of practical phenomena in their local specifics, rather than in terms of an pre-given schema or rule-set" (p.177). [23]

Throughout his text Paul TEN HAVE demonstrates a concerted commitment to ethnomethodology that at times seems provoking and stimulating and at other times appears dull and boring. It could be that I am guilty of what TEN HAVE notes many qualitative researchers are guilty of: being more curious about the personal experiences and cultures that I study than about the more obscure details of routine that have become the hallmark of ethnomethodology. [24]

As in other texts on qualitative methodologies (e.g., CRESWELL, 1998; DENZIN & LINCOLN, 2000) TEN HAVE discusses the theoretical and conceptual principles underlying major approaches. Two primary approaches to qualitative methodology (ethnography and grounded theory) are identified and contrasted to ethnomethodology. [25]

2. Context for Application

TEN HAVE's background as a qualitative researcher and sociology professor at the University of Amsterdam provides a wealth of expertise to understand qualitative research methods. His work on doing conversational analysis (TEN HAVE, 1999) is one of the major texts in the field. [26]

Ethnomethodology is a framework for evaluating research and theory. The key contribution of ethnomethodology is to raise difficult questions that challenge the assumptions of methods and procedures used in a variety of qualitative and, to some degree, quantitative methods of inquiry. In a sense TEN HAVE's text provides a framework for "... stimulating reflection on the ways of doing qualitative social research by asking the general question, 'How is qualitative social research possible?'" (TEN HAVE, p.1) [27]

3. Evaluative Commentary

TEN HAVE's book provides few pragmatic suggestions for using ethnomethodological procedures. The text would have been of greater value to my teaching if it had laid out a programmatic tutorial for learning how to think from an ethnomethodological perspective. The summaries of major points at the end of each chapter provide a good review of the major ideas presented in the chapters. The recommended readings at the end of each chapter are a good source for easily reading elaborations and the comparisons of ideas more briefly presented in the TEN HAVE text. [28]

Perhaps the feature of TEN HAVE's book that I find most useful is the examples of the work of classical ethnomethodologists such as GARFINKEL and GOFFMAN. Through the exemplary works of GOFFMAN, TEN HAVE provides illustrations of how theoretical and methodological ideas can be embedded in the text. [29]

4. Extensions and Further Applications

As I read the book I thought of several applications of ethnomethodology that could be made in my own work as a marriage and family therapist. I could also see how my training in sociology can revisit my earlier training in ethnomethodology over three decades ago and consider how the theoretical principles proposed by Harold GARFINKEL (1967) have been advanced (GARFINKEL, 2002). [30]

In my work as a marriage and family therapist and supervisor of other therapists I currently use documents from family histories and genograms to provide a picture of generational connections. This feature of my work does not directly follow TEN HAVE's approach to ethnomethodology using documents. Nevertheless, the application of documents and pictures that I use in the therapy process has a key aspect in common with ethnomethodological studies, that of focusing on procedural aspects of the shared "situated practices" that illustrate patterns of everyday life through the generations. This is found in the commonalities that are embedded in the family system in past generations such as name preferences for children, occupations, religion, and political participation. I have used Jerry GALE's (1996) conversational analysis notations in analyzing dialogues in clinical cases. GALE's procedure is similar to TEN HAVE's conversational analysis. [31]

As a professor teaching qualitative research methodologies to doctoral level students I have observed two reactions to ethnomethodology that lead students to be curious about it but to experience difficulties in applying ethnomethodological procedures. First, students are puzzled about how ethnomethodology can be applied because there are no clear-cut guidelines available to them. Second, students attempt to master the skills with little success and leave ethnomethodology for other qualitative strategies that have clearer procedures. [32]

I have come to see this confusion about ethnomethodology as a by-product of the position of not providing common formulations for how to apply ethnomethodology. TEN HAVE notes that ethnomethodologists refuse to offer templates because "... they trust that their methods are self-evident from their text ..." (TEN HAVE, p.36). If my students are not comforted by this "self-evident" clarity of the methods and procedures they are left to wonder how the procedures could be transferred from one researcher to another. [33]

I was hoping to find, in this book, answers to the problems ethnomethodology posits to the novice. In reading and reflecting on TEN HAVE's text I saw examples of applications that address some of these problems, but I am left with the haunting questions of my students on how to teach the procedures in order to make the application of ethnomethodology pragmatic for young researchers interested in examining this approach to qualitative research. [34]

5. Summary

In this review I have provided a commentary on and evaluation of TEN HAVE's text *Understanding qualitative research and ethnomethodology*. This book is not easy to read and requires deep thought and reflection to understand. In this sense TEN HAVE has achieved his goal of stimulating thought about qualitative research. [35]

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FQS 6(3), Art. 12, Review Charles Lee Cole:
"Understanding Qualitative Research and Ethnomethodology" (Have 2004)

Citation

Cole, Charles Lee (2005). Review: Paul ten Have (2004). Understanding Qualitative Research and Ethnomethodology [35 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 6(3), Art. 12, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0503121>.