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Anne Warfield Rawls (Ed.)

# Harold Garfinkel: Parsons' Primer



J.B. METZLER



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Anne Warfield Rawls  
Editor

# Harold Garfinkel: Parsons' Primer

With an introduction by Anne Warfield Rawls  
and Jason Turowetz



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# Introduction to Parsons' Primer

Anne Warfield Rawls and Jason Turowetz

Harold Garfinkel gave the title *Parsons' Primer* to a manuscript of nine chapters that he wrote from 1959 to 1963 to explain the importance of Talcott Parsons' social theory and the significance of his move toward social interactionism in his later work. The manuscript is important for at least four reasons: *First*, written by Garfinkel in response to discussion and correspondence with Parsons (while teaching a seminar on Parsons in 1959 and again in 1963 at UCLA), it reflects a sustained but unknown dialogue between the two scholars about culture/interaction in their respective positions (Rawls and Turowetz 2019); *Second*, throughout Garfinkel maintains that Parsons was misunderstood *because* he put interaction (and culture *as* interaction) at the center of his social theory, while few scholars realized that he had done so; a problem that was exacerbated by a wartime turn against the study of social interaction in US sociology (Rawls 2018); *Third*, the analysis challenges conventional readings of both scholars, showing Parsons to be more sophisticated and oriented toward interaction, and Garfinkel more indebted to him, than generally understood; and, *Fourth*, in the manuscript we find Garfinkel offering his own research on "ethno-methods" as a demonstration of Parsons' position.

In essence, Garfinkel credits Parsons with taking a social contract position that inverted Hobbes. Whereas Hobbes and the social contract philosophers, who followed him, had argued that rational beings would see the necessity of making a social contract as the only way to avoid living in a perpetual state of war, Parsons proposed that only in the context of a prior and implicit social contract can humans function as the "rational individuals" that Hobbes' position assumed. Parsons was introducing Durkheim's "constitutive practice"

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References to parts of the text within this book are indicated only by page number.

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position to US sociology (Rawls 2009, 2012)<sup>1</sup> with a twist that incorporated Weber's conceptions of legitimacy and mutual orientation, while putting implicit social contract at the foundation of a theory of social order in which "systems of interaction" ground an approach to culture as "assembled stable social structures of interaction", with a focus on the assembly.

As Garfinkel explains it (Chapter IV), Parsons' initial contribution to sociology in the 1930's was to posit the need for a moral commitment to an underlying social contract and its guarantee of sanctions, as a precondition for the possibility of rational actors, meaningful objects and meaningful actions. Parsons' move toward culture as an independent dimension of social action in 1949 and his formulation of interaction in terms of "double contingency" in 1951 were moves toward a comprehensive theory of interaction. Garfinkel's elaboration of the "Trust conditions" that are required to ground this conception of "culture as interaction" built on Parsons' foundation.<sup>2</sup> While Garfinkel was also inspired by Schutz' conception of "taken-for-granted" practices and Wittgenstein's notion of "language games", and made extensive use of both – he used them to supply filler for the theoretical architecture of the interactional system derived from Parsons – as neither treated constitutive practices in terms of a "system of interaction" that was fully sociological in the sense that Garfinkel required.

This is not to say that Garfinkel adopted Parsons' position, but rather that he tried to modify and improve it – and to do so with Parsons' approval. The

<sup>1</sup> A constitutive practice is one in which meeting constitutive criteria is required to accomplish the practice. Durkheim introduced the idea in the *Division of Social Labor* (1893) that constitutive self-regulating practices could enable modern work and science to escape the boundaries of belief. The legacy of this idea was passed from Durkheim through Parsons to Garfinkel (Rawls 2019). But, it has been essentially lost to mainstream sociology.

<sup>2</sup> What Garfinkel meant by Trust is not the ordinary meaning of the word. For that reason the word will be capitalized whenever it bears Garfinkel's meaning. Garfinkel had been sketching what became known as the "Trust argument" and Trust conditions in various forms since 1946 and had presented it in various forms in unpublished manuscripts and conference talks (Turowetz and Rawls 2019). The first published version of the argument in 1963 was titled "A conception of and experiments with 'trust' as a condition of concerted stable actions". The argument maintains that participants in social settings must meet three constitutive criteria in order to make sense together. Constitutive criteria are necessary and defining criteria of an action, meaning or object. The three constitutive criteria are 1) that participants/players orient a set of basic constitutive rules that they expect to use regardless of personal preference; 2) the participants/players expect that the same set of constitutive expectations are binding on the other participants/players as are binding on themselves; 3) the participant expects that as they expect conditions 1 and 2 of the other participants/players, the others expect 1 and 2 of them (Garfinkel 1963:190). That state of mutual sharing is called Trust and meeting Trust conditions. It does not mean that we trust one another in the ordinary way. You can deeply mistrust someone and still Trust in Garfinkel's sense that they are meeting the constitutive conditions of sensemaking. Participants in social situations must Trust that others are meeting the constitutive Trust conditions as the others must Trust that they are. When Trust conditions are not met, meanings cannot be established and, in the absence of remediation, the situation becomes unintelligible. As such, Trust – as an implicit set of constitutive contractual conditions – is the cornerstone of social order and a lack of Trust leads to disorder and senselessness.

shortcomings Garfinkel called attention to in Parsons' theory were, he argued, the result of Parsons' failure to fully comprehend "constitutive" aspects of the social contract position he had taken: with particular emphasis on his failure to appreciate constitutive aspects of language/concepts. To say that practices are constitutive means that they must meet the criteria actual participants are using to achieve them in actual instances of use. This involves contingency and variation. Parsons like most other scholars adopted a simplistic conceptual and referential view of language and social practice that was inadequate to the task. This led to contradictions, including Parsons' adoption of external authority to limit variations (exigencies), his acceptance of inequality and his emphasis on consistency; all of which conflict with the flexibility and mutual orientation required to achieve meaning in actual situations.

It was Garfinkel's view that if the question of *how* meaning and other social objects are assembled/achieved in actual interactions was addressed, the problems with Parsons' position could be remedied. From the very beginning of their relationship in 1946 Garfinkel had been trying to convince Parsons that this was possible. Even without remedy, however, Parsons had, in Garfinkel's estimation, gone farther than any other social theorist in positing an underlying moral commitment and the possibility of further clarification to situated "systems of interaction" and their corresponding sanctions, as the foundation of social order. The necessary preconditions for this interactional system and its situated interactional framing, which Garfinkel conceptualized as "Trust conditions" were, in Garfinkel's view, most successfully worked out by Parsons in his 1960 revision of the pattern variable argument<sup>3</sup> and other writing after 1960, although his continued acceptance of authority and inequality and his insistence on consistency kept Parsons from ever getting it quite right.

Durkheim had been the first to try modernizing sociology in the 1890's by setting it on an implicit social contract footing that eliminated individualism and positivism. Unfortunately, early critics had misunderstood the argument, and WWI brought the Durkheim School of sociology to an abrupt end. Parsons had re-introduced Durkheim in the 1930's with the idea of modernizing US sociology on similar terms. Once again war intervened, as the urgent demands of WWII for fast and efficient "scientific studies" worked against Parsons' attempt at modernization; fostering a narrative that elevated the older

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<sup>3</sup> The "pattern variables", which Parsons first introduced by name in the 1940s and spent the next two decades revising, were meant to capture all of the normative ways participants could orient the assembly of social objects in interaction. The pattern variables were of particular interest to Garfinkel because they were a key way that Parsons centered interaction in his theory. While he felt that they ultimately fell short of their purpose, Garfinkel argued that the pattern variables represented an advance over other contemporary social theories, which ignored interaction entirely.

individualist and positivist approaches that Parsons was challenging (Rawls 2018). Treating social objects as if they were “natural” and measuring them as such – counting them as if they were natural “things” – is much easier and quicker than establishing their social parameters. Without studying how they are “assembled” as social objects in particular situations of practice, however, the “scientist” will naively incorporate taken-for-granted cultural assumptions into the categories of things they count. By the early 1960’s retrograde approaches based on naturalism were starting to overwhelm Parsons. Garfinkel was concerned for the future of sociology in the face of this backward trend and saw in Parsons’ theory the best foundation for grounding an approach to interactional systems with the potential to stop social theory’s slide into irrelevance.

The Parsons of the *Primer* is not the structuralist, idealist, or functionalist we have come to expect, and Garfinkel, its author, emerges as a dedicated sociologist and social theorist.

## Garfinkel’s Effort to Promote and Defend Parsons’ Social Theory

For many years a mimeographed version of the first five chapters of the *Primer* (dated 1960) circulated with the mistaken idea that its purpose was to twist Parsons’ position to fit Garfinkel’s own perspective. However, materials in the Garfinkel Archive, including letters to and from Parsons (Appendix #1), make it clear that the manuscript constitutes a serious and important scholarly effort by Garfinkel to explain why Parsons’ social theory is important to sociology, and that the effort was *coordinated with Parsons*. The manuscript explains important aspects of Parsons’ argument that are not well understood, while also providing essential grounding for Garfinkel’s own approach.

The circulation of the manuscript may initially have been Sacks’ idea. In an undated letter to Garfinkel, Sacks wrote: “Since you’re not going to be doing anything much with the *Primer* for a while, it might well do to publish a barely revised version as ‘working volume’. It is too important to let lie around”.

Most treatments of Garfinkel’s position that have considered its relationship to social theory, have discounted Parsons’ influence and maintained that Garfinkel drew primarily from Alfred Schutz. Parsons and Schutz are described as holding opposing positions, and Garfinkel is said to have chosen between them, with most critics claiming he chose Schutz. In the *Primer*, however, Garfinkel paints a very different picture. Rather than choosing be-

tween Parsons and Schutz, it becomes clear that Garfinkel considered both important for how they treated interaction/culture as the key to social order, albeit in different ways.

Misunderstandings about the relative contributions of Parsons and Schutz to Garfinkel's position, along with a lack of knowledge of his indebtedness to Wittgenstein, have combined with a general lack of awareness of Parsons' own developing interactionism to obscure both Garfinkel's general position and the argument he was making about Parsons. Consequently, the relationship between Garfinkel and Parsons has remained unknown, the *Primer* has not been taken seriously as a scholarly treatment of Parsons, the overall point has been missed, and the manuscript is essentially unknown beyond a small circle of those interested in Garfinkel's work.

This is consequential because the Parsons connection is an important missing piece of insight into Garfinkel's argument. Parsons provided a social contract foundation for an approach to a theory of social interaction, conceived as systems of rules grounded on an underlying social contract. Without it Garfinkel's position has been interpreted as individualist. While Schutz suggested a preliminary way of conceptualizing the assembly practices that are used to create social objects and meaning within those interactional systems, and Wittgenstein offered a way of talking about culture/interaction as a language game, neither supplied an overall architecture needed to ground Garfinkel's conception of a system of interaction. Garfinkel saw the positions of Parsons and Schutz as fitting together and often referred to his indebtedness to Parsons and Schutz in combination (see Appendix #2). In another manuscript, "Notes on Language Games" written in 1960–1, but not published until 2019, Garfinkel grounded the effort to adequately articulate the kind of constitutive rules involved in "interactional systems", and the Trust conditions involved, on Wittgenstein (Garfinkel [1960]2019). *He was not taking sides.*

In Garfinkel's view, the contributions of Parsons, Schutz and Wittgenstein were all necessary to ground an adequate theory of how social order and meaning are achieved in a diverse modern society. When Garfinkel wrote the *Primer* he was hoping to craft a synthesis of these positions (and others) with the addition of his own research on members' methods of making sense (which he named ethnomethodology in 1954) as both a demonstration and a transformation of Parsons' argument. At the time, Parsons was still hoping to satisfy his critics, Wittgenstein scholarship was enjoying a period of popularity, and phenomenology had not yet fallen under the wheels of the post WWII "objectivity" train. Later, as they all fell out of favor, Garfinkel would have little

choice but to let ethnomethodology stand on its own, and this important book was not published.

From 1958 to 1963, however, still optimistic about the prospect of effecting a theoretical synthesis, Garfinkel worked on the *Primer* with the idea that a better understanding of Parsons would strengthen social theory, while also making it clear that Garfinkel's own work addressed issues at the center of both Parsons' theory and sociology more generally. In particular, Garfinkel sought to explain how Parsons' conception of culture as an independent domain of social order had the potential to modernize social theory by moving social interaction to center stage, treating actor and action as "objects" that exist only, as Parsons put it, "in-their-course", in the context of a prior implicit social contract/agreement, and then framing the question of social order such that "culture" could be specified in empirical details, through studies of interactional assembly practices and the systems of constitutive expectation that define them.

## The Importance of Parsons' Position on Culture as Interaction

It was Garfinkel's position that in theoretically centering culture *as* interaction, Parsons had made an invaluable contribution to social theory, but that the move had been misunderstood *precisely because* of its emphasis on interaction. Garfinkel was worried about this and expressed concern that, while Parsons' theory was essential to a modern sociology, important interactional aspects of his argument, like his embedding of interaction in the variables in his 1960 revision of the pattern variable argument, were not being recognized, which was leading to additional criticism.

In a January 22, 1959 letter to Parsons, Garfinkel expressed the view that, properly understood, Parsons' work had the potential to sort out serious problems that he saw developing in post-war sociology as quantitative methods pushed aside general social theory and important theoretical domains like social interaction. Referencing his own department at UCLA as a case in point, Garfinkel described a troubling disconnect between theory and methods:

"Methods are stressed while students and faculty alike operate with an impoverished knowledge of the nature, tasks, uses and procedures of sociological theory. Where general theory is concerned, the paradoxical combination of interest and fear is an added ingredient. I propose to demonstrate that the intent and effect of your work is the clarification of the important theoretical domains..."

Letters between Garfinkel and Parsons (Appendix #1) show that Garfinkel's effort to promote Parsons' social theory as an antidote to these problems was coordinated with Parsons from the summer of 1958 to 1964 (and probably through at least 1968) and enjoyed Parsons' support and encouragement. These letters also show that Garfinkel's effort to explain Parsons in the *Primer* was closely connected to his development of ethnomethodology, as well as to several versions of his "Trust argument" and his studies of language/culture and games, for which he drew on Wittgenstein: *It is important that all of these efforts were taking place at the same time and do not indicate a change of position.*

Unfortunately, this important collaboration between Garfinkel and Parsons was overwhelmed by the turbulent politics of the 1960's (war getting in the way again, this time the American war with Vietnam), which characterized Parsons as a conservative "insider", while casting Garfinkel as a radical "outsider". The idea that Garfinkel abandoned Parsons and sociology generally, along with the belief that his position was built on Schutz, contributed to a *false narrative* of Garfinkel as an "outsider" who rejected sociology and focused on the "individual" experience of social interaction, rather than on society and social order. While being Jewish had marginalized him socially (and was an important source of insight, see Turowetz and Rawls 2019), academically Garfinkel was not an outsider, and he did not abandon either sociology or Parsons. Rather, it was sociology that abandoned the study of social facts, social selves and social interaction during and after WWII, and in its quest to be more "scientific" abandoned the Durkheim/Parsons vision of a social order grounded on implicit social contract that Garfinkel was building on.

That Parsons was collaborating *with* Garfinkel to defend the importance of both social interaction and general social theory was left out of the narrative. That intellectually Garfinkel was more of an "insider" (having been at North Carolina with Howard Odum, at Harvard with Parsons, Robert Bales and Jerome Bruner, and at Princeton with Wilbert Moore), and that his innovative ideas dated from the 1940's not the "radical" 1960's, was also left out.

However, because Garfinkel preserved the relevant materials in his Archive, we have been able to reconstruct the collaborative effort of Parsons and Garfinkel to revive sociological theory through an explication of culture as social interaction. *Both Parsons and Garfinkel were radical thinkers in this sense.* Parsons had initially centered social theory on interaction/culture to remedy theoretical shortcomings in the 1940's, and so had Garfinkel. Parsons' embedding of interaction in the pattern variables in 1960 was another revolutionary move, and in writing about money in 1963, Parsons referred to money as "interaction", to emphasize the point.

Garfinkel emphasized this interactional side of Parsons, and for his own part, focused on how “members” of society assemble mutually intelligible meaning and identity in interactions that are grounded on implicit Trust conditions. He noticed early on that some categories of person (Black, Jewish, transgender, mental patient) had to work harder than others to “pass” as “normal”. Studies of such people, he argued, were “natural experiments” that could reveal the assembly practices and underlying “Trust conditions” that any member of society has to engage in to achieve meaningful social objects and identities. For most members of society, the work of achieving “normal” identities and meanings remains invisible and taken-for-granted. But, Garfinkel argued, those persons inhabiting marginal identities that require more work develop an awareness of that work which can be studied to reveal, in turn, what the rest of us are doing.<sup>4</sup> Developing this awareness of the work involved in being seen as “normal” is much like the self-awareness of being treated differently by Race that is involved in W.E.B. Du Bois’ “Double Consciousness” thesis, aligning Garfinkel with Du Bois in significant ways.<sup>5</sup>

While Garfinkel’s debt to Schutz is large, Schutz did not offer a way of theorizing interactional systems sociologically. Neither did Wittgenstein. Parsons did. This is one reason why interpreting Garfinkel primarily in terms of Schutz (and as a phenomenologist) has created the false impression that Garfinkel was focused on the individual and not on interaction as a social system. Materials in the Garfinkel Archive document Garfinkel’s substantial and frequently acknowledged debt to Parsons and his theory of interaction as a system of sanctioned rules and expectations grounded on implicit social contract, along with a dedication to sociology and social theory generally. Sections of the *Primer* manuscript (especially Chapters VI–IX), also make it clear that Garfinkel was using his own research in ethnomethodology to defend Parsons and build on his theory. In transcripts of the 1962 ethnomethodology conference at UCLA

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<sup>4</sup> Garfinkel and Goffman had planned to publish a book together in 1962 to address this issue. Tentatively titled *On Passing*, it was to include Garfinkel’s chapter on Agnes and Goffman’s monograph on Stigma. After Garfinkel got additional information about Agnes that required revisions to the chapter in February/March 1962. Garfinkel told him he should try to publish without him and not let the opportunity get held up waiting for the Agnes revisions. Goffman was able to secure a contract to publish his own contribution as a monograph. Goffman’s *Stigma* was subsequently published without Garfinkel’s contribution.

<sup>5</sup> The taken-for-granted attitude of “normal” members of society is analogous to the White American lack of awareness of tacit racism (Rawls 2000, Rawls and Duck Forthcoming). The awareness that research in ethnomethodology develops about how marginal identity and other social categories are achieved in everyday life is like a double consciousness. The sociologist engaged in Ethnomethodological research learns to see how social categories are being achieved in ways that are invisible to most others. It is an important resource. For further discussion of the relationship between Garfinkel’s argument and Du Bois see Rawls and Duck, Forthcoming and Turowetz and Rawls 2019.

(in the Garfinkel Archive), Garfinkel talked about Parsons and the Primer in the context of ongoing ethnomethodological research.

Garfinkel consistently attributed his interest in sociology to his early reading of Parsons (Garfinkel 2002), and his admiration did not wane. For a celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Parsons' *Structure of Social Action* (1937), at the *American Sociological Association* meetings (ASA) in 1987, even as he reiterated his disappointment that Parsons never accepted the need to examine actual concrete interaction (the principle unresolved difference between the two scholars), Garfinkel wrote that "Ethnomethodology began with Parsons" (Garfinkel 1988:3).

## The Relationship between Parsons and Garfinkel

The relationship between Parsons and Garfinkel began in 1946 when Garfinkel arrived at Harvard and became a PhD student of Parsons. Then after Garfinkel completed his PhD in 1952, there were several years of less contact until the relationship intensified again from 1958 to 1964 while Garfinkel was reading and teaching Parsons in seminars at UCLA, preparing the *Primer*, meeting with Parsons at Harvard in 1958, working with him on the revision of the pattern variable argument in 1959, and corresponding and sharing materials. The relationship continued through the late 1960's with Garfinkel arranging for Parsons to visit UCLA in 1964 for an extended meeting at the *Suicide Prevention Center* and again in 1966 to give a "Chair's" talk (transcripts in the Garfinkel Archive), and spending his sabbatical at Harvard in 1968.

The two managed to coordinate their efforts to situate interaction at the center of social theory *for over two decades – without anyone noticing*. That they did not immediately succeed in rescuing social theory is due more to the post-WWII turn away from social interaction and back toward an earlier individualism and naturalism, and the various misunderstandings that resulted from that, than to the soundness of Parsons' interactional social contract position, or its relevance to Garfinkel and ethnomethodology. The effort was certainly not derailed by attention to it.

It *should not* be surprising that Garfinkel admired Parsons and was inspired by his work, or that Parsons in turn was influenced by Garfinkel. Garfinkel was after all Parsons' PhD student and had gone to Harvard to work with him, both were important social theorists, and their working relationship lasted over 20 years. What is *strange* is that we *don't* think of the two bodies of work as related. *They are related*.

In the *Primer* Garfinkel explains why Parsons' theory is important for an adequate approach to culture/interaction and says that Parsons was misunderstood *because* of this important contribution. In essence, Garfinkel is arguing that Parsons specified a system of social interaction that his critics simply did not acknowledge. This is strange in itself as it was Parsons who had first singled out culture/interaction as the central feature of a modern approach to social theory in 1949 (Parsons 1950), and again in 1951 (while Garfinkel was with him at Harvard).

The *Primer* makes it clear that this much overlooked interactional aspect of Parsons' work was the basis for Garfinkel's interest in Parsons. In Garfinkel's view, Parsons' theory wasn't perfect. It needed changes. In particular, it took for granted essential aspects of language and interaction that led him to incorporate authority and inequality into his system. This was a problem for Garfinkel. One of the first things he had done when he got to Harvard in 1946 was to lay out a blueprint for the changes he said were necessary. He did this in 1946, 1947 (Garfinkel [1948]2006), and again in his 1952 PhD dissertation (Garfinkel 1952). But, he expressed hope that Parsons would be open to resolving the problems.<sup>6</sup> While Garfinkel had taken guidance on some of these issues from Schutz (starting around 1946), in the *Primer* he maintains that Parsons continued revising his position to accommodate the criticisms. In Garfinkel's view, the development of Parsons' work after 1958, and, in particular, the revision of the pattern variable schema in 1960 (on which Garfinkel worked with Parsons), resolved most of the problems with the earlier argument, resulting in a model that fully embedded interaction, bringing Parsons closer to what Garfinkel considered an adequate theory of modernity.

It is an indication of his seriousness about the importance of Parsons' theory, that in mounting his defense of Parsons, Garfinkel used material from his own "studies" of "members' methods" for assembling culture to explain aspects of Parsons' social system. Garfinkel did this to explain the revisions to the pattern variable argument in 1960 (Chapter V), and in defending Parsons' conception of norms and values (as constitutive rules) from his critics (Chapter VI).

On page three of a January 14, 1963 letter to Parsons, and in the *Primer* itself, Garfinkel indicated that he considered instances of "action-in-its-course", that are recognizable as references to his own studies of ethno-methods (e. g.

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<sup>6</sup> In his 1946 seminar paper, "Some Reflections on Action Theory and the Theory of Social Systems", written while he was a PhD student at Harvard, Garfinkel (1946:2) remarked on a "very promising kind of unsettledness in Parsons' thinking" and expressed his hope that Parsons would make a "breakthrough to a full phenomenological position" that would allow him to achieve "a fully rational theory of social action" (1946:3). Here, a "fully phenomenological position" would be one that combined Parsons' insights about social contract and moral order – his theoretical architecture – with insights from Schutz about the assembly practices through which that order is assembled.

on “accounts” and “accounting”), to be “representations” or “symbols” of the “social system” as Parsons’ conceived it. The point made is similar to C. W. Mills’ (1940) famous argument that institutional order can only be actualized through “vocabularies of motive” (a sociological elaboration of Kenneth Burke’s (1936) approach to motives/accounts through language).

Parsons, for his part, was not indifferent to Garfinkel’s assessment of his position, and confirmed their mutual understanding in letters and audio-recorded meetings, which show Parsons contributing ideas, time, and encouragement to the effort. In a remarkable audio recording of a session with Parsons, Garfinkel, Goffman and Sacks that took place at the *Suicide Prevention Center* in Los Angeles during the spring of 1964, Parsons demonstrates a surprisingly nuanced understanding of what Sacks and Garfinkel were saying about situated meaning, at times even explaining their position to Goffman, when he was not following the argument.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, the urgent demands of the 1960’s for a macro political focus increased the already strong pressure on social theory to move *away* from social interaction where inequality actually plays out, driving a wedge between the mainstream social theory that claimed Parsons as its champion, and the social interactionism that Parsons was himself moving toward (that would subsequently be led by Garfinkel, Goffman and Sacks). It did not help that this was all happening just as the alleged “structural-functional” Parsons was coming under increasingly heavy criticism by those who did not realize how much his argument had evolved in an interactional direction and how that could have eliminated its problematic adoption of authority and inequality and led to an interactional demonstration of the need for equality of the sort Garfinkel produced.

## An Invitation from Parsons – 1958

The *Primer* manuscript itself has a complicated and interesting history. The collaborative discussions between Garfinkel and Parsons that were the immediate inspiration for its production were initiated by an invitation from Parsons to Garfinkel in the summer of 1958. In a letter dated July 14, 1958, the day before Parsons left the *Center for Advanced Studies* at Stanford to drive back to Cambridge Massachusetts, Parsons wrote inviting Garfinkel to attend a conference of Parsons’ most valued associates at Harvard that September,

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<sup>7</sup> There is a transcript and audio recordings of this meeting in the Garfinkel Archive, an excerpt from which appears at the end of this introduction.

at which the group would discuss Parsons' recent work. The conference was planned to extend over six days, four working days with a weekend in the middle. Comprised of five former students and colleagues, Garfinkel, Kaspar Naegele, Jim Olds, Robert Bales and Robert Bellah (Neil Smelser couldn't make it), the conference was to be devoted entirely to discussion of Parsons' work in the context of a manuscript he had just completed that summer at the *Center*.<sup>8</sup>

Letters make it clear that Parsons had sent out a call for those of his students with serious theoretical interests to return from far flung places to advise him, and at fairly short notice.<sup>9</sup> Naegele was in British Columbia, Garfinkel in Los Angeles and Smelser at Berkeley (Olds, Bales and Bellah were already at Harvard). Parsons included Garfinkel in this group of close and valued associates and wanted him by his side.<sup>10</sup>

That Parsons included Garfinkel in this group will be a surprise to many. That Garfinkel took this invitation seriously and prepared for the conference with diligence at a time when he was focused on his own studies in ethnomethodology may surprise them even more. The seriousness with which Garfinkel took this invitation is evident in a letter he wrote to Parsons on August 19, 1958, less than a month before the meeting, in which he described his preparations for the conference:

"I've put everything aside in order to work through your manuscripts. The reading is going slowly because I am trying to manage several tasks in the reading: to grasp the intended sense of your formulations; to sort the corpus into its analytic parts and to re-read and interpret these parts in light of my own concerns. Also, I've taken the conference as an occasion to re-read Durkheim. The whole effort has turned into an 'experience'".

Garfinkel described his preparations much the same way in a letter he wrote to Naegele the following day, on August 20, 1958, saying that he had "put everything aside" to prepare:

<sup>8</sup> Robert A. Scott was Assistant Director at the *Center for Advanced Study* while Parsons was there in 1958. Peter K. Manning reports that Scott would tell the story that the other residents at the Center made daily bets on how many pages Parsons would dictate each day. Apparently, he dictated his manuscripts into a Dictaphone and was legendary for how much he could "write" in a day with little correction. It was one of those stories you "dined out on".

<sup>9</sup> It is clear from the July 14th letter that there had been a prior inquiry about this invitation. But the earlier letter has not yet been found, so we don't know how far in advance Parsons began planning for the conference.

<sup>10</sup> In a letter to Schutz written August 20, 1958, Garfinkel explains that his schedule is flexible enough to allow him not only to attend the conference, but to schedule a meeting afterward with Schutz in New York because he has been awarded a five year fellowship from the National Institute of Health, which also explains his availability to work with Parsons over the next several years; an availability that Parsons also refers to in his letters to Garfinkel.

"I've put everything aside in order to work through the large number of Talcott's manuscripts. The reading is going slowly because I am trying to manage the double tasks of reading for the intended sense of Talcott's formulations, and interpreting his formulations in light of my own concerns".

Then, in a letter to Martin Martel, also written on August 20, 1958, Garfinkel announced that he was planning to give a seminar on Parsons during the spring semester of 1959 at UCLA, a project that appears to have been inspired by his preparations for the Harvard conference. He asked Martel to send him a copy of a manuscript, titled "Primer for Parsons", that he said Dave Gold had told him Martel had prepared, offering to pay for the cost of sending him a copy, and telling Martel he would like to assign it to his students, and also share it with those attending the Harvard conference (it does not appear that Martel sent the manuscript).

We know that Garfinkel discussed the proposed course, and the idea of preparing a manuscript on the basis of it, with Parsons (probably at the Harvard conference), because on January 22, 1959, Garfinkel wrote Parsons asking him to send copies of four pieces of his work for students to read in that seminar, mentioning the *Primer* as if Parsons already knew about it, and promising to tell Parsons more about his plans soon. The UCLA seminar in 1959 was SO 172 (in 1963 it was renumbered SO 251), titled *Contemporary Sociological Theorizing*, and we see from the syllabus (Appendix #3) that, while focusing on Parsons, it also covered related materials, including articles by Parsons' students (like Naegele). Parsons had already given Garfinkel the new materials and manuscripts discussed at the Harvard conference. The additional materials Garfinkel requested were:

"Introduction to Part I, Section A of the Theory Reader: The General Interpretation of Action".

"General Introduction to Part II of the Theory Reader: An Outline of the Social System".

"An Approach to Psychological Theory in Terms of the Theory of Action".

"The Role of General Theory in Sociological Analysis: Some Case Material".

These materials are in the folder of materials for that course in the Garfinkel Archive, so we can assume that Parsons sent them. In these letters there are many requests for materials, as well as requests to return materials given previously.

This exchange of materials is in itself important. Because this work was being done in the era before Xerox, sharing unpublished work required maintaining relationships. Everyone made mimeos of their work. But, a mimeo master would print only a limited number of times. When copies ran out the mimeo masters needed to be retyped at great cost. Copies were valuable, to be given only when it mattered, and only to trusted people. To get copies scholars needed to write to each other and ask for them. Copies were given and returned as treasured items in a kind of *gift exchange* without which scholarly collaboration in that period would have been severely limited.<sup>11</sup> Parsons and Garfinkel were engaged in such an exchange (Garfinkel and Martel were not, hence the offer to pay for the copy and Martel's failure to send it).

Garfinkel wrote to Parsons again one week later, on January 29, 1959, fulfilling his promise to tell him more about how he was going to teach the course. His plan, he said, was to teach the materials *backwards* as a way of keeping the discussion current, and avoiding the inevitable focus on the *development* of Parsons' ideas that Garfinkel worried would come from dealing with them chronologically. Garfinkel wanted to emphasize the relevance of Parsons' mature approach to the "current situation of the discipline":

"I've decided to teach your materials by using the most recent writings as the precedent for reading the earlier ones. Reading the corpus "backwards" lends to the earlier work, its sense of what you have been up to "all along" or "after all". The criticisms of such a rereading procedure, i. e., that it produces an "interpretation" of Parsons, or that it reads Parsons for something more, less, different, better, worse than he intended, are easily met. A chronological reading would be difficult to carry off without making the development of your ideas a central theme. I feel that the seminar, and a "Primer" based upon it, should be directed to the uses to be made of your materials in the current situation of the discipline".

The important thing was to explain what Parsons had been "up to" and how that was relevant to the situation post-war sociology found itself in. That "current situation", as exemplified by his own department, Garfinkel wrote, was an "impoverished knowledge... of sociological theory", combined with an imbalance in favor of statistical methods and against social interaction, that was leaving students and faculty alike in a paradoxical state of "fear" and "interest" with regard to social theory that is still familiar today. Garfinkel proposed to rectify the situation by explaining Parsons, and in particular why Parsons' emphasis on social interaction is a *necessary* foundation for a modern

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<sup>11</sup> Anne Rawls was given a copy of the index to Sacks' lectures as a wedding present by Alene Terasaki as late as August 1978.

sociology, and also offering much needed empirical demonstrations based on his own research.

For Garfinkel, in spite of their differences, the way Parsons had positioned social interaction/culture at the center of his social system, grounding it on mutual commitment and insisting on its independence from social structure, was an essential platform for Garfinkel's own studies of ethno-methods. If Parsons was positioning social interaction in his theory the way Garfinkel says he was, sociology somehow missed that important theoretical development. Furthermore, if Parsons was proposing that objects and identities exist only within the context of an interactional system grounded on an implicit social contract, then the fact that his critics continued to treat his position as positivist, structuralist, and/or idealist, is a huge mistake that has left a big hole in social theory.

Garfinkel was still hoping in 1958 that a revised Parsonian theory that approached interaction in terms of self-organizing practices, on the basis of studies of actual concrete interaction, could improve the situation. That he gave up on the attempt to theorize about this publically at some point does not mean that he ever stopped believing in its importance. Ethnomethodology is a *theoretical commitment* to approaching the problem of social order in concrete empirical terms – *not a method* – and it built in essential ways on Parsons.

We hope that this publication of the *Primer* manuscript will revive and reground this important collaborative effort in contemporary social theory.

## The Parsons' Primer Manuscript

This book reproduces the last and most complete copy of the *Parsons' Primer* manuscript that resulted from this collaboration between Parsons and Garfinkel. As it appears in the Garfinkel Archive, the version of the manuscript published here was assembled as a "book" (in a blue cloth three ring binder), consisting of nine chapters, and bearing the date April 1962 (although Garfinkel worked on it extensively after that date). Garfinkel produced at least three different versions of the manuscript between 1959 and 1963. The first five chapters were completed in 1960 (the part of the manuscript that has been circulating, although some editing was done to Chapters II, III and V in 1963). The four additional chapters (VI to IX) are in the April 1962 binder, but evidence suggests that most of what they contain was not written until 1963 and was certainly edited in 1963.

Because the original mimeographed version of the manuscript – the first five chapters – continued to circulate and Garfinkel continued to teach from it, most people who have seen the manuscript have seen the 1960 version of the first five chapters and may be surprised to find that those chapters are slightly different here, as Garfinkel continued editing them. They may also be surprised that there are nine chapters.

The manuscript as we reproduce it contains all nine chapters from the 1962 binder. We know from their letters that Parsons commented on Chapter V in January 1963, and that Chapter VI seems to have been written in response to those comments from Parsons. Chapters VII to IX build on Chapter VI and represent a further elaboration of Parsons' later position, so they also must have been written after 1963. These later chapters all have in common a more explicit positioning of Garfinkel's own research with regard to Parsons' theory than the first five: with Garfinkel using descriptions of his research to demonstrate theoretical points in Parsons' argument.

In preparing the manuscript for publication, we have attempted to incorporate all of Garfinkel's edits so as to publish the most up to date version of each chapter. Garfinkel produced an entire new mimeo of Chapter V (which discusses the pattern variables) in 1963, with a new introduction and many corrections which we have incorporated. It appears that he was preparing that chapter as a stand-alone article which was never published. There are also several edited versions of Chapters VI to IX all of which appear to be from 1963.

In making corrections to the manuscript we found that some ends of pages had been typed too close to the bottom on the original mimeo masters and had consequently never been reproduced. Other corrections to mimeo masters made early on had also never been reproduced. We worked from the original master sheets for these corrections. Those who are familiar with the original version, and have been looking for missing parts, will hopefully find them included. Garfinkel's corrections were fairly clear on the manuscripts from which the mimeos were prepared and the versions were often dated. His corrections of the mimeo masters themselves, however, could have been done at any point after the masters were typed, making it impossible to date those changes. Working from the latest versions that could be identified in all cases, the intent has been to publish the manuscript in a form as close to the final one produced by Garfinkel as possible. This has also meant leaving his footnotes in the middle of pages bounded off by lines, as he presented them, and adding citations and clarifications only in [Editor's Notes] at the bottoms of pages.

The nine chapters are published together with a paper that has been positioned at the end, titled “The Program of Ethnomethodology”, and bearing the date October 16, 1961 (when it was apparently delivered orally to an audience of persons listed on the manuscript's last page). Garfinkel kept several versions of this “Program” manuscript in folders with *Parsons' Primer* materials (there are several file drawers of these in the Garfinkel Archive) along with handwritten directions for how sections of the *Primer* should be edited to accompany it. He obviously intended the *Primer* and the Program to be published together. In one case the Program was to be the opening section of a relatively short selection of materials from the *Primer*. In another it was positioned as the introductory chapter of a binder titled *Essays in Ethnomethodology* (1961).

In Appendices, along with the letters (Appendix #1) and Garfinkel's situated discussions of his indebtedness to Parsons and Schutz (Appendix #2), we include a syllabus (Appendix #3) for the Parsons' seminar as Garfinkel taught it in 1959, which mainly consists of a bibliography. Much of Parsons' work as listed in this bibliography was unpublished in 1959 and was still unpublished in 1963, the second time Garfinkel taught the course. Some of this work was subsequently published, but too late to temper the criticisms that would undermine Parsons in the late 1960's.

## Points of Agreement and Difference between Parsons and Garfinkel

Because one of the most serious misreadings of Garfinkel is that his work proceeded in stages from a point where he was more conservative and embraced Parsons, to a later more radical phase that has been associated with Schutz, it seemed instructive to include the Program manuscript from 1961 – which announces Garfinkel's Ethnomethodological studies – along with his careful exegesis and defense of Parsons in the *Primer*, which was completed two years later. The argument that there was a transition is wrong. Garfinkel did not abandon Parsons for Schutz.

Garfinkel was not criticizing Parsons either. The *Primer* is not so much a critical reading, as a close reading of Parsons' argument and in the later chapters, which were written as he got closer to the publication date for *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967), Garfinkel used more of his own research to support Parsons' ideas – having been encouraged to do so by Parsons' responses to reading the first five chapters of the *Primer* (expressed both in person and in his letters). In 1961, in the Program manuscript, Garfinkel had already

laid out the program of research he would pursue for the rest of his career. Chapters V through IX of the *Primer* were written after this announcement. There is extensive overlap between the Program statement and Garfinkel's use of Ethnomethodological research to defend and explain Parsons in the *Primer*.

Parsons and Garfinkel agree that categories of actor, action, and objects must be achieved in systems of social interaction that are grounded on an implicit underlying social contract. They agree that evidence of the underlying commitment and descriptions of the values/rules must come from empirical observations of sanctions. They agree that social order is constantly made and remade through the cooperative use of interactional assembly practices. They agree that a theory is only valid if the assembly practices of interaction/culture that it describes would produce the actions and interactions that actors are actually engaged in. In other words, they agree that a theory can be falsified by empirical research.

The main difference between them is how they handle the exigencies/contingencies involved in interaction. Because he did not grasp the full implications of constitutive practices, Parsons thought it was necessary to analytically control the exigencies, while Garfinkel was able to document that contingencies are "routinely" turned into orderly/meaningful phenomena in actual concrete interactions by participants in ways that can be documented systematically.

For Parsons these variations are *problems*, while for Garfinkel they are part of the *solution*. Parsons maintained that in order for meaningful categories to be accomplished in interaction, what he called "environmental exigencies", the endless situated variations in interaction, must be brought under control by external social authority. For Garfinkel, by contrast, the contingencies are important resources that people use to make order and meaning. Garfinkel rejected the idea that external authority and inequality are necessary, instead embracing self-regulation in a context of equality; which he maintained was a necessary condition of sensemaking. Because organizing the contingencies must, in Garfinkel's view, remain a flexible process, he argued that *how* contingencies work cannot be specified analytically, but must be *discovered* through empirical study of *actual* concrete practices in use.

In insisting on this focus on the concrete details of actual practices Garfinkel was taking a different variant on Durkheim from Parsons: taking up Durkheim's (1893) argument that in diverse modern societies contingencies can become a *resource* with which participants who are engaged in the "double contingency" of social interaction, can self-regulate from the "bottom up" to *create* certainty from uncertainty through the cooperative use of constitutive

practices (Rawls 2008, 2019).<sup>12</sup> Durkheim had argued that this needs to happen in diverse modern societies, not only because it is the only way of making sense across diversity, but because it is the only way that science and technical progress can break free from the constraints of top down authority and shared belief. This self-regulation, in turn, enables the creation of new meanings and new constitutive practices. Garfinkel was already echoing this Durkheimian position in 1946–47, writing that a way of making sense that does not depend on shared beliefs or analytics needs to develop in any society that is not bounded by what he called “tribal” reasoning.<sup>13</sup>

Although they differed over how to *handle* interactional contingencies, however, both Garfinkel and Parsons treated contingencies as a central concern, and agreed that the processes involved in bringing order to contingency in interaction needed to be taken seriously. In the Program manuscript, Garfinkel aligns with Parsons in criticizing the discipline for ignoring contingencies, and concludes that, as a consequence of this neglect, sociology had abandoned itself in favor of the “biological and physical aspects of the events of human conduct”, leaving it mired in the individualism and naturalism that Parsons had been warning against since 1938, and negating the purpose of sociology as a discipline.

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<sup>12</sup> Parsons (1951:6) introduced the term “double contingency” to refer to the fact that in interaction, meaning is contingent on what an actor does and says *and* on the response it receives. Meanings are made and remade sequentially, over the course of an interaction, a sequential process Garfinkel (1967:7) would come to call *reflexivity*.

<sup>13</sup> In his 1947 “Notes on the Information Apperception Test” Garfinkel contrasted “Tribal” with “Cartesian” perception, a distinction that he would maintain for decades. He also discussed tribal reasoning in his PhD proposals. The text from 1947:25 is as follows:

“We pointed out earlier in the paper that communicative effort was conceived of as the expression of an “inner dialogue.” Insofar as the subject engages in the personalization of the objects, we have a clue as to the way the subject has his relationships with others. Depending then on how he relates the objects to each other and how he relates himself to them we have a picture of what is crudely approximative of the Rorschach concept of the feeling for closeness, but which we shall conceive of as the subject’s modes of participation with others. The reasoning does not go, however, that the objects are representative of other persons, though such reasoning would be legitimate where it could be shown that the objects are the express representations of latent objects which are persons. (See the protocol of DJS for an example of this.) Rather, the reasoning goes that personalization is a phenomenon peculiar to the discourse of *gemeinschaft* relations. It occurs as a peculiarity of something we shall call “tribal perception”, and does not occur in “cartesian perception.” It bespeaks a mode of perception peculiar to a set of relations where one depends for a check on the accuracy of one’s view of an object on the consensus of other persons to whom one is related as a member of primary group. What one sees is given in a context in which another person or persons are particularistically given. Such a set of conditions placed upon the object seen is to be compared with the Cartesian view in which one is made accountable to a formal body of apersonal rules of procedure for the accuracy of things seen; one knows “for himself”; the rules are given in a context in which the other person is represented according to some formal schematic model, as for example, “the rational man”. We shall have to be satisfied temporarily at least with these few notes, and will make whatever use we can of them as they stand. The problem of the relationship between perception and the tribal and Cartesian modes of understanding is badly in need of investigation. The area has been treated in scattered writings but it lacks systematic investigation”.

In essence, in the *Primer* manuscript Garfinkel describes a deep convergence between his own core positions and those of Parsons. They both maintained that the exigencies/contingencies of interaction/culture stand at the heart of social theory and that ignoring them was undermining sociology. They both focused on the assembly of social objects. What they diverged sharply over was how the exigencies/contingencies are rendered meaningful in specific instances of social interaction and this difference had implications for how contingencies should be approached theoretically. Parsons' analytic approach left him needing to accept authority and inequality, while Garfinkel's focus on the constitutive conditions of concrete practices enabled him to demonstrate that authority does not organize interaction (except indirectly via accounts) and that inequality at the level of constitutive assembly practices of interaction/culture prevents meaning.

The difference over exigencies/contingencies makes a big difference. But, it is only one point, which explains how Garfinkel could agree with so much of Parsons' theory, and still be the author of an innovative theoretical position that ends up being so different that it has appeared to many critics to be opposed to Parsons. It is not. The theoretical implications of Garfinkel's position with regard to Trust, equality, and how to study social order and social interaction, all turn on this difference.

## **Working on the *Primer* Manuscript from 1959 to 1963**

With the initial lectures from spring 1959 in manuscript form, Garfinkel secured a Fellowship at the Harvard Law School in the fall semester of 1959. It is interesting to note that Goffman and Sacks were also in Cambridge that semester (at Harvard and MIT respectively), and that this is where Sacks met Garfinkel and Goffman.<sup>14</sup> It is also likely that Garfinkel introduced them both

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<sup>14</sup> Garfinkel and Sacks both attended a sociology of law seminar given by Talcott Parsons in Spring 1960. Audio for two meetings is in the Garfinkel Archive. In a letter to Edwin Schneidman on March 22, 1962, Garfinkel says the following about Harvey Sacks: "Sacks is 26 years old, has an undergraduate degree from Columbia, a law degree from Yale Law School, a year of graduate work in the political science department at MIT, sitting in on whatever looked bright at MIT and Harvard particularly in linguistics and sociology, and is currently finishing his second year of graduate work at Berkeley. He has been working under Phil Selznick's sponsorship in Phil's Center for the Study of Law and Society. I met Sacks at Harvard when I was there 1959–60. By the time the work at the Center would begin, Sacks will either have finished his degree or will be close to it. For the past two year he has been shuttling back and forth between Berkeley and UCLA to work with me on my ethnomethodology stuff. I'm talking with full responsibility when I say that Sacks is the best graduate student I've ever had a hand in training, and one of the two or three best ones I've ever seen in my travels."

to Parsons that fall. Although Garfinkel and Goffman had exchanged work and corresponded as early as 1953,<sup>15</sup> this was the first extended face-to-face time they had spent together. Sacks would subsequently become a graduate student of Goffman's at UC Berkeley, while traveling frequently to UCLA to do his graduate research work for his PhD with Garfinkel in Los Angeles at *The Suicide Prevention Center*. The three would collaborate on studies of social interaction for the next 15 years.

During that fall semester of 1959 Garfinkel not only shared and discussed a draft of the *Primer* with Parsons, but the two engaged in extended discussions of Parsons' intended revision of the pattern variable argument for his 1960 "Reply" to Dubin's "friendly" critique, which Garfinkel helped Parsons to edit. A new introduction at the beginning of Chapter V of the *Primer* (added in 1963), explains that while the original pattern variable argument had changed several times, at the time Dubin wrote his critique in 1959 Parsons had not yet published a revision of it. Parsons decided to take the occasion of his "Reply" to Dubin's article to do so.

Parsons' 1960 revision uses terminology like "oriented object", "oriented actor" and "member", which had first appeared in Garfinkel's work around 1948, and through their collaboration was now appearing in Parsons' writing. Evidence for their collaboration on the revision consists of a citation in the article (Parsons 1960), Garfinkel's own narrative of the time, the revised introduction to Chapter V, and several hours of audio recordings made in the fall of 1959 of meetings between Garfinkel, Parsons and Winston White, as they discussed their plans for the Reply/revision of the pattern variable argument (audio in the Garfinkel Archive).

Parsons and Garfinkel saw each other again at Stanford in 1959 at a conference on "deviance" for which there are audio recordings of the presentations and discussions in the Garfinkel Archive (Goffman and Bittner were also present). In a letter from Parsons to Garfinkel on January 30, 1963, he also mentioned seeing Garfinkel at Berkeley (no date) and expressed regret that they had not found time to talk about their work in any detail on that occasion because Garfinkel had been busy with Evelyn Hooker. In that letter, Parsons expressed a desire to find time to discuss in person issues raised in their letters about his reading of the *Primer* and suggested that he might be able to make it out to California in the spring of 1964.

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<sup>15</sup> Reported to Anne Rawls by Garfinkel in the 1980's: Garfinkel said that Saul Mendlovitz told him that Goffman had been getting copies of papers written by Harvard Graduate students and circulated in mimeo form for seminars for years. These included several papers of Garfinkel's. Then in 1953 Goffman sent Garfinkel comments on his [1948]2006 manuscript – which talked about the presentation of self – and encouraged him to publish it. Garfinkel did not.

An extended meeting with Parsons did take place in Los Angeles in 1964 at *The Suicide Prevention Center*. Sacks and Goffman also attended (along with Ed Rose and Edwin Schneidman) and the meeting was audio taped (audio and transcript in the Garfinkel Archive). In the transcript Garfinkel introduces Parsons as their theoretical resource (Reel 3 of 4, Side A1, trans. Pgs. 68–9), saying: “As I see it Talcott was invited to spend the two days with us as a resource on the problem of social order”. Garfinkel had been actively working on the *Primer* manuscript until several months before this meeting, and Sacks would complete his PhD thesis on calls to *The Suicide Prevention Center* later that year. Parsons was an important resource for both.

Garfinkel produced many versions of the manuscript between 1960 and 1963 all of which bore the title *Parsons’ Primer*. In all versions the first five chapters are similar and correspond closely to the mimeo version that was circulated in 1960 (with the exception of the new pages added to the beginning of Chapter V). The additional four chapters written between 1960 and 1963 continue to present a serious exegesis of Parsons’ later position, even though in the interim Garfinkel had prepared the 1963 version of the Trust paper for publication, most of the research for *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967) was already completed, and Garfinkel and Sacks had begun working together on the studies of conversation that would generate new insights into how orderly the constitutive assembly practices of conversation actually are and how closely conversational preference orders orient trust conditions.

## Parsons’ Revised Pattern Variable Argument

Parsons’ (1960) revised pattern variable argument is referred to by Garfinkel in the *Primer* as the “revision”. The first four chapters of the *Primer*, written during the period when Garfinkel was collaborating with Parsons on the revision, make it clear that Parsons’ new position was very important to Garfinkel. These chapters also make it clear that in his view much of the criticism of Parsons is due to the fact that scholars have not understood that Parsons’ move toward social interaction changed the epistemological grounding of his theory and the criteria it must meet, such that debates over idealism/realism, culture, functionalism (and other classic questions), on the basis of which Parsons is often criticized, no longer apply. Because Parsons’ critics missed his move toward interaction they missed the fundamental changes in his theory that followed. It seems to have been literally the case that Parsons was putting a kind of social interactionism at the core of his position, while almost no one realized that he had done so. In the *Primer* Garfinkel’s objective is to highlight not only the

*fact* of Parsons' move toward interaction, but its overall *theoretical significance*. He also wants to bring Goffman and Sacks into the picture, and make sure that everyone with an interest in social interaction understands what Parsons had achieved.

Garfinkel considered Parsons' move toward interaction to be particularly clear in the revision, which he reviews in detail in Chapter V. He has spent the first four chapters laying a foundation for this extended review. It is still problematic to Garfinkel that even in the revision Parsons approached interaction in analytic terms, rather than allowing himself to be persuaded by Garfinkel that concrete details of interaction are essential to the model. Nevertheless, Parsons was still the first theorist to argue in his 1949 presidential address to the American Sociological Association (Parsons 1950) for culture as an independent level of social order, still the first in 1951 to incorporate double contingency into the heart of his social theory, bringing actual social interaction into the frame (Parsons 1951), and Garfinkel was still hoping to persuade Parsons that order can be documented in the actual concrete details of cultural assembly practices.

In the context of Garfinkel's discussion of the pattern variables in Chapter V, and in the description of values and norms in Chapter VI, Garfinkel illustrates Parsons' argument with his research in ethnomethodology, a pattern that continues through the later chapters. Without understanding the collaborative nature of their work on the pattern variables this has been confusing, and there has been a strong sense that Garfinkel was trying to put his own reading over on Parsons here – a thing he did sometimes do and referred to as a purposeful “misreading” of a text. *But, that is not what he is doing here.* Garfinkel uses the same examples and terminology in his letters to Parsons, and it is clear from Parsons' responses that he has no objection to Garfinkel's characterization of his work in these terms; even suggesting further topics for similar treatment, like norms and values, which become the topic of Chapter VI (see Garfinkel's January 14, 1963 letter and Parsons' response).

Although Trust conditions and accounts are discussed in relation to Parsons in earlier chapters, it is in the review of the pattern variables that it becomes clear that Garfinkel is proposing a relevance for Trust conditions, accounts, and other studies of “normal troubles” in conjunction with Parsons' social theory. It also becomes clear that Parsons must have seen this relevance as well.

It matters a great deal that Garfinkel produces an extended and explicit articulation of ethnomethodology in relation to Parsons in a chapter on which we have comments from Parsons. It is also significant that it happens in a chapter addressed to the pattern variables, because there seems to be an as-

sumption that Garfinkel would not have had anything positive to say about the pattern variables, whereas we can see that he has a great deal positive to say about that argument, worked on the revision with Parsons, and even prepared Chapter V as a stand-alone article on the strength of its importance.

Garfinkel was obviously pleased with the progress Parsons had made in the revision on moving toward interaction and he hoped for progress on other fronts. In his January 14, 1963 letter to Parsons Garfinkel also wrote that “Via the rumor chains I heard that you had revised or were in the course of revising your uses of “function”. The rumor aroused my curiosity and hopes”. Not only was Parsons moving farther in the direction of interaction, but he might also be revising his functionalism.<sup>16</sup> Garfinkel had expressed hope in 1946 that Parsons would revise his functionalism, a hope that seems to have persisted until he completed his dissertation in 1952. The change had not come to pass. Now, suddenly, here was another chance. Given the respect Parsons enjoyed in that moment it just might have been possible for Garfinkel to have successfully launched the study of interactional systems as a legitimate sociological enterprise in alignment with Parsons. This would explain Goffman’s presence at meetings between Garfinkel and Parsons, and why Sacks was attending. But, the functionalism would need to change.

Parsons’ original argument had been problematic in assuming an untenable form of means-ends rationality as a given, and treating motivation as a characteristic of natural/epistemic individuals, who are oriented toward natural/epistemic objects and goals, also as givens. In other words, in spite of having identified individualism and naturalism as the big problems in American social theory as early as 1937–8,<sup>17</sup> Parsons had managed to retain both problems in earlier versions of his own argument, treating reason and motivation as properties of individuals, rather than as characteristics of “courses-of-action” defined by a system of interaction grounded on an implicit social contract. As a consequence, Parsons’ conception of the “unit act” has been treated as an arbitrary attempt to define the boundaries of events that relies on a structure versus individual dichotomy.

The revision solved most of these problems and Garfinkel explains how. Among other changes, in the revision, Parsons built motivation and rationality into the rules of the system of interaction, no longer treating them as

<sup>16</sup> This would have happened well after the September 1958 conference, if Garfinkel was only hearing about it through “rumor chains” in 1963.

<sup>17</sup> For example, in his “The Role of Theory in Social Research”, Parsons (1938:19) emphasized the distinction between the objects of the natural and social sciences. Sociologists, unlike physicists, deal with facts that are cooperatively assembled in interaction, so that it is necessary to specify *how* they are made – which, for the early Parsons, meant “fit[ting] them to analytical schemes” – before they can be measured or counted.