In feminist theory, the concepts of essentialism and constructionism are intertwined with debates concerning nature/nurture, biological/social, sameness/difference(s), and modernism/postmodernism. The idea that men and women, for example, are classified and identified as such on the basis of transhistorical, eternal, immutable essences has been unequivocally rejected by many anti-essentialist poststructuralist feminists concerned with resisting any attempts to naturalize human nature. Furthermore, for the essentialist, the body occupies a pure, presocial, prediscursive space. The body is "real," accessible, and transparent; it is always there and directly interpretable through the senses. In contrast, constructionism is a belief that there are no natural facts of femaleness and instead femininity is a socially produced characteristic. The body, for the constructionist, is never simply there; rather, it is always already culturally mapped and subject to sociopolitical configuration. The idea that the body is biologically fixed and contains the true essence of maleness or femaleness as well as heterosexuality, homosexuality, and racial properties is thus rejected by anti-essentialists as biologically determining and politically problematic.

Feminist theory has developed within these struggles over the question of essence and its accompanying question of the meaning of the category "woman." Debates among and between essentialist and constructionist feminisms have been the bedrock of feminist social theory throughout the 1980s and 1990s. At its core is not only a debate about whether "woman" is an essential characteristic or a socially constructed subject but also a debate concerning how to deploy, use, or "take the risk" of essentialism for political ends. A central argument here is *strategic essentialism,* espoused by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in which feminists are urged to strategically use essentialism to enable political ends.

Thus, a central issue emerges: If woman is made and not born, as Simone de Beauvoir argued in her 1954 book, *The Second Sex,* then questions emerge regarding in what ways gender is a sociocultural construction. If gender and sex are not innate features, then where do they come from? How are they enacted?

— Laura Mamo

See also Beauvoir, Simone de; Body; Feminism; Identity; Mead, George Herbert; Postmodernism; Postmodernist Feminism; Social Constructionism

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ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

Ethnomethodology, literally "the study of ethnomethods" or "members' methods," derives from a collection of investigations conducted by University of California, Los Angeles, sociologist Harold Garfinkel in the 1950s and 1960s, published in 1967 under the title *Studies in Ethnomethodology,* which is universally taken to be ethnomethodology's foundational text. The term "ethnomethodology," coined by Garfinkel in tandem with his readings of the ethnoscience literature in anthropology, names investigations into an empirical domain of concrete social practices essential to, and productive of, the perceived stability of everyday practical action and practical reasoning. Accordingly, ethnomethodologists are directed to a specific topic or subject area: empirical practices whereby people find themselves in orderly, everyday, and familiar social circumstances in whose terms they can regularly display ordinary social competence. Generally, these practices are considered to be invariant and common to all societal members, including professional social scientists.

For nearly 40 years, Garfinkel's work has inspired generations of diverse ethnomethodological research around the world, with special concentrations at various campuses of the University of California (Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, San Diego), University of Manchester, Boston University, University of Wisconsin, University of London, and the Palo Alto Research Center (California). Ethnomethodology has influenced virtually every substantive area of sociology, as well as cognate disciplines such as communications, education, medicine, law, and cognitive science. As of 2002, the number of ethnomethodological publications—individual and collected articles, books, and other monographs—is reasonably estimated at well over 2,000.

Ethnomethodologists differ widely with respect to the significance of their studies for social theory and theorizing. Some have written that no theory at all is necessary to link the disparate studies, either to inform the basis of the studies or to summarize them on behalf of wider, overarching principles; some of these commentators come close to saying that ethnomethodology is atheoretical. Although *Studies in Ethnomethodology* is freighted heavily with citations to social phenomenologist Alfred Schütz (and indebtedness to Aron Gurwitsch and Edmund Husserl), Garfinkel

himself has sometimes suggested that in their empirical concreteness, ethnomethodological studies speak for themselves, recommending that students and readers go directly "to the studies." Some, however, have more fully developed the phenomenological themes, drawing especially on Gurwitsch's notion of "functional significance" in Gestalt contextures to describe how people collaboratively assemble perceptual fields experienced as stable, connected, and internally consistent. Others have drawn upon historicism in Karl Marx and Max Weber as partial rationales for ethnomethodological studies, carefully distinguishing such theorizing from the types of theory the studies themselves lead to, for example, the turntaking model in conversation analysis. Still others have argued that ethnomethodology goes directly to the heart of classical theoretical issues, notably those of Émile Durkheim and Max Weber. Most recently, Garfinkel (2002) has written that ethnomethodology is a fulfillment of Durkheim's mandate to examine "social facts" and that it studies "the phenomena of ordinary society that Durkheim was talking about" (pp. 92–3), characterizing his own early studies as "working out Durkheim's aphorism" from the start.

These debates notwithstanding, ethnomethodologists are in general agreement in rejecting comparisons between their program and other contemporary developments, such as symbolic interactionism (or social psychology generally), cognitive psychology, "microsociology," dramaturgical sociology, most phenomenological sociology, individualistic or subjectivist sociologies, postmodernism, or any but the most highly qualified readings of the term *social constructionism.* Most definitely, ethnomethodology is not a research method, its practitioners having engaged in a wide variety of methods in their studies, and ought not to be confused with a generic commitment to "qualitative" sociology.

ORIGINS IN PARSONS

Whatever ethnomethodology's continuities or discontinuities with other schools, it most certainly owes its origins to conventional theoretical concerns and sociological problems, particularly those that preoccupied Garfinkel's teacher and dissertation supervisor at Harvard University, Talcott Parsons. Garfinkel attributes his earliest initiatives to Parsons's *The Structure of Social Action,* which outlines what later became Parsons's functionalist sociology.

Parsons begins with society as an observed "factual order" of patterned, standardized, coordinated behavioral routines and asks, following Hobbes, how such a thing is possible. He answers this question in terms of another order, "normative order," or a culture of norms and values, which both transcends societal members generationally and assimilates to members' consciousness through socialization and internalization. Members thereby follow norms and values not only as a matter of necessary adaptation to real culture but also as a matter of subjectively given voluntary compliance. By this reasoning, a deductive causal link exists between behavioral prescription and actual behavior as it happens. Moreover, since subjectivity amounts to internalized culture, it contains objectively identifiable material. Thus, Parsons seems to have solved the classic philosophical problem of intersubjectivity, which asks how people know what is in one another's minds: They know because their subjective content derives from the same objective material, namely, a shared culture of norms and values.

Garfinkel's investigations broke with Parsons's theory at almost every turn, including the background premise of society as factual order, the existence or stability of a body of rules, possible deductive links between the two orders, and the Parsonian vision of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. In one such study, Garfinkel asked student researchers to code events at a mental health clinic to discover the standardized routine whereby patients were processed through various treatment stages. While both clinic members and coders took this standardized routine for granted and could fully understand and appreciate it, coders were nevertheless unable to document it without grounding their documentation in "loose" knowledge of clinic routines, which was itself uncoded. Every effort to capture the uncoded knowledge with precise methodological criteria, in turn, depended for its adequacy on yet further uncoded knowledge of the clinic for determining that coded versions were coded correctly. Thus, the actual work of the clinic (as well as the work of the coders) remained undescribed. It escaped detection even as it was counted on to produce evidence of standardized routine. Garfinkel calls this work "ad hoc" practices.

Similar ad hoc practices became evident in Garfinkel's investigations of rule-governed behavior in which people presumably "follow" norms or depend upon them for future action. Here, he found a chronic incompleteness in rules, both in their length and their number and in the clarity of any particular rule in advance of its application. When playing tic-tac-toe with his students, Garfinkel would periodically erase his opponent's mark, replacing it with one of his own; players would invariably see that as a rule violation even though nobody could strictly document the rule either as written someplace or as learned sometime in the past. Likewise, in chess, replacing an opponent's piece with an identical piece from the box was seen as a violation even though it did not affect the outcome of the game and no rule forbidding it could be documented. In such cases, rules were imputed by players as "known in the first place" and "there all along" even as they were produced for the very first time to cover a precise contingency.

In general, Garfinkel found that people do not so much follow rules as use them, invoke them, or make them up for practical purposes—to instruct others, to account for

behavior in retrospect, to anticipate future behavior, to normalize, to restore temporarily disrupted order, to find fault, to explain or describe, to repair damaged rapport, on and on—but never as a necessary or sufficient prerequisite to action. At the same time, some of his experiments reveal that where people most seriously take institutionally prescribed rules for granted, presumed rules can sometimes be openly violated with little or no consequence; such was the case with his students' bargaining for merchandise in department stores in apparent violation of the "one price rule" (so-called by Parsons). Thus, Garfinkel concludes that standardized society and standardized expectations are "attributed" standardizations, whose self-evident and commonsense status is based solely in people's mutual avoidance of situations in which they might otherwise learn about them. He suggests that these avoidance strategies are proportional to the degree to which people take their knowledge of social standardizations to be important and incorrigible.

Also instructive is Garfinkel's reworking of intersubjectivity from Parsons, who viewed it as shared subjective material. In searching for shared material, Garfinkel asked participants in a conversation to write down what they said in one column and what they "understood they were talking about" in another. The second column read like a detailed clarification of the first, which, in turn, could be read as shorthand for what was intended in the actual conversation but unnecessary to delineate. Yet this expanded version of the conversation was itself indefinite and could be seen as shorthand for "something more," which Garfinkel then asked subjects to write as a third column. Subjects eventually gave up on the task of "finishing" this ongoing clarification process, complaining that it was impossible. For Garfinkel, the impossibility resided not in the massive complexity of intended material, but in the "branching texture" of the experiment itself, the writing, which in each case produced the "more" that needed to be clarified; as subjects performed the task, they generated the as yet unfinished task that needed to be done. Garfinkel concludes that intersubjectivity or "shared agreement" does not consist of overlapping subjective content or material at all: It is, rather, an operation, a procedure, a practice, an active moment-to-moment production.

Thus, the Parsonian edifice was challenged in all of its details. Society as patterned behavior, culture as norms and values, subjectivity as content, and intersubjectivity as shared culture—all these were found by Garfinkel not to be really "there" for science as empirical phenomena. Instead, their perceived factual status and stability are ongoing, moment-to-moment accomplishments of societal members' ad hoc practices. These practices are social, accountable, invariant to culture, and omnipresent ("no time-out") in the embodied lives of societal members. And they are empirical, subject to sociological analysis.

ETHNOMETHODOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Social practices are also, in Garfinkel's term, "irremediable," which is to say that there is no alternative to them; they do not resemble something else that could be substituted for them; and they resist strict nomenclatures or typological analysis. This has been troublesome to the traditional social sciences, whose practitioners, says Garfinkel, run up against these practices constantly but view them as flawed, sloppy, commonsensical, or otherwise less than adequate to the tasks of their sciences. In their efforts to rid themselves of sloppy commonsense methods, social scientists, with varying degrees of self-acknowledgment, engage in these very practices. While ignoring them in their texts, they sometimes allude to them in methods appendices (where they again engage in the same practices while ignoring them), regarding them as second-best shortcuts or approximations to what social science might someday achieve with improved measurement and standardized conceptual vocabulary. But they are always treated as nuisances, things to be gotten out of the way for improved formal theory or scientific understanding. Garfinkel analogizes these efforts to tearing down the walls of a building in order to see what holds the roof up.

Social scientists are not alone in their awareness of social practices while strategically overlooking them or treating them as sloppy, imprecise, or second-best. Societal members in general know of the practices, and they are their virtuoso practitioners. But they seldom, if ever, talk about them (save in highly specialized situations, such as those requiring the adroit undermining of someone's credibility, and even here they are treated as exceptional). Members do not make their practices primary topics of discussion and are generally uncomfortable when anyone forces them into the limelight. In fact, active concealment of the practices is itself part of the very practices; not camouflaging them is almost certain incompetence. Thus, Garfinkel identifies as a key feature of these practices their "uninteresting" character. Members' discomfort can be illustrated with an experiment in which Garfinkel (1967) had students seek clarity from unsuspecting subjects to mundane utterances such as "How are you?" and "How are your Med School applications coming?" (pp. 42–3). These experiments, innocent as they seem, left subjects bewildered and angry. Similarly, Garfinkel's efforts to get jurors to talk about their actual practices of deliberation, as opposed to the way they describe them in idealized accounts, "rapidly used up interview rapport" (p. 113).

More recently, Garfinkel has characterized traditional social science as "the worldwide social science movement" and collected all of its variations under the rubric "Formal Analysis." While claiming no critique of the standard social sciences and declaring nothing less than enthusiasm about

their discoveries and accomplishments, he nevertheless maintains that their commonality resides in their unwillingness to see order in "the concreteness of things." Rather, they find order as outcomes of methodological procedures by which they transform "the concreteness of things" into categorical phenomena legislated by the terms and protocols of their respective disciplines. Thus, the "concreteness" of what they study, as well as their own actual real-time methods of transformation, escapes notice. The worldwide social science movement necessarily and purposefully ignores the foundations of social order, which are the methods of its production.

Partly because of such observations, ethnomethodology has often been read as making general criticism of the social sciences. Such readings are less likely when considering that the practices of Formal Analysis and of commonsense knowledge of everyday social structures are, according to ethnomethodologists, fundamentally identical practices. To criticize either would be to criticize both, which would ultimately be to criticize the human species for being what it is and doing what it does. Given that social practices are irremediable and without alternatives, such critique would be internally self-defeating on its face. What Garfinkel proposes is investigations of these practices as topics in their own right—not to overcome them, but to learn about them.

ETHNOMETHODOLOGICAL STUDIES

Ethnomethodologists have made social practices the focus of studies in a vast array of social settings, including schools, hospitals, families, informal face-to-face interaction, correctional facilities, police work, legal work, a suicide prevention center, social welfare agencies, bureaucracy generally, jury deliberation, congressional hearings, a teacher training program, doctor–patient interaction, courtrooms, Azande witchcraft rituals, mathematical proofs, deductive logic, and "social problems" recognition and discovery—as well as settings in which standard social scientists do the work they do, keep the records they keep, develop their tables, and write their reports.

Over the past two decades, a substantial subset of ethnomethodological literature has been devoted to the sociology of the "discovering sciences," including astronomy, optics, biology, and neurology. An early progenitor of these studies was an analysis of audiotapes that apparently resulted from a tape recorder having been inadvertently left in the "record" mode during an actual pulsar discovery at Steward Observatory. The astronomers later described their discovery in their journal article, where the pulsar had the quality of being "already out there before its discovery." Garfinkel and his colleagues described, in their journal article, the discovery as it revealed itself in real time on the tapes, comparing it to the active work of a potter shaping a piece on a wheel. In a brief rejoinder, one of the astronomers wrote, in essence, that the ethnomethodologists had gotten it right but that to notice such things is dangerous. This was clearly intended as wry humor, but it does point suggestively to members' discomfort with topicalizing the practices they know so well.

ETHNOMETHODOLOGICAL TERMINOLOGY

Despite the difficulty of its texts, ethnomethodology has remained remarkably free of jargon or special vocabulary, due in part to its resistance to exchanging concrete data for formal theory that could once again camouflage social practices as its main topic. More often, vocabularies come and go with the times and depending on how various authors decide to put their phenomena to their reading audiences. In *Studies in Ethnomethodology,* Garfinkel called social practices the use of "et cetera," "let it pass," "unless" (each of these a variation on the practice of allowing incompleteness and ambiguity to count as complete and clear with the anticipation of future elaboration as needed), and "factum valet" (once something otherwise prohibited is done, it counts as in accordance with general stipulations). Other terms that have been used to name ethnomethods include "members' methods," "glossing," "ad hocing," "the documentary method of interpretation" (following Karl Mannheim), "prospective/retrospective determination" (following Schütz), "invariant procedures," "artful practices," and "ritual practices." In various ways, such coinage describes how people allow here-and-now particulars to count as consistent with, and as evidentiary documents of, previously taken-for-granted presuppositions and commonsense background knowledge.

To lay emphasis on the nature of their topics and to avoid misunderstanding, ethnomethodologists have attached to ethnomethods modifiers such as "in situ," "in vivo," "incarnate," "concrete," "empirical," and "endogenous." This is to show that the practices under investigation are actively organized in and of themselves, in the moment, here and now, rather than "in conformity" with exogenous patterns or other transsituational rules or structures. To isolate the topic, the term "respecification" is often used to qualify members' vocabulary and members' phenomena to show that for everything that members orient to as factual and real, there is a separate domain of social practices that members know about but ignore; thus, for example, bureaucratic stability or the work routines of the discovering sciences are "respecified" for ethnomethodological study. That members' phenomenal worlds are always analyzable in sets of two in this manner has led to the expression "Lebenswelt pairs," where the phenomena of one pair member are actively produced in and by the other even as that includes concealing that very activity from view. Recently, Garfinkel has begun to use various symbols to

qualify standard English, such as asterisks (e.g., order*), and different brackets and parentheses to identify respective members of Lebenswelt pairs and to draw distinctions between concrete practices and the achieved products of both everyday members of society and Formal Analysis.

Two of the most famous ethnomethodological terms came out of *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, these being "indexicality" and "reflexivity" (Garfinkel used the term "indexical"). Both of these owe to the fact that members' practices are to a large part linguistic in character and that it is through the use of language that members produce and describe the factual status of their phenomena for themselves and each other. Language includes the broad array of words, concepts, categories, recipes, theories, formulas—all manner of conceptual resources, including those of the natural and social sciences—which members mobilize as background knowledge to classify matters before them into instances of the familiar or routine.

For reasons similar to those identified with respect to rules, language resists formal deductive codification. When Garfinkel says semantic expressions are "indexical," he means that they are context-dependent for their specific here-and-now sense and that they are at the general level equivocal and imprecise. Garfinkel states that efforts to replace indexical expressions with "objective" (context-free) ones have failed because all expressions are indexical: Attempts to remedy this, an important preoccupation of Formal Analysis, inevitably result in further indexical expressions as the clarifying material. Moreover, he says, contexts are themselves specified with indexical expressions, including the fact that "context" is itself indexical, which is to say that there is neither a finite set of contexts nor such a thing as context-in-general. Thus, whatever clarity is displayed in language, it is an achieved clarity, an occasioned clarity, which, even where members take it as crystal clear (for the moment), is a clarity-for-all-practical-purposes.

If members mobilize indexical expressions to generate the factual status of what they describe, it follows that what they describe has no particular identity (as opposed to any other) independent of that productive work. Thus, there is an interdependence, even an equivalence, between descriptions-of-social-settings and social-settings-as-described. Herein lies the crux of Garfinkel's use of the term "reflexivity." In a nutshell, he asserts that descriptions of a setting are part of the very setting they describe. The factual order of a setting is what it is by virtue of its members' descriptions of it. There is no way to get outside of social practices to discover the objective ordering of the setting "really" in the sense that it would have that particular identity independent of somebody's situated description. Because traditional social sciences try diligently to do this, early ethnomethodologists sometimes referred to them as "folk-sciences," or sciences from within that which they study.

All of this is to say that the constraint upon members' descriptions does not derive passively from objects described, but rather from the fact that members' descriptive work is a collaborative effort. Thus, while one could argue that something can be "different things for different memberships," it does not follow that it can be whatever anyone wants it to be or however anybody describes it or that it is all a matter of individual interpretation. From the outset, social practices, for Garfinkel, were, above all, "accountable" practices. Members find as much constraint exercised on their productive work as sociologists have ever suspected. The ethnomethodological offering is that the constraint does not come from beyond the aggregate, from outside the immediate setting, from transcontextual norms or linguistic rules or cultural prescriptions, or from concepts and principles described "in general" by the social sciences. Rather, the constraint comes from within the exercise of the very practices that are constrained. Members constrain one another much as jazz musicians constrain one another's improvisation, without outside forces determining what the band as a whole will have played. In that sense, each person working in the aggregate bumps up against massive social force, which in its empirical detail is no different from the work of other members of the aggregate.

CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

One of Garfinkel's close collaborators and coauthors in the 1960s and early 1970s was Harvey Sacks, who had studied with Erving Goffman and drawn inspiration from Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Ordinary Language Analysis school of philosophy. By the mid-1970s and Sacks's untimely death, he and others (Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson) had developed a "turntaking" model of ordinary conversation, together with ways of transcribing audiotapes faithful to conversational detail theretofore unimagined. From this beginning, conversation analysis (CA) proliferated into a huge literature that is at once exemplary ethnomethodology and tangential to it. The two often appear side by side at scholarly conferences and paper sessions, as well as in edited volumes, and they are generally associated with one another in everyday professional discourse ("ethno/CA"). Yet conversation analysis has to a large degree taken off in a disciplinary direction all its own, even though many conversation analysts would not attempt to teach it to students without a heavy background in Garfinkel's sociology. Also, while many non-CA ethnomethodologists are content to call CA a "type" of ethnomethodology, others criticize it for being overly "canonical" or for treating microsociological structures in standard sociological ways.

Conversation analysts transcribe the actual sounds of conversation, including nonverbal sounds, such as stutters, false

starts, repetitions, precise pronunciation (including the drawing out versus punctuating of syllables), silences, interruptions, and the passage of time, measured sometimes down to thousandths of a second. What they find in their transcripts is order entirely and visibly the doing of conversants themselves. This is to say that it is an order actively produced by conversants as they engage in conversation, not an order that conforms to exogenous patterns of conversational activity. It is an order "in and for itself," not an example of general order that could be described in a theory. Most important, it is a collaboratively produced order, a social order whose production appears to be distinct from culture and may, in fact, warrant recognition as "species-specific behavior."

It is a counterintuitive order as well, involving units of time impossible for anyone to imagine, much less keep track of. Thus, it is an order conversants cannot possibly know about in so many words. In fact, untrained readers of conversation analytic transcripts often have a difficult time reading them fluently or in ways that actually make sense as a conversation, though hearing the tapes themselves usually clears that up. Moreover, the conversants themselves seem to "experience" the order even as they attribute to it their commonly known repertoire of structural terms, sometimes as matters internal to the conversation (such as interruptions or embarrassing silences) and sometimes as cultural matters external to the conversation (including institutional reality and the so-called micro- and macrostructures of standard sociology). That there could be an equivalence or articulation between counterintuitive, empirically produced conversational order and nonempirical structural order nevertheless oriented to by conversants as real and intractable is one of the more intriguing questions raised by conversation analysis. If this is so, these conversational practices are at least some of the members' methods Garfinkel writes of. But whether or not this is so is still a matter of some debate.

— Richard A. Hilbert

See also Conversation Analysis; Discourse; Garfinkel, Harold; Parsons, Talcott; Social Studies of Science

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EVOLUTIONARY THEORY

The theory of evolution or "the Modern Synthesis" can be applied to any system that changes, with the theory part of evolution used to explain how these changes occur. It is the unifying theory for disciplines as diverse as genetics, archaeology, primatology, biology, paleontology, systematics, and ecology. It is flourishing in psychology, economics, and anthropology and is slowly making inroads into sociology.

Historically, the word *evolution* was derived from the Latin verb *evolvere,* or an "unfolding process." In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, this usage was combined with a theory of progress to promote a new scientific theory that higher forms had slowly developed out of lower forms. Evolution was also the centerpiece for the first social science paradigm, which viewed human societies as evolving from simple to complex forms. Three of sociology's founding fathers, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Émile Durkheim, imported this original definition of evolution into their theories of society. Unfortunately, early evolutionary ideas became intermingled with racism and Social Darwinism as aboriginal peoples were characterized as biologically inferior to members of Western populations.

By the mid-nineteenth century, natural scientists realized that evolution involved much more than an unfolding sequence from simple to complex forms. Charles Darwin in *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection* (1859) provided the first meaningful understanding of evolution, by proposing that the environment itself is the agent for evolution by "selecting" for survival those members of a population with useful or adaptive traits. Darwin named this process *natural selection,* because it shapes the traits of a species for a local environment. Traits with adaptive value enhance *fitness,* or an organism's ability to leave behind offspring.

Darwin's theory of natural selection accounted for the "survival of the fit" but not the "arrival of the fit," or how variations were transmitted to the next generation. In 1866, Gregor Mendel discovered that what are now called "genes" preserve and transmit heritable traits by self-replication. By the 1940s, Darwinian selection and Mendelian genetics were merged into the integrative theory of evolution, or the Modern Synthesis, which rests on the idea of adaptation and change through natural selection. Today, the Modern Synthesis recognizes four agents of evolution: (1) natural selection, (2) mutation, (3) gene flow, and (4) genetic drift. Natural selection is the primary agent, favoring individuals better able to survive in a local environment. Yet evolution, or what Darwin called "a descent with modification," is a population concept, because each new generation is the genetic product of the last breeding population, or *deme.* To capture this process at the population level, biologists adopted the term *gene pool,* or the

EXPLOITATION

Exploitation is a particularly important component of Marxian theory. Some observers would say that it lies at the very heart of Marx's theory. Marx was a humanist who saw capitalism as preventing people from achieving species-being, or their true potential as human beings. A major roadblock to species-being for Marx is found in the structure of the capitalist system and the way in which it is constructed. That system not only permits and exacerbates the exploitation of the proletariat by the capitalists, but is also, in fact, based on that exploitation.

Marx's labor theory of value asserts that labor is the source of all wealth. Hence, the surplus value of the capitalist is derived from that labor and therefore from the exploitation of the worker. Capitalists are able to purchase labor power from workers, who can bring to the market only their own labor power. Capitalists are then able to pay the worker less than the value they produce and can keep the rest for themselves. This is what Marx meant by "surplus value," which he saw as "an exact expression for the degree of exploitation of labor-power by capital, or of the laborer by the capitalist" (Marx [1867] 1967:218). Although some of this surplus value extracted from the labor process is used by the capitalist to pay for overhead (rent, interest on loans, utilities, etc.), the most important component is profit.

Although some profit is used by the capitalists for personal consumption, its most important use is as reinvestment in the system to accelerate its growth. Therefore, the greater the exploitation of the worker, the more the system is able to grow and the more the worker becomes exploited, creating a vicious cycle of capitalist growth and heightened exploitation of the proletariat. At first, capitalists are driven to lengthen the working day to increase exploitation, since the proletariat ends up working the additional hours for the capitalist in the production of surplus value. However, this route to the heightening of exploitation is eventually closed off as the state is forced to intervene through the law to limit the increasingly long workday. Capitalists are then forced to look for ways of improving the production process (e.g., through technological advances). Such improvements make it possible for the proletariat to produce more in less time. It takes progressively less time for the proletariat to produce enough value to cover the cost of their subsistence, with the result that an increasing proportion of the workday is devoted to the production of surplus value.

Following Marx's idea that capitalism carries within it the seeds of its own destruction, the increased level of exploitation over time also leads the proletariat to resist the system. Marx foresaw a time when, eventually, the two classes would come into open conflict with one another, and given the enormous numbers of the proletariat and the declining numbers of the capitalists (many of whom over time would tumble into the proletariat as they lost out in the competitive world of the capitalist economic system), he felt that the proletariat would emerge the victors. Their victory would mean the end of capitalism and of the exploitation inherent in it, and the creation eventually of a communist system that, ideally, would be free of such economic exploitation, indeed, all forms of exploitation.

— Michael Ryan

See also Alienation; Capitalism; Marx, Karl; Marxism; Political Economy

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