

**Truth, Falsity, and Schemas of Presentation:
A Textual Analysis of Harold Garfinkel's Story of Agnes**

Leia Kaitlyn Armitage

Face-to-face communication has been the archetypical sociological phenomenon and with its fascinating equivocalities has upstaged the mundane and often tiresomely impenetrable universe of textual communication and textually mediated action. (Smith, 1990a: 122)

Although textual explorations have the potential to be 'tiresomely impenetrable', even 'mundane', as Smith suggests, it would be an error to dismiss all such explorations in these terms. Some explorations, I believe, can be extremely fascinating and revealing in their own right. In fact, as I will argue in the following pages, the text has a great deal to say about the argument the author is making and why the argument becomes convincing. One need only take the time to delve beyond the content of the text to look at the structure and the organising schemas or discourses in which the argument is framed.

The present paper is an exploration of one such textual communication that underscores the deeper level at which an argument can operate. On the one hand, an argument operates at the level of the ideas themselves where the merit of the argument apparently rests on the strength and validity of the points presented, the supporting data and logic of their presentation. Perhaps more interesting, though less obvious, is the level at which the argument operates in terms of the discourse it appeals to, the organising schemas that it is presented within, and how each of these impact on the success of the author's undertaking. This is perhaps no more evident than in texts in the field of "interpretive sociologies" where the methodologies that result in the production of text can be turned back on the text itself.

A particularly apt test for such an exploration is Harold Garfinkel's (1967: 116-185, 285-88) account of Agnes which has, on occasion, been accorded the status of a double sociological 'classic' (Denzin, 1990: 198, 1991). On the one hand, Garfinkel has given a pure methodological account of the continuous nature of the social production of gender (Kessler and McKenna, 1978: 112-115; Bologh, 1992) and, on the other, he has provided an exemplar of the ethnomethodological method that reveals how people produce stable, accountable, practical activities in everyday life.

In terms of the social production of gender, Garfinkel 'aimed at capturing the socially situated work whereby [his subject] Agnes, accomplished the task of passing as a "normal" woman' (Rogers, 1992a: 174). In terms of methodological contribution, Garfinkel transformed the phenomenologist's concern for the everyday world, as constituted by mental acts of consciousness, into a new sociological concern for the methods used by people in the management of the public, scenic, and interpersonal activities of their lives (Mehan and Wood, 1976).

Garfinkel's accounting of Agnes' production of gender is a classic example of the textual product of face-to-face communication. However, a body of academic debate has begun to grow out of an interest in reading Garfinkel's text as a social phenomenon in itself (Bologh, 1992; Denzin, 1990, 1991; Hilbert, 1991; Lynch and Bogen, 1991; Maynard 1991; Rogers, 1992a 1992b; Zimmerman, 1992;). For example, Norman Denzin (1990: 198), in his paper, 'Harold and Agnes: A Feminist Narrative Undoing', undertook a deconstructive, feminist, narrative analysis of 'The Story of Agnes' arguing that Garfinkel's assessment of Agnes 'has much in common with conventional interpretive sociology, in which there is a masculine preoccupation with theorizing the genesis, origins, causes, and effects of various social situations, including social problems and the types of persons and groups who have or who are those problems'. His conclusions aside, Denzin's approach takes him beyond the mundane, beyond what the 'inert text' (Smith, 1990a) can offer in the way of an inoperative, uncontexted body of data, to deconstruct Garfinkel's project 'so as to open up textual possibilities of representation and interpretation that previously have been hidden or glossed' (Denzin, 1990: 198). In effect, Denzin turns Garfinkel's method back upon itself. Rather than begin with the assumption that there is a world 'out there' that can be studied and that this world is contained within the subject's experiences and is available to the observer through the subject's social accomplishments, Denzin attempts to show how the objective reality of a text about the world out there becomes a social

accomplishment in itself that can, in turn, be deconstructed and undone (Denzin, 1990: 199n5).

The interest that Garfinkel's account has generated, and continues to generate, suggests that a number of contentious issues lie buried within Garfinkel's text. Notable among these is an issue that Denzin raises regarding Garfinkel's 'ironic use (and dismissal) of Agnes's lie as **support** of his [Garfinkel's] method' (Denzin, 1990: 204 emphasis added). It is in terms of this particular question that the present paper is concerned.

The Lie and its Ramifications: Defining the Problem

The study of Agnes appears in chapter five of Garfinkel's (1967) ground breaking text, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Garfinkel, and the other researchers involved in her case, were drawn to Agnes' plight given the singular nature of her situation. Garfinkel's account of his subject begins in October of 1958, when a young woman was referred to Dr. Robert Stoller at the Department of Psychiatry of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). The young woman was seeking plastic surgery to remedy an apparent endocrine abnormality. Agnes was, by all accounts, a very 'feminine' woman possessing the visible characteristics of a young woman her age: well developed breasts, wide hips, narrow waist and a smooth complexion. However, what made her situation of particular interest to this team of researchers was that she also possessed 'a fully developed penis and scrotum' (Garfinkel, 1967: 117).

At the time, a group at the medical center was involved in a study of intersexed patients. The UCLA researchers, including psychoanalyst Robert Stoller, sociologist Harold Garfinkel, and psychologist Alexander Rosen, became interested in Agnes' case and worked with her to determine the cause of her abnormality and to investigate the effects of it upon her gender role and personal management skills (Hausman, 1995: 1). As a result of the 'approximately thirty-five hours of conversation' that he had with Agnes, Garfinkel formulated his theory of gender as a 'situated accomplishment' (Garfinkel, 1967: 121), an accomplishment in which:

"membership in a sex category is sustained across a variety of practical circumstances and contingencies, at the same time preserving the sense that such membership is a natural, normal, moral fact of life." (Zimmerman, 1992: 194-195)

However, unbeknownst to Garfinkel, Agnes was not altogether forthright during the interviews; her story had yet to be told in its entirety. Agnes was, in actuality, a nineteen year old genetic male who had been raised as a boy (although she maintained steadfastly that she had always felt herself to be female) who, at the age of seventeen, began living as a woman and at the age of nineteen, was seeking remedy for "nature's" mistake.

In the 'Appendix to Chapter Five', that is included in *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Garfinkel informs his readers of how, eight years after the completion of the study, and presumably too late for him to alter the publication other than to add the appendix, Agnes revealed to Robert Stoller that she had lied to them. The feminization of her body, that was so remarkable in a male her age, was not due to the 'rare disorder: testicular feminization syndrome' (Stoller in Garfinkel, 1967: 285), that the medical authorities had diagnosed. Rather, her condition was due to the continued and prolonged ingestion of female hormones. She had been stealing hormones that had been prescribed for her mother. The physical feminization that was so outwardly apparent in Agnes' body was willfully self-induced.

In the appendix, Stoller sets out a number of reasons why the research team felt certain that Agnes had not been taking hormones on her own. Most notable among these was that Agnes had consistently 'denied taking such estrogens at the time that she revealed many other parts of her history which would seem to be equally embarrassing to reveal' (Stoller in Garfinkel, 1967: 286). In addition, Agnes continued to deny having taken hormones even after receiving the operation that accounted for her willingness to participate in the study.

Stoller's chagrin at learning that the team had been fooled by Agnes 'was matched by [his] amusement that she could have pulled off this coup with such skill' (Stoller in Garfinkel, 1967: 288). However, the ramifications for Garfinkel were potentially more disastrous. As a man intent on inventing his science and establishing his credibility as an innovative social scientist, the fact that he had been hoodwinked by his subject, must have indeed been worrisome. Garfinkel's report on Agnes is the longest chapter in the text constituting nearly a quarter of the overall text (pages 116-185) and is, in addition, supplemented by the now well known 'Appendix to Chapter 5' (1967: 285-88). The success of *Studies in Ethnomethodology* as a whole, it could be argued, is in no small part due to the study of Agnes. Agnes' disclosure must be viewed as having had the potential to discredit his whole theory. Garfinkel had

mistaken appearances for reality and developed a sociological perspective on these mistaken assumptions.

Agnes was not an intersexed person with a "legitimate", biological claim to womanhood (however complicated that claim might be) that the researchers had believed her to be (and she had presented herself to be). She was nothing more than the 'highly accomplished liar' that Garfinkel, at one point in his account, passingly reflects on the possibility of her being (Garfinkel, 1967: 174). Garfinkel, however, dismisses the issue in its entirety arguing that it does not matter that Agnes lied. The news of Agnes' lie merely shows how the 'recognizedly rational accountability of practical actions is a member's practical accomplishment, and... that the success of that practical accomplishment consists in the work ...which includes ...accounts "as determinant and independent objects"' (1967: 286).

In response to Garfinkel's disclosure of Agnes' confession, Denzin (1990: 204) asks the inevitable question: How could Garfinkel produce 'a text that allowed him (and the reader) to see Agnes as an intersexed person'? Denzin further pursues this line of questioning by asking: How Garfinkel organized his text 'so that it gives the appearance of having accounted for Agnes's passing?' Denzin (1990: 204) argues that Garfinkel was 'duped', a fact that Stoller's ensuing comments on the case seems to confirm (see also Hilbert, 1991: 266). Garfinkel maintains that this, and the fact that Agnes lied, do not, in themselves, diminish Agnes' 'practical accomplishment' of gender. As Hilbert (1991:2), in defence of Garfinkel suggests, Garfinkel's interest is not in the 'real' Agnes but in the methods of her femininity.

Garfinkel's response however, fails to address two very important issues both of which come back to the concerns raised by Denzin (1990). First, given that Garfinkel chose to portray Agnes as intersexed, was this important to the success of his project? Did the success of Garfinkel's project depend on Agnes being seen as an intersexed person rather than as a transsexual or other type of compromised male? Second, if it was necessary to see Agnes as an intersexed individual, how does the organization of his text compel the reader to see Agnes' accomplishment of gender in this light, as the accomplishment of a 'real' woman. That is: How does the organization of the text compel the reader to see Agnes as a woman with a problem of anatomy rather than as a man with psychosocial problems of identity? (Denzin, 1990: 204)

Following in the spirit of Denzin, but along a somewhat different trajectory, I will take up these issues to illustrate how the textual organization of Garfinkel's project allows him to convincingly portray Agnes as intersexed and how this is crucial to his enterprise of illustrating gender as a situated accomplishment. Finally, I will argue that it was crucial to Garfinkel's success that he **not** alter his text in light of Agnes' later revelations.

The Hypothesis

It is my contention that regardless of whether or not Garfinkel knew or suspected Agnes' deceit or was 'duped' as Denzin alleges, the success of Garfinkel's project, to illustrate Agnes' methods of femininity, as typical of 'Anywoman's' methods of femininity, depended on Agnes first being seen as a 'real' woman. Contrary to what Garfinkel implies in the appendix to *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (that Agnes' 'true' status, and therefore her perceived status, are irrelevant to the study), I will argue that the success of his enterprise, given prevailing attitudes toward sex and gender, depends on Agnes being perceived as having a credible claim to her 'elected sex status' (Garfinkel, 1967) and that this premise could only be entertained if Agnes could be seen, in essence, as a 'real' woman.

At a structural level, perceiving Agnes as a real woman requires that Garfinkel first frame his argument within an overarching discourse that the reader can comfortably draw upon in order to accommodate such a proposition. Garfinkel's argument conforms to an ideological framework that illustrates the circularity of the interpretive process (Smith, 1990b), a process that begins with the author framing his or her intentions within an existing discourse, a discourse that the reader must draw upon in order to follow the argument.

However, before such an undertaking can begin, I believe it pertinent to review the relationship that existed between Garfinkel and Agnes in order to understand what was at stake for each and how each was dependent on the other for the accomplishment of his or her respective goal.

Garfinkel's Goals

The relationship that Garfinkel and Agnes entered into was for the sole purpose of each accomplishing his or her own specific agenda. Each needed the other. For Garfinkel, there was a desire to instill in the sociological community an appreciation for the new methodological approach he was developing - ethnomethodology. For him to be successful, and his approach to be accepted, it had

to render visible the "ethnomethods" of an individual in coping with everyday life. As Hilbert (1991: 264) points out, ethnomethods 'are not ethnomethodology's research methods but rather its topic of investigation'. Ethnomethodology seeks to make visible ethnomethods that tend to remain hidden and invisible by nature of their comfortable, taken-for-granted familiarity and everyday occurrence. In order to study the ethnomethods of femininity, Garfinkel needed to contrast the ethnomethods deemed appropriate to an individual with the ethnomethods employed by that individual. Agnes offered Garfinkel just such a case.

Here was a individual, raised as a boy who had been living undetected (though not without difficulty) as a woman in society for a period of only two years (Stoller in Garfinkel, 1967: 286). Here was an individual who had made a conscious choice to live as a different social being; to become a woman, rather than a man. Of necessity, Agnes had to learn a set of ethnomethods that had not been acquired through the normal process of growing up and she had to employ those ethnomethods in order to be recognised as the woman she always felt herself to be.

However, to be more than a human interest story, or a mere example of a "management of impressions" *ala* Erving Goffman, Garfinkel's text of the case required that he mediate Agnes' case and present it in a broader context, within the larger, social context of what we now understand as gender. As Garfinkel (1967: 184) argues:

"To enumerate Agnes' management devices and to treat her 'rationalizations' as though they were directed to the management of impressions and to let it go at that, which one does in using Goffman's clinical ideal, euphemizes the phenomenon that her case brings to attention."

Whereas Goffman is interested in the ways members of society play their part, or manage their self presentation in response to an imposed social order, Garfinkel believes that social performers create and sustain that social order. In this case, Garfinkel is interested in how a woman does her part to create and sustain a gendered social order. Therefore, before Agnes' methods of femininity could be seen as 'anywoman's' methods, made highly visible in this case due to Agnes's overwhelmingly difficult practical circumstances, they first had to be seen as 'one' woman's methods and not simply as an act in response to an imposed reality. To study the methods of femininity, Garfinkel, needed a sincere subject whose qualities could be convincingly read as naturally feminine rather than as contrived performances, impersonation, effeminacy, or, in Goffman's terms, impression management. Garfinkel needed Agnes to be seen as having a legitimate claim to womanhood and to the associated ethnomethods of a woman.

Agnes' Goals

As much as Garfinkel needed Agnes for the success of his enterprise, Agnes needed to participate in the study that Garfinkel and his colleagues, Robert Stoller and Alexander Rosen, were conducting if she was to succeed in her own enterprise. Any hopes that she might have for marriage and future happiness as a woman depended on her being accepted for the sex-change surgery that would transform her penis and scrotum into a vagina and make her anatomically normal as a woman. Ideally, as Garfinkel points out, Agnes' goal was 'to obtain a competent, guaranteed, and low-cost operation without "submitting to research"' (1967: 162). However, there was little chance of that happening.

Agnes' social situation suggests that she did not have the money necessary to finance such an operation on her own. Garfinkel (1967: 119) informs his reader that Agnes' father, who had been a machinist, died when she was eight years old leaving her mother to support a family of four children through occasional and semi-skilled work in an aircraft plant. Agnes' own financial prospects were no more promising than those of her mother. She was a high school dropout who was skilled only for office work, having worked briefly as a legal secretary and later as a typist. Her future, as Rogers (1992a: 171) notes, no doubt 'lay in the pink-collar ghetto'.

To achieve her goal, Agnes would have to barter her participation in the study for the surgery she desired. Although Agnes' access to surgery depended on her participation in the research, that participation depended on the uniqueness of her case and the interest it generated in the research community. Undoubtedly, Agnes was an extreme study in contrasts. Garfinkel tells us she presented as an attractive 19-year-old, white, single woman (1967: 119). Closer examination suggested that she was special inasmuch as she was one of a group of individuals with 'severe anatomical anomalies' (Garfinkel, 1967: 117). Agnes was believed to be unique in terms of what was already a most rare disorder. This was Agnes' "ticket" to surgery. Properly exploiting the uniqueness of her circumstances would depend on creating in the minds of the researchers the belief of her entitlement to such a procedure, a belief that she really was or should have been a woman. Considering the way in which she doggedly held to her initial story, Agnes no doubt believed that she needed to be seen as "genuinely" feminine to be deemed worthy of a surgery that would confer upon her the final, outward

characteristics that she lacked. While Agnes' duplicity in the matter suggests that she was not part of a conspiracy to present her as a woman, she was certainly a willing collaborator. Participation in this study was Agnes' most efficacious route to the desired surgery.

The Need to See Agnes as a "Real" Woman

The success of Garfinkel's project, in illustrating gender as 'one woman's' situated accomplishment, rather than as an articulated management of impressions, depends heavily on how readers of the text situate Agnes. Although individuals such as Christine Jorgensen and Roberta Cowell had achieved surgeries similar to that desired by Agnes, in the early 1950s, and physicians such as Dr. Harry Benjamin, who would later be known by many as "the father of transsexualism" (Schaefer and Wheeler 1995), were beginning to advocate such surgeries, their influence on the medical establishment was still in its nascence. The idea of transsexualism, that one's sex identity could somehow be mismatched, was an idea that had not yet taken hold.

Before '1966 and the opening of the Johns Hopkins Gender Identity Clinic, transsexualism was not a legitimate diagnostic category and there was little or no treatment in the United States for such persons' (Kessler and McKenna (1978: 116). Dave King (1993: 56) notes that on those few occasions when surgery was being used to treat transvestite/transsexual patients, it was being used surreptitiously and only in 'a small number of cases'. When 'the use of surgery was legitimised theoretically, this was in terms of an intersex theory' (King 1993: 56).

The emergence of gender as a concept separate from sex that was taking place in the mid 1950's was in response to 'the treatment of a specific (and small) set of patients ... those born with sexually indeterminable genitalia and/or reproductive organs' (Hausman, 1995: 8; see also Kessler, 1990). According to the many specialists that Suzanne Kessler (1990) interviewed, the management of intersexed cases is based upon the theory of gender first proposed by John Money, J.G. Hampson and J.L Hampson in 1955 and later refined by Money and Ehrhardt in 1972. The idea of "gender", as the psychosocial counterpart to "natural sex", which has become the cornerstone of transsexual awareness, was a concept that was still largely untenable at the time Garfinkel and his associates were conducting their study. The concept would not achieve wide acceptance until years later, particularly after the publication of Benjamin's book *The Transsexual Phenomenon* in 1967.

Although intersexuality has been managed in many and various ways throughout history, with the advent of the 20th century, the existence of a biological sex dichotomization was considered a natural, ultimately logical truth and the medical establishment had at its disposal the necessary means to resolve issues of sexual ambiguity. As Pagliassotti notes:

"Today the hermaphrodite is considered to have been born physically abnormal. Steps are usually taken early surgically to assign the hermaphrodite to whatever sex seems dominant and to reconcile this with birth certificates and other legal documents." (1993: 481-482)

Although Garfinkel seems to have an intrinsic awareness of the difference between sex and gender, that is between the physical reality of belonging to a sex and the individual's "sense" of belonging to a sex, he never fully articulates the concept. His colleague, Robert Stoller, on the other hand, discusses this concept in great detail but only in later publications (see Stoller, 1968, 1985). Instead, Garfinkel speaks of 'sex statuses' and 'elected sex statuses' but without ever adequately unravelling the concepts of sex and gender from one another. Garfinkel argues that 'the normative, i.e., legitimate sexual composition of the population as seen from the point of view of members who count themselves as part of the perceivedly normally sexed population, can be described with the following table of transition possibilities:'

		At Time 2	
		Male	Female
At Time 1	Male	1	0
	Female	0	1

(Garfinkel, 1967: 117)

Garfinkel recognises that the dichotomy of the sexes only 'provides for persons who are "naturally", "originally", "in the first place", "in

the beginning", "all along", and "forever" one or the other' (Garfinkel, 1967: 116). As Garfinkel's words suggest and the table illustrates, at the time the study was conducted, one's social sex status was still inextricably linked to one's biological sex status and movement between one sex status and another was not within the realm of possibility.

While one's sex status was omnirelevant to one's everyday life, one's social sex status, by virtue of its inseparability from one's biological sex status existed merely 'as an invariant but unnoticed background in the texture of relevances that comprise the changing actual scenes of everyday life' (Garfinkel, 1967: 118). What we now understand as gender, the social presentation of one's sex status, existed only as a background aspect in the life of an individual. Garfinkel's interest in individuals who have taken on an elected sex status was, of necessity, limited to individuals with 'severe anatomical irregularities', individuals whose claim to that sex status is legitimated, though confounded, by an ambiguous sexual identity. The experiences of these intersexed persons permits an appreciation of those background relevances that are otherwise easily overlooked or difficult to grasp because of their routinized character and because they are so embedded in a background of relevances that we now understand as gender. Garfinkel's project depends on transforming gender into something visible and noticeable, something that cannot be taken for granted but that at the same time, is a natural aspect of the individual.

While the accomplishment of gender can be rendered visible in the intersexed, it can also be argued that their claim to an elected sex status has a moral foundation rooted in biological entitlement. Women are expected to be female and men are expected to be male. If Agnes cannot be recognised as entitled to her elected sex status, then Garfinkel's undertaking of presenting gender, as a managed achievement, as a natural "cultural event", fails. It fails because Agnes will be seen as a man imitating a woman. What would otherwise be seen as the accomplishment of gender becomes rather, an affectation, a managed contrivance, no more than prolonged female impersonation. It degenerates into a Goffmanesque "management of impressions". Without a legitimate biological claim to her elected sex status, Agnes' behaviour is, arguably, nothing more than extreme example of effeminacy and mimicry.

The Transformation of Agnes: Establishing Agnes' Credibility as a Woman

Agnes, as the subject of Garfinkel's text, is a woman faced with a serious problem. As feminist philosopher Alison Jagger (1975: 464) argues, the criteria for membership in the class known as "women" is fairly straightforward: to 'be a woman is no more and no less than to be a female human being. All and only female human beings are women. To be female and to be human are the necessary and sufficient conditions to be a woman'. Such ideological stances are, as Hausman (1995: 9) argues, informed by theories of cultural feminism that, take "woman" as a self-evident category, a category based on biological capacity or identity validated through various ethereal concepts such as authenticity and integrity and from which female experience issues. This is the discourse that Garfinkel must situate Agnes within if his concept of gender as a situated accomplishment is to have currency.

Although Agnes' demeanour, outward secondary sexual characteristics, and social presence are all convincingly female, as Garfinkel makes abundantly clear, her inclusion in the social sexual category of woman must ultimately be won on the basis of cultural understandings of both biological capacity and value concepts such as integrity and authenticity. From this perspective, it is clear that the body plays a crucial role in the construction of an individual's social identity. If a body is read as female, or as having a 'legitimate' claim to femaleness, then the subject will be positioned within a discourse of femininity.

Although seemingly significant, situating Agnes as a woman is probably the least difficult task Garfinkel has to overcome. Garfinkel accommodates feminist arguments, or rather anticipates such arguments (since, as Rogers (1992a: 169) points out, Garfinkel's report antedates women's studies) by petitioning for Agnes' inclusion in the category of women on the grounds that Agnes' (and others like her) lack the proper signifiers of their sex due to physical trauma, pathology, or natural defect. They lack the appropriate physical signifiers of sex due to conditions beyond their immediate control. Garfinkel is able to situate the woman of his study as one among many whose intersexed condition can and should be resolved. Agnes' claim to her elected sex status is ultimately based on a claim of intersexual entitlement as the title of the chapter, 'Passing and the Maintenance of Sexual Identification in an Intersexed Patient' indicates. Agnes' perceived sex at birth and sex of rearing are convincingly presented as mistakes, accidents beyond Agnes' control. Although they are mistakes, they are mistakes that are resolvable. When:

"we compare Agnes' beliefs not only with those of normals but with what normals believe about persons whose genitals for one reason or another change in appearance, or suffer damage or loss, through aging, disease, injuries, or surgery we observe that it is not that normals and Agnes insist upon the possession of a vagina by females (we consider now only the case of the normal female; the identical argument holds for males). They insist upon the possession of either a vagina that nature made **or a vagina that should have been there all along**, i.e., the legitimate possession. The legitimately possessed vagina is the object of interest. It is the vagina

the person is entitled to." (Garfinkel, 1967: 127 emphasis added)

Although lacking the most significant signifier of her sex, Garfinkel establishes Agnes' entitlement to that signifier in the mind of the reader by appealing to a discourse of intersexuality. Agnes is seen as subject to a problematic and intolerable condition, a condition that the medical establishment can and must be called upon to rectify.

Rendering Gender Visible as a Situated Accomplishment: The Transformation of Agnes

Once Agnes' situation is established as a biological and cultural possibility, that is understandable within the cultural and moral obligations of society to reconcile her dilemma, the task of presenting Agnes as a valid sociological object of interest begins. This is the more difficult problem confronting Garfinkel. The presentation of Agnes as a 'real' woman is, as has been noted, particularly aided by her physical anatomy. Early in the report, Garfinkel begins to paint a vivid picture of her in his reader's mind as a woman with a problem:

"...the case to be reported here is that of a nineteen-year-old girl raised as a boy whose female measurements of 38-25-38 were accompanied by a fully developed penis and scrotum [that] were contradictory of the appearances that were otherwise appropriate..." (Garfinkel, 1967: 117)

Garfinkel's task of establishing Agnes as a woman but as a woman worthy of note for his methodological enterprise, is a delicate problem that must be artfully handled. Garfinkel introduces his subject as a 'girl', a girl with a stereotypical female presence 'accompanied' by a fully developed penis and scrotum. Garfinkel appeals, through his text, to his reader to see Agnes as a woman whose accompanying male traits are foreign and out of place. The penis and scrotum are here problematised as a kind of **excess**, as something superfluous to her condition thereby rationalising the removal of the offending parts. Garfinkel frames Agnes' real problem in terms of what she is **lacking** and what she is lacking of course is the vagina that Garfinkel convinces us she is entitled to. Garfinkel relies on Agnes' appearance to act as a kind of rhetoric as is seen in his reiteration of Agnes' measurements along with his continuing assurance that Agnes was:

"convincingly female. She was tall, slim, with a very female shape....She had long, fine dark brown hair, a young face with pretty features, a peaches and cream complexion, no facial hair, subtly plucked eyebrows, and no makeup except for lipstick. At the time of her first appearance she was dressed in a tight sweater which marked off her thin shoulders, ample breasts, and narrow waist." (Garfinkel, 1967: 119)

At this point of the text, the presentation of Agnes is not only convincingly female, it is notably untainted with male overtones. There was no need to manage her presentation with props as a transvestite might with heavy makeup, elaborate hairstyles, or ultra feminine clothes. Agnes' 'natural' attributes speak for her in a way that will be read positively in terms of the discourse of femininity as opposed to being read negatively in terms of a discourse of masculinity. The discourse of femininity (Smith, 1990a: 159-208), that Garfinkel organizes his theory of the managed achievement of sex status within, acts as the necessary repository of the stereotypical and expected qualities of women against which the qualities of Agnes can be gauged. As Rogers (1992a: 182), taking exception to Garfinkel's sexist stance, points out:

"Although Agnes's feminine shape is obviously relevant... [as are] her "fine dark-brown hair," her "pretty features" and her "peaches and cream complexion" [they] are less relevant to her situation than her lack of facial hair which gets no particular emphasis. That Agnes apparently met cultural standards of female attractiveness is far less relevant than that she exhibited no physical characteristics visibly jeopardizing her appearance as a "normal" female."

Garfinkel's voice, Rogers argues, could just as easily have been that of 'the man on the street':

"Given the widespread objectification of women as sexual objects (Safilios-Rothschild, 1977: 26-40), one could assume that most

readers would readily absorb the point about Agnes's shapeliness and that parsimony should therefore prevail." (Rogers, 1992a: 182)

However, Garfinkel's aim is not to merely describe Agnes' situation. His goal is to convincingly situate Agnes as a woman in terms of the attributes common to a discourse of femininity. Parsimony, would be risky in this context. Beyond explicating the features of her situation Garfinkel aims to bring about Agnes' transformation in the mind of his reader so that she will be seen in a way that totally obliterates the relevance of her birth and sex of rearing. Denzin (1990: 205) suggests, that 'Garfinkel is leading Agnes into femininity'. In actuality, he is taking her beyond femininity; he is leading her into femaleness. Garfinkel situates Agnes securely as a woman in terms of a common understanding of what a woman is before proceeding to unsettle her place as a woman in order to focus on her "problem" and thereby illustrate his theory of gender as a situated achievement. Although Garfinkel establishes Agnes' place as a woman he also problematises it to a degree in order to permit an appreciation of those background relevances that we now understand as gender.

To accomplish this, Garfinkel establishes a three-way relationship between Agnes, himself and the reader. The reader is placed in the position of having to rely on Garfinkel's interpretations, as access to Agnes is restricted. Agnes remains, as Denzin (1990: 206). puts it, 'an elusive subject who is talked about more than she talks herself'. She is little more than a representation for the reader. With Agnes duly isolated from the reader, Garfinkel emerges as the only one authorised to tell her story.

Once Garfinkel has Agnes established as a woman, and himself as the one authorised to present her story, he is free to unsettle her placement as a woman. Garfinkel provides his reader with tidbits of information on how to detect Agnes' secrets at a social, public level. The reader is of course privy to the knowledge that this woman possesses a fully developed penis and scrotum. This is what makes her case interesting but this is private knowledge that would not be known outside the research environment. Given the 'naturalness' of Agnes appearance and demeanour, additional information is needed so that the reader can be assured that her problem is both public and social as well as private, and physical.

At the same time that Garfinkel proffers the information that will diminish Agnes' placement as a woman, he simultaneously reassures his reader of Agnes' place as a female being. For instance, he informs his reader that:

"Agnes was typical of a girl of her class and age... There was nothing garish or exhibitionistic in her attire, nor was there any hint of poor taste or that she was ill at ease in her clothing, as is seen so frequently in transvestites and in women with disturbances in sexual identification. Her voice, pitched at an alto level, was soft and her delivery had the occasional lisp similar to that effected by feminine appearing male homosexuals." (Garfinkel, 1967: 119)

Garfinkel reinforces Agnes' femininity by presenting her feminine characteristics first followed by the unsettling male characteristics. For instance, we are left to presume that Agnes' lisp was natural while effeminate homosexuals **effect** a lisp. Garfinkel reinforces Agnes' natural femininity by contrasting her with negative masculine readings. However, her femininity is nonetheless compromised by the very fact that it needs to be compared with that of males who would be regarded as socially inadequate or "failed". Equally equivocal is his suggestion that at the age of 19 her 'manner was appropriately feminine with a slight awkwardness that is typical of middle adolescence' (Garfinkel, 1967: 205). She is appropriately feminine but lacking a degree of maturity and experience.

Garfinkel's picture of Agnes is one that will pass ordinary scrutiny but one which on close observance (of the ethnographer for instance) lacks the seamless perfection of a 'normal' woman. To the discerning eye, Agnes is flawed but only to the degree that the reader is made aware that in her, one can observe how she accomplishes what all 'normals' take for granted. Garfinkel's method of presenting Agnes serves to establish Agnes' place as a woman but it also illustrates Agnes' need to 'do' gender. The characteristics Garfinkel observes test Agnes' place as a woman but they do not disrupt it. Agnes possesses all of the necessary characteristics except one to be received as a bonafide woman; she lacks only a vagina. But the vagina she lacks is the one that she is deemed to be entitled to and the one that can be created for her.

Conclusion

In light of Agnes' confession, Denzin (1990: 204) raised the obvious question: How could Garfinkel produce 'a text that allowed him (and the reader) to see Agnes as an intersexed person'? He also pondered the question of how Garfinkel's text organized 'itself so

that it [gave] the appearance of having accounted for Agnes's passing'? His conclusion was that Garfinkel had simply been duped. A closer analysis suggests that Garfinkel, regardless of whether or not he knew or suspected Agnes' duplicity, masterfully crafted a textual communication in which he was able to align his interpretation of Agnes within a discourse that was complementary to the completion of his project and from which he could proceed to develop his argument for the managed achievement of sex status as a cultural event rather than as simply a management of impressions. By organizing his presentation of Agnes in accordance with the medical discourse of intersexuality, Garfinkel was able to structure his text in a way that intended the reader to situate Agnes as a woman with a physical problem beyond her control rather than as a man who had elected to pursue and manage a particular course of action.

However, within the discourse of intersexuality, Agnes emerges as nothing more than a being with the potential to be a 'real' woman. Transforming Agnes from a being deserving of medical intervention into a being of sociological relevance, a being whose methods of femininity can be viewed as anywoman's methods required further textual organization and management. This second organization of the text situated Agnes, the being with female possibility, within a social discourse that completed the picture of Agnes as a woman. By organizing the physiological possibility of Agnes as a female in terms of a social discourse of femininity, the picture of Agnes as a woman whose circumstances necessitate the 'doing' of gender completed the picture of Agnes as woman.

Agnes can be seen as having the potential to be a female being because we, as cultural beings and consumers of medical knowledge, know that her situation, as it is told by Garfinkel, is a situation deserving of intervention. We know as well that Agnes, as a social being, is convincingly feminine based on what Garfinkel has told us, how he has told us, and in comparison to what we know (or think we know) about femininity. Presenting Agnes in this way allows the reader to complete what Smith describes as the "Ideological Circle".

The ideological circle occurs when:

"an interpretive schema is used to assemble and provide coherence for an array of particulars as an account of what actually happened; the particulars thus assembled, will intend, and be interpretable by, the schema used to assemble them. The effect is peculiarly circular, for although questions of truth and falsity, accuracy and inaccuracy about the particulars may be raised, the schema in itself is not called into question as a method of providing for coherence of the collection of particulars as a whole." (Smith, 1990a: 139, see also 1990b: 93-100)

The work of transforming Agnes into a woman is work begun by Agnes, who took the hormones, aided by Garfinkel, who organized the text, and completed by the reader who augments the story by drawing on what he or she "knows" or accepts in terms of the relevant discourses he or she has had to draw upon in order to follow Garfinkel's argument and see Agnes as she sees herself.

Garfinkel suggests that Agnes' disclosures have no effect on the 'managed achievement of [her] sex status'. Agnes' disclosures can be regarded as having no effect only so long as the organising discourses that are appealed to are left intact. A rereading of the text, as Garfinkel invites on the last page of the text, will result in an appeal for Agnes to again be perceived as a woman because the schema of presentation remains unchanged. Regardless of our ensuing knowledge that Agnes lied and is not the intersexed individual she claimed to be, the organising schema within which Garfinkel has articulated her story remains intact. The reader will, while reading the text, still tend to draw upon those particular discourses in order to piece his or her understanding of Garfinkel's project together. Given this relationship between the organising schema and the facts of the study in shaping the interpretation of the data, Garfinkel's decision not to rewrite or alter the text was perhaps his wisest choice of action. To do otherwise, would surely have led to folly.

Textual communication, far from being the 'mundane and often tiresomely impenetrable universe' that the opening quote may have suggested, is as revealing and vocal as that of the face-to-face communications that have hitherto upstaged it (Smith, 1990a). This becomes apparent when the same methodologies that are employed on the social phenomena that surround us are turned back on the textual products that are the outcomes of our face-to-face interactions. The success of an author's enterprise does not rest solely on the content of the communication and the necessary and sufficient conditions to establish the logic of an argument but rest also on the context of the argument's presentation. It pays therefore, to understand how the intricacies of the text's organization and how the presentation of the data can be made to appeal to the idiosyncrasies of the reader and the current ideological perspectives of the time that, together, combine to convey the author's intent.

[References](#)

